

Date with destiny

HAVING focused on my career, I find that I'm now 40 and financially successful. However, I'm single and yearn to love and be loved.

So when my mother suggested I sign up with dating agencies, I didn't see the harm in it. After all, my mother's theory is this: If you never go to the dance, how is anyone going to ask you to dance?

Two years ago, I signed up with the first agency. The first interview was with the agency owner in her office in the city. I liked her immediately and she seemed to have a genuine desire to help. Her fee of RM1,200 seemed reasonable to "match" me with six suitable candidates. When she asked about the kind of man I'd like to meet, I said: "As long as he's a good man, I'm fine."

I wish I had thought about this a little more.

A month later, I was introduced to a divorcee with no children. Although he was pleasant, I soon discovered that he wasn't divorced, but merely separated. The next few introductions were worse: One was four times

my size and blamed his obesity on the women in his life. One wanted me to join his "down-line" in his business selling weight-loss products.

Another made a "commission" (i.e. bribe) each time he arranged to get clients' fees payable to government agencies reduced. The worst was the one who told me how he played with himself when he was young and that his mother thought he'd "make a woman happy".

My mother then asked me to try another agency as I might have better luck with them. I sent them an email and was impressed when they called me two hours later.

An appointment was made for the following week.

Compared with the first agency, this one looked fabulous. It had leather sofas, music wafting from the ceiling and even a laptop to help with the presentation. This time, when I was asked what I was looking for in a man, I was prepared. I said that I didn't mind a man of any race or religion (except a

Muslim). He can even be younger and I was not concerned about his looks. I just wanted someone who was a professional and solvent.

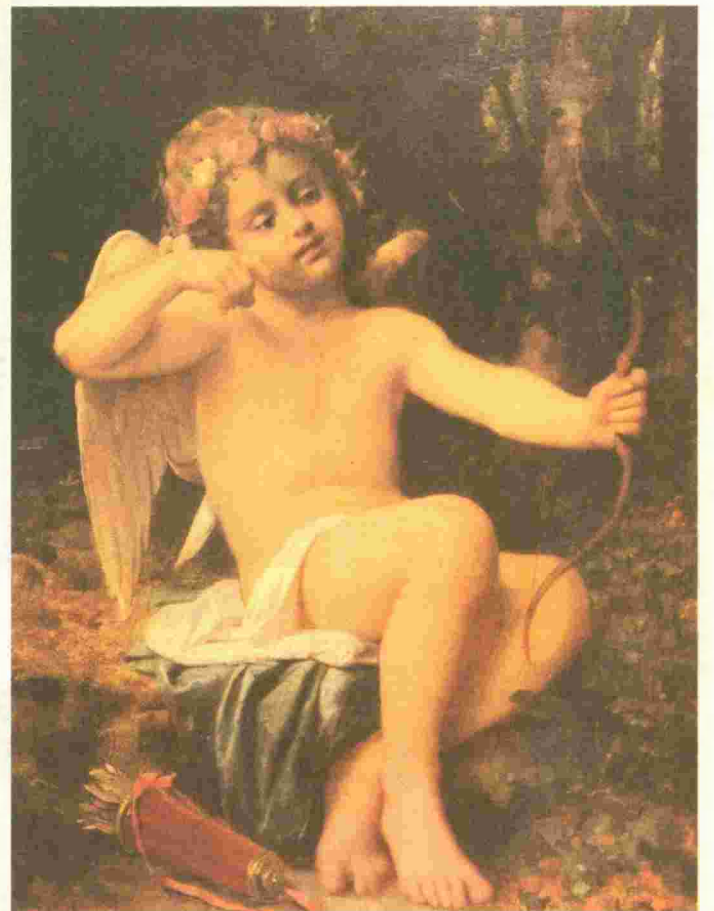
The dating consultant gave me an icy cool stare and told me I was being inflexible. That's when I realised that her concept of professional was completely different. A professional, to her, was someone with lots of money, whereas I think of a professional as someone who is in a profession like medicine, dentistry, engineering, accounting or law.

When I asked if their success rate of 85 per cent meant that the couples they helped were married or in long-term relationships, she replied: "We're not a marriage bureau." Clearly, success was nothing more than a great date.

The fee for three dates came to just under RM1,900. When I confessed that this was beyond my budget, she told me about their interest-free instalment option, but I had to make the first payment that day. Any later and I might have to pay more. I left. As far as I was concerned, this agency was just out to make money and not interested in helping me.

Now, when someone asks me what I'm doing about finding the right man, my answer is simple: I pray.

By Dr Sharmini Jeganathan



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