

Three's A Crowd

a One-Act Light Thriller

by Rob Davis

Scene : A well-appointed hotel bedroom. UL is a double bed and dressing table, with adjacent bedside table with a telephone. The room's entrance door is CR. Another door DL leads to the ensuite bathroom. A coffee table and chairs are DR.

Time : the present.

Characters : all three main characters should be of a comparable age. Jack is a smooth, slick salesman with the gift of the gab. Pam is an attractive woman who dresses well but occasionally betrays more humble origins. Her husband, Martin, is a more rough-and ready type.

As the curtain opens, Jack and Pam are asleep in bed, wrapped in each others' arms; they have obviously spent a passionate night together, as they appear to be naked under the bedclothes, which are in great disarray. Clothes, shoes and sexy underwear are strewn over the chairs. An empty bottle of champagne is on the bedside table, with one glass on the carpet either side of the bed. Directly the lights are up, the phone rings.

Jack	Mmmm? <i>(He is only half awake; the phone rings again and he leans over Pam to reach the handset.)</i>
Pam	<i>(Not really awake)</i> Give me another few minutes, darling.
Jack	<i>(Having reached the phone handset, he listens; it is a morning call from Reception)</i> Oh, thanks. Thank you. <i>(He hangs up, ferrets round for his wristwatch, lifting clothes and the duvet, and having a lingering look at the apparently naked Pam underneath the quilt).</i> Ah, yes, VERY nice.
Pam	<i>(A little more awake at this disturbance)</i> Not yet, darling. Five more minutes.
Jack	<i>(Kissing her)</i> Morning, my love.
Pam	Whassa time?
Jack	Eight fifteen. <i>(He holds up his watch; she peers at it, rubs her eyes, and groans.)</i>
Pam	I'm exhausted.
Jack	Nice though, isn't it?
Pam	Did we actually get any sleep last night?
Jack	I think I snatched forty winks in between.
Pam	<i>(Stretching)</i> God, I ache. I ache all over.
Jack	Turn over. <i>(He rolls her onto her front, and massages her back and shoulders)</i>
Pam	Mmmm, that's nice, lover. <i>(As he carries on)</i> You are good at that.
Jack	You're good at the other.
Pam	Only with you.
Jack	Not with him?
Pam	Oh no. He hasn't a clue. We've been married over ten ¹ years and he hasn't the slightest idea what turns me on. Anyway, he's always at work – that bloody engineering company he owns – if I hear the name Millshaw's again, I'll scream. No holiday last year, or the year before. I want to get about and see places. I want to do things. I want a life.
Jack	More fool him!

¹ Adjust the number of years to suit the age of the players

Pam	I know that deep inside, he loves me, and he thinks that he's doing it all for us. But you ... you found out straight away what turns me on.
Jack	A tune is only as good the instrument it's played on.
Pam	I love you playing tunes on me. <i>(They dive under the quilt, embracing energetically)</i> No, Jack ... no ... no more ... I don't like sex first thing in the morning, I'm all damp and sticky, and achy, and I need a shower.
Jack	<i>(As they surface)</i> All right, hon. Go on, jump in the shower, and I'll get on to room service and chase up some breakfast. What time to you want to be away?
Pam	I'm not supposed to be meeting him until this evening, but I've got some shopping to do. I'd better be off by ten thirty.
Jack	Plenty of time. <i>(He reaches for her again)</i>
Pam	<i>(Fending him off)</i> Down, boy. Pass me my knicks and things, will you?
Jack	<i>(Reaching for his dressing gown or bathrobe, which has been discarded and lies close by on the carpet, and putting it on).</i> Ok. <i>(He gets out of bed, picks up her underwear, and examines it with interest)</i> Hey, I never saw these in daylight. They're seriously sexy.
Pam	Rotter! Give them here!
Jack	What's it worth?
Pam	Come in the shower with me after you've sorted out some breakfast, and see if you can find anything interesting to play with.
Jack	Sound. <i>(Examining the underwear with a closer look)</i> H'mmm ... maybe I'll just add these to my collection!
Pam	Then you'll just have to buy me some more, won't you? <i>(She wraps herself in a sheet or quilt, and giving him a definite come-on look, disappears into the ensuite. After a few seconds there is the sound of a shower running.)</i>
Jack	<i>(Having listened at the ensuite door to make sure she is out of earshot)</i> This will be the death of me. I'll have to take up rugby or weightlifting or something. I can't keep up with her, and I've got that bloody sales meeting this afternoon. Come three o'clock and I'll be dead to the world. <i>(He sits down at the coffee table, and stretches out, yawning. After a few seconds there is a knock at the door. He rises and walks tiredly over to the main door. He is suspicious.)</i> Who is it?
Martin	<i>(Off : with a foreign accent)</i> Room service, sir, your breakfast as ordered.
Jack	<i>(With a gesture of forgetfulness)</i> Just a minute. <i>(He straightens his hair and dressing gown, and then opens the door, giving a wide yawn at the same time. As the door opens, a pistol appears at arm's length, and the yawn is replaced by a look of horror. The pistol indicates that he move into the room, which he does. The arm holding the pistol appears, followed by Martin, and without taking his sights off Jack, he pushes the door shut and locks it.)</i> What the hell do you think you are doing?
Martin	<i>(Gesturing with the gun; normal voice)</i> Sit down, and shut up.
Jack	I haven't any money -
Martin	Shut up. Sit down. There. By the low table. <i>(He again gestures with the pistol.)</i>
Jack	Will you put that thing down a minute?
Martin	Why should I?

Jack	Well – <i>(nervous laugh)</i> – if it's loaded, it's dangerous, and if it isn't, it's silly.
Martin	It's loaded. <i>(He cocks the pistol, briefly shows Jack the side view, and then resumes holding it aimed at Jack.)</i>
Jack	Er ... yes ... I'll take your word for it. <i>(Sits down as ordered)</i>
Martin	You can put it to the test if you like.
Jack	<i>(Swallowing nervously)</i> I'll pass on that one.
Martin	Discretion being the better part of valour.
Jack	Just who the hell are you and what do you want?
Martin	<i>(Walking over to the bed and making a point of examining the scene)</i> Yes, quite a battlefield, I see. Quite an encounter it must have been. Your wife must be quite an energetic lady. Judging from the aftermath.
Jack	<i>(Angrily)</i> What my wife is like is nothing to do with you!
Martin	She's in the shower, I think?
Jack	Leave her out of this!
Martin	Oh, but she's in it.
Jack	Listen, you crazy halfwit, I don't know who the hell you are, but -
Martin	Do you know I've actually met your wife?
Jack	What?
Martin	<i>(Detached)</i> Yes. It was yesterday, actually. She's quite a reputation as an MP. She was very sympathetic when I attended one of her constituency surgeries.
Jack	What the hell -
Martin	In fact, yes, she must be quite a remarkable woman. <i>(He indicates the bedclothes again)</i> Quite remarkable. Quite bloody remarkable.
Jack	Look, this has gone far enough -
Martin	Absolutely bloody remarkable. So remarkable, in fact, that she can be in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne at suppertime yesterday and here in bed with you in Exeter only two hours later. That's remarkable. I'd call that pretty bloody remarkable, myself, wouldn't you agree?
Jack	What the hell do you want?
Martin	<i>(Sarcastically)</i> I suppose Scotty beamed her up? And then back down again, 400 miles away. <i>(Indicating the ensuite; knowingly)</i> She's not your wife at all, is she?
Jack	Of course she is, she flew down late last night -
Martin	<i>(Hard, flaunting the pistol)</i> Bollocks. Liar! That woman in the shower, the one you spent the night with, is not your wife, is she?
Jack	I told you -
Martin	<i>(Raising the pistol and pointing it at Jack's head)</i> Is she?
Jack	<i>(After a pause)</i> All right. So she isn't my wife. What of it?
Martin	<i>(Long sigh)</i> Aaaahhh. At last. The truth. <i>(He speaks as if quoting)</i> "Prominent MP's husband in sex scandal". <i>(Normal voice)</i> That's look good in the papers, wouldn't it? Look good brought out a shareholders' meeting, wouldn't it? Mind you, how would the opposite headline look? <i>(Quoting again)</i> "Millshaw's Managing Director fights bedroom instead of boardroom battle".
Jack	All right. You win. What paper are you with? News of the World? The Sun? Or is it some other gutter tabloid trash?
Martin	<i>(Shaking his head sadly)</i> Paper? No, I don't think so.
Jack	Then what the bloody hell do you want?
Martin	So she's not your wife. <i>(Theatrically, quizzically)</i> Who is she?
Jack	<i>(Realising; horrified).</i> She's your wife.
Martin	Bingo! Go to the top of the class. Ten out of ten.

Jack	My God. She said you were on some buying trip in Wales.
Martin	I was. I drove all night. Now I'm here. <i>(The sound of the shower stops)</i> Keep quiet. Not a word. One false move, and – <i>(he waves the pistol, and retreats out of sight, just on the blind side of the ensuite door, which opens into the room.)</i>
Pam	<i>(Coming out of the ensuite, wearing one towel wrapped around her body and another around her head)</i> You naughty boy. I waited for you all that time, and in the end <i>(pouting)</i> I just had to wash myself. <i>(She walks up to Jack, and embraces him. He remains stiff and unresponsive.)</i> Didn't you want to get all soapy with me?
Jack	I kind of had other things on my mind.
Pam	Silly boy. Too late now – you had your chance – and you blew it! <i>(She attempts to kiss him again and draw him into an embrace, but he is still unresponsive)</i> Well, if you don't want me again, I'll have to manage on my own. <i>(She starts to unfasten his dressing gown, but he takes her wrists and stops her.)</i>
Jack	Not now. Now is definitely not the time.
Pam	Oh dear, lover boy ... have you run out of energy? Are your batteries flat? Has Pammie worn you out? Isn't she a naughty girl? What is Jacko going to do about it? Does Pammie need a firm hand? Ooohh ... is Jacko going to see that she gets one? <i>(She pats her bottom)</i> Sounds like it might be fun!
Jack	<i>(Fast, nervous)</i> I'm never much good in bed when I've got a madman pointing a gun at me.
Pam	Is that the best excuse Jacko can do?
Jack	Like I said – <i>(he turns her round so that she can see Martin aiming the pistol at them)</i> - I'm never much good in bed when I've got a madman pointing a gun at me.
Pam	<i>(She drops the body towel in shock, and Jack rapidly picks it up and covers her)</i> Martin! My God! Martin! What – are – what the hell are you – put that gun down before you -
Martin	<i>(Very coolly)</i> Hello, Pamela. Fancy running into you. Yes, fancy. Yes, I do fancy, actually. Even after this.
Jack	<i>(Into Pam's ear)</i> I think he's off his trolley. Humour him. You're supposed to know what he likes.
Pam	Martin! This is not what you think – <i>(she grasps at the towel covering her body, and then realises the futility of this argument)</i> . Well – I suppose – I suppose it is what you think.
Martin	How long has this been going on? I've only just found out, but you two seem to be getting on particularly well with each other, for a pair of strangers.
Pam } Jack }	<i>(Together)</i> Nine months. <i>(Together)</i> Only a few weeks.
	<i>(Desperately - after a lightning exchange of looks)</i>
Pam } Jack }	<i>(Together)</i> Only a few weeks! <i>(Together)</i> Nine months.
Martin	<i>(Laughing coldly)</i> Well, which? A few weeks or a few months ?
Pam	Since Easter.
Martin	<i>(Sarcastically)</i> This Easter or last Easter?
Pam } Jack }	<i>(Together)</i> This Easter. <i>(Together)</i> Last Easter.
	<i>(They exchange the same desperate look, but stay silent this time)</i>
Martin	You were supposed to be on the book conference.

Pam	You were on the Management Information Software weekend.
Martin	Why, Pamela? We've been happily married for years.
Pam	Married ... bored ... frustrated!
Martin	And the best way to handle that was to have an affair with this idiot?
Jack	<i>(Angrily)</i> I'll have you know – <i>(he starts forward)</i>
Martin	<i>(Pointing the pistol at Jack's groin)</i> I'll have you know that you're in the shit. <i>(Jack retreats)</i>
Pam	Martin. Look, be reasonable. What do you want?
Martin	Well, curiously enough, I want you.
Pam	What?
Martin	Odd as it seems, Pam dear, I still actually love you. I know that you've cheated on me a few times –
Jack	What?
Martin	Well, ok, more than a few times, if you count matey here, I guess he's about number seven or eight.
Jack	Seven or eight? What is this, a shagging conference?
Pam	But you're away so much! I get so lonely. I need someone there for me.
Martin	Yes, I know, and I agree completely. You do need someone there, and from now on, that someone's going to be me.
Jack	And where does this leave me, exactly?
Martin	<i>(Uncaringly)</i> I don't much care, matey.
Jack	Well, buster, it just so happens that I care about Pammie too, and I'm prepared to take over where you seem to have left off.
Martin	I haven't left off, I've been a bit of a dickhead and left my wife alone too much, that's all. I've taken on a well qualified assistant at work and I'm going to spend more time at home. And <i>(with a good look at Pam)</i> I want to start a family.
Pam	A baby!
Martin	That's generally how you start a family.
Pam	Why didn't you mention this before?
Martin	Well like I said, I've been a bit of a dummy, and I've done too much time at work and not enough time on you. <i>(Casually indicating Jack)</i> Unlike matey here, who seems to have done plenty of time on you. <i>(Jack advances again, but Martin waves the pistol and he retreats)</i> But, everything that's happened is in the past. I'm willing to forget all the past, I still love you, and I want us to be a proper couple with a proper family.
Pam	<i>(Touched)</i> Despite all – <i>(indicating Jack)</i> – this?
Martin	Yes.
Pam	There were others ...
Martin	I know. It's all history, if you want it to be.
Jack	Just a minute. Just a minute. I've said that I'm prepared to look after Pammie, and I meant what I said.
Martin	She's not your wife.
Jack	Don't you think she should have some say in this? Pam, we've been ... er ...
Martin	Having an affair.
Jack	Er yes, well we've been together for a while now, and we get on, don't we?
Martin	It's not just bed, then?

Jack	Of course not!
Pam	He does have a point. We do get on.
Martin	Well, we can't all three get on. Two's company, and as they say, three's a crowd.
Jack	Pam should have some say in this.
Martin	<i>(Thoughtfully)</i> Yes, she should. You're right.
Jack	Let her choose. Me or you. A free choice.
Pam	You want me to decide between the three of you, right here and now?
Martin	Go and get dressed first. <i>(Pam gathers her clothes and with a very worried look, goes into the ensuite. There is a long hard look exchanged between Martin and Jack)</i>
Jack	You're a big fella when you're standing behind that gun.
Martin	<i>(He carelessly tosses the pistol at Jack, who despite his surprise, catches it, points it at Martin and pulls the trigger. It promptly squirts water at him. Jack looks very angry)</i> I could have hit you with it, but the thing would probably have broken in half. <i>(Jack looks even more angry)</i> I suppose I could have <i>fanned</i> you to death with it. On a good day I might have drowned you. <i>(He laughs, as Jack looks thunderous)</i>
Jack	<i>(Staring at the pistol, and then at Martin)</i> Well, you've got balls, I'll say that for you!
Martin	If you're going to bluff, you might as well bluff on a grand scale. <i>(There is silence between them until Pam enters from the ensuite, dressed normally)</i>
Jack	So what happens now?
Martin	We do what you suggested. Pam, you have to choose which one of us you want.
Pam	Now?
Martin	Yes.
Pam	I've been thinking about that whilst I was getting dressed. There's a lot in favour of both of you. I don't know that I can choose just like that.
Martin	I think it's better if you do – then we all know where we stand in this mess.
Jack	Pam, I meant what I said, I'll look after you.
Martin	I meant what I said, I'll spend much more time with you at home.
Pam	Oh – I don't know -
Jack	She needs time to think.
Martin	She should decide now.
Jack	She can't, not just like that! Can't you see she needs time to think it all through!
Pam	I can't make up my mind. I just don't know.
Martin	Well then, here's a pretty problem.
Jack	No need to be so flippant.
Martin	No, you're right again. You say that you really care for her?
Jack	Yes, I do.
Martin	Well, so do I.
Pam	I care for you both.
Martin	Then I have the ideal solution. If the lady can't choose, then she should have neither of us.
Jack	It's not fair to push her into a decision like this.
Martin	I have an elegant solution.
Jack	And what's that?

Martin	Let Fate decide.
Jack	You're talking rubbish.
Martin	No, I'm serious. Fate. Let the Fates decide the answer. If Pam could be content with either of us, and it seems that she can't decide, we could always agree that neither of us gets her – but then, neither of us would believe that the other wouldn't sneak in at some point in the future.
Pam	He's right.
Jack	I suppose he is.
Martin	Pam – since you can't seem to choose, I assume from this that you'd be happy with either of us?
Pam	<i>(Reluctantly)</i> Yes.
Martin	Then, here's the solution. This should satisfy everyone, since it gives Pam one of us, and ensures that the other one doesn't ever get in the way. <i>(He fished in his pocket and draws out three absolutely identical small vials of liquid)</i> These are three vials here. One contains deadly poison, absolutely guaranteed to bring about a rapid, painless death. The other two are nothing but plain water. Absolutely guaranteed to have no effect at all.
Jack	Are you completely out of your mind?
Martin	Far from it. The solution is simple. We each take a vial, retire to our rooms and drink. <i>(Jack and Pamela look horrified)</i> Don't you see the elegance of the solution? If I get the poison, Pam gets you. If you get the poison, Pam gets me. If Pam gets the poison, neither of us get her. <i>(Seeing that Jack is looking thoughtful)</i> And whoever fails to drink, loses by default.
Pam	<i>(Thoughtfully)</i> I like it. It's the perfect solution.
Martin	Not bad, eh?
Jack	<i>(Horrified)</i> You're both stark, staring mad!
Martin	Not at all.
Jack	You expect me to fall for this trick?
Martin	You two can choose whichever vials you like, and I'll take whichever one is left over. That way you get a completely free choice. How can that be a trick?
Pam	This is so exciting!
Jack	Let me have a look at them. <i>(Martin makes a 'help yourself' gesture, and Jack examines all three vials very closely.)</i>
Martin	As you see, they are all identical. But as I said, you can choose whichever one you want. I'll just have the last one.
Jack	It's a trick!
Martin	No trick. Just Fate.
Pam	Let's do it.
Martin	<i>(to Jack)</i> Pick one.
Jack	<i>(Hesitates, trying to work out what trick might be played on him. He picks up one vial, gives it a minute examination, and seems to decide on it.)</i>

	This one.
Martin	Fine. Pam, you choose.
Pam	<i>(Taking the first one which comes to hand)</i> This one.
Martin	OK, I'll have the last one. <i>(Jack and Pam look at their vials very carefully and with great trepidation)</i> OK, what happens now is that I go down to the lobby and take my <i>(laughs)</i> special mixture. Jack, you go into the ensuite, get nice and comfortable, well as comfortable as you can, and take yours. Pam, you lie on the bed and take yours. In half an hour the two who are left will meet up – and the Fates will have decided. <i>(Jack and Pam look at him)</i> Elegant, isn't it?
Jack	It's a trick, I say! <i>(He holds up his vial again and looks at it through the light)</i>
Martin	No trick.
Jack	I don't know how – but it's a trick!
Pam	You had first choice. You could have had any one you wanted.
Martin	You can swap with either of us if you like.
Jack	<i>(Torn between keeping his own vial and swapping, he stares at it with undisguised fear)</i> Swap?
Martin	<i>(Equably)</i> Yes, I'll swap with you if you want.
Pam	So will I.
Jack	<i>(Lumpily)</i> No – I'll stick with it.
Martin	<i>(Making for the door)</i> Fine. Let's do it. I wonder who will meet up? <i>(He opens the door)</i> Maybe see one of you later.
Jack	<i>(Viciously)</i> It's a bloody trick!
Martin	No trick.
Jack	Swap with me then! <i>(Martin shrugs, and walks over, holding out his vial. Jack is about to swap, but at the last minute snatches his hand away.)</i> No – I'll stick.
Martin	<i>(Uncaringly)</i> As you wish. Until later, then – maybe! <i>(He exits, smiling)</i>
Pam	<i>(Lying down on the bed and holding up her vial)</i> Exciting, isn't it?
Jack	<i>(Aghast)</i> My God – you're actually going to do it. You're going to take that stuff!
Pam	Yes. Martin was right, it's the perfect solution. <i>(As Jack looks even more horrified)</i>

	<p>Go on then, go in the shower room and take your medicine.</p> <p><i>(Jack does not move)</i></p> <p>Don't you want me, after all? Aren't I worth the risk?</p>
Jack	I do want you. You know that. I offered often enough. I do care.
Pam	<p>Well then, here's your chance to prove it.</p> <p><i>(Jack still does not move)</i></p> <p><i>(Hard)</i> Go in there and take the bloody stuff!</p>
Jack	It's a trick – somehow – I don't know how – but it's got to be a trick!
Pam	<p>No trick. I'm up for it. Are you?</p> <p><i>(She sits up and makes to uncap the vial)</i></p>
Jack	<p>Stop!</p> <p><i>(Pam pauses)</i></p> <p>Swap with me then – if it's not a trick!</p>
Pam	<p>Sure. <i>(She holds out the vial, and Jack approaches, hesitates, and then finally swaps with her. He looks at his new vial as if it's a live grenade)</i></p> <p>Night night, sweetie. Go on in there and do it. I want to see what happens!</p> <p><i>(Jack hesitates at the door to the ensuite)</i></p> <p><i>(Sexy and husky)</i> Tell you what, if it turns out to be me and you, you can have me all afternoon, and you can play me like guitar so as long as you like, and I'll twang your strings for you.</p>
Jack	<i>(As he closes the ensuite door behind him)</i> I still think it's a bloody trick.
Pam	<p><i>(Unfastening her vial and sniffing the contents)</i> Ah well – down the hatch! <i>(She drinks, drops the vial onto the bed, and coughs heavily, as:-)</i></p> <p>BLACKOUT</p>
	<p>SCENE : an empty stage. Very bright, with the gentle sound of harps playing.</p> <p><i>(This could be done in front of the closed tabs)</i></p>
Martin	<i>(Enters L and looks about)</i> H'mm, pretty much as I thought it would be. Now where's everyone else?
Pam	<i>(Enters R, and sees Martin)</i> Why am I not surprised to find you here?
Martin	Because we love each other.
Pam	<p>Yes, I suppose we do.</p> <p><i>(They embrace)</i></p> <p>Jack still thinks it's a trick.</p>
Martin	No trick.
Pam	Where is he, anyway?
Martin	<i>(Pointing down and into the audience)</i> Oh, he's still down there.
Pam	But how did you arrange this? It must have been a fix.

Martin	It was a fix, but not a trick.
Pam	I don't get you.
Martin	I knew that he wasn't serious about you, and that he'd chicken out.
Pam	And so?
Martin	All three vials held the poison.
Pam	Ah! You crafty dog. <i>(Martin gives a very theatrical wink)</i> I underestimated you.
Martin	I guess you can work it out.
Pam	He didn't ...
Martin	No. He didn't take his. So he didn't love you enough to take the risk. So he's not the right person for you.
Pam	And you are?
Martin	I think we've just proved that we both are right for each other after all. Like I said, the past is wiped clean. <i>(Looking round, curiously)</i> Well, it is up here, anyway.
Pam	And our family - that baby ... up here?
Martin	<i>(Airily)</i> Up here we can do whatever we like.
Pam	But you said that two's company ...
Martin	Three is only sometimes a crowd. And ... as I may have mentioned ... if you're going to bluff, then you might as well bluff on a grand scale! <i>(As they embrace, the CURTAIN falls.)</i>