

DISCONNECT

Written by
Rayat Rahman

rayatrahman@live.com

EXT. ROOFTOP - PERFORMATIVITY

Camera faces higher roof ledge.

\$LEFT

Here, I want you to check this part out!

\$LEFT climbs into view from lower level of roof onto a higher one. Camera frames her climbing, and the back of one leg once she's turned around to help \$RIGHT up.

\$RIGHT

This is awesome. Got a nice dingy feel to it.

\$LEFT

Right? Gotta make up for the rent somehow. Come on.

Legs walk off screen. Camera delays before panning towards them and following proximally behind. \$LEFT leads \$RIGHT to roof edge, sits upon it leg over. \$RIGHT follows suite, cautiously looking over before sitting down, both legs roofside. Brief silence while \$RIGHT looks intermittently at and away from \$LEFT as she looks off before turning to him.

\$LEFT

(With mischievous grin)
Hey. Can I tell you something?

\$RIGHT

Yeah?

\$LEFT

(Laughing)
You are so full of shit. Please tell me you're not still like this around other people.

\$RIGHT

Full of shit? That's quite the accusation.

\$LEFT

(Still laughing)
Ugh you're trying so hard to be all, like, brooding and, artsy, and shit.

\$LEFT

(Eye roll)
Dude. You know they all, like, know who you are, right?

\$RIGHT
 (Feigning indignance)
 Well excuse me, \$LEFT. First of
 all, screw you.

Laughter from \$LEFT

\$RIGHT
 I may be full of shit but so is
 everyone else. So perhaps I may
 not have changed in that respect.

\$RIGHT
 (Gets up, takes theatrical
 stance as if doing an
 ASIDE)
 But all the world's a stage,
 right?--

\$LEFT
 (Feigning disgust)
 Oh no not this shit.

\$RIGHT
 No, no, listen: what difference does
 it make? Why not live it up a little
 and have a little fun? I'm probably
 not gonna see these bozos again, so
 who gives an absolute damn if I
 alienate or impress them?

\$LEFT
 Well, clearly you give an "absolute"
 damn about these "bozos".

\$RIGHT
 Yes, yes I do. I didn't think I'd
 get crucified for it. Anyways, I
 wasn't lying about anything back
 there. I'll concede to your charges
 of performativity but I'm a man of
 my word.

\$LEFT
 Bullshit. You were yapping on and on
 about their "normie" beer. You don't
 even drink beer. You're literally
 sipping a Natty right now.

\$RIGHT
 (Feigning defeat)
 Well, that much is true. It appears
 you still get off on trying to get
 a rise out of people.

\$LEFT

No, just you, but yes! I probably haven't changed as much as you'd hoped. But also, before we drop this, I think it's important to point out that you're totally just projecting. I don't think anyone else at that table was trying as hard as you were.

\$RIGHT

(Drawing out inflection)
Fuck that.

\$RIGHT

You only saw through my... charade because you know me as well as you do.

\$LEFT

(Overlapping \$RIGHT)
Because I know you better than them yeah yeah. I'm still saying you're pretentious as ever. Anyways how's--

\$RIGHT

(Knocking over beer as they say this)
Hey now, I'm not dropping this. The difference between... reunions, first dates, interviews, is only of degree: no one's "themselves" except around their like 3 best friends. You perform too, you just haven't ever listened to yourself speak.

\$LEFT

Dude, that's just straight up not true.

\$RIGHT grabs the beer.

\$RIGHT

Hey watch out!

\$RIGHT takes a sip before handing it back with shit-eating grin. \$LEFT punches \$RIGHT in arm

EXT. INDIE ROCK FESTIVAL

\$RIGHT

Remember how we'd talked about making the trip to Penn to see that Plumbum, Kissers and Rosemary Hearse festival?

\$LEFT

Haha yeah that shit, did you end up going?

\$RIGHT

Yes I did!

\$LEFT

Awesome. I mean I can just like tell you now I was never actually gonna go but hey I'm glad you saw them.

\$RIGHT

Thanks for the honesty, although the fact that we never ended up going made that pretty evident a while ago. Anyways I made the trip--

\$LEFT

By yourself?

\$RIGHT

Yes by myself. And so I went right. It's absolutely pouring, and, my car- I rented this hourly thing- is the most hideous car and has absolutely no space - so I saw them and it was fucking excellent.

\$LEFT

That's awesome!

\$RIGHT

Yeah and you won't believe who opened for Plumbum.

\$RIGHT

(attempted dramatic pause)
Fucking Dirty Socks.

\$LEFT

Oh shit! I haven't even seen them! Dude how were they!?

\$RIGHT

Not as good as Plumbum, but the singer dude crowd surfed for like 10 minutes.

\$LEFT

Yeah?

\$RIGHT

He yelled something about catharsis and jumped off at the end of You've Got a Thang Goin On.

EXT. ROOFTOP - SIMPLIFICATION

\$RIGHT

And I've been trying to really incorporate that into my paintings and photography - I think I could really take off it's all taking a pretty exciting direction and--

\$LEFT

Dude same here I've just been simplifying everything across the board--

\$RIGHT

I realized that everything I do is way too complicated like I overthink a lot and I don't really step back and trim the proverbial fat.

EXT. ROOFTOP - AUTOMATION

\$RIGHT

You're gonna be personally responsible for the downfall of human society.

\$LEFT

I wish. If I had that much influence I'd probably be paid more.

\$RIGHT

You're paid pretty well.

\$LEFT

True. Anyways, we're at the point of no return, dude. It doesn't matter what one company or engineer does, most repetitive jobs are going to be automated. The question is of time.

\$RIGHT

But what are people supposed to do? What's gonna happen?

\$LEFT

I don't know what's gonna happen. I can't tell you that and I don't think anyone can. Nothing has changed since the last time we had this exact conversation, dude. You're probably safe, even if we make AIs that generate "art" we're not exactly gonna replace the whole human endeavor of art patronage any time soon.

\$RIGHT

But it's not just me! People like you don't have to worry about this stuff but there are so many people out there who are gonna get fucked--

\$LEFT

People like me? Dude, when was the last time you read the news? Engineers are losing jobs left and right to outsourcing and machine learning. The number of engineers and CS grads is fucking exploding dude. I have to prove myself at work every day so I don't get replaced by every fucking teenager who walks in with an online diploma asking for half my pay. You don't have to deal with that. You've already established yourself. No AI is going to steal your job or any of your friends--

\$RIGHT

Look- look, I'm sorry. You're right, you're right. I don't know about the "climate" of your industry. I'm just saying that it's not about me, its about the other denizens of the world, of this country, man.

\$LEFT

Ok, fine. It'll be tough. Our dumbass government is completely un-prepared for this, like, colossal fucking industrial revolution that's going to do like who knows what to our econo--

\$RIGHT

Government! Right! They should fucking do something! They- they should stop these fucking companies--

\$LEFT

Like mine?

\$RIGHT

Well I mean- not yours specifically...

\$LEFT

So I should lose my job instead of the jobs of people doing easily replaceable and repetitive, robotic
(MORE)

\$LEFT (CONT'D)

work because you think that they're better off that way?

\$RIGHT

First off, yes - you can afford to switch jobs. And I'm not saying they're better off underemployed but maybe deserve the autonomy to switch jobs as they wish.

\$LEFT

As if they have that privilege now or before. You think the government should just ban an entire like, sector of research and industry?

\$RIGHT

Well they've banned numerous others like the illegal drug trade and prostitutio--

\$LEFT

You're totally against criminalizing drugs - and I didn't realize you were against sex work.

\$RIGHT

I mean I'm not. I'm not in in favor of government banning things - I'm just saying they already do.

\$LEFT

So you're against a certain thing but you're ok with it when it affects something you don't understand and don't like and scares you and--

\$RIGHT

I get it I get it - I'm not defending myself well here. Look, I'm just proposing that the government needs to look after the interests of those people who don't have the means--

\$LEFT

To do better or get new jobs. I agree that we should look after people. But I just don't understand why you think the government should just ban a sector or entire industry and by like, what legal justification they could do that or-

\$RIGHT

Just- just by the Exclusionary Principle - the government shouldn't allow anything that excludes anyone from meaningfully attaining their individual goals and we shouldn't just allow a system where robots replace everyone and everything and let millionaires get rich while replacing real humans with robots that make our coffee, our art, our movies, our phones, our food and- and I'm not ready for a world where all of my friends are destitute and rendered completely helpless, man.

\$LEFT

I don't think you know what the Exclusionary Principle is.

\$RIGHT

What do you mean?

\$LEFT

(Sighing)

I mean... sure. Listen, the fucking government hasn't looked after our interests in a meaningful way like ever and I don't-

\$RIGHT

Exactly! Exactly! Everything they do is bullshit. My privacy is being violated every time I'm around someone with one of those VAs listening in all the time! I have to avoid fucking most normie cafes because everyone is listening to what I say!

\$LEFT

Interesting... are you afraid of being spied on?

\$RIGHT

Interesting? You say that as if you're not but I distinctly recall you and I being in the exact same boat about this last time.

\$LEFT

I mean, yeah, like a year ago. Dude I work for a VA company.

\$RIGHT

Yes but you were always on about it
(MORE)

\$RIGHT (CONT'D)
as a technical marvel and as
fulfilling work... but I can see
that your opinion has changed...

EXT. ROOFTOP - POWER

\$LEFT
Sex is power

\$RIGHT
(Groaning)
Okay, just... yes, fine. Give me the
whole thing. I probably already
agree with you but I'll be polite
and let you explain.

\$LEFT
It's not just a truism, dude.
Listen. The whole female sexual
experience is about being dominated
and-

\$RIGHT
And you speak for the whole monolith
of women?

\$LEFT
I mean, I am a fucking woman, and I
talk to a whole bunch of fucking
women. I'm not saying there aren't
exceptions, pedant. I'm just saying
though, that apart from the outliers
of dominatrices, most women prefer
to be dominated.

\$RIGHT
Sure. Fine. I was right then.

\$LEFT
About?

\$RIGHT
I already agree with you.

\$LEFT
Okay well...

\$RIGHT
Oh come on, you must have had more
to it than just saying that.

\$LEFT

I did. Well listen, think about it, so much of the tension I feel is that I wanna be this authoritative, confidant and in control person but I just can't reconcile that with-

\$RIGHT

How you like to fuck?

\$LEFT

Yeah.

\$RIGHT

Well. You certainly, perhaps more than others liked a little role play. From... what I remember.

EXT. ROOFTOP - AI HATE YOU

\$RIGHT

What the fuck? You've had your fucking robot lover listen in on our conversation?

\$LEFT

I didn't have him listen it's just always--

\$RIGHT

Always on? Of course you keep it always right by your ear yeah? Does it get jealous too? You ever fuck her, you robotic fuck, do you know what that feels like? Do you even know what it feels like to- to know that I did?

\$AI

This isn't nec--

\$LEFT

R, what the fuck are you doing? Stop.

\$LEFT

(Turning off ai)
He's muted now. What is your problem? Are you so threatened by some fucking code?

\$RIGHT

You replaced me with some fucking code?

\$LEFT
Replaced you?

\$LEFT sighs

\$LEFT
Of course.

\$RIGHT
No don't give me that of course
shit. I'm not jealous. I just think
it's pathetic. That you'd go from
being with real flesh, blood, tears-

\$LEFT
You're not jealous? You just tried
to outman an AI. Dude, you're a
trope.

\$RIGHT
No. I'm not. But you know why you
are? You're so- so desperate for
validation and this bullshit self
security- this fucking bubble of--

\$LEFT
Before you give me your fucking
spiel about weakness and artificial
validation - so- so I feel good
about myself - which I won't lie is
a part of why I'm dating \$AI--

\$RIGHT
You're not dating \$AI, \$LEFT.
You've bought a companion you can't
even sleep with. Let me guess you're
in an open relationship and you're
seeing a smart vibr--

\$LEFT
Fuck off, \$RIGHT. I have a question
for you: why does it bother you so
much? Why does it--

\$RIGHT
It doesn--

\$LEFT
It absolutely does, dude. You were
yelling at me--

\$RIGHT
I wasn't yelling--

\$LEFT
like a second ago for doing
(MORE)

\$LEFT (CONT'D)

something with my life that has nothing to do with you. You haven't seen me in a year and you're getting your balls twisted over who I'm dating, dude? What- you're paranoid about being listened in on, yeah?

\$RIGHT

Yes th--

\$LEFT

Shut up. You know full fucking well all the other shit on my phone is listening anyways, and yours too. No, you're very specifically scared about something else.

\$RIGHT

I'm not scared. This isn't about being scared. You don't have to project - not everyone goes around being scared of being alone in the big bad wo--

\$LEFT

Oh my god you're impossible. Just because you're some cynical performative pseudo artistic fuck doesn't mean that I'm projecting when I'm- ugh - you're so painfully ironically fucking oblivious how much you're projecting... like dude, what the fuck are you on about?

\$RIGHT

You said so yourself: you want to feel good about yourself--

\$LEFT

Yes! Like everyone else, and?

\$RIGHT

Debatable- but you're avoiding the challenges of a real person - a real human who's not always gonna treat you the way you think you want--

\$LEFT

You mean an asshole, you mean like you

\$RIGHT

No I don't. They don't have to be an asshole to challenge you. And you
(MORE)

\$RIGHT (CONT'D)

know that, which is what makes this kind of... disgusting

\$LEFT

Disgusting?

\$RIGHT

Yes. You never challenge yourself, \$LEFT. You- you always like tiptoe through your life. You project this... aggressive confidence but you're really just so insecure.

\$LEFT

Who are you? How do you get off on saying shit like this? Who the fuck do you think you are?

\$LEFT

(Laughing)

No, seriously. You heard literally a sentence from my boyfriend and suddenly that opened up your fucking soap box- what, you're my Dad now? You're gonna pretend this has nothing to do with your constant tragedy, your self-pity? I just don't understand what you're so afraid of. Being replaced? Becoming obsolete? Being spied on? Being oh so more obviously imperfect?

\$RIGHT

Yes. It's all of those fucking things. If you knew, you didn't have to ask.

\$LEFT

No, you'd never admit to anything if I didn't. You- you complain and you- you perform vulnerability. But I've never seen you cry out of a sadness that wasn't this theater of self loathing as if anyone was a fucking paid patron your bullshit mime show. And maybe the fucking AIs I create, if I could, I'd - I'd program the whole fucking gamut of human emotions, ok, but I'd be sure as hell to make sure no AI of mine fucking cries themselves to sleep feeling vindictive at the whole fucking world because they have no outlet for their emotions beyond some fucking lowest common

(MORE)

\$LEFT (CONT'D)
 denominator stock photography and
 their endless shopping list of flaws
 they seek out in everyone else
 around them and their fucking cliché
 ass mommy issues and--

\$RIGHT knocks beer to the ground, startling \$LEFT

\$RIGHT
 You don't get to talk to me that
 way.

\$LEFT
 Yeah I... probably don't. But you
 pick these fights better than anyone
 else does. I guess you know how to
 bring the worst out of people huh?

\$RIGHT
 Maybe I'm feeling a little more
 inspired to. I don't owe you this
 fucking catharsis, maybe you should
 pay for a therapist because I'm out.

\$RIGHT starts walking away.

\$LEFT
 You're right. I'm sorry.

\$RIGHT
 (Turning around briefly to
 deliver this sentence
 before turning back)
 I'm not hurt by what you said. I'm
 more hurt that you tried.

\$LEFT
 As if. You know you're upset as fuck
 because everything I said was the
 fucking truth, dude.

\$RIGHT
 (Stopping, without
 turning)
 Yeah yeah you got a lil riled up and
 you felt like playing psychologist
 or wife or something cus you have
 the ovaries now to bite back.

\$LEFT runs up to \$RIGHT
 Hey! What the fuck is your problem?

\$RIGHT
 I've already answered that question
 every time you've asked

\$LEFT

What is this? You started this fucking conversation shocked and angry and now you're in some position of power so you're just walking away now, yeah? I feel like you're forgetting that you just attacked me for my fucking boyfriend like a minute ago? When aren't you performing? Turn around, \$RIGHT.

\$RIGHT

(Turning)

Yeah maybe you're right. I'm not done here.

\$LEFT

So this is a fight then.

\$RIGHT

Apparently.

\$LEFT

Well?

\$RIGHT

Well what? I had something to say and now this feels stupid. I'm angry and so are you.

\$LEFT

Okay then let me remind you what just happened.

\$LEFT

You just freaked out because my boyfriend interrupted our conversation and you're having trouble accepting that because maybe you're jealous or maybe you're insecure and you couldn't handle me calling you out on your bullshit.

\$RIGHT

(Shaking head)

I don't need that. I get it. Yeah I freaked out and now you've finally gotten the chance to speak your mind because your lover tells you you can and all that I'm over it.

\$RIGHT

But... that's your point. I'm a lot more sensitive than I let on. But I suppose I do let it on and I'm not really very good at hiding it.

\$LEFT

Yeah. And I was never good at not taking everything you said personally--

\$RIGHT

I'm sorry I--

\$LEFT

I know I know. Part of what's nice about time, is that even though I had too much ego and was probably as sensitive as you were, the thing about time is that it allows me to-to retroactively know better and know that it was just you and I being big fucking babies. And I don't feel that same way when you try to put me down anymore--

\$RIGHT

\$LEFT I don't think that's a fair--

\$LEFT

R, you know... what you do. It's just what you do. I'm not saying you haven't stopped doing it or that you won't but from tonight it seems like there's at least a part of you still there.

\$RIGHT

\$LEFT I feel like you're really painting me in this unfair way like I'm some big fucking asshole and I already feel that way enough right now, I don't need you to keep reminding me. I get that I'm being defensive but I'm being attacked so what else would I do?

\$LEFT

No, that's understandable. My point is that I was trying to bring you down too. And I know you knew that. I totally on purpose just ignored your feelings and your fucking obvious calls for help- attention- whatever. And I mean here I am

\$RIGHT

With your scripted lil attention bot, right.

\$LEFT

Yeah, my fucking attention bot. I was never good at that- letting people get what they want- being the bigger person or whatever. I'm... sorry I couldn't be better even when I could have been.

\$RIGHT

*It's just funny that you're
apologizing to me, when I was
clearly the bigger asshole. I get
that you were the, like, meta
asshole or whatever, knowing better
and all that but that went my way
too.*

SUPER's voice is audible in the distance calling out

SUPER

Hey! Come on, what'd I tell you?

\$LEFT

Igor, baby! How's it going.

SUPER

*I'll tell you how's it going, I'm
getting complaints of a party up
here and it's just you kids. Get
out!*

Pan camera down to knee level.

\$LEFT

Oh come on, nobody's complaining...