

# Marriage: Impossible?

*Everybody knows that show-business marriages can't work – everybody, that is, except Barbara Bain and Martin Landau of Mission: Impossible. They've been happily married for eleven years*

By Nora Ephron

Show business marriages! We know all about them. They don't work. They feed on jealousy. Careers conflict. Long separations on different coasts, different continents, are the rule. Show business marriages! They don't last. We know why. Too much ego. Too much self-love. Too much self-absorption to share the spotlight with anyone else – particularly with one's own mate. You know the old joke about the actor's marriage. "It's perfect," it goes. "She loves him and he loves him." Show business marriages. We know all about them.

And knowing all about them, we are faced with secret agents Barbara Bain and Martin Landau of Mission: Impossible. As a matter of fact, they're sitting right here at a table in the plush red velvet Edwardian Room of the Plaza Hotel in New York. Having lunch. And poking each other. Teasing each other. Interrupting each other.

"Martin, can I say something?" she asks.

"Sure, Babe, but I'm in the middle of a word."

She laughs. He breaks into German accents. She wriggles. He grabs for her hand. She teases him about his huge mouth.

"I used to count his teeth because I was sure he had more than anyone else," she says.

"Whaddayou putting me down?" he asks.

"No, dear."

"You know," he says, "I get letters telling me how often I smile on the show."

"And when you smile, Babe," she begins ...

"It's a piano," he finishes.

Barbara Bain and Martin Landau have been married eleven years. "By some

standards," he says, "that's a very long marriage."

She is tall, ash-blonde, gray-eyed, stunning, and an exuberant contrast to cool Cinnamon Carter, the intrepid kure she plays each week on CBS' smash hit series, Mission: Impossible.

He is taller, dark, blue-eyed, with a flat, mobile mouth and an elastic face that seems to turn itself inside out as it changes from inscrutable Chinese to scrutable Russian, from simpering sheik to strutting storm trooper; and his face does change, each week when he plays the part of Rollin Hand, "the man of a million faces," who is also a member of the Impossible Mission Force. Barbara Bain and Martin Landau have a show-business marriage, yes – but with a difference. And let them tell you, in their own interjecting way, just how they worked it out.

"We met acting," Landau explained, "so that's always been part of our relationship. But when we had our first baby seven years ago, Barbara stopped. We went to Rome when I did Cleopatra and for five years she did nothing about her career ..."

"But when we went back to Hollywood," Miss Bain continued. "I began to be offered contracts. I realized that if I signed up I'd be tied down; then I'd be the one saying where we were going. I like him to tell me where we're going. They offered me a big movie with John Wayne, but I turned it down ..."

"Everyone thought she was crazy."

"But he's always been more important to me," she said reaching for his hand.

"That's a nice lady," said Landau.

"It's not nice," said his wife. "I just care."

"That's a good lady," he said. "Every time I think about it, it's groovy."

"I signed a contract with him," said Miss Bain.

"And every year I pick up the options."

"And of course," she added, "so many of our friends are in show business, and you can't help noticing what separations do to their marriages."

"If you want to be together," said Landau, "there's so little time. Look, if Barbara had gotten something really big she wanted to do, of course I would have gone ..."

"He said, 'I'll pack and go with you,' " she recalled. "And I knew he would. But things fell his way, we went where he said, and that was much better."

Things began to fall Martin Landau's way shortly after he and Miss Bain were married on 1957. He was a young New York actor – "Serious, serious, serious," he said, "and I wore nothing but black" – and she was a successful model-turning-actress. Then they moved to California. There, Landau got his first big part as the sinister spy sidekick in Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*. From then on, he worked steadily. Like Lee Marvin and James Coburn, whom he started out with, he became an actor's actor, playing villainous parts on almost every television series on the air. In addition he played the third male lead in *Cleopatra*, though many of his scenes ended on the cutting room floor. But his success was trifling in comparison to what has happened to him and his wife since *Mission: Impossible* began two seasons ago.

Suddenly, autograph collectors call their hotel room asking when they plan to go out for the evening. Suddenly, strangers wave from their cars at stoplights. Suddenly, crowds form to gape. There are stacks of mail – love letters say, 'Here we go again,' " said Miss Bain. "Everyone cares about the show."

Generally speaking, *Mission: Impossible* concerns the efforts of the five-member Impossible Mission Force to thwart crime and despotism and the like. What makes the show popular is the fact that these efforts are hilariously devious, overwhelmingly gimmick-laden, and incredibly complicated.

(The *Mission: Impossible* approach to opening a beer can would probably be to use a laser beam.) Miss Bain's role in the team's exploits, said one writer, is to be "the cheese that baits the trap." Landau's image changes in each show, depending on the disguise he must assume.

"I spend three hours in makeup sometimes," he said, "which is very hard for me. It's hard for me to sit still. You get buried under plaster of Paris, with straws sticking out through your nose, and a lot of people who are claustrophobic can't take it. It's like being buried alive. And when we did the pilot for the show, they were using slow-drying plaster of Paris ..."

"When we did the pilot," Miss Bain interrupted ...

"It took forty-five minutes to dry," Landau went on.

"Martin, can I get something in here?"

"Sure, Babe."

"When he was playing the dictator in the pilot, he was in makeup for three hours."

"Two and a half," said Landau. "And I came out with this thing on my face – I wasn't even using my own teeth – and I said to Barbara, 'Am I here? Is it coming out? I'm in here somewhere.' I felt as if I were in a cave. I said, 'I'm feeling sad– can you see that on the outside? Hello out there, I'm in here somewhere.' "

On long days, the Landaus did not get home until after dark. But when they do, said Miss Bain, "We don't need to say, 'Well, dear, how was your day?' We already know, so we can talk about other things. We are both great talkers." In addition to their daughters, the Landau household also consists of a Hungarian sheep dog named Rags. "Susan named her," said Miss Bain. "She got past Blackie, and since the dog didn't have a spot, she got past Spotty. When she landed on Rags we felt pretty lucky." The Landaus lead an active social life. Among their friends are comedian Carl Reiner and his wife.

Martin Landau and Barbara Bain first met in New York in 1956, when Miss Bain, a model who was studying dance with Martha Graham, walked into Curt Conway's acting class. She was in her early twenties – she is now somewhere between thirty-two and

thirty-five, though she won't say just where. A Chicago girl whose parents were Russian immigrants, she attended the University of Illinois, where she was homecoming queen, and came to New York after graduation. "I was a very unhappy model," she said. "I used to work with girls who could talk about a shade of lipstick for three hours. I can make it for about eight minutes, but that's stretching it."

Landau, now thirty-eight, was a New York boy, the son of a manufacturer who made money during the Depression and managed to lose everything when World War II started. Landau grew up wanting to be an artist; after attending Pratt Institute and the Art Students League, he went to work as a cartoonist for the New York Daily News. But one summer, there was a job in a stock company; the name a successful audition. Before long, Landau had decided to be an actor. "I had the New York dismal period," he said, "I lived on peanut butter and package dinners." He had long hair and a beard and was dressed in his usual black ensemble the day his wife-to-be walked into his acting class.

"I had just come from a shooting," Miss Bain recalled. "I was wearing white makeup, black eyes; I was very skinny and very dressed. It was no way to go to class, but who knew?"

Landau noticed her immediately. "I thought she was just an empty-headed model who had a lot of nerve walking into an acting school."

"I hated him," Miss Bain recalled. "I found him really crude, shallow and ignorant."

It was, in other words, love at first sight. A year later, they were married in City Hall in time to grab up a rent controlled apartment on West End Avenue; ten days alter there was a religious ceremony, with a rabbi, for their families. And within months the apartment was vacated, and the Landaus, a now deceased fox terrier, and a pile of old magazines, referred to as Martin's junk, were on the way to Hollywood.

In the last couple of years, since Miss Bain has begun having a successful career of her

own, people occasionally suggest that their relationship is similar to Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne's. "It's crazy," says Landau. Or to Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton's. "It's nonsense," says Landau. Still, all three couples have this much in common: they have managed to make their marriages thrive under most difficult circumstances.

The Landaus fight, loud and hard, but they are frank about it. "We don't bottle things up inside us," says Landau. "We can live and work together and like it." And if there is any uncommon jealousy or outsized ego operating in their marriage, it is well hidden. Even the fact that his wife has won two Emmys is related with delight by Landau, who is by far the better actor and who has won none. The first Emmy Miss Bain won, Landau said, she accepted with the remark, "Cinnamon just lost her cool."

"I just saw a tape of the Emmy show the other day," said Landau. "It was fantastic. I had already lost to Bill Cosby and I knew it, but it was between Barbara and Barbara Stanwyck, and we had no idea who'd won. Peter Falk got up to give the award and said, 'And the winner is Barbara'- it seemed like hours before he said - 'Bain.' And there I was lifting her out of her seat and shouting 'You did it, Babe.' Talk about uncool!"

"You know," said Miss Bain, "we have a kind of shorthand between us, and working together is very exciting."

"When we started the show," said Landau, "we told CBS not to make a point of our being married. The people we were playing on the show weren't married and we didn't want to make a big thing of it. But everyone seems to think there's something marvelous about people like us who are married and working together."

"I never wanted to separate us," said his wife. "But when we met - if I'd closed my eyes and dreamed how I wanted it to be, it never would have been this good."

Show-business marriages - we know all about them. Well, almost all. A few of them work out very nicely.