

CONVERSATION, LIKE, TALKING WITH EACH OTHER ABOUT STUFF

AJ stood at the counter, wagging an imaginary tail and singing a song to himself as he counted the bills from the register into piles of 100s.

“Got money today, got it here in my paws, sold vegan food today, smoke weed and break laws, got money today—Woahhh where are you going with that?”

The new hire, Fief, stopped walking with a huge bag of trash just as he was nearing the front door. He turned and looked back to AJ.

“Benny said to take out the trash.”

“Yeah go out the back, you can’t get in from that way, there’s like a gate that’s gonna be closed unless it’s trash time. Trash time? Day. Trash day. Garbage day.”

AJ continued to wag his imaginary tail, and wished the kid would laugh along with his it-has-been-a-long-day-today-oh-my-god line of thinking to arrive at the word for garbage day, instead of just standing there holding the garbage with a concerned frown. But, if he wanted to be all serious, his loss.

Fief offered by way of explanation, “Benny said to go out back too, but I only saw the one door back there and it said an alarm will sound if I open the door, and I didn’t want to set it off so I was going to go around front, is there a way I could open the gate out front, like is there a key or something I could use?”

“Nah just go out the back, don’t worry about it.”

“So, set off the alarm?”

AJ snickered, and said, "Yeah I unplugged that twenty million years ago."

"Okay, but the door did say—"

"It's fiiiine, plus we're closed, it would be fun to set off the alarm even if it did happen. You done after taking that out?"

"Yeah."

"Sweet, remember your stuff and have a good night, I'll clock you out when you go."

"Oh uh, okay. Sounds good."

Fief headed behind the counter again with the garbage, headed for the back door.

AJ continued his song.

"Got money today, most of it was on cards, no one uses cash today, something something some bards." As he finished totaling it all up and jotting down the figures on a scrap of paper, he said to himself, "Allright, not bad," and then shouted into the kitchen, "Money good!"

He then heard a shout back, "Yay money good!"

"Home soon good!"

"Home not soon!"

"What!"

AJ put the money into the safe under the counter, and then walked into the kitchen to find out what heresy Benny meant by home not soon. He passed by Fief, who was on his way out. Benny there in the kitchen had a clipboard in his tattooed hands, and was marking items off on a checklist that all of the equipment had been turned off and cleaned.

"Thanks for the help Fief."

AJ and Fief high fived, it kind of didn't connect amazingly but the spirit was there. AJ snapped his fingers, did a clap, and then slid up to the punch in thingy, brought up Fief, and waited until a little bit after he heard the front door close to punch him out. Then he turned around to yell stuff at Benny, and saw Benny had been standing directly there behind him.

"Oh. Hi," AJ said, and began timidly wagging.

"Hi you," Benny said back.

AJ got up on his tiptoes, and he and Benny kissed.

"Why are we not home soon good?" AJ inquired.

Benny gave a smooch to AJ's forehead, minding he didn't mess up AJ's fox ears headband. "Do you really not remember?"

"No?"

"It was your idea?" Benny prompted.

AJ: "Benny I have no idea at all what you're talking about."

Benny: "We agreed to do the dishes of that sit-down Chinese place two doors down."

AJ: "You are fucking me."

Benny: "Um. Not actively."

AJ: "You are fucking WITH me, Captain Grammars-A-Lot."

Benny: "Nope. Unless I'm going to be really surprised by the totals you counted, getting paid to knock out these dishes is actually the only way we're making a profit today, like, personally, and our home loan kind of depends on like, that."

AJ groaned, but didn't disagree. He also remembered that it completely was his idea. It had come up in a group chat with a bunch of the local businesses that the sit down Chinese place's whole dishwashing apparatus basically needed to be completely replaced, and the sit down pizza place next door made an offer on cleaning the dishes during the day but they closed early, and so he had jumped in and offered to clean up the end of day for the same rate proportional to the number of dishes, which was a steep figure but it was a figure that meant the Chinese place could stay open while their dishwasher was being retooled, and anyways they had agreed to it.

AJ groaned a second time more loudly and for longer.

Benny rested his hands on AJ's shoulders, and gave the fronts of the shoulders little massages with his thumbs. "Hey, we're doing alright," Benny said. "It was always going to be a stretch starting a vegan burger place out here. We're making it work. I'm proud of us."

Timidly, as though the answer might change if he acted small enough, AJ asked, "How many dishes are there?"

"They left a pallet out front—"

"A pallet!!"

"Yeahhhh."

"Godddd. Alright let's do it." AJ karate chopped away Benny's hands off of his shoulders, and started trotting for the front door. Benny snickered, and followed after with a cart.

Outside, AJ had turned his head up to the night sky and was letting out a groan like howling at the moon. Together, the two of them piled the dishes from the pallet onto the cart, and then brought everything inside to their sink.

“Okay okay okay okay okay,” AJ said, “let’s throw them in the dishwasher and let that run for like forever and meanwhile we will go outside and I will eat your face, like, make out.”

“Ohhhh, *not* like a zombie.”

“Right.”

“You’re not going to eat my face *off* like cannibalism, you’re going quote-on-quote ‘eat my face’ like kissing.”

“Right.”

“Okay let’s do that.”

Benny turned on the water and soap feeds to get the sink going. The churner thing inside didn’t seem like it would be a problem for any of the dishes they were about to throw at it. It was a pretty general purpose, straightforward piece of machinery. Benny and AJ piled in all of the dishes, both of them lamenting how caked on some of the crud seemed to be. Neither was optimistic the dishwasher would get the entire job done, but they agreed it would at least help. When the basin was all full of dishes and water and soap, AJ turned off the feeds, started the churning thingy, took Benny’s hand, and lead the two of them outside.

There were a couple of park-style table-benches-combo things out there, for diners to eat at if it was a nice day outside. It was a really nice night out, as Benny and AJ sat down together on one of the benches: cool, but not chilly, clear sky, you could be out in a t-shirt and it would feel great.

AJ wriggled up onto Benny’s lap, and sat there as the two of them started pressing their lips together and doing stuff with their tongues. Benny’s whole mouth and stuff tasted like vanilla cake vape.

The two of them had met about five years ago. AJ was making a vlog of offering people piano lessons at a public piano. And then a skinny tall boy—guy, adult, AJ just said boy a lot for that—a skinny tall boy with messy hair and tattoos of geometry and howling wolves and deer antlers and stuff came up, and it was over, AJ was in love at first sight. He played it pretty cool,

showing this cute boy how to play up a scale, and that went well and they joked around a bunch, and then AJ asked, “Hey so would you wanna meet up for another lesson sometime, or like, food, we could eat lunch together, I am asking if you want to go on a date tomorrow or whenever, I like you.” And Benny said yes, and the two of them turned out to have so much in common it was uncanny. They were both vegan, both artists who did lots of drawings of animals, both into doctor drama TV shows, both had gone through a period of going by she/her pronouns but then went back to he/him, both ambidextrous, both atheists, both interested in projects like vlogs and blogs and making video essays and all of those internet entertainment kinds of things. Each of their follower bases were very into the fact that they were dating each other, it was a perfect match. And it really was. It wasn’t just for the fact that them kissing and being snuggly on the selfie cameras did numbers, they were just chronicling their lives, and their lives now happened to involve kissing and being snuggly and having a really aesthetic and intimate existence.

AJ moaned as he kissed Benny, sitting there in his lap, and Benny ran his hands all over AJ’s body, feeling, touching, taking AJ in. AJ’s imaginary tail wagged and wagged and wagged.

Both of them jumped a little as they heard from the parking lot, “EEEUUUUUGGGGGG!!!”

A cry of disgust, on par with a lot of AJ’s earlier groaning about the dishes, but something different. Angry rather than despairing.

The two of them looked, and saw a man with grey hair and a collared shirt walking by, looking at them as he went. He went on, “Gross!”

Benny asked, “Gross?”

The man jeered, “Sickening!”

AJ snickered. “Sickening you say?”

“Eugh, awful. Two GROWN MEN defiling each other!”

AJ clung tight around Benny, both of their stomachs contracting in trying-to-keep-quiet laughter against each other.

The man went on, at this point speaking louder as he had passed by them and was not looking back, “You’ll be fired for

this! I'll be sure to call in about employees in an illegal 'relationship!'"

Benny lost it, and began laughing openly. AJ drummed his hands against Benny's chest rapidly in excitement, and whisper screamed to Benny, "He said *illegal!!* He said 'relationship' like sarcasm!!! aaaaaa!!!!"

"You won't be laughing TOMORROW when your manager FIRES YOUR ASSES."

Benny called after the guy, "We're co-owners of the restaurant sir! Have a nice night!"

AJ called after the guy, "Being gay is legal also!"

Benny called after the guy, "We're gonna keep being so gay back here!"

AJ called after the guy, "We both used to be trans too but we changed our minds!"

The old man shouted, "Don't shout at me, that's assault! I'll press charges!"

Benny asked AJ in a much quieter tone, "Do you think he was in the store's security cameras that whole time?"

AJ answered, "Bro yes and the front door is mic'd."

Benny gasped.

AJ headbutted Benny's chest in excitement.

Benny hugged AJ, and said, "I am so gonna start editing this right when we get home, this is goldddd. Homophobia in 2024, that is so amazing."

Benny and AJ, AJ in Benny's lap, sat there hugging as they both calmed down, a process marked with many reignited giggling fits on both of their parts.

Benny repeated, "He actually said we were *defiling* each other."

AJ nuzzled Benny, and said, "He did. That was so funny of him."

Benny: "What did he think that meanssss."

AJ: "Like, in all honesty, probably he thinks we should have wives and make offspring and we're ruining our potential by getting with another hairy boy instead."

Benny: "Why does *he* care if we have kids!"

AJ: "Bro he is tripping I'm not defending him."

Benny: "Wait, oh no, I did forget to check again when we sat down whether or not you consented to kissing."

AJ: "Oh no, you did."

Benny: "I know we had made plans that we agreed about to go kiss, but I forgot before we started to check in and make sure that those plans were still something that you consented to."

AJ: "Right."

Benny: "You didn't ask me either."

AJ: "Oh no."

Benny: "Maybe we *were* defiling each other."

AJ: "That seems possible now that you mention it."

Benny: "Did you consent to all of that kissing that I forgot to ask about your consent with?"

AJ: "Yes. Did you also all of that stuff?"

Benny: "Yes."

AJ: "Phew."

Benny: "Phew for real."

AJ started petting Benny's back, and asked, "Do you consent to more kissing, just a little?"

Benny: "Yes. Do you consent to more kissing, just a little for fun before we go in and do dishes?"

AJ: "Yes."

AJ licked Benny's lips, and the two of their mouths connected as one again.

Eventually, thinking of how the dishwasher had probably done all it was going to do, AJ rested his palms on the sides of Benny's head, gave one last big mwah, and then gently pushed Benny's head back.

Benny gave a disappointed little groan, and asked, "Do you consent to going back inside and helping me with the dishes?"

AJ slid off of Benny's lap and stood up and stretched, and then said, "Mmmmmm yeah, I consent to helping with the dishes. You kind of already implied you will be doing dishes also, but just to double check because it's always good to be safe, do you also consent to doing dishes with me?"

"Yeah, I do."

"Yay." AJ wagged his imaginary tail a little.

The two of them headed inside, and got to work. Throughout the process, they shared questions of, "Do you consent to trying

to get this gunk off of this dish? I can't get it." "Yeah. Do you consent to handing me that dish so I can do that?" "Yeah. Oh sorry, do you consent to me handing you this dish so you can do that?" "Yeah." "Do you consent to starting to drain the sink?" "Yeah I'll hit that. Boom, there we go, sink is draining. Do you consent to sniffing some of these with me to make sure they're clean?" "I consent to you doing that in front of me but I don't think we need to sniff the dishes, they're clean." "Do you consent to toweling some of these off with me so we can stack them up and get them back?" "Yeah. Do you consent to the towel stuff too?" "Yeah."

When the dishes were all ready to be brought back, the two of them wheeled the cart out. Benny unlocked the front door of sit-down Chinese place with a key he'd been given for the occasion, left the cart inside, and locked the door behind himself.

"Phew," Benny said.

"Phew indeed," AJ agreed.

"Home now."

"Home now yay so glad."

The two of them started walking for their car.

AJ asked, "You got the keys?"

"Yeah I'll drive."

"Cool. You still gonna start working on that video when we get back?"

"Nah I don't know."

AJ mentioned, "Sarah is good on mornings, she honestly wants us to leave her alone and trust her more I think."

"You think?"

"Yeah I think."

"Hmmm," Benny hm'd, and then said, "Yeah if you think, I will stay up late and work on it then."

"Do you consent to me lying on your feet under your desk while you do?"

"I don't know why you like that so much."

"Dog stuff."

"You do like dog stuff. Yeah you can lie on my feet."

"Ayy, glad, yay."

Benny unlocked the car with the remote key thing, and AJ got into the passenger seat and settled in and relaxed as Benny turned the ignition.

Benny drove them out of the parking lot and onto the road.

AJ turned on the radio, and closed his eyes as some R&B played.

At some point in the drive, Benny turned down the volume to one.

AJ opened his eyes, and sat upright.

Benny mentioned, "Hey so uh. Talking about consent. I know we've been joking around tonight but like, I actually have some thoughts I wanted to share."

AJ answered, "Sure. What's up? I am so here for this."

Benny: "So like, remember I said a long time ago that I thought animals can't consent?"

AJ: "Yeah, and that's why you like, never would, even though you're interested. Like, you think a lot of animals are really hot, you are technically a zoosexual, but it's just fantasy and stuff. Is what you said before. But, you think differently now?"

Benny: "Yeah so like. I think I've changed my mind."

AJ: "Yeah?"

Benny: "Yeah um. I think they are really capable of expressing themselves. Like, it's actually really insulting—and I was at fault on this before, for sure—I think it's really insulting to say that they can't communicate what's on their mind. And, a lot of animals are sexually capable beings."

AJ: "Yeah, for sure."

Benny: "So like. What convinced me, and this is going to sound so spicy—"

AJ: "Oh my god please."

Benny: "I swearrr the neighbors' dogs are trying to fuck me."

AJ gasped, and asked, "Are they??"

Benny: "I swearrr dude."

AJ: "Holy shit I love that."

Benny giggled, and asked, "Really?"

AJ: "That rules."

Benny: "Like, I haven't, to be clear. I haven't done anything with them. But I swear they all want it. Like, literally I will just be sitting out back reading a book like I do, and one of these

dogs will come up, try to get my attention, or *literally* casually just grab my leg and start humping and I have to push them off.”

AJ giggled.

Benny: “And like, sometimes, like you do, one of them will come up and lie on my feet. Like, I don’t even know what’s up, I have never fed these dogs, I have barely even pet them honestly, but there are like five dogs in the neighborhood who think I’m their boyfriend.”

AJ: “I’m so happy for you.”

Benny: “Yeah?”

AJ: “Yeah. Also I know all of the dogs you mean and none of them want me like that, they so just think you specifically are dog hot.”

Benny snickered.

AJ: “They do! They must! I have never had any of them try that with me at all!”

Benny: “Well, that’s flattering, maybe.”

AJ: “I think we should give one of them a handie. Like, you jerk him off, I’ll supervise.”

Benny: “Oh my god, I. Actually kind of would like that, but I didn’t think you’d be, like. This up for it.”

AJ: “We should! Animals deserve sex.”

Benny: “I mean, hey, I agree.”

AJ: “So you’re like a real zoosexual now.”

Benny: “I mean, I wasn’t *fake* before.”

AJ: “I mean you kiiind of were.”

Benny: “Well, I know what you mean. Yeah I guess kind of. But yes, I am a zoosexual, like, fully actually now, I guess I really would do it if you’d be so okay with that.”

AJ: “Yeah man. So like, you definitely for sure approve of that stuff in real life? Like, if someone actually had sex with a dog, you would cheer them on from the penalty box?”

Benny: “From the penalty box?”

AJ: “Ugh, noooo, what’s the other one? The like, box, you sit in to watch sports from high up?”

Benny: “Ohhhh.”

AJ: “Is that also called a box?”

Benny: “I think it’s just a box.”

AJ: "It definitely has a fancier name than a box. Hold on I'm going to look it up. Uhhhh... Luxury box, oh we were close. Luxury box, club seating, suite. Anyways if someone actually had sex with a dog would that not be a big deal to you?"

Benny: "Yeah I mean if they were respectful to the dog and everyone seemed to have fun, good for them."

AJ let out a big relieved sigh.

AJ: "Fiiiiiiiiinally."

Benny: "What?"

AJ: "Okay, I, haha, the short version is I lost my V card to a dog."

Benny: "Nooooo."

AJ: "I did!"

Benny: "You just let me keep hating zoos when you were one?"

AJ: "I mean I kind of am I'm kind of not, it just happened that way that first time! And it stuck with me, like, I have a lot of animal-oriented thoughts, that I kind of ascribe to that, like, him rawing me imbued me with dog mentality. But like, there's no dogs I'm having sex with anymore, so whatever you thought about that stuff was like alright I'm not really over here having a reason to argue."

Benny: "You should have!"

AJ: "I don't think people really listen about that kind of thing, I think they just have their opinion and it is immune to arguing."

Benny: "Oh wow. I mean. Yeah."

AJ: "Hey, we got there now."

Benny: "So when you tell me about your tail, is that like, part of that?"

AJ: "Yeah totally."

Benny: "So what happened?"

AJ: "What?"

Benny: "What was your first time?"

AJ: "Ohhh."

Benny: "Like, did the dog lick you, or—"

AJ: "Oh he mounted."

Benny: "Oh fuck!"

AJ: "I said he rawed!"

Benny: "I thought you were exaggerating!"

AJ: "It was so... So like, I had been playing around with myself, learning how to bottom for some hypothetical partner, but I wasn't really out to anyone? So like, what's a fella to do, well, what I did is get myself all lubed and played with and ready, and then, there was a neighborhood near where I lived that was notorious for having ill-behaved dogs just run around —"

Benny: "Oh my god."

AJ: "Yeah and so I went there, like oh yeah these dogs definitely have balls, and a dog pretty soon did come up to me, and we got on the ground and kinda petted and swiped at each other all playfully, and then he sooooo fucked me under a pine tree, and that was my first time."

Benny: "Woah."

AJ: "It was so good."

Benny: "That's amazing."

AJ: "It was so amazing."

Benny: "Did he knot?"

AJ: "Oh yeah."

Benny: "Wow."

AJ: "I think of him basically every time I have a plug in."

Benny: "Oh my god, so, my wang has been inside of the same ass that a dog wang has been in."

AJ: "Haha, yeah I guess so."

Benny: "Wow."

AJ: "Does that matter to you?"

Benny: "It's... kind of really hot."

AJ reached over and felt at Benny's lap, and definitely felt the raised outline of a boner in Benny's pants. He said to Benny, "Alright, drive safe, you're getting road head right now."

Benny answered, "Nooo that seems dangerous."

"I believe in you."

Benny held AJ at bay with one hand, and said, "No I wanna save it anyways for uh. If you'd be up for anal when we get back home."

"Ohhhhhhhh. Yes," AJ said. "Yes let's do that, I'm into what you're going for. I consent to that."

AJ patted Benny's penis, and then left it alone for later.