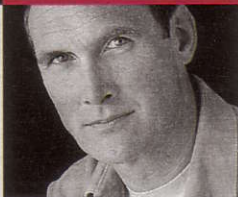




AA GILL TABLE TALK



A surprising thing has just happened. I was on a bus (a surprising thing, though not *the* surprising thing), when a woman, an attractive, intelligent woman, moved seats to sit behind me.

Now, that is surprising. She held up a book. It was a book what I wrote. Sweetly, she wanted to pass on a word of kindness.

That isn't just surprising — it slaps the god of chance in the face with a fish called serendipity. What is the statistical probability of getting on the 14 on Fulham Road to find a pretty woman reading a book you authored and actually bothering to come and tell you? Well, it beggars the chaos of the spheres. We're not talking Jilly Cooper here (the book, or the lady). This is a volume that bravely struggled to sales of triple figures.

Journalism is not a trade that inspires recognition or affection. We troglodytes in the mine of events are rarely bothered by face-to-face appreciation, and are very bad at it. I tend to smile pathetically at the kindness of strangers and hide behind execrable Hugh Laurie impressions. What I wanted to say was:

"Please, might I put my head in your lap while you read out your favourite bits and stroke my hair?"

But that's not the end of the surprising thing. Because, just before the bus, I had a call from a strange American, who said "Hi" in that inclusive, I'm-not-strange American way. He went on: "I was on holiday in Jamaica, and a page of your book floated past me at sea. I read it, and I just had to call you. I'm the editor of this new magazine [I am not making this up]. I love your work. You must write for me." That's astonishing.

I like the idea of my words being oil on troubled waters, castaway messages of hope. I am half considering publishing a thin *oeuvre* by burying it at sea. Anyway, you are now reading the new agony aunt for Bareback Chubby Chasers: A Fistful of Fun for the Gay Man with a Fuller Figure.

Recognition in restaurants, of course, is another kettle of red herrings. Critics are divided on how far we should go to preserve anonymity. American critics go to absurd lengths to remain incognito, particularly the one from Bareback Chubby Chasers. Over here, we tend to be a little more relaxed, generally booking under an assumed name, then turning up

Carpaccio ★

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Lunch, Mon-Fri, noon-2.30pm, Sat, noon-2.45pm. Dinner, Mon-Sat, 7pm-11.30pm. Closed Sun

★★★★ Chelsea Girls ★★★★★ Chelsea Flower Show ★★★ Chelsea Clinton ★★ Chelsea smile ★ I don't want to go to Chelsea