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SAVAGE LOVE

PUBLIC PLAYERS

BY DAN SAVAGE

I'm a twentysomething straight woman. About a month ago, I had a really vivid dream in which I was at a party and engaging with a guy I had just met. We were seriously flirting. Then my fiancé showed up—my real, flesh-and-blood, sleeping-next-to-me fiancé—who we'll call G. In the dream, I proceeded to shower G with attention and PDA; I was all over him in a way we typically aren't in public. I was clearly doing it to get a reaction from the guy I'd just spent the last dream-hour seducing. It was as if it had been my plan all along. Last night, I had a similar dream. This time, the guy was an old high-school boyfriend, but otherwise it was the same: flirty baiting, followed by the use of G to reject and humiliate the other guy. I was really turned on by these dreams. In real life, whenever another woman has flirted with G, I get aroused—conscious of some feelings of jealousy but drawing pleasure from them. And when other men have flirted with me, I get similarly aroused for G. There is definitely a component in that arousal that wants to tease and mock these other men with what they can't have, even though the teasing is just in my head. I would NEVER use another person like I do in these dreams/fantasies, because it's cruel. But could this become a healthy role-playing outlet for me and G? Are there ethical implications to hurting strangers (albeit imaginary ones) for sexual pleasure? From what little I know of degradation/humiliation kinks, it's important that the person being degraded is experiencing pleasure and satisfaction. Is it healthy to make someone's (again, an imaginary someone's) unwilling pain a part of our pleasure? If G is into it, this would be our first foray into fantasy/role-playing/whatever. But I worry that I might be poisoning the well by pursuing something so mean-spirited.

My Extra-Arousing Meanness

We watch imaginary people being harmed—much more grievously harmed—in movies and on television and read about imaginary people being harmed in novels. Think of poor Barb in *Stranger Things* or poor Theon Greyjoy in *Game of Thrones* or poor Christian in *Fifty Shades of Grey*. If it's okay for the Duffer brothers and HBO and E.L. James to do horrible things to these imaginary people to entertain us, MEAN, it's okay for you and your boyfriend (if he's game) to do much less horrible things to an imaginary third person to entertain yourselves.

But why limit this to fantasy? Why not fuck your fiancé's brains out after flirting with and subsequently humiliating a living, breathing, willing third?

But first, MEAN, give some thought to what exactly turns you on about this and then discuss it with your fiancé. It turns you on to see your partner through another's eyes for obvious reasons—when someone else wants to fuck him, you see him with fresh eyes and want to fuck him that much more. As for the power-play aspects of your fantasy, does your turn-on evaporate if your victim is a willing participant? And how do you feel about threesomes? Threesomes don't have to involve intercourse or outercourse or any other sort of course, of course. Bringing someone else in—someone who gets off on the idea of being humiliated—counts as a threesome, even if all your third "gets" to do is be ditched in a bar. You could even work up to letting your willing third watch and/or listen while your fiancé gets to do what he will never get to do—fuck your amazing brains out—which would allow for the humiliation games to continue all night long.

Once G is on board, MEAN, you can start with a little role-playing about this scenario. Then, once you've established that this is as exciting for G as it is for you, advertise for your willing third. The internet is for porn, first and foremost, but it's also pretty good at bringing like-minded kinksters together. As long as your third consents to the play and gets off on it, you aren't poisoning the well or doing harm. And if you're worried it won't be as much fun if your victim is a willing participant, MEAN, remember there will be witnesses, i.e., other people in the bar who won't know it was a setup, and in their eyes you will be cruelly humiliating this poor schmuck.

Not into threesomes of any sort? Well, flirting is just flirting—it's not a binding contract—and there's no law that requires all flirtations to be strictly sincere and/or immediately actionable. A little casual flirtation with someone else before your fiancé rolls into a bar is permissible—but you'll have to let the other person know right away that you have a fiancé and that this flirtation isn't going anywhere, and then you can't go too crazy with the PDA once your fiancé arrives.

My husband and I have been together for 15 years, married for five. He is more sexually adventurous than I am, but I try to keep up. At his request, we have gone to a few sex clubs in our area to have "public sex." That's his main interest. He promised that it would be a one-time thing but insisted we keep going back. He told me that if I ever got uncomfortable, he didn't have to go back. I told him I did not want to go to any more sex clubs, and he found a loophole: sex booths at porn shops. If I have to do sex in public, booths are best because they aren't very popular and there is some privacy. This wasn't good enough for him. He wants an audience, he wants to see me with others, etc. I hate this. I hate how it makes me feel. I hate it. He says all the right things—he respects me, he knows a relationship is a two-way street, etc.—but he is constantly furious with me about this, he tells me I don't contribute anything to our relationship and that we don't have a true partnership—all because I don't want to have sex in public with him or with strangers. Right now, he's storming around the house in a rage about this and I am tired of it. I react to his "public requests" with nausea and panic because I know he will be enraged for a week if we don't go. I have even suggested that he go outside the marriage, but he wants me to be a part of it. Everything else in our relationship is great. We have a house, a child, and pets. I'm not sure if all that needs to be broken over this.

Denial Enrages Selfish Partner And I'm Reeling

I'm running out of column here, DESPAIR, so I'm going to have to be blunt: Your husband is a selfish, emotionally abusive, manipulative asshole, and you should leave him. You gave him a try, and not only was it not for you, it makes you fucking miserable. You gave him the okay to find other sex partners to explore this with, and that wasn't good enough for him. He has responded not with the gratitude you deserve—for the effort you made, for the permission you gave him—but with emotionally abusive behavior. And what's his goal? To make your life a living hell until you consent under duress? That wouldn't be genuine consent, DESPAIR, and therefore not consent at all. Being served with divorce papers may open his eyes. If so, perhaps your marriage can be saved. If not, go through with the divorce.

On the Lovecast, look out, monogamy, here comes Esther Perel: savagelovecast.com.

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