



After five weeks of dating Anne, I was in love with her. A week later, she suggested a threesome. We were at the health-food store. ‘With who?’

She shrugged. ‘Simone? Katie?’

To any other man, a night with his girlfriend and another girl – a fantasy reiterated by countless friends and teenage comedies – would rank with the greatest moments in human history. But I knew better. Threesomes are a test of love no one passes. If I were to look at Katie’s (appealing) face a half-second too long or graze her upper inner thigh half a tempo too tenderly, Anne would be heartbroken. ‘He wants *her* more.’ The next morning she’d be uncommunicative. By lunch she’d be furious. By nightfall she’d be accusing me of imagined infidelities, physical and emotional. If, on the other hand, Anne affected a progressive attitude and pretended not to care, I’d be offended and see to it she changed her mind right away and take Katie, Simone – or, better yet, Chloe the redhead – by the hips, flip her...

‘Are you OK?’
 ‘Fine.’ ...flip her over the bedside table Anne’s mother gave her and proffer a Mexican cartwheel that would make gymnast Elsa García Rodríguez Blancas denounce her skill and return her medals.

‘It was just an idea,’ Anne said. ‘We don’t have to do it.’

THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

A threesome: it’s every man’s FANTASY – until your girlfriend organises one. Sam Wasson experiences the anxiety of the MODERN ménage à trois

‘Then why bring it up?’
 ‘I thought it would be fun,’ she said. I turned to face her.

‘Have you done it before?’
 ‘No. OK, once.’

‘With whom? No, I don’t want to know.’
 We had left the fish counter and were drifting toward the salad bar. ‘Tell me,’ I said. ‘You don’t want tuna?’ she replied. ‘Was it Andy?’ I asked.

‘Look,’ Anne said, reaching for the tongs, ‘we don’t have to do it. It was just an idea.’

I watched as she shuttled chard into her little plastic salad tub. Maybe this was Anne’s way of including me in an affair

she had been fantasising about for some time. Maybe talk of another woman was pre-empting talk of another man.

I plucked a cardboard box from the top of the stack and went for the kale she’d been trying to make a part of my diet. ‘What about Jonathan?’ I asked, careful to seem blasé.

‘Jonathan?’ She laughed. ‘From my office?’ Jonathan was a soft-spoken man from Nigeria. He was the only athletic guy I knew. Anne laughed again, nervously. ‘Jonathan?’

‘I knew it. You’re attracted to him.’
 ‘*Lou* brought him up,’ she retorted. ➤

'To see how you'd respond!' I said. She touched a finger to the tip of my nose. 'Are you *sure*?'

I should have known this was coming. When asked if he could be interested in another guy, pleading innocent is no longer an option for the straight man. He can either deny it, thereby protesting too much and implicating himself further, or he can implicate himself directly by admitting, in the spirit of full disclosure, a small item of curiosity. (Joking is out of the question.) 'Well,' I cleared my throat, 'Jonathan has... nice legs.'

'What about his arms?' She asked. 'Also nice. Very smooth,' I replied. I had gone too far. Without speaking a word, we dropped the subject.

That night we had the best sex of our relationship. It was efficient, satisfying and totally wholesome. In the middle of it, Simone's face popped up. I thought of whispering something about her to see what it did to Anne. But it had to be neutral. Too erotic and she might spiral down. 'Simone has great knees,' I murmured. Anne came, then I came. The next day, she woke up early and made us breakfast.

'We're going to do this carefully,' she said, taking out a pad of paper. 'We're going to do this openly and honestly and if anything feels weird, I just want you to say so.'

'Me?' I said. 'Why not you?'
'You haven't done it before.'

Maybe this was Anne's way of including me in an AFFAIR... Maybe talk of a woman was pre-empting talk of another MAN'

'We haven't done it before.' She drew a line down the middle of a fresh page. At the top of one column she wrote, Friends. At the top of the other she wrote, Strangers. 'Strangers?' I said.

'If we go with a friend, it could get weird.' 'If we go with a stranger, we could get murdered.' Anne crossed out Strangers and wrote Acquaintances. 'Then we'll aim for the middle.' She started adding names. In the spirit of fairness, I didn't say

anything about the guys. By the time we finished, we had about a dozen names, three of them men. I took a sip of coffee. 'I noticed Michael was the first name you wrote down.' She crossed him off the list. 'You were quick to volunteer Genevieve.' She drew a line through the name. 'Emma, John, Gary.' Cross, cross, cross. 'Sean, Chloe, David.' She crossed them out, too. The only names remaining were Simone, Katie and Jonathan. They stared back at me knowingly. 'Two Friends. One Acquaintance,' she said. 'Interesting.' It got quiet.

'Jonathan is a Friend!' I blurted. 'Last time I saw him we talked for, like, two hours. He's definitely a Friend.' 'There's no way that's possible. You have nothing in common.'

'We were left alone at your office party – I asked him if he liked *Graceland* by Paul Simon. It's the only African thing I know.'

Why were we doing this? Had a single episode of great sex fuelled by the mention of another's anatomy turned us into swingers overnight? Or had I been secretly interested in the group thing all along and too ashamed to act upon it – this idea I had about Anne, one of her friends, and... 'Are you OK?'

'Fine.' The bedside table Anne's mother... 'Because we don't *have* to do this.'

I looked up. Anne's girl-woman smile beamed at me from all directions and seemed to rearrange the furniture. 'You love me,' I said. Her face bloomed and I felt myself slip a little in the chair.

Jonathan arrived at 6.30pm. At the

door, he handed Anne a bottle of wine and me a bag wrapped in ribbon. I was glad to have something to do with my hands and began pulling out tissue paper. Maybe Jonathan sensed my anxiety. 'You can save it for later,' he said, placing a hand on my back.

I wasn't sure what he meant by later. I also wasn't sure how to remove myself from his hand without seeming like I was rebuffing him, so I tried a friendly double pat of his shoulder, something that said

'Good to see you, buddy!' hoping that he would release me. He did not. Instead he returned my pat with a pat and we stood there patting and repatting ourselves, like two Japanese businessmen. 'You look well,' he declared.

'Thank you,' I said. Sensing my discomfort, Anne approached us with the bottle raised. 'Who wants a drink?'

'Wonderful!' Jonathan said. He swung his free arm around Anne and drew us into a bear hug. 'Shall I help in the kitchen?'

'No need,' I snapped back. 'You make yourself comfortable right here, put on some music and we'll be back with wine.'

I drew Anne into the farthest corner of the kitchen. 'What did you tell him?' 'Nothing.'

'He doesn't know why he's here?'

'I don't know.' She drove the corkscrew into the wine. 'I was dropping hints on the phone, but I'm not sure if he picked up on them. But he seems very affectionate. If you feel uncomfortable at any point –'

'Annie, I can't do this.' She put the bottle and three glasses on a tray.

'We haven't *done* anything yet. Just put the Gruyère on a plate and come in here.'

I followed her back into the living room and came at her with a kiss. Having spent the whole day at the gym, I was feeling commanding and poured whatever of it that remained onto and into her lips right in front of Jonathan, who seemed to be stifling his laughter. Anne had shot her hands up the back of my shirt and was leading me I don't know where when she tripped over Jonathan's gift bag we had left by the door. We looked down.

The bag, now on its side, had spilled out a CD. It was *Bridge Over Troubled Water*.

'For you,' Jonathan said. 'By Paul Simon.'

'Yes,' I said. 'Yes.' I took a long look at our new friend. 'Thank you.'

It wasn't long before the conversation turned to Casey Anthony, etsy.com and Banksy. Jonathan left around 10.30pm. Slightly drunk and full of Gruyère, Anne and I climbed into bed. 'Are you tired?' she asked.

'No. Are you?'

We drew close and for half an hour, before the evening news, we whispered into each other's ears what we had been thinking in the moments before he left. ■