

Pillow Talk v1.22

An online larp for two (adult) people, to be played via audio only, lasting about an hour. Written by Mo Holkar.

Introduction

The two participants play a couple, in a series of scenes taken from different stages of their relationship. Each scene takes the form of a conversation, lying in bed together.

None of the scenes actually involve sex, although they may involve talking about it, if the participants both wish to.

Ideally the participants will themselves each be lying in bed, in the dark, connected via audio chat. But whatever's practical.

Asexual characters

Many thanks to Laura Wood, who has prepared an alternative collection of scenes for **Pillow Talk** that relate particularly to asexual characters. Laura says:

"Although these scenes are intended to be more accessible for situations where one or both of the characters is asexual, they can also be used when both characters are allosexual. A lot of the activities (eg. exploring sexual boundaries) are not exclusive to asexual couples; and relationships without sex are not exclusive to asexual couples."

You can find this variation from page 14 onwards of this document.

What you need

- Two people who have both read this document and who are happy to experience this larp together, and who are adults.
- Some means of communicating together online via audio. With earphones is best, unless there's some reason why earphones don't work for you.
- Each should have a comfortable place to lie while playing, and ideally they should be able to make it dark.
- About an hour.
- Ideally, both people would have read through this file. If only one of you has, you will need to set aside some time at the start to explain it to the other.

Planning the relationship

The two participants have to be in agreement about what kind of relationship they want to play. Preferably this should be done in advance of the larp, to make sure that your wishes for what will happen are compatible.

See the **Planning the relationship** worksheet towards the end of this document on page 11 – you should go through it together.

Character creation

Before the start of the larp, you should create your characters as they are at the start of the relationship. This is done by answering the questions that you'll find in the two **Character creation** worksheets at the end of this document (pages 12 and 13). One is for you to answer together; the other is for each of you to answer separately.

Scenes

Each scene is framed by an intro audio track of voiceover and music, which sets the story and the mood for the conversation that is to come. You should listen to this simultaneously (as much as that's possible, given the limitations of whatever technology you're using) and then start playing the scene that it sets up.

Each scene should last ten minutes or so (although you can make them longer by mutual agreement, if you want to keep talking and you have the time available).

During play, you will both be improvising details of your characters and their lives – it's not possible to agree everything in advance. When your partner comes up with something new, try to just go with it, rather than stopping the larp to talk about it – in a spirit of 'yes, and...' and 'no, but...'.

Choosing scenes

There are four scenes. Three of them have variants available: you should choose together now, before starting play, which variant you wish to use for each scene. (You can change it during play by mutual agreement, but it's important to have the default path laid out in advance.)

You may want to talk through together how the scene arose: for example, in Scene 1, how did it come to be that you are in bed together?

Where a scene has an open or unspecified ending, you should either agree together where it's going to go, or else agree to find out through play.

Ending a scene

When either of you think it's time to end a scene, you offer the meta-word "scene?" The other can reply "scene." if they're happy to end it there, or carry on a bit longer if there's something important to add.

When you've finished the scene, you can take a break if wished (for an agreed length of time), and then get ready to start the voiceover/music for the following scene. It's a good idea to first check in with each other, to make sure if you're both happy to stick to the plan: "How do you feel about us continuing the next scene as planned, ie. [whatever you had agreed earlier]?" If either of you is not comfortable with that – or if you now together have a better idea of what you want to do next – then it's fine to change it up.

You should also now talk about how much time passes in the lives of the characters between that scene and the next one, and think about what has happened to each of them during that time – important life events, experiences that they've had together, etc. Don't go into too much detail here, because some of this can just be improvised as required during the scene.

The scenes

(The text of the voiceover intro for each scene is given at the end of this document, in the **Scene intros** section from page 6 onwards.)

Scene 1A

The first time the characters have been in bed together. They may or may not decide to have sex. (The scene should end at the point when they make that decision.)

Scene 1B

The first time the characters have been in bed together. They may or may not already know that one or both of them does not really want sex.

Scene 2A

At the height of the relationship, after a (non-sexual) happy snuggle.

Scene 2B

At the height of the relationship, after having had happy sex.

Scene 3A

When the relationship has become tired and empty, after trying and failing to have sex [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred].

Scene 3B

When the relationship has become tired and empty, after deciding not to have sex [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred].

Scene 3C

When the relationship has become tired and empty (and there has not been a question of sex).

Scene 3D

When the relationship has become tired and empty, after sex which was enjoyed much more by one than the other.

Scene 4A

They both know that this is the last time that they share a bed together [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred]. There may or may not have been sex beforehand.

Scene 4B

They do not yet know that this will be the last time that they share a bed together, but the scene will make it clear that this is the case [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred]. There may or may not have been sex beforehand.

Finishing the larp

At the end, after the conclusion of the last scene, you will silently listen to a piece of music together. It lasts about three minutes. You should use this time to emerge from your character and get back into yourself – to feel that your body is your own again, and that the thoughts and feelings that you experienced during the larp can now be managed. When it finishes, then you can debrief together, if you wish to.

We've included a suitable ending piece of music in the download; but if you prefer, you can agree to play something different that will fit better to your two characters. We recommend that it should last three minutes or so.

Debrief

Debriefing together is optional of course, but we advise that you do so, as this larp can involve a lot of bleed.

You will probably have your own preferences for debriefing intense larps: in which case, do what works best for you.

Here's what we suggest:

Answer these questions in turn – first one of you, then the other. While one is speaking, the other should remain silent – not turning it into a conversation, and not making sounds of agreement or disagreement. It's important that each should be able to answer without that being interrupted or disturbed. This is a chance to share thoughts and feelings with each other.

1. Is there anything that you need, right now? [And get it for yourself.]

2. How are you feeling?
3. What might you like to leave behind, about the character that you played in this larp?
4. What might you like to take with you, back into your own life?
5. What else would you like to share?

Once you've each answered the questions, you can switch to a more general conversation.

Safety

Before the larp

You will want to agree topics that should not be included in the larp – these are called 'Lines'. Each of you should make a list of your personal Lines, and then you should combine them together – and then avoid mentioning or playing upon any of them during the larp itself.

For example, one of you might not want to play on themes of infidelity; the other might not want pregnancy to be mentioned in play; and so on. Other potentially-sensitive topics include marriage, divorce, miscarriage, childbirth, serious illness, death of a relative, and so on.

During the larp

It is important that you feel comfortable and safe with each other during the scenes and between them. If at any point you don't, you can just stop the larp – that is absolutely ok, and you don't need to explain yourself unless you want to.

During scenes you can use:

- **Cut** – to stop play immediately, either because you need to take a break, or because you need to talk something important through together.
- **Brake** – to reduce the intensity of play. For example, if the two characters are having an argument, and you wish to continue doing so but to make it less vitriolic.
- **Offgame** – to temporarily pause play perhaps to check on some detail of the backstory, or to make a suggestion, or for any other offgame subject you might need to talk about..

Between scenes, rather than going from one straight into the next, you also can pause to recalibrate and agree new versions of the planned scenes, the details of the relationship, or anything else – if either of you wishes to. It's important to be responsive to possible changing needs.

Starting the larp

You're now ready to prepare for play. Get physically prepared and make sure that your tech is working and you can access the audio tracks. Then, together play the audio track for your choice of first scene.

Music

Each of the optional scenes has a corresponding audio track, which you should both listen to in silence and then immediately go into playing the scene. So for example the track 'Pillow_Talk_1A' is for scene 1A, and so on.

'Pillow_Talk_End_Music' is for the end of the game, after concluding Scene 4. Again, you should both listen to it in silence, simultaneously if your technology allows that.

Credits

- The end music is 'Pillow Talk' by Virna Lindt, slightly edited.
- The scene musics are sections of 'Anura', by REW<<.

Playing offline

You could maybe play Pillow Talk offline instead, if you wanted to – actually lying beside each other in bed, or perhaps on adjacent couches. That might be quite a powerful experience. (Note: this has not been tested. It would probably be more bleed-y; and the existing design, with online play, is already pretty bleed-y.)

Playing established characters

Miroslav Wranka suggested that it might be interesting to play this larp using established characters – such as Romeo and Juliet.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Willoh Osmond for suggesting the choice of different framings for scenes. Thanks to Anne Marchadier, Karolina Soltys, and Laura Wood for helpful thoughts and suggestions for improvements. Thanks to the amazing playtesters, especially Marijke Van Hauwaert, Jonas Verhaever, and Miroslav Wranka! Thanks to Laura Wood for the asexual variation, and to Quinn D for helping with that.

Scene intros

This is the text of the voiceover introductions for each possible scene.

Scene 1A

The first time the characters have been in bed together. They may or may not decide to have sex. (The scene should end at the point when they make that decision.)

"Welcome to Pillow Talk.

"This is all new. It's the first time. You're in bed together. You don't know yet what this means, or what it might mean. But it's exciting!

"You don't dare to reach out just yet. You don't dare to feel each other's warmth and presence.

"First, you need to talk. What do you want to happen? What do you think they want to happen? Can you make it work, together?"

Scene 1B

The first time the characters have been in bed together. They may or may not already know that one or both of them does not really want sex.

"Welcome to Pillow Talk.

This is all new. It's the first time. You're in bed together. You don't know yet what this means, or what it might mean. But it's exciting!

You don't know yet if you understand each other – but you know that it's important to do so. You don't want to reach out, to touch, until you've talked.

How can you make this work, together? What might 'making it work' even mean? You need to find out."

Scene 2A

At the height of the relationship, after a (non-sexual) happy snuggle.

"That was sooo good! Your bodies snuggle together so beautifully. There's just the right amount of warmth, and solidity, and squishiness. You understand each other so well – when to squeeze, when to stroke, when to let go.

Now you're lying side by side, cooling down, feeling your heartbeats in sync with each other. Feeling your bodies tingle all over.

You want to speak to each other – to connect your minds, now. To share thoughts and feelings, perhaps. Or to talk about what might happen next? Or just to ramble, maybe. Anyway, it's important."

Scene 2B

At the height of the relationship, after having had happy sex.

"That was sooo good! Everything just clicked. You moved so well together – you understood each other's wants and needs perfectly. It really did feel transcendent, at one point – like flying, maybe.

Now you're lying side by side, calming down, your heartbeats returning to normal. Feeling your bodies tingle all over.

You want to speak to each other – to connect in that way, now. To share thoughts and feelings, perhaps. Or to talk about what might happen next? Or just to ramble, maybe. Anyway, it's important."

Scene 3A

When the relationship has become tired and empty, after trying and failing to have sex [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred].

"Well, that was not great. It didn't work – you weren't on the same page, for whatever reason. You felt disconnected – and that didn't feel good.

Is it because of a failure of communication? Or of too much communication, about the wrong things?

You feel that you ought to talk about it, anyway. This is something that maybe should be important; and it's not working at the moment."

Scene 3B

When the relationship has become tired and empty (and there has not been a question of sex).

"Another night of lying side by side without touching – there have been more of these, lately. It feels like whatever brought you together at the start is no longer working its magic in quite the same way.

This time, though, you don't want to just fall silently asleep. It feels like you need to talk together. Maybe talking about the actual problems between you – or maybe that will be too difficult. Maybe you can reconnect somehow – or maybe drive yourselves further apart.

But, whatever the outcome might be, you feel that words must be said."

Scene 3C

When the relationship has become tired and empty, after deciding not to have sex [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred].

"It feels odd somehow, just lying here side by side like this, not touching. You guess it was the right decision – if it's not a good time for sex, then it's not a good time.

But is this a sign of something more general – is whatever brought you together at the start no longer working its magic in quite the same way?

It feels like you need to talk together. Maybe talking about things that might cause problems between you – or maybe that will be too difficult. Maybe you can reaffirm your connection – or maybe drive yourselves apart.

But, whatever the outcome might be, you feel that words must be said."

Scene 3D

When the relationship has become tired and empty, after sex which was enjoyed much more by one than the other.

"That was... well. You aren't quite sure. From some perspectives it was good – from others, not so much.

You each may or may not have had a feeling that you were not on the same page any more.

Is this a sign of something more general – is whatever brought you together at the start no longer working its magic in quite the same way?

It feels like you need to talk together. Maybe talking about things that might cause problems between you – or maybe that will be too difficult. Maybe you can reaffirm your connection – or maybe drive yourselves apart.

But, whatever the outcome might be, you feel that words must be said."

Scene 4A

They both know that this is the last time that they share a bed together [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred]. There may or may not have been sex beforehand.

"So, this is it. The last time that you'll be side by side like this. It has come to an end.

Perhaps turning to look at each other – meeting each other's eyes – would be too much to bear, or too painful.

But you have to communicate somehow – to say something meaningful. You can't just let it drift away in silence!

Although, in the end, perhaps that is what will happen."

Scene 4B

They do not yet know that this will be the last time that they share a bed together, but the scene will make it clear that this is the case [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred]. There may or may not have been sex beforehand.

"Lying here side by side, as you have done so many times before – it feels obviously wrong somehow. You are out of joint – something is broken.

Perhaps turning to look at each other – meeting each other's eyes – would be too much to bear, or too painful.

But you have to communicate somehow – to say something meaningful."

Planning the relationship

Answer these questions together and make sure that you're both happy with the answers. If it's not possible to find answers that you're both happy with, then it's probably not a good idea to take part in this larp together:

- For each of the two characters, do they have a gender, and if so, what is it?
- What sexual orientation are each of the two characters?
- Is the relationship to be intensely sexual, or lightly so, or not at all?
- Is the relationship to be romantic?

(And of course it can change, eg. start as unromantic but become romantic over time, or start as intensely sexual and become less so or not at all. That's fine, as long as both are happy with that and agree it in advance.)

Character creation – to answer together

Answer these questions together, as your characters. Make sure you agree on the answers:

- When, and where, do you live?
- How old are you?
- How long have you known each other?
- When/how did you first meet?

Character creation – to answer individually and privately

Answer these as your character. You can share the answers with each other or not, as you mutually prefer.

- How do you feel about the other person?
- How do you feel about yourself, at this point in your life?
- How do you feel about sex, and about your sexuality?
- What is missing in your life?
- What do you most fear losing?
- What, do you think, are the prospects for this relationship?

Pillow Talk asexual variation, by Laura Wood

Although these scenes are intended to be more accessible for situations where one or both of the characters is asexual, they can also be used when both characters are allosexual. A lot of the activities (eg. exploring sexual boundaries) are not exclusive to asexual couples and relationships without sex are not exclusive to asexual couples.

For allosexual participants

Thank you for playing this variation of **Pillow Talk** and exploring something that is different from your own experience. I'm going to give a short explanation of asexuality and different ways that it can be experienced and include some resources for people who want to learn in more detail.

Sexual orientation

Asexual people experience little to no sexual attraction. Asexuality is an umbrella term: so, it includes people who normally define themselves as asexual who experience no sexual attraction; people who are greysexual, and rarely experience sexual attraction; and people who are demisexual, and may experience sexual attraction after they've experienced a bond with someone (sometimes years after they first get to know them).

Romantic orientation

People who are asexual can experience any romantic orientation. So, for example, a woman could be an asexual lesbian, meaning that she is only romantically attracted to women. People who do not experience romantic attraction are aromantic. Like asexual, this is an umbrella term.

Attitude to sex

Attitude to sex is a spectrum which starts at sex-favourable (someone who enjoys sex). This should not be conflated with sex-positive, which is a political position.

People who are indifferent to sex may not enjoy it for its own sake, but might engage in it for the benefit of a partner, or if they have a high libido. People who are sex-repulsed do not enjoy sex, and are normally unable to overcome that for the sake of a partner.

What is defined as sex will be individual. For some people their attitudes to kissing or sensual touching may differ from their attitude to sex, and for other people they won't.

Some people may be sex-repulsed even if they aren't asexual, for example due to trauma.

Libido

Libido is sex drive and is separate from all other considerations. You may be a sex-repulsed asexual with a high libido, or a sex-favourable allosexual with a low libido. A high libido might not always be acted on with a partner if the person isn't comfortable doing so.

Scenes

When choosing scenes, remember that you may need to agree the context in advance, eg. how is it that you have come to be in bed together?

Scene 1A

The characters are in bed together for the first time, after exploring their sexual boundaries, what they are comfortable with, and what they enjoy.

Scene 1B

The characters are in bed together for the first time, after having spent a long time talking about their lives and getting to know each other.

Scene 2A

At the height of the relationship after having sex. (Even if one of the characters is indifferent to sex this should be portrayed in a light of mutual enjoyment – maybe with a sense of exploration, or one of the characters wanting to make the other happy, with no pressure to do so.)

Scene 2B

At the height of the relationship, lying in bed after cuddling up together and watching a film.

Scene 3A

When the relationship has become tired and empty, after deciding not to have sex [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred].

Scene 3B

When the relationship has become tired and empty, lying in bed after having just come home from a party.

Scene 3C

When the relationship has become tired and empty, realizing that you are having difficulty talking about your physical and emotional interests and boundaries.

Scene 3D

When the relationship has become tired and empty, after an argument when you have almost, but not quite, reconciled.

Scene 4A

They both know that this is the last time that they share a bed together [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred]. There may or may not have been sex beforehand.

Scene 4B

They do not yet know that this will be the last time that they share a bed together, but the scene will make it clear that this is the case [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred]. There may or may not have been sex beforehand.

Scene intros

This is the text of the voiceover introductions for each possible scene.

Scene 1A

They are in bed together for the first time after exploring their sexual boundaries, what they are comfortable with, and what they enjoy.

"Welcome to Pillow Talk.

"This is all new. It's the first time. You're in bed together. You don't know yet what this means, or what it might mean. But it's exciting!

"First, you need to talk. What do you want to happen? What do you enjoy? What are your boundaries? What does the other person want? And can you make it work, together?"

Scene 1B

They are in bed together for the first time after having spent a long time talking about their lives and getting to know each other.

"Welcome to Pillow Talk.

"This is all new. It's the first time. You're in bed together. You don't know yet what this means, or what it might mean. But it's exciting!

"You don't know yet if you understand each other – but you know that it's important to do so. You don't want to reach out, to touch, until you've talked.

"How can you make this work, together? What might 'making it work' even mean? You need to find out."

Scene 2A

At the height of the relationship, after having sex.

"You have spent time together exploring each other's bodies.

"Now you're lying side by side, calming down, your heartbeats returning to normal.

"You feel connected to the other person in a new way.

"You want to speak to each other – to connect in that way, now. To share thoughts and feelings, perhaps. Or to talk about what might happen next? Or just to ramble, maybe. Anyway, it's important."

Scene 2B

At the height of the relationship, lying in bed after cuddling up together and watching a film.

"You feel an effortless closeness. You understand each other perfectly and you feel like you are completely in sync.

"You want to speak to each other, To connect and share your thoughts and feelings. Or to talk about what might happen next? Or just to ramble, maybe. Anyway, it's important."

Scene 3A

When the relationship has become tired and empty, after trying and failing to have sex [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred].

"Well, that was not great. It didn't work – you weren't on the same page, for whatever reason. You felt disconnected – and that didn't feel good.

"Is it because of a failure of communication? Or of too much communication, about the wrong things?

"You feel that you ought to talk about it, anyway. This isn't the only thing in your relationship that's not working at the moment."

Scene 3B

When the relationship has become tired and empty, lying in bed after having just come home from a party.

"You have travelled home almost in silence and are lying in bed staring at the ceiling.

"This time, though, you don't want to just fall silently asleep. It feels like you need to talk together. Maybe talking about the actual problems between you – or maybe that will be too difficult. Maybe you can reconnect somehow – or maybe drive yourselves further apart.

"But, whatever the outcome might be, you feel that words must be said."

Scene 3C

When the relationship has become tired and empty, realising that you are having difficulty talking about your physical and emotional interests and boundaries.

"It used to be so easy to talk about what you wanted physically and emotionally from the relationship. It seems harder now. You are scared that broaching the subject of unmet needs and compromise will end in another argument. Is whatever brought you together at the start no longer working its magic in quite the same way?

"It feels like you need to talk together. Maybe talking about things that might cause problems between you – or maybe that will be too difficult. Maybe you can reaffirm your connection – or maybe drive yourselves apart.

"But, whatever the outcome might be, you feel that words must be said."

Scene 3D

When the relationship has become tired and empty, after an argument when you have almost, but not quite reconciled.

"You are arguing so often these days and when you do talk it doesn't seem like it's about anything that matters. You haven't talked about your most recent argument, but you have tried to put it behind you. Still, lying here in bed and staring at the ceiling feels awkward.

"It feels like you need to talk together. Maybe talking about things that might cause problems between you – or maybe that will be too difficult. Maybe you can reaffirm your connection – or maybe drive yourselves apart.

"But, whatever the outcome might be, you feel that words must be said."

Scene 4A

They both know that this is the last time that they share a bed together [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred]. There may or may not have been sex beforehand.

"So, this is it. The last time that you'll be side by side like this. It has come to an end.

"Perhaps turning to look at each other – meeting each other's eyes – would be too much to bear, or too painful.

"But you have to communicate somehow – to say something meaningful. You can't just let it drift away in silence!

"Although, in the end, perhaps that is what will happen."

Scene 4B

They do not yet know that this will be the last time that they share a bed together, but the scene will make it clear that this is the case [for reasons to be decided together in advance or found out during play, as preferred]. There may or may not have been sex beforehand.

"Lying here side by side, as you have done so many times before – it feels obviously wrong somehow. You are out of joint – something is broken.

"Perhaps turning to look at each other – meeting each other's eyes – would be too much to bear, or too painful.

"But you have to communicate somehow – to say something meaningful."