

Dancing At The Library

Marus Anet
marus.anet.neff@gmail.com

Characters

Jeff (Any, M, 40's)

Greg (Any, M, 30's/40's)

Ruth (Any, F, 60's)

Dad (Any, M, 60's/70's)

Pete and Brent (Any, Male, age range 40's/50's)

Doubling: Dad with either Pete or Brent

Scene One

The Scene: Gym locker room after a pick up basketball game.

At Rise: Pete, Grant, Brent, and Jeff chatting as they change after a game.

PETE

You're awful cheerful today, Jeff.

JEFF

Darling! You noticed! Are we back together?

BRENT

Dude, I mopped the floor with your ankles. You didn't swear once.

JEFF (Casual)

Had a good weekend.

PETE

You got laid, didn't you.

JEFF

Well, it wasn't with you! You ignored all my calls.

BRENT

Meet a girl?

(Jeff indicate Pete.)

JEFF

I could never cheat on him! Even though we're off more than we're on.

PETE

It's the hours I keep, dear. A relationship just isn't possible.

BRENT

I saw you at The Library over the weekend -

JEFF

Yeah, and I left almost as soon as I got there.

BRENT

Might be mistaken but could have sworn you were dancing.

JEFF

You need to get your eyes checked, Dr. Brent! No dancing happening here!

(Greg enter, fresh from his workout.)

PETE

Come on, you can level with us. Who is she?

JEFF

There is no she.

BRENT

Hey, new guy!

(Greg visibly startled from his thoughts)

GREG

Yo!

BRENT

What do you think?

GREG

Sorry, wasn't listening -

PETE

Does this look like the mug of a man who just got some or what?

GREG (Chuckle)

I'm just an unaffiliated bystander -

BRENT

You can level. Whatcha think?

GREG

I think you're all oxygen deprived.

PETE

Tell me all about her, Jeff. I've been so buried in lab work, I haven't seen a proper chick in six months.

JEFF

There's pert little co-eds practically bursting out of your lab.

PETE

But they're all in lab coats and scrubs!

BRENT
Then get one to take her scrubs off!

PETE
I tried!

BRENT
I find they rarely turn down extra credit -

GREG
Ok, now that's just offensive. Reel it in, man.

BRENT
It's not like you've never done it -

GREG
How would you know? I'm just the new guy -

BRENT
So keep your nose out of it!

GREG
You're the one who dragged me into it.

BRENT
Bet you're one of those enthusiastic consent princesses too. Figures.

GREG
Nah. Not into femminization but you do you, boo.

(Brent launch himself at Greg. Pete hold him back.)

PETE
Dude. Chill. You don't even know the guy.

BRENT
Fucker!

PETE
So. Jeff. About those weekend plans, that possibly involved The Library -

JEFF
Had a nice relaxing weekend with a good book and trips to the dog park. That's it.

PETE
Is she cute?

JEFF

Nah. She's got a face only a mother could love.

PETE

The dog or the mysterious wifey?

JEFF

The dog. She looks like a St. Bernard and a bloodhound had rather unfortunate offspring. Shelter called her a lab mix.

(Pete make a gesture that roughly outlines a female body.)

PETE

But the wifey. Come on, paint the picture.

JEFF

If there was a mister at home, *which there isn't*, he'd be pretty offended by you calling him my wife. Need to get moving. Going to be late getting to my lecture.

(JEFF exit, GREG scramble to follow him out.)

END SCENE

Scene Two

The Scene: Outside the athletics center.

At Rise: Jeff and Greg enter together, maintaining the pretense of casual friendship. Greg bump up against Jeff's shoulder, teasing.

JEFF (Smug)

I seem to recall a significant amount of dancing, vertical and otherwise.

GREG

"Otherwise" seemed to work pretty well for us.

JEFF

Wouldn't mind doing it again sometime.

GREG

Not sure that would work for me.

JEFF

More of a monogamous guy?

GREG

I've never been a very good hook up gay, I'm afraid.

JEFF

Me neither. Don't know what possessed me to proposition you the other night.

GREG

I'm glad you did.

JEFF

So if by "a regular thing," I actually meant more like dating -

GREG

Exclusively -

JEFF

You'd be interested?

GREG

Very interested.

JEFF

You don't actually have a lecture to run off to, do you.

GREG (Laugh)

What gave it away?

JEFF

You're not trying to hurry me out of this conversation, for one.

GREG

I enjoy talking with you.

JEFF

And we've been standing in the same spot for five minutes.

GREG

That could be a problem if one of us had a schedule to keep.

JEFF

I don't.

GREG

Good thing I don't either.

JEFF

If I said you have a hot body, would you hold it against me?

GREG

Anytime you like.

END SCENE

Scene Three

The Scene: A low hedge or fence, other scenery to suggest the division between two back yards.

At Rise: Ruth and Greg standing at the property line, chatting.

GREG

Now don't be surprised if I get in late tonight, Ruth.

RUTH

You know I don't like when the neighbors get in after I go to bed. The headlights wake me up.

GREG (Laugh)

It is not possible for every set of headlights on this block to point directly into your bedroom, Ruth.

RUTH

It is possible, and they do. Where are you going tonight?

GREG

If you must know, I've a hot date.

RUTH

It's about time you did something nice for yourself.

GREG

Would you mind taking Moxie for a quick walk while I'm out?

RUTH

Where did you meet him?

GREG

A gentleman doesn't kiss and tell.

RUTH

No, of course not.
But you are no gentleman.

GREG

What makes you think that?

RUTH

When was the last time you brought a nice young man home for dinner? A gentleman always makes dinner for his beau occasionally.

GREG

You're the neighborhood watch block captain. How many dates have I gone on in the last year?

RUTH

None that I know of.

GREG

Exactly.

RUTH

Well you work too much and don't take care of yourself enough. You should go out on more dates.

GREG

I'm trying to reform myself -

RUTH

You're still a young man . . . stay out till three am once in a while . . . date boys who aren't your type . . . keep a condom in your wallet because you never know when . . .

GREG

What's my type, Ruth?

RUTH

Twinks. Blonde, your height, slutty, a little too young to be proper.

(Greg stare at her speechless for a moment.)

GREG

Wow. I'm not sure if I'm horrified or impressed you know that term. So what about it? Will you walk Moxie for me tonight?

RUTH

Of course I will. I always like to take a good look around after dark.

GREG

I'll leave her leash on the back porch for you.

RUTH

When do you think you'll be in?

GREG

You never know. I just might take that advice about staying out and always being prepared . . .

END SCENE

Scene Four

The Scene: Kitchen island with bar seating, a bit of counter and cupboards. Also, part of a living room - couch and a chair, a side table or coffee table.

At Rise: Greg working at the kitchen island. Sound cue - doorbell. Greg exit, return with Jeff.

JEFF (Amused)

You know Netflix and chill usually involves takeout, not a homemade dinner, right?

GREG

So I've been duly informed by multiple generations of students.

JEFF

Scary!

GREG

They do have a way of making their elders feel *old*.

JEFF

Tell me about it!

So. What're we having?

GREG

Nothing special, although I did make the pasta sauce from scratch.

(Both men teasing and flirtatious to end of scene.)

JEFF

Do you even have Netflix?

GREG

Considering we met at The Library, do you really think I'm a Netflix guy?

JEFF

Didn't see many books at The Library -

GREG

Then you weren't looking in the right places.

JEFF

I've been going there for years. Never once seen a book in the place.

GREG

They remodeled a couple years before you got hired.

JEFF

Is that so.

GREG

Yep. Remind me to show you the back room some time.

JEFF

The back room. Dive bar dance floor out front, sophisticated whiskey bar in the back?

GREG

You only wish.

JEFF

Then tell me. What am I missing out on in the fabled back room?

GREG

Meta-phor play.

JEFF

Dad joke?! Seriously?!

(Greg set their plates on the counter with a flourish)

GREG

Thank you! I'll be here all week! Try the veal!

JEFF

So who's your favorite?

GREG

My favorite?

JEFF

Book, author, all of the above?

GREG

Promise you won't laugh?

JEFF

Never, darling.

GREG (Embarrassed)

The pulpiest gay romance novels I can find.

(Jeff laugh, startled, before remembering his promise not to laugh.)

JEFF

So you teach the classics of American literature by day -

GREG

Many of the novels we consider classics today were considered pulp when they were published, you know!

JEFF

Got it. Your defense is that you're looking for the next great queer American novel.

GREG

No! Yes! No, I mean - ! God, just stop -

(Both dissolve into laughter.)

There are a few that may hold up. Thoughtful, grounded in their history, pulpy as hell, and a delight to read. But most are just tropey and fun to read. What about you?

JEFF

Sci/fy, fantasy. The newer stuff where authors actually spend time building worlds that don't take our kind of patriarchy for granted.

GREG

You're going to have to give me some rec's. Not genres I'm familiar with.

JEFF

Oh my God! So. You really should start with Octavia Butler. She's amazing. She wrote this series -

(Jeff ad lib to end of scene)

END SCENE

Scene Five

The Scene: The same kitchen and living room. Several months after scenes 1 - 4, indicated by seasonal change in clothing.

At Rise Jeff seated at the table with a knife and can of cheese whiz. Jeff enter with his hands full of something, perhaps a laundry basket.

(Greg exasperated and fond as he addresses Jeff.)

GREG

Jeff stop eating canned cheese straight from the can.

JEFF

Then get me the crackers.

GREG

Your legs aren't broken, get them yourself.

(Jeff make a show of getting the crackers down. Lean into Greg while passing him.)

Have you read the ingredients in that?

JEFF

Nope.

(Greg read from the can.)

GREG

Whey, milk, canola oil, milk protein concentrate -

(Jeff struggle for the can)

JEFF

Give that back!

(Greg continue as if not interrupted and Jeff not fighting for the can.)

GREG

Maltodextrin, sodium phosphate -

(Greg look up in surprise, Jeff seize moment to snatch can away)

Canned cheese doesn't even have cheese in it!

(Jeff hum softly while fixing canned cheese on a cracker.)

JEFF

If there were cheese in that can, it wouldn't taste like canned cheese.

GREG

Give that back! I was reading it.

(Jeff lick knife, staring down Greg. Greg push a salad bowl towards Jeff.)

Eat this instead.

JEFF

That has, like, vegetables in it. I don't like vegetables.

GREG

Vegetables are good for you.

(Jeff clutch the canned cheese and crackers to his chest.)

JEFF

Delicious calories and fat.

(Greg push the salad bowl closer.)

GREG

Delicious minerals and vitamins. When was the last time you ate something green?

JEFF

Last week? Last night! I had lettuce and tomato on my hamburger last night!

GREG

That doesn't count!

JEFF

It totally counts!

GREG

Since when?

JEFF

Since I worked at that burger place in college. We called all the green stuff "salad."

GREG

That's not even a serving! It doesn't count. Here, have some.

(Jeff pick through the salad bowl, showing mock outrage.)

GREG

Are these raisins? Did you put raisins in a bowl of salad? Why would you do such a terrible thing!

GREG

Just take a bite. You'll like it. There's cucumbers in it . . .

JEFF

You're cute. Vegetables are not cute.

(After a thoughtful moment, Jeff pick up the canned cheese.)

GREG

Greg! No!

(Greg try to wrestle the can away. Jeff squeezes cheese whiz onto salad bowl.)

Why would you ruin perfectly good salad?

(Teasing, sad expression)

Now I can't eat it.

JEFF

I save half for you. Get a fork and join me.

END SCENE

Scene Six

The Scene: The same kitchen and living room

At Rise: Jeff kiss Greg good bye, exit as Ruth enter through kitchen door. She has a large basket covered with a tea towel. Greg pours himself a fresh coffee as Ruth fully enters kitchen.

GREG

Good morning, Ruth. How are the Ladies who Walk?

RUTH

That young man has been here quite a lot recently. When are you going to kick him out?

(GREG take the basket from RUTH, peek under the tea towel.)

GREG

Home baking? You shouldn't have. Ruth, you are a doll.

RUTH

He's been here more than fourteen days. You're not zoned for boarders, Greg. I checked.

(Tidying up a bit, amused.)

GREG

Am I zoned for lovers, partners, a spouse? Is there a zoning reg for that?

Here, hand me those plates.

RUTH

Since when do you cook breakfast?

GREG

I haven't started cooking breakfast.

This is Jeff's doing. We have a deal. If I get up with him, he makes breakfast for both of us.

RUTH

Jeff . . . is he the young man who just left?

GREG

He's hardly a young man, Ruth! We're practically the same age.

RUTH

At my age, young man, you're all young. What's he doing making you breakfast if you get up with him?

GREG

Sit down with me, Ruth. Have a cup of coffee and -

(Greg look through basket, pull out a loaf of quick bread)

- A slice of cranberry nut bread.

(Greg hand her coffee, turn back to slice the bread.)

RUTH

Where did you find this Jeff? He looks like you cleaned him up good. Was he homeless? He looks like he belongs in one of those rags to riches pictures you see in the papers sometimes. You can get them cleaned up and into a decent job but they always have a look about them. I can tell, Greg. I can always tell when someone used to be homeless . .

(Greg bring the sliced bread on the table, sit across from her with his coffee.)

GREG

Ruth, I'm going to tell you this because I know you'll tell all of your Ladies who Walk and they'll tell their husbands, and their husbands will tell everyone at the golf club and the entire town will know by the end of the week. This way, I only have to say my piece once.

(Greg take a breath. Ruth set down her slice, Greg has her full attention.)

No, Jeff is not and never was homeless. I don't want to hear you spreading rumors about that, got it?

(Ruth sip coffee, nod.)

Jeff and I . . . Jeff is my boyfriend. He teaches at the U -

RUTH

How often is he sleeping over?

GREG (Amused)

You need to get your powers of observation checked Ruth. Yours are slipping. Jeff's been living here for little over a month now.

RUTH

More than a *month*? I knew he was here often but -

GREG

Well, I mean, he was out of town for a conference week, and had to go home for a few days - help his dad out - but - Would you like to hear how we met?

RUTH

You'd better have a good one.

GREG

A classic: Our eyes met across a crowded bar -

(Ruth snort)

No, really, that's what happened. We were at The Library last summer. He asked me for a dance and things . . . evolved from there.

It's funny Ruth. We've both taught here for about five years, we even teach in the same building, but our schedules are just different enough that we never crossed paths until that night.

RUTH (Dismissive)

In my day, people didn't tumble into bed on a first date.

GREG

I know. You tumbled into the back seat of a car instead.

RUTH

That's right. You could make proper love in the back of cars back then. They all have cheap narrow seats and bad fake leather now.

GREG

Fair enough.

There was some heavy petting but the couch saw more action than the bed, if you know what I mean.

RUTH

Anything done on a bed can be done on a couch if you have enough determination.

GREG

That's not what I mean. We talked most of the night . . .

RUTH

We didn't call it talking when I was a girl, I'll have you know!

GREG

I think my dad said it was necking that was all the rage.

RUTH

Necking was before my time, so there!

GREG

If you say so. There might have been a little kissing involved.

RUTH

There's no such thing as "a little" kissing, if you like the boy!

GREG (Grin)

I suppose we can agree on that.

RUTH

Do your parents know?

GREG

They want to know why we haven't gone to the courthouse yet.

RUTH

And you?

GREG

He's the smartest, funniest, most complicated man I've ever known and . . . I've had a few serious relationships but never like this.

RUTH

Well, look at the time. I really must go. City beautification committee meets promptly at nine.

(Ruth stand, kiss GREG's cheek; heading for the kitchen door.)

You and Jeff must come over for dinner one night. Let me know what your calendar looks like and we'll pencil something in . . .

END SCENE

Scene Seven

The Scene: The same as for scenes 4 - 6

At Rise: Jeff, alone in the kitchen. Folding laundry, sorting into "his" and "mine" stacks. Phone rings. Dad in a comfortable chair, beginning a phone call.

JEFF

Hi dad.

DAD

I had an appointment with my cardiologist this morning. I ignored your call.

JEFF

That's fine dad. How's your heart?

DAD

I'm still alive and kicking. Doc wants me to stop eating red meat, eat more vegetables.

JEFF (Laugh)

Greg tells me the same thing. Busy trying to get me to eat salad with dinner every night.

DAD

How's Greg?

JEFF

He's fine. He had a paper in the American Literature Review last month. He's pretty proud of that. And he -

DAD (gruff)

When am I going to see you boys?

JEFF

We were talking about that last night. That's why I called, actually.

DAD

Well, why didn't you leave a voicemail and say so.

JEFF

Because I wanted to talk to you, dad.

DAD

Humpf

JEFF

And I knew you'd call back.

DAD

You never know. Next time I might not.

JEFF

We thought, maybe for a couple days at Christmas. Make a long weekend of it. What do you think?

DAD

If you're ok with this whole town getting to know your boyfriend. I plan to introduce you two to all my friends -

JEFF (Laugh)

Planning to take over the big table at the diner and hold court?

DAD

Yup. Take you by my doctor's office, introduce you around there. Doc's got a male nurse now. You might like him -

(Jeff burst into laughter, Dad join him.)

JEFF

Dad! Greg - !

DAD

Just yanking your chain. I'm glad you're happy, son. It's been a long time.

JEFF

I did tell you we're living together now, right?

DAD

You might have mentioned it.
When are you going to make an honest man of him?

JEFF

Ok, yes, I know we're moving kinda fast. But not that fast.

DAD

You're not getting any younger. No sense in putting it off -

JEFF

We'll think about it.

DAD

Don't you want me to walk you down the aisle? I ain't getting any younger either, you know.

JEFF (Sigh)

Ask us again in six months. You never know -

DAD

And no running off and eloping, you hear? I want to see you get hitched.

JEFF

Dad, I'm in love -

DAD

Then propose to him and get it over with. I never regretted asking your mother and it took us three years to get around to setting a date.

JEFF

I know the story -

DAD

When do you think you'll drive down?

(Jeff fumble to get a paper calendar.)

JEFF

Well, let's see. Finals are over on the fifteenth . . . grades due by the twentieth . . . What do you think if we drove in on the twenty-second . . .

FINE