

No, Virginia

By Matthew Greene

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CHARACTERS:

Cameron

Quinn

Both characters are in their early to mid-thirties and are written intentionally gender-neutral.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE:

This script is crafted for any two actors to be able to play these roles, regardless of gender identity or presentation. However, I'd be fooling myself if I didn't acknowledge that these casting decisions can have a big effect on the play. For better or worse, Quinn's career ambition or Cameron's lack thereof (to cite just a couple examples) could be read very differently depending on their gender. Since the script only provides the blueprints to build the characters, it's up to the cast and creative team to grapple with these implications once living, breathing humans embody these two roles.

That being said, certain changes to the text might help in creating the verisimilitude of this world, including:

- The gender of the unseen character of David (the name can be changed to Dana)
- Substituting "mother/mom" and "father/dad" for the neutral "parent"
- Substituting "husband" and/or "wife" for "partner"

Any other changes should be cleared with the writer.

A NOTE ON THE DIALOGUE:

A slash in the middle of a line (like this / for example) indicates the point where the next line should start.

An ellipsis (like this...) at the end of a line is a trailing off.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy.

-Francis Pharcellus Church
Letter from the Editor, The Sun

SCENE ONE

A cozy cabin nestled in the Poconos. The living room is furnished with timeless comfort in mind, and windows overlook the snowscape outside.

Lying in the middle of the floor, a freshly-cut Christmas tree is still bundled up in twine. Next to the couch, suitcases of the recently-arrived occupants.

Quinn stands beside the fireplace in the corner, assembling a child safety gate around it, creating a safe perimeter.

A knock at the door.

Quinn sighs and goes to answer: no one. Before the door can close, a teddy bear peeks out from around the doorframe.

The arm holding the bear belongs to Cameron, whose voice we hear from outside.

CAMERON

(mock high voice)

Excuse me, kind stranger, can I come inside? I've traveled *such* a long way.

Quinn doesn't laugh, but Cameron emerges from outside with a grin.

QUINN

Are you insane?

CAMERON

I was in the neighborhood.

QUINN

Cameron.

CAMERON

Don't we always brag how convenient this place is?

QUINN

For a weekend away, not for...

CAMERON

(teddy bear voice again)

“A special delivery?”

QUINN

(not amused)

Come in, it’s freezing.

Cameron steps inside and Quinn closes the door.

What did you do, take an Uber from the Greyhound?

CAMERON

I’ve got a company car, for your information.

Quinn looks out the window.

QUINN

You stole the catering van.

CAMERON

Borrowed, if anybody asks.

(looks around)

Where’s our little terrorist daughter?

QUINN

I finally got her down.

CAMERON

(re: teddy bear)

Alone?

QUINN

It was a struggle, but I told her we didn’t *forget* Dingo, he was just going to spend Christmas in the city.

CAMERON

What a cosmopolitan bear.

QUINN

I made up a whole thing. He had tickets to the Rockettes, then he was going ice skating in Bryant Park with Woody and Buzz.

CAMERON

You could've told her he was just staying with me.

QUINN

And make her jealous?

A beat. Quinn didn't mean to say this. Cameron tries to change the subject.

CAMERON

Love what you've done with the place. Very festive.

QUINN

We're decorating the tree after naptime.

CAMERON

I guess I should be grateful you didn't go artificial.

QUINN

The guy from the lot delivered, I gave him all the specs. Eight foot ceiling, Fraser fir, girthy.

CAMERON

Girthy?

QUINN

Full, I mean. They said it was the most specific request they'd ever gotten.

CAMERON

And you took that as a compliment.

QUINN

Well, I wasn't going to leave it up to them, that's how you end up with one of those Charlie Brown situations. I make my expectations clear up front so there's *no room* for misunderstandings.

CAMERON

Sure, why should Christmas be any different?

QUINN

I used to slip the guy an extra fifty bucks when we got the tree in person, they steered us right to the good stuff.

CAMERON

You're kidding.

QUINN

Why do you think we always had to stop for cash on the way up here? Twenty bucks for the neighbor kid, too, who shoveled the walk before we arrived.

CAMERON

You did that every year?

QUINN

You would've noticed if I didn't, hauling the luggage up from the driveway. It's all in the details, those little things people don't really think about.

(beat)

The bear was an unfortunate oversight.

CAMERON

The exception that proves the rule.

QUINN

That's right. The packing lists, the schedules...Christmas down to a science.

CAMERON

I remember it well.

(looks around)

So, where's the rest of it? The wreathes, the lights, the garland...

QUINN

Well, I'm not the mayor of Whoville.

CAMERON

You mean this is it?

QUINN

It's a lot to pack up, a lot for one person to handle. But why should Christmas be any different?

CAMERON

Hey.

QUINN
(re: the bear)

Thank you. For this.

CAMERON
I get it, I haven't really been holding up my side / of things lately.

QUINN
Let's not get into that / right now.

CAMERON
You have every right to be pissed about last week.

QUINN
And the week before. And sixteen different times / this year.

CAMERON
Jesus, you've been counting? They keep switching my schedule around.

QUINN
Always someone else's fault. You wanna blame them for the *divorce*, too? Or just your parenting?

CAMERON
Okay, ouch. I made it up to Virginia, didn't I?

QUINN
Levain cookies for dinner, I heard all about it.

CAMERON
My apologies to the food pyramid.

QUINN
I'll pass those along to the dentist.

CAMERON
I'm taking her to the next appointment.

QUINN
Better check your schedule first.

CAMERON
Did it occur to you that I might actually be doing my best?

QUINN

Oh yeah, the thought keeps me up at night.

CAMERON

I'm working sixty hours a week trying to afford a place where Virginia can stay the night, tending bar the rest of the time, it's total chaos.

QUINN

I noticed.

CAMERON

But that's how it's always been, I have to keep things flexible.

QUINN

In case Broadway comes calling.

CAMERON

...

QUINN

Okay, that was mean. I just...I turned down a promotion last month, in Chicago, obvious reasons. Or maybe it's *not* obvious / to everyone.

CAMERON

What kind of promotion?

QUINN

It doesn't matter.

CAMERON

You didn't tell me / about this.

QUINN

Because it wouldn't be fair. To you, to Ginny. You see that, right?

CAMERON

For what it's worth, I ditched an audition this afternoon when you called about Dingo.

QUINN

Swooping in to save the day. Meanwhile, *I* made the packing lists, *I* stocked the kitchen with groceries, *I* took care of all the things that *don't just happen*, even if you and our daughter think they do. And yet, I'm the villain for leaving *one fucking teddy bear* at home.

CAMERON

I could've helped you pack her things.

QUINN

(eye roll)

Sure.

CAMERON

You know, I tried that one year. You pretended to appreciate it, and I pretended not to notice when you did it all over again yourself.

QUINN

Who forgets mittens in December?

CAMERON

I actually forgot *again* last weekend, when I took Virginia sledding. I had her wear the extra pair of socks in my bag, we both thought it was hilarious.

QUINN

Yeah, I bet.

Cameron starts rooting through a cabinet for something, clearly feeling at home.

CAMERON

Well, there's *one thing* I was always better at. I think it's half the reason you kept me around as long as you did.

QUINN

I told you, I've got all this handled.

CAMERON

Lemme just feel useful for one second.

QUINN

You sure they're not missing that van out there?

CAMERON

(head in the cabinet)

They've got a whole new fleet, retiring these bad boys. Explains why the brakes are in such bad shape.

QUINN

Thank god Dingo made it in one piece.

Cameron pulls a old metal Christmas tree stand from the cabinet, positions it in front of the window.

CAMERON

No crooked Charlie Brown tree on *my* watch!

QUINN

My hero.

CAMERON

You know, I could swing by the Christmas tree lot, too. Pick up a couple of *girthy wreaths*. And there really should be lights out on the roof so Santa can find the place.

QUINN

That's cute.

CAMERON

I'm serious, Virginia thinks about that kind of stuff.

Cameron lifts the tree and Quinn helps to position it in the stand over the following.

Just the other day she was asking what Santa's favorite cookies were, for brownie points, so to speak.

QUINN

And what did you say?

CAMERON

That I'd never really thought about it, but make sure to leave some carrot sticks for the reindeer, too.

QUINN

I don't think I bought any carrots.

CAMERON

There might be a crudité platter in the van.

QUINN

I thought we weren't doing that anymore.

CAMERON

With keto-friendly ranch, too. Like New Years Resolutions came early.

QUINN

No, not the veggie platters, the...I didn't think we were still doing the whole Santa Claus thing.

The tree falls into place. Cameron looks at Quinn in disbelief.

CAMERON

Sorry, I blacked out for a second.

QUINN

Okay, don't freak out.

CAMERON

"The whole Santa Claus thing?"

QUINN

I'm sure we talked about this, / more than once.

CAMERON

Oh, we did? And where did we land on the issue of childhood innocence / and magic?

QUINN

I'm not going to lie to my daughter. That's all.

CAMERON

Define "lie."

QUINN

This is starting to sound like our divorce proceedings.

CAMERON

Kids believe in all kinds of things that aren't real.

QUINN

And now it's my parents' divorce proceedings. I'm just saying, if Virginia broaches the subject...

CAMERON

"Broaches the subject?" She's *five years old*.

QUINN

So, it might not even come up.

What about Christmas Eve? CAMERON

We'll hang the stockings... QUINN

And who's gonna fill them? CAMERON

I will, with the presents I bought. QUINN

If *that's* what it's about... CAMERON

Cameron has reached for a wallet, the tree falling without support.

How much do you want for the Spirit of Christmas?

Cam! QUINN

Cameron reaches out to catch the tree, Quinn grabbing it from the other side.

You're gonna wake Ginny.

I'm gonna call Child Services. CAMERON

Could we not have the drama / right now? QUINN

You wanted the holidays, you insisted! CAMERON

Because you're working all week. QUINN

I could've requested it off. CAMERON

And then who pays your December rent? QUINN

CAMERON

So it *is* about money, / great.

QUINN

This is about what's best for our daughter. Maybe she doesn't need to be sold some fairy tale about a man in a red suit.

Cameron sees the safety gate in front of the fireplace.

CAMERON

Oh my god you're barricading him in, you're gonna burn the poor guy alive!

QUINN

The grate gets hot, you know that.

CAMERON

Wait, is this because she burned herself?

QUINN

Nothing to do / with it.

CAMERON

Last year, when I was supposed to be watching her. I *knew* you were still pissed about that.

QUINN

You caught me, Cam. And I'm taking my revenge by *canceling Christmas* / for everyone.

CAMERON

I take my eyes off her for two seconds...

QUINN

We are not re-litigating a first degree burn. It was an accident, I know, but *someone* has to think about these things. *Someone* has to protect that little girl.

(beat)

We'll take it down when we hang the stockings.

CAMERON

And lay out the cookies.

QUINN

(re: the tree)

Can you deal with this, please? The screws or whatever.

Cameron kneels, sulking and tightening the tree stand. Quinn goes on, holding the tree steady.

I know you don't exactly *get this*, but trust is earned.

CAMERON
(under the tree)

Kicking me while I'm down.

QUINN

I'm not talking about *us*, I'm talking about...what it feels like going to sleep wondering what you're gonna wake up to. Wondering if your parents are going to be there in the morning.

CAMERON

Virginia doesn't wonder that.

QUINN

She doesn't *have* to, it already halfway came true.

CAMERON

...

QUINN

You never lived it, but that kind of thing sticks with a kid, it's always in the back of your mind. You wonder *every day* if your parents are coming back from work, like they promised. Or if you're one bad report card away from scaring them off for good. It's irrational, kids are irrational, but...

CAMERON

We're not your parents, Quinn.

QUINN

Exactly. Because *we* tell the truth.

CAMERON

Okay, but / there's a fine line...

QUINN

(ignoring this, going on)

My mom told me my dad was going on vacation, when they finally separated. I believed it for an embarrassingly long time. I asked for postcards.

CAMERON

But, I mean, you got over it.

QUINN

Did you know I didn't make place cards for them at our wedding? I didn't believe the RSVPs, neither one, not until their flights landed, day-of. The calligrapher had to make an emergency house call.

CAMERON

You didn't tell me that.

QUINN

Because it's crazy! Because that's what happens when you've been lied to.

CAMERON

Okay...

QUINN

Our daughter needs to know that she can trust her parents.

CAMERON

I mean, I trusted *mine*. And they were all-in on "the whole Santa thing." I said I couldn't hear the reindeer on the roof and my dad snuck up there the next year banging coconut shells together.

QUINN

A very Monty Python Christmas.

CAMERON

Are you gonna say that screwed *me* up, somehow?

QUINN

It's not the same for Ginny. We're not *your parents* either. They set a high bar, Norman Rockwell level. But it's just...different for a child of divorce. You know, you...overhear things, you fly unaccompanied, you develop a bullshit detector before you lose your baby teeth. And we can try to protect our daughter from all that, but she's not gonna have *your childhood*, Cam.

(beat)

I'm sorry.

Cameron has finished, stands back up to face Quinn.

CAMERON

Not your fault.

QUINN

Maybe not entirely.

CAMERON

I know you always thought my family was so perfect.

QUINN

You thought so, Cam.

CAMERON

Joke's on me.

QUINN

Still not speaking to them?

CAMERON

Well, Samantha said Mom and Dad would be *ashamed* of me for betraying the sacrament of marriage.

QUINN

Your sister's an asshole.

CAMERON

And Conrad and his wife have just been absorbed into her parents' ...

QUINN

Cult?

CAMERON

How dare you.

QUINN

That's right, it's a "wellness center."

They share a smile for a moment. Quinn takes a step closer.

I know you miss your parents, that whole time / in your life.

CAMERON

We don't have to talk / about it.

QUINN

Especially this time of year. And I'm sorry for springing this on you.

CAMERON

You're making yourself a cliché, you know. The jaded lawyer who needs to rediscover the magic of Christmas. I'm calling Hallmark for an intervention.

QUINN

Listen, / Cameron...

CAMERON

Gonna melt that frozen heart.

QUINN

(uncomfortable)

Okay...

CAMERON

Speaking of which, I'm guessing there's hot cocoa in here...

Cameron is heading for the kitchen.

QUINN

Cam. Stop.

Cam freezes, turns back to Quinn. An awkward beat.

Just...she's gonna be awake soon.

CAMERON

Uh huh...

QUINN

And they're gonna put out an APB on that van / before long.

CAMERON

You don't want me here when Virginia wakes up. I mean, you can say it.

QUINN

Look, I told you not to bring Dingo / all the way up here.

CAMERON

I think you're gonna be happy I did. She cried for, what, an hour?

QUINN

She wasn't crying for the bear.

CAMERON

...

QUINN

She'll be fine, it's just being *here*...it's hard. The memories, you get that.

CAMERON

I'm not *dead*.

QUINN

She's still lost something. We all have, right? But it'll be okay, I have it all planned. Cookies and sledding and some pinecone craft from one of those mommy blogs. We're not even gonna have time to...

CAMERON

Miss me.

QUINN

Hey. We agreed on this.

CAMERON

I know.

QUINN

Dr. Jill said it's best for her / to have a clean break.

CAMERON

I know what Dr. Jill said, it keeps me up at night.

QUINN

This has always been Christmas for Ginny. The cabin, the Poconos. We have to make things / feel familiar.

CAMERON

Feel familiar, right.

(looks around)

So, does it?

Quinn considers the response, chooses honesty.

QUINN

I almost couldn't get out of the car. We pulled up here and I looked at the place, it hasn't changed, obviously. Which just feels...wrong, like the stone steps and those stupid little gables on the roof were mocking me, you know? I was *this close* to turning the car around and driving back to...Well, there was nothing to drive back *to*, is the thing.

We didn't put a tree up in the apartment, and I had all these plans for the perfect winter-wonderland-god-bless-us-everyone holiday extravaganza here. I learned from all our mistakes, ordered everything in advance, thought of every single detail except that fucking tree stand. And I *know*, I know I can do this. I'm being crazy.

(beat)

I'm just scared.

CAMERON

Come on, you two are gonna have a great time together. I mean, kids fucking *love* pinecones.

Quinn laughs. Quiet for a moment.

Let's just give it a year. Yeah? You might be right, I'm *sure* you're right, about divorce and trust and the infinite wisdom of Dr. Jill...

QUINN

But...?

CAMERON

I just think we all might've had enough *reality*. For now.

(beat)

I'm scared, too. For the record. And not *just* because of the fucked up brakes in that van.

Cameron is trying to hold it together, goes to the front door.

QUINN

Are you working tonight?

CAMERON

I'm going ice skating with Woody and Buzz, don't worry about me. Just give her an extra kiss goodnight, and make sure you take bites out of the cookies. Make it believable.

QUINN

We're really running a long con here.

CAMERON

You're gonna be glad I convinced you. These are the good years, right? They don't last forever.

Quinn is about to give Cameron a hug, holds back.

Merry Christmas, Cameron.

QUINN

Merry Christmas, Quinn.

CAMERON

Cameron goes and Quinn closes the door.

Quinn looks at the teddy bear again, then looks around at the empty room.

Opening a box of decorations, Quinn pulls out a stocking and hangs it over the fireplace, then does the same with another.

A third stocking causes Quinn to pause. A quiet, sad moment as Quinn glances at the door, then places the stocking back in the box.

Quinn heads for the kitchen.