

Dialogue sample from  
(Un)comfortable Silence

by DJ Sanders

(PAPER and BOOK sit in chairs. PAPER is reading the newspaper and BOOK is reading a book. BOOK looks up from the book and looks over at PAPER who continues to read. BOOK begins to speak but does not. BOOK tries to read again but puts the book down. BOOK becomes frustrated trying to find a way to begin a conversation. Finally, BOOK breaks the silence)

BOOK

Was this a comfortable silence?

PAPER

Pardon?

BOOK

Or was it an uncomfortable silence?

PAPER

What do you mean?

BOOK

We just had a period of silence. Where neither of us were speaking.

PAPER

I was reading.

BOOK

But before that, before the silence, we were talking.

PAPER

Were we?

BOOK

I believe so.

PAPER

I don't remember talking to you.

BOOK

I'm certain of it.

PAPER

I only remember sitting here and reading the paper.

BOOK

But before that. What were you doing?

PAPER

Nothing.

BOOK

You had to be doing something. Don't tell me you've spent your whole existence reading the paper.

PAPER

I simply mean that what I was doing before reading the paper is of no consequence.

BOOK

Of no consequence?! How can you say that?! What if we were having a delightful conversation and all of a sudden you said something offensive, or I said something offensive. Then what just happened could best be described as an uncomfortable silence. But if we had been sharing some of our favorite childhood memories or recounting a funny story from the television, we may have reached the natural end of the conversation--both satisfied with having shared in a special communicative moment that neither of us knew how to best continue the topic. In that case, our conversation lull would best be called a comfortable silence.

PAPER

This is the first conversation that we have ever had. Any objective observer would have to agree. You can't recall the topic of any prior conversation.

BOOK

We may not have textual evidence, but it seems reasonable enough to assume that two people sitting in a room together, both reading, had, at some point, had a conversation prior to the present exchange. We could be long lost friends, or family members, or top secret agents spying on unsuspecting passer-bys.

PAPER

Or we could be two randomly chosen people with no special connection and no particular back-story, just placed in an arbitrary place for a fixed period of time.

BOOK

Even if that were the case--but I'm not saying it is-- wouldn't it be more interesting if there was some kind of history between us, perhaps a shared tragedy, or a major conflict, or one of us had a secret. Then we could surely figure out whether that silence was comfortable or uncomfortable.

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