

The Further Adventures of a London Call Girl

Belle de Jour

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Extract

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Septembre

dimanche, le 5 septembre

‘What I want, what I really want . . . this probably sounds silly . . . is to please you.’

The client was fiftyish, dressed office-casual. Oh great, I thought, another half-hour of earnest licking from a man whose wife no doubt thinks her body stops at the waist. ‘That’s a gorgeous idea,’ I purred.

‘Tell me your fantasies,’ he said, tracing the cup of my bra with his finger. ‘What do you desire right now more than anything?’

I thought. ‘Well, it’s a good long time since I had a titwank,’ I said.

‘Pardon?’

‘You know,’ I said, and sat on his lap. ‘All those lovely things you do when you’re a teenager, because they’re very exciting, but never do again when you get to having real sex. Tossing someone off in the back of the cinema. Kissing until your jaw hurts. A titwank.’

‘That doesn’t sound like you’d get much pleasure, though,’ he said.

‘I do actually. There’s something so . . . satisfying . . . about the feel of someone using your breasts to wank himself. Or when the come hits your face, just . . .’

‘Um, that’s nice. How about if I go down on you instead?’ he asked, turfing me off his lap.

‘Oh, okay, whatever you want,’ I said.

‘Oh no,’ he said, slipping his face down to my inner thighs. ‘It’s all about what you want.’

lundi, le 6 septembre

The first thing I do is shower, wash hair, dry with clean fluffy towel. Check all shaving is shaven, all plucking plucked. Moisturise and ample deodorant: even after going through the routine so many times, I still get nervous.

I imagine there are hundreds – if not thousands – of women like me in London, doing precisely what I'm doing right now.

Hair carefully styled. Glossy but not girlish, professional but not stiff. Nice suit, just back from the cleaners. A blouse unbuttoned to the base of the neck – mustn't go flashing cleavage or people will look at you strangely. Underwear and stockings. The good shoes. Jewellery – just enough, not too much. First impressions are everything. The goal is to be asked back a second time.

Check everything in my bag. Address, phone number, toiletries. Must turn up on time, never early, never late.

I leave the flat, lock the door, and walk to the corner. Hold my hand out to attract the driver's attention. The hulking vehicle slows as it approaches. I finger the wallet in my purse anxiously. 'Morning, love,' the driver says as I flash him my bus pass. I find a seat upstairs. It's daytime and not night. No taxi waiting for me, not today.

It's a job interview I'm going to, you see, not an appointment.

mardi, le 7 septembre

I come in from an appointment with a client, strip and shower. Hanging on the back of the bathroom door is the jacket of my interview suit. It went well, I think; so well that going back to trawling the hotel circuit today was a bit of a comedown.

The man who interviewed me was round, fortyish, Chinese; very successful, very chatty. I'd had clients like him.

His eyebrows shot up as he looked over my application again; as the half-hour went on, his voice grew more and more excited. One of his colleagues dropped by – a dour Israeli with a mouth like liver sausages – and commented, 'Well, it looks like you have this under control. Let me know when you've made your mind up, though it looks like you already have.' I was surprised. Either my luck was in or I was setting myself up for yet another disappointment. I had come home, shed my clothes, and steeled myself for the follow-up. There was a call within the hour. They wanted me to come back.

Phone rings. No name and no number. Either the manager ringing to tell me about a client, I think, or a call from overseas. I pick it up, anticipating the latter.

'So how did it go in the end?' Dr C asks.

I smile involuntarily. Even the sound of his voice is enough to make me melt, and I feel my knickers going slightly sticky. 'Really well, as it happens. I have a second interview.'

'Oh, that's great news. I can help you get ready on the morning.'

'It's after you've gone, unfortunately,' I say. 'Couldn't he possibly have asked for more than a week off work? I bite my tongue: that would sound aggressive. Besides, no matter how little time we have together I am sure the sex will be worth it – I don't usually send out to California for a takeaway, but in his case I can make an exception. 'But you can help me prepare.'

'What was the interview like?' he asks. 'Did you bowl them over with your talent and wit?'

'Actually, they seemed a little more bowled over by my referees.'

'How do you mean?'

I tell him that most of the interview was spent on questions about A2, how well I knew him, whether I could set up a meeting between him and the company's directors, and so on.

‘He’s on your CV?’

‘Why shouldn’t he be?’

‘He’s your ex-boyfriend.’

And the man who introduced me to Dr C, for which I should really send a thank-you note at the least. ‘He’s a *character reference*.’ Yikes, I shouldn’t have mentioned it. Maybe it was improper business practice or something. I must admit my ethics radar has been somewhat recalibrated since I started having sex for money.

‘And the fact that he’s one of the most respected businessmen in his field has nothing to do with it?’

‘I knew him when he was living off Pot Noodle and beans on toast. You can’t say I hitched my trailer to a star knowingly.’

Dr C laughs. ‘Don’t worry, if I’d thought it would improve my job prospects, I’d have done it, too. Most people end up exaggerating in their interviews. You do, of course, have explicit permission to use me as a reference if need be.’

‘Ta, love, I’ll keep it in mind.’

‘That’s a no, then?’

‘I’d rather have explicit permission just to use you in general.’ We laugh.

jeudi, le 9 septembre

Sometimes I feel I’ve been doing this job for ever, then I remember it’s only been about two years. Funny how steep the learning curve is with sex work. Also how quickly you can tire of it – I can’t help feeling I’ve seen all these men, had all these requests, before.

‘Where do you want it . . . here or here?’

‘You know where I want it,’ I said in my sauciest voice.

‘I want to hear you tell me.’ The end of his cock was twitching, and with one of his hands on the shaft and one on his balls I could tell he was holding back until the right moment.

‘I want you to come all over my face.’ You know what would be nice about landing a legitimate job? Not having to wash come and makeup off my face more than once a day.

‘Beg me.’

Well, whatever works for him. ‘Please,’ I said. Please let him give me a big tip. ‘Please, I need you to come all over my face.’ At that moment, he released his hands and sprayed.

Of course, it rarely ends up where you want it to. You can hardly blame the client – the moment of ejaculation is not the right time to say, ‘Er, actually you’re mostly just getting my hair there.’ But it’s a fact of life, if you want some on the face, be prepared for any result. And for your own sake keep your eyes shut – that stuff’s like battery acid.

Other tips for a successful facial:

- Eyelashes. Waterproof mascara at a minimum; those long-lasting three-day formulations aren’t bad; personally I go for the eyelash tinting option. It wouldn’t do for people to think you’ve been crying, or, worse, guess what you’ve been up to.
- Pillow. Adjust your head height and angle accordingly. If you studied physics, you’ll be able to calculate from the angle of his penis and expected pressure the distance the ejaculation will travel. But save yourself the time and simply prop your head up in front of the cock, not below.
- Smile! It’s the mental photograph he’s after, and we all want to look good in a photo, don’t we?

vendredi, le 10 septembre

‘Looking forward to seeing your man, am I right?’ N asked. We were watching telly and eating crisps. He’d brought round a bottle of wine; I put it in the cupboard and opened

a bottle of Bailey's instead. He smiled; it's terribly unfashionable but we love it. A little of what you fancy always does you good.

'Can't wait,' I said. I was a bit nervous, though: Dr C had been to visit twice since we first met, and it was rapidly passing the point at which I should have told him how I pay the rent in between looking for other work.

'Damn sight better than the last one,' N said. 'You ever hear from that arsehole again?'

'Um, no,' I said and sat down, turning the television volume higher.

I felt bad about lying, but it had to be done. The Boy kept sending texts – all of which I ignored – for ages after we split. Then one night a month ago he rang. I was feeling soft and a bit lonely, and Dr C and I never asked many questions about what each other's lives were like outside seeing each other. The Boy and I hooked up. I swore it would be only the once.

Plus there are a number of reasons not to go there again:

- 1 His friends hate me. Well, to be fair, most of them never even *met* me. But the ones who do know me definitely do not approve.
- 2 He's a snob. Not that this is a deal breaker in and of itself. But to him and his friends, girls like me are on the bottom rung of middle class and always looking for an opportunity to marry up. Never mind that I couldn't possibly be on the make because a) I don't want to marry anyone and b) I make more than he does; it's a class thing.
- 3 He's not the sharpest knife in the drawer. Yes, I'm a snob too. I see enough arses in a day; I don't need to be dating someone who constantly talks out of his.

Anyway it turned out to be only the once, as planned.

samedi, le 11 septembre

Note to self: if in future really really need hair cut, but usual stylist is away, WAIT UNTIL SHE RETURNS. No one else will understand what is meant by 'shorter but not too much shorter'. And pulling the hair won't make it grow back any faster.

The colour's rubbish, too. No excuses there – same person as always. You know the dingy look from too many hours in the swimming pool? It's like that. Why? Why???

dimanche, le 12 septembre

Wake up. Panic. Straight to mirror; yes, hair is still rubbish. Shower, rubbing scalp vigorously. Circulation helps hair grow, right?

Run out door. Just catch bus; thank heavens for whatever genius invented Routemaster. Must learn to schedule time better before this route is phased out.

Tube. Which change to make? Slower train with fewer stops, or faster with more? Compromise and go for alternative slower with infinite stops route; only just make train.

Arrive panting at airport to learn flight is delayed by two hours. Spend six pounds on hot chocolate and try to make it last.

Lose track of time. Feel tap on shoulder and look up and he's standing, bags in hand, by my table. Dr C smiles and I can't help but grin.

Worth the wait.

lundi, le 13 septembre

We sat on the sofa reading, my legs round Dr C's hips, his head in the hollow of my shoulder. From here it's like reading to a child, I thought, all softness and nuzzle and warmth. Though I did have to hold the book out at a strange angle in order to not block his view. After a few minutes, the raised hand started to tingle, and I put the book face-down on the table. I have always had the most appalling habit of breaking book bindings, but it's something to read, not a collector's item, right?

I love it that Dr C doesn't ask many questions. What goes on in my life is seldom up for examination, and that seems fine with him. Though it is beginning to bother me: when is a good time to tell someone you have sex with other men for money? I suspect he knows there are other people and chooses not to mention it. But I'm not sure most men can make the jump from thinking their girl has an active social life to thinking she's a whore.

The big problem is that I've been making an effort to be as nonconfrontational as possible with this relationship. When I think back on my most recent boyfriend, the shouting, the slammed doors, it doesn't bear much examination. We were both passionate people, yes, but at the heart of it was that he couldn't bear what I did for a living. I never want things to go like that again.

I've been imagining how the conversation with Dr C might go:

'You remember when I went back to your hotel with you the first time we met? I do that professionally, you know.'

'I'm glad you enjoyed the blowjob. I've had a lot of feedback on that particular move, and eighty per cent of my clients agree.'

'How about a little role play in the bedroom? I'll pretend to be a call girl, and you'll pretend not to be freaked out about it.'

Er, probably not.

He sighed and shifted in the sofa cushions. 'This is like heaven.'

'I was just thinking the same.' Actually, I was really thinking how I'd forgotten to use any deodorant that morning and with his nose practically in my armpit, I hoped he didn't notice.

mercredi, le 15 septembre

Dr C dashed off after quick breakfast and sex to see parents in Bournemouth. He didn't invite me; I didn't ask. Don't want to impose when things are still relatively new. Every month in a long-distance affair is like a week in a normal one, so by that reckoning we're not even at asking about each other's careers yet.

Also, I think I've learned my lesson from the Boy. Be the calm one, the collected one; be the cool girl. Don't be the freaky oddball. When he says he'll call, he'll call. You have to trust a man sometimes.

vendredi, le 17 septembre

Dr C called late, to say he'd be back even later. I said fine, did he want someone to meet him at the train? That's sweet, he said, but no, you keep the bed warm.

I kept the bed warm reading, feeling very virtuous for not throwing a scene. We had so little time together, but what was more important was that we didn't argue.

Switched the light off some two hours after deciding that probably he couldn't get to a phone to let me know he'd caught an even later train.

Fell asleep certain he'd be home any minute.

Just before dawn, heard someone try the door. I'd left it on the latch. Heard his soft steps on the stairs and rolled over in what I hoped was a sleepy yet sexy way.

'I'm wiped,' he said, throwing a black bag on the floor. 'Absolute madness at my parents'. No wonder I left the country. You don't mind if I crash for the next twelve hours, do you?'

'Of course not, love,' I said. Because it's all about compromise.

samedi, le 18 septembre

A quiet day in. I asked Dr C if there was anywhere he wanted to go, maybe see some of the sights that have been built since he moved to America, like the London Eye?

'Eugh, no thank you,' he said. 'Not really my sort of thing. I left the city for a reason, you know.'

I didn't know, not particularly. Sometimes he says things – nothing specific, just a way with a phrase – that make me think he's been married once, maybe in London. But if so it probably wasn't a good idea to ask. If he wanted to, he'd bring it up.

Met N later for a meal. Chinese. Dr C made a flourish of picking up chopsticks instead of the fork. 'No Chinese restaurant in California would even think of putting those on the table,' he smirked. Unfortunately, it was a little lost on us, as N and I are both adepts. Particularly impressive in N, who had never even been to a Chinese before we met. You'd be surprised how motivated you can be to learn the correct method when you're hungry.

N and I chattered away about people we knew. Dr C turned to me and started a conversation about our mutual friend A2. Oh, yes, N knew him, too, and soon we were talking nineteen to the dozen. I noticed Dr C going quiet and pushing noodles round his plate.

‘Everything okay, darling?’ I asked when N went to the toilet.

He squeezed my thigh under the table. ‘Just longing to get you home,’ he said. ‘I’m leaving tomorrow night.’

He growled in my ear, a move that sent a shiver up my back. ‘We’ll make it quick,’ I said, squeezing his thigh, higher, harder.

dimanche, le 19 septembre

The morning was not spent, as I’d have preferred, nibbling on smoked salmon and enjoying the weekend papers. It was spent on an alarm set for stupid o’clock in the morning and an emergency shop for things he couldn’t get back in California (Marmite, and lime shower gel). But I was determined to enjoy every minute, smiling bravely as we negotiated the bus, Tube and then train to the airport. When he suggested – repeatedly – that maybe we should have arranged a car, I didn’t disagree. I waved him off (sexy embrace in front of security, check; goofy kissy faces from other side of barrier, check) and made my way home. It had been a good visit if a little brief.

N came round, and as it was so late, I made supper for two. Nothing special – pasta, cream, mushrooms, asparagus. Wildly out of season but I find it so hard to resist, and try to make up for it by only eating British apples. N wolfed his down, declared it the best effort yet, and for a moment it looked as if he was going to dive for mine. That or he was looking down my top. Either way it was flattering.

The phone rang. Unknown number – could be a client, but more likely Dr C. I answered; it was the latter. N could tell by my smile what was up and he discreetly removed himself upstairs.

‘I take it you made it home safely?’ I did the maths. ‘It’s, what, lunchtime there?’

‘Yeah,’ he said. He sounded tired, and no wonder. Very thoughtful to ring me first thing, though.

‘How was the flight? Any good films on?’

‘Um, mostly I spent the time thinking.’ My heart dropped, and I knew. He wasn’t calling because it was the sweet, romantic thing to do. He was calling to end it. He said he thought the distance was too far and that he was too busy to be in a relationship, anyway – man code for ‘I’d like it if you were more convenient, but don’t worry, I’ll find someone who is.’ He said he’d been thinking this since before the visit, but he didn’t want to ruin my good time.

Ruin my good time? We’d barely spent three evenings together, I wasn’t the one who’d made a 12,000-mile round trip. I said nothing, just let him spool out the list of reasons. No sense trying to argue about it; I’d parted ways with so many men it was practically a lifestyle choice as well as a career. As soon as he said ‘I don’t want to hurt you . . .’ I felt a door shut in my heart.

He paused, possibly waiting for the vitriol. Still I said nothing. ‘Well,’ he said, clearing his throat, ‘I hope we can still be friends.’

Oh, cringe. Friends? I’ll say who gets to be my friend, thanks. I can play at being civilised but there is a line. There is a fucking line and he crossed it, right then, and I was not going to be Cool Girl any more. ‘No, thank you. I have enough friends as it is.’ I hung up and turned the phone off. When I looked up N was in the doorway.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said.

‘You’re not the one who has to apologise.’

‘Someone should,’ he said. ‘Want a hug?’ And even though I thought I didn’t, I really did.

mardi, le 21 septembre

Positive aspects of breakup:

- Money saved on travel expenses
- Never having to have awkward conversation about being a call girl
- Noticed some hairs growing out of his nose when we were on the sofa. Will not have to deal with that

Negative aspects of breakup:

- Phone bill for calls to California not coming for another three weeks
- Having to announce yet another failed relationship to family
- Looking at phone so hard likely to cause blindness, if not insanity

jeudi 23

‘It’s an impressive CV, all right,’ the young man said, flipping through my application. ‘And your references are impeccable. My colleague was very impressed when he met you. But I’d like to ask, where do you see yourself in five years’ time?’

I smiled weakly. I hadn’t had breakfast or lunch, and was constantly checking my phone. But Dr C took me at my word and hadn’t rung. I’d turned it off before coming into the room for the interview but was starting to regret that; surely the man sitting across from me could tell how distracted I was?

Possibly not. ‘Because in this company, we’re interested not only in our bottom line, but also in our people. Developing your skills to the best they can be. Investing in you. Yes, we

think we're just the right size to be able to deliver excellent service to our clients, while still maintaining a family atmosphere among the associates.' I had the distinct feeling he was eyeing the line of my cleavage through my shirt, which, given that it was a very conservative, high-buttoned stripey number too starchy for call-girl work, was an impressive feat.

I crossed my legs at the knee. Excellent service to the clients, eh? I noticed his eyes following my leg from conservative, mid-heeled shoe to conservative, mid-knee skirt.

So that's the way it's going to be, I thought. Fine, if that's what gets me through this, he can check me out. Then I can go home and cry myself to sleep. I leaned closer to the desk, pulling my arms in to emphasise my bust. Let him do the talking. And he did, for almost an hour.

'The fact is, we'd like to offer you a job,' he said eventually.

'The fact is, I'd like to take it,' I said. Fucking Dr C. When was he going to realise what a mistake he'd made and ring me? I'd better get out of here and fast.

The young man seemed taken aback with my answer. 'Ah, uh, okay. Well, when can you start?'

'When will you have me?' I raised an eyebrow. If he'd been a client this would have been the part where he pushed me back on the bed. In real life this is where he stood up and offered me his hand.

'Immediately. Please call me Giles, I'll be your supervisor.'

'Splendid, Giles.' I stood and shook the offered hand. 'I'll see you tomorrow.'

vendredi, le 24 septembre

Turned up early to be shown around the offices and meet my co-workers. Everyone seems keen to ask questions, most of which I don't know how to answer. Smile and glide, I think. Stay cool. Smile and glide.

The mobile rang repeatedly in my handbag; I peeked at the

number. Cripes. It was the manager. How was I going to talk to her without anyone in the office noticing?

‘Just off to the loo,’ I announced. Giles nodded. I scampered off to the toilet to ring the manager back.

It wasn’t my lucky day. There was a queue for the toilet. The woman in front of me smiled and half shrugged, as if to say, My, isn’t this terrible? She had no bloody idea. All she was doing was trying to keep from wetting herself. I was a prostitute trying to manage her appointments.

I waited until the last cubicle was free and phoned the manager back. ‘Darling, hello,’ she said. ‘There is a lovely man who wishes to meet you Sunday—’

‘Um, wait,’ I cut her off. The woman in the cubicle next to me was wrestling with the toilet roll dispenser; how much could she hear? ‘I’ve been thinking that, well, you know, perhaps it’s time that I, I mean we . . . What I want to say is, er . . . I’d like to consider, you know, quitting.’

‘Pardon?’

The rustling on the other side of the toilet wall stopped abruptly.

‘Well, yes. My schedule outside work has been very busy lately, and I’d like to . . . consider . . . other options.’

‘Haven’t we had this conversation before, sweetie?’ she cooed reassuringly. ‘I’m sending only the most carefully selected men to you now.’

‘Yes, but maybe it’s time for me to stop for good.’

‘Oh, darling,’ the manager sighed. ‘If it’s a matter of more money . . .’

I turned in to the corner of the cubicle. I swear my voice was echoing. ‘It’s not about the money. I have enough. It’s more, well, it’s taking a lot out of my personal life,’ I whispered hotly. And what if someone here stumbled across the website? It had been hard enough to land a job; that would kill any career for certain.

‘Sweetheart, darling,’ the manager laughed. ‘That happens to everyone.’

I froze. The woman in the next cubicle hadn’t gone yet. She

must be eavesdropping. ‘Yes, well, I’m worried about my’ – I lowered my voice to almost subaudible level – ‘privacy.’

‘Your what?’ the manager asked sweetly.

‘My privacy,’ I whispered, only a touch louder.

‘Darling, I’m sorry, you must be losing signal, I can’t hear a word you’re saying.’

‘My privacy!’ I shouted. ‘I’m concerned about my privacy!’

A snort from the next cubicle. ‘You might consider not taking phone calls in the toilet,’ a voice said.

‘Oh, darling, if only you’d said,’ the manager cooed. ‘It is a very simple matter. I can anonymise your photos on the website, so that no one recognises you. Okay? Okay. Good. Now I’ll text you the details for the weekend and we’ll speak tomorrow.’ She hung up.

‘Great. Talk tomorrow,’ I said to the dead line.

dimanche, le 26 septembre

The client was younger than me. We met at a private address. He said it was his house, but I wasn’t sure. How many twenty-somethings have homes over four floors of a building in central London? Apart from someone you’d recognise in films, I mean. Exactly. Probably his parents’ house.

I was rushed up to the top bedroom. ‘You’d better undress,’ he said. I untied the wrap dress but left on the suspenders and stockings – he’d requested them specially. He looked at me a few minutes.

‘All the way,’ he said, indicating the lingerie. I did.

He wanted oral; I gave it. He sat back in the half-dark and I sensed he was bored. ‘Okay, enough,’ he said, pulling me off his member. ‘Tell me something dirty.’

I started a story about me and a girl at a club, in the toilets.

‘Would you ever do a threesome?’ he interrupted.

‘I’ve done plenty,’ I said. ‘How about you?’

‘Yeah, of course.’

‘Were they friends or strangers?’

‘Two girls,’ he said. ‘Strippers. I made them both come.’

It seems to me that there is no need for a man to try to impress a woman he is paying for sex, but then the male of the species is an odd creature. Maybe they look on it as practice for the women they meet in real life. Maybe they can’t help themselves.

I rolled a condom on him and we went at it, me sitting on him facing away – the classic Reverse Cowgirl position. An absolute lifesaver when you have to make like you’re enjoying the experience, but aren’t up to looking the part. It appalled me to think that I was counting down the minutes until it would be over.

Maybe I got a little carried away with the counting, because even with ball-tickling and toe-licking he was still going soft. Without any clues to go on, I didn’t know what would help. Talking dirty? Squealing girlishly? Struggling a little?

No luck there. He asked me to suck him again. Oral sex after a condom is always distasteful: the shaft tastes strongly of latex, and before long my lips start to swell and will be painful for the rest of the night. But the hour was winding up, and I didn’t think he’d take the suggestion to have a wash first very well.

The effect was minimal. ‘You can stop now,’ he sighed. I smiled and tried to hide my relief; my lips were aching already. So what if he didn’t come? What a world-weary little worm. We sat in silence for a few minutes. ‘I’m sorry,’ he said. ‘I was a bit nervous, and took a Xanax before you came over. Do you think that would have an effect on . . . ?’ and he indicated his penis.

I felt guilty about judging him harshly. ‘You poor thing,’ I said, stroking his chest. ‘I suppose it would. I hope you didn’t find me too frightening.’

‘No, I think you’re a nice girl. I’ll call again next month – it’s my birthday.’ In spite of feeling sorry for him I sincerely hoped he wouldn’t. ‘I think you should take the full fee anyway.’

Well, duh. If I'm going to turn up at work tomorrow on three hours' sleep it had damn well better have been for pay.

lundi, le 27 septembre

Meeting people for the first time is something I'm used to.

The stilted conversations, the awkward questions as I negotiate my way round a new set of rules, the polite introductions and biting of the tongue. I'm well practised in the art of nodding and smiling; it's served me well thus far.

Reserving my judgments of people encountered at work for a late phone call with N, tick. Remembering not to wear too short a skirt in a professional setting, handled. Repressing the urge to imitate the flat accent of the Canadian sitting behind me, this I can do.

Having to come back every day and do it all over again is a bit harder.

mardi, le 28 septembre

Home from yet another half-hearted assignment on the call-girl front. I can't blame the man, he was unobjectionable; I blame myself and an inability to say no. Sometimes I think the manager is trying to punish me. Maybe I'm simply at a low ebb but it all feels terribly tedious sometimes. On the other hand, any job probably feels this way. It's simply that there are a number of conversations I never want to have with a client again, such as:

- 1 What's a Nice Girl like you doing in a place like this?
Do you ask the woman at the Superdrug till why she's not frolicking in the stacks at the library? Do you question a

- building-site manager's choice of career when you walk past? No.
- 2 My wife doesn't understand me.
Honey, it goes without saying. That you've decided to call a professional in on the job pre-empts further explanation.
- 3 Tell me about your manager/the other girls/your other clients.
They're all shining examples of humanity, impeccably behaved and jewels among the dross; every man a gentleman. Oh, and they're all Nobel laureates, too. Please, please don't ask if I've slept with anyone famous. I have, it was unremarkable, and no, I will not name names.
- 4 How did you vote in the elections?
Are you kidding? You selected your evening's companion based on a picture of me bending over in hot pants. Unless this is a research project seeking to connect labial size with political leanings, it is about as relevant as asking Jordan what she thinks of joining the euro. And the odds are I will just tell you what you want to hear, anyway.

mercredi, le 29 septembre

The Canadian came round and introduced herself today. 'Hi, I'm Erin,' she chirruped. 'How're you finding it so far?'

'Fine, thank you,' I said. By now everyone in the company has made a reason to stroll by my desk at least once. I don't know if there's something on my blouse or if they're simply curious. And I've learned more names than I can possibly remember.

Worse still, she probably wants to be friends. And if there's one thing I can't take it's *making friends* with women.

Don't get me wrong; I have female friends, though they are admittedly outnumbered by men. But '*making friends*', that pink-covered, sugar-coated state heavily promoted by women's magazines (Is she your Bessie Mate 4-evah? Find

out on page 42!) in which two people audition each other over the course of months, years, or possibly the rest of their lives, applying criteria higher than you'd use for selecting a gynaecologist or partner, I have no patience with it.

As a result, I have few female friends and the exceptions are people of some character. Such as Angel, another working girl, who is about as batty as they come but rarely sticks around long enough to be too annoying, and L.

When L and I meet – sometimes after a gap of months or even years, but that's okay, because we're friends, not completing some creepy tick list of 'friendship' – it's as if we never left off. The two girls who used to pass filthy notes about their teachers written in schoolgirl French are much the same, but with wider hips and better shoes. I'm really not counting on *making friends* at work.

'Well, if you need anything, just gimme a shout,' Erin said. Given her general volume I suspect that was meant literally.

'Cheers, I will do.' I leaned over and ran a finger inside my aching instep. When you've been used to either stilettos or flats, court shoes are murder. 'Bye.'

'Byeeeeee.'

jeudi, le 30 septembre

Great Pub Games #1 – Obscure claims to fame.

- A2's lady friend: Was at school with Richard E. Grant in Swaziland.
'Not bad.'
'I propose having been to Swaziland is obscure enough.'
ObScore: 6/10
- A2: Sent threatening letters to Cliff Richard when Sir Cliff was dating Olivia Newton-John.
'I was young. It was a confusing time.'
'How young?'

‘Around twelve.’

‘That’s no excuse.’

ObScore: 2/10

- A1: Was in Berlin when the wall came down.

‘Eh, you and everyone else.’

‘But it was historically important!’

‘That’s a different game.’

ObScore: 1/10

- A4: Is named for an ancestor of his who was hanged for being a Luddite.

‘Ooooooh.’

ObScore: 8/10

- Me: Was kissed by the singer from Franz Ferdinand.

‘It was only a peck. His girlfriend was right there.’

‘Not that you would usually find that a problem . . .’

‘I was on a date with his brother’s friend, you see.’

‘Did the friend get to kiss you?’

‘He didn’t even try.’

ObScore: 4/10

- N: Lives round the corner from Cynthia Payne.

‘Britain’s première prostitute. She ever invite you in?’

‘Hey, I resent that!’

ObScore: 6/10

- A3: Had a ticket for one of what turned out to be one of Joy Division’s last ever gigs; it was cancelled when the singer had an epileptic fit; everyone rushed the stage.

‘I don’t think any of us can top that.’

- ObScore: 9/10 (and the winner)


Dear Belle

Dear Belle,

I recently arranged a blind date on a gay hook-up website – and the man who came to meet me was my closeted father. Family dinner conversation is now somewhat stilted. Do I tell Mum?

Dear Twisted Sister,

Only if you two are now an item.




Dear Belle,

My boyfriend fantasises about covering me in strawberry jam. Maybe I am a bit of a stereotypical gayer, but I like my body to be clean and sweet-smelling, and can't bear the idea of properly sticky sex and then hours in a bath scrubbing syrup off my whatsits. Can you suggest how I gently turn down his suggestion, or another substance we could substitute for the jam? To his credit, he is a Bonne Maman man.

Dear Squeaky Clean,

Few things taste better than cream tea on a human plate, but I do understand your reservations. Whole fruits, organic and in season, are far cleaner than messy jam. Failing that, supply him with yummy fruity-smelling soaps and similar in a picnic hamper or resign yourself to the fact that getting sticky is one of those things we have to do for love.




Dear Belle,

I'm quite capable of coming up with a chat-up line. My problem is what to say next. Any suggestions?

Dear Tongue-Tied,

Your name and a suggestion to buy the object of your affection a drink are usually a good place to start. But I have a question for you: what's a nice lad like you doing in a column like this?



Dear Belle,

I've fallen for a gorgeous Catholic girl. She's pledged to stay a

virgin until she's married. I've pledged to shag her before the summer. How can I tempt her into the sins of the flesh?

Dear Mortal Sin,

Pop the question. It doesn't mean you have to go through with it, and if my understanding is correct Catholic girls will normally let you have one sample before buying.