

We Were Friends, Episode 2
Help a Brother, Help a Sister: Industry
[10/2/18]

Ralph in the space alone. Dancing with the printing press. Taking out the form. Fumbling with the rollers. We see how he works—lively, clumsy, quick shifts in rhythm—unencumbered by the pressures of listening to another person. Schubert’s “Fantasy in F Minor” is already playing, a YouTube recording projected on screen. Stops to watch and listen to the two pianists from time to time, as if gleaned something from their synchronicity. Frowns at text on easel. Etc.

After some time, Margaret enters like a tidal wave. Carrying a ton of stuff, eating on the go, splint on finger. On the phone with an editor of her translations. (Always, the hustling.) Ralph is waiting to greet her, but as the phone conversation goes on, not wanting to pressure her to end it, he slips back into his own work.

M: *(on the phone)* ...Well, that’s what I thought until...

I’ve been working on it day and night, I’m not sure how much faster...

Margaret mouths words to Ralph, not spoken: “Sorry, I’m late!”

I promised you I’d have them done by October...

The last I checked, Alice, it’s still September.

Margaret mutes the Schubert, which is very loud. Smiles at Ralph apologetically when she can.

No, the French is a piece of cake. And all these poems are in prose, so...

(a little irritated) The only person who can answer that is the late Francis Ponge. I’m just his translator.

Why don’t we find a time to get lunch, then, and I’ll show you what I have so far.

Okay, in general...I think...yeah, usually Thursdays work well, but this Thursday I’ve actually...

...No, I wouldn’t call it a date. It’s...a meeting. But the following week...

Perfect.

Thursday, then, I mean, a week from.

I'll bring the manuscript.

Okay.

Yes, I look forward to it.

See you then, Alice.

Bye.

You, too. Bye.

Margaret hangs up and looks to greet Ralph, but now he is busy with the type, and she doesn't want to distract. Margaret lays down her things, transitions from the outside world to here, now.

A breath.

She looks at the easel, and reads aloud:

*We request the pleasure of your ~~company~~ camaraderie
The Customary Post-haste Post-Electoral COSTUME PARTY!
...the bipartisam party of all parties...
& remember to vote!
R.S.V.P. & ~~bring~~ carry a dish to share
House of R.W.Emerso&c., Tuesday night at nine*

A furrowed brow.

M: [The wording is off.

R: We're missing N.]

M: We're missing N?

He nods, smiles sheepishly.

M: Okay.

Bit.

M: "The *bipartisam* party" ...?

R: Remember the Persian weavers! You've got to leave one mistake to appease Allah.

M. Yeah, don't out-God God.

R. It's kind of nice to remind ourselves of our imperfections. I don't like to be always...curating things.

M: So you're curating your mistakes instead?

R: Somebody's got to. *(indicating all the offprints strewn around)* Welcome to the Museum of Graceful Mistakes!

They smile. Hi. Here we are.

M. How about, "The apolitical political-party party?" It's more [welcoming.

R: vague.]

Bit. Considering.

M. [I can see that.

R. You're right.] No, that's a good change. We'll have to reset some type. What happened to your finger?

M: *(offhand, as if it explains)* I went camping. *(gesturing at the press)* Can I peek in there?

R: Go ahead. Just...uh...watch your fingers.

Margaret looks at press briefly, then sets up her books at the table, checks her phone. Ralph is working at type case.

Sam calls. Margaret is eager to talk, and ever so slightly flustered.

M: Sam?!? Thanks for calling me back.

She covers the receiver with her hand. Looks apologetically to Ralph, who gets the hint.

R: *(whispered, gesturing to the door)* Coffee?

M: Yes please.

Ralph heads out. Margaret puts Sam on speaker mode. Starts a slow pacing back and forth.

M: Are you there?

S: *(a little weary, preoccupied)* Hey Margaret.

M: Finally! I wish I could see your face, but this'll have to do. Is everything installed?

S: Almost. It's looking good.

M: Are you at the gallery now? *(looks at her watch)*

S: Yeah.

M: God, you must be exhausted.

S: I've had some eleventh-hour help.

M: Good. Who?

S: Anna.

M: Anna's there?

S: Yeah, she's in the city with her parents, visiting family.

M: Lucky you! You're a genius, Sam, but you can't do everything alone.

S: I know. I'd be totally screwed without her.

M: That's my girl.

Noncommittal nod from Sam.

Bit.

M: *(not precious)* I miss you. I miss talking with you.

Sam squirms.

M: Don't worry, I'll let you go soon. Sleepy guy. *(smiles)*

S: Margaret.

M: What?

S: Anna and I have been talking...

M: Ok.

S: I, uh. I really value your friendship, our friendship.

M: Of course, Sam. I know that.

S: I know. Are you... It feels like maybe you're expecting something...from me...

M: *(still playful)* You mean, more than your undying devotion to my spiritual welfare?

S: Without your face, it's hard to tell if you're being serious.

M: When in doubt...probably.

S: *(getting bolder)* I've been...I've been thinking lately I should tell you that I don't feel what you feel, whatever it is.

M: *(hardening)* If you don't know how I feel, how can you know you feel something different?

S: I don't feel anything toward you.

M: It's impossible to not feel anything.

S: Ok.

M: I don't need you to feel romantic toward me, Sam.

S: *(pace picking up)* Ok, but intimacy, passions, those are important. I feel like you don't allow me to go—

M: What do you mean, "allow?" And what's friendship if not intimate and passionate? Isn't that what—

S: You really believe that?

M: What?

S: Intimacy and passion without romance.

M: Yes! Romance is playing spin-the-bottle at the county fair. Friendship has a pulse—

S: (*jumping in, impatient*) Don't you want to fall in love, Margaret? Sex? Blind devotion?

M: That's for children! True friendship...(*she's working this out:*) The absurd challenge of it! Meeting someone up here (*high up*), and not just understanding them as they are now, but opening your mind to every version of who they might become...

S: I sometimes think you want another you, Margaret.

M: No, there's already way too much of me! I can be in love with my friends. I don't need to want them. I've said this to you before.

S: I guess I never thought you were completely serious.

Bit.

M: I just like you, Sam. I like talking to you, I can be myself. You make me feel good.

S: It's all, it's just a little much.

M: (*a smile, a little effort to normalize*) Ralph calls me "the much that wants more."

S: (*chuckling*) Say hi to the old man for me.

M: I'll let you go now.

S: Margaret, I do love you. You're like—

M: Please don't say I'm like a sister to you.

S: No! No, no. You're like a—

M: Sorry, Sam. I have to go. Happy opening.

Margaret tosses phone down, somewhat rattled. She stands, goes to look at the type on the printing press. Thinks. Comes back to her computer. Goes to (returns to?) "Snails" in a two-column [Google Doc](#), French on left, English on right. Game-faced.

She reads her English version.

M: "Here I touch on one of the main points of their lesson, something snails have in common with all shelled beings: that shell, part of their essence, is at the same time a work of art, a monument. It lasts longer than they do.

That is the example that snails offer us: *saints* who make masterpieces of their lives, works of art of their own perfection. They secrete form. Nothing outside themselves, their necessity, or their needs is their work. Nothing is out of proportion with their physical being.

And so they trace for us the duties of men: great thoughts come from the heart.

She changes "men" to "human beings." She stares down the last two paragraphs, which she hasn't yet attempted.

Types, hesitantly, perhaps mouthing it or speaking it:

But how are they saints? Precisely, by obedience to their natures. So: know yourself! And accept yourself as you are. In accord with your *[this is a sticking point]* mistakes problems vices. Scaled up to your measure.

What is our shell? Words. Morality. Humanity.

Ralph returns with coffees, places one beside her.

M: Thanks.

She changes "Morality" to "Decency."

Ralph—fuming, alight from his encounter with brother-in-law—is obviously champing at the bit to talk it out with her.

R: I just ran into my sister's Matt. He's a character.

M: What does that mean?

R: What do you mean?

M: Just say what you really mean.

R: ... I mean he's a...piece of work.

M: *(laughs)* That doesn't mean anything! If you've got something unsavory to say about someone, Ralph, you better savor it! *(smiling:)* I won't tell.

R: (*a little reluctantly*) He...puts me off sometimes. Can fix anything, brilliant in a pinch. Really. But—

M: He gets under your skin.

R: He says things that get under my skin. I should be patient. I don't know if he is just ignorant or an elitist prick. Or a little of both. Maybe I am.

M: What did he say?

R: Forget it.

M: Okay.

Bit. Margaret back to work, Ralph surveying printing press, feeling stuck.

M: This whole thing would sound better in Italian.

R: How common is the letter "N" in Italian?

M: It should be illegal to translate works of genius.

R: You'd put yourself out of a job.

M. Can I read you my favorite part?

R: You need more of a challenge: French into English into Italian into Arabic into Mandarin into Swahili into American Sign Language, and then back into French.

M: Like a big game of Telephone! How do you say "snails" in sign language?

*Ralph curls himself up into a shell and peeks out with "vulnerable, highly sensitive eyeballs."
They share a laugh.*

R: So, you hurt your finger camping?

M: Camping.

R: Ok, read me your favorite part. (*cutting her off*) In English. I'm still a child compared to you, Margaret. I need to hear it in my mother-tongue.

She projects poem again. She reads paragraphs 2 and 3 (on page 1).

M. Okay, so this is from a prose poem called “Snails” by the French poet Francis Ponge. He’s talking about the slime that snails secrete and leave behind them.

“The expression of their anger, like that of their pride, shines as it dries. But it also makes the trail that reveals them to predators. What’s more, this trail is ephemeral and lasts only until the next rain. / That’s how it is with everyone who speaks in an entirely personal way, in verses and lines only, without taking care to build their phrases into a solid dwelling with more than two dimensions. Something more durable than themselves.”

Ralph goes up to the screen. Long silence. We expect him to praise the poem, or at least comment on it, but when he speaks, it’s in an entirely different direction.

R: Matt’s an asshole.

M: There it is!

R: Just now he’s driving by me in his truck, I’ve got my hands full of coffee, he stops in the road with two cars behind him, he rolls down the window and says, “Ralph, how many liberals does it take to change a light bulb?”

Quick pause.

M: How many?

R: That’s the thing, he just smiled me this great big smile and drove off waving his hand out the window.

M: I’ll bet it takes at least two.

R: Yeah, one to call the Republican electrician...

M: ...and one to write an op-ed for the *Times* about the whole experience. *(small laugh)*

R: Margaret, he doesn’t vote, he’s never voted!

Margaret stops everything.

M: What? Why?

R: Like I said...he’s a piece of work. *(gesturing back to poem:)* For him, everything’s “entirely personal.” Doesn’t care to build anything “more durable than himself.”

M: Why doesn’t he vote?

R: Because it doesn't have anything to do with him. That's what he claims.

M: Does he pay taxes?

R: Yeah. I mean, my sister works it out with their accountant...

M: That burns me. It's like choosing not to go to school. Some schools are terrible and some elections are corrupt. Do something about it.

R: I can appreciate the skeptics. Our laws *are* like a fun-house mirror half the time. But if we're too proud to see ourselves in those laws... It's a MORE perfect union, right?

M: How does he expect things to get better?

R: I think he wants to see the apocalypse. I really do.

M: So he can say, "I told you so?"

R: Yeah, and show how little he needs us. He can sharpen a chainsaw, rebuild an engine, rewire a doorbell—

M: Can he camp in the wilderness?

R: He has a camper!

M: That's cheating.

R: That's preparation...

M: Preparation for what?

R: The end times.

M: Oh my god, Time is ending all the time! What is he waiting for? An asteroid to hit Earth?

R: He wants to test himself. He will be the hero.

M: The apocalypse is already here, Ralph, and it doesn't give a damn what Boy Scout's got the best Swiss Army knife. You don't outsmart catastrophe: the rug's coming out from under somebody, somewhere, every minute of the day, and if you're not helping, there's not going to **be** anybody to ring your brand-new doorbell—

R: It's the same doorbell, he just knows how to fix, you know—

M: *(the guillotine comes down)* ...if you're not pitching in, you're not a hero, you're no one.

Let that sit a minute. Maybe even back to work.

R: No one's a no one.

M: *(as if accusatory)* Are you going to invite him to the party?

Ralph noncommittal. She's really taken his last line to heart, though.

M: You should invite him to the party. *(insistent)* You've got to get him to the party.

Pause. Ralph brightens.

R: So we need to change our invitation to *"Remember to Vote...or Not."*

M: You mean "Vote or [r]ot."

R: Damn. I almost forgot.

Pause.

R: "Vote or Don't."

M: There's no "N."

R: "Vote or Abstain."

Margaret just looks at Ralph. They're kind of stuck.

M: If I'm stuck on a word when I'm translating, I take a break and I play a game like this, to soften the brain, or sharpen it. We must avoid the use of the letter "N" till 6:08 [or whatever the time will be].

R: *(cheeky)* Nifty.

M: The game will start...forthwith.

A beat of silence. They're not sure what to say. Both bounce a little on their toes, as before the start of a boxing match.

Tempo is different, since no “N”s. Margaret is more or less fluent. Ralph’s not slow, just careless: the rules of the conversation matter less than the substance. M. buzzes his errors (underlined).

M: Oh my god!

R: What?

M: Did you hear Brattleboro has a law—you are allowed to be...completely bare...all public places.

R: No.

M: But you’re...prohibited from...the removal of...clothes. So you may be dressed or...without a stitch.

R: Either entirely -- fully clothed, or fully exposed.

M: I tell you, the place be-...twixt the two -- does feel private. A fellow camper saw me as I pulled my swimsuit...over my body. I would make that illegal if I could.

Ralph struggles for the next words.

R: This is...hard. My clock moves slower, I’m pretty sure.

M: [Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock]

R: [Your clock is ticktockticktock]

They smile.

M: Time moves so fast for me. Some people have biological clocks or career clocks. For me, it’s a death clock.

R: Margaret. You will outlast us all.

Smile. Beat.

R: Have you heard that all animals—...mammals have the same.—...total of heartbeats over the course of their lifetime?

M: So, wait. Mammals who have shorter lives—like a mouse—their hearts beat faster?

R: (*nods*) Their whole clock, their *lives* move faster.

M: So, regardless of the *years* we're alive, we all get the same total heartbeats?

R: People have a clock, red squirrels have a clock, hawks have a clock.

M: But some lives are cut short.

R: It's the average for each animal—...mammal.

M: There's a lot of roadkill this time of year.

R: So much beauty...dead beside the road...it makes me want—...desire to drive with a blindfold.

M: You lose!

R: (*extreme frustration*) I desired to say: "Mask without eye-holes!"

Breath.

M: Good game.

Long pause. They go back to their work. After a minute, Margaret looks over at Ralph.

M: You want to see something ugly?

R: Always.

M: Open mind?

R: Wide open.

M: So Anna told me about these different dating sites...you know how they work?

R: Vaguely.

M: I'll show you. (*moving to computer*)

R: It's like a chat...a chat line, right, a big online cocktail party?

M: Not quite. Not everybody can see you, and you can't see everybody. Depending on where you live, how old you are, who you're looking to meet—all that.

R: And the computer fills out your dance card for you?

M. That's a nice way to put it. Actually, yes.

R: And does it... it knows who the good dancers are?

M. *(for some reason, this sets her off laughing, tipsily)* I'd say it knows as much about matchmaking as you know about algorithms.

R: I've always thought romance is—

M: Oh, good, yes—romance is...what?

R: Well, that it should happen...that it should spring up more easily between friends than between strangers.

M: You'd think so, wouldn't you? *(finding the profile)* Ok, here's what I look like online.

Ralph reads the first paragraph of the profile out loud, not knowing how seriously he's supposed to take this.

R: "Earnest. Industrious. Idealistic. ENFJ. Born at the wrong time, I think, i.e. long after people stopped believing in Higher Things. I don't know if I believe in Higher Things either, but that some things are higher and lower than others, sure. Higher: Clean sheets. Swimming in cold water. Conversation that's not pleasantries. Lower: Machismo. The way sandwich bread disintegrates in the heat. Pleasantries that aren't conversation."

An interval of trying to decide what to make of this.

R: Are you...are you doing...

M: Yes?

R: Is this, like, research into the life of the Modern American Woman? You aren't really...

M: Oh no, I am really.

R: "Putting yourself out there..."

M: *(laughing, but with real distaste)* God, I hate that phrase. I have this image of God in his workshop, putting the finishing touches on Eve, patting her on the butt and saying, "All right, whaddya say, let's put you out there!"

R: Was that in Genesis?

They share a smile.

R: So you're seriously trying to meet men this way?

M: Well, at least half-seriously. Ironic-seriously.

R: Then why aren't you using your real name?

M: What, what's wrong with "Agnes"?

R: Kind of old-fashioned.

M: Old-fashioned is in right now, Ralph.

R: Old is the new new.

M: And we are old-fashioned! If you haven't noticed...*(pointing out their printing project)*

R: But why not use your real name?

M: Then people start Googling, reading all about you...

R: But aren't they already... *(gesturing at online profile)*

M: This is different. I can present the sides of myself I want to present. I can choose photographs where I don't look like a felon or a drunk or a neurotic mouse.

R: I'd like to see those photos.

M: The whole idea is choice: I get to choose what I look like; I get to choose the people I'd like to speak to; I get to choose whether or not I'd like to be chosen by...*(calling up a man's profile)*...this guy.

R: Mmm. No.

Next.

R: No.

Next.

R: No.

M. You've got such good taste in men.

R: (*struggling*) So it's not...what you like is not...not the freedom of choosing so much as the freedom not to choose anybody.

M. Mostly.

R: It says "Phoenix" right here. Phoenix, like...

M. One lover born from the ashes of another.

R: (*incredulous*) You've decided to not choose men from Phoenix, Arizona? What happens if you actually want to go on a date?

M: He'll come to me. Or I'll go to him.

R: I don't know, I don't quite get it. None of this seems like you.

M: It's Agnes.

R: Go back a second to your...where you were. Your autobiography. (*as she does this*) I'm just trying to imagine, if I were on the other side of this, would I recognize you?

M: Would you want to?

Ralph reads another section of the profile out loud.

R: Okay, right there: "I could probably beat you at...cataloguing my failed relationships according to the Dewey Decimal System. Religion: 1. Cooking:1. YA Fiction: 2. All of them: History."

M: Can I read you my favorite part?

R: Sure.

M: "I would most likely be arrested for...failing a field sobriety test while under the influence of Aretha Franklin. / What I'm really looking for...you can use a semicolon without consulting an instruction booklet from IKEA. / ...you liked the fact that Pippi Longstocking could lift her horse off the porch each morning. / ...you are kind.

R: I mean, you come off as...

M: (*defensive, prickly, vulnerable*) As what?

R: No, I didn't mean anything by that.

M: Good, because you haven't said anything yet.

R: This is just more...the thing about the semicolon, come on, that's kind of limiting your suitors...

M: That's the point!

R: But think about it from the other side...if a guy sees this, is he going to say, "Ooh, a girl who's into semicolons—

M: I think the plural is "semicola."

R: Right. Thank you. Is he going to say to himself, (*voice of the Phoenix hunk*) "Ooh, this girl is turned on by good punctuation. I punctuate like nobody's business"? Or is he going to pass you by, thinking you're kind of a snob...

M: I don't give a shit what he thinks!

R: But is this really the way to reel somebody in...

M: (*hopping mad*) Now that's just a little too old-fashioned for my taste.

R: What?

M: The fishing metaphors. I'm saying, "This is me. Say hi to me or don't." I'm not angling. I'm not luring. There's no fucking bait to take.

Ralph taken aback. A good pause while things settle.

M: (*back to the semicolon thing*) I thought it was funny.

R: (*trying to win her back*) It is funny. You are funny. I like that you can get drunk on Aretha Franklin.

M: It's...keeping up with it...it's an unbelievable amount of work.

R: Really? Aren't you done now that you've...(*pointing*)

M: Ohhhh no. No no no. You've got to answer a million questions, like, "Would you prefer to date someone of your own racial background?" or "How do you feel about sex in the morning?"

R: About having it, or about having had it?

Margaret shrugs. Laughs?

R: (*tipping point...too many jokes...exasperated*) But what's it all for, Margaret? Everybody's wearing a mask, probably a number of masks at the same time. Everybody's posing. A cocktail party in a wax museum. You could be going out with flesh-and-blood people... You could be writing. You've said yourself, it's a waste of time.

M: Sometimes it feels like writing's a waste of time, doesn't it? Cocktail party in a graveyard?

R: Come on.

M. At least here somebody's reading me.

R: (*adamant*) This is not reading, no. Reading a person is a whole nother thing. Reading a person is being there with him, holding his heart in your hands. This is...

M: [I'm sorry I opened it up.

R: ...this is: being sized up.]

Bit. Calmer.

M: It doesn't make your heart race, just a little bit? The idea of all these beautiful Arizonan men clamoring to meet me?

R: To meet your mask.

M: You have masks, too! Emerson the Lecturer! Emerson the Essayist! Emerson the Father! Emerson the Husband! Emerson the Hub of Intellectual Society!

R: Oh please.

M: I saw this gif (*hard G*) of you the other day...

R: A gif is what...my cartoon double?

M: Wait a sec, I'll show you... (*moving to call it up*)

R: Will it hurt my feelings?

M: Depends how thick the skin of Emerson the Great Man is.

Shows him.

R: Oh, god. Does this really exist?

M: People admire the way you say things. They need some kind of shorthand for it. You know, to summarize...you.

She was trying to help, but now she realizes she's accidentally stepped in it. He's not mad at her, just sad.

R: So much sweat poured out over the question of what Character really is—how one comes by his Character, how one makes his Character, how one carries around his Character like a shell on his back...only to find out that Character looks quite a bit like a...a what?

R: *(mad now, imitating his imitation)* And I'm stuck repeating this, for all eternity?

M: Till the apocalypse.

R: What do you see, when you look at this?

She doesn't answer right away.

M: I see...you...but you're...dressed up as yourself.

Ralph goes over to computer and shuts it firmly, turns off projector.

R: So what happens now?

M: When?

R: Now that all the men of Phoenix have started clamoring. Will you let them see you on this side of the screen?

M: I hadn't decided.

R: Pulling on your bathing suit?

M: Oof, anything but that. Blindfolds for everybody. Cupid told Psyche they had to—do you remember that myth? Cupid told Psyche they could only make love in the dark.

R: It didn't really work out for either of them, as I recall. I never...to tell you the truth, I never understood that story: I thought Cupid was blind himself?

Bit.

M: Do you think Sam and Anna...

R: (*paying attention*) What?

M: Nothing. (*change of tack*) When I'm translating something... Like this Francis Ponge I've been working on, when I'm translating, he's dead, I don't even know what he looks like! and yet I swear I can feel my way around inside his whole body... I know exactly how the hair on the back of his neck itches. You know?

Ralph is with her.

M: Ponge sat here just like I'm sitting here, trying to come up with words for his thoughts, and now I'm the one doing it for him.

Exactly the same, however many years later, it's like we're lovers!

I just showed up a little late.

Talk about intimate..it's...necrophilia.

R: What are the chances his coffin is made out of snail shells?

M: (*breezing past*) Or maybe it's the other way around, and Ponge is using me as a surrogate...squeezing a few extra heartbeats out of my living body.

It's terrifying, isn't it? That two minds could get that close?

R: It is.

M: Do you think it's only possible with the dead, or can it happen with the living?

R: I don't see why not. So long as they're all at the same costume party, dressed as themselves.

This gives one or both of them a good idea for the invitation. They race to the easel...one of them wins and writes in big letters: "COSTUME PARTY / COME AS YOURSELF." Margaret reads the words out loud, exultantly. She doesn't know what to do with being so happy. She socks him in the arm, hard, like a sister would a brother, and it really hurts.

R: Owww!

Instant, instinctive remorse. She rubs his arm, as a mother would a child's. There's a moment of intimacy...until she sees herself doing what she's doing. She steps back, suspicious.

M: Do I mother you?

R: What? Do you mother me?

M: Yes.

R: No! Can I sock you back?

M: No! You've got your brother-in-law to pick on.

R: *(remembering)* I've got to figure out what to say in this invitation. You've got to help me translate it into whatever language my brother-in-law speaks.

M: You really want him to come? What if he starts telling jokes?

R: Then...then people will get their feathers ruffled.

M: Or laugh.

R: Or laugh. *(pause)* So what's the next line going to say? *(considering)* I'm going to have to reset the type.

Ralph moves back to type case and picks up his composing stick. Margaret scribbles some notes at the table. Her bubbly happiness has passed as quickly as it came. She's quiet, even melancholy. She goes to mantelpiece, where Ralph's prints are drying, and pulls one off the clothesline. Back at the table, she begins to fold it into a cootie catcher.

R: So, what are you going to do when you're done with your translations?

Margaret shrugs.

R: Have you thought of writing a biography of Ponge? There isn't a good one that I know of, at least not in English. Wasn't he part of the French Resistance?

M: I thought we were talking about Matt and ruffled feathers.

R: I thought we're talking about Cupid and online dating.

M: We could be. We like talking about four things at once.

R: I wouldn't mind talking about one thing at once, for once.

M: What's the one thing?

R: Blindness. Would you rather be blind or deaf? I mean, would you rather not be blind, or not be deaf?

M: I'd rather lose my sense of taste.

R: *(makes M.'s buzzer sound)* Not on the table.

M: I'd rather lose my sense of smell. This ink is making me sick.

R: What do you think a squid's heart smells like?

M: You know they eat it with spaghetti in Italy? Spaghetti al nero di seppia. They actually sell it at Trader Joe's now.

A breath.

R: I'd be blind. The only way to keep looking everywhere at once.

M: Me too. I can walk around my entire apartment in the pitch black and make myself a sandwich.

R: On good sandwich bread!

M. The best.

R: Too bad you no longer have a sense of taste.

M: We could open a midnight sandwich shop! Laboring while the world sleeps.

R: Like newspapermen. Or bakers.

M: I should change my OkCupid region to Australia. The time difference would suit me and my beau.

R: “How did you meet?” they’ll ask. “In the dark,” you’ll say.

M: Let’s ask Fate.

Margaret snaps the cootie catcher back and forth. Opens it to read her fate.

M: *(hyperdramatic narrator of a juicy romance novel)* “Often Psyche begged him to stay with her through the day, that she might see his face and make him a sandwich; but this he would not grant...” *(weary)* I’m not sure I want to meet an Australian.

R: Good.

M: What do you mean, “good?”

R: Did I say good? I don’t remember saying anything.

M: You were probably answering a question you had asked yourself twenty minutes ago. Like, “How do I feel about Margaret advertising for a lover?”

R: I don’t think there’s a word for how I feel about that. It’s more like a sound. Fortunately, we both have our hearing. If you close your eyes, I’ll make the sound for you.

She does. Long silence.

M: [Are you...?

At the same time: E makes a sound, a pure, high-pitched tone, like a radio gone off the air. Pushing down the handle of the press three times, he’s accompanied by the bird-like sound of iron and squeaky springs. The tone stops. He lets the handle down with a crash. From somewhere, Aretha starts up: “I was born by the river...”]

End of play.