

(At Marc's. On the wall, a figurative painting: a landscape seen through a window.)

YVAN. We laughed.

MARC. You laughed?

YVAN. We laughed. Both of us. We laughed. I promise you on Catherine's life, we had a good laugh, both of us, together.

MARC. You told him it was shit and you had a good laugh.

YVAN. No, I didn't tell him it was shit, we laughed spontaneously.

MARC. You arrived, you looked at the painting and you laughed. And then he laughed.

YVAN. Yes. Something like that. We talked a little and then it was pretty much the way you described it.

MARC. And it was a genuine laugh.

YVAN. Perfectly genuine.

MARC. Well, then, I've made a mistake. Good. I'm really pleased to hear it.

YVAN. It was even better than you think. It was Serge who laughed first.

MARC. It was Serge who laughed first ...

YVAN. Yes.

MARC. He laughed first and you joined in.

YVAN. Yes.

MARC. But what made him laugh?

YVAN. He laughed because he sensed I was about to laugh. I guess he laughed to put me at my ease.

MARC. It doesn't count if he laughed first. If he laughed first it was to defuse your laughter. It means it wasn't a genuine laugh.

YVAN. It was a genuine laugh.

MARC. It might have been a genuine laugh, but it wasn't for the right reason.

YVAN. What is the right reason? I'm confused.

MARC. He wasn't laughing because his painting is ridiculous, you and he weren't laughing for the same reasons, you were laughing at the painting and he was laughing to ingratiate

himself, to put himself on your wavelength, to show that on top of being an aesthete who can spend more on a painting than you earn in a year, he's still the same old rebellious pal you used to kid around with.

YVAN. Mm hm ... (*A brief silence.*) You know ...

MARC. Yes ...

YVAN. This is going to amaze you ...

MARC. Go on ...

YVAN. I didn't like the painting ... but I didn't actually hate it.

MARC. Well, of course not. You can't hate what's invisible, you can't hate nothing.

YVAN. No, no it has something ...

MARC. What do you mean?

YVAN. It has something. It's not nothing.

MARC. You're kidding.

YVAN. I'm not as harsh as you. It's a work of art, there's a system behind it.

MARC. A system?

YVAN. A system.

MARC. What system?

YVAN. It's the completion of a journey ...

MARC. Ha, ha, ha!

YVAN. It wasn't painted by accident, it's a work of art which stakes its claim as part of a trajectory ...

MARC. Ha, ha, ha!

YVAN. Go ahead, laugh.

MARC. You're parroting all of Serge's nonsense. From him it's heart-breaking, from you it's just comical!

YVAN. You know, Marc, this smugness, you want to watch that. You're getting bitter, it not very attractive.

MARC. Good. The older I get, the more offensive I hope to become.

YVAN. Great.

MARC. A system!

YVAN. You're impossible to talk to.

MARC. There's a system behind it! ... You look at this piece of shit, but never mind, never mind, there's a system behind it! ...

You think there's a system behind this landscape? (*He indicates the painting on his wall.*) ... No, uh? Too evocative. Too expressive. Everything's on the canvas! No scope for a system! ...

YVAN. I'm glad you're enjoying yourself.

MARC. Yvan, look, speak for yourself. Describe your feelings to me.

YVAN. I felt a resonance.

MARC. You felt a resonance? ...

YVAN. You're denying that I'm capable of appreciating this painting for myself.

MARC. Of course I am.

YVAN. Well, why?

MARC. Because I know you. Because apart from being disastrously open-minded, you're quite sane.

YVAN. I wish I could say the same for you.

MARC. Yvan, look me in the eye.

YVAN. I'm looking at you.

MARC. Were you moved by Serge's painting?

YVAN. No.

MARC. Answer me this. You and Catherine get this painting as a wedding present. Does it make you happy? ... Does it make you happy? ...

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YVAN. (*Alone.*) Of course it doesn't make me happy.

It doesn't make me happy, but, generally speaking I'm not the sort of person who can say I'm happy, just like that.

I'm trying to ... I'm trying to think of an occasion when I could have said yes, I'm happy ... Are you happy to be getting married, my mother stupidly asked me one day, are you at least happy to be getting married? ... Why wouldn't I be?

What do you mean, why wouldn't I be? You're either happy or you're not happy, what's why wouldn't I be got to do with it? ...

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