

Worst day of my life

I had no reason to suppose that this particular Wednesday was going to be any different from – or, indeed, any worse than – any other.

I didn't oversleep, the milk for coffee had not got interesting lumps in it, and I didn't stick my fingernail through my last respectable pair of stockings as I put them on. In fact, everything was comfortably normal as I parked the car, crossed the road to the bus stop and waited for the next number 91 into Charing Cross.

I'd been standing at the stop for a mere three minutes when a bus hove into view – I glanced down to avoid a puddle as I went to board it – and realised that I was wearing one dark blue and one black shoe. I'd bought two pairs in an identical style – and as I fumbled about in the wardrobe I had managed to pick out one from both pairs. Before I realised this, I don't expect anyone else had noticed, but once I was aware of it, I was certain that everyone was staring and thinking, 'Nutter'.

So as soon as I got to the office I found an excuse to sneak out to the nearest shoe shop and buy a new pair – £55 I really couldn't afford... Anyway, at least I had matching feet again.

Start again...

The day settled back to humdrum normality – a new projects meeting, a few letters, a couple of interviewees to see – then lunch. I was meeting a friend I used to work with and

we had lots to catch up on. We picked on a little local Italian bistro, ordered drinks and a light meal and were chatting when the waiter appeared with our order – and a whole row of plates cunningly balanced up his arm for another table. He bent over our table – and it was then that a minor landslide started somewhere at the top of his sleeve and two large dinner plates, with contents, slid, frisbee-like towards my head – actually, towards my nose. He managed to salvage one of the plates before it reached me, but the other one struck my nose side-on and deposited a hot trail of spaghetti in rich sauce over my shoulder.

A bad-wardrobe day

So, it was some time later that I went back to the office, my light linen jacket (with new and colourful shoulder detail) stuffed in a carrier bag, and a promise from the restaurant manager to pick up the cleaning bill. Sadly, I didn't expect there was much they'd be able to do about oily tomato stains – but it was a nice gesture. I did suspect, however, from the sore sensation at the side of my nose, that I would probably soon be sporting a black eye. Not so good for the early evening jolly with the company's

visitors from the German office. Ice-pack needed, and some careful application of makeup – and I might not look too bad.

Why me?

The rest of the afternoon was uneventful – well, that's if a threatened team mutiny is run-of-the mill. The work-experience lad who had joined us had what I can only describe as a 'freshness problem', and in essence, the team had got together and agreed that if I didn't have a word in his ear, they'd start dropping hints – deodorants and washing powder on his desk and the like. This was turning into a 'mare of a day – I couldn't think of anything more acutely embarrassing. I found an empty room and asked the boy to join me for a chat – and completely tongue-tied, and after going round and round the issue for what seemed like an age, I got to the point. The boy looked at me as if I'd crawled out from under a stone. He grunted non-committally and watched me as I went on digging myself into a verbal hole. I brought our interview to a close with a few more mumbled suggestions regarding personal freshness.



Surely the day could offer nothing more excruciating than this last encounter? I returned to my desk with a sense of relief at a difficult diplomatic hurdle crossed and felt that in comparison the forthcoming Anglo-German beano would be child's play.

However, things could get worse, and they did. I was sitting at my desk, minding my own business when my mobile announced that I had a text message. From the boyfriend, it seemed... I opened it...

DARLING M - HERSELF OUT WITH OFFICE TONITE - CANT WB TO CU - YOUR PLACE B? JXXX

Just a clue – my name doesn't begin with M – it's L. Looks like one of those slip-of-the-keyboard sends – like accidentally texting a horny message to your father. An interesting development... I wonder who M is...

I can't pretend I wasn't upset – I was devastated. Ten months down the pan, by the looks of it – and I'd had such high hopes of 'Mr Right'. I couldn't decide whether to text back straight away – or even what I'd say, so remembering that revenge is a dish best served cold, I put my phone away and braced myself for the evening's jollities.

Evening entertainment

The UK contingent convened at the designated restaurant and we arranged ourselves in comfortable low chairs around a table in the bar area to wait for our opposite numbers from Hamburg. By the time they arrived



the bar was filling up, but we still managed to find some extra chairs from neighbouring tables. Soon the eight of us were rather too cosily wedged around the table – but a couple of bottles of wine eventually loosened up the atmosphere.

We planned to stay in the bar until our guests had to leave for the theatre, so we ordered more drinks – and the chap next to me – Reinhardt – shuffled his chair back as he went to the bar. He came back and dragged his chair up again, tilting it so that the front legs dropped neatly into the small space. Eventually it was time for them to go, and I got up to say goodbye – and as I stood up there was a ghastly rending noise and a tugging sensation around my waist. I looked down and realised that when he put his chair back, Reinhardt had put the leg of his chair down on the fabric of my skirt where it fell on the floor. I was standing in front of our visitors with one side of my skirt ripped away to reveal a cheeky expanse of stocking-top, suspenders and glimpse of underwear.

End to a perfect day

A localised sharp intake of breath around our table drew the attention of the rest of the room to my predicament – and a few ill-concealed sniggers were audible. It was only then that I became aware of two people sitting at a nearby table. An elderly lady – very elegant – and a rather delicious younger man – around thirty, I'd say.

I sank back into my seat and contemplated my exit and journey home – without even a jacket to cover my absence of skirt. The German contingent were gathering themselves together to leave so I said my goodbyes from my seat



and then was left with one colleague. I ferreted in my handbag for a safety pin – without success, so I pulled the ragged bits of my skirt about me and prepared to leave. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was the man from the nearby table. 'My mother and I saw what happened just then – and thought this might help.' Over his arm was draped an ice blue pashmina which, until moments ago had adorned his mother's shoulders. 'You could wrap it around you like a sarong... It would get you home, then if you work around here I could pick it up from you tomorrow. Perhaps you could join me after work for a drink...'

So, after the day from hell – bad shoes, wrecked jacket, bottom-clenchingly embarrassing exchange with sweaty boy, the defection of now ex-boyfriend and the final humiliation of my skirt being ripped up – things might be looking up. As Scarlett O'Hara said, 'Tomorrow is another day...'