

Giving someone a ring

An elderly woman with red hair, bohemian clothing and an eager to please expression waited for Stephan to make his decision. Both looked perfect; unusual, sophisticated and in some way capturing the stylish yet humble spirit of the little Parisian jewellers. The white gold was more suited to Julie's delicate hands though. The thought of showing her the ring made his head spin. This was exactly the kind of ring he had been looking for. Now he only had one small problem....

The screaming voice ring tone broke Nicole's sleepy reverie and told her that her services were needed again. That particular ring tone meant that her friend Stephan was in trouble. She pulled over into a lay-by to concentrate fully on the problem at hand. Stephan only called when his world was at an end, usually twice a day. She said the word answer, and the mp3 download chart playing on the radio faded as Stephan's panicky breathing issued from the speakers all around her.

"Ring size.....What's the ring size?"

She laughed. She couldn't believe Stephan had forgotten to get Julie's ring size before leaving. His "business trip" was in fact a covert operation to obtain the perfect engagement

ring, and Stephan was no covert operative.

"You daftie, she's an L", Nicole replied fondly. As she talked an emoticon with a funny face was sent to his mobile to let him know she was teasing. He breathed a sigh of relief and thanked her before hanging up. Clearly the trip to Paris hadn't helped his nerves.

Stephan's call made her ponder her present situation in comparison to Julie's. While Julie had a globe-trotting Romeo, Nicole was stuck with a teddy bear and a mug of cocoa each night. She was a graphic designer who worked hard and slept hard, and she was stuck in a rut. Her friends were out partying while she planned her next project or listened to relaxing whale calls while burning incense.

No more she decided. Tonight she was hitting the town and not a drop of cocoa would pass her lips. As she pulled into her cul-de-sac the GPS in her mobile told her ever-so-smart home that she had returned. The central heating came on, the kettle boiled, the lights came on and the stereo selected "sounds of the ocean 12". She spoke into her hands free mobile "party selection" and as she stepped in the front door she was greeted by the playlist for a night out blazing from every speaker of her new stereo. She would give Lisa a

call. Lisa always new the best clubs in town.

Lisa got the call just as she was selecting which type of cereal to buy. She held the oaty-bran in one hand and captain crunchicles in the other. She quickly dropped the captain in her trolley and answered.

"Shouldn't you be asleep by this time", she joked.

"Not tonight, we're going out tonight" Nicole replied.

"We are, are we? What if I'm busy?"

"Are you?"

"Nah, just kidding Nic. Where do you want to go?"

Lisa waited for the reply but instead Nicole sent her a map of the city. Nicole wanted her to pick by selecting something on the map. She filtered out everything but nightclubs, and drew a circle around the newest, trendiest bar in town with her stylus.

"As long as you're paying babe", Lisa teased. She hung up and thought about the night ahead. Nicole sounded excited. As she described her outfit for the night, Lisa concocted an evil scheme.

It wasn't until she got home that she checked her phone to find out why it was bleeping at her. She laid down her groceries and read a message onscreen, marked as high importance. The message said simply "You forgot

to buy milk". She laughed at her own forgetfulness. In a world where her phone could securely check her groceries receipt from her credit card transaction and realise that she had bought cereal without milk, she had still managed to forget something. She disregarded the message for the moment and booted up her pc with an impish glee.

Within moments she had found the web site for the club and registered herself for their e-dating service. She sent Nicole an invite to do the same then created a profile with her likes and dislikes, what she was looking for in a partner and a picture of herself. Now when they got to the club all she had to do was wait for her mobile to give her the signal that someone compatible was nearby and the night was guaranteed to be interesting. She decided to ask her friend Amar if he wanted to come along...

Amar received the email just as the class was finishing. Thankfully his phone had realised he was in a lecture earlier when it picked up the University's wireless network and had switched itself to vibrate. He flipped it open and selected the narrate option. The phone read his e-mail to him in a computerised voice as he walked down the corridor. Apparently Nicole and Lisa were heading to a new club and wanted him to come along. The email also had the web address of a dating

service. Chuckling to himself, Amar visited the web page on his mobile web browser. Not tonight ladies he replied. Tonight studying, tomorrow exams and the next day, fame and fortune.

First stop for Amar was the on-campus coffee shop. It was one of the cosiest places to study, and a lot tidier than his flat. The wireless broadband was down for maintenance, but his laptop had a 3G card so he was fine. He logged on to the Universities webpage and all of his notes were ready for download. He brought them up one by one, scanning over them to decide what area he was weakest on. Contemporary economic issues seemed to be the winner, he had missed what the lecturer had said was the most important areas to study for that subject and his notes were chaotic. He resolved to ask Julie to help him. He sent a text to Julie, inviting her to look at his notes so far and comment on them.

Julie almost jumped out of her skin when she got the message. She was trying to relax with some retro games while she was waiting to hear from Stephan. He had sounded nervous last time she talked to him. This message was from Amar though. He was stuck with his revision (again) and his notes were probably a mess. If there was one thing Julie could do, it was organise.

Clicking on the invitation to look at his notes, they appeared on her phone and as expected, they were a total mess. She squinted at them for a moment, then turned on her plasma TV and clicked a button on her phone. The picture from her phone was now on her television and she could read the notes more closely. She used the phone as a remote control and as she pointed at the TV she was able to circle sections of text and annotate them with a few words on what he should focus on. Once done, she turned off the TV and the newly annotated notes appeared on her phone again. She clicked the send button along with a message chastising him for being so disorganised and asking for help at the last minute. She turned off her mobile to get some quiet time to herself.

Free to relax at last, Julie clicked her TV back on and resumed her multiplayer game. She was playing a puzzle game with falling blocks and was battling against an architect from Sweden, a schoolboy from Japan and a Grandmother from Slough. The Grandmother was winning but Julie was catching up. When the notification icon appeared on the bottom left of her screen that she had a message, it took her a few moments to notice it. The icon meant that someone was trying to call her but her mobile was switched off. The icon meant that the call was from Stephan,

if it had been anyone else she wouldn't have answered.

Turning her mobile on, she new something unusual was happening. The video call showed Stephan down on one knee. She should have realised what was happening, but it wasn't until he took the ring out that she realised what he was trying to say.

"I couldn't wait till I got back. You know what I'm like, can't keep a secret to save myself. As soon as I saw this I had to ask....", he swallowed.

"Will you marry me?"

The crystal clear picture of the ring appeared on her television, unusual, sophisticated and totally perfect. She couldn't stop herself from crying.

A picture of that ring, Stephan's anxious expression and Julie's teary but glorious smile was sent to every single person in his address book.

"Of course I will!"