

The Thinking Contest

John Bandler

A young man tries hard to engage a young woman in conversation.



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The Thinking Contest

A one-act play

By John Bandler

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THE THINKING CONTEST - A Stage Play

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PLOT SUMMARY

A young man tries hard to engage a young woman in conversation.

CHARACTERS

BLAKE, a young man

TULIP, a young woman

SETTING

A coffee shop

SCENE 1

Two chairs face a small table.

Seated on a chair, deep in thought, TULIP warms her hands on her paper coffee cup.

BLAKE approaches, cup in hand.

BLAKE

May I?

Without looking up from her cup, Tulip waves him to sit. Blake sits, stares at her, takes a few sips, looks around. After a while --

BLAKE

Are you a student?

Tulip doesn't look up.

BLAKE

Right. Sorry. Silly question.

A long SILENCE.

BLAKE

This place is swarming with them. Students, dropping in, hogging tables, ordering one latte, hanging around all day, burning time on their laptops. Right? Not sure how this place stays in business. Do you?

(takes a sip, waits for a response)

I wouldn't admit to being a student either. Hey, bad idea. Really. You're right not to admit to being a student.

Tulip finishes her coffee, puts her cup down, looks up at him.

TULIP

Are you talking to me?

BLAKE

No. Sorry. Thinking aloud. You know? That's me. Just thinking aloud? Staring into space? Thinking? You were doing that, right? Caught in the act!

TULIP

What? Staring into space?

BLAKE

Thinking.

Slowly, Tulip crumples her cup.

TULIP

Thinking?

BLAKE

Thinking. Everybody does that --

TULIP

I try to do my thinking silently.

BLAKE

OK?

TULIP

And usually open my mouth only when I have something to say.

BLAKE

Profound. I mean, that's profound. "I try to do my thinking silently." That's deep. Deep. That's how a real scholar talks. A thinker. I was right! I knew you were a student!

Tulip looks around, perhaps searching for another table she could escape to. She continues crushing her cup.

BLAKE

So what are you studying? Philosophy? Political science? Real science? I play chess, you know. My mother taught me. Are you into chess? Real deep thinkers are into chess. Did your mother ever teach you anything?

TULIP

You do say the stupidest things.

BLAKE

(takes a sip of coffee)

Sorry. I'm kinda spiked on this coffee. It's my third. It's getting cold, though. Do you get spiked on coffee? Some of the deepest thinkers who ever lived got their aha moment on coffee. Don't you think? Do you think Einstein drank coffee?

TULIP

(still crushing her cup)

Einstein?

BLAKE

Yeah. He had lots of aha moments. He must have drunk lots of coffee.

TULIP

You know, I never really thought about that. I have absolutely no idea.

BLAKE

See! There is something in our universe you never thought about!

TULIP

Does it matter? About Einstein? I'm not sure I really need to know.

BLAKE

Thinking matters. It really mattered to Einstein. He was, like, totally into thinking.

TULIP

I'll bet you have no idea what I'm thinking about right now.

BLAKE

Ah, but that's good. Isn't it? If I knew what you were thinking about right now then we'd both be thinking the same thing, the same thoughts, and that's not too -- No. Wait. It would be interesting.

TULIP

I'll let you into a secret, then.

BLAKE

I love secrets. Hit me!

TULIP

What I'm really thinking about, right now, what keeps crossing my mind ever since you sat down, is... guess what...?

BLAKE

What?

TULIP

What I'm really wondering, right now, is how long you are likely to keep this up?

BLAKE

Keep this up? Keep what up? Thinking?

TULIP

Or, maybe... lack thereof?

BLAKE

Look, I can keep up with thinking for as long as any man can. How about it?

TULIP

How about what?

BLAKE

I'll take you on.

TULIP

On?

BLAKE

Yeah. On.

TULIP

Are you suggesting a pissing contest?

BLAKE

Pissing. We can try that later.

TULIP

After what?

BLAKE

A thinking competition.

Suddenly self-conscious of her crumpled cup,
Tulip pushes it off to the side.

TULIP

A thinking competition.

BLAKE

A thinking competition.

TULIP

This sounds like an echo chamber.

BLAKE

A thinking competition. Right here.

(pause)

How about we sit right here, elbows on the table, just like our mothers told us never ever to do --

TULIP

-- or talk to strangers --

BLAKE

(elbows on the table)

-- and stare at each other. And think. Think. First person to stop thinking loses. Then we try to guess what each of us was thinking about just before the loser stopped thinking.

TULIP

You may find it easy to suspend your thinking, obviously, but I don't think I can.

BLAKE

Let's go!

TULIP

I already know exactly what I'd be thinking.

BLAKE

Already. Awesome. You're halfway there already. You know what you'll be thinking about before you even start thinking about it.

TULIP

(elbows now on the table)

What I'll be thinking about is what I'm still doing here, at this table, crushing my coffee cup, letting this weirdo guy with these crazy eyes stare at me, having an are-you-kidding-me "thinking" competition.

BLAKE

So what's wrong with that? OK? We're already thinking, right? We're already doing that anyway. So all we're gonna do, all I'm asking you to do, is have a focus to your thinking, doing a thinking competition with a focus. You've been kinda staring at me for a while anyway...

Tulip sits back in her chair.

BLAKE

So staring at me for a little while longer won't hurt either of us.

TULIP

You're kidding, right?

BLAKE

Serious. Just like chess.

A SILENCE.

They stare at each other.

TULIP

(elbows back on the table)

When do we begin?

BLAKE

Great! I think we've begun already.

TULIP

Aren't we supposed to be silent while we think?

BLAKE

Silent? Are you adding to the rules?

TULIP

What rules?

BLAKE

All we have to do is to think at the same time.

TULIP

I think all the time.

BLAKE

Then you're sure to win.

TULIP

Have we started?

BLAKE

Started what?

TULIP

Thinking. I mean, have you started thinking, or are you spinning your wheels in the early stages of the endeavor? I mean, it seems to be really tough for you to stop talking.

BLAKE

I can think and talk at the same time.

TULIP

Stop.

BLAKE

What.

TULIP

Talking.

BLAKE

Have you stopped thinking? Remember, the idea is the first guy to stop thinking loses.

TULIP

I told you, I never stop thinking. Now shut up.

BLAKE

I did admit it.

TULIP

What? No, cancel that. I don't wanna know.

BLAKE
I told you I think aloud.

TULIP
Just shut up for a second, will you?

BLAKE
And look at you?

TULIP
You've been doing that since you sat down.

A SILENCE.

They stare at each other.

TULIP
(sits back in her chair)
I give up.

BLAKE
Awesome. You stopped thinking!

TULIP
I think so.

BLAKE
You give up?

TULIP
I never give up.

BLAKE
You just said you did.

They both laugh.

BLAKE
(reaching for her arm)
Now, are you a student or not?

END