

LUST IN L.A.: HOT, STICKY & BOTHERED

Wondering why guys don't make the first move anymore, and notes on the pains and pleasures of threesomes

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It was the longest I'd gone without sex in more than a decade — six months. Having spent the past year trying not to die while recovering from an herbal abortion gone awry, I'd hardly noticed — I had barely enough energy to bathe, clothe and feed myself, let alone ponder getting off. I saw no larger repercussions to this extended sexual drought until my doctor issued an otherwise unorthodox prescription.



(Click to enlarge)

Head cocked to one side, Dr. Habib Sadeghi, my hero and a brilliant healer/physician — trained not only in traditional Western medicine but in alternative therapies as well — held onto my wrists, retrieving information from various organs, channels and neurotransmitters through his fingertips. He smiled and told me that the worst was behind me. I was finally strong enough to start rebuilding my system. He inserted acupuncture needles into my head, chest and ankles, slipped a pair of purple color-therapy glasses over my eyes and began digging his fingers into the backside of my pelvis by way of my bellybutton, massaging out the bad karma, the trauma and a year's worth of pain and lonely despair. The treatment, integrated neuromyofascial release, while excruciating, was a triumph, and I laughed my way through the pain, taking solace in my progress, and in the slow but certain return of my life force. He told me to expect a sudden surge in my libido. And then he gave me some instructions: I needed to make sure I had "at least three to four releases a week."

He wasn't talking about massage treatments. *Releases* wasshy-young-doctor speak for *orgasms*, which would, according to Dr. Sadeghi, unleash a flurry of oxytocin into my system, restore my ravaged uterus and induce whole-body healing feelings of love, warmth and tenderness — all abstract concepts that I only vaguely recollected in light of this past year of heartache, body break and isolation.

As a lifelong serial monogamist, flitting from one co-dependent commitment to the next as a means to work through the baggage I'd accumulated throughout my formative years, I'd never had occasion to dally with sex for sex's sake outside the confines of a "relationship." After finally getting over the boyfriend whom I affectionately refer to as "the guy who knocked me up and ditched me," I'd opted to fly solo, not wanting to take on anyone else's issues, personality defects or mood

disorders while I healed and focused on my career. The medical mandate to “release” inspired fantasies of hot, sweaty nights of frivolous, freewheeling passion — unbound by the constraints of commitment and compromise and heavy “Where is this going?” conversations, with the excuse that my doctor told me to.

But there was a problem. All my single-guy friends who railed on and on about what a catch I was when I was dangling off the arm of emotionally unavailable Boyfriend X wanted nothing to do with my prescription.

“It would be weird,” said a newly divorced friend, valiantly trying to figure out how to be alone.

“I can’t,” lamented the best friend of yet another ex-boyfriend. “It would kill Ole.”

“Um ... I guess so,” said the snack from the health-food store, 26, with the model-perfect body and neurotic disposition, just before he boarded a plane to New York and never called me again.

I was zero-for-three and confused. I thought no-strings-attached sex with a beautiful woman was a no-brainer. Was it me?

“You’ve got no game!” shrieked my friend Dave, artist and fellow celibate by default at the tender and virile age of 26. It was true, my hard-hitting propositions leaned toward the spastic, but I had no time for coquettish subtleties, or clever seduction scenarios; I had a quota to meet. Plus, the pelvic treatment had unleashed the sudden return of my libido with a vengeance, and I was in an exaggerated state of frisky 24/7.

At the same time, I noticed girlfriends with no medical-orgasm mandate complaining of the same problem — an oddly urgent need for sex, and no willing participants with whom to have it.

“I don’t know if I’m coming or going, but I’m definitely not coming,” lamented Bryony, of the sun-streaked blond waves, the plump, kissable lips and sexy British accent into my voicemail. “I need to have sex and, yes, this is the kind of message I’m leaving these days.”

Michelle, a slim clothing designer with flaming red hair and serious brown eyes, whimpered into the phone, “I’m having the worst case of hives, and I’m pretty sure it’s linked to sexual repression.”

Venturing out of solitude and into the city by way of gallery openings, intimate gatherings and a few extraneous New Age hippie events, I saw beautiful people in beautiful clothes standing awkwardly apart from one another, not dialoguing, not smiling, not engaging. Gone were the furtive glances and flirty exchanges I was used to experiencing in the social sphere. A profound sense of alienation had taken their place. It seemed as if no one in L.A. was having sex, at least no one that I could see. I started sniffing around, testing the waters to see if my theory checked out.

“All of my friends are fucking celibate, and *not* by choice,” lamented J., a 26-year-old actress, yogi, teacher and Scorpio (the infamous sex sign) with high cheekbones and smooth, caramel-colored skin, while fiddling with a rubbery purple dildo in front of her altar.

While the men around me seemed unfazed by the drought, my girlfriends and I were crawling up our proverbial walls and bouncing off glass ceilings, needing to connect, release, express. Sure, I could self-administer my weekly three to four with far less time and effort than it was taking to find a willing participant, but it wasn’t just the orgasm I wanted, it was the holistic, sensual experience of being touched, of tasting and smelling and exploring another body. I wanted unattached intimacy, an interim profundity that included soft caresses and sweet kisses and would ultimately take care of my quota, without compromise or drama. Feeling like a cross between a lecherous 18-year-old boy and a leprous Scorpio, I was hot, I was bothered, I was inappropriately propositioning all the cute boys I knew, and getting rejected from every possible angle. It was humiliating to be on the receiving end of so many shades of no. I may be strong and I’m certainly direct, but I’m no hunter. I like a man who knows what he wants and goes after it, especially when it’s me. Still, I pressed on — in my mission to release, as well as my inquiry into why it was so fucking hard to find someone to help me to do it.

I turned to Cindy Guidry, author of *The Last Single Woman in L.A.* She has a hot Pilates bod, a raspy voice, strong opinions — and she wasn’t getting any either.

“I think the fact that women have become more predatory is part of it,” she said over a bowl of steaming-hot miso soup at M Café, “because now men are confused as to whether they’re predator or prey. Traditionally, men are the hunters, and the hunt no longer exists, so I think if you’re talking about someone’s biological drive to pursue something, and that *thing* is now being thrown in their laps, I think that thing, all of a sudden, becomes less interesting.”

This role reversal hasn’t been working out so well for some of us. “If a guy’s sitting there thinking, ‘If a girl really liked me, she’d do something’ — because that’s what women do now, they make the move — and if I’m sitting there waiting for a man to make the move,” Guidry said, “there’s not really anywhere for things to come together.”

“There is identity chaos going on,” confirmed sex lecturer, author and artist Eric Francis by phone from New York, where, he assures, people are still having sex. “The guys have become the sappy romantics, and the women have become the shameless hussies.”

Antiquated idioms aside, it was true that the men in my life all seemed to want deep, meaningful, monogamous relationships, and

were willing to hold off on any sort of co-creative erotic interplay until finding 'em, while the women around me just wanted to have drama-free, no-strings-attached sex. It's not that we don't want those same romantic, profound connections — we do. It's just that we want to be having erotic exploits in the interim. I know too much to think that every pretty face is a potential Prince Charming with an amazing sense of humor and a bone-deep desire to grow and expand and evolve, which outweighs his ego's urge to be right, look cool or play it safe. Still, I love men, especially the cute, dark, creative ones, and these days, when I see one, I'm not thinking about taking long walks on the beach or growing old together; I'm wondering what he smells like and how he looks with his shirt off.

“U up?”

It was around midnight, a full moon was out, and a 25-year-old pro-poly cutie I'll call “Ben” was texting me. He has twinkling Nepalese eyes and a million-watt smile, so I leapt out of character once more and drove east to his hilltop hideaway to rattle my status quo and possibly check off one of my weekly three to four. Curled up on opposite ends of the couch, egos and urges tucked safely beneath us, we talked ... and talked ... and talked some more.

“I never make the first move,” he suddenly announced.

I thought my midnight trek to Silver Lake was the first move.

A standoff ensued. No spit was swapped, no bodily fluids of any kind exchanged.

I couldn't help but wonder if there was something bigger going on. Between processed food, pharmaceuticals and even reports of chem-trails wreaking havoc on what we eat and drink, it's no wonder our bodies are more toxic than ever. Studies abound about rising dioxin levels leading to lower testosterone counts — could some kind of feminizing effect on men have brought us not just metrosexuals but guys who refuse to make the first move?

Hyperintense tonic herbalist and local optimal-health guru Truth Calkins, 38, himself celibate for the past eight years despite his taut, toned physique and his pretty blue eyes, blames the sexual drought on skyrocketing stress levels. “Stress levels are so high to keep up with all the stimuli in the modern world,” he said. “People's adrenals, pituitaries, ovaries get more depleted. There's so much pressure in so many areas. They don't have the kind of drive, like hormonal energy, to get through their life with a lot of vigor, let alone have sex.”

Under a shade tree in Venice, beneath a straw fedora and a dusty ray of setting sunlight, James Mathers, 44, an artist/poet /philosopher and keen observer of human relations, told me that he's witnessing “a lot more holdy-holdy, a lot more support, a lot more nutritious man love” among his otherwise hetero peers. “I'm content with my gender confusion,” he said.

“People seem very alienated and very isolated,” said Bay Area-based relationship therapist Kathy Labriola. “[They're spending] more time in front of the television, in front of the computer, [forging] fewer community ties and less interaction.”

Technology may be folding the world into one neat global culture of commerce, activism, awareness and distraction, but it's wreaking havoc on our sex lives. We've effectively removed the sensory experience from our exchanges, relegating them entirely to the realm of so much sterile brain stuff. The telephone was never great, but there were still lifts, giggles and telling pauses to color conversation, even if visual cues, smells and — dare to dream — tactile components were removed. Today, relationships are forged via so many square screens, with LOL replacing the holy, healing act of laughter, and abbreviated text messages passed off as courtship. When we are face-to-face, or even just voice-to-voice, we're rusty, awkward and out of shape.

“You in town?” I messaged a sexy little alternative-medicine doctor with whom I'd been having a sexy little e-mail exchange.

“Nope.”

The single-syllable reply was out of character for the otherwise long-winded and flirty e-mailer.

“Dr. Sadeghi just prescribed me at least three orgasms per week, and all you have for me is 'nope'” I typed, annoyed, but hopeful.

“You have to strike when the libido is hot.”

I thought I had. And so ended my brief and disappointing relationship with Dr. D. We probably could have gone on for months, e-mailing thinly veiled innuendos punctuated with flirty emoticons, but as soon as I tried to bring our technological fantasy into the realm of eye contact and intonation, it crumbled.

Abstinent by default, doctor's orders swirling around my newly unblocked second chakra, I tried the online porn scene, hot-pink Babeland vibrator in hand. Here, everyone's having sex — bronzed, hairless, dry, overacted, self-conscious, stupid sex. But it seems that the gender shift hasn't yet infiltrated our neural receptors as they relate to receiving visual erotic stimuli — at least not mine. *Ew.*

As for Internet dating, with its lengthy questionnaires and airbrushed headshots, it removes faith and fate from the equation, relying on résumé points, laundry lists and acronyms to define the perfect life partner. Social-networking sites like MySpace, Facebook and Tribe

seem to work for bands wanting to share their music, but as far as the forging of true intimacy, I wasn't convinced.

A week after our standoff on his couch, Ben and I ended up having sex. I not only made the first move, I made all the moves, including paying for foreplay ... I mean lunch. He was adorable and eager to please, and generously knocked out two of my weekly three to four. I left with a rosy glow and tousled hair and the realization that I didn't want casual sex after all, even with a gorgeous witchy boy who was open and conscious and aware well beyond his scant 25 years. Yes, he threw me on the bed and we laughed and I came, but there wasn't enough ... I don't know — time? trust? connection? life? ... love? — between us to make it much more than two bodies using each other to get off.

But if I didn't want casual sex and I didn't want a relationship, what did I want? I wondered if there wasn't some sort of magical in-between place where I could engage erotically with someone I actually loved and trusted, a (beautiful, fit, sweet) friend who wanted to share an erotic experience without the drama, compromise or extra conversations that came along with commitment, who happened to live within a four-block radius.

Confused, frustrated and still terrifically frisky, I crawled into bed with my best girlfriend, snuggled up close and held on tight while dreaming of a magical man with soft skin, big hands and a brilliant sense of humor. She nudged me awake to massage coconut oil onto her back, which was the most fulfilling action I'd experienced in months.

"Nicki," as I'll call her here, came into my life at a meditation retreat up north. I'd spent 10 days delving inward in silence — no reading, no writing, no eye contact — observing various bodily sensations, and found myself seated behind a tall, bookish woman with blood-red streaks in her curly black hair. We broke the silence with giggles and mischief-making, and discovered that we were both writers, me of fluff and art and magic, and she of a critically acclaimed seminal guide to three-way love.

Back in Los Angeles, calm and clear, I devoured Nicki's how-to book in one sitting. While I wasn't jonesing for a three-way myself, I grooved on the alternative it proposed to the mythical dinosaur of monogamy. According to Nicki, a veritable expert on the subject, polyamorous relationships, while mostly closeted, are rapidly spreading into the mainstream.

The Judeo-Christian fundamentalist fable of human relations would have us believe that boy meets girl well before 30, then they marry, breed and supposedly live a perfectly fulfilled happily-ever-after without ever flirting with, fantasizing about or, God forbid, tasting anyone else. The primary partner will satisfy every possible need — sexual, intimate or otherwise. Attraction to others is a sign of deviance, as are homosexuality, masturbation and staying single. Lying and cheating are to be expected but never acknowledged.

Why we continue to buy into this model is beyond me, but every mythology in our culture has been shoving it down our collective throat since the moment this machine that is our consumptive empire started running.

"Marriage is big business, the central fairy tale, and, as a narrative-based culture, we don't have any alternate mythologies," Francis patiently explained by phone. "A culture is dependent upon its mythologies."

In her book, Nicki not only proposed an alternate mythology of three-way love, she encouraged her readers to throw rote social convention aside and to engage critical thinking and radical honesty in creating relationship models designed specifically for themselves, by themselves. The idea of custom-crafting a relationship with boundaries of my own choosing blew my mind wide open.

"It's important to me to design a relationship that isn't about what society dictates," Nicki said, contemplative and interview-shy, though firm in her beliefs, over tea following an afternoon MOCA outing. "There are so many ways to have relationships ... there are so many different sets of rules that work for different people."

Nicki and I forged a friendship based on self-inquiry, adventure and a love-hate relationship with the local Burner community. She advised me on writing residencies; I took her with me to see Dave Cooper's muted, maniacal oil renderings of strange and silly girl-on-girl action. Nicki was a subdued combination of accomplished and worldly, humble and innocent, full of long pauses of thoughtful reflection and effusive outbursts of cheeky enthusiasm. She was a doer and an explorer, always dipping her purple-painted toe into something new and exciting — from impromptu road trips to building igloos on snowy mountaintops. When she brought her husband, "Sasha," along on a weekend wildflower excursion, I wondered if they were scoping me out.

Sasha is classically gorgeous with a dazzling smile, complicated blue eyes and a chiseled physique. We had an immediate rapport based on wit and wordplay, and an unspoken something that ignited in the space between our gazes. He swigged from my water bottle as if he'd known me for lifetimes, and by the end of the day, we were finishing each other's sentences and sharing mutual fantasies of living sustainably, somewhere lush and lovely and communal, while making art and whittling.

Back at the home that Sasha built himself, we dined on raw food specially prepared with me — the high-maintenance vegan geek — in mind, and then talked into the wee hours of the morning.

We started spending weekends together. Our daytime outings effortlessly spilled into evenings. Time slipped away in the wake of laughter, wild, creative conspiracy and a down-deep-'n'-dirty sort of honest inquiry into ourselves and each other that left all of us wanting more. The chemistry between the three of us was electric.

I wondered if I had the balls to take it all the way. It was easy to talk a good game from the sidelines of celibacy, but to step into

someone else's marriage for the sake of their fantasy and my oxytocin was another story. I'd been railing on and on about wanting uncommitted sex with someone beautiful and brilliant and on my wavelength for months, and now here I was, faced with not one, but two gorgeous, aware, awake, artsy, progressive possibilities, and I was wavering. Was it fear of the unknown? Sure. Was I afraid of getting attached? Probably.

"It's a gift," enthused Ben. "You don't turn down a gift. You take it, and say thank you ... most people don't get opportunities like this."

Experiencing Nicki and Sasha's marriage from the inside was palpably shifting my attitude toward love and commitment. They were deeply, respectfully in love with each other, and it was beautiful to witness. What I'd judged as a barbed-wire cop-out, I was now seeing as a supportive structure for conscious partnership, especially in light of the space they held for each other's individual expression and exploration. I'd never seen a relationship, let alone a contractually bound marriage, that looked even vaguely appealing; theirs seemed ideal.

I was starting to soften. Sasha's e-mails weren't making it any easier — playful, flirtatious and, *sigh*, really well written. I was saying yes to openings and events that I had no time for just so I could spend more time with Nicki, who dug deep, asked hard questions and lived big and bold in her own way. It was all flowing so easily, and since a little loving was precisely what the doctor had ordered, what harm could come from a light-hearted tryst that was safely confined to the realms of uncommitted experimentation with two people I genuinely cared for?

"I'd like to have one more night of you before you leave town," Sasha e-mailed me as I was scrambling to get ready for a trip that I never ended up taking.

I groomed and moisturized before they came to fetch me ("Kidnapping you is half the fun," texted Sasha). I was nervous.

"It's weird enough getting naked in front of one person," I vented to my best girlfriend. "But two? Just think of the ensuing dialogues comparing notes about my flaws and my scars and my bungling technique."

She laughed away my doubts as textbook threshold anxiety, while I lamented my regrettably hetero track record. "I've never licked pussy before, and he went to a weeklong intensive to perfect his skills! How can I possibly measure up?"

At Nicki and Sasha's, the three of us chopped vegetables together, and ate outside under the stars. Sasha admitted he had a crush on me, and I fessed up to the one I'd been harboring for him.

"Oooh ..." gushed Nicki, smiling at this latest development. Our first awkward silence ensued. I wondered if they'd discussed this but was suddenly too shy to ask.

"C'mon," Sasha said, leading us both inside.

My threshold anxiety turned out to be a nonissue. Take three beautiful bodies, add immeasurable amounts of chemistry, attraction, affection, creativity and intrigue, and let the sparks fly. It was amazing: finally consummating weeks of pent-up passion while kissing Sasha, and then turning my head to kiss Nicki's sweet, smooth lips, her killer hips, her soft skin, the adorable freckles dotting her world-class shoulders. I languished in the surplus of skin and limbs. There was always something to hold, someone to kiss, somewhere to touch. Nicki was shy; Sasha was strong. I stayed out of my head and open to the love, the affection, the sensations and the sweetness that abounded in the unmodeled space we were creating. The balance of masculine and feminine was comforting, exciting, amazing — and, as the guest of honor, I received more than my share of attention, effectively taking care of my weekly dose, and then some.

The days following our first night together were marked by subtle energetic shifts in our triangular dynamic. I awakened in Sasha's arms the morning after, and after sharing a potential boundary-crossing two-minute snooze entwined, Sasha appropriately refocused his affections on his wife, distancing himself from me, ever so slightly. As usual, we had a splendid time together — driving out to the old Manson family ranch for a workshop on how to become a sovereign citizen versus a federal slave. But the palpable pulling away left a shallow bruise on my otherwise rapidly opening heart. I came home from our excursion feeling somewhat crummy — left alone to observe the insecurity, the flitters of jealousy, the longing for more. There was no ambiguity in this situation, and I was left only with what was real. With eyes and heart wide open, I chose to walk my talk — to take what I was being offered with gratitude and humility, and to let the hang-ups about what I wasn't getting drift away. By Saturday, when we came together in a Chumash sweat lodge in Moorpark, I had gained a significant distance from the emotions, and a stronger foothold on my role in the triad. Sitting next to Sasha in the pitch black of the sweat lodge, I felt my petty insecurities burn up in the volcanic rocks, leaving my body in the streams of sweat pouring down my spine, soaking my sundress and the earth beneath me. I exited the lodge, purified, just in time to see Sasha faint into Nicki's arms.

Yet another weekend spent hiking, laughing and making love did wonders for my disposition. My heart was wide open and, with no illusions of forever or tomorrow or "mine" to filter it into, I spread it far and wide, showering affection and gratitude and compliments and appreciation among my friends and my community and everyone who crossed my path.

"The more you love," said writer Robert A. Heinlein, "the more you can love — and the more intensely you love. Nor is there any limit

on how many you can love.”

Our triad was quickly expanding beyond the confines of reductive ideas like heterosexual and commitment. The growth was exponential, and I found myself processing at lightning speed and stepping up, again and again, into new realms of expression, experience and expansion, getting out of my head, acting from an ever-opening heart, in a constant practice of surrender. I checked in daily: *Does this feel good? Is this serving me?*

“It’s not the kind of thing that a complacent person should do,” said Sasha, pensive on the patio of the Alcove on a sunny afternoon. “I have friends who say they want to be comfortable in life, and that they want things to be easy, and I don’t think it’s necessarily comfortable or easy, but I think it makes you better.”

My friends dubbed them “The Couple.”

“How’s it going with The Couple?” they’d ask.

“Amazing,” I’d beam.

It was great having another woman around for those especially girly moments like primping, teasing and tag-team flirting. The extra dose of feminine energy lent itself to extra giggles and late-morning bedroom lingering.

Sweaty and tingly, we scuttled into bed, just as the sun was coming up. Sasha stood naked before the window in front of us, fiddling with a swath of fabric, trying to block out the onslaught of daylight while Nicki and I oohed and aahed over his magnificent tush from under the covers. Fabric finally secured, Nicki leapt up and yanked it loose, forcing Sasha to start over again, and giving us another extended look at his beautiful backside. Nicki slipped back under the covers and into my arms, while we giggled wildly. Three was working out wonderfully.

Of course, it had its share of weirdness: Unspoken rules Nicki and Sasha had set up between themselves trickled down to me, experientially. After a carefully avoided rendezvous and a few subtle logistical reconfigurations, I figured out that Sasha wasn’t allowed to be alone with me. And it was a couple of weeks before Nicki felt comfortable with Sasha and me moving from foreplay to coitus. Taking Sasha inside me while holding tightly to Nicki’s hand was deeply erotic and amazing. The six orgasms it inspired were less about fetish or perversion, and more an expression of a rapidly expanding affection, as well as the truly overwhelming gratitude and respect I felt for Nicki’s courage and generosity.

“It won’t work,” said my friend Frank, a young Dominican *ayahuascero* steeped in esoteric mysteries, celestial secrets and the sanctity of his own traditional marriage.

“What do you mean by ‘work’?” I asked, genuinely unclear. I was loving and receiving love, and growing. Oxytocin was flowing freely throughout my happy, healing body. It was already working.

“It won’t last,” he said. “It’s not sustainable.”

One of the fundamental problems with the old model of intimacy is that we project permanence onto love. The feeling arises, and it’s magical and monumental and, instead of savoring it in the moment with gratitude and presence, we cling onto it with outstretched claws and lay claim to it forever.

“A lot of experiences can be missed if we’re always focused on the long-term,” my friend the photographer/philosopher Herwig Maurer said over the phone from his Pacific Nexus Gallery in Venice. “The moment is all we have.”

I’ve never thought that because a relationship ends, it fails. Everything ends — relationships, systems of thought, life, all of it. All we can ever truly count on is change, and that includes endings.

Besides, there are plenty of long-term polyrelationships that challenge the notion that multiple partnerships are doomed to the short-term. As a means of child-rearing, it’s actually ideal, with extra hands to diaper and dry dishes, and additional perspectives to enrich a developing human’s worldview.

“I have no reason to believe it’s not sustainable,” defended Sasha, curled up like a cat on his purple L-shaped couch, still wearing his *kundalini* damp yoga clothes. “People always think that because they don’t see a lot of people doing something that it doesn’t work, and that’s total horseshit. Right? Everyone thought that a horseless carriage was a fantasy, and now everyone’s driving around in cars.”

“Did *everyone* think it was a fantasy?” I teased

“No,” he said, smiling his way into the center of my heart. “There were a few forward-thinking maverick geniuses who knew it was possible.”

“Do you want to make out with me?” I asked.

He laughed that sparkling, lovely Sasha laugh: “Yes.”

There were poems and flowers and long lingering eye locks. There was talk of road trips and introductions to families and friends. I found myself thinking about Sasha more and more and more, and what I'd never considered, and what I didn't see coming, was my falling hard and fast and stupid for my friend's husband. All at once, weekends weren't enough and holding back wouldn't do, and maintaining the balance of affection and attention between two autonomous individuals — one with whom I was suddenly, surprisingly in love, the other, a friend whom I admired and adored and yet didn't dream about or pine over or long for, though her body was slammin' and her kisses were sweet.

Love is the ultimate outlaw. It just won't adhere to any rules. The most any of us can do is to sign on as its accomplice. Instead of vowing to honor and obey, maybe we should swear to aid and abet. That would mean that security is out of the question. The words make and stay become inappropriate. My love for you has no strings attached. I love you for free.

—Tom Robbins, *Still Life With Woodpecker*

After a long weekend spent art-hopping, adventuring and experiencing a handful of mind-blowing orgasms, Sasha and I vibed high and huge, but Nicki seemed to be slipping away. I found myself crouched inside a crooked head space, wondering how much longer I could dangle on the outside of this relationship, clamping down on my emotions, holding my tongue and my feelings, trying to fit my heart into a tiny box on the periphery of someone else's marriage, and pretending I could keep my shit together in light of this unforeseen onslaught of intense emotion and all that wasn't being said. It felt like we were moving into real relationship territory, and, for the first time, I really was getting the short end of the stick. I went home Sunday night, exhausted from the delicate dance we were performing, depleted for my own week, with no one to rub my back or to whisper sweet nothings in my ear or to reassure me that I was his favorite.

Aside from my feelings for Sasha, or perhaps because of them, I became suddenly aware of my inherent primal nature — the alpha in me who wasn't okay with second place, who couldn't make herself smaller to make Nicki feel better. I was annoyed with her, not for doubting, but for pretending, for not walking her talk, and in being annoyed, I was out of integrity. It no longer felt good. It was no longer serving me. Our experiment had reached its logical conclusion.

The breakup was bumpier than I'd expected. Several weeks of tiptoeing around the edges of definition, without creating visible boundaries or revealing our true feelings or talking about just what it was we were really getting into backed up on us, bigtime. Insecurities were triggered, reactions had and harsh words recklessly strewn about. We all said stupid things, rationalizing our agendas, protecting our egos, trying to backtrack through the mess of silence and innuendo and overwhelming emotion and energies that had intensified faster, bigger and brighter than any of us had imagined possible.

“No one's that evolved when it comes to matters of the heart,” consoled my writing partner, Nina, a tiny, ageless beauty who's talked me through many a broken heart.

“I have no illusions about how much fear there is, and how difficult it is for people to change from what they were taught as children,” e-mailed Eric Francis, who himself struggles to navigate his way through the wild frontier of polyamory. “The issue behind the issue is not the supposed immorality of having more than one partner, nor a lack of the ability to love more than one person. The issue is jealousy. Do we really need it? Well, it's a good cover-up for our own insecurity.”

My feelings for Sasha only intensified in the days following our breakup. All that I had been holding back came rushing in. I vacillated between despair over the cruel irony of meeting the man of my dreams, had I ever been bold enough to dream so big and so beautiful, and gratitude for a healed heart, for regaining my faith in love and partnership, for experiencing a profound level of intense connection that I never knew was possible — and for the trust that both Sasha and Nicki, especially Nicki, extended to me in bringing me into their hearts and their marriage. The sadness is attachment and temporality, and still very, very real. It's all those things I judge as old-model and unevolved and beneath me. It's me wanting more Sasha, wanting a shared future, a longer now, a liminal loophole in which we could slip away for a 24-hour infinity and put it all out there, without hurting anyone, an imaginary space wherein he kisses me freely and touches me forever and never has to tear his eyes away to check in with his wife.

From this end of it, gratitude prevails. The anger has dissipated. The hurt is subsiding. I miss him; I miss her — as my friend, as my plus-one, as my lover and, selfishly, as my admirer. I burst into tears last week while making dinner for myself, wishing I'd had a chance to cook for them, wishing I'd felt less so that we could have shared more, wishing there was some way to make it work, wanting to believe that three is indeed sustainable, which it very well may be under different circumstances. I just don't know.

Still, I stand by the success of my threesome.

“It's shifted you, massively, in the best of ways,” remarked my best friend, who said she's never experienced my heart so open.

So many knots were untangled, so much love was shared, so much healing was had, that the structure can't simply be cast aside. As a long-term solution to our crumbling model of happily-ever-after, I'm not so sure, but as a haven for experimentation, and for the

untangling of so much socialized angst around eroticism, intimacy and partnership, I dare say the multipartnered relationship experience is a must.

"Polyamory is a tool ...," maintained my philosopher friend Maurer even before I stepped inside my own triad, "... a way to reprogram the human relational condition."

"The revolution is not going to be polyamory," predicted Francis. "It's going to be redefining monogamy, wherein we give our partners more freedom ... the freedom not to lie."

I'm still not quite sure what's going on between the sexes, or where we're headed. Something is amiss, this much I know. I spent months trying to get laid and the only way I was able to find real satisfaction was with a married couple. Clearly, the myth of old-model monogamy is broken, and without an alternate template to show us how to come together authentically, we Los Angelenos are more isolated than ever. The answer may be as simple as honesty. More truth certainly couldn't hurt.

On the back end of my triad, once I'd dipped my toe in the soft, sweet waters of connection and affection, loneliness crept in during the dullest of moments. Ever and always independent, I found that being alone suddenly sucked in the wake of three hearts and six arms. But I've moved through it and found my way to a new faith in love and connection, knowing that now that I've tasted it, it will be that much easier to call in again, when I'm ready, and the stars align and I have the energy to be a partner and to dive into a relationship.

In the meantime, I'm back to self-administering my weekly three-to-four, one-dimensionally taking care of myself while I continue to heal, no longer yearning for that imaginary in-between sex friend, having tasted something so much sweeter. Rather, I'm holding space for what James Mathers calls "that really powerful, really grounded and beautiful intimacy [that] is a service to the whole world and to every world," whatever that may look like, and however it decides to meet me.