

FOUR SIDES OF A TRIANGLE

Cast of characters:

Narrator

Sarah mid-30s

Kate (Sarah's friend, Adam's partner) mid-30s

Adam (Sarah's friend, Kate's partner) mid-30s

Jeremy (No one's friend, no one's partner) late-30s / late 40s (?)

Properties:

2 x newspapers (one for Kate and one for Adam)

Sound effects:

Triangle (to mark beat or short pause)

Waltz music

Birdsong

Choral music

Part music

Restaurant noise

FOUR SIDES OF A TRIANGLE

Narrator Four Sides of a Triangle.

SFX Triangle

Narrator There are two sides to most stories ...

Kate Hi. I'm Kate. Sarah's oldest, bestest friend.

Adam Hello. I'm Adam. Sarah's friend from childhood.

Narrator Sometimes there may be three ...

Sarah Sarah. What else would you like to know?

Narrator And — once in a while — there are four.

Jeremy My name's Jeremy. Or it was the last time I looked. That's a joke by the way. Have we met before?

SFX Triangle

Kate *(reading aloud from a column in a newspaper)* Man 41, kind, considerate, serious, steady, would like to meet warm, vivacious, confident, outgoing woman (35-45) for long-term relationship.

SFX Triangle

Sarah 'Tragic'? No, I don't think so. 'Tragic' would be overstating it. 'Unfortunate.' Yes, that's the word I'd choose. It doesn't say it all, but it does say enough.

Jeremy At the end of the day, in the final analysis, when it comes down to it, we all have to take responsibility for our mistakes. Full responsibility. Although only if we are responsible, naturally.

Sarah You could say that Kate and Adam were an unlikely couple. You might be right. But many couples are 'unlikely', aren't they? I don't suppose Kate and Adam were any more unlikely than most.

Kate Sarah? Oh, I've known Sarah for ever and ever. She's always been there. There must have been a time when she wasn't, but I can't remember when that was.

Sarah Kate and Adam were very different. That's undeniable. But people are different. Difference doesn't need to lead to disaster.

Kate Sarah and I understand each other. What I think I mean is that Sarah understands me and — as much as she allows herself to be understood — I understand her.

Sarah It's not at all important but, as it happens, I've known Adam longer than I've known Kate. Adam and I met when we were both twelve years old. At ballroom dancing classes, would you believe?

SFX Fade in waltz

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Adam What on earth can have possessed our mothers to send us to ballroom dancing classes? Sarah and I were both hopeless. We danced together because no one else would dance with us.

Sarah Adam was awkward and shy, but he had a sweet smile. He still has. I liked him right away. We've been friends ever since.

SFX *Fade out waltz*

Adam Before I met Kate ... Before I met Kate, my life was tidy, ordered, organised. My shirts hung on rails. My shoes stood in neat rows. My books were arranged on the shelves in alphabetical order.

Kate Late night parties. Early morning meetings. Frantic deadlines. Frenzied celebrations. My life was an intoxicating, exhausting see-saw of work and play.

Adam At weekends I cooked elaborate gourmet meals. Three courses, four courses, sometimes five. Which as often as not I threw away uneaten.

Kate I had no time to myself. From morning to night. All day, every day. Not one minute. Except for holidays, that is. I came to dread holidays.

SFX *Triangle*

Sarah Who was Jeremy? Where did he come from? I can't tell you. I've no idea. But all of a sudden, there he was. I have a feeling that appearing out of nowhere was a particular talent of his. For a some time it seemed as if Jeremy was always — inescapably — there.

Jeremy One does what one can. It's only right that one should. A sort of duty if you like. An obligation. It's been my experience, you see, that there are couples who need to be 'helped along the way'.

Adam I always thought Jeremy was one of Kate's friends. She thought he was one of mine. By the time we'd worked out that neither of us really knew him, Jeremy had become part of our lives.

Jeremy Adam and Kate? I know. But I can't blame myself. After all, there is only so much one can do. There comes a time when people need to get on with things by themselves.

Sarah I'm afraid I didn't like Jeremy. Why should I say 'I'm afraid'? I didn't like Jeremy. As simple as that. I especially disliked his smile.

SFX *Birdsong*

Jeremy It was I who brought them together. It's something I've done in the past, and it generally works out well. A picnic in the park. In this case, Kensington Gardens. Foie gras, peaches and chilled Chablis. (It's obviously more pleasant when the sun's shining.) After lunch, tactful as always, I left them alone. Took myself off for a longish walk. Which would have been longer if it hadn't started to rain. When I came back, Adam and Kate seemed ready to leave, but I suggested we all have dinner together. If I hadn't — well — that might well have been that.

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Sarah I'd known Adam and Kate for such a long time that I somehow assumed they must know each other. It came as a surprise to find that they didn't.

Adam If I had to state a preference, I'd say Baroque. Albinoni, Purcell, Scarlatti. Anything later than Handel and I'm a little less keen.

Kate In those days, pop, rock. Nothing too taxing. Occasional Classic FM. Nothing Radio Three.

SFX Fade in choral music

Sarah On Thursdays, I sing in a choir. I have done for years. When we give concerts, I invite my friends. Adam used to come regularly. He was always terribly loyal. Kate didn't come much. She was always so busy.

Adam Kate arrived late. Long after the concert had started. She came in, sat down completely unapologetic. I found it rather wonderful. In the interval, she asked if I was enjoying it. I admitted I wasn't, which isn't something I would normally have said.

SFX Fade out choral music

Kate We went for a drink in a pub round the corner. The Pig & Whistle. I liked the way Adam listened. It was as if he thought I had something interesting to say. But he was feeling bad about leaving the concert early, and I went back with him to say goodbye to Sarah.

Adam We waited about a bit but Sarah was caught up, talking to other members of the choir. Then Jeremy appeared. Nodding and smiling. He seemed to know us.

Kate Adam and I had been going to take a bus, but Jeremy insisted we should all share a cab. They dropped me off first. I don't know who paid the fare.

Adam I'd forgotten quite how expensive black cabs are.

SFX Triangle

Jeremy The thing is I've knocked about a bit, and I've learnt a thing or two along the way. I'm always happy to share my experience with other people. I've found that almost everyone appreciates a little guidance in their lives.

Adam Kate was always so alive. So much fun. By comparison I felt dry, dull, leaden. At one point — much later — I must have asked Jeremy what he thought Kate saw in me. He said he really didn't know

Kate I liked Adam's seriousness. His intelligence. His depth. Sometimes, while I was with him, I felt a little shallow. Gauche and frivolous. Should I have asked myself what he saw in me? Maybe, but I never did.

Jeremy I was — if I may so express it — the midwife to their relationship. It's a role I've played before. I was, if you like, 'there at the birth'. And, truth be told, for some time after that.

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I took them walking in Suffolk and cycling in Kent. I don't cycle myself but we met up in a charming little tea-room at the end of the afternoon. Then there was the Saturday night we spent in Winchester and a lovely Sunday in Bath.

Adam There were confusions. Muddles and misunderstandings. There are in every relationship, aren't there? I'm sure there must be.

Kate It takes time to adjust oneself to someone else. It's perfectly normal, isn't it? Not something one needs to apologise for.

SFX Fade in party music

Adam It was someone's birthday. A colleague of Kate's, I think. I told Kate I didn't like parties much — I should have said I didn't like them at all — but she said I'd be fine. Within minutes she'd disappeared entirely, leaving me on my own. As it happens, it wasn't a problem. I scouted about and found a quiet corner at the top of the house. A leather armchair, a reading light and, open on a writing-desk, a copy of *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. After a while, Jeremy found me and told me Kate had left.

Kate When I couldn't find Adam, I assumed he'd hated the party so much he'd gone home without telling me. You must remember that I didn't know him very well at the time. He forgave me, of course. Adam always forgave me.

SFX Fade out party music

Adam I'd been looking forward to it for some time. An exhibition at the National Gallery. Sorolla, the 'Master of Light'. I'd planned to go alone. I was pretty sure Kate would be bored, but she insisted on coming with me. She must have said something to Jeremy because there he was, waiting for us at the entrance.

Kate I didn't tell Adam but I'd never really been to a gallery before. It was a bit of a mystery to me. He'd stand in front of a picture for minutes at a time, and didn't seem to hear me when I asked him questions. It was clear that Jeremy was as much at sea as I was and, after a little while, he suggested going to the café in the basement for a cup of tea. Which is what we did. The gallery was closing and I tried to find Adam but there was no sign of him. He'd obviously forgotten I'd been with him. I confess I was angry. Very, very angry. Although not for long.

SFX Triangle

Jeremy I booked a little cottage for us at Easter. A charming spot on the Isle of Purbeck. We went for walks and played board games. We were due to stay for a week, but Kate started to get restless and we went back to London after only four days. In the summer, Adam and Kate decided to go to Italy. Siena? Perugia? Somewhere like that. I didn't go with them.

Sarah They sent me a postcard from Bologna. The Basilica of Santo Stefano. Good, I thought. Very good indeed. They've escaped him at last. Now they're on their own.

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Adam It's easy to forget it, but Jeremy did serve a purpose. There was a gap — a space — between us which it took time for us to fill. I'd sometimes find I had nothing to say to Kate. It didn't worry me in itself. But it did worry me that it might worry her.

Kate For the first time in my life I began to understand what it might mean to be shy. Although I'm still not sure that shy is the right word. There's a lot to be said for silence, isn't there? There were times when I'd hear myself talking. Talking and talking. Then I'd stop and wonder what I'd been saying.

SFX Triangle

Adam The truth is that Jeremy filled the space between us. A little like plastic packaging. We'd become so used to his presence that being somewhere without him seemed strange at first.

Kate Adam and me. No Jeremy. It was good to be there on our own. Good to find we didn't need him any more.

Adam How can I put this? Up until then, Kate and I had been just a little tentative with each other. We were finding our way, so to speak. But Italy released us. The food. The wine. The light. We found ourselves free.

Kate A not unusual story, I'm sure. A history of mostly pretty unsatisfactory lovers. Self-absorbed. Clumsy. Violent. Guilt-ridden. Emotionally destitute. Weepily impotent. Adam was a surprise. A very lovely surprise.

Adam As soon as we came back from Bologna, Jeremy reappeared. There he was. Nodding and smiling. Kate was furious.

Kate It's true I was annoyed. I thought Adam had invited him. As if he felt we still needed Jeremy. And I was quite sure we didn't.

Jeremy Kate and Adam seemed very tense after their week away. I succeeded in lightening the atmosphere by recalling the story of our afternoon together in Kensington Gardens, and some of our other excursions. The evening ended happily enough although I felt it advisable to keep an eye on them.

Adam Once Kate and I began living together, Jeremy started to invite himself to supper most weekends. He was obviously lonely, and I felt we owed him something.

Kate It was irritating. Very irritating. We should have said something. But we didn't.

Adam We always knew what was coming next. Jeremy had this habit of lifting his chin, and clearing his throat before making a pronouncement. Then he'd say, 'Mind you, it was I who brought you two together ...' As if he was claiming an ownership of some kind.

Kate It began to really grate. I felt he was trying to drag us back to a place we'd left behind. Besides, Jeremy's story wasn't true. He had it wrong.

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There'd been no picnic in Kensington Gardens. Not with us. He must have confused us with another couple.

Sarah It's something one has to accept. When two of your friends become a couple, it's natural you'll see less of both of them. I missed them — of course I did — but Kate and Adam had each other. They also had Jeremy. I did my best to avoid Jeremy.

SFX Triangle

Adam There were adjustments we had to make. Kate's untidiness puzzled me at first. The jumble, the muddle. It seemed — what can I say? — unnecessary. But I loved Kate's genuine delight when she found something that she hadn't been looking for.

Kate Living together isn't easy when you're used to living on your own. Adam had a place for everything and everything in its place. It seemed so — I don't know — regimented. The strange thing is that it grew on me. I'll never be a tidy person, but I began to be less untidy. There's something soothing about things being where they ought to be.

Adam There was one time when it suddenly became too much. I'd been away for a week. An overlong business trip. Things everywhere. Nothing in its place. I raised my voice. Not something I ever do.

Kate More than anything I was shocked. I hadn't realised that Adam's books were arranged alphabetically. I promised faithfully that I'd never touch them again.

Adam I knew Kate deserved an explanation. I tried to analyse my need for organisation and my horror of chaos. I don't think what I said made any sense to her at all, but she said she understood. It was kind of her. But Kate was always kind. Always generous.

Kate We held each other very tight. As if we were being tossed about in a spring tide. It was exactly the worst time for the doorbell to ring.

Jeremy As soon as I walked in through the front door, I sensed 'an atmosphere'. Kate barely looked at the flowers I gave her and Adam seemed thoroughly ill at ease. Naturally, I tried to jolly them along but it was very heavy going.

Adam It was becoming too much. The lifted chin, the cleared throat and then, 'Mind you, it was I who ...'

Kate I very nearly said something, but Adam caught my eye and I bit my lip.

Jeremy What people so often fail to realise is that every relationship goes through sticky patches. It can't all be sweetness and light. There has to be patience and tolerance. That's what I told Adam and Kate. I think they understood what I was saying. Although I have to say that theirs seemed a stickier patch than most.

Sarah I had the feeling I was losing touch with them which I didn't want to do. I telephoned Kate who said she was pleased I'd called. Adam was away again on another business trip and she was missing him.

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She invited me to supper. She seemed relaxed. But Jeremy continued to come round most weekends which plainly aggravated her. It would have infuriated me.

Adam Kate felt I should put a stop to it. I agreed with her, but I was waiting for the right moment to say something ...

Kate Why didn't I say something myself? I had the perfect opportunity. A weekend when Adam was travelling. I suppose I was angry with both of them. Jeremy for being there, and Adam for being away. I gave Jeremy supper. Why? Habit, I suppose. And then he began browsing through Adam's bookshelves. Something he'd never done before. When he asked to borrow a couple of books, I said he could. I think I knew at the time it was a mistake.

Adam I have to admit it. I'm not a naturally generous person in the way that some people are. I'll give gifts for birthdays, Christmas, weddings. But I don't give away what's mine. Whereas that's exactly what Kate does. If someone admires something of hers — whatever it is — she will try to give it to them. It's admirable, enchanting, but not something I do myself. Or, if I'm honest, not something I entirely understand.

Kate Whenever Adam went away — which he did fairly frequently — he came back with something for me. A brooch, a print, an ornament. Nothing too costly but always exactly right. I've always been hopeless at presents. I don't seem able to get beyond giving people what I'd like to have myself. But Adam's presents were chosen with tremendous care and — how can I put this? — 'precision'. As if they couldn't possibly have been given to anyone else. I was touched that he seemed to know exactly what would please me.

Jeremy They had a friend who showed up from time to time. I've forgotten her name. A real sourpuss. I didn't like her and she didn't like me. I tried my best to engage with her, but she was inordinately keen on the sound of her own voice.

Sarah When I arrived, Adam was laying an extra place for Jeremy. I groaned inwardly but it was too late to do anything about it. I resigned myself to an evening facing that dreadful smile. The pompous mannerisms. The droning voice. The man held views on everything. Views which he insisted on sharing. Politics, ethics, religion, literature, art, music ... It was while he was pontificating on marriage and relationships that I interrupted him. It was mischievous, I know, but I was tired of listening to him. All I did was ask him, very sweetly, why he wasn't married himself. The dreadful smile died. 'Never found the right woman,' he said. 'Oh,' I said. 'What a shame.' There was a silence. Should I have felt awkward? I didn't.

Kate Then Jeremy lifted his chin and cleared his throat. 'Mind you ...' I couldn't bear to hear it all again. 'I'm sorry, Jeremy,' I said, 'but it wasn't you. Adam and I were old friends of Sarah's. We met at one of her concerts. Yes, you were there but Kensington Gardens was someone else. One of your other couples.'

Adam Kate was right to tell him, although it did feel a bit brutal. Jeremy looked so utterly deflated that I felt sorry for him.

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Earlier in the evening I'd noticed a brooch on Sarah's jacket. Art deco. Carnelian and marcasite. I recognised it at once. Now here I was, searching for something to fill the silence, and I found myself commenting on Sarah's brooch. 'It is nice, isn't it,' she said. 'Kate gave it to me.' I remembered the jewellers in The Lanes. Picking it out from the tray. Holding the brooch in the palm of my hand. I wanted to say, 'No. It was me. I gave it to Kate.' But I didn't.

Kate Cruel. I know it was cruel. But Sarah and I giggled uncontrollably in the kitchen. 'Did you see his face?' she said. 'Like a crumpled paper bag.'

Adam It was stupid of me. Very, very stupid. But I thought that, by sharing a confidence with him, I might make Jeremy feel better. And so I told him how much I admired Kate's generosity but admitted that, despite myself, I still found it slightly hurtful when she gave away my presents. I said that although I knew it was nothing of the kind, it felt a bit like a rejection. If I'd expected some sort of response from Jeremy, I was disappointed. He sat there looking glum. Then he went home without saying goodbye. Sarah stayed on for some time and I'm afraid the three of us forgot about Jeremy.

Kate I was surprised when — as if nothing had happened — Jeremy telephoned to invite himself to supper. I asked him to bring back the books he'd borrowed. He said he would but he forgot. That Friday night he arrived earlier than usual. I joked with him about how we really needed to replace the books on the shelf before Adam noticed they were missing. Jeremy wasn't amused. In fact he lectured me. He said I should be more sensitive to Adam's feelings. Be less cavalier with his belongings. He told me how hurt Adam was whenever I gave away his presents. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Thinking about it, I could see that Adam might be upset, but he'd said nothing to me. To have told Jeremy how he felt and not told me struck me as a kind of betrayal.

Jeremy The next time I went to supper with them — the last time, in fact — the atmosphere was very sour indeed. I tried to jolly them along, but Kate was sulking and Adam looked wretched. When we were alone, I suggested to him that he and Kate would probably benefit from a 'cooling off' period. The next day I suggested the same thing to Kate when I spoke to her on the telephone. She asked me if that was what Adam wanted and I told her it would probably be for the best ...

Adam That Sunday Kate said, 'Perhaps it might be better if ...' And I said, 'If that's what you want.'

Kate I could have said that it wasn't what I wanted. Not at all. But I didn't. I don't know why I didn't. A silly sort of pride, I expect.

Adam Kate left a note. It didn't say much. And that's all she left. Nothing of mine was out of place. I noticed a couple of my books were missing but that was all. It was as if she'd never been there. The flat seemed sterile without her. It took time to get used to it again. I'm not sure I ever have.

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- Sarah** Kate came to stay with me. Only for three or four days. If she'd stayed longer, we would have quarrelled. However much I love her, she's too untidy to live with for any length of time.
- Kate** Adam didn't call me and I didn't call him. I pictured him — his organised life in his well-ordered flat — and I didn't want to disturb him. Not unless I was sure that he wanted to be disturbed.
- Adam** I continued to hope she'd come back, but it wasn't a surprise that she didn't. Kate was bursting with life while I was — I still am — so staid. I've always found it difficult to understand what she saw in me.
- SFX Triangle*
- Sarah** Kate comes to my concerts whenever she can. Adam doesn't. Not any more. He and I go to the theatre instead. And sometime the cinema. Kate comes to supper most Sundays. Otherwise, things are much as they were.
- SFX Background restaurant noise*
- Kate** When Adam and I meet — which we do once or twice a year — it seems very much as it was. I talk and Adam listens. I laugh and Adam smiles. It's easy. Relaxed. Uncomplicated. Until I remember that it's nothing more than lunch.
- Adam** I didn't want to ask for the bill but the waiters were becoming restless. Outside the restaurant — to prolong the moment, I suppose — I asked Kate about Jeremy. Somehow I assumed they'd kept in touch but it seems they haven't. Like me, she never heard from him again.
- Sarah** It's a conversation we have from time to time. Kate tells me that she thinks that she and Adam were simply much too different. They should have stayed friends, she says. They should never have been lovers. She waits for me to agree with her. Or to contradict her. But I don't say anything. After all, there's really nothing to say.
- Jeremy** Adam and Kate? Let me think. Oh, yes. Kensington Gardens. One of my very few failures. Foolish to reproach myself, I know, but I felt almost responsible. There's someone for everyone. That's what they say, isn't it? It's usually true, but not always. I could have tried to bring them back together, but the truth is they were never really suited. Better to let them go. (*direct to camera*) Much better, don't you think?
- Adam** (*reading newspaper supplement*) Woman 41, warm, vivacious, confident, outgoing would like to meet kind, considerate, serious, steady man (35-45) for long-term relationship.

THE END