



MY BRILLIANT DIVORCE

BY GERALDINE ARON



DRAMATISTS
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The world premiere of MY BRILLIANT DIVORCE
was produced by The Druid Theatre Company
at the Town Hall Theatre in Galway, Ireland,
on November 28, 2001.

The British premiere produced by Michael Codron, Max Weitzenhoffer,
Nica Burns for Theatreshare plc., Pieter Toerien and James M. Nederlander,
opened at the Apollo Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, on February 24, 2003.

*For James "Har" Kennedy
and my beloved godson
Robert Bachler*

The world premiere of MY BRILLIANT DIVORCE was produced by The Druid Theatre Company at the Town Hall Theatre in Galway, Ireland, on November 28th 2001. It was directed by Garry Hynes; the set design was by Francis O'Connor; the lighting design was by Jon Buswell; and the sound design was by Paul Arditti. Angela was played by Glenne Headly.

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CHARACTERS

ONSTAGE

ANGELA, a New Yorker. Declares she's 39 at the beginning. Three years later, she's 51. She is Mrs. Average, good-natured and vulnerable. In telling her tale, she is sincere and unaware that it may amuse.

DEXTER, 8. A medium-sized dog on wheels. A white Cairn terrier is ideal. He wears a red paisley scarf and has a rolled up document in his mouth.

HEARD ON TAPE

MOTHER, 75. Educated Irish-American.

HELP LINE COUNSELLOR VIKRAM, 40. Indian.

HELP-LINE WARREN, 40. Welsh. Kind.

ROUNDHEAD, 54. Londoner. (Says only the word "yellow.")

HELP LINE EILEEN, 50. Scottish. Gentle, then a bit fierce.

DELIVERED BY ANGELA, ONLY WHERE INDICATED

(Or some can be added to the taped list.)

VANESSA, 19. Angela's daughter, Londoner.

MEENA AND LEENA, 30s. Eastern-European cleaning ladies.

MR. TRIPP, 50. Londoner.

DR. STEDMAN, 50. Londoner.

MAX/ROUNDHEAD, 54. Londoner.

DONALD, 60-plus. Londoner (height 5'4").

WAITER, 40. Spanish.

MS. CHANG, 22. Chinese.

DR. EPSTEIN, 60. Israeli woman doctor with smoker's cough.

BIBI, 50. Brooklyn, New York.
KEITH, 40. Cockney shop assistant.
VIC, 18. Cockney shop assistant.
MR. GLUTE, 40. London pharmacist.
MELODY-ANN, 19. Cockney shop assistant.
DRUG ADDICT, 30. Northern Irish.
JULIE, 40. London housewife.
TED, 42. London accountant.
FINTAN, 40. Slightly camp Londoner.
SYLVIE, 48. Well-spoken Londoner.
JAKE, 55. Ex-US Marine.

PLACE

London.

TIME

The present.

NOTES

THE SET

A dark blue space with a star-cloth.

A moon that can rise, if possible.

ONSTAGE

Dexter, a medium sized dog on wheels with a rolled-up document in his mouth. On the cross-bar of his pushing handle, three counting beads, like an abacus.

A sturdy table with a drawer and a chair.

ON THE TABLE

A wireless phone (not a cell phone, as a dial tone is required).

A smiling SpongeBob paper mask.

Barbie and Ken dolls.

A *Time Out* magazine.

The travel section of an English newspaper.

PERSONAL

ANGELA: Well-worn letter. Well-worn fax. Wedding ring. Shawl.

COSTUME: Perhaps Angela wears pants; flat shoes; a loose, hip-length tunic with pockets.

OFFSTAGE: A huge bag with the logo "I (heart) THE SEX SHOP."

MY BRILLIANT DIVORCE

ACT ONE

Angela is discovered on, facing upstage, with Dexter at her side.

They are watching the moon rising from right to left in a starry sky, to the music of a poignant flute.

Angela wears a big shawl.

When the moon has risen, Angela turns Dexter downstage, and smiles at the audience.

ANGELA. Hello. I'm Angela Kennedy Lipsky. I used to be half of Angela and Max, the world's happiest couple. He was a handsome young English accountant with a solid client list. I was a pretty little window dresser.

We met when he was vacationing in New York and set up home in London.

Of course neither set of parents approved.

Mine — Irish Catholics — refused to attend the wedding on the grounds that the civil ceremony made a mockery of religious wedding vows. His were disappointed he'd chosen me when he could have had Rifka Cohen, whose family had a whole side of smoked salmon hanging on a hook in their kitchen, just for snacks. *(She sighs hugely.)*

On November fifth —

(A prolonged burst of fireworks is seen and heard, vertical and hori-

zontal, startlingly loud. Angela waits, smiling indulgently while the audience settles down. Just a few stars remain. Angela takes off her shawl and tosses it aside.)

Guy Fawkes night — an English event which celebrates the anniversary of an arsonist — Max arrived home from a tax-planning seminar in Orlando. “I’m very sorry,” he said, packing instead of unpacking, “but we only pass this way once and our marriage has been emotionally dead for many years.”

He was scrunching up his new cashmere roll-neck so I took it out of his hands and folded it properly. “Naturally, you and Vanessa will want for nothing.” He handed me a small gift-wrapped package — *(Footsteps gallop down a short flight of stairs. A heavy front door slams distantly.)*

And then he was gone. His laundry in the basket, a duck in the oven and our daughter’s dog, Dexter, and I left staring at the door. Well. After a lifetime of faithfulness and devotion, can you imagine how I felt?

(Pause.)

Sheer joy. Because the truth is — just between ourselves — I’d grown to dislike an awful lot of things about my husband. The shape of his head, for example. Irritatingly round, especially when seen from the back.

Smugly round, with flat ears. Sometimes, walking behind him down the hall, I’d get an urge to throw something really heavy at that ... *globe-like* head. I made up my mind to view his departure as a reprieve.

But within twenty-four hours, panic set in. It seemed *Roundhead* and a twenty-five-year-old woman from Buenos Aires who spoke little English, had already set up house. Main source of info was Meena, my cleaner, whose sister Leena — also a cleaner — was accidentally recruited by *Roundhead’s* secretary.

The lovebirds had no idea she was a spy. And she’d sworn never to become a double agent:

(As Meena.) “May her children go deaf, dumb, blind, lame. And have no luck.”

(Angela produces a well-worn letter from her pocket and reads it in her own voice.)

Letter from Max: “Dear Angela,” — *from a man who never called me anything but Angel* — “I’m sorry if you find this upsetting but it is equally painful for me. I met a woman while abroad and

we are certain that our relationship will be lasting. As a Catholic yourself you will understand that Rosa — *Rosa* — is uncomfortable about living with me while I am technically married to you, which brings me to the subject of divorce. I suggest you initiate the proceedings and I'll bear the costs. Meantime, let me know whenever you need money and I will top up your account."

My friend Fintan — who's never actually *met* Roundhead, said do nothing he'll be back, but Leena told Meena they'd bought a tan leather sofa from Harrods:

(As Meena.) "It like a huge toffee — it so big it took four men to get it in."

Rosa hung a life-size picture of Jesus, with rolling eyes, above it and Roundhead put towels on the seats so he wouldn't slide off.

Leena said they were always laughing. One Saturday morning, when she let herself in, they were chuckling in the shower, while he shampooed away his grey with Grecian 2000 and she washed Clairol Dusky Tulip into her springy black curls. Leena told Meena:

(As Leena.) "She got massive big bazooms. She got awesome big hair on the head and she don't, you know, shave under." (She briefly mimes shaving an armpit.) "But on the pubicals — nuthink. She like a peach."

Grecian 2000! It probably makes him look like a two thousand-year-old Greek.

It seemed wrong to initiate a divorce I didn't want, but my friends said it was better to be viewed as the dumper than the dumpee.

I called my mother, who'd recently returned to Dublin for her retirement.

(She picks up the phone.)

MOTHER. *(Voiceover. Crackling with agitation.) That's hardly the sort of news a mother wants to hear, Angela. Divorce my eye. Eat a slice of humble pie quick and apologise for whatever you did to annoy him.*

(She puts down the phone.)

ANGELA. I was gently explaining things to our daughter, Vanessa, when she burst out that she'd known about her dad's girlfriend for months.

(As Vanessa.) "Sometimes it's as if you're like, in a coma, Mom. Because all those business trips were visits to like, Argentina, to see Rosa. Rosa the Posa."

But he said it was snowing, when he called from Zurich.

(As Vanessa, sing-song.) "Argentina, Mom."

What about the Channel Islands? The Cayman Islands?
(*As Vanessa, kindly.*) “*Argenteeena. I’d of told you, but I thought it was just like, a mid-life thing.*”

You’re wrong, I said. He definitely went to Sydney. Our koala bears!

Vanessa said they were bought at Safeway — it was on the packaging. And then she said she was moving out, getting an apartment with her boyfriend, a drummer named Hotstix Moltino. And I could have Dexter because Hotstix says the domestication of canines is like, *dog-ist*.

I wanted to fall to the ground, grab her ankles and beg her to stay.

I said: So. All grown up and leaving home. That’s wonderful, sweetheart.

She hugged me and said:

(*As Vanessa.*) “*I love you, Mom. Me and Hotstix will visit you, like, every minute. You’ll be fine. Hotstix says a divorce doesn’t have to be a downer. His parents’ divorce was brilliant.*”

(*Footsteps galloping down a short flight of stairs. Door slams distantly.*)

I re-examined Roundhead’s gift. The Mickey Mouse key ring from Orlando. Most likely place of purchase: the Disney Store, Regent Street, London.

Fintan said the sooner I got legal advice the better, and my friend Sylvie recommended her cousin, Mr. Laurence Tripp.

(*She goes to an area of the stage that becomes Mr. Tripp’s space throughout.*)

The firm’s initials were woven into the carpet, and there was a huge, flattering oil painting of a young, red-haired Mr. Tripp on a fancy chair, posing with his hand on a Labrador’s head.

(*Angela mimes sitting, with her hand on a Labrador’s head.*)

In real life, he was bald and afflicted with Bell’s palsy, a — usually temporary — paralysis of one side of the face.

(*She walks to centre stage for Direct Address 1.*)

At this point I should mention that an uncle of mine was a doctor, and I don’t want to sound boastful, but I’m sort of famous for my diagnostic skills.

(*She returns to Mr. Tripp’s area.*)

I asked Mr. Tripp what he thought about a clean break settlement. (*She yawns and speaks on one side of her mouth.*) He said *closure* was always a good idea and he’d need the usual thousand up front.

I couldn’t sleep due to a sickening fear that I should have fought off The Posa and hung onto my husband, regardless of his

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1W

"Observations about jealousy, loneliness and the absurdities of life. A sturdily constructed comedy with an underlying poignancy, the play could easily become a staple of regional theater."

—The New York Times

"The show's charm lies in the fact that Aron pushes the absurdity of the situation as much as its pathos ... Mixing vaudevillian solo-turn and vicarious soul-baring, she offers an enjoyable evening of stand-up tragedy."

—The Guardian

"There are some great jokes ... but there are also sudden shafts of piercing emotional truth ... the sequence when Angela goes to a sex shop to buy a vibrator is a small masterpiece of comic embarrassment ... A peculiarly frosty heart is required to resist MY BRILLIANT DIVORCE."

—The Daily Telegraph

"Gorgeous stuff ... something odder and more satisfying ... a kind of midlife Alice in Wonderland."

—The Times (London)

"Men and women in Angela's predicament, but especially women, may find BRILLIANT DIVORCE resonant with defiantly buoyant verisimilitude. Funny, sad, angry, accidentally insightful and, above all, articulate."

—Newsday

"Geraldine Aron's script is absolutely gorgeous. It has irresistible Irish twinkle combined with a New York dryness ... it has marvellous, grounded warmth and humour and it ripples with wonderful, tiny moments. They say God is in the detail and, God, Aron's detail is good."

—The Scotsman

"MY BRILLIANT DIVORCE is a fast-moving play with many subtle layers and nuances of emotion, sarcasm, and humor. The truly wonderful dialogue is heartwarming, funny, and filled with relatable touches that bring each point home whether you've been through a divorce or not."

—Hamptons.com

"Devastatingly honest ... hugely empathetic and amusing ... packed with detail ... treat yourself!"

—The Sunday Express (London)

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