

# SLOW DATING

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A one act play

Written by  
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### Cast of Characters

ESTER: 70+, well dressed, wearing a scarf.

### Setting

An empty stage, place is suggested by the words as we're taken from the speed date and beyond...

### Time

Today.

### Synopsis

When an elderly lady tries speed dating it leads to a night with a charming stranger and a heartbreaking revelation about her husband. A one woman show which explores the beauty of holding on and the vulnerability in letting go.

## ESTER

When I saw it pinned on the notice board at the club I figured it to be some kind of practical joke: "Speed dating for seniors".

The only thing that happens quickly at our age is dementia.

Now I'm a happily married woman and hadn't even contemplated attending, but as chance would have it I find myself passing the event some weeks later.

Curiosity gets the better of me and I go in for a little look-see. And it's filled with these women all primed and plucked and held together by Botox and spandex control pants. Sitting cross legged at little tables, their skirts hitched up just enough to show their 'libido isn't incognito'.

And these men. My God. Not one under eighty.

Struggling up from their seats onto their walking sticks and Zimmer frames. Squinting so badly from cataracts that they wander off to the wrong tables. Having conversations they're too deaf to hear, with no memory to remember they've sat with the same woman three times.

Dear old Bob tells me all about his bladder infection. Harold asks if my hair is real. And Jim rolls his dentures around like he's sucking gum balls.

And as others babble away I sit there pitying these incredibly sad, sad souls - all just wanting to feel less alone for a moment.

And I think, you know what I would do if I were in charge of this 'speed dating'? I'd run proceedings like those restaurant sushi trains. Put the men on a conveyor belt and let the women pick out the ones that still smelt fresh.

But a bell rings. Men move. And I hear the clickity-clackity of gum ball Jim coming back for a second bite. So I grab my handbag and stand just as this gentleman sits down.

Three piece suit. Nails trimmed. No colostomy bag bulging out his trousers. He introduces himself as Leon and says:

"Do you believe in being fair"?

I nod - hesitantly, as he stares right at me with this little half smile and says:

"Well gorgeous, you've had that incredible body your whole life. It's only fair I have it for one night."

Let me tell you, I've never been propositioned. It didn't happen in my day. At least not to me. I held nothing but a man's hand until Albert put a ring on mine. Married for fifty-two years. The only thing a man ever offered me was a seat on the bus.

The next thing I know Leon and I are in the back of a taxi. Now I'm a rational woman. God knows I certainly don't pick up strange men. At my age I barely have the energy to pick up my medication.

But before I know it we're sharing a hip flask, coughing from the home brew and laughing like two naughty school children. I catch the driver smirking at us in his rearview mirror.

What on earth am I doing?

At the next red light I'll apologize to Leon and make a less than dignified exit.

But every light is green. Intersection after intersection. Like some greater force is driving me forward. And as I lean towards the drivers' ear - to ask him to pull over - Leon leans towards mine and says:

"Don't do anything that makes you uncomfortable. I'm paying the driver for the night. He'll take you home anytime you want".

Maybe he just wants companionship. To hug. To feel that warmth of another human being. To feel less alone for a moment. That's not cheating. Right?

I'm merely being... a Good Samaritan.

We check into this lavish five-star hotel as Mr and Mrs Bum-smells. The snooty nose concierge types in our details asking us how to spell "Bumsmells". Leon, completely straight-faced responds with:

"B-U-M as in backside. Hyphen. S-M-E-L-L-S as in odooooor. It's Dutch. My family were in the baked beans business".

(upbeat, muzak, 'La Vie en Rose' or  
something like it)

As the elevator doors close behind us we burst into hysterics. Tears down our cheeks. Literally clutching at our bellies. I haven't laughed that hard since....

As we settle the silence leaves just muzak.

(awkward elevator moment, only  
muzak)

I catch his eye in the mirror. He grabs my hand. It's soft. His thumb rubs my clammy palm.

I think he might want more than companionship.

He leads me down the long plush corridor towards our penthouse suite. We pass walls lined with portraits of regal men, their eyes tracking us.

What must they be thinking? What on earth am I thinking? I could catch God knows what. You read about that kind of thing. I've seen Doctor Goldberg for 38 years. What is he going to think when I show up with chlamydia?

Leon extends his arm, letting me enter the suite first. Winking, he excuses himself to freshen up. Like I need him any fresher.

I move to the balcony, staring out at the city lights and picture Albert sitting at the bay room window.

I look at the front door. Escape is closer than the bedroom. I stand there. Thinking.

And then I walk.

To Leon.

He's by the bed, smiling and I move towards him - my knees shaking like I'm tiptoeing a tight rope between two skyscrapers. I say:

"You know Leon, I never intended to come to this speed dating business".

He steps towards me, wrapping an arm around the small of my back. His warm breath on my neck as he whispers:

"I watched you take down the flier from the notice board last week".

He takes my hand. As he gently hums.

(hums a waltz, dancing slowly with her  
the scarf - her imaginary partner)

And as this tornado of guilt inside my head begins to lose its breath, I drift... I let go... I let go... let go...

I sit alone in the back seat of the taxi, every light is red as it crawls through morning peak hour. I squirt Channel Mademoiselle on my wrists and rub my neck - Alberts favourite perfume...

He's sitting by the bay window. Staring, blank faced. I walk towards him and stand by his side, listening to his heavy breaths. I reach for his hand, unclenching it from the dressing gown I'd ironed a day earlier.

I hold it. And I cry.

Remembering nine years ago today, when he was moved into care and he... he began to slip away from me - how he said:

“Visit me, love me, but promise me you'll let me go... you have to let me go”.

CURTAIN