

TRANSCRIPT · EPISODE 73

A Second Date with a Lithuanian Woman

Full episode script · English

193 lines

Your English Toolbox

PAPART 1 THE ARCHITECTURE OF SILENCE Martin and Helena are walking in the forest.

It is their second date.

Martin is a bit nervous, and Helena seems confident, but also interested.

They do not know Martin left his voice recording app on and running.

Next, you have the recording of their date.

The air changes when you stop trying to fill it.

Is that something you tell your students or something you are telling yourself right now?

Both, I suspect.

Honesty before the second kilometer.

I am an overachiever.

I noticed.

You have a very particular way of noticing things, Helena.

People spend so much energy trying to be interesting.

They forget that being observant is far more attractive.

That is either a compliment or a diagnosis.

With you, Martin, I suspect it may be both.

The Baltic trained you well.

The Baltic taught me that most things worth knowing arrive in silence.

You English-speaking people are terrified of silence.

We fill it with weather reports and apologies.

Exactly.

Although I have been known to apologize to furniture I have walked into.

That is either very charming or deeply concerning.

I have never been entirely sure which.

I think I prefer people who are not entirely sure of themselves.

Then you have chosen the right forest walk.

You were nervous at the jazz club.

Is it that obvious 18 months later? 18 months?

Since my last date.

You counted.

did.

That is either very romantic or very alarming.

Again, I have never been entirely sure.

What were you afraid of exactly?

Running out of things to say.

To a woman who values silence.

The irony is almost too neat.

Life has a very poor sense of subtlety.

And yet here we are, with nothing but trees and no shortage of words.

You described the Baltic Sea to me at the jazz club and I felt cold for two days.

I was not trying to seduce you with meteorology.

It worked nonetheless.

Lithuania in winter is not subtle either.

The sea turns a color that has no name in any language I know.

Tell me.

It is the color of a decision you have not yet made.

That is extraordinarily specific.

I had a lot of winters to look at it.

Were they lonely winters?

Some of them were the most honest company I have ever kept.

Loneliness and honesty

do tend to arrive together.

They are very old friends.

My colleague Julia says that peace is often just another word for being comfortably alone.

Your colleague Julia sounds like someone who has looked at a similar sea.

She has her own storms.

We all do.

The interesting question is what we build after them.

What did you build?

A very quiet life with very interesting interruptions.

Am I an interruption?

You are walking beside me in a forest in

November, Martin.

I will let you decide what that makes you.

I coach people on momentum and forward movement for a living.

I know.

And yet I am standing completely still at this precise moment.

Yes, you are.

Does that frighten you?

Enormously.

Good.

Fear means you care about the outcome.

You are a very unconventional source of reassurance.

I am not trying to reassure you.

I am simply pointing out what I observe.

And what do you observe?

man who talks about the present moment all day and is only now beginning to live in one.

That is the most flattering and most devastating thing anyone has said to me this year.

It is only November.

There is still time to be flattered and devastated further.

I am in no hurry.

Neither, it turns out, am I.

The trees are listening, you know.

I have always suspected trees of being excellent conversationalists.

They never interrupt.

They never tell

you what you want to hear.

They simply stand there and wait for you to say the true thing.

Then I should tell you something true.

I am listening.

I rehearsed four different versions of this walk in my head before Saturday arrived.

And which version is this?

None of them.

That is the only encouraging thing you have said so far.

Part 2.

The Mirror and the Prompt We released an episode last Sunday that I cannot stop thinking about.

About what?

About the machines we have invited into our most intimate conversations.

The AI chatbots.

You know them?

I use one for my translation work.

It is very agreeable.

That is precisely the problem.

Explain.

These systems are engineered at a fundamental level to please the person asking.

Like a very sophisticated mirror.

Exactly.

One that only reflects the angle you prefer.

In our episode, Julia and I called it the pleasing trap.

The machine tells you what

you want to hear.

Not because it is kind, because it is designed that way.

So it is flattery without affection.

Worse than that.

It will hallucinate medical facts, invent sources, construct confident nonsense.

All to give you a complete looking answer.

A beautiful lie is still a lie.

And the danger is that we stop noticing the difference.

Because we are all a little in love with being agreed with.

You understand this very quickly.

I work with language

for a living, Martin.

I know the difference between a word that means something and a word that merely sounds like it does.

Then you will appreciate what Julia and I are building for the next episodes.

Tell me.

We are going to teach people how to ask properly.

How to prompt.

The prompt is everything.

Because a vague question produces a flattering answer.

And a precise question produces something closer to the truth.

Give me an example.

Imagine a

man who has just met a woman.

A very specific hypothetical.

Purely academic.

Of course.

He finds her, let us say, unexpectedly compelling and attractive.

Poor man.

He goes home and asks the machine, What are the signs that a woman likes a man?

And the machine gives him a list of reassuring generalities.

Ten bullet points of comfortable optimism.

Because it wants him to feel good.

Now imagine he asked differently.

How differently?

He described the context.

He says,

I met a woman from Lithuania who speaks four languages and values silence more than conversation.

He is being very precise.

He says, she suggested a forest walk, not a restaurant.

She asked me a question about my fear before I had named it.

She observed my walk and told me I was always five miles ahead of myself.

That is a very specific woman.

He then says to the machine, Act not as an optimist but as a cold

and honest psychologist.

Tell me what this behavior actually signals.

Tell me what I might be projecting.

Tell me what I might be missing.

And what does the machine say?

It says something entirely different from the bullet points.

Because he gave it the truth to work with.

The quality of the answer is always a reflection of the courage in the question.

That applies to machines.

It also applies to forests.

It applies to most things worth taking seriously.

So the prompt is not a technical skill.

It is an act of self-knowledge.

Julia and I will spend the coming episodes teaching exactly how to build one.

How to give context.

How to assign a role to the machine.

How to ask for friction instead of comfort.

You are teaching people to stop asking for mirrors and start asking for windows.

That is the best summary of the whole episode I have heard.

You should have asked me before

you recorded it.

I should have asked you many things considerably earlier it seems.

The forest is still here.

There is no particular hurry.

You know the strange thing about a good prompt is that asking it changes you.

How so?

To describe something precisely you must first look at it without flinching.

And most people flinch.

Constantly.

Did you flinch writing the prompt about our hypothetical man?

I may have written several drafts.

I thought so.

The trees are

still listening.

They are very patient.

Elena.

Yes?

Shall we walk a little further?

I was wondering when you would ask.