

SWEET HOME
a play in 1 act
by Emmet L.F. Cameron

CHARACTERS

CARO (23, she/her) is a recent university graduate. She ordinarily lives in the city but has just spent a weekend at the home of a man significantly her senior who is somewhere between her client & her boyfriend. She has a naturalistic but artfully cultivated femininity, & a Holly Golightly air of being perfectly able to take care of herself, but inviting towards those who fancy themselves helpers. In turn, she is quick to help others, & fiercely loyal once she has formed a bond with somebody, whether in family, romance, or friendship.

DEE (22, they/them) is a philosophy masters student returning to their father's home for a visit between terms. Maybe masc of centre, but pretty close to centre. Their style is self-consciously casual, a deliberate attempt to play down the feminine gender & generational wealth they were raised in. They are chronically scattered when it comes to physical objects, which can come off as carelessness, & have difficulty letting go of ideas, which can come off as moral purism. They make casual sexual connections with ease, but have little patience for casual friendship, to the point of being nearly platonically monogamous.

JAMES (57, he/him) is a handsome man, spry for his age. Recently retired from a career in finance, happily (albeit not amicably) divorced, & with his only child grown, he spends his considerable free time & money travelling & contributing to environmental causes, & lives relatively modestly when he's at home. He has a natural charm derived from self assurance, & a much greater need to lavish attention on others than to receive praise himself. Typically an easy man to be around, a difficult man to fluster.

SETTING

Spring, present day. A divorced empty nester's home in a wealthy suburb, stripped of many of the personal touches you'd expect in a family home, but clean & cozy. The audience is situated with a view of the kitchen. There is a door from the kitchen to the backyard, a bathroom door, & down the hall, the front door to the house.

DIALOGUE NOTES

- A / in a line of dialogue indicates a suggested point for characters to speak over one another.
- CARO & DEE may add small, unscripted reactions to one another's lines at any point, such as "Mhm," "Oh," "Right," laughter, or physical gestures of reassurance, without interrupting the flow of the story. Suggested moments for such ad libs are indicated by a *.

CARO sits at James' kitchen table, sans James, wearing a sundress, reading a newspaper & drinking coffee from a mug that says something like "#1 Dad", with a small wheeled suitcase close at hand. She puts the paper down, & uses her phone camera as a mirror to adjust her hair. She takes a selfie of herself sipping coffee, looks at it, scowls, takes more selfies, scrolls thru them, scowls. She re-arranges the objects on the table, takes a photo of them, appears satisfied, & puts her phone down. She picks up the paper again & turns the pages too fast to read anything. Her phone chirps. She picks it up, laughs, responds with a single emoji, & sets the phone back down. She almost picks up the paper again, but instead rises & paces around the room & down the hall, looks at everything, picks up some of the few movable objects in the room & carefully replaces them exactly as they were, sometimes more than once to be sure. Somewhere in this process, she begins to mutter to herself, slowly building in volume & coherence, practising for a near-future conversation.

CARO

I know the way we met was.... Obviously the arrangement we've had has been entirely... no, not entirely.... Your financial help has been a literal lifesaver. But I want you to know that I don't look at this relationship as a job. Any more. I did. In the abstract, when I was swiping through profiles, but...we've both been here, I mean...we've both been with us the whole time we've been together so I don't think it'll come out of left field to say there's genuine affection that goes both ways. I think? I'm not asking for exclusivity or to meet your daughter or.... I'll be gone before she gets here, obviously. I'm not asking for a thing. I'm only telling you that I couldn't leave after this weekend without you knowing for sure, from my own lips, that this is real for me. Do with that what you will.

(drops into a less romanticized version of herself)

Except obviously you'll say stuff too & I won't get all that in, because what kind of goon makes a prepared speech at a guy when he walks in the door?

(looks around the room)

& where does she make it?

(tries a few locations & poses)

I couldn't leave after this weekend — I couldn't — Nope, way too extra. — Did you find the cereal you were looking for? — Who am I, the cashier? — I'm all packed up. I just couldn't leave after this amazing weekend without telling you....

CARO grabs her phone, uses it as a mirror again, then sniffs her pits. They're not rank, but she sniffs them a few more times, retrieves a toiletry bag from her suitcase, goes to the bathroom & begins to fill the tub, leaving the door ajar. A car pulls up outside. CARO, unseen, throws her dress across the threshold of the bathroom door & sends her underwear flying, as if leaving a trail, & splashes into the tub, water still running. DEE enters through the front door, with a knapsack over one shoulder & an overstuffed tote bag or three in hand, also somehow carrying their phone & a half-full jar of coffee.

DEE

Dad? Are you home, or did you forget to lock the door again? I didn't see your car, but I parked the rental on the street anyway.

(CARO slams the bathroom door from within. Her underwear & part of her dress is still visible, but DEE is too preoccupied with setting their things down on & around the table to take notice.)

Just hopping in the shower at 11:45 on a weekday, wow, you're loving this retirement shit.

(DEE dumps jar into sink, feels temp of mug, dumps it too.)

I know I'm super early. Technically I had office hours until 10, but it gets to be 9:30 & the kid who specifically asked to talk to me at 9 hasn't shown, nobody's shown, & Tasha's there to hold down the fort & I'd already packed up the car & everything so I could just get up & go after lunch, & I couldn't think of a reason not to hit the road right then & have lunch with you.

Stopped at Sammy's on the way.

(DEE takes wrapped sandwiches from tote.)

You probably can't hear me in there anyway.

(DEE picks up newspaper.)

I can't believe you still get these things delivered. Aren't trees like, your thing, Mr. Philanthropist? Philantreepist?

CARO

I'm not here.

DEE

What?

CARO

I'm not your father.

DEE

Pardon me?

CARO

Um. Housekeeping.

DEE

When did dad get a housekeeper?

CARO

Just this weekend.

DEE

Ha. He knew I was coming & he wanted to prepare for the whirlwind, eh? — Sorry, do you usually shower at your clients' houses?

CARO

Yes. No. Not usually. Your father is particular. Because of his allergies. Pollen season.

DEE *(noticing underwear)*

Okay. I won't get in your way. Maybe I should set up lunch outside?

CARO

Maybe that would be best.

DEE packs the sandwiches back into the tote bag & goes out the back door. CARO turns off the water & her dress disappears from under the bathroom door. She emerges from the bathroom hastily dressed, with her toiletries bag in hand, dripping a bit, but with her hair still tied up & dry. She finds her own suitcase in the midst of DEE's things & tucks her toiletries in it.

DEE *(returning)*

I'll be out of your hair soon, I just need....

(DEE meets CARO's gaze as she looks up)

Holy shit. * What are you...

CARO

I...

DEE

I thought you were supposed to just be getting back / from your...

CARO

I was.

DEE

Holy shit. Caro.

CARO

Dee. I didn't know.

DEE

What the fuck?

CARO

We just met on the app. I had no idea he was your dad.

DEE

I guess fucking not. Fuck.

CARO

Fuck.

They both laugh.

DEE

Wait. I am maybe not ready for this to be a thing we laugh about together. * Where is he?

CARO

He went to get groceries. In retrospect I should've clued in when he said he needed to stock up on peanut butter puffs before his kid got home.

DEE

I should've picked something up from you posting a pic of literally the mug I got him for Father's Day in sixth grade.

CARO

I'm a little concerned now that I know you were commenting at the wheel.

DEE

This is maybe not the time to lecture me on traffic safety.

CARO

Sorry.

DEE

Anyway, I commented while I was waiting for the sandwiches, mom. * O holy fuck, this is so fucked up. Whole new waves of fuckupitude keep washing over me.

CARO

I should go.

DEE

So we can discuss how fucked up this is when I get home, after a week of casually hanging out with my dad pretending I don't know he's fucking my roommate?

CARO

You'd never last a whole week.

DEE

I won't last five minutes. Stay. I got too many sandwiches. He's my dad; he's your sugar daddy...one big fucked up family.

CARO

He's not my / sugar daddy

DEE

He pays you right?

CARO

Gifts.

DEE

& you have sex.

CARO

It's not that clear cut an exchange.

DEE

You already explained the nuance to me when it was an abstract idea of how you could make rent. I get it. You're collecting on the market value of your youth & beauty without the hardline objectification of outright prostitution. Which frankly I thought was a fairly problematic distinction when you said it the first time, but I really can't process this whole turn of events without saying some shit you're not going to love hearing, so just suck it up. * Was this the first time you...? No details, for the love of god, just — 1 weekend? Casual? You could still ghost?

CARO

I've never ghosted anyone before.

DEE

It's real easy. I'll show you the ropes.

CARO

That ship has sailed.

DEE

Have you been coming out here every time you were gone?

CARO

No! This was the first time at his...here. The first time he came into the city & we just met for drinks. He was seeing some other girls too. * Still is, I think. You probably know more than me.

DEE

We don't talk about that stuff.

CARO

You don't tell your family who you're dating?

DEE

I don't tell them who I'm hooking up with.

CARO

But they know you have a sex life.

DEE

I'm an adult with my own robot phone in an urban area with a thriving queer community. They can draw their own conclusions.

CARO

Don't ask don't tell?

DEE

This isn't some regressive thinly veiled homophobia shit. My dad is straight, so far as I know — but I don't really care. That's my point. My dad's private life is private. My private life, also private. If one of us decides to bring somebody home & introduce them, it ceases to be private life & becomes family life.

CARO

So have you? Ever?

DEE

Yeah. Remember, I took Simon home the weekend after graduation.

CARO

I thought that was to your mom's place.

DEE

Does my mom not count as family?

CARO

No, I just wondered if... Never mind.

DEE

Back up. How long ago was drinks in the city?

CARO

I thought private life was private.

DEE *(accompanied by finger gestures that gradually become lewd)*

My dad's yes. But now his private life overlaps with your private life, & I'm realising I should've asked more about the latter before this happened. * So. Drinks in the city was...?

CARO

Um. Remember when I first told you I was going to try...? * He wasn't the first guy I met up with, but it wasn't too long after that. Late October, early November? It started snowing outside the window while we were talking, but by the time I left the ground was dry.

DEE

Our window at Mae's?

CARO

No! I didn't want to bring any of those guys to my usual places, so I let him choose. * Do you want to know?

DEE

Let me guess. Medium ritzy hotel. Near the airport?

CARO

Cliché, I know.

DEE

Saturday, right?

CARO

Yeah. I know because we talked pretty late, but the 4 was running all night so I took it home.

DEE

Shit, it's bad enough knowing my dad's a sugar daddy, but he's a cheap one?

CARO

It was our first meeting, & I didn't expect a thing yet, but he paid for all of my drinks, plus like 3 appetizers we barely touched, & then gave me cab fare, which from the airport to our place was going to be like 60 bucks, so I took the cab like three blocks around the corner from the hotel to the bus stop, took the 4 to our 24/7 grocery, spent the rest of the cash there, & then hoofed it the rest of the way home with all these bags on my arms at like two in the morning in stupid heels & my old prom dress that I hacked off & hemmed above the knee.

DEE

You're such a martyr sometimes.

CARO

I'm really broke sometimes.

DEE

Fair. Well that explains it. He called me that morning. Said he had a layover on his way to...somewhere; I can't keep track of his vacations. He wanted to get brunch. Remember, he gave me the money to Uber out there & back, & you came along for the ride because there was that craft store outlet you wanted to check out.

CARO

Oh, shit. Yeah. Location matching. That's when it happened.

DEE

Smooth moves, dad. I didn't even see him on his phone.

CARO

It would've been while you were walking from the strip mall to the hotel.

DEE

Well. It's a little unfair because I tried to swipe through some cuties while he was in the bathroom & it was a queer desert. So much for my bellhop fantasies.

CARO

Might be a few decades late for those. Is that still a job, even?

DEE

We may never know. Anyway. Brunch was really mediocre & expensive & I spent the whole time griping that I should just take him to Mae's next time. * Maybe we are weird about that.

CARO

About...?

DEE

Why didn't you know my dad when you saw him? Why don't my family know who I spend my time with?

CARO

That's not true. I met your mom & your stepdad & your little brother at graduation.

DEE

For a minute. & dad wasn't even there. Which sounds bad, but it was actually kind of sweet of him, because he knew it meant a lot to mom to bring Pascal & celebrate her kid with her other kid, & they're not the kind of divorced parents who try to act cool in the same room on big occasions. They're the kind of divorced parents where mom gets the real holidays because she has the real family, & dad makes up for it by sparing no expense in the off season. That sounds really fucking sad, doesn't it?

CARO

I don't think it's sad if it doesn't make you sad. Families figure out how to be. & you do spend time with your dad, so pulling in ahead of me there.

DEE

I wasn't going to ask, but this whole thing is like, classic daddy issues, isn't it?

CARO

No. It's more like.... Well, it started as classic money issues. But now it's a little more complicated.

DEE

So you met in November. * I'm guessing you didn't wait 'til May for a second date.

CARO

No. Our second date was Bali.

DEE

Bali was my dad?

CARO

Yeah. It's kind of mostly been your dad since.... Well, it's entirely been your dad since February.

DEE

You're exclusive?

CARO

Not officially. I mean, not at all. I told you, I think he's — I'm sure he's still seeing other — & as far as he knows I'm still — But I haven't had to. Like, financially. & with all the other guys it felt like work. Not even the sex work, just...the compounded emotional labour of men.

DEE

I have dabbled in those muddy waters myself.

CARO

Right. But with him that part of it comes naturally. You probably don't want to hear this from me right now, but he's really sweet.

DEE

I could be hearing worse things.

CARO

I know your parents only split a few years ago, & I'd understand if you felt weird about another woman describing how sweet your dad is / let alone...

DEE

You're already doing a lot right now. Probably not a great time for your inner therapist to jump out too.

CARO

Sorry.

DEE

I'm glad he's been good to you. Somebody should be.

CARO

You are.

DEE

You know what I mean.

CARO

I do.

DEE

I guess you want to keep seeing him.

CARO

It would be so selfish of me to answer that honestly.

DEE

You don't have to. It wasn't a question.

CARO

Okay. Um. Can I ask you a question?

DEE

Shoot me.

CARO

How out are you with him?

DEE

He knows I'm queer.

CARO

Right, but does he know like...what kind?

DEE

So he called me his daughter.

CARO

Yeah. I mean, it only came up this morning. I knew he was divorced but he was vague about the whole kids thing, I think on purpose. But then he kind of let his guard down today & was talking about getting ready for your visit, and...yeah.

DEE

Okay.

CARO

It's not though, right? Like, if it were anybody else I would just go ahead & give them the talk about respecting pronouns without bothering you, but I just wanted to make sure you wanted that, before.... I mean, maybe it's moot now.

DEE

If I let myself think about how people refer to me when I'm not around, I'd never get to think about anything else.

CARO

Sorry. That sucks. I can't imagine.

DEE

You do imagine, though. That's why we're friends.

CARO

Not just that.

DEE

True. Some of our friends have shit imaginations. Not to name names.

CARO

No names needed.

DEE

He's a good dad. We're close. There are just some things we don't... I don't know. Maybe we're not close if you're looking at it as you, with your mom who you call up every time you see a cute boy across the cafeteria / but we have a decent relationship.

CARO

That was one time. In first year. & he was criminally gorgeous.

DEE

Whatever. I don't want to get defensive.

CARO

I'm feeling pretty defensive of you right now. Or maybe I'm just embarrassed to be seeing a guy who fumbles his own kid's gender.

DEE

He's working on it. He gets the they-them thing right most of the time in front of me at least, but the daughter thing is — He doesn't want to call me his child. * He says I've been running the show since I was 3 & a half & he can't call me a word that makes it sound like I'm still that little.

CARO

Well. That's almost sweet, actually.

DEE

Almost. I don't know. We're working on it.

CARO

God. What a mess.

DEE

Yeah, not the mess I thought would end us, if I'm honest.

CARO

What? No. It won't. Right?

DEE

I don't know. What do you want, really?

CARO

I don't know.

DEE

No. You don't know what you can have. What do you want?

CARO

Dee. I love you.

DEE

He takes you to Bali. He pays your rent.

CARO

He pays both our rent.

DEE

Okay, if you want to go there.

CARO

Well he does. & I could find something or somebody else to pay my half, & I could get some other guy to take me to Bali, so let's not act like this is all a money thing. Just because I've never had a lot of money doesn't mean I don't know how to make it.

DEE

I know that.

CARO

I had more different jobs through high school & college than you'll probably ever have in your life.

DEE

I...yeah. That's probably true.

CARO

I didn't start doing this because I'm lazy.

DEE

I never thought you were lazy.

CARO

Good.

DEE

It never sounded easy to me. Sex work is work. & if it were easy, so what? Capitalism's biggest scam is convincing us we have to have a shit time to justify / our existence.

CARO

No. No. Not now. I am not your politics. I'm not the proletariat in microcosm or a case study in desperation. I am your best friend.

DEE

Of course, but like, the personal is political, right?

CARO

If you wanna write me into your thesis under a pseudonym later, knock yourself out, but right now? No. I am Caro, you are Dee, / &...

DEE

& my dad is my dad.

CARO

Yeah. That too.

DEE

& he's your...?

CARO

Do we need a word?

DEE

Why are straight people so afraid to label things?

CARO

I'm not saying no labels ever. But how do I put a label on something when I don't know / what it is?

DEE

The app is literally called Sugar Date. How is that not a label?

CARO

It is. I just don't know if it's the right one any more. * It's fucking complicated, okay? That's why I'm not ready to complicate it more by bringing Marxist philosophy into this.

DEE

More like Agustín.

CARO
Not him either.

DEE
Her.

CARO
Cool. I'm dumb & I'm sexist & I'm too weak to do just plain sex work like a real / empowered feminist.

DEE
That's not what I was saying.

CARO
You didn't have to.

DEE
Sorry, okay! Sorry I don't always think exactly the right thing right away! Sorry I'm not good at hiding it!

CARO *(steps back, grabs her suitcase)*
I can't do this right now. I don't know why I ever thought I could do any of this.

They stare at each other in attempted telepathic silence for a moment.

DEE
I don't know either.
(CARO starts briskly towards the front door. DEE almost lets her leave.)

Caro. Wait.
(DEE picks up underwear from stairs)
You love this pair.

CARO *(takes underwear, laughs)*
Your dad gave me these.

DEE
Oh. That's nice. Did he show you we have a cozy fire pit out back?
(CARO shakes her head, maybe tearing up.)
Sorry. Fuck.

CARO
Fuck. Okay. I'm out.

DEE *(begins to gather their things)*

No, come on. I'm the one who's not supposed to be here yet. I'll clear out. Let him get you on the train & then you'll have the apartment to yourself for the week, whether I stay here or fuck off somewhere else. We all just need some space.

CARO

Are you telling him or do I have to?

DEE

What's to tell? I was never here, okay? We'll figure out the rest later.

CARO

Just text me when you tell him, okay?

DEE

Maybe I won't tell him.

CARO

Okay. But text me when you do.

DEE *(heading out the back way with all their stuff)*

Shut up.

A car pulls into the drive. Footsteps approach the front door. CARO stands petrified, underwear in her hand. Maybe almost tries to put them back on, but panics & tucks them under her as she resumes her starting position at the kitchen table. She looks for her missing coffee, fumbles with the paper. JAMES enters with a single canvas grocery bag, pausing to admire CARO.

JAMES

I know your train leaves in an hour, but would you mind staying just there for another hundred years or so?

(CARO looks up at him, managing to compose her expression)

Even better.

(JAMES slides across the room & gently touches CARO's face)

All set?

CARO nods. They gaze into each other's eyes for a moment. DEE bursts back in, still carrying everything.

DEE

Weather looks iffy, so I thought we'd do lunch inside after all.

JAMES pulls away from CARO, who is frozen.

JAMES

Dee.

DEE

I know, I'm early. You didn't tell me you'd have company.

JAMES

Why so soon?

DEE *(drops their armload on the table)*

Long story. Well, short but boring. Sandwich, anyone?

JAMES

I apologise; this isn't how I planned / to introduce you.

DEE

I'm sorry too. I didn't get that prickly pear soda you like. Turns out those compostable cups don't really decompose, so I thought fuck that, we'll make lemonade. Do you have lemons?

JAMES

Juice. In the fridge.

DEE goes to the fridge.

CARO

How did you plan to introduce us?

JAMES

Pardon me?

CARO

This isn't how you planned to introduce us. So what was the plan?

JAMES

I admit, I hadn't thought that far ahead. You weren't meant to meet today.

CARO

But we were meant to meet.

JAMES

Sure, someday, perhaps. But...here we all are, Time enough for a quick bite. Let's make lemonade, as it were. Caroline, Dee; Dee, Caroline.

DEE

Charmed.

(holds up glass bottle of lemon juice)

Do you recycle these bottles?

JAMES

Of course.

DEE

You know glass only has a lower carbon footprint than plastic if you reuse it?

JAMES

I'll have to look into that.

DEE

It's pretty obvious if you think about it. Heavier to ship. Higher melting point.

CARO

I hadn't thought of that. Makes sense.

JAMES

I'll look into it.

DEE

I looked into it.

JAMES

You're welcome to reuse the bottle yourself if you feel that strongly about it, Dierdre.

DEE *(rifling through cupboards for lemonade implements)*

It's still full. I just thought you'd be interested.

JAMES

When did you arrive?

CARO

Oh, um.

DEE

Just before you did. Go ahead & eat. This'll be ready in a second.

JAMES *(clears newspaper)*

No rush, we haven't set the table.

DEE *(to CARO)*

He's like this with you too? *

(imitates JAMES)

"Respecting yourself means never eating from the package."

JAMES

The more I travel, the more I want to feel at home when I'm at home.

DEE

Okay, but the package exists either way. The tree's been cut, the dino's been slurried into clingwrap. You're just making more dishes.

JAMES

Is it wrong to make lunch a pleasant affair?

CARO fetches plates from the cupboard.

DEE *(to CARO)*

I see you know your way around the kitchen.

(CARO gives DEE a 'why are you like this?' stare. DEE shrugs past her to take the pitcher of lemonade to the table & speaks to JAMES)

I take it this is a sleepover friend?

JAMES

Dee...

DEE

We're all adults here. Right?

JAMES

That doesn't mean I want to discuss this over lunch.

DEE

I'm supposed to share a meal with the mysterious woman you're seeing & not ask anything about your relationship?

JAMES

Let's not embarrass Caroline.

DEE

Caroline, does it embarrass you if I ask my dad if you've spent the night here?

CARO *(puts a plate in front of DEE)*

I think it's nice to make the table nice,

(puts a plate in front of JAMES)

& I am not the one who's embarrassed to tell Dee the truth.

JAMES

The truth is...yes. Caroline spent the weekend. You may draw your own conclusions.

DEE

Why do we do that?

JAMES

What is it we do?

DEE

It's just you & me hiding from each other. Mom married a whole other guy less than a year after you two split. They have a toddler. They never made any big mystery about it. They met my last boyfriend. But you & me...

JAMES

Boyfriend?

DEE

Don't sound so excited.

JAMES

No, it's just...is this a...regular boy?

DEE

Wow.

JAMES

Well you know how it is. Some of your circle...I mean, is it boi with an i? That's a thing, isn't it?

DEE

No. Simon is not a regular boy.

JAMES

See? I'm not totally off base.

DEE

He's a cis boy I actively choose to spend time with. Very rare.

JAMES

Cis. I know that one, but I can't get used to it. In my day we'd just say straight.

CARO

That's not the same thing.

JAMES

So you can keep up with all these terms, Caroline? It seems so niche to me. When the big battle was over marriage, or even military service, that made intrinsic sense. Give everybody the same security, make the closet obsolete, everything out in the open. But now, Dee, it seems like your generation wants to be an underground society again.

CARO

Our generation.

JAMES

Hm?

CARO

It's my generation too.

JAMES

I suppose so. But that's why I'm asking you. You're straight —

CARO

More or less.

JAMES

More or less. Sure. I suppose we all have certain — Well, it's the Kinsey scale, isn't it?

DEE

Great. You're all caught up on 1950s concepts of sexuality.

JAMES

I do try to stay up to date. I suppose that's my point. It seems so recent that there's been any need to try. I was 17 the first time one of my friends came out to me, & I'm sure my reaction wasn't perfect, but it wasn't much trouble to grasp. I liked girls, he liked boys, simple as that. & even

the basic transgender thing; I don't claim to understand the hows & whys, but I don't have to, do I? He was Bruce, now she's Caitlin. Good for her. I can follow that.

CARO

Not quite.

DEE

Baby steps.

JAMES

So this is really a generational thing? You don't feel overwhelmed by this whole secret language we're all suddenly expected to be conversant in, Caroline?

CARO

It's not that secret. Maybe it's more than anybody expected you to know back in the day, but it should be, right? We're in the future; we have google now. & not to play the 'I have queer friends card' but like, I do. We talk. It's not that complicated.

JAMES

Is she allowed to say the Q word?

DEE

Yes, but don't you start.

JAMES

See! It's not just the lexicon, there's a whole grammar to it, & it seems to me it's designed to keep the old fogeys like me out of the loop. If I'm being honest, I think it's ageist.

DEE

Dad, I'm having lunch with the young woman you're sleeping with, emphasis on young. If I were in a mood to shit on your age, trust, I would start there.

JAMES

If you're trying to prove that we're all adults here, there's no need to be crass.

DEE

No need, but I'm throwing in the swears for free.

JAMES

I'm not offended by profanity. I'd just like to think I raised you to express yourself more creatively.

DEE
But not too creatively.

CARO *(gets up)*
We need glasses.

JAMES
Speak for yourself. I have 20/20 vision.

CARO
Ha ha.

DEE
So he doesn't turn the dad jokes thing off when I'm not around?

CARO
You are around.

DEE
But when I'm not?

CARO
Relentless.

JAMES
I am nothing if not consistent.

DEE
I know. I got you the roast beef.

JAMES
Very considerate, but I've gone plant-based.

DEE
Okay, I guess I got me the roast beef. I got you the satay tempeh. Or the veggie pate with cheese, if you're still doing cheese.

CARO
I'll take the roast beef.

JAMES
But you're vegetarian.

CARO

I'm flexible.

DEE

So am I.

CARO

Okay, but I'd be happy with the roast beef, so there's no point in you suffering through it.

JAMES

I know you're trying to make a good first impression, but I should warn you, Dee will either like you, or she won't. There's no winning / her over.

CARO

They.

JAMES

So you've had that conversation.

DEE

Yup.

JAMES

I didn't want to out you.

DEE

My closet's been obsolete for a while, Dad.

JAMES

Of course.

All 3 tuck into sandwiches to cover the awkwardness.

CARO

That is incredible.

JAMES

Sammy's does it right. Local grass fed organic free range everything, sourdough fresh baked every morning from a 200-year-old starter somebody's grandmother brought from the old country. You'd never guess from looking at the place. Unassuming greasy spoon style spot. Used to be a greasy spoon still when Dee was little, dating back to the fifties at least. Don't know how they stayed in business as long as they did. Awful food, worse service. The new owners kept the

name & the decor & all that wonderful kitschy surface stuff, but made the food — well, they started making real food.

CARO

It's delicious.

JAMES

I'll have to take you sometime. Their takeout is divine, but being there is a real experience.

DEE

Yeah, so heartwarming to see gentrification way out in the suburbs.

JAMES

Is it impossible for you to simply enjoy anything today? Even the lunch you picked out yourself?

DEE

Look, I'm enjoying.

DEE takes a massive bite of sandwich & begins choking. JAMES & CARO both reach over to pat their back. DEE dodges both of them, runs to the bathroom & slams the door. JAMES & CARO follow, standing outside.

JAMES

Do you think she's all right in there?

CARO

They.

JAMES

Well they may be choking to death, so I had other things on my mind / than grammar.

CARO

Dee? You okay in there?

DEE is silent.

JAMES

Dee, if you're okay, knock once.

DEE knocks once. Pauses. Then another knock.

CARO

Does the second knock cancel the first one out?

DEE

I'm fine. I coughed it up. Dad?

JAMES

I'm here.

DEE

That lemonade is trash.

JAMES

It's fine, Dee.

DEE

No, it needs mint. Can you go pick some from Mom's herb garden?

JAMES

I haven't taken care of anything back there in ages. I've been travelling.

DEE

Yeah, that's why the mint's taken over half the yard. It's like a weed.

JAMES

I'm not sure I even know which weed.

DEE

The one that tastes like toothpaste.

JAMES

So I'll just go out & chew the lawn.

DEE

Please?

JAMES goes out the back door. DEE opens the bathroom door slightly.

CARO

He's gone.

DEE emerges & slumps on the floor. CARO slumps beside them.

DEE

Can I ask you a weird favour?

CARO
Always.

DEE
Stop correcting him? I appreciate the effort, but it just makes it a whole thing, & then I focus on it, & then I'm a brat. Not that that's your fault, obviously.

CARO
I get it. Parental regression mode. You've seen me with my mom.

DEE
You with your mom is like Gilmore Girls. Me with my dad is like a pedantic 13-year-old eco-terrorist gay Hulk. * Anyway, we're usually not like this. We usually just hang.

CARO *(looks around)*
You know what's weird in this house?

DEE
I thought we were pretending the weird part wasn't happening.

CARO
Besides that. There's no pictures. Like family pictures. In the whole house. That's weird, right?

DEE
Well, his wife left him for a younger man & his only child refused to be photographed without a hand over their face for a solid 18 years.

CARO
Right. Sorry.

DEE
No, it is weird. Mom took all the framed family photos & my kid drawings & stuff, & he's just not a things guy. * I don't think he'd still be living here if he was.

CARO
That scans. Mr. Experience. * He's the only guy I ever met from the app who isn't always trying to like, collect his souvenir that he was in this expensive place with this hot chick. * I mean it, I don't think he's taken one single photo when we were on vacation.

DEE
That might be my fault. I threw his camera overboard in Venice when I was six. * Broke the habit.

CARO

He teased me for wanting to take selfies together when we were in Bali. That's why I didn't have any, when you asked.

DEE

His loss. You take stunning pictures.

CARO

It was kind of nice. 4 days of just existing somewhere beautiful without trying to prove it.

DEE

I remember when you got home from that trip. & I was like, "Tell me everything." & you didn't really say much. You were just...happy. * Like that was the story. Just happiness.

CARO

That was the story. * When I didn't know the backstory.

DEE

I don't know why I never showed him any pictures of us together. * You took the first picture of me that made me not hate the entire concept of pictures of me.

CARO

I did?

DEE

Yeah. Remember the first party we went to together, that like, '50s thing?

CARO

'60s. The Business Students' Society Mad Men Holiday Office Party.

DEE

You were so into it, doing your makeup in my dorm room. & I still had no idea what to wear, because like...there's clearly a you for you to be at that party. You're the cute ingénue secret genius secretary.

CARO

Peggy. She's not really a secretary after season one.

[Note: The above lines could be altered if the actor playing Caro bears a stronger resemblance to a different Mad Men character.]

DEE

Which I didn't know because I didn't even know the show, I just knew... '50s, '60s, whatever;

lots of moms in high heels & husbands drinking hard liquor in the office & cheating with their secretaries in even higher heels. Not so much for a gawky freak who doesn't know how to gender.

CARO

I don't know why I dragged you to that thing. I just wanted to hang out with you all the time.

DEE

Same.

CARO

I also did not anticipate how far they'd take the theme. I fully got groped by a low rent Pete Campbell. * Could've used a smidge less gender at that party myself.

DEE

Yeah, that party was — well, it was one way to find out which guys to avoid for the next 4 years. * But before. When it was just you & me in my room. & you were doing your makeup. & I was collapsed on my bed on top of a pile of rejected clothes in my T-shirt & sweat shorts. * & yeah, I wanted to hang out with you all the time, but I thought this was the time you'd catch me out, that I didn't know how to just be a person & go to a party. & you swivelled around in my desk chair & I said you looked gorgeous, & you said thanks. & then you asked what I was going to wear, & I made a sound like a dying cat.

(CARO makes the sound.)

That's the one. & you curled up next to me on top of all the clothes I wasn't going to wear. You had that crinkly skirt on. & you pulled your phone out of the pocket & asked if you could take a picture to show me how cute I was already. * & I said yes, because I have never in my life said no to a girl in my bed. * & I held still & thought about like, when you're a kid & the doctor has to give you a shot?

CARO

If I'd known it was physically painful, I never would've asked.

DEE

Good thing I didn't tell you. That's how I found out you could see me.

CARO & DEE share another telepathic stare, more effective this time. CARO's head drops into DEE's lap & their arms drape over her back, head down. JAMES re-enters at the back door, with fistfuls of herbs, pleased with himself. As he speaks, he drops some of the herbs into the lemonade pitcher, then sprinkles the rest into the glasses already poured. He finds the underwear on CARO's chair & picks it up. Steps towards the bathroom & sees CARO & DEE still entwined.

JAMES

What is going on here?

(DEE & CARO lift their heads & turn to see JAMES. They're all frozen for a moment, & then DEE begins to laugh. CARO remains still for as long as possible, but eventually she laughs as well.)

What is going on?

DEE

Relax, Dad. I wouldn't let you catch me with your girlfriend's head in my crotch. You raised me classier than that. We were just hugging.

JAMES *(waves underwear)*

What are these?

DEE bursts out laughing again.

CARO

Those are mine.

JAMES

I know whose they are.

(CARO composes herself to explain, but she's dragged down by another wave of laughter, & DEE with her.)

This is a joke to you. This is how much you despise me?

DEE

It's a joke because the thing you think is happening is absolutely not happening. Get it? Ha ha.

CARO

They're telling the truth, James. We were talking, & things got emotional, & I just hugged them. You know me. Affectionate.

JAMES

Why am I holding your underwear, Caroline?

CARO

Because I took them off for you. Before you showed up. Okay? I was going to let you follow my trail to the tub, because I thought if I was wearing nothing but bubbles when I told you I had feelings for you, you'd let me say it. So well done, you figured out how to embarrass me.

DEE *(pulling herself up)*

Congrats, dad. She really likes you.

JAMES

Stop it, Dee. I don't think it's appropriate for you to insert yourself into / this conversation.

DEE

I don't think it's appropriate for you to insert yourself into my roommate, but whoops.

(stunned silence)

I know. You didn't know. & she didn't know until I waltzed in here. & I didn't know I was going to find out any of this today. I didn't know I was failing to find out about it every day for...what, half a year? I woke up every day that whole time — mostly in the room next to you, sometimes in the room next to you; sometimes I had the place to myself because you two were off in Bali together, or New York, or, fuck, here, all weekend — & I had absolutely zero reason to go snooping for clues. & you know that's the truth. Because I would've found them. & I would rather find out any other way. So I'm sorry to intrude on this intimate moment between the man who raised me & the woman I go home to. But I need to know as much as anybody else in this room: what's your answer, dad?

JAMES

Answer to...?

CARO

It wasn't a question.

DEE

I think it was.

CARO

I just needed to say it. & that was before I knew...anything.

DEE

You knew how you felt. That counts.

JAMES

I'm lost. I still haven't heard a question.

CARO

Is this real for you?

JAMES

Real...in what sense?

CARO

Is this a relationship that began a bit strangely? Or am I like really expensive takeout you order from your favourite restaurant to indulge yourself?

DEE

I'll know if you're lying.

JAMES

I don't know if it's necessarily either of those. I mean, Dee, you know better than anyone that a binary choice seldom / reflects reality.

CARO

Are you fucking kidding me? If you want to say something else, say something else. Don't make this about Dee.

JAMES

Caroline, you're a beautiful, intelligent, 23-year-old girl. Are you really looking for a relationship with somebody like me?

CARO

I wasn't looking for a relationship at all. I've just been wondering lately if I'm in one.

DEE

It's not that crazy, dad. Mom was 23 when you got married.

JAMES

I was a much younger man then.

DEE

You were 35.

JAMES

I'm confused, Dee. What do you want my answer to be?

DEE *(grabs sandwich & lemonade)*

You are confused. I don't want any of this.

(exiting by the kitchen door)

You 2 figure it out. I'll be in the backyard having a picnic by myself.

CARO

I'm not asking to marry you. I'm not asking you to stop sleeping with anybody else, or even tell me who else you're sleeping with. If this is a relationship, for seven months in, I'm really not asking much at all.

JAMES

I thought we were having fun.

CARO

Yeah. It's been fun.

JAMES

But you want more than fun?

CARO

I want to know what kind of fun I'm having.

JAMES

I find you a delightful travelling companion.

CARO

Likewise.

JAMES

Then what's the trouble?

CARO

Aside from the obvious?

JAMES

Well that's nobody's fault. & we can adjust. You two were already laughing about it.

CARO

We were.

JAMES

Surely that's more complicated than not having a label to put on this.

CARO

Surely.

JAMES

Isn't it?

CARO

Maybe this weekend just got my wires crossed.

JAMES

What do you mean?

CARO

I found out I like being with you. Not just in New York or Bali or Iceland or on a boat or a first class flight or anything like that. Just here, making pasta & pesto together. Or watching a movie. Or walking in the park. & that made me wonder if it meant something that you asked me to spend an ordinary weekend together.

JAMES

If that's all you're asking, then yes. I enjoy your company wherever we go or don't go, Caroline. You're really quite marvellous. If I were ready for another serious relationship — Maybe I could be. You've put me on the spot, but if you let me think about it, I'd certainly consider you before anyone else. For a girl your age, you understand me so well.

CARO

Have you ever been with a girl who wasn't my age?

JAMES

I was married for 19 years. She wasn't 23 the whole time.

CARO

When did you stop looking at her the way you look at me that makes me think this could be something?

JAMES

I must say, I preferred when my family life was off limits for us.

CARO

A couple times I woke up next to you & I wondered, 'What don't I know about this guy?' Just for a second, while I was still almost asleep. Because I couldn't think about it with my eyes all the way open, or it'd start to matter to me, & then I'd start asking you, & you'd either tell me or you wouldn't, & those would each be their own flavour of hell. So I just let you tell me who you were your own way, drips & drops, with all the wife & child parts redacted.

JAMES

I suppose there's no point editing that out any more.

CARO

Suppose not. I imagined so much worse.

JAMES

Did you?

CARO

It's the responsible thing. Assume every date could be a murderer. I've never been that careful. I

don't carry a knife; I just say, "Bye Dee! If I'm not back by noon tomorrow, check the morgue!"
Can't happen if you joke about it, right?

JAMES

You must've edited yourself too.

CARO

Who wants to be reminded his little bird sings for others when he's away?

JAMES

You & Dee...you're sure it's not...

CARO

It's not.

JAMES

Even just on their end? There's no romantic attachment?

CARO

You've never seen Dee fall in love.

JAMES

You have.

CARO

Doesn't hold a candle to our friendship.

JAMES

& when you fall in love?

CARO

Did I say I'd seen that?

JAMES

Isn't that what you're looking for?

CARO begins to move around the space as she did when we first saw her, but with less anxiety. Looking, but not touching. JAMES follows her, sometimes with his eyes, sometimes taking a step or two after her, unsure if he should. CARO lands back in the chair she started in at the kitchen table. JAMES gestures to ask if he might sit down in his own chair. CARO gestures that he may.

CARO

I thought it was only right to tell you I'd seen you for real. In case you meant to hide. But that was...what, an hour ago? A century?

JAMES

& now?

CARO

By now you should know how much more I've seen. The brilliant, beautiful, insufferable human you helped raise. One of my all time favs, so good work there. & I've seen your ex. Who is gorgeous, & kind, & the mom I want to be some day. & I know she wasn't blameless in your marriage ending. I got the play by play long before you & I met. & I'm sorry. That must have been a rough year. It was for me, & I was just watching my best friend dodge the collateral damage. I understand why you aren't on speaking terms, & you've never met Dee's little brother — who is adorable, by the way.

JAMES

Dee's shown me pictures. He looks like they looked. I imagine they'll be quite the handful together as the years go by.

CARO

They are. Just, being in this house. Now that I know what I've known all along. I wonder when you stopped seeing the woman you married.

JAMES

I don't know. It happened slowly.

CARO *(holds his hand)*

I have had a truly wonderful time with you, James. You really know how to make a girl feel special. But I don't want to disappear. No matter how slowly.

(rises)

Train's leaving soon.

JAMES *(rises)*

Of course. I'll put your suitcase in the car.

CARO *(takes suitcase herself)*

Dee will take me.

CARO exits by the back door. JAMES stands alone in the kitchen. After a moment, DEE enters with their empty lemonade glass.

JAMES

I suppose you know.

DEE

I know. I'm sorry, dad. We'll talk when I get back, okay?

DEE

I think we should. I'll pick up vegan cheesecake or something.

JAMES

I got your favourite cereal.

DEE hugs JAMES, then exits by the front door. When JAMES hears the car start, he opens the front door to see them go.

END OF PLAY