

My love,

I really appreciate that we are both committed to talking things through openly and honestly. And I also appreciate how, as our relationship deepens, you've been able to be more direct and transparent with me. It makes me feel closer to you, and I'm grateful for that.

I know that we have different styles around conflict – when and how we bring things up – and I don't think one way is better than the other. Rather than trying to find a single approach, I just want to ensure that in addition to resolving individual moments of tension, we build a shared understanding that helps us communicate in ways that work for both of us.

I don't think you've done anything wrong, and I'm not mad at you. But some of our communication this week has left me feeling unsettled, and I'd love to explain why.

**1. I don't like conflict when we're drunk, tired, or just not in the right headspace.**

I find it hard to have nuanced conversations when we've been drinking or aren't in the right headspace. Alcohol makes it harder for me to express myself clearly, or trust that I'm understanding you properly. It also affects my judgment—like when I pulled your top down on Saturday. I totally misread your mood and the context, and I regret that. If I can misjudge something that obvious, I worry about navigating more complex conversations in that state.

I've also noticed that when you've had a drink, you express emotions more immediately and freely - which is great in some ways, but can also lead to reactions that feel overwhelming or out of proportion to me. Sometimes, it can feel like it's not actually an immediate response, but just that something has triggered a flood of unresolved emotions or resentments that you are more comfortable expressing when you've had something to drink. That's part of what made Saturday night hard for me: what I meant as a simple comment - "I like Ruby's energy, I find her sexually attractive" - suddenly became a much bigger conversation that I wasn't expecting. And it felt like having raised it you expected a resolution to it that was never going to be possible that evening.

**2. I prefer to address things in real time, rather than resent & vent.**

I prefer addressing things as they arise, rather than letting resentment build. But to me, Saturday didn't feel like a "real-time" conversation—it felt more like you were venting frustrations you'd been holding onto. That's totally understandable, and I know I've done the same at times. But when a conversation suddenly includes months of unspoken thoughts, from conversations as far back as December - I struggle to separate what's a genuine concern from what's just heightened emotion in the moment.

Part of my desire to park that conversation was to make sure that we can actually clear up the confusion rather than further contribute to it while drunk. I'd love for both of us to be conscious of when conversations start to feel like a spiral of frustration and venting so we can pause and reset, and come back to it in a different context.

### 3. I want to be able to approach conflict as collaborators

We get to live together forever! I am so excited by that fact. But it means we need to be really good at conflict resolution. I want to underline some things that can make me feel like we're not on the same team.

**Being combative rather than curious:** Sometimes I feel like you approach conflict as though there is a winner and a loser, someone who is right and someone who is wrong, and you being a conversation from a settled understanding of what you have decided is capital T "True". This can end up feeling quite judgmental or ungenerous, and like I'm being forced into an adversarial discussion when all I really care about is finding an answer. In general I think we're both better at communicating when we ask more questions and check that we've understood each other before making judgments. This is partly a substantive thing, but actually more often than not it's a tone and language thing, for example:

- *"You have been confusing in the way you've communicated about X"* feels very different from *"I am feeling confused about X."*
- *"You have double standards when it comes to our sexuality"* feels different from *"When you said Y, I felt judged."*

**Being impatient, disrespectful, or condescending:** I know I can be long-winded when I talk things through, and sometimes I need to think aloud before I land on what I really mean. Often times this is actually fairly deliberate - I'm aware there's not one right answer, and I want to invited discussion of where our thinking differs to produce different answers. When you seem impatient with that, or communicate with your face or body language that you don't think what I'm saying is important or worth paying attention to, it hurts my feelings and means I don't feel heard. I don't think I'm smarter than you, but I also don't think you're smarter than me. We just have different ways of processing, and that's why it's so important to have these conversations in the right context - so we can both be patient with each other.

- Last night when you were debriefing therapy, I wanted to engage because we've been investing a lot of time, energy and money in trying to help you through a tough period. I feel very committed to learning and understanding more, because I feel very committed to you. But when I wanted to share reflections, it felt like my participation wasn't welcome - or was annoying to you.

#### On the substance of what you raised on Saturday:

What I heard was the following (and because I was drunk, and you were drunk, I may have heard you incorrectly - or heard you correctly, but misunderstood your meaning):

- You were not upset that I found Ruby attractive.
- You are annoyed about a double standard in the role of other people in the relationship.
- You are confused about what I want or am open to when it comes to other people.
- You feel judged or shamed for wanting more sex than I do.
- You think some of my communication on these things comes from a place of insecurity.

*On the involvement of other people in our sex life:*

**I'm not interested in *actually* having sex with other people right now.** I think this partly comes from vulnerability which I think I acknowledged when I raised it in December. I feel very in love with you, attracted to you, married to you, and possessive of you. These feelings are new and big and fun, and I'm enjoying feeling them without distractions.

**I am open to the idea of including other people in our sex life if it's something you want.**

This is something I've done in the past and have enjoyed. I can see the positives, but I'm also aware of the risks and pitfalls - and I'd want us to have a really clear, structured discussion about it before we even seriously consider it.

**I love talking openly about attraction and sexuality.** I love to fantasize! Dirty talk is a fantasy world for me that has no bearing on the world outside that sex. I also draw a bright line between finding people sexy and actually having sex with them. I draw a less bright, but still clear line, between flirting and infidelity. To me, secrecy and privacy are much bigger factors in infidelity than the actual behaviour - eg. texting an ex privately would be more concerning than telling me openly that you miss them and want to reach out. Telling me you want to flirt with someone, and then watching you do it would be quite fun for me (I think), sneaking away from a party to flirt with someone in secret would be borderline traumatic for me.

*On our sex life:*

**I never want you to feel judged or shamed about sex.** If you ever do, it's very important to me that you let me know in the moment, because I want to make sure we have space to talk freely, feel understood and have our needs met.

**I don't think it is unreasonable to want to have a lot of sex - but it takes real effort.** If this is a priority for you, I'd love you to take more responsibility and ownership over creating space for it by flirting during the day, discussing sexual dynamics in advance, letting me know what you want me to do to you, sending me nudes, playing into power dynamics either by being flirty and submissive, or dominant and aggressive. Saying "I don't respond well to direct requests" isn't saying "don't initiate things directly" - it's saying "there are other ways".

**We have quite a lot of good sex when we're been deliberate about it** - when we aren't overcommitted professionally or socially so that we have the time and energy for it. The past year has been big, and sometimes challenging - we've moved jobs, moved cities, getting married, mental health struggles. It makes sense that this has impacted things at times.

I'm sorry this is such a long letter. I don't want it to feel like I'm shutting off any alternative perspective. I just wanted to make sure I'm expressing myself as clearly as possible while I'm a bit mentally and emotionally overloaded.

I love you, and I appreciate all the ways you support me. Let's keep figuring this out together.