

Identity card

Charlotte Reather's recognition skills are a joke to friends and acquaintances alike. So much so, she's stopped going out

LAST week, Comb Over Man (COM) and I were trapped on an easyJet flight to Sardinia (which is bad enough) next to a beer-bellied Aussie snoring like a bush-pig. COM wanted to poke him in the guts with his G&T stirrer to stop the racket but I slapped him down. "What if he has a heart condition or is diabetic or a narcoleptic," I whispered. (I once nudged a chubby Welshman roughly on a train to cease his nasal rumbles and then spent the remainder of the journey apologising to his wife as she told me the tear-jerking story of his incurable sleep disorder. I wasn't about to make the same mistake again.)

I urged COM to let the poor chap sleep. He grumpily gave in. I then selected the rock band Bush on my iPod, leaving my aggravated companion to listen to the Pig. He tore paper napkins into strips and stuck them in his ears.

That evening we were having dinner at our hotel, when who should walk in but Bush-Pig. He came over and said: "Hi, it's you guys! I was sitting next to you on the flight." He was very friendly and we had a quick chat. He then went to his table to dine alone. We felt rather sorry for him being on his own and wanted to invite him to join us but we were having such a lovely time together we decided against it.

Later, we went up to the roof terrace to enjoy after-dinner drinks and a game of backgammon. Our easyJet friend was there, alone again, drinking a beer. COM and I bounced over and said, "Hello! We can't have you sitting here all on your own. You must join us for a drink. We won't take no for an answer." We almost went to drag him up from his seat. He stared at us with fear in his eyes: "But I'm waiting for my wife." It was the wrong man.

COM and I slunk back to our table, heads down, and nursed our drinks, faces reddening, toes curling. This guy probably thought we were the resident nutters or a pair of weird swingers trying to inveigle him into a dodgy threesome but, even worse than that, we had compared him to a guy double the size and beaten twice as hard with the ugly stick. What if he worked out we'd mixed him up with Bush-Pig? He'd be furious. What if Bush-Pig

came up for a drink and joined us? Then he'd know for sure. His wife arrived. She was no oil painting. COM took one look and said, "If I'd been waiting for that I'd have joined us or the Foreign Legion immediately." I smuggled him away.

It's bad enough when you can't quite place someone when you're out walking the dogs or in the supermarket – we've all done the tactical eyes down manoeuvre – but it's hellish when you emphatically wave at someone or clasp him to your bosom while in the same split second realising you don't know him from Adam. Or when someone says "Hi" and you say "Hi" back and then he walks past you to chat to his real friends behind.

COM and I compared embarrassing stories as we supped our brandies back in our room. I confided that one of my worst mistaken identity moments was at a farmers' shoot in

call of nature. The gentlemen's urinals in those days comprised a long trough of flowing water. Lord B stumbled in, spied an old friend taking a tinkle, slapped him on the back and tipped his hat forward so he couldn't see what he was

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Wiltshire two years ago. My breast doctor shoots locally and I was thrilled to see him. I marched over: "Dr Bristol, how great to bump into you. You'll be glad to know my puppies are in good order!" Of course it wasn't Dr Bristol but a pole-axed garden designer from London. When the power of speech finally returned, he replied: "I'm pleased your breasts are in order. I'm actually a horticulturalist, so I'm more interested in your Virginia creeper!" The other guns roared with laughter and I have been mobbed up ever since. My face prickles with heat when I think of that day. I no longer shoot in Wiltshire.

However, I take some solace in what happened to my great friend Bungalow's father, Lord B. He was at Newmarket races when, after a surfeit of ale, he was forced to answer a

doing. Unfortunately, the hat fell clean off, floated down the gully and was sprinkled on by three other racegoers. Naturally, Lord B couldn't apologise enough. However, he was totally mortified when his poor victim turned around and he found himself facing a complete stranger. "I am so sorry. I thought you were a friend of mine," he stammered.

"If that's how you treat your friends I'm surprised you have any!" barked the less-than-happy punter.

In light of these terrible boos, COM and I have elected never to go out again and, if we do, not to say anything or do anything to anyone, just in case – it's safer that way. ■

Charlotte Reather is winner of the Gloucestershire Glamour Award 2008

