

THE GANDER AND THE GOOSE

A PLAY BY JOHN MCINERNEY

TIME: The Present, still fairly early on a Saturday morning
PLACE: The bedroom of an apartment shared by the two characters:

PETER HALBERTON

ABIGAIL MURRAY

They are both twenty-somethings and young professionals; as the following dialogue takes place, they are sharing the task of making the bed, evidently the one that they share. We join them in mid conversation, and as they talk, they continue their task, intermittently.

PETER

Setting a date? Why are you bringing up marriage now?

ABBY

Well, we've been together for what, almost two and a half years now, And we've been living together for six months. Don't you think it's time we planned ahead a little? I don't mean we should go get blood tests Monday morning, but maybe we should think about early next year, or later this year. We did agree, remember, that marriage would be in our future. So, when does the future start?

PETER

Oh, yes, we'll get married, sure, but do we need to set a date and everything now? I thought we were very happy with things just as they are. We've adjusted to each other very well, haven't we?

ABBY

Oh yes. Very well. I hope you've noticed I don't even mention it anymore when you leave the toilet seat up.

PETER

I have noticed, yes. And have you noticed that I don't complain about your clothes now taking up space in my closet?

ABBY

See? Marriage won't make much of a change for us at all.

Peter pauses when he hears this, and sits down on the bed briefly before replying:

PETER

But Abby, that isn't so, not really. Marriage will change things for us big time. Now, you and I, we're still like free agents; we're not tied down tightly to one place or even one job. If somebody offered me a job in San Francisco or, I don't know, Paris, we could take it, just pack up and go, for as long as it lasted. But when people get married, they start putting down roots: first they buy a house; then they get super committed to the jobs they have, because they need bigger salaries to keep up payments on the house, and security systems for the house, and lawn care, and God only knows what else. And then the next thing would be, they start having kids, and that ties them down even more tightly to their neighborhood, and the school system, and on and on.

At this point, Abby sits down on the bed, facing Peter, and says:

ABBY

Peter, we want kids. At least, that's what we both said a year ago, and I know I want one or two of them. Besides, we need to face the fact that we're 26 now, and in four years we'll be thirty. Think of that: **thirty!** And Peter, you've got a nice career going now, but let's face it: no one is going to offer either of us a dream job in Paris or San Francisco. So maybe it's time for us to start putting down some roots.

Now Peter gets up and begins to pace a few steps away from the bed, as he says tentatively:

PETER

I ... I can't disagree with anything you're saying, Abby. You're ... well, You're right. It's just ... it's just ...

ABBY

It's just what? What's really bothering you, sweetie?

PETER

Abby, I ... sometimes I wonder if ... if I know enough about myself to ...

to start settling down like a 26 year old man should.

ABBY

Pete, where is this coming from? Are you having doubts? Doubts, about what?

PETER

Oh, I ... I can guess what you'll think of me when I say this, but sometimes I have these thoughts that I haven't ... sowed enough wild oats."

ABBY

WHAT?! What are you telling me? After all this time together, you need to go on a Don Juan adventure? You wanna see how many more women you can bed? I can't believe this!

Now it's Abby's turn to get up and begin to pace around angrily, but there are tears in her eyes too.

PETER

Oh Abby, wait a minute! Abby, let me explain!

ABBY

If this is your way of telling me that you're tired of me, and you want to us to break up, it's hateful. I thought I meant more to you than this.

PETER

No! No! I don't want us to break up. I do want to marry you! I do! Please let me explain! Please!

ABBY

Explain! What is there to explain? You want to go tomcatting around; that came across very clearly.

PETER

But I've got to tell you why I feel this way, so we can get past it. Will you just listen for two minutes?

Abby pauses in her pacing for a beat or two, considers briefly, then says:

ABBY

I don't believe you can talk your way out of this, but go ahead and try. *She sits down on the bed.*

PETER

When we get married, Abby, and remember, I just said “when,” not “if,” I want to be a good husband, in every way. I won’t cheat on you, not ever, I promise. But first, I have to deal with these feelings I have, so they won’t cause trouble for us later.

ABBY

Oh for God’s sake! I was hoping for something better than that from you. So, you want me to wait patiently while you go around seducing one woman after another, until your sex fever burns itself out? I might be ready for social security before that happens.

PETER

No, no. I’ve thought about that problem. And here’s how we can deal with it. If you agree, we will begin an “open relationship” on a specific date; it will last for a maximum of two months, and then it will end, forever.

ABBY

Peter, that’s unrealistic nonsense. You’re talking about a... a sexual spree as if it were a short term lease. What if those two months are still too long for me, and not long enough for you? And I still can’t understand why this urge to “sow more wild oats” is so important to you? I mean, I thought our sex life was very happy, and very active.

PETER

It is, it is. It’s just that I never had the experience of being a young guy on the prowl, dating a lot of different women. You know that’s true, Abby. We were going to be scientists, researchers, so we were always studying, or always stuck in a lab, in college, and in graduate school. I didn’t even date very much until we started. In fact, I never told you this before, but I was still a virgin when we got together. So now, when guys my age are getting nostalgic about the times when they were dating three girls at the same time, or the “mornings after” when they woke up naked in some strange house, I have nothing to say, and nothing to remember.

Abby sounds distinctly satirical when, in response, she says:

ABBY

Poor dear. You have been so deprived. You were never raised in a mansion; you never had the chance to be an astronaut, and to top it all off, you never got to be in an orgy. Well, do you ever think about the fact that I never got to be wild and free either. I had to study a lot too, and I had to haunt the lab; we were often working in the same lab. So my experiments were usually with test tubes, not with men.

PETER

Well, yeah, but ... it's ... different for women, isn't it?

ABBY

Different? That's the old double standard way to look at it. A man can "go thru" women as if they were ... Kleenex tissues, and he'll get envious glances from a lot of "the guys," but if a woman behaves the same way, she's called a tramp, by both sexes sometimes.

PETER

But that's changing now, they say.

ABBY

Yes, I suppose so, but not fast enough. And ... Hey, wait a minute. This makes me think: I want to reconsider this whole "open relationship" idea from my point of view. While you are off chasing skirts for two months, I'm not going to be pining away in this apartment, the whole time, right? What's sauce for the gander, is sauce for the goose too. I can be out on the town nights, making up for lost time.

PETER

Well, yes. I guess that's only fair. I just didn't ... I didn't think you would be interested in that sort of thing.

ABBY

On the contrary: if this scheme of yours happens, and I get the opportunity, I know just where, or I should say who, I want to start with: Jake Dillon, the fitness coach at my women's workout

club. He takes his shirt off sometimes during the workouts, and shows off his six pack abs. That sure gets our attention, and if we're feeling frisky, we whisper to each other what a treat it would be if we could see the rest of him *au naturel*. And here's the best part, he's been paying lots of attention to me lately.

PETER

Paying a lot of attention to you!? What do you mean?

ABBY

Oh, he stops by me during the workout routines to tell me how well I'm doing, and when I'm stretching and bending I catch him looking right at me.

PETER

Why didn't you tell me this? It sounds like he's making a pass at you!

ABBY

Oh, he doesn't do anything unprofessional or obnoxious. Besides, if he looks at me ...appreciatively, as if he thinks I'm a pretty woman, that's kind of nice. I know, women are now supposed to resent the way wolf whistlers "objectify" women's looks, but most of us have to admit, privately, that, if the whistles are for us, we like it.

PETER

And, and if we do have an open relationship, you're going to be interested in this Jake guy?

ABBY

Well, yes. You can bet on it. Just like I can bet you will go after that busty redhead that works on your unit. I've seen the way you "appreciate" her.

PETER

And you might even be... intimate... with him?

ABBY

Yes, that's a definite possibility. And why shouldn't I? After all, if you are dating the redhead, are you going to be satisfied with a nice goodnight kiss at her front door at the end of an evening?

Peter doesn't answer the question. Instead, he sits down on the bed, looking thoughtful for a long moment. Then, rather matter-of-factly, he says:

PETER

I've changed my mind. Let's get married at the end of the year. Okay?
Now I'm hungry, let's go out for breakfast.

With that, he gets up, stretches, and leaves the room. After he exits, stage right, Abby sits down on the bed, folds her arms, and smiles.

THE END