

Divorcees.Biz

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FIRST EDITION

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For my husband, Phil, with thanks for never complaining when I sit at the computer for hours on end

CHAPTER ONE

“I hope we’re going to have enough food.”

Connie swept into the large banqueting hall of London’s prestigious Royale Hotel, clutching an elaborately decorated cake high above her head. If she held her arms any lower, she would trip over the flounced hem of her long dress.

“What’re you talking about?” Lucy gestured towards the table. “We’ve mountains of food. I think you’re forgetting we only have five people on our books; the four of us, who set up the whole thing in the first place plus my elderly aunt and she only joined for a laugh.”

“Yes, I know all that,” Connie huffed. “But don’t you see, this is what the launch is all about – getting more people to join and…” Unfortunately at that point, she trod on the hem of her dress and stumbled forward. The cake wobbled dangerously in her outstretched arms while she fought to regain her balance.

Seeing what was happening, Lucy rushed forward and managed to grab the cake before it crashed to the floor. “For goodness sake, your dress is far too long. Haven’t you something else you can wear?”

“No!” Connie replied. She hitched up her dress. “Well – not with me, anyway. Besides, I paid a fortune for this creation and I’m going to wear it if it kills me.”

The midnight-blue dress, with its sequined bodice had looked gorgeous draped on the model in the shop window. She knew it would accentuate her blonde hair and sparkling blue eyes perfectly. It was a dress to die for. She simply had to have it, no matter what it cost. But Connie hadn’t taken into account that the display model was several inches taller than she was.

Even the sales assistant, mindful of her commission, had felt duty bound to point out there might be a problem when it came to actually walking. Yet Connie waved the advice aside, feeling sure it would be the right length when she wore her brand new, platform shoes. However that wasn’t the case: the dress was still so long, she kept treading on it with every step she took. It wasn’t so bad when she could hitch it up a little. But carrying something, which needed both hands, was a real problem. She’d very nearly had a catastrophe on her way up the stairs. There was no doubt she would have toppled over when she stepped on the dress without realising it. That was if a rather attractive man hadn’t rushed to her side and taken the cake from her in the nick of time.

“It probably will.” Lucy carefully placed the cake in the centre of the table. “If not the dress, then those ridiculous shoes will do the job for you. Just be careful when you go up and down the stairs. And, come to think of it, what on earth were you doing carrying the cake, anyway? Surely a member of the staff should be doing that? We’re paying enough money!”

“I was coming up here, so I thought I would save someone a journey.” Connie smoothed down her dress. “I simply forgot there were so many stairs.”

“Stairs!” Jenny screeched across from the other side of the room. “You mean you carried the cake which, might I add, cost us a small fortune on its own, all the way up the stairs? Why didn’t you at least take the lift?”

“Because I couldn’t press the button to call the lift! I was holding the cake with both hands – remember?”

Jenny closed her eyes and shook her head. For an intelligent woman, Connie could be unbelievably dim sometimes.

“I don’t know why we let you talk us into using the Royale in the first place,” Lucy grumbled. She and the others would rather have held the launch for their new dating agency somewhere

more modest – more within their tight budget. Yet, somehow, Connie had got her own way. But then, didn't Connie always get her own way? "This whole thing is costing an arm and a leg. I'm sure we could've found somewhere less expensive."

"If you recall, I did get a bargain on the catering." Connie was a little put out by their lack of enthusiasm.

"Only because you allowed the catering manager to gaze down your cleavage while you negotiated the deal." Jenny grinned.

"Anyway," Connie continued, ignoring the last remark, "we want everyone to know our new dating agency, for divorcees only, is a high class organisation – not some seedy, back street knocking-shop set up by a bunch of divorced women on the pull. Everyone recognises the Royale as somewhere special." She gestured around the room. "Even the Queen has visited this hotel."

"That may be," said Lucy. "But, I think it's extremely unlikely Her Majesty will be coming to sign up to our dating agency. I understand she's happily married." She frowned. "I still think we should've shopped around."

"I suppose you'd both have been happy to use the pokey, little nook we call an office for the launch?" Connie shook her head, causing her large, gold earrings to swing vigorously. "I simply felt we should make a big impression."

Lucy sighed. "We'll make a big impression in our bank balance if we don't manage to enrol a number of people tonight. And we're not just talking about the Royale. Don't forget all the ads you put in the papers; they don't come cheap, especially the glossy magazines. Not to mention these expensive evening dresses you insisted we buy."

"Talking of evening gowns, how do I look?" Jenny did a twirl. She hated arguments and tried to lighten the mood a little. Lucy was right, though, they had spent too much on this evening. But it was done now, so as far as she was concerned, they might as well enjoy it. Tomorrow was another day.

"You look great; but then you always do." Lucy looked down at her more ample shape. She felt so dowdy compared to the other two women. She had chosen to wear a black dress with an A-line skirt, which she had been assured would keep her hips in check. At the moment the dress and her hips seemed to be battling it out between them. She had tried so many diets during her life, yet she never lost more than a few pounds and even those sneaked back on when she wasn't looking. However, deep down, she knew her love of all things chocolate didn't help. "You have such a lovely figure and that slim-line dress shows off your trim waist and hips beautifully. I love the shade of green, too."

She sighed. What she wouldn't give to look even a little like Jenny. She was tall, attractive, and had the most beautiful auburn hair, which was always perfectly behaved. Whereas Lucy was short and round-ish. Okay, she was very round, with dull, mousy coloured hair, which always did its own thing, no matter how many times she combed it into place.

Jenny also had a lovely bubbly personality – so full of life. In fact she had it all. Lucy had never been able to understand why Rob had taken other women to his bed when he had Jenny at home. Some men were morons.

"We all look good tonight." Connie interrupted her thoughts.

"I only hope it'll all be worthwhile after the trouble we've gone to," replied Lucy.

“Of course it will. However, if you’re going to take that kind of attitude, then we’re on a loser from the start.” Connie crossed her fingers behind her back. She desperately hoped this evening would be a huge success. Lucy was right: she had been the one who insisted on having this grand launch, evening dresses and all. She had told a little white lie when she mentioned the estimated cost of the evening. If they had known the truth, she would never have got her own way.

The idea of starting up a high-class dating agency for divorced ladies and gentlemen had come late one evening when she and her three friends were having a few drinks at a wine bar. They had been discussing how difficult it was to get a decent man interested in them after going through a divorce.

“I joined a dating agency hoping to meet a nice bloke who was looking for an ordinary girl, with a view to marriage.” Jenny had wailed. “Yet, every man I’ve been introduced to seems to think because I’m divorced, I’ll be up for a quick grope on the back seat of his car.”

When it appeared the others had faced the same problem, Connie suddenly came up with the suggestion they should start their own dating agency for divorcees only. “Something with a bit of class, and an office in Mayfair,” she’d slurred over her umpteenth glass of wine. After further persuasion, not to mention several more drinks, the others agreed and Divorcees.biz was born.

The following morning, lying in bed with a cold towel wrapped around her head, Connie hadn’t felt so confident about the whole idea. For a start, it would take a great deal of money to set up. Andrew, her ex-husband, had been very generous in the divorce settlement, but her allowance certainly wouldn’t stretch to paying for an elaborate launch or renting an office in Mayfair. Not unless she drastically cut back on her wardrobe, which was something she was very reluctant to do. However, as she had proposed the idea in the first place and had insisted on an extravagant launch, and an office in Park Lane, she’d kept her reservations to herself. It was only after phoning nearly every person in her address book that she managed to find a room slightly larger than a broom cupboard on the top floor of a tall building on Park Lane. At least they were able to add Mayfair to the address on the top of their stationery and that was a very important factor as far as she was concerned.

“It’s almost time.” Lucy looked at her watch. She was beginning to feel a little nervous. “Are we all ready? Does anyone want to go to the loo? We can’t have one of us running off to the ladies room the minute the first person shows up.”

“If anyone shows up. Some people might be put off by such a grand venue.” Jenny gestured towards the room with its Roman style pillars, gold-flocked wallpaper, and crystal chandeliers.

“I’m not sure I would’ve even thought about coming to anywhere like this, simply to join a dating agency.”

“Nonsense! Of course you would. You enjoy the finer things in life, don’t you?” Connie pursed her lips in disapproval.

“Well...” Jenny began. The finer things in life were all very nice, but they usually came with a large price tag attached.

“Of course you do,” Connie interrupted. This was no time for Jenny to put doubts into everyone’s minds. “The only people who’ll be put off by the venue are the kind of people we don’t want anyway. Don’t forget, this is going to be a high-class agency. The right people will come and I’ve lined up a photographer to take some pictures during the evening, as well as photograph every person who joins. He should be here any minute now.”

Deep furrows appeared on Lucy’s forehead. This was getting out of hand. “A photographer! You mean a real photographer – a photographer that charges lots of money for every click of his

camera? Do you know how much those people cost? If you'd mentioned it earlier, I could have asked my brother. He'd have been happy to do it for a couple of drinks."

"If we're going to be an online agency, we need to have really good pictures up there on our site." Connie paused. "I don't mean to be disrespectful to your brother, but we want professional photographs to show our prospective clients that we're an upmarket organisation."

"Still," Lucy pouted, "I think this should have been discussed. You seem to have made all the decisions without even consulting the rest of us."

"It's almost time, Madam." Connie welcomed the waiter's interruption. However, her relief was short lived when he continued. "Do you wish me to pour the champagne now?"

"Champagne!" Lucy hissed. "Are you mad, Connie? We can't afford champagne." She looked across at Jenny. "You see what I mean? I didn't know about the champagne. Did you?"

"No, I didn't." Jenny turned to Connie. "Isn't it rather extravagant? Goodness knows how much they'll charge us for champagne in a place like this!"

"Yes, please pour out a few glasses now," said Connie, smiling graciously at the waiter. She turned back to her friends. "For goodness sake, keep your voices down. He'll hear you and think we can't afford to pay."

"He'll be right then, won't he? We *can't* afford to pay!" Jenny insisted. "You're forgetting, I'm the treasurer of our little venture and I know how much we have in the bank. You should..."

"Well, we certainly can't afford to skim on the drinks." Connie broke in. "Not now we've spent so much setting up the launch. Calm down, have a glass of champagne and enjoy the evening."

"I'll enjoy the evening a lot more, when I know we can pay for it." Lucy grumbled, taking a glass from the waiter. She looked around. "Where's Sadie? She should be here having some champagne. Come to think of it, I haven't seen her yet."

"Wasn't she downstairs with you, Connie?" asked Jenny.

"No! I thought she was up here with Lucy."

"Oh my God! What's happened to Sadie? Surely someone must have heard from her," Lucy wailed.

A loud thump in the corridor caught their attention. The door swung open and Sadie strode in, towing an extremely large suitcase behind her. She was wearing a long, skin-tight, strapless, white lace dress, which looked in danger of sliding down to the floor any moment, and a pair of ridiculously high-heeled shoes. Dumping the case by the door, she hitched up her dress a little, tripped across to the waiter and took a glass of champagne. "I really need this," she said, swallowing it down in one go. She replaced the glass and took another.

"Where the hell have you been?" yelled Connie. "We've only just realised you were missing."

"You mean I could've been stripped naked, raped and left for dead in some back alley, and all the while you guys hadn't even noticed I was missing?" She looked at the waiter. "Some friends, huh?" Her glasses slid down the bridge of her nose and she pushed them back into place.

"You do exaggerate, Sadie," Lucy laughed.

"Okay, we can take it from here, thank you." Jenny took the tray from the waiter, who was grinning broadly. "I'm sure there's something else you should be doing."

“Not really. I’m part of the staff that’s been assigned to help out in here tonight,” he replied.

“The others will be here to hand out canapés to the guests as they arrive.”

“Then please help out later. We don’t need you at the moment.” Jenny placed the tray on the table and watched the waiter walk out of the door.

“Of course we would’ve missed you. It’s just we all thought you were with another one of us – if you see what I mean. Where’re you going, anyway?” Connie pointed towards the suitcase.

“I haven’t a clue!” Sadie took a sip of champagne. “Alex arrived at the front door a couple of hours ago and said he wanted the flat back. He had some woman with him. He told me she was his new girlfriend.” She pulled a face. “Girlfriend – my arse! She had tart written all over her. Her skirt hardly covered her backside.” Sadie’s glasses slipped down her nose again and she pushed them back.

“Your vocabulary doesn’t get any better,” sniffed Connie. Sadie was one of those women who never minced their words. She always said exactly what she thought. It could be so embarrassing at times. “I hope you aren’t going to use that sort of language during the evening.”

“You’re such a snob,” said Sadie. She swallowed another mouthful of champagne.

“I’m not a snob!” Connie snapped back at her. “How can I possibly be a snob, and still call someone like you a friend?” She bit her lip. Why had she reacted like that? She hadn’t meant to sound so harsh.

Connie had known Sadie for several years, having met when they both worked at the same firm. They were complete opposites. While she enjoyed the finer things in life, Sadie was down-to-earth, matter-of-fact and anything else that described someone who just got on with life, whatever it brought. Yet, despite Sadie’s outrageous dress sense, her more colourful language, and her quirky outlook on life, they became really firm friends. Even when they had both moved to other jobs, they’d remained very close.

“I see. So…” Sadie began.

“I don’t get it, Sadie. Why didn’t you just tell him to get lost?” Lucy asked. She knew Connie would never have reacted like that under normal circumstances. But she feared the impending launch was taking its toll on everyone at the moment.

“Because I was foolish enough to agree to something really stupid. I was to live in the flat for the foreseeable future. However, the first one to get a regular partner could claim it for good. Never in a million years did I think he would find anyone to fall for him; he’s such a rat.” Sadie hesitated. That sounded ridiculous: after all, she’d married him, hadn’t she? “Still,” she continued, “thinking back to the woman dripping from his arm, I reckon he’s got what he deserves.” Sadie swallowed down the rest of her drink and took another glass. “This is good stuff!”

“Hey! Steady on. The champagne isn’t on the house. Connie ordered it for this evening and it has to go a long way.” Jenny sighed. “So where’re you planning to spend the night? You were joking when you said you hadn’t a clue, weren’t you? You must have somewhere fixed up.”

“Yes, of course I have.” Sadie tried to avoid looking at her friends, but she could feel their eyes boring into her, waiting for her to tell them her plans. “Well, sort of…” She took another sip of her champagne and gulped it down. “Okay. No! I suppose I haven’t. I kind of hoped one of you would offer to put me up.” She looked at her three friends in turn, but they all remained silent.

“Come on, guys. I certainly can’t afford to stay here at the Royale and I haven’t had time to look for anything else. I had to pack a few things, get dressed and come here. Then I forgot my wallet. All I had was loose change, not even enough for a taxi. I had to take the bus. I looked an idiot dressed like this.” She pointed down at her dress. “I could hardly lift my foot up onto the platform and just when I thought I’d cracked it, I trod on my dress. So of course when I heaved myself up onto the bus, my dress slid down and I flashed my boobs at the driver. That happened twice! In the end, he took pity on me and came out of his little cab thingy and lifted me on. He even waved aside the fare. Everyone on the bus cheered! Nice of him really – don’t you think?” She swallowed some more champagne.

The others looked at each other. They were trying to suppress their laughter, while picturing the scene.

“You mean Alex didn’t even give you a few days notice?” Jenny said, at last. “He expected you to just walk out of the flat and leave everything?”

“Yep! That’s about it.”

“Knowing you, I’m surprised you didn’t shut the door in his face,” uttered Lucy.

“I did, but he just opened it again – he still has a key.” She giggled. “I did trip him up, though. I stuck my foot out as he strode in. He was trying to look the big man in front of his tart, but fell over my foot, crashed into the hall table and ended up in a crumpled heap on the floor.” She sighed. “I guess that’s when the shit hit the fan. He got to his feet and booted me out straight away. I suppose he was trying to salvage some dignity.”

“You can stay in my spare room,” said Connie, heaving a sigh. It was the least she could do after her outburst earlier. “But only for a few days. I remember the last time you stayed at my house; it looked like a rubbish dump. This time, I’ll set out a few ground rules.” Sadie screwed up her eyes, causing her rather large, ornate glasses to slide down the bridge of her nose again. “Rules? What kind of rules?” she demanded, pushing her glasses back into place.

“Are they new?” Jenny broke in. She pointed at the glasses. “They look way over the top, even for you!”

“No, I borrowed them from a friend especially for tonight.” Sadie removed the glasses and held them out for the others to see. “Cool, aren’t they? I can see through them okay – well almost. If I squint a little I get a better view of what’s going on.” She giggled. “I flagged down the wrong bus twice. Trouble is, they’re a bit large for me and keep sliding down my nose. My friend has a fatter face. However, I thought the large white frames with the sparkly bits running around the top went with my white dress.” Putting the glasses back on, she peered at Connie. “What rules?”

“And what about that?” Jenny pointed to a large ring on Sadie’s finger. “I don’t think I’ve seen it before.”

“No, I’ve only just bought it.” She grinned as she held up her hand so they could all see the ring. There was a large, dark coloured stone in the centre. “It’s called a Mood ring because it changes colour with my mood.”

“How does the ring know when your mood has changed?” asked Connie.

Sadie looked at her blankly and shrugged. “Didn’t I just say? It changes colour.”

“Yes, I heard that bit. But how does it... Never mind.” Connie rolled her eyes. Sadie could take you round and round in circles forever.

“Shush, I can hear voices in the corridor. They might be our first arrivals.” Lucy put down her glass. “Sadie, I’ll help you to move your case under the table. The tablecloth should hide it.” She pointed to the table laden with food. “Otherwise one of our prospective clients might think you’ve come prepared to move in with him right away.”

“If he looks anything like George Clooney I’d be happy to do just that.” Sadie giggled and then hiccupped. “Oops, sorry!” She placed her hand over her mouth.

Lucy frowned. First, Connie and Sadie had almost come to blows and now Sadie had drunk too much champagne and was likely to giggle her way through the whole event. She hoped this wasn’t an omen for the rest of the evening.

Connie reached the door first and held out her hand to greet a rather distinguished looking gentleman. Behind him trailed another gentleman. The other ladies followed a little way behind Connie. “Good evening, nice to see you,” she said, looking the first fellow up and down. He was wearing an evening suit and bow tie. This was a man of class, just the kind of clientele she had in mind for the agency. Very impressed, she gave him a warm smile.

“Is this the Divorcees.biz Dating Agency launch?” he enquired. Taking her hand, he leaned forward and kissed it.

“That’s a bit over the top,” Sadie whispered to Lucy.

“Yes, that’s right, and you’re most welcome.” Connie gushed, trying to cover Sadie’s remark.

“I’m Connie Somerfield and these are my partners, Jenny Matthews, Lucy Anderson, and Sadie Grant. You are the first to arrive.”

“My name is Quentin Brooke and this is Alan Peterson, a colleague.” They all shook hands

“Would you care for a glass of champagne?” Connie pointed towards the tray on a side table.

“We have a waiter assigned to us for the evening, but he seems to have disappeared at the moment.” Making discreet signals to Sadie to find the waiter, she led the two men across the room and handed them each a glass of champagne. “Please help yourselves to some food.” She gestured towards the table. “I do hope you both have an enjoyable evening.”

“Yes, I’m sure we will,” replied Quentin. “However, I see you have more guests arriving, so we won’t keep you. No doubt we shall speak again later this evening.”

Connie turned to see about a dozen people spilling through the door. She smiled at Quentin before hurrying across to greet them. By now the waiter had reappeared and was striding towards the champagne. Sadie was tripping along some way behind him, hitching up her dress as she went.

“Looks as though word has got around,” Jenny whispered to Connie out of the side of her mouth, before greeting another new arrival. “We’re so pleased to see you here,” she said to a tall, rather elegant woman, who appeared to be alone. “I’ll introduce you to my friends in a few minutes, but meanwhile, please have a glass of champagne.”

After about an hour, the room was full of people and still more were piling through the door. Most came alone, though there were a few, like Quentin, who arrived with a friend. Connie was delighted to see they were all wearing formal attire. “Just what I’d hoped for,” she said, clasping her hands together. “It shows good taste; exactly the sort of clientele we need in our agency.”

Sadie looked around the room and smiled. “I reckon we should get commission from the hire shops. They’ll have made a great deal of money from our launch.”

“What makes you think they’ve hired the suits?” Connie gestured towards everyone. “These people might attend formal functions all the time.”

“Come off it!” Sadie retorted. “Surely you, with your eye for detail, must have noticed that some of the jackets are way too big or small for the men wearing them.” She paused. “Now if they did a swap...”

“All right!” Connie said. She glanced around at the men who were nearest to her. “They might have hired the outfits, so what? At least they’ve taken the trouble to dress correctly for the event,”

“Okay! Okay!” Sadie held up her hands. “Don’t come out in a rash! All I’m saying is, they might not turn out to be the sort of people you think they are – if you get my drift?”

“I’m going for another drink,” mumbled Connie. Sadie could be so irritating sometimes. The trouble was, she was so very often right.

“I’ll join you.” Sadie followed Connie across to the waiter.

“Don’t you think you’ve had enough already?”

“No way!” Sadie uttered, picking up a glass. “For goodness sake, if I’m paying for it, then I want my share!”

During the evening, the four friends were left breathless, as they tried to spend some time with everyone. “It’s going well,” said Jenny, when they all finally managed to get together for a few minutes, “and there are some rather attractive men here. I rather like Alan, the guy who arrived with Quentin. He has such come-to-bed eyes.”

“More like x-ray eyes, if you ask me!” Sadie sniffed. “I could feel him undressing me every time he looked my way.”

“That wouldn’t take much doing,” Jenny said with a raised eyebrow, “your dress doesn’t leave much to the imagination, especially when he accidentally trod on it. I thought you were going to flash your boobs again.”

“Nevertheless, I think we should keep an eye on him.” Sadie heaved up her dress again. “I bet he did that on purpose.” She looked across the room. “I prefer the guy over there.” She pointed to a young man helping himself to some food. “Now he’s what I call attractive. He could rattle my chain any time.” She quickly turned away. “Oh my goodness, don’t look now, he’s looking this way.”

“Yes, he is rather handsome,” Jenny agreed.

“What’re you doing? I thought I told you not to look!” Sadie paused. “What’s he doing now?”

“I don’t know. You just said not to look.”

“Well he’s probably seen you watching him by now, so it doesn’t matter. Is he still looking over here?”

“Yes, he’s still looking,” said Connie, joining in the conversation. “No, wait a minute. He’s looking at someone else now.” She laughed. “I don’t think you stand much chance there, Sadie. He looks about ten years younger than you – unless, of course, he likes older women. However, I wouldn’t get your hopes up too much, he seems to be devouring a tall, elegant woman right now.”

Sadie scowled when she turned back to see him handing a glass of champagne to the attractive woman, who had arrived on her own. "Jenny rather likes Alan," she continued, "but I'm not sure about him."

"Why?" Connie asked. "What's wrong with him?"

"For one thing, he tried to pull my dress down. And for another he reminds me of Raffles." Connie raised her eyebrows. "Who?"

"Raffles! You know? Raffles. The guy in all those old movies, who used to go to parties and rob the other guests. All he lacks is a shiny top hat and a swirling cloak."

"Sadie! You're unbelievable! You've had too much to drink," uttered Connie.

"No, I haven't. I'm just saying watch your jewellery." Sadie covered the rings on her fingers.

"You've got a vivid imagination." Connie laughed. "Besides, I don't think you've got anything to worry about. I doubt he's here to rip the mood ring off your finger."

Sadie opened her mouth, but before she could say anything more, Lucy joined them. "Everyone seems to be mixing, which is good. I had a horrible notion they might all stand around not saying a word."

"They're mixing too well," grumbled Sadie, glancing around the room. "If we aren't careful, they'll all pair off and leave without joining our agency. I think we'd better start asking people to sign-up or else we won't get a penny."

"Sadie has a point," Jenny added. "It would be just our luck for that to happen."

"My God, you're right. I hadn't thought of that." Hurrying across to one side of the room, Connie kicked off her shoes and heaved herself up onto a chair, taking great care not to step on her dress. It wouldn't do to fall into a crumpled heap on the floor. "Ladies and gentlemen," she called out. As no one seemed to hear, she tried again, this time much louder. However, everyone carried on talking. Connie looked down at her friends and shrugged. "I can't make myself heard above the chatter. I'll have to leave it for the moment."

"Not bloody likely! Shit, Connie, the place could be half empty before you get a chance to say anything," said Sadie. "You stay up there, I'll get their attention." Lifting her fingers to her mouth, she gave out a most piercing whistle.

"What the hell are you doing...?" Connie yelled. She broke off. The room had fallen silent and everyone was staring at her. She had been shouting at Sadie, when everyone suddenly stopped talking.

"You're on," hissed Sadie. "Get on with it!"

Connie smiled to hide her embarrassment and quickly began talking. "We... that is, I, on behalf of Divorcees.biz would like to make a couple of announcements." She coughed. She was making a mess of this. The well-rehearsed speech wasn't going to plan. She had been totally put off her stride when Sadie had whistled. That sort of thing wasn't done in polite society.

Taking a deep breath, she continued by thanking everyone for joining them. "The fact you are all here tonight must mean a dating agency especially for divorced people is needed." After telling them how she and her colleagues hoped this dating agency would be different from the rest, she went on to explain the reasoning behind the higher than normal fee.

“We feel that the two-hundred and fifty pounds enrolment fee, will be a deterrent to those who aren’t seriously looking for a partner and are simply joining the agency for a lark.” Connie paused as there was a ripple of laughter from the floor. “But on a more serious note,” she continued, “allowing us to arrange all the meetings, means that we know where and when they will take place and more importantly, who with. We feel this will be a simple, but effective precaution for everyone’s safety.” She smiled. “However, it also means that at least one of us needs to be watching the website most of the time, which brings us to the extra fee of fifteen pounds every time you wish to arrange a meeting.”

Connie quickly glanced around the room, trying to gauge the reaction to her comments. Most of the women were looking at each other and nodding their heads in agreement. It seemed the idea had gone down well.

“So, for those of you who would like to enrol,” she continued, “forms can be found on the table by the door. Once you have completed the form, proceed to have your photograph taken by Terry, our photographer.” She gestured towards Terry and he held up his hand. “He will print out a copy of the photograph for you to sign and attach to your form, this will ensure we know who is who when we add you to the website.”

Connie concluded by stressing they wanted Divorcees.biz to be a reputable dating agency, which meant they needed everyone to be honest when they filled out their profile. “So please, no tinkering with the truth.” After thanking everyone again, she stepped down from the chair. “Thank goodness that’s over,” said Connie. She asked Jenny and Lucy to go over to the table, where a queue was beginning to form. Grabbing Sadie’s arm, she steered her to a corner of the room. “Was that whistle really necessary? It certainly wasn’t ladylike. I felt so embarrassed standing up there with everyone peering at me. They all thought it had come from me.”

“Of course it was bloody necessary!” Sadie snapped. “How else would they have noticed you? Besides, you were the one shouting like a fish wife when everyone stopped talking.” Connie shook her head. It was amazing how swiftly Sadie could turn everything around so it appeared to be someone else’s fault. “All right, let’s drop it. But *please* watch your language when you’re talking to our potential clients. Think before you speak, try to be diplomatic.”

“Okay, okay.” Sadie held up her hands. “Don’t worry, I’ll make all the right noises.” Connie wasn’t convinced and would like to have said more, but seeing the others needed help at the table, she let the matter drop and hurried across to them. At the table, she gave a huge smile to the man nearest to her. “So you wish to join the agency?”

“Yes, my name is Brian Lomax.” He looked around the room. “It seems you’re off to a good start.”

“Yes, indeed. We’re delighted so many people have turned up this evening.” Connie handed him a form. “Jenny is our treasurer, so when you have paid her, she’ll give you a receipt. If you have any questions at all, please do not hesitate to ask.” She held out her hand. “And now, may I welcome you to the Divorcees.biz Dating Agency.”

“Thank you, my dear.” Brian took her hand. “I hope to hear from *you* very soon,” he winked, still holding her hand “Perhaps, when you check my form, you will find us to be compatible.” Connie smiled, weakly. “Perhaps,” she said, pulling her hand away.

“Sounds like you have an admirer there.” Sadie grinned, as Brian walked off towards Jenny.

“I hope not!” replied Connie with a shudder. Brian looked back at her and gave a little wave. Raising her hand, she wiggled her fingers. “Surely I can do better than that. He’s eighty, if he’s a day.”

“You’re exaggerating a bit, besides, he could be wealthy. He might even be a millionaire looking for someone to leave his money to.” Sadie clapped her hands with excitement and her glasses slid down her nose.

“I don’t care. There’s more to life than money.” Connie paused, as Sadie pulled a face. “Okay, I agree, money is important, but there’s got to be more than money in romance.” She was about to turn to the next person in the queue, when she thought of something else. “By the way, what makes you think he’s wealthy? I recall you saying everyone wasn’t what they seemed to be.”

“Because he’s the only one wearing a suit that actually fits him,” Sadie said with a giggle. She turned back to the queue. “Okay, you guys! Who’s next?” Connie took a better look at Brian. Sadie was right. His suit was a good fit and looked expensive.

They were only half way through the evening and already the four friends were beginning to feel the strain. They had shaken countless hands and explained numerous times what they hoped their agency would achieve, yet the queue seemed to be never ending. Connie picked up a form to hand to the next person without even looking up. “Good evening, welcome to...”

“Good evening, Connie.” A man’s voice interrupted her.

Recognising the voice, she looked up quickly. “Andrew?” she hissed. “What the hell are you doing here?” She hurried around the table and came face to face with her ex-husband.

“I’ve come to join the new dating agency.”

“You can’t!” Connie steered him away from the table and across to where the waiter was standing. “Have a drink and then go.” She took a glass from the tray and thrust it into his hand.

“Why can’t I join?” he asked, sipping the champagne. “This is good stuff, not the normal run of the mill sparkling wine you find at some of these functions. You should try some.”

“I jolly well hope it’s good stuff. I’m paying enough for it.” She paused and gestured towards her friends still busy at the tables. “Well, at least, *we* are.”

“You mean this is your dating agency?” Andrew spluttered. “It can’t be.”

“Yes, it is. Which is why I don’t think it’s a good idea for you to join.”

“Why ever not? The fact I’m your ex-husband shouldn’t make any difference.” He grinned. “In business you can’t afford to be choosy.”

“That’s very true. Though it depends on who you’re dealing with.” Sadie chimed in. She had heard the last part of their conversation. “Hello Andrew, nice to see you. Sorry to interrupt, Connie, but have you got any more forms tucked away somewhere? We seem to be running short. Just tell me where they are, I’ll see to it.”

“Yes, there are lots in my bag under the table.” She turned her head away, so Andrew wouldn’t hear. “Get me out of this.”

“Hello, Sadie,” said Andrew. “How are you? I was very surprised to learn you ladies had set this up.”

“Why was that, Andrew?” Sadie drawled. She took a glass of champagne from the tray. “Didn’t you think a bunch of women were capable of doing something so...adventurous?” She watched

him over the rim of her glass, while she took a sip of champagne. He was looking rather flustered.

“No! No, not at all. I...”

“So, you *did* think we were incapable?” prompted Sadie, pushing her glasses into place. “That’s what they call sexist, isn’t it?”

“No! Sorry, what I mean is, yes,” Andrew bumbled.

“Yes, we’re incapable, or yes, it’s what they call sexist?” Sadie glanced at Connie, who had her hand over her mouth, trying hard not to laugh.

“Of course not... You’re confusing me.” Desperately looking for an escape route, Andrew pointed across the room. “Ah! There’s what’s-his-name. Must have a word, I’ll catch you later.” He hurried away and was lost in the crowd.

“Well done, Sadie. I didn’t want to be stuck with him all evening.” Connie laughed. “You certainly put him in his place. I don’t think he believed I was capable of anything business-like. Only cooking and doing his dirty washing.”

“Most men are the same, all they think about is having their creature comforts laid out for them,” agreed Sadie. Though she didn’t really think Andrew was like that. She had always thought him to be a very considerate man. She looked across the room to where he was now having a conversation with Quentin. She was sorry she had made him feel so uncomfortable.

Connie followed her gaze. “He was good in bed, though,” she murmured.

“I wouldn’t know,” replied Sadie.

“Well someone did, otherwise we wouldn’t be divorced!”

“I suppose that’s something positive about him – being good in bed, I mean.” Sadie sipped her drink. “Most men just think they are.”

“We’d better get back to the table.” Connie drew herself back to the matter in hand. “You said you needed more forms.”

At last the evening came to an end. When the last person had departed out of the door, the four friends slumped into the chairs.

“I’m knackered!” Sadie threw her head back and closed her eyes.

“My hand has gone numb after greeting so many people this evening.” Connie rubbed her right hand. “Why do men seem to think they have to grip so hard? Do you think it’s a macho thing?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps you’re right. It could be their way of showing you how strong they are,” said Jenny. “Anyway, it all went very well in the end and that’s the main thing. At the last count I had two hundred and seventy-five forms, so at two hundred and fifty pounds a head, we should have over sixty eight thousand pounds. There may even be more when I do the final check.”

“Not a bad start for a bunch of women,” said Sadie. She opened her eyes and glanced at Connie. They both laughed.

“What’s the joke?” asked Lucy.

“Andrew turned up and told me how surprised he was that we four had set this up.” Connie explained. “Condescending so-and-so. Anyway, Sadie overheard, and by the time she’d finished with him, he didn’t know what he was saying. You know what she’s like when she gets going. Andrew scampered across to some friends as fast as he could.”

“Did you know he joined our agency?” asked Jenny, cautiously. When he had handed her his form and photograph, she wasn’t sure whether to accept them or not. However, as there had been a number of other people waiting in the queue at the time, she’d decided not to cause a scene.

“He did say he came here to join, but I wasn’t sure it was a good idea and tried to put him off.” Connie shrugged. “However, if he paid the fee, why not? He did pay, didn’t he?” she added sharply. “I mean, he paid the full fee and didn’t ask for a discount or anything?”

“Yes, he paid the full amount. In fact he paid cash,” replied Jenny.

“Two hundred and seventy five people. I didn’t think we would get so many here tonight,” said Lucy.

Connie went across to the table where the remainder of the food was still waiting to be cleared away. “The food went well,” she said, choosing a couple of sandwiches. “I’m starving. I didn’t have anything to eat earlier. I was so nervous about the whole thing, I couldn’t even think about eating, but now I could eat a horse. There’s some food left if you guys are hungry, though you’ll need to be quick. The staff will be along soon to clear it away.”

“Not for me,” uttered Lucy, wearily. “To tell you the truth, I’m shattered and just want to fall into bed. What time should we meet up in the morning? We’ll have to go through all the forms and add the profiles to the website. It doesn’t matter that it’s Sunday. They’ll all expect to log onto the site and see their profiles up there.”

“We’ll meet at the office at around ten o’clock,” mumbled Connie, tucking into her plate of food.

“I’m going home, too,” said Jenny. “Perhaps we could share a taxi, Lucy? See you both in the morning,” she added over her shoulder.

“I’m not hungry either, Connie, and don’t forget I’m coming home with you. You said you would put me up for a week or so.” Sadie pulled her suitcase out from under the table.

Connie groaned. “Oh blast! I’d forgot about that. Yes, okay. If you don’t want anything to eat, perhaps you could organise a taxi. I’ll only be a couple of minutes.” She screwed up her eyes. “What do you mean a week or so? I thought I said a few days.”

“Whatever!” Sadie needed to keep Connie sweet for the time being, so she didn’t want to push her luck by arguing about it now. Hopefully, the few days would automatically lead to a week and, if she played her cards right, a month or two. Finding something she could afford wouldn’t be easy.

Back at the house, Connie pointed to the spare bedroom. “Hope you sleep okay.”

“I’m so tired. I think I could sleep anywhere.” She paused. “Thanks for putting me up, Connie. I promise I won’t get in your hair.”

“It’s not my hair, I’m worried about,” replied Connie. “You’re just so untidy. I recall the last time you stayed with me, I spent most of my time clearing up after you.”

“It’ll be different this time, Connie. I promise to be more tidy.”

“I’ll believe that when I see it.” Connie sighed as she left the bedroom. Sadie was a great girl, but she did tend to cause chaos wherever she went.

Sadie unpacked her case quickly and began hanging her clothes neatly in the wardrobe. “Blow this!” she mumbled, and flung the rest of the stuff over a chair. “I can start being tidy tomorrow.” Undressing, she flopped down onto the bed. “Goodnight,” she called out. “Give me a shout in the morning if I sleep in.” If Connie made any comment, Sadie didn’t hear. She fell asleep the moment her head hit the pillow.

*

CHAPTER TWO

“It seems we’re the first to arrive. I thought the others would have been here by now.” Connie was rather surprised to find the door to the office was still locked. She fumbled around in her bag for the keys. “We’ve just got to find out where the switch is for the landing light. It’s too dim up here to find anything.”

“I knew we’d be too early,” grumbled Sadie. “I told you we could’ve had another hour in bed.”

“You *did* have another hour in bed!” uttered Connie, pulling the keys from the depths of her bag.

“If you remember, I was up and dressed an hour before you. You wouldn’t budge. I had to resort to dropping a cold flannel over your face. If you’d got up earlier, we might have missed all the traffic at Marble Arch.”

“Okay, okay,” Sadie held up her hands. “I knew I’d get the blame for the traffic hold up at Marble Arch.” She looked around the empty office. “So now we’re here, what’re we going to do? There’s nothing we can do without Jenny. She has the forms and the cash and, if she has any sense, she’ll still be curled up in bed. It’s Sunday morning for goodness sake or hadn’t you noticed?” She dropped her bag onto the floor and slumped into a chair. “By the way, has anyone ever told you your spare bed is uncomfortable? I hardly slept a wink last night.”

“Andrew complained about it a couple of times, when I told him to sleep in the spare room after I found out about his affair with the floozy.” Connie paused. “Anyway, if you couldn’t sleep, why did I have so much trouble waking you up this morning?”

“I thought Andrew only slept with the floozy once – hardly what you would call an affair,” Sadie replied.

“Once can become a habit,” Connie said. “Besides, how do I know he was telling me the truth? He could have been shagging the wretched woman for months.”

“True.” Sadie yawned. “On the other hand, has he seen her since? It doesn’t sound like it when he’s resorted to joining a dating agency.” She paused. “Our dating agency.”

“Whose side are you on? Aren’t you forgetting who you’re relying on for a bed tonight?”

“I’m not on anybody’s side. I’m simply looking at it from all perspectives.” Sadie sighed. “And all I’m saying is, Andrew might not have seen the floozy again. It could have been a one off. He’s a man, isn’t he? He was out at a stag do and...”

“What was a woman doing at a stag party in the first place? It could have been a put up job. He might have invited her for a weekend away.” Connie interrupted. She hoped that would silence Sadie – at least for the moment. Once her friend got started on something, she was like a dog with a bone. Gnawing at it for hours. This wasn’t the first time Sadie had suggested Andrew’s misdemeanour might have been a one off. Well Sadie could think what she liked, but as far as she was concerned, once, twice, or a regular habit, it was still a betrayal. “Listen! It sounds like someone’s coming! I hope it’s Jenny, then we can make a start.”

The door flew open and Jenny bounced in. “Sorry I’m a bit late, but I slept in and then the traffic was bad around Marble Arch. I think there’s a problem with a gas leak.”

“We got caught up in that, too.” Connie laughed.

Jenny opened her bag and pulled out four bundles of forms, all fastened with elastic bands. “I divided them into two groups this morning over breakfast. These are all men.” She placed two

bundles on the desk. “And these are women,” she added, holding up the other two bundles. “We seem to have a fairly equal number of each.”

“Yes, I noticed that last night when I looked around the room,” said Sadie. “I’d been concerned we might have a surplus of one sex.”

“Okay,” Connie interrupted. “How’re we going to do this? What I mean is, how do we set about getting them from here to there?” She pointed to the forms and then to the computer.

“Lucy is the computer buff, but she isn’t here yet. So really we can’t do anything until she gets here. She’s set up the website and if we start messing around with it, we could lose everything.” Sadie picked up the electric kettle. “Why don’t we have some coffee while we’re waiting? I’m sure she won’t be long.”

“Alright,” said Connie, reluctantly. She was keen to get everything moving. Any clients logging on this morning would expect to find the site up and running, yet here they were, sitting around drinking coffee. “But once Lucy gets the names up there, we must sit down with her and learn how to do these things for ourselves. We each need to know how to set up a client and arrange meetings for them. We can’t wait for Lucy every time someone gets in touch. It’s not professional, and it’s not fair on her.”

Lucy arrived just as the kettle boiled. “Good to see you have your priorities in order. I’m dying for a coffee. I’ve been stuck at...”

“Marble Arch!” the others chorused.

“Yes! How did you know?”

“This is going to take forever,” moaned Sadie, tossing another form on the pile in front of Lucy.

“That’s another form ready to be added to the site.” She rubbed her right hand. “I don’t think I’ve hand written so much stuff since I left school. I’m beginning to get writer’s cramp.”

When Lucy first set up the website, she had suggested they shouldn’t include any addresses for fear of someone hacking in and sending unsolicited messages to their clients. Though it meant they had to write everyone’s name and address together with a few details into ledgers, the others had agreed.

“I think some of these people are telling a few lies,” said Connie. She held up a form. “For instance, this guy, Brian Lomax, has put his age at forty-nine.”

“So?” asked Lucy, glancing up from the keyboard.

“Seventy-nine more like.” Connie retorted. “Someone must have noticed him.” She gazed at the blank faces. “For heaven’s sake, Sadie, you saw him coming on to me. You even suggested he might be wealthy.”

“Gosh, yes. I do remember him. He did look elderly, but I think you’re exaggerating a bit.” Sadie grinned. “I seem to recall, he rather fancied you.”

“So, he came on to you, Connie?” laughed Lucy. “Perhaps I should arrange a date for the two of you?” Glancing at the others, she smiled and wiggled her fingers over the keyboard.

“Don’t you think it would be good for our new company to get two people matched up on our first day?”

“Don’t you dare!” Connie yelled.

“Andrew seems to have advanced even further in the world.” Sadie held up his form. “I know he’s Chairman of a large international company, but according to this, he is also a consultant for another two top firms. Drives a Bentley, a Rolls, and has a yacht moored in some French resort, and another in the Bahamas. It seems he has a mansion somewhere in the country and a large apartment in Park Lane.”

“The lying toad!” Connie reached over and snatched the form from Sadie’s hand. “I hope they all haven’t told lies about themselves.”

“How would we know if they had?” asked Jenny. “It’s only because we all know Andrew rather well and you distinctly remember Brian Lomax from last night that we’re even having this discussion.”

“That’s true. Nevertheless, we do know all this information on Andrew’s form is rubbish. We can’t upload it – it’s fraud – isn’t it?” Connie peered at the others over the top of her reading glasses. “Some unsuspecting woman is going to arrange to meet him and find out he’s a lying cheat.”

“But we can’t alter things people have written about themselves,” insisted Jenny. “That would be wrong. If you’re unhappy about what Andrew has put on his form, then you should give him a call and discuss it with him.” She paused. “The same applies to Brian Lomax. However, as for the others, we must upload the information they’ve given us.” She looked across at Lucy. “What do you think?”

“I think you’re right. There isn’t anything we can do at this stage.” Lucy suddenly had another thought. “Unless of course, someone makes a complaint after they’ve met up with a prospective partner and find things aren’t what they read on the website. Then we would have the right to check it out and alter the profile accordingly.”

“Perhaps we should have given the whole dating agency thing more thought.” Connie sighed heavily. “We were relying on everyone being honest and telling the truth about themselves. It seems we were a bit naïve.” She hesitated. “Perhaps we should just add Brian’s details as he’s written them. And as for Andrew...” She glanced back at Andrew’s form. “I’ll give him a ring later today and have a chat about what he’s written here. I don’t want to do it now. He’s likely to talk for ages and I’d rather we finished loading these folks onto the site.”

The women continued adding clients to the web database until Sadie suddenly realised how hungry she was. “If I don’t have a break from reading all this stuff, I think my eyeballs will fall out and my stomach will declare war on me,” she said. “Isn’t it about time we had something to eat, it’s gone three o’clock. I don’t suppose anyone thought to bring anything?”

“I made a few sandwiches and bought some biscuits on the way here.” Lucy rummaged around in her bag. “I thought we might be stuck in here for a while.”

“Well done! I must admit Sadie and I didn’t think about it.” Connie reached for the kettle. “But once Sadie dragged herself out of bed it was too late to do anything, anyway.”

“I thought it would be all my fault,” Sadie snorted.

“Forget the kettle.” Jenny giggled. She pulled two bottles of champagne from a cooler-bag she’d heaved into the office. “I saw them sitting on the table just before I left the Royale and took pity on them. They’ve been in my fridge all night.”

“Great! Now that’s more like it. I thought you’d brought a mountain of sandwiches in there.” Sadie leapt to her feet. “I’ll get the glasses.” She paused. “Do we have any glasses? Or will we have to use the mugs?”

“Yes, of course we have wine glasses,” Connie replied. “I brought some spare ones from home when we set up this office.”

“I should have guessed,” Sadie said. “I can’t see you drinking wine or champagne out of a mug.” It took a while to clear a space where they could spread out the food and drink. The office was so small there was only room for two desks and four chairs. The women had to sit facing each other. A filing cabinet, which doubled for a small table for the coffee, tea, and mugs, stood in one corner, while a sink was squashed into another.

“We really must get a bigger office as soon as we can afford it. This is ridiculous.” Connie carefully placed some of the paperwork onto the floor under the desk. “We can hardly move in here.” She looked up at Jenny. “Will there be enough room now? I don’t want to get these mixed up, especially as we have them into some sort of order.”

“We would have a bigger office if we had taken the one in Ealing,” said Sadie, almost tripping over her handbag. “It was three times the size of this poky hole. But you insisted we should be here on ‘Park Lane’.” She made quotations signs in the air.

“I simply thought that if we were going to be an upmarket agency, we should have an upmarket address,” Connie explained. “Anyway, once we get the agency underway, we won’t all be in here at the same time.”

“Okay!” Sadie held up her hands. “I was only saying

“Stop arguing, you guys,” Jenny interrupted. “I’ve poured out the champagne and Lucy has laid out the sandwiches; so cool it and let’s eat.”

“I didn’t realise cheese and chutney sandwiches and champagne went so well together.” Jenny popped the last morsel of sandwich into her mouth.

“I think champagne makes everything taste better,” replied Connie, refilling their glasses.

“I agree,” Sadie giggled, as she raised her glass to her lips.

“You’ve had enough,” said Jenny. “Don’t forget we still have lots of forms to go through this afternoon.”

After finishing off the champagne, they went back to sifting through the forms.

“I think we might be coming to the end at last.” Connie held up about half a dozen forms.

“Thank goodness! I have a splitting headache,” Sadie moaned. “I thought we were going to be here all night.”

“I must admit I didn’t think it would take so long.” Jenny passed another form to Lucy. She laughed. “You had too much champagne at lunch time, Sadie.”

“I suppose we could simply have scanned the forms into the computer,” said Lucy.

“What do you mean?” Sadie looked up sharply. “Are you saying there was an easier way to do this?”

Lucy explained what she meant by scanning.

“Well, why didn’t we do that? Why have we been sitting here all day, going through everyone’s life history, when we could have photographed each form and uploaded it?” Sadie flopped back into her chair and held her head. It was still aching. “Has anyone got any painkillers?”

“Because I thought it would look amateurish.” Lucy explained, pulling some tablets from her bag. She passed them across to Sadie. “Here, try these. What I mean is,” she continued, “they’d all have different handwriting, and some might have scanned worse than others and been illegible. This way, they all look the same. It’s much more professional.”

“I agree.” Connie removed her glasses.

“Of course you do!” Sadie grumbled, swallowing the pills.

“For heaven’s sake, Sadie. After spending all that money last night on an impressive launch, it would have been stupid to have a cheap looking website.” Connie paused. “Lucy’s done a good job. She’s the one who’s set up the site and typed up all the info. All we’ve done is sort out the forms into alphabetical order, read them through, and add a brief outline and email address to our registers.”

“Yes, I suppose so,” mumbled Sadie. She heaved a sigh and picked up her pen. “Sorry, Connie. But I just wish we were finished. I feel I know every single person intimately.”

“Yes, I understand what you’re saying.” Connie held up the form she was working on. “For instance, this guy has detailed his whole life here. He even mentions what toffees he liked as a child.”

Jenny laughed. “Yes, I’ve had a few profiles like that, too. Someone said how he wanted to join the Navy because he looked good in a sailor suit when he was a toddler.”

“I can beat you all.” Sadie held up a form. “This guy ends up by informing everyone he changes his underwear every day!”

They all burst out laughing.

“I think everyone misunderstood you last night. When you said ‘be honest’, they obviously thought you meant ‘tell all’. It’s not quite the same thing as telling the truth,” said Lucy, when they had all stopped laughing.

Finally, the last form was checked and Lucy added it to the computer. “There we go!” she said, clicking the mouse. “Divorcees.biz is now up and running.”

They all crowded around Lucy’s desk to see the finished website. “We did it, girls! Isn’t it exciting?” Connie clasped her hands together. “We’re in business. Until last night, the whole thing had been a project. Something we were working on for the future. Now the future is here, our agency is out there on the World Wide Web.” She paused and looked at the others. “But this doesn’t mean we can sit back and relax and wait for the money to roll in; this is only the first step. From now on we must promote Divorcees.biz for all we’re worth.”

She recalled how they had given up their full time jobs to set up Divorcees.biz. Had they been too hasty? The money they received last night was good, but it wouldn’t last forever. The Royale still had to be paid and the rent for this office was due on the first of every month and despite it being a rather pokey place, it didn’t come cheap – nothing ever came cheap in Mayfair. What they needed now was for lots of clients to log on and ask for meetings to be arranged. That

would bring in more income. And, hopefully once the word got around, new clients would register.

Sadie interrupted her thoughts. "What about Andrew? Someone will have to give him a ring and speak to him about his form."

"Damn! I'd forgot about him." Connie sighed.

"Would you like me to do it?" Sadie asked.

"No. If he had simply made an error, then it would have been okay. But since he has added all this... rubbish," she shook the form "I guess I'd better do it. However, I don't intend to stand for any nonsense. I'll make him understand Divorcees.biz is to be honest and above board and we won't tolerate lies on our site. I'll be calm and polite, but firm."

Andrew's phone rang several times before he answered.

"What's all this rubbish on your form?" Connie bellowed down the line. "You haven't got a Bentley, a yacht, or a mansion. What the hell are you talking about? And where did all these business consultancies come from? We can't put that up on our site; it's all lies."

"Hello, Connie, good to hear your voice. Lovely party last night." Andrew's smooth tone came down the line.

"Yes! Sorry! Hello, Andrew." Connie tried to calm down a little. "But like I said, what you've written is absolute rubbish."

"Perhaps we could meet up and talk about it," he replied.

"Talk about it?" Connie's voice rose again. "For goodness sake, what's there to talk about? We both know you've made it all up." She put her hand over the mouthpiece. "He wants me to meet up with him and talk about it," she whispered. "Can you believe it? No way." She swept her hand across her throat to emphasise the point.

"Of course it's rubbish, but it got your attention," Andrew continued, his voice remaining calm.

"We could chat about my details over dinner. You could even help me fill in the form to your satisfaction. What're you doing this evening?"

Connie was speechless.

"Connie! Are you still there?" asked Andrew. His voice had lost a little of its calmness. "Connie?"

"Yes, I'm still here," she spluttered. "I'm lost for words."

"That's a first." Andrew laughed. "I'll pick you up at seven." He hung up before she could reply.

"What did he say?" asked Sadie.

"He's picking me up at seven." Connie replaced the receiver slowly, wondering what had just happened.

"That went well." Lucy grinned.

"What happened to 'I'll be firm' and 'no way'?" Sadie made quotation marks in the air again.

“I got screwed! That’s what happened!” Connie shook her head vigorously. “He wrote all that nonsense because he knew I’d be the one to call him about it. Then he wound me up and put the phone down before I had time to refuse his dinner invitation.” She slammed her fist down on the desk. “Why didn’t I see it coming? Sadie should’ve made the call after all. She would have run rings around him.”

“Too late to say that now.” Jenny paused. “But look on the bright side.”

“There’s a bright side?” Connie raised her eyebrows.

“Of course there is.” Jenny laughed. “You’re fixed up for dinner this evening.”

Connie groaned. “I’ve had enough for today. I think we should go home. The site is up and running, if anyone logs on they’ll be able to check out their details for themselves. No doubt we’ll hear if something is wrong.” She turned to Lucy. “Would you keep an eye on the website this evening in case anyone gets in touch? However, tomorrow we’ll bring our laptops and once you have uploaded the site details onto them, you can teach us how to work it. We can’t leave it all to you.”

Once everything was cleared away, they all left the office together. “Come on, Sadie, I can see our bus coming.” Connie began to run towards the bus stop. “See you guys in the morning.”

“What’s so funny?” asked Connie. They were sitting on the bus and Sadie had burst out laughing.

“So you got screwed!”

Connie looked around at the seats behind. An elderly man smiled at her, while another man gave her a wink. “Keep your voice down, they’ll think I’m a call girl. Anyway, what about it?”

“Nothing, it’s just I was supposed to be the one with the colourful language!”

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