

“The Dating Agency”

by

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THE DATING AGENCY

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First performed by The Desborough Players
at the Walton Playhouse
on 10th and 11th of June 2011

THE DATING AGENCY

CAST LIST

(8f & 2m)

Bruce Sheridan.....
Vivienne Sheridan.....
Martin Crouch.....
Lucy Brown.....
Cynthia Bell.....
Barbara Crouch.....
June Scott.....
Linda Carr.....
Hilary Angel.....
Penny Brown.....

Approx ages:

Bruce and Martin (male) and Viv and Barbara (female) all 60 plus.

Cynthia, Hilary and June 40 plus...Penny (quite attractive) 40 plus

Linda (quite attractive) 60 plus

Lucy is 23.

Background

Bruce.....Married to Viv for 35 years.

Viv.....Happily married to Bruce... but develops suspicions about his fidelity.

Martin...Married to Barbara...but seeking affection elsewhere.

Barbara...Long suffering wife of Martin.

Penny.....Had a brief affair with Bruce 23 years ago when she used to work with him.

Lucy.....Penny's (and Bruce's) daughter from this brief union.

Cynthia...The first potential client (from the dating agency) for Martin.

June.....Another likely partner for Martin.

Linda....Mellow Blossoms agency boss and old friend of Bruce, Viv, Martin and Barbara.

Hilary...The final dating partner for Martin. She is a confidence trickster.

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SYNOPSIS

Martin is suffering the trials of a long lasting, stale marriage that is slowly juddering to an acrimonious halt. In order to infuse a spark into his dull, purposeless life, he joins a dating agency. His intention is to test the waters of an alternative life style with a new partner.

Problems arise when, in order to conceal his ultra-matrimonial actions from his long suffering wife, he borrows the identity of his old friend, Bruce.

Due to the confused ID and resultant coincidental, unforeseen circumstances, the two men suffer a succession of perils, which lead to the heightened suspicions of each man's partner.

During the confused exchanges, Martin comes to learn of a long held secret about Bruce... but should he tell his friend of this devastating information.

STAGING

There is a main (front door) entrance to the rear centre stage. There is a window to the left of this. A settee is positioned to the right and an arm chair to the left of the stage. There is a side entrance stage right. Props to include... a watering can, two newspapers (both Daily Mail), one cup (unbreakable), a bottle of red wine, a box of chocolates, two glasses, a length of rope.... and handcuffs.

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Act 1

(The living room of the Sheridan household. Viv and Bruce have each returned from working their half-day stints. The time is one p.m.)

(Vivienne is sitting in the armchair, poring over today's 'quick crossword' in the newspaper, pencil in hand. After a few seconds, her husband, Bruce emerges from another room, having returned from his morning job. Bruce has changed his shirt and he is in the process of buttoning it).

Vivienne Did you manage to look at the crossword today, Bruce?

Bruce No, I got side tracked. I thought I'd leave it to you.

Vivienne Well, Martin'll be here in a minute. We don't want him having the satisfaction of beating us to it. You know how smug he is when he thinks we've been stuck on a word.

Bruce You couldn't finish it, then?

Vivienne No, I'm still floundering.

Bruce (sits on the arm of Viv's chair) All right. You'd better read out a clue then.

Vivienne This one....Five down....Six letters...shun or avoid...second letter 's'...last letter 'w'.

Bruce Something 's' ..something, something, something 'w' (thinks...finally...) 'Eschew'.

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Vivienne (Wryly) Bless you dear.

Bruce It's right though, isn't it... 'eschew'..

Vivienne Of course dear. You're always right.... I've never heard of it.... but it fits...so in it goes.

Bruce Any more?

Vivienne I think I can finish them on the right hand side now we've got that one....but there's a long one down the bottom that we'll need to fathom....it's ten letters...and the clue is 'explain'.

Bruce Erm ... Is it "elucidate"?

Vivienne No ...Not unless it's got two Ls...I make it only nine letters.

Bruce How about 'interpret'?

Vivienne (Again counts the letters) No ... It's nine again...but I could make it 'interprets'.

Bruce (Despairingly) Come on Viv! How long have we been doing these damned so called 'quick' crosswords. You can't just stick an 's' on the end to make it fit. The clue always indicates whether the word is singular or plural.

Vivienne Well I give up then.(tossing the newspaper aside) unless you can quickly find that Thesaurus upstairs before Martin gets here.

Bruce (Standing up) I suppose I'd better go. (looking at his watch) We need to move fast though...or he'll be in here going through his usual superior repartee...sensing blood again.

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- Vivienne Why do we have to have this silly game each week?
- Bruce Because he's insufferable when he thinks we can't do it. We've got to finish it...or we're done for... but we need time.
- Vivienne When he gets here, better to get him off the topic of crosswords then...and on to his favourite subject.
- Bruce What...you mean himself?
- Vivienne Well, yes...that.... plus his usual saga of love-lorn 'lonely hearts' ...falling at his feet.
- Bruce What...Martin's leftovers from the swinging sixties. ... some of 'em on the shelf so long, their 'sell by' date expired two decades ago. I'll get that book before he comes bouncing in here.
- (Bruce leaves the room...leaving Vivienne alone. She picks up the paper and again studies the crossword).
- Vivienne (Still mulling over the crossword)
...Explain....Explain....
- (Martin suddenly appears from the side entrance).
- Martin Watcha! Allo, allo, (laughing) Caught you at it old girl.
- Vivienne Martin!...You startled me...coming in like that.
- Martin I saw you through the front window. I didn't want you to get up, so I came round the side. Viv, lovely to see you as always
- Vivienne (Recovering) I wish I could say the same, Martin.
- Martin (Looking at the unfinished crossword in the paper in Vivienne's hand).....Oh oh oh.... oh...oh deary me.

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Looks like you had a problem with today's little teaser..... I managed to wrap it up in ten minutes.

Vivienne That's what you always say, Martin. You've probably been sweating over it since daybreak...We've both been working all morning... D'you remember that work?

Martin Not sure...Sounds damned unpleasant.

Vivienne I've only just picked up the paper and Bruce hasn't even seen it yet.

Martin Ah well. I'm sure you'll beat me to it one day...and then you'll be able to avoid making up all these flimsy excuses...oh...did I say, 'avoid'...maybe I should have said, "eschew".

Vivienne All right. We got that one.(showing Martin the crossword). Here, look.

Martin So you did, Viv...Well done old girl...bloody good.

Vivienne Thank you, Martin...old boy....

Martin (searches the paper).. . What's this big gap down the bottom then...Oh I see...Twenty one across. The clue is 'explain'.

Vivienne All right smart arse. What is it then.

Martin It's easy...Hey...Where's Brucie today.

Vivienne He's just.....

(Bruce comes through the door clutching the Thesaurus. At first, he doesn't see Martin....then, when he does, he utters,)

Bruce Oh Christ!

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Martin (Rising to his feet) Ah... Caught you at it Brucie ! I see it all ...the unfinished crossword...the jolly old thesaurus. Well I never. It seems desperate people will do desperate deeds.

Bruce (Unconvincingly) This has nothing to do with the crossword. (Holding the thesaurus away from Martin)

Martin No, of course not...but if you'll just permit me to check what page you're holding back with your finger....

(Martin grabs the book from Bruce and checks the page entries).

Martin Let's have a little look now...page two hundred and forty nine... let's see... 'expiate', 'expiation', 'expiration', 'expire' and....(triumphantly) oh yes...here we are... 'explain'. The very word.

Bruce Do we have to have this performance?

Martin (ignoring Bruce...and continuing) Well I never.... There's a whole plethora of alternatives to cover twenty one across in today's crossword, right here on this very page....er...the one that you were furtively concealing, Bruce.

Bruce All right.... now you know.....we were going to cheat ...So spare us the agony and tell us what's the ruddy answer then.

Martin For the clue, 'explain'...mmm ...difficult ... I'll have to....(said slowly and deliberately) 'illustrate'.

Vivienne and Bruce (almost together, in recognition...to each other) Illustrate!

Vivienne We'd have got it, given another five minutes.

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- Martin Yes, these books are very handy, aren't they. Saves all the time and bother of thinking out the clues.
- Vivienne We wouldn't need to cheat if we'd had more time....
- Martin Well, shall we just say that I won again,and *without* cheating..
- Vivienne You're no better than us, Martin.... What with your sly brand of duplicity on that 'desperate dames' network.
- Martin Please Viv...It's a dating agency.
- Vivienne But you deceive those poor wretches...even before you meet them.
- Martin (With indignation) I'm always honest to the core.
- Viv What!....Just to arouse even a flickering of interest from those rapidly wilting wallflowers, you use a false name, post up a photo of yourself taken at the Silver Jubilee Party and miraculously scythe off ten years from your real age.
- Martin Some of them do the same.
- Bruce Yeah, they both arrive at the designated meeting place done up to the nines like it's Brad Pitt meeting Penelope Cruz...whereas in reality, it's more like Young Mr Grace meeting Dot Cotton.
- Martin Say what you like...but it's a damn useful system for matching people up. Cuts out all the ferreting out...and gets right down to the bottom line immediately.
- Bruce The bottom line? What a novel euphemism.
- Martin Please Bruce, I refuse to engage in any crude banter in front of Vivienne...

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- Vivienne (interrupts) It's never stopped you before.
- Martin But ...look, frankly...There's no secret...I'm seeking female company....There's a whole horde of 'em, on hand; right on tap...attainable at just a depression of the digit.
- Bruce Depression seems a very fitting word.
- Martin Come on, it's simply a case of supply and demand. I'm in the market...and the ladies put themselves in the shop window.
- Bruce Didn't I once see something like in Amsterdam.
- Martin But Bruce, seriously, would you believe I've already got replies from thirty six ladies...thirty six of 'em!
- Bruce I s'pose that's about the same as ordering three dozen crumpets.
- Martin But they're all anxious to meet and bond with me. (rubbing his hands)
- Vivienne And at your age, what do you think you've got to offer these unbridled fillies...?
- Martin Unbridled fillies? Well Viv, in those gee gee terms, you could say, I've done the course and distance a few times.
- Vivienne So, I reckon by now, ... you're just about ready for the knackers yard.
- Martin Ah, but I still know how to treat a lady.
- Bruce Mmm...Would that be similar to your handling of Barbara ...your estranged wife. The degenerating hospitality, a huge helping of deception....and add to that, a liberal dose of infidelity... Now what woman could resist that?

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- Martin That's unfair. I know I've made mistakes...but I've learned from 'em....and it's made me a more polished individual.
- Viv And turned Barbara into a shattered wreck.
- Bruce You'll never change.... I reckon at your age, it's about time you hung up your after shave and hair dye....and settled down ...into a more befitting....sedate life style.
- Martin I'm not ready for that yet... Whenever I feel the scent of the prey in my nostrils, I can still stealthily go in for the kill
- Vivienne Martin, I'm sure you've still got the capacity to make some nice woman...very unhappy.
- Martin Whatever...but it's all quite exciting..... It's given me a new lease of life.
- Vivienne You've been overdosing on that Phillosan again.
- Martin Viv...please though....not a word to Barbara...She knows about the agency...but she doesn't know I'm actually meeting some of its clients.
- Viv Why should that affect you...after all, your marriage is all over....bar the shouting.
- Martin That's it... the bit I can't bear...*is* the shouting.
- Bruce Why don't you just get out if the atmosphere at home's so bad. It can't be doing either one of you any good...after all, the poor woman's still cooking your meals and washing your clothes.
- Viv She needs her head examined...still doing that for you while you totally neglect her.

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- Martin But Barbara likes doing all that....Anyway, she's agreed to a divorce...so I'll have to get out when they sort out the property situation.
- Viv Doesn't Barbara mean *anything* to you now...after all these years?
- Martin Oh, yes of course. I'll miss having her around the place.
- Bruce You make her sound like an old spaniel.
- Martin I have to admit she's been good to me over the years. She probably deserved someone far better than me.
- Viv That's exactly what she said to me.
- Bruce Why don't you make things up with her...Go home...take her a huge bunch of flowers.....you know.
- Martin Crikey...If I did that, she'd be even more suspicious than she already is.....Anyway...enough of this Amateur Relate stuff...I'm off...got a busy day ahead....See you Viv....oh and Bruce, I'll be popping by later...with all the gen.
- (Half-hearted goodbyes from Viv and Bruce as Martin exits through the side entrance).
- Viv How does he get away with it. He's treated Barbara like a door mat for thirty years....while he tries to act like a sixteen year old who's still living in the mid nineteen sixties..
- Bruce He's trying to win the age battle against overwhelming odds.
- Viv Custer's last stand.
- Bruce It could definitely be Martin's last stand.

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Vivienne Barbara's done the right thing going for that divorce. She'll be well shot of him.

Bruce Are you seeing Barbara today.

Vivienne I'd better go over. She'll be in need of a bit of comfort and support.

Bruce Yeah, you can file your report.

Vivienne You don't have to put it like that, Bruce. Barbara and I have never had any secrets from each other.

Bruce But you don't tell her...*everything*....Viv... Do you?

Vivienne No... I still try to retain a certain amount of privacy...and some dignity.... And I definitely wouldn't like her to be acquainted with some of your little shortcomings.

Bruce I'm glad to hear it.

Viv (Continues) Be they domestic... or matrimonial.
(Bruce's face falls)

(Martin reappears)

Martin Hello...I'm back again.

Viv That was quick...

Martin No, no...I've just remembered....there was something I wanted to ask Bruce.

Viv Oh well...I'll get out of your way then...I'm sure it'll all be very manly chatter. (Viv rises)

Martin Don't go on my account.

Viv (standing up) It's fine. I was going anyway.... going out.

Martin Oh ... Where you off to then?

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- Viv I'm visiting an injured friend.
- Martin I hope she's not too bad.
- Viv I'm sure she'll be fine. She'll soon be getting rid of a nasty lump.
- Martin (doubtfully) Oh good.

(Viv exits. Martin takes Viv's vacated chair. Bruce remains standing)
- Martin Bruce.....I hope you don't mind if I asked a favour from you.
- Bruce Oh no...how much?
- Martin No no...nothing like that.
- Bruce Well that's a relief... with that minor scare out of the way... I'd say I was reasonably approachable.
- Martin It's something personal to you...something I'd like to borrow.
- Bruce (Jokingly) As long as it's not Vivienne...ha ha.
- Martin Erm...ah.
- Bruce It is Vivienne!
- Martin No no...Not quite like that...actually, it's your name I want.
- Bruce My name....I'm sorry, Martin...but I'm not sure we'd be that compatible...and I'm already supporting Viv.
- Martin I'd better explain....You know this agency that I belong to.
- Bruce For desperate dames.

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- Martin For desperate dames...(does double take) no no
....for 'gentle, seasoned prospectors'.
- Bruce Seasoned prospectors? Is that how they advertise it.
To the hills ladies and gents! Roll those wagons and
stake that claim ! Oh my God....well, what about
this agency.

(Bruce now takes a seat on the settee)
- Martin Well, I've got to hold my hands up here...When I
first contacted them I wasn't on the net...had no
access to E mails etc...so when they asked me my
name.....
- Bruce (Apprehensively) Go on.
- Martin I gave them yours.
- Bruce (querying) You gave them mine...You *are* kidding,
aren't you. You're saying that you've taken my
identity....so now, in effect, you're me...
- Martin Only in name, Bruce.
- Bruce But couldn't you have used your imagination a
bit....You know...Richard Cook, Brian
Jones...anything would have been better than to
pinch my name.....You can't have it.
- Martin I'm afraid things have gone too far. It's on their list
now and all the clients have my name and
address...er .. that's your name and address on their
records.
- Bruce My bloody address as well...You cheeky bugger....
I'll have an endless stream of Bunny Boilers
stationed outside my house for ever more...(head in
hands) Oh my God!

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- Martin I'm sorry, Bruce. I couldn't think quickly enough...I'd have preferred to use a 'care of' address or a post office box number but the agency insisted on a direct contact address from me.
- Bruce So that'll be my phone number and E Mail Address as well. Goodness... what will Viv say to this?
- Martin Look Bruce...you haven't got a sole monopoly on the name Bruce Sheridanthere's probably a whole stack of 'em dotted around the U.K.
- Bruce But not with my address and phone number...and not at the disposal of a whole bunch of hot blooded husband hunters.
- Martin Look....I'll be honest with you, Bruce...I've always liked your name...
- Bruce Bruce..... Sheridan?
- Martin Yes...y'know, when we used to work together, I was always envious of you... just picking up the phone, and saying, "Bruce Sheridan speaking"... so suave sounding...seeming to carry more authority with it than my..."Martin Crouch here"...Not the same, is it. I think it's that extra syllable
- Bruce Possiblybut what do I do if they come round here to the doorstep....I daren't utter my own name...or I could be swept aside in a hurricane of over-drenched perfume.
- Martin You won't have to worry 'cos it's only the agency that holds your address....I'm getting a P.C. fitted tomorrow, so then it'll all go through me. I doubt if anyone'll call here.

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- Bruce So how do you arrange to meet these women?
- Martin By phone...and through the agency.... You have to give them the proposed meeting place... and then it's up to you.
- Bruce And your rendezvous for these trysts is where precisely?
- Martin (Sheepishly)...I thought the pavilion across the way.
- Bruce The pavilion that can be seen from my front window!
- Martin Well...yes really...I mean, that's the plan....I can see them coming...y'know, from here...so... if I see Godzilla or the bride of Frankenstein lumbering down the road, I can just sit here.... and refuse to take up the challenge.
- Bruce And as we're the nearest house to the pavilion, isn't there a chance they might make some enquiries here?
- Martin God, I hope not. I never thought of that...Damn...and some will have seen my picture....oh hell
- Bruce How many of 'em have you got lined up?
- Martin There's three today.
- Bruce Three!.....Today!
- Martin Not all at the same time.

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- Bruce I should hope not! But even one at a time...I mean, if they're all live wires....how will you ever man....
- Martin (interrupts) No, no no no no The agency has very strict rules. The first meeting is purely introductory...just to see how each other shapes up...although after that, of course, it's no holds barred...
- Bruce What... not even the Tombstone Thigh Jerk or the Overlapping Cross Buttock.
- Martin I'm always willing to give them a try..
- Bruce So what names are on today's itinerary.
- Martin The lucky ladies...in no particular order are.....CynthiaHilaryand finallyLinda. Linda says she likes her men 'rough and ready' ...very rough...and very ready.
- Bruce What indeterminate fate, I wonder, lies in waiting for this hapless trio.
- Martin I'd say, 'glorious opportunity,' Brucie boy....but... do me a favour, mate, don't tell Viv about these girls, eh....I know she's told Barbara all about the agency thing...but she doesn't have to know the fine details.
- Bruce You're putting me in a difficult position... Viv and I have no secrets from each other. It's tricky for me to have to hold things back.