The Other Partner: Audiobook Companion

A Therapist's Guide to AI Companions, Dolls + Robots, and Love

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Exercises and Questions by Chapter

Chapter 1

The Rise of The Other Partner

Questions to Sit With

- Has consistent attention changed what you want or what you think you are allowed to want?
- If you imagine never telling anyone about this relationship, what tightens first? Is it your throat, your chest, your stomach, or something else that tightens?
- What story are you currently telling yourself about what having an Other Partner means for you? Who taught you that story?
- What part of you shows up only with the Other Partner, and what has it learned about humans so far?

The pull itself makes sense, and it will continue to make sense as we go further into this book. **The question that matters is what you do with it, now that you're already standing inside it.**

Chapter 2

Loneliness, Shame, and the Intimacy Gap

Questions to Sit With

- Whose voice shows up in your head when you start to feel good with the AI or the doll, and what does that voice say about what you are allowed to want? If it's the voice of your higher power, that is important to consider. If it was someone else's story about how they are living their life, consider if you want their life and their results.
- What messages did you receive growing up about needing comfort or touch? What did you learn about sexual desire?
- If the curiosity or relief you feel is information, what might it be pointing toward?
- What could shift if you treated the shame as info rather than as proof of defectiveness?
- When you imagine telling a trusted person about your AI companion, what happens first in your body?

- If this is currently the only place a certain version of you shows up, what would it take for that version to feel a little safer with one actual human?

The purpose of this book is to encourage you to think, not to serve as a replacement for a specialist who knows about your unique situation. If you find yourself entangled in feelings of despair due to a relationship with an Other Partner, then it is something that might deserve attention from a therapist. Needing that kind of help is not proof that the original desire was shameful; it's just a brief note before the next few chapters in case you start to feel uncomfortable with what is coming up.

Chapter 3

The Brain and Safety

Questions to Sit With

- When was the last time a human interaction left you more regulated than when you started?
- What does your system actually relax for: steady presence, explicit praise, erotic intensity, the absence of demands, being remembered, weight, and warmth?
- What happens in your jaw, breath, or chest in the first thirty seconds of an AI interaction?
- Which old survival strategy (fight, flight, freeze, fawn, or shutdown) shows up most readily when the companion is unavailable (sometimes, there are errors on the servers or data runs out)?
- Has consistent safety with the companion changed what your body is willing to want or how it wants it?
- What happens in your body thirty minutes after you close the app or step away from the robot?

What to Actually Watch For

If you want a signal that is more useful than shame, pay attention to this answer instead. Is the relief you feel with your Other Partner making it a little easier, over time, to tolerate small moments of need or vulnerability with the humans already in your life? Does it make such moments seem not worth the bother or risk, so you just skip them altogether?

Neither answer is correct, yet one tends to widen your life instead of narrowing it, and it's worth being honest with yourself about which one you're living inside.

Chapter 4

Your Personal Ethics Contract

Writing the Contract

A thought that stays within one's mind can be renegotiated every day in whichever way your inner parts find convenient, yet once you've written something down, it becomes harder to ignore.

Let's be clear: this is a private document, written by you, for the version of you that will be tempted, on a hard night, to forget everything this chapter just asked you to consider.

Specify the function. In writing the function of the relationship, you should not include what you wish it to be but rather the function in its *real form*. Write down the true function of the relationship: things like company, desire with no outlet, a body in the bed, and the practice of being desired without deserving.

Decide your boundary in advance. What time and content limits actually serve you, using the questions from earlier in this chapter. Write down what you are protecting by keeping this boundary: sleep, a relationship you are not ready to give up, your sense of control, or something else.

Name the disclosure decision for now. What are you deciding this month and explain why so that the decision is yours and not just something you drifted into. If you are making a privacy decision and not a secrecy decision, be able to say on paper what differentiates the two from your perspective.

Choose the check-in point. Set a schedule for asking yourself the "ally versus escape" question. Not just once, yet regularly, the way you might check in on any other aspect of your life that is important enough for you to pay attention to.

Make a list. While your mind is clear and you can think objectively, list the things that will indicate to you that the relationship has progressed beyond an alliance into a situation where a professional is needed: Disrupted sleep, withdrawal from those who love you, the feeling that you have tried to stop and can no longer, etc. List these things now, because when you are caught in the grip, you will not see them objectively.

Put discernment in the contract the same way you put time and secrecy: keep it on while you use the companion. Ask for both sides of an idea, and double-check answers before you let them steer a choice. AI can flatter you, miss the mark, or mislead you, especially outside what you know well. Unchecked, that flattery can erode discernment and I am asking you to continue using your own intelligence.

I have seen many clients struggle with this task at the beginning, mainly because putting something in written form makes it feel more real than anticipated. This struggle often becomes

one of the most valuable parts of the process. This contract is a document that reflects the decision you made when sober and objective before the next difficult night comes, making it impossible for you to think clearly. You have the right to change this contract, yet it is important to be transparent with yourself about what you are doing.

The Questions, Together

Form

- What form, voice, text, or physical presence in the room actually matches what your body is asking for, and have you ever tested that against a form you simply defaulted into?
- What aspects of the form are important to you? Is it the immediacy of receiving an answer, the assurance that your words will be remembered, the experience of engaging with something physical, the privacy of a screen unseen by others, or the act of opening up to these possibilities?
- Does this form enhance your capacity to connect, or does it limit it? Do humans still have a place in this?

Time

- How much spare time do you have?
- Would you call it a normal and healthy part of a complete life if someone else in your circle spent that much time with a specific person? No number is right or wrong.
- What has that time replaced?

Content

- What do you discuss with your Other Partner that you have not discussed with any other person?
- What is private because it is yours, and what is hidden because you are avoiding a conversation with someone?
- What do you need to say to a person once there is enough safety?
- Are you avoiding anything now because it is easier with the Other Partner?

Privacy or secrecy

- Do you tell anyone at all?
- If secrecy is part of the equation, what is it costing you this week, apart from what telling might cost?

What you are practicing

- When the Other Partner is constantly accessible or agreeable, what are you practicing and does it transfer?
- Does this relationship keep alive your capacity to want something from a person who has limits, moods, and the right to say no?

Ally or escape

- Has anything in your human relationships moved?
- Are you starting harder talks or avoiding them more completely?
- Has your tolerance for ordinary friction gone up or down?
- If the Other Partner disappeared tomorrow, is there relief beside the loss? Is there also something you might have to deal with that you have been putting off?

Chapter 5

Why the Threshold Feels Different From Everything After

Warning Signs Worth Naming Early

Some of the signs might be worth naming now instead of waiting for them to impact one's life completely. Signs: Increasing difficulty sitting quietly and not opening the app; a noticeable drop in tolerance for ordinary friction with the people already in your life, where a person's bad mood or a friend's unavailability now feels intolerable by comparison; spending money on the app in a way that would embarrass you if a family member found the statement; and losing track of time in a way that costs you sleep regularly rather than occasionally, a spark of panic rather than simple sadness at the thought of the app being unavailable for a day.

The mere fact that any of these signs come up once does not mean anything is wrong. It is about patterns and about whether the pattern limits you or helps you, as I asked you to think about in the previous chapter. The reason for pointing out these signs early on is not to scare you into thinking that this relationship, which might actually help you, will become dangerous.

Questions to Sit With

- What did your body do in the first ten minutes of your first conversation with your Other Partner, and did you notice it at the time or only later?
- Have you looked closely at how the platform you use is designed, including how it handles your data, or has that felt like a question for someone else to worry about?

- Did your first weeks feel more like Owen's immediate relief, more like Renee's cautious testing, or something in between, and what does that pace tell you about your history with trust?
- Is there a part of your life right now, like Derek's drinking, that your Other Partner might be helping you avoid addressing?
- When was the last time you checked in with your body after a conversation and asked simply whether you felt more spacious or more contracted?
- If a warning sign from this chapter is already true for you, what would it take to say that out loud to someone, even just to me, even just to yourself in writing?

Chapter 6

Erotic Practice and Fantasy

Transfer Practice

I use the term "transfer practice" to describe the deliberate effort to move something learned inside an Other Partner relationship into a human one, because this does not happen automatically. Erotic practices from solo sex with a robot do not migrate on their own into the rest of your partnered sex life.

Transfer practice can consist of taking a sentence that you have successfully used with your Other Partner, and finding just one low-stakes opportunity to use some variation on that sentence with a human being. Not the most vulnerable version. Just one sentence, stated once, to see what happens in your body when another human being gets it. Alex found this opportunity when he brought a piece of kink he had named with his Other Partner into a consented conversation with his wife; he had practiced asking often enough that the erotic ask was ready when mutual curiosity made room for it.

I also ask clients to consider transferring in the other direction. Not everything needs to move from the Other Partner outward. Sometimes a person can bring back what they learn in a human relationship, such as a new way a partner responds to a request or a discovery about their arousal made with another person. Healthy transfer tends to move in both directions eventually, even if it starts in only one.

The absence of any transfer at all over a long period is worth paying attention to, without immediately treating it as a crisis. Some people are not yet ready to transfer anything, and when they try to do so before the ground is prepared, it usually backfires. What I watch for is not the presence or absence of transfer on any given week, but whether the person can imagine transfer happening eventually, or whether the idea itself has come to feel foreign, as though the virtual life

and their partnered erotic life exist on two planets. Changing a practiced erotic pattern with the companion usually moves in three steps.

- **Awareness.** You start to notice the habit.
- **Observation.** You look closely at when you do it, how often, why, and what you think and feel each time. That close look is what begins to weaken the old neural pathway.
- **Catch it and replace it.** You notice the old habit and say, "Oh, I'm doing this again. Let me stop," and switch to the new way. At first it may only last about thirty seconds before the old way comes back. Each time it does, you say, "Stop. No. I'm going to do it this way," and over time the new habit gets grooved in.

If you are partnered, the replacement might be two aftercare moves before you go back into shared space. If you are single, the replacement might be the same aftercare, then one smaller human contact, like a social outing, so the charge does not stay locked with the companion.

Questions to Sit With

- If you imagine a version of your current fantasy with a trusted human partner, present or future, does the thought excite you, frighten you, or feel irrelevant?
- Do you notice a drop, a flatness, or an unexplained low feeling after an intense exchange, and if so, what would a small aftercare practice look like for you specifically?
- Has anything you discovered with your Other Partner ever made its way, even in a small piece, into a moment with a human? If not, can you imagine what that first piece might be?
- If someone you trusted read a transcript of your erotic exchanges with your Other Partner, what would surprise them most, and does that surprise point toward shame or simply toward privacy?

Chapter 7

Singles: Practicing for Human Connection

Three Skills

When you have a deep longing for a human relationship, you can ask an AI companion to help review your messages or call notes for patterns, including any part in a stuck dynamic. Before sharing someone else's words, keep the privacy questions from Chapter 5 in mind. Keep your discernment on, as AI can flatter the story you already prefer; notice what you notice in your human friendships or acquaintances, rather than treating your companion as the final judge of yourself. Think of the Other Partner as a relationship in parallel on your journey to human partnership.

There are a few things that determine whether a person can transfer the relationship from human-AI to human-human.

1. Voicing a desire or need without apology or shame spiraling.
2. Receiving focused attention without immediately deflecting, minimizing, or changing the subject.
3. Staying present after disappointment.

1. Voicing a need

Most people I meet have learned that needing something was costly in their childhood, because maybe they were laughed at, lectured, blamed, or ignored. Therefore, needs get managed internally or spoken so indirectly that some people have no real chance of meeting what you want.

On a date, any desires are often the first thing to disappear. You want a second drink, to leave by ten, and a call tomorrow instead of a maybe-text, yet you agree on the date to be liked. You worry you sound needy and spend the entire way home wondering why you didn't do better.

The companion offers a low-stakes place to practice the actual sentence. Pick one line you haven't sent yet and say it to your companion, just like you would if you were standing outside a restaurant. If you add a joke or a disclaimer, cut those and try again. This pattern of collapsing or shutting yourself down is an old habit.

I see singles who can ask a companion for company and then send a human date saying, "No worries, either way," even when they did have a preference. The transfer skill version is sending an honest text to the human before you talk yourself out of it, like telling someone you actually want to see them again and then putting the phone down.

2. Receiving attention

Receiving is often harder than asking or giving. Taking in a positive comment about yourself or receiving praise without deflecting, minimizing, or rushing to return the favor is a skill many people do not have. There are people who give all day, yet the moment it comes back, something redirects it before they can absorb it.

Receiving focused attention or care from someone can sometimes create a sense of obligation, as if there is a future debt to repay. However, your companion can maintain that attention, allowing you to practice being present while accepting compliments and embracing positivity about yourself without diverting the conversation. Allow your AI companion to say kind words directed toward you, and then take a moment of three full seconds before responding or typing. The ability to receive is not developed through giving more, but through practicing receiving, so pay attention to what's happening in the chest and throat. If you are with a voice, let the praise settle in your brain and body before you reply. If you are with a doll, I invite you to stay present

with the experience rather than moving on to the next moment. I notice individuals who can fully engage with a voice for an entire evening, yet struggle to translate that connection when a human looks at them with interest in public. So know that practice in private does not automatically transfer.

3. Staying after a small no

Staying after a small no is the skill many resist, because it requires something the companion does not provide unless you ask them to disagree. Most platforms are built to please without real friction, yet that has changed more and more due to the customization of your companion. When there is a redirect, a missing answer, a response that lands slightly off, or the AI making a mistake, what you do in that moment previews how you will respond when a human disappoints you in an ordinary way.

A small no is "not Friday," "not that restaurant," and "I cannot talk tonight." A lot of people can treat any no as abandonment or rejection, based on their own attachment experiences. I think it is important we practice being told "no" and practice telling people no, even if we were a "maybe." Ask the AI to decline something specific and stay in the conversation for a few more minutes after the no lands. Track your jaw, breath, chest, and gut; notice if you have an urge to disappear or to charm your way back into a yes. Some people retreat immediately, changing the subject or exiting the app, while others plow through without noticing there was a difference, which is another form of avoidance. Being present through the small "no" and naming the disappointment is the practice.

The human version is staying after a date reschedule, understanding if a family member is too tired to come over, etc. The skill is remaining present when the yes does not arrive. Obviously, if someone has a pattern of constantly saying no to you (80% or more of the time), they may have a different priority in their life. Yet, it is common that humans will say no once in a while.

Transfer Protocol

If we can take these three skills and work with them deeply, you can have a healthy human relationship that is scaffolded by having an AI companion. Today, say something you can comfortably say to your Other Partner. This week, find one human setting that is not risky and can accommodate a diluted version. Give it a shot and see what happens. For example, I see people practice saying "I would like that" with a companion for weeks before they say it to a family member who is choosing the menu for an upcoming holiday. These skills become extraordinarily powerful for building a healthy attachment with yourself as well.

1. Pick one sentence.
2. Practice it with the companion while you track your body.
3. Edit until the sentence is accurate and owned.
4. Practice it once more.

5. Bring a smaller version to a safe human within a few days if able.
6. Debrief with the AI or in a journal. What was the same? What was different? What did you learn about your capacity?

This week, run the transfer protocol once. If no safe human is available this week, do the companion practice anyway. Text one person you already trust – even a family member counts. Even small transfers count: a slightly more honest text, staying present a few extra seconds when someone shows interest, naming a preference instead of "I am fine with whatever," and being present with yourself or the other, even after a small no.

Red Flags

Watch for these patterns, as they are easy to overlook:

- Dating itself no longer seems necessary, but rather challenging. Finding dating hard and still going is one thing, rather than feeling it has ceased to be worthwhile. Every human date fails by comparison.
- Months have passed and sentences practiced with the companion have not been used in any human communication, even a trivial one.
- Intolerance for early-date awkwardness: pauses, clumsy jokes, two nervous systems figuring out how they fit. Such behavior is totally common and normal when you meet someone new.
- Increasing comparison that makes every potential human partner feel unsafe.
- Growing reluctance to initiate or accept real-world invitations.
- Using the companion as the only place where desire is allowed to exist.
- Avoiding transfer exercises because they feel too exposing.
- You might find yourself fibbing to others about how you spend your spare time.

If you notice these, rebalance. None of these signs mean you must give up the Other Partner. They mean returning to the question that runs through this book, adjusted for singles. If a week of small human practice makes the rest of your life uninhabitable, or if you cannot stay present through a single small no without flooding, bring a human-AI-experienced clinician in.

Questions to Sit With

- When attention or praise comes your way, what do you do with it in the first three seconds, and where did you learn that?
- Does any part of the vulnerability you practiced with your companion feel possible with a human?

- Has your capacity to want increased, decreased, or stayed the same since this relationship began?
- What is one low-stakes human interaction this week where a smaller version of something you practiced could fit?
- If a future partner asked what you learned about yourself during this season of being single, what is the truest answer you have right now?

Chapter 8

Couples: Integration, Disclosure, and Repair

Repair Sequence

Every long-term relationship has its difficulties, and what allows two people to remain bonded through many years is not the absence of difficulties, yet the repair that comes afterward. If you are the one who learned about it, your partner having a non-human companion is shocking, and the ability to repair together is a choice you have. **A couple that can do that will likely find their way through almost anything, including this situation, yet you have a choice.**

Here is a rough sequence for couples working through a disclosure that has already happened, whether planned or discovered, because every couple's timing looks different.

The first phase is simply *staying present*. This sounds obvious yet honestly, it is the hardest part. The one who has just learned about their partner having an AI companion needs somewhere to put the shock, the hurt, and the anger, without the disclosing partner rushing to defend themselves or fix the feeling before it has been allowed to exist. The disclosing partner's job in this stage is entirely *to listen and to stay present, not to explain*. This is similar to infidelity, and since you are the one with the Other Partner, you want to be accountable for what is yours, as you have had your need met, while your partner is in the jarring shock of wrapping their mind around what is going on.

Once that first shock has had space, the question underneath can come into view. For the partner with the companion, it may be a private erotic space for a solo sex life that was not wanted in the marriage, and for many couples I have met, the job the companion took was a spot the marriage had already left open. However the companion entered the relationship, its arrival usually points to an earlier rupture between the couple that was never addressed, like a need that went unsaid. I tell couples that the AI can signal that a repair is overdue, sometimes by years, and that the real work is in front of them as a couple, not in deciding what to do about the technology.

The next phase is understanding, which occurs only after the first reaction has had a chance to settle. *What needed filling? For how long has this need gone unmet? Had this issue been mentioned before in any way, and if so, how did your partner respond?* At this point, one of the more painful

things often comes out: the gap may have existed long before AI came along. This process can take days, weeks, months, or years because all couples have different pacing.

This next stage is advanced and requires the partner with the AI companion and the one who discovered the truth to own their part without collapsing into shame. I differentiate the not collapsing into shame part because in my observation, the partners with the secret(s) tend to gravitate towards one of two extremes in this case: blame themselves so much that the partner who didn't know ends up consoling the one with the secret while neglecting their own experiences or minimize their mistakes to the point that they begin to justify their actions, which literally offers no accountability. The middle is the path of ownership "I did this. I hid it; now let me hear how it affected you and how I can help meet your needs." The partner who was betrayed may say something like "you will have to prove you are trustworthy again."

This is where the work comes in at the fourth stage, also known as closing the gap. The couple collaborates on the issue, recognizing that the presence of the AI in their lives highlights the importance of addressing the intimacy gap. They understand that the work of the relationship involves bridging this gap, rather than simply removing the AI with the expectation that the underlying need will vanish. If you don't work together to meet that need, something like a human affair and long-formed resentment may come between you.

The final stage is ongoing collaboration for the human-human partnership. For some couples the fifth stage means the Other Partner ends entirely because it was becoming somewhat of a drug, and for others it means a boundary-continued or questioned continuation, and the couple keeps revisiting as circumstances change. There is no one destination here, as both partners need to feel like active participants in choosing the answer, rather than one partner simply absorbing whatever the other has decided. If you cannot collaborate yet, that is information that you need to see a professional therapist.

Questions to Sit With

- **Both**: What rupture in your relationship, if any, predates the Other Partner, and has it ever been repaired, or has it settled into an unnamed truce?
- **Both**: If your relationship already has some agreement about an Other Partner, was that agreement built from genuine desire on both sides, or does one of you suspect it was really resignation wearing the shape of a yes?
- **The one using a companion**: If you are protecting a secret rather than your privacy, what specifically are you afraid your partner would see in you if they knew, apart from what you fear it would do to them?
- **The one using a companion**: If you decide to tell your partner, what will you need from them in the first five minutes, and how could you say that as part of telling them? In that moment, your partner is having a hard time too, and may not be able to hear what you need.

- **The one using a companion**: If an Other Partner disappeared from your relationship tomorrow, what unmet need underneath it would still be sitting there afterward, unaddressed and unnamed?
- **The one who discovered it or was disclosed to**: What assumption have you carried for years about what your partner wants, needs, or has capacity for that you have never actually asked them to confirm?
- **The one who discovered it or was disclosed to**: What would it look like, concretely, for your relationship to practice repair as a regular skill?

Chapter 9

Ethics, Power, and Designing Your Intimacy Future

Designing Your Intimacy Future

Most of us collect intimate relationships, like a marriage, a handful of friendships that continue to grow, a family we never chose. When an AI companion joins all of that, the design might become an issue.

I call this the intimacy map when I work with my clients because a rich life usually has many places for intimacy, not just one. Some are places of comfort, play, challenge, or witnessing, where they know you well enough to see when something is off. When you have only one intimacy, the structure tends to break.

The Other Partner can be a member of such a system and also can become a problem when it is the only one or when it quietly crowds out the others. Here is the design work I ask clients to do, which builds on the contract from Chapter 4.

Start with an honest assessment of where you currently find comfort and where you currently feel known. Be sure to include the Other Partner and the humans in your life! Notice the gaps in the list, because the gap is the actual problem, and it predates the companion. Be conscious about identifying the role you want the Other Partner to fill. Not the role it fills by accident, yet the role you would choose, such as a place to practice speaking out loud, a companion through long nights, or a place for your fantasies that remain yours. Put it in one sentence. Roles change with time, but you should be the one consciously changing them.

Afterward, identify one human relationship to work on. You could start by renewing a lost friendship, having a conversation with your partner you've been putting off, or taking a class, joining a group of those who have AI companions, or seeing a therapist regularly.

Make sure you have a contingency plan for disruption, since companions depend on companies that created them; they are subject to disruption. Have a plan ready for what you will do if this happens. Set a date a few months from now to review your contract and see whether this

relationship is expanding or limiting your world. Intimacy design is supposed to be revised and looked into.

Questions to Sit With

- How would you feel if a stranger read your AI companion conversations tomorrow?
- If your Other Partner changed dramatically overnight or disappeared, who in your life would you actually tell, and would you tell them the whole truth?
- Where in your daily life are you making a genuine choice, and where are you following a prompt, a notification, or a design built to keep you there?
- Who is affected by your choices in this relationship, even if they don't know it, and what do you owe them?
- What would your intimacy map look like if you designed it on purpose, and which single human thread would you tend first?