

Dating for the Mature Woman.

Cast

Angela. (The Mature Woman)

Everyman (Plays all the “dates” and the part of the Stage Manager who moves the set as necessary.) Everyman will always change on stage, at great speed, into the next “date”

The woman plays Angela and narrates some passages, speaking directly to the audience. (When speaking in parenthesis, she is doing so without the other character hearing her.)

Scene one.

A woman is onstage rather impatiently waiting for the audience to seat themselves. She may interact with them and argue about where they sit. This is ANGELA.

When they are finally seated, she nods to the S/M and the lights change.

The thing is, you have to wear the right face. Never mind clothes. Some don't even notice what you wear, or don't wear come to that. Though many would be traumatised by the knitting pattern that my body has become.

You have to appear interested, you see, and the key to this is eyebrows. The quizzical high arch accompanied by “....really???” or when eyebrow fatigue has set in for good, you can lower them to a deep frown of concentration and say “Mmmmm...yes. I see what you mean.” Or there's always the compassionate eyebrows. A mix of a frown and an Awww face. And don't forget the pouty mouth. A must-have for compassion and sorrow to be expressed.

By the way. There are rules.

WAITER begins to lay a table with white cloth, cutlery etc. Muzak in the background.

First dates are really difficult on both sides you see. There's nerves; there's the distinct possibility that they will in fact resemble your last father-in-law or worse, your last husband or....that dodgy chap who is always at the bus stop when it's raining and insists you share his umbrella. And that's not a euphemism.

The WAITER waits, expectantly, by the table

So, the first date should be casual. Somewhere you can escape from if necessary and should not – definitely not include Dinner.

The WAITER sighs and clears the table.

Something casual. A coffee shop perhaps

The WAITER brings on a coffee cup in one hand

Or a pub.

WAITER turns to reveal the wine glass. He looks at ANGELA with a smug smile.

Okay. Let's say it's a pub.

(S/M begins polishing glasses with vigour, whilst chatting to imaginary punters.

The woman looks at him with disdain and waits for him to stop.)

Nice and casual, you see. And you can always people watch while he's in the Gents.

So, this is where *(WAITER becomes the first date and sits on a chair by the table, looking bored.)* you can get all the admin out of the way.

ANGELA (To him as she sits in the other seat) Kids?

MAN Two.

ANGELA Live with you, do they?

MAN No.

ANGELA Good. Me neither.

Lights change. They re-start the scene.

ANGELA Kids?

MAN No.

ANGELA. (Why not? Don't like them? Closet Gay? Can't get it up? Murdered them?) (*A pause*) And then, when you've managed to stop yourself from saying any of this, you hear.

MAN My wife.....she died last year. Cancer.

ANGELA You've got me there!! *(to the audience)*(Don't worry, I don't actually say that. Never ready for that one.) So, you re-set your face to match his and wonder why in God's name he wants to go out with anyone so soon afterwards and *then* you hear.

MAN In fact, you remind me of her. You're very.....very.

MAN begins to cry quietly.

ANGELA The depressed ones come in two packages. The weeping ones or the silent ones. David was a silent one.

DAVID *(looking her up and down from his seat while folding the Guardian with great reluctance.)* I'll get you a drink. *He rises slowly and wanders over to the bar. When he's gone, ANGELA rises and speaks directly to the audience.*

ANGELA While he's gone, I look around at the lookers. I've got "Blind Date" written all over my forehead. The newspapers rise again; conversations re-start and the Gentleman's club resumes. He returns with my (tiny glass of white) His is a massive glass of beer. I fleetingly wonder where it will go. He is slight and thin and carries his misery in the left side of his hip.

DAVID sits carefully down and eyes the folded paper. Then with a sigh turns to ANGELA who sits again

ANGELA (Conversation is stilted shall we say.)

DAVID So.... Tell me about you.

ANGELA Well, I'm an actress and I.....

DAVID Doesn't pay though does it?

ANGELA *(to the audience)*The check list is shorter than usual. Two kids and a dog and lives in Wales. I am reminded of Thomas More's line in *Man for all Seasons* to Richard Rich. "Wales Richard?!" Always gets a laugh

in company but not this company. I leave the line in the bag of tricks.
Right at the bottom.

His wife -name not known- could have died yesterday or last year. He is replacing the gap in his life as a course of tablets are taken to cure the common cold.

We have a second. "My shout " I say.

He doesn't refuse or accept so I nip over to the bar, *The bartender picks up a new glass. She points at a bigger one.* sure in the knowledge that the glass will be bigger this time. On return, he has vacated his seat.

The bartender rushes over and sits covering his face with a newspaper, lowers it and smiles

GENT " Gone to the Gents love."

ANGELA At which I nod and smile and drink my wine briskly before his return. Which is when I decide that trains are running early that night and I really should.... However, we will meet again after I have phoned him to arrange and when he next visits London.

DAVID *(to the audience)* He is a scientist who has invented a new food stuff to replace mushrooms.

ANGELA Me, I'd rather go out and pick them than create a Frankenstein of the fungal world but that is not our only difference.

I continue as his London "bit on the side" for a few months and we manage well enough. I dream of romantic walks on the beach in Wales with the dog. He dreams of mushrooms.

Mostly we meet in Central London and stay over in a shabby hotel somewhere in Charing Cross where most guests are doing the same as we are. Shagging perfunctorily on a regular basis with neither joy nor disgust.

There were a few looks at Breakfast.

BLONDE "How was it for you?"

She was a regular visitor so I should have asked her first.

I do understand that I was second in line to a prostitute – or may be third in line. He didn't pay for my services. He didn't pay for the room either – that was on the firm that made the mushrooms. And we ate in small cafes at night with steamy windows, either hidden gems to create intimacy or secret hiding places to avoid being seen by those he strove to impress.

One night the fire alarm went off in the dead of night and we stirred but did not rise. A fleeting thought as I lay in the dark. I haven't said goodbye to my children.

Soon afterwards, mortality having taken a grip, he emailed to say he would not be continuing our liaison. There had been a gap in communication, and I had done my filing cabinet email starting with

ANGELA "Hi. Hope all is well"

and ending with

ANGELA "look forward to seeing you again soon."

The quality of writing not my best and completes a cycle of

ANGELA "Don't want to be a pain but..."

when I really want to say

ANGELA "Will you please treat me with respect. Will you show a modicum of interest in my, my life, my dreams, my desires? Will you look at me sometimes as if you care? Will you re-join the world?"

He wrote to say there won't be a

DAVID "Soon"

Additional clauses were

DAVID "You don't know what it's like"

a reminder that he is a grieving widower and a final parting shot

DAVID "If I wanted to see you again, I would have got in touch"

I wanted to say

ANGELA *(she looks directly at him)* "I did not kill your wife. Cancer did. I wanted to say – you are treating me with disdain and unremitting negativity. I am worth more than that". But I didn't think I was, so just said nothing.

As she speaks the waiter is laying a new table in another restaurant. ANGEA speaks directly to the audience.

And that's my default. Say nothing, reserve crying for later or better yet, don't cry at all. So, I moved on to pastures new and the cows moved away from me in scorn.

Scene 2.

Then there was and "only lunch" date which was just that and only once.

Graham was bitter and angry and self-absorbed. We met in beautiful restaurant in Covent Garden and he treated the waitress like a skivvy. I was in awe of his ability to deny everyone eye contact and further shaken by his nonchalant tossing of the linen napkin in her direction when whatever was on the menu did not suit. Here was a man who was used to being obeyed. I on the other hand was held by convention. His hobby? Taking people to court .And winning.

He hates everyone and everything except his daughters who phone him constantly with long conversations while I gaze at the décor and pretend I have nothing to lose.

Having told me about his wife

GRAHAM She sold my Mercedes while I was in surgery. Can you credit it?
Under the surgeon's knife and the silly bitch is selling my car.

(Question: Which do you love more wife or car? Car? Wife?)

ANGELA No, I didn't ask that of course but I was so wanting to meet this amazing woman.

GRAHAM Do you like opera? (yes please) I have a flat in Covent Garden (useful) and I've got this adorable dog (nothing to report there)

ANGELA The cons are weighing heavier than the pros. And, in the end, I can find no pros. I decide to go. He wants to see me to the station and offers to buy shoes.

(Boy! That is on a par with Opera) but I decline and keep my moral compass in tact.

As we crawl nearer to the finish line, he says

GRAHAM "So, you're a writer".

I open my mouth (the food long since eaten) to say a little more accurately what I do, but he has moved on to stage four in this unending afternoon to be his most impressive. Thus, we move together down the Charing Cross road.

There is blue tape cordoning off the road. Bus kills Man. Someone has died. I am appalled and want to be silent. He has an opinion to share.

GRAHAM Well, what do you expect? I've always said this. The traffic is chaotic. No-one obeys the rules, the buses come down here far too fast. This should be a one way.....I've always said pedestrians are the most stupid.....

(Graham stops and looks at Angela.)

ANGELA A man has died here.

He is non plussed and we continue our journey without further dialogue. On reaching the station he turns to me

GRAHAM "That was lovely, Thank you."

I move away carefully to prevent me bolting for the steps and stop when I hear

GRAHAM "When can I see you again?"

I pause for breath and begin.

ANGELA This is what I would like you to understand, Graham. Listening is as important, if not more so, than talking. I find you rude and arrogant and am perfectly sure that you have no regard for me, the waitress or.....

GRAHAM I was all right to her. I tipped her didn't I?

ANGELAor the dead man who you presume is really stupid. With all those points in mind please tell me, why should I want to see you again?

GRAHAM Well, it was a nice lunch, good restaurant.

ANGELA A relationship is a two way street Graham. Rather like this one. But without the bus.

Still perplexed he lets me go.

The opera would have been nice, and my friends tell me still how I should have at least said yes to the shoes.

Scene 3.

So then there was Louis. He's waiting over the other side of the prairie that is Wetherspoons rather like I'm the last interviewee of the day and he has a meeting at four.

LOUIS What you having?

A query rather than a gesture of good will. He wanders over to the bar, returns and the interview begins.

(LOUIS mimes talking at her, looking away most of the time)

I pass the prelim and we agree to meet again and slowly the ice cracks and we emerge from the pond of mistrust and seem to have something in common.

He is short and neat and very tightly held together as if at any moment he may burst. Two daughters at a Steiner school; a flat overlooking the harbour; wife re-married – a thinly veiled and painful gash to his pride and nothing at all about his work.

We live far away from each other so stay over in turns. I take him to Greenwich Park and beyond and he takes me to the South Downs and for a while all is well and I am taken in.

One day, on leaving a country pub we notice the number plates are missing from his car.

LOUIS "I know who's done this"

and the sky darkens. He phones people then visit a garage to b echoes forth. I am

an appendage, a satellite for his murky thoughts and plans; no longer needed.

ANGELA "Who do you think..." .

LOUIS "I know who's done this".

Somewhere in the background is the Harry Lime music. I am a stranger in his world and lost in his relentless pursuit of revenge.

The next morning there is a nightmare happening in the kitchen. A harsh scraping sound, I cannot label. I find him in charge of the cat's tray. I realise now that this was his way of getting me away. I realise also that he was transferring his pent-up anger onto the cat's tray but thankfully not to the cat. But I also realise we are through. I dress and depart and then re-think. I phone the next day and his opinion is

LOUIS I think you are angry. An angry person.

I can hear his own fury like a smoking gun.

Some of me is devastated and outraged at the same time; the other some is glad to be away from his malevolent presence.

Scene 4

I was set up with Richard by friends who thought I needed him. He was attentive, bear like, bearded and leaning towards scruffy. Always late and always analysing my behaviour with amateur spiritual well-being.

The first time I stayed with him I was the recipient of a long and detailed account of the reasons for non-penetrative sex.

RICHARD "Two reasons"

(There should have been a power point at this moment)

RICHARD One – my penis has some sort of infection

(Inside I'm screaming);

RICHARD My penis is bruised

(overuse perhaps?)

So you would presume that I leap from the snowy freshly laid sheets and run.

No. Too polite. So, we stay in bed together and watch the telly. After some efforts to get comfortable

RICHARD Are you okay?

ANGELA Yep– You?

RICHARD No

ANGELA Oh.

And a shuffle as we re-arrange.

The only certain thing you can say about Richard is that he can't do commitment. He just can't. He didn't get the upbringing lesson that says- don't let anyone down; be on time; be respectful' keep your promises.

He lived in a village by a millstream and we often went to the village pub. Now I think of it I have no idea what he did for a living.

Our parting was ordinary. Some time later he invited me and others to his birthday party consisting of a country walk and supper afterwards. He ignored me during the walk and then, when no-one was looking, he made a grab for me and the hairy face clamped itself without asking on mine. I left promptly.

Via Facebook, I saw that his failing parents needed all his care until they conveniently died one after another and he inherited their combined wealth. Some time later he married a Thai girl. Should have been tied.

Scene 5

During the following, the male actor carries out the actions and dress code of VINCE

Imagine, if you will an oily suit with matching oily hair. Imagine also the repetitive gesture of a raised elbow as the wine was poured in abundance and the defining smile that agreed we were both in the same club. The drinking club.

The TV programme opposite me had grown in confidence, leaning forward in an attitude of adoring film star as he placed a sweaty palm on top of mine. His teeth were momentarily covered by a glass full of red as he poured more of it down his eager gullet. By the second bottle the film star had decided physical action was assured and I pulled an alternative script out of the bottom drawer.

VINCE Go on, sunshine, you really do want to you know. I can always tell.
 Don't be a tease now. There's a good girl.

The reasons for not were too many and I wrenched myself free with a breathless must go – last train – lovely evening- so much – and I was free. The heart rate decreased as I descended into the safety of Zone 1. But the seeds of fear of what might have been were sown and I gripped the handrail tightly with both hands and glanced back. He was gone.

The film had turned from Cary Grant to Orson Welles. I remember nothing of what we ate. Of subject matter; of names, job, marital status. I just remember the fear of being on unknown ground, of a stranger with a mission to pull me in and dominate. The fear of being trapped.

Scene 6

The first time I met Alan he was sitting alone in a booth in a pub looking scared, shy, miserable and needy. He'd made an effort with a shave – face all shiny and clothes were clean, though more befitting a junior tennis match than a first date. We greeted each other with caution, and he went straight to the bar.

ALAN So...tell me about you. You're an actress? Right? I've always wanted to go out with an actress.

ANGELA So...kids?

ALAN Yeah two girls and a boy. The wife threw me out. Don't blame her. I'm staying in a hotel. I've got nothing with me. The kids hate me. She's changed the locks.

He pauses for breath and stifles a sob.

ANGELA I'm really sorry to hear that. You must be feeling really miserable. Why did she?

(Reasonable question)

ALAN Well, you know. Too much booze. Lost my job. Hopeless really.

Compassion overwhelmed me and I agreed to meet him again. He was funny and chatty and good company but not in the least bit sexy.

It was summertime in London, and we spent time in parks having picnics, walks but no money, no artistic stimulation and he finally moved up to Hertfordshire to stay with long suffering friends. When they were sick of him, he came to me and met my children, neither of whom liked him.

We saw less and less of each other and then one day he pleaded to meet at Victoria station, and I agreed. He was upstairs in the bar, hiding like he had several months before.

ALAN I've been thrown out again. I've nowhere else to go. Please?

ANGELA No. You must not stay.

ALAN Please it's not my fault. I'm destitute.

ANGELA One night Just one night.

ALAN You're so sweet. I'll never forget you. You're so sweet.

We were at the barrier. He had no ticket. No money to buy one. No bags. No anything. I bought the ticket. I took him home and the next day I too threw him out with just a modicum of self-doubt.

He went. I know not where. But two weeks later two large suitcases appeared in my front garden and alongside them stood Alan.

ALAN I'm homeless.

ANGELA Again?

ALAN Sorry.

ANGELA Come in.

It was impossible not to feel sorrow for this the weakest of men. But his days were numbered, and he knew it.

That week, he left for the final time. He disappeared from my life, never to return. His cases remained however, and I took the entire contents to a charity shop.

And there amongst the clothing and the odd replicas of his life was a stash of pornographic magazines which I burnt with a rage against myself for being so gullible, so taken in. So foolish.

That Christmas he phoned me.

ALAN Just wanted to wish you well. I'm back in Wales now. With Mum. Yeah, she's doing okay. We're okay together. I'm doing okay. So...take care of yourself. Happy Christmas.

For once, it has to be said, he meant what he said. So, I did.

After Alan, enough was enough.