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Bad Dates

Theresa Rebeck

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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BAD DATES

by

Theresa Rebeck

was originally produced Off Broadway
in the Spring of 2003 by

Playwrights Horizons

Tim Sanford, *Artistic Director.*

Cast

Haley

Julie White

Directed by John Benjamin Hickey

Scenic design by Derek McLane

Costume design by Mattie Ullrich

Lighting design by Frances Aronson

Sound design by Bruce Ellman

Production State Manager Megan Schneid

Production Manager Joshua Helman

CHARACTERS

HALEY: Late 30's/early 40s, a restaurant manager.

SET

Haley's bedroom in an apartment in New York City. It is a friendly, warm space, not frilly. At the top of the play there are clothes thrown everywhere, and a lot of shoes, a very, very lot of shoes. Upstage right is the door to Haley's bathroom. Stage left is the door to the hall leading to another bedroom: the unseen domain of Vera, Haley's daughter.

SCENE 1

(A woman, HALEY, stands alone, in her bedroom. It is a friendly, warm space, not frilly. There are clothes thrown everywhere, and a lot of shoes, a very very lot of shoes, although the shoes are not in piles. She handles them with some care.)

HALEY.

Do you like these shoes? They're cute, right?

(Dissatisfied, she throws them down and goes to pick through several pairs that are on the bed. She starts to put them on.)

I can't wear shoes anymore. You know, it's not that you can't wear them, but you start to go, oh god these things hurt, it's like having your foot stuck in a bear trap.

(She goes down the hallway, calls.)

Vera! Hey, come look at these. Come on, it's a big night for me. *(A doorway opens, the sound of teen music. HALEY yells over it)* Do you think these are cute? These are cute, right? Oh. Well. No. You're right, you're right. They hurt, anyway.

(The music stops as Vera's door is shut. Haley hobbles back into her bedroom.)

Listen, I haven't looked at these things in years. It's not like I have a fetish or anything. I mean, I know that it looks like I have a fetish. Well, I do have a fetish, but it's not like some crazy Imelda Marcos fetish, although I admit it might look like that.

(She looks at a pair of shoes in a box, then shows them to the audience.)

These aren't as cute as I thought. Joan and David. Remember when you thought they were cute, and now they're not, they're just not hip enough? It's 'cause the name isn't good enough, that's what I think. Jimmy Chou, much cuter name and sure enough the shoes are cute in a timelessly cute way. *(Off the dagger-like heel.)* Well, maybe not cute. They look like you could stab someone with this heel, don't they, what is that about? Anyway, I used to live six blocks from this shoe store in Austin, George's shoe store, I kid you not that was the name, not very glamorous, the name or the store, which was kind of a little dump but this guy George had some sort of a deal with all these major shoe designers and he got their leftovers, which he sold at rock bottom prices out of this icky little hole in the wall. This place was a miracle. Everything he sold was something like twenty or thirty bucks, I am dead serious, you could go down there at least once a week and pick up a three hundred dollar pair of Chanel pumps for a mere thirty dollars. Well, you couldn't do that every week, that only happened to me once, but it was an unforgettable day, as you may imagine. Here they are....

(She holds them up, jubilant.)

Okay. A little conservative but still unspeakably chic. Thirty bucks. But you had to have the right size foot. Six to seven and a half, that was mostly what he sold, that's mostly what the leftovers were, your foot's bigger than that you are mostly out of luck. I took one of my friends there, she's a size nine, she had to go outside and have a good cry. Anyway, the other cool thing about this astonishing little store,

there was a lady's spike heel shoe, huge, it was like size eleven or something, and someone had glued little macaronis all over this shoe, and then spray painted it brown, and it was in the window. It looked like something a kid would have done, and then to be nice, his dad put it in his store window. So I was very touched by this shoe, even though the color it was spray painted was kind of an icky brown. If you're going to go to all the trouble with the macaroni, wouldn't you think to paint it lime green, or sparkles or something? Anyway—oh ow. Oh no. Oh no....

(She has on the Chanel pumps, which are too tight.)

Dammit, they shrank. Shoes don't shrink. My feet grew. Oh shoot. They're not that cute anyway. Yes, oh yes they are. Oh I'm going to just weep. Shoot. Maybe I'll just frame them, or something. Anyway this shoe store, you just couldn't resist—

(She opens a box and, surprised, sees a huge wad of cash.)

Oh wow, well, this does not belong with the shoes now does it?

(She packs it back up and puts the shoebox under the bed.)

Anyway, I ended up with some pretty strange shoes, I'll admit, zebra stripe half boots, gold lame spikes, you know, stuff you just think is too wild to pass up, maybe the occasion or the outfit will someday present itself. And George was nice, and I'm moved as I said by the shoe with the macaronis. So I end up with this huge collection of shoes for very little money. And I was pregnant. The two things really didn't have much to do with each other, although I'm sure I was wearing something in this mess the night Vera was conceived. Whatever. So the next thing I know I have six hundred pairs of shoes, a husband—Roger—and a kid. And then things start disappearing around the house, including the Toyota, which Roger has traded for three

pounds of marijuana. I hope you don't think ill of me for admitting all this. Because I am not that person anymore, having a child makes some of us grow up. Not all of us, Roger being the relevant case in point. I'm going to weep I am just going to weep, do none of these fit? What kind of cruel universe would do that to me? So the next thing I know I'm a divorced waitress with a five-year-old kid—see these are cute, and they fittttt.

(She looks at herself in the shoes in the mirror.)

Yeah they're cute, of course they're cute, they belong to my daughter. I look like a thirteen year old in them.

(She starts to take them off.)

(Yelling to door.) Hey Vera, I found your blue buckle shoes! *(She takes them to Vera's room, quickly, then returns.)* Anyway, we move to New York, Vera and I. Fresh start. We're in the big city, getting by, you know, I got a nice little job as a waitress. I found this amazing apartment—rent controlled! And things are looking up, definitely, when it turns out this restaurant I'm working at is some kind of front, some Romanian mob put all their money in it as a tax shelter or money laundering, I can't even, believe me, you didn't want to know, at that point I was raising a five year old and the less I knew about—

(She starts in on another pair, very high heels.)

I'm mostly hoping the feds or the police or whoever don't find out whatever illegal activity is going on, because I don't want to lose my job. Then sure enough—ow, god, ow—

(She walks around.)

Okay, these hurt but they fit.

(She continues to walk, looks at herself in the mirror.)

I'm sorry this story is taking so long. Because it's just of course the police do figure out something—I think it was money laundering—

(She starts to change her clothes, into a snaky little dress.)

—Which I of course suspected, and then have to lie about when all these detectives descend and ask how much you know. I felt like such a terrible person. They had this whole complicated sting worked out, one of those things that they spent years setting up, so you know they've been working for years figuring out something you knew all along. But you can't really feel sorry for them because why the hell did it take them so long? Besides which they're being kind of pushy and snotty around the restaurant, making us all wait in the back, where there's no place to sit, and not telling anyone what's going on, my little girl is with her baby sitter and I'm not even allowed to call, and all of us, we're all like great, there goes my job, and finally I say to one of them, the cops, What's going on, anyway? And he's like, some big macho, when we need to talk to you, we will let you know. And there is so much creepy attitude, I mean, this is our lives he's messing with and he's just some big old nasty cop. So I say to him, look, is this about the money laundering thing? And he sort of looks at me, all surprised, and says Oh you know all about that, huh. And I said, well, isn't it common knowledge? At which point one of the cooks offers me a cigarette, just to get me to shut up. I mean, I admit I was being a bit stupid, they had already taken Veljko off in handcuffs. We all of course felt that it was about time somebody did—Veljko was just a big fat criminal, there was no question, big and fat and mean, he looked like Al Capone or a cardinal or something, and it was a huge relief someone finally arrested him, but my point is, this was clearly a serious matter, I had no business mouthing off to anybody about anything.

(She looks at herself in the mirror.)

Okay, that looks good. Right? This is very good. I look like a hooker. Well, maybe I can wear this with a scarf. You know, look like a hooker wearing a scarf or something.

(She starts to look for a scarf.)

So then, all the guys who are running the restaurant are completely arrested but then the family, which as it turns out not all of them, apparently, are mobbed up, you know how those things work, there's always like a couple who are not complete criminals but they can call up the complete criminals when they need a favor. So that side of the family decides to keep the place open, but they have no idea how anything works and a new one shows up every night, so I'm the one ends up walking them all through it cause I seem to be the only one who knows anything about how the place works. Everybody else there is so concentrated on their own little piece of turf no one knows anything about the whole place, except me. So, you know, the non criminal Romanians finally go to hell with it, and put me in charge, because apparently I'm sort of weird restaurant idiot savant. Who knew? Born to run a restaurant. Which is exciting. When you find something, some strange combination of, who you are and what you can do, to find your gift like that? How many people get that to fall on their head like that? 'Cause I started out being like just a waitress trying to support herself and her kid, I mean I was just another person who married a moron and then had a load of shit to deal with. *(Off outfit, in mirror.)* Yeah okay, this is a clear disaster but I do like the top.

(She starts to take off the skirt.)

So things are swinging. I'm allowed to do things that nobody else ever thought of, add stuff to the menu, change the layout of the place and get rid of the lousy flatware, you know, plus I went out and stole somebody's chef, not the nicest thing I've ever done, but they were abusing him over there, I mention no names, but chefs are artists. You

treat them nicely. And the next thing I know—'cause this stuff happens so fast you can't even, you would not believe and I mean that—get reviewed in *The New York Times*, it's a rave, and Leonardo DiCaprio throws his birthday party at my restaurant and we make Page Six! And business goes through the roof. Which could not be more fun.

So I'm feeling fantastic, because there is nothing better in life than being allowed to do a job that you're good at, so guys are asking me out all the time. I mean I am *en fuego*, and I don't actually have time to date, between the restaurant and Vera, so I'm turning them all down, which makes 'em want me even more! But I'm thinking, there's got to be a way to work this out, I miss sex, it would be fun to have someone to talk to, besides Vera, who is a great kid but let's face it she's seven by that point and I'm hitting my sexual prime. So I'm contemplating this, I'm ready, there's this guy hanging around who seems like a good possibility, you know, he's nice, and funny, and great looking in this skinny way. You know how great looking skinny guys are sometimes? So he's showing up at the restaurant two or three nights a week, just to have a drink and flirt. And this is very high end flirting, you know, when he says something snappy, and you hand it right back to him only better and then float away to show somebody to their table, and then curve back around the bar for another dazzling four second encounter, it was sooo sexy, and he finally asks me out, and I am yes yes yes. I mean, I like this guy, I really—He—whatever. The thing is, right then—right then, this friend of mine, Eileen, sees this Joan Crawford marathon on some movie channel. And she comes over the restaurant laughing her fool head off, and says have you seen *Mildred Pierce*? 'Cause Haley, it is you. She thinks this is this big hilarious blinding insight, cannot stop laughing, so I rent the video. You know, I go out, I rent the video, and I watch it.

(HALEY looks at the audience. Beat.)

Okay. Have you seen *Mildred Pierce*? Joan Crawford, gorgeous, com-

petent, devoted to her kids, husband turns out to be kind of a loser, so she goes out and gets a job—as a waitress. She’s got no training, does it because she has to, and turns out to be—well, you know, kind of a restaurant idiot savant, gets her own place, it’s a huge hit, she doesn’t have time to date but men are falling all over her so she finally starts to date them and terrible terrible things happen, and everything goes to shit. I mean, I am not making this up. That is what happens in this movie I truly, I mean, oh lord. And oh, get this. The kid’s name? She has an evil daughter? Veda. My kid’s name is Vera.

And they are nothing alike, Vera is really a good kid, she’s more like the tragic daughter who dies, but still. On top of it, this guy who’s been sniffing around, asking me out, is just a dead ringer for Monty, the evil socialite who Mildred marries and who steals from her and then destroys her and seduces her daughter. I mean— Okay, he didn’t look exactly like him, but they were both skinny. And I just went, no, I got my restaurant, I got my kid, for the first time in my whole life I got enough money so I’m not worried about it every waking moment of every single day. I am not tempting fate.

(She is now dressing herself in much more conservative clothing, a long skirt, and a sweater.)

I mean—I’m not saying watching that movie five years ago made me realize I couldn’t have a man in my life. It just made me think. So I said NO to Monty and I did without. And you know, it’s all right, everybody has to do without something in their lives. A lot of people have to do without the work that they love, I know people, can’t get a job, doing the thing that they love, and it’s a wound that they carry. You know, really, a great sadness. I think that would be a bigger loss, frankly. ‘Cause I have family, my kid is fantastic, and I have friends. My friend Eileen, she doesn’t have a boyfriend or a kid, plus for the longest time she was always in and out of work, she’s a, one of those, you know—she paints, or photography, or film something—she really

is a genius, but she never seems to land somewhere where they'll just let her do what she does, whatever that is at the time. It's hard. And she drinks, you know. Well, why not...

(She goes down the hall to Vera's room.)

Vera! Come look at this! *(Over Vera's music.)* Don't just make a face. I'm real nervous. Tell me what you think, is it the skirt? Don't tell me what you think. You're thirteen, what do you know.

(The music stops. HALEY comes back into her bedroom.)

She's right, this skirt is way too something, who knows what. *(She adds a belt.)* Anyway Eileen. Once things worked out for me at the restaurant I gave her a job of course, what else can you do with somebody like that, it's not what she wants to do but at least she's working for someone who loves her, and she's a pretty good bartender, no surprise there. So last week, this is what happened: Eileen gets us invited to this benefit for Tibetan Buddhist books. I kid you not. She has a friend who said we could come to this thing for free, which seems to me like no way to run a benefit, but apparently it's more common than you would think. So this "benefit" is out on the Island, so we take the train out there. And sure enough everyone is walking around this gorgeous estate, talking about Tibetan Buddhist books. Acres and acres of lawn and huge trees and this gorgeous sprawling mansion and people dressed in traditional Buddhist robes serving brie with sun-dried tomatoes, and glasses of chardonnay to everybody. And then the celebrities start to arrive. Not a lot—Janet Leigh, of all people, shows up, and then a couple of television stars who I didn't know who they were. And then people start to say, Richard Gere is coming, Richard Gere is coming, but he never came.

(She starts to go through her makeup, looking for lip gloss, puts it on as she continues with the story.)

So anyway, they finally seat us at tables which are scattered about this gorgeous lawn. Now the thing is, Eileen, as I said, got us into this thing for free because a friend of hers is on the committee, and they need people to fill out tables. So they basically split us up. And I get seated at this table, the kindest thing, the only thing to say about this table, is that it is the table of the weirdos.

Real nuts, every one of them, so I decide I need to act very normal, and I say, Hi, I'm Haley Walker, I mention the restaurant, blah, blah, blah, and this old lady starts talking about bugs, and how she's trying to communicate with bugs. Some famous Buddhist told her to do that, and suddenly the entire table is having a seemingly endless conversation about how when a mosquito lands on your arm you should become one with it, rather than flicking it off before it gives you encephalitis.

(She rolls her eyes.)

Then it starts to rain, just a little, and the lady who owns the house, who doesn't want to let us in her house for some reason, gets up and starts talking about how the rain is a gift of the Buddha. So we're all sitting there, getting rained on, thinking about how it's a gift of the Buddha, and then it starts to rain really hard, and the lady who's house it is suggests we all put our napkins on our heads. So all of us are sitting there with napkins on our heads, getting rained on, including Janet Leigh.

(She stops, looks at herself. She looks very nice. She bites her lip, goes back to the piles of shoes and starts to look again, for a pair that goes with her lovely but staid outfit.)

So it's raining and raining and we're all getting rained on, but the conversation about bugs just keeps going. And there's this guy sitting next to the old lady who started the whole thing, who cannot get enough of this. He is positively fascinated by her stories about talking to bugs.

And then he turns to me and says, "Have you ever tried it?" No shit. And the entire table, all the weirdos turn and are all looking at me with deep and real, serious-minded expectation. There is a hush, an absolute, definite hush. So I say, "No, I am not friendly with the insect world but there are several amphibians with whom I play golf regularly." And then they all continue to stare at me, but now there's a kind of shocked disappointment that gathers in the silence. And I confess, you know, I think I may have let a little bit of an edge creep into my voice, when I said it, so I guess I did communicate that talking to nut jobs about bugs in the middle of a thunderstorm was not especially my idea of a good time.

(She sighs, remembering her own bad behavior.)

So then the bug guy, you know, the one who attempted to drag me into this in the first place—he says to me, "So ... what's a frog's handicap, these days?" And I mutter, "The ones I play with are pretty much scratch golfers," and the old lady gets huffy about not understanding golf and goes back to the damn bugs and the hope that all sentient beings might someday come to enlightenment. And then I think oh dear god, they're not talking about the bugs now, they're talking about me. It was completely mortifying. So I'm sitting there, feeling bad, and wet, and like a bug, and then I realize, in this sort of strange, hallucinatory moment, that the bug guy is looking kind of good, and the things he's saying about bugs are really kind of fascinating— and it is then that I realize that maybe it has been too long since I've been on a date. When the bug guy starts looking good, it's time to get out of the house.

(Beat.)

Tonight, I'm going on a date.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(HALEY is in her robe, with a towel on her head. She is eating a pretzel and on the phone, on her bed.)

No I am not wearing that. B.J.—I look like a slut in that dress. Yes, you were the one who told me at Sue Jane's wedding, it was the first time I wore it and you said I was the only one who wasn't dressed like a chicken, AND I looked like a slut. *(Laughing.)* What, the one with the little sleeves? I hate those sleeves. B.J., that has polka dots. You're no help at all. I have to go, I have to figure out how to look sexy without looking like a slut. I can too. Can too. Can too. Tell Frank I said hi. I don't know why he likes you. Bye bye, brother.

(She hangs up the phone and starts to lay outfits out on the bed, this time trying tops and skirts and shoes together, like Barbie outfits.)

(To audience.) All right, that first date was not what you would call a success. It was a bad date. I'm obviously out of practice, and having decided to date again as a matter of necessity, I went out with the first guy who asked and it was just a matter of getting my feet wet. What's that terrible thing they used to say, about kissing, you have to kiss a lot of frogs before you find a prince. What a thing to teach girls. Not that I kissed this guy. Okay, I did kiss him, and he was an asshole, but by that point I was just trying to get out of the entire predicament and just go home and get to bed, so one kiss seemed a small price to pay. Regardless of the fact that there was tongue involved.

(She rolls her eyes and tosses all the clothes together, shoves them

into a laundry basket, and kicks it.)

Oh for heaven's sake, it's not like I don't do this every day anyway. You know, dress?

But that is where things went off, right at the beginning, after all that messing around I did with my clothes, the first thing out of that guy's mouth, the very first thing he says to me was, "What are you wearing?" Can you believe that? My mother used to do that to me. And I say to him, why? What's wrong with it? And he says, "It just makes you look kind of old." That was the beginning. Now, I know I've been out of the game for a while, and I'm not in my twenties anymore but you have got to be kidding me, men are out there, running around, thinking that shit's okay. I'm not even—this guy is over forty, of course men at forty are considered the hottest thing going. And I'm like—what difference does it make how old I am. The point is, I am not as old as him.

(She sighs, and starts to dress, still eating pretzels. The outfit she chooses this time is considerably sexier.)

So after that spectacular opening we go to—I picked the restaurant, trust me, I know, I mean, right? You go out on a date with me, the thing to do is let me pick the restaurant and this place is nice, a high end bistro so it's not outrageous, but the food is delicious—there's only two things on the menu that are not worth trying, the calf's liver, and okay, they actually do a cow's head, which, I'm sorry, but this is America, nobody is going to order that. Anyway, so there we are, bad start but the restaurant could not be lovelier, candlelight, flowers—Beautiful.

The service is excellent, the wine, a ninety-five Bordeaux, I pick it because I know this stuff and it's just a lovely bottle with so many colors, berries and chocolate and just the right hint of smokiness

around the edges, you know, it's almost an Amarone but it's French, it's one of those bottles that have no right to exist and yet there they are. So everything that I have contributed to this evening, I think, is rather good. This is a date I think many people would like to go on. And this guy is sitting there, looking at the menu and says, there's probably butter in all this stuff, isn't there?

(Beat. She looks at the audience, pissed.)

It's a goddamn French restaurant! Of course there's butter! And then we go down the list, item by item we study the menu and he talks about every single one of these positively brilliant offerings to the God of Food, and he wonders what might be in it, you know, "Do you think that has cream in it?" And he turns up his nose at it all and talks about how bad cream and butter are, and then I hear about his cholesterol. *(Beat.)* Let me tell you something. The first topic on a first date should not be cholesterol. Besides which I'm sitting there thinking, then order the salmon! How is this a real subject? If you're worried about your cholesterol, then order the fish! It's grilled! It says right on the menu, all our fish are grilled! BUT NO. We have to have an endless—and all of it, you know, is complicated by some sort of neurosis he has about numbers. Like, the normal number for a man his age would be this, but his doctor feels that his muscle mass is more appropriate to a younger man—of course he found a doctor out there who told him he wasn't as old as he actually is—so they calculated the cholesterol according to some other schedule and then sub-selected half of the difference, blah blah blah, so that means he has to watch his cholesterol but not really. So then, I kid you not, he orders the coquille Saint Jacques—scallops, wrapped in bacon, swimming in cream sauce, topped with toasted cheese.

And then through the entire first course, we continue to talk about cholesterol, only then we move on to his colon, apparently his battle with cholesterol has had an extremely negative impact on his COLON.

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