

Meaningless conversations

by Rhys Nixon

"This coffee shop sucks. We should have gone to the place across town. This isn't a latte at all."

"My friend works here, I get cheap coffee. Plus they don't charge extra for soy milk."

"You aren't vegan."

"Well, yeah, but you have to look out for your body."

"I can see you hate it though. Why drink it if you hate it?"

"I like it fine. I love the art here. Don't you love the art here?"

"It's okay, lots of birds and landscapes. It's okay."

"We don't have to stay here."

"Good."

"Why did you come here?"

"I wanted coffee, not art. That's why I came here, and the coffee here isn't even that good. We should have gone to the place across town, their lattes are the best."

"How do you determine the best coffee? Do you think they have judges that go from store to store trying coffee?"

"How else would they be able to put up the 'BEST COFFEE HOUSE/CAFE 2012 AWARD WINNER' plaques? They need a judge. And this place is lacking in plaques."

"It's not all about the plaques."

"When I want a good coffee, I check for the plaques."

"We didn't have to come here, you know."

"Why didn't you say that before we came here? Absolving yourself now is meaningless, we bought the bad plaque-less coffee, and your friend is happy. Don't tell me we didn't have to do this now."

"Whatever."

"You don't even like soy, or coffee. You always order a dark hot chocolate, what gives?"

“Well, not drinking coffee makes me feel like I miss out on something. Everyone drinks coffee, people go out for coffee. It's a social thing. I feel awkward when I go to a coffee house and order a hot chocolate when everyone else has coffee. I want to like coffee.”

“Say coffee again.”

“Coffee, and besides soy milk is good for you, and I have been meaning to switch to soy.”

“Coffee is a weird word. And you can order soy hot chocolates, you knew that right?”

“Yes.”

“Then why don't you have the soy hot chocolate? People will see that you care about yourself, and you are enough of an individual to order something different from the rest.”

“It isn't that easy. It's like Homer Simpson said, ‘I'm not popular enough to be different’.”

“I wonder how people know they are popular, do they get a judge to come over to their house, look at their bookshelf and CD's, who then gives them a plaque to put outside their place that says ‘COOLEST/MOST POPULAR 2012 AWARD WINNER’? Or would they give them a shirt that says so? Or maybe they give them a tattoo?”

“I don't know, but either way I am plaque-less. I am drinking plaque-free coffee and my apartment is plaque-free. I am the opposite of a plaque; I'm a ‘Great Effort’ certificate.”

“Maybe they could hand out plaques for ‘LEAST AMOUNT OF PLAQUES 2012 AWARD WINNER’, but instead of an actual plaque it's a copy of The Simpsons on DVD.”

“Yeah, but then the idea of not having plaques would become the new thing. Next thing you know I have the most plaques in town and too many award winning coffees. Everyone would be drinking hot chocolates at MacDonal'd's and never going out of home, and that will be the cool thing to do. I will be the only one at the bars while everyone else is watching television. I cannot win.”

“Let's just get out of here, and go to the place across town. You don't even like soy.”

“I'm going to get a hot chocolate, this coffee sucks.”

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“I don't understand, why did we even have to go to the first place? You knew you didn't want their coffee. It sucks.”

“It's the pressure.”

“The pressure?”

“Yes, the pressure of maintaining a certain image. The pressure of making sure I drink the right coffee, eat the right food, like the right music, watch the right movies, read the right books. It's exhausting. I sometimes feel like it isn't me who likes them, just an idea of a self I made up.”

“But why? Why deal with it all? Why would you subject yourself to these feelings, why would you question your own identity over a cup of coffee?”

“Because the pressure of not fitting in is suffocating, you don't feel it? You never feel it at all? You have never thought that maybe people laughed at you for ordering something you really like, because they have pre-conceived notions of it not being *the drink?*”

“Well, sure, maybe sometimes. But I try not to let it get to me. I understand the feeling, but honestly, if you want something than you should be able to have it.”

“I know! And that is the most agonizing part. I hate what I do, but can I stop? No. I am a slave to the concept of trend, the idea of cool. I can't help it! Acceptance, that's all I want here, a group of people to think of me as someone important; to think of me as someone worthwhile.”

“I think you need to re-think who you spend your time with.”

“The thing is, I don't think it's just my problem. I think that the people I spend time with all feel this way to a degree as well. It's like we are all hanging onto an idea of ourselves, and are constantly terrified of being found out. So we pretend. We lie to each other

straight in the face. We all want to feel important, like we matter, so we make up our own version of the person that matters to the outside world."

"Okay, I think I know what you mean, but I don't agree entirely. Some people are seen as 'important' or 'worthwhile, in your words, because they are able to express themselves entirely. They have confidence in what they do, and people find that impressive, to an extent."

"But still, I think I have the right idea. Hey are we going to order something?"

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"I like that place so much more than that other coffee place, who are they even trying to kid there? What a joke."

"Yeah, I know what you mean."

"What did you have in mind now? Want to come back to my place?"

"Yeah sure, I've got nothing better to do."

"So, do you feel better for getting what you wanted in the end?"

"Yeah, I really do. It was so liberating, and I know that sounds ridiculous, but just getting what I wanted gave me this huge sense of freedom, and in a sense, it felt like some sort of accomplishment. I was able to just be myself and it felt fantastic."

"See? You just have to do what you want to do. But what you said before, about how you think everyone just pretends, has made me think. Maybe you are right, what if I am pretending right now to be the confident person that tells you 'just do what you want to do'? Maybe we aren't aware of it, that it is just a part of the human condition. This undeniable force designed to make human beings want to cohabit, want to live with each other, to make us a more social species? Maybe you are right, and that even if we try our

hardest to do and act how we want, in the end maybe what we think we are doing is still some form of pretending, in denying trying to fit in, we are fitting a different stereotype.”

“We just can't win.”

“I know! It's like, no matter what we do, think, or say, it might not even be us speaking! This is getting too confusing; all I was trying to say was that there might be some truth behind what you said before. That maybe we all tend to create a character of ourselves to a degree when faced with the challenges of day to day life. That perhaps we need to do this on occasion, whether we agree or not, and that it's just in our nature to do this. Maybe that's why the people you hang out with all drink soy, and all go to that terrible coffee house, as a way to 'break the ice' and to try and connect. The problem then is, what are they connecting with? Are they connecting with you or are they connecting with a character? I think that is the main issue, not that people tend to create themselves, but that one could create *too much* of themselves, and what people connect with aren't people at all, just ideas.”

“That's my problem too, that's what I am afraid of being a part of. I want people to want to know me for me, not this created idea of me. I mean sure we all create ourselves to an extent, but I don't want that to be my life. I want my life to be mine, with whatever happens being how it happens. Not some carefully planned ordeal that I can look back on and think 'man I sure was cool, look at me go'.”

“Exactly! Why would anybody want to live like that? You would end up being even more isolated; being completely alone in a crowd of people.”

“And even the things you think you like, films, books, music, it's all a lie. You can't even go home and read a book you really enjoy because it isn't the *right book*. And if you want to watch a movie, you almost have to go through a list of films that are deemed worthy to watch for the purposes of creating the perfect persona. And music, knowing all you can about a band you hate so you can sit

around at a party and talk about how you love their early work more than their later stuff, and that their solo projects are far superior, when in fact you haven't heard more than three songs and you didn't like them, but still doing this all for the sake of creating this person."

"Why do we do this? Why do I do this? I almost feel completely hopeless. What do you do when you are faced with the realization that maybe what you have been doing hasn't been right at all? It could even be unhealthy, mentally, for me to act this way. I'm not making and meaningful relationships with people, it's more like I'm collecting trading cards to show off to other people. I can tell them 'I'm friends with these people, I read these books, I watch these movies and I listen to this music, how about you?', and it's now gone from a general interest in the other person to a competition of who can have a bigger collection."

"I know that I do not want to be a collectable, I want to be a human being."

"I agree."

"Well, we made the first step, we went to the good coffee place and got what we wanted, and we enjoyed it. From now on we both have to do things that we just want to do. Listen to whatever we want to, read whatever we want, and watch any film or TV show we choose. We cannot let what other people think of us dictate what we do with our lives, it's just sad really. The fact that we are more concerned with how people will react to what we do rather than just enjoy what we do is so limiting, we could be missing out on some amazing experiences just because some people don't agree. That isn't fair to ourselves, and we do deserve to enjoy what we want to enjoy."

"Yes I couldn't agree more, the hot chocolate tasted even better because I just did what I wanted, without thinking about any pre-conceived notions, and just got what I wanted. Let's just watch whatever we want, no matter what people think, because we just have fun watching it. Let's read whatever we choose to read, just

because we love it. Let's listen to whatever music we want because it makes us feel good."

"I feel like this is the beginning of something new, not just for you, but for me as well. This idea, that we can just enjoy what we want to enjoy, is so liberating."

"I know, it's almost exciting, it's like finally I can just do what I want without worrying about what others think. Well, maybe not right away, I think I will still worry about what people think at first, but that can't be helped. Like you said, maybe it's just how humans are as a species, that we create these methods of interaction to better equip us with the ability to co-exist. If it can't be completely helped then I guess that's just how it is, but either way trying to create these 'more human' beings doesn't sound like a natural species at all. Maybe we need some of these tools to survive, but going to these extremes just creates more problems, and eventually alienates us and leaves us with nothing but a 'deck of cards', so to speak."

"All in all, I am just glad we both agree on this, and who know, maybe we won't even be completely honest with everything we do, but at least we will for the most part be ourselves, and just enjoy what we want to enjoy."

"On that note, I think we should go inside and watch whatever comes on TV first, and see if we like it or not without thinking about what other people think."

"Awesome."

