

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEIZE

Presenter: *Mr Martin, about fifty, is transferred to Montpellier. A native of the north of France, he is delighted with this new posting and is considering buying a house. He has taken three days off to find his dream house in the company of his wife. Mr Martin is a nice man who likes the good things in life. Mrs Martin is a stout, austere and cantankerous woman. Here they are accompanied by Miss Dubois, the estate agency employee. Young, slender and absolutely charming, Miss Dubois takes the Martins to visit their first villa.*

Miss Dubois: There we are. As I told you on the phone, we've got here very good value for money. Three bedrooms, a bathroom, a shower room and a living room of quite a reasonable size.

Mr Martin : Er... yes. You really think the house is one hundred and twenty square metres? I would have thought less. The bedrooms aren't very big!

Mrs Martin (outraged): Not very big? You mean they are tiny! As for the shower room, it will be better if we don't both go in there at the same time because obviously we will remain stuck there!

Mr Martin (looking at his wife then at the young employee): It depends, my dear. You shouldn't exaggerate.

Miss Dubois: In any case, I imagine that you will use the bathroom instead. As you noticed, the bath(tub) is equipped with a jacuzzi and the owner confirmed with me that he would leave all the cupboards in.

Mrs Martin (sourly): That's the least he could do, in view of the price he is asking!

Miss Dubois: You are quite mistaken As I said to you, the price is very reasonable, at least if one takes the current market into account. Montpellier is a rapidly expanding town and property prices have climbed over the last few years.

Mr Martin: If you don't mind, I'd like to see the garage again.

Miss Dubois: Yes, of course. Let's go.

Mr Martin (looking at the garage): Yes, that could be a nice room. *(He turns to his wife).* What do you think, my dear, we could convert the garage into a bedroom? By having a window made here, on the side, it wouldn't be bad at all.

Mrs Martin (still sourly): Yes, that's right and then we put the car in the bedroom, I suppose?

Miss Dubois (conciliatory): If you choose to convert the garage, you can still park your car in the street. It's very quiet and there is always space. I know because I've got a friend who lives a bit further up.

Mrs Martin: Yes and this way we'll be at the mercy of the petty criminals who hang about in the streets and scratch the doors of the cars!

Miss Dubois: I assure you, there are no petty criminals in the area. I told you: it's quiet and has the right kind of people.

Mrs Martin: Precisely. It's generally in the middle-class areas that the petty criminals come to carry out their petty thefts. I know the problem well. We were burgled four times last year in Calais!

Miss Dubois (*slightly annoyed*): Would you prefer to visit houses situated in more working-class areas?

Mrs Martin (*horrified*): Good Lord! Certainly not! On the other hand, I'm adamant on one point: we do need a garage, so there's no question of our converting it. And frankly, the bedrooms are much too small.

Mr Martin (*a bit embarrassed*): Right; apparently my wife isn't very enthusiastic. Would you have anything else to show us?

Miss Dubois takes a file from her briefcase and consults her sheets.

Miss Dubois (*showing a sheet to Mr Martin*): I've got this one which is located in the next street. It's superb. Done up like new last year. A big garden, fruit trees. In short, it's a rare product. But it's distinctly over the budget you gave me.

Mr Martin (*taking the sheet held out by Miss Dubois*): Nice villa indeed. But yes, it's far too expensive in comparison with what we want to pay.

Mrs Martin (*grabbing the sheet from her husband's hands*): Really! To ask such a price for a house which seems quite ordinary, it's incredible!

Miss Dubois: Oh! I've got this one as well. A very good area. Within your price range. One hundred and ten square metres. A very well maintained garden. On the other hand, you'll have to plan for some interior work.

Mr Martin (*looking at the sheet*): It seems nice to me.

Mrs Martin: Come on, Georges, you're not thinking about it, you're hopeless at D.I.Y! As for the workmen, either they don't come anymore after a few days and leave you right in the middle of a building site, or they rip you off. So, no, thank you! We need something clean which we can move into immediately.

Mr Martin (*he looks at his wife with exasperation then kindly to Miss Dubois*): Well, let's drop it. Do you have anything else?

Miss Dubois (*she leafs through her sheets*): I don't think so. Oh! yes, I still have this one left. (*She holds out a sheet to Mr Martin.*)

Mr Martin (*impressed*): It's really magnificent! And... the price? It's the one written down there?

Miss Dubois: Absolutely.

Mr Martin: And... the area?

Miss Dubois: Excellent.

Mr Martin: Has it just been put up for sale?

Miss Dubois: No, it must be about eight months that we've had it at the agency. The plot of land is nearly one hectare and there is a very nice swimming pool.

Mr Martin (*very surprised*): It's surprising! Is it possible to visit it today?

Miss Dubois (*she searches in her briefcase*): Right now if you want. I always have the keys with me.

They go to the villa in question.

Mr Martin (*who still can't get over it*): This property is absolutely magnificent! How do you explain that the price is so low?

Miss Dubois: There are two reasons for this: the owner is in a hurry but the house is not selling.

Mrs Martin: Yes, true, it's suitable. And for once, the owner doesn't seem to have delusions of grandeur. The fitted kitchen will remain, I suppose?

Miss Dubois: Absolutely. The owner is selling everything in its present state. Fitted kitchen, fitted bathrooms. If you are interested, he is even leaving all the garden for nothing.

Mrs Martin: Let's be careful, Georges. It's not possible, there are undoubtedly hidden defects.

Miss Dubois (*in a firm tone of voice*): Not at all, I've got here the expert's report: there's absolutely no hidden defect.

Mr Martin: But why on earth isn't the house selling?

Miss Dubois: Because it has a particular history which puts off all the potential buyers.

Mr Martin (*intrigued*): Oh? And what's the story then?

Miss Dubois: Well, here it is. At the outset, a couple had the villa built. Unfortunately the building works lasted far longer than planned because the husband and the wife were never in agreement on the choice of materials and the decoration. Their relationship deteriorated as the construction went on, to the point that only a few months after their moving in, the husband asked for a divorce. The wife couldn't bear it and committed suicide.

Mrs Martin: My God! How horrible! Poor woman.

Mr Martin: And as a result the husband sold the house?

Miss Dubois: Yes, he did. He sold it to a couple quite well-known in the region. He was a renowned surgeon and she was a dancer. The tragedy happened shortly after their settling in. The young woman drowned in the swimming pool.

Mrs Martin: How dreadful! And what has become of the husband?

Miss Dubois: Grief-stricken, he immediately sold the house then left the region. I heard he had settled in the United States.

Mr Martin: And... With the new owners, did everything go all right?

Miss Dubois: Not at all. A quiet couple bought it, retired people. Everything was going well, but three months after their settling in, the lady electrocuted herself with her toaster and she died. The husband didn't want to stay. He went back to Lille after having put the house up for sale. That was eight months ago.

Mrs Martin: How terrible!

Miss Dubois: Yes, women who live in this house seem to end up badly. So quite obviously, people hesitate. That's the reason why the owner, who wants to try to erase these unhappy memories, was compelled to drop the price a lot.

Mr Martin: Of course, yes, I understand. *(He looks at his wife and seems to be thinking. Then, an arm around his wife's shoulders, he turns to Miss Dubois):* I think we're going to take the risk. After all, we're not superstitious, are we, dear?