

Looking for Mr Wrong

He was more than two metres tall, dewy eyed and drop-dead gorgeous, but for English teenager, **Judy Rumbold**, finding a man to match the pin-up perfection and predatory nature of '70s heart-throb David Cassidy wasn't easy.

the Best READING

I DON'T think I'm exaggerating when I say David Cassidy was probably the most divine creature ever to draw breath. Viewed alongside the other toothsome heart-throbs of the day — Donny Osmond, David Soul, the Bay City Rollers — he was in a league of his own. Those heavily lashed, girly eyes, that softly feathered hair, the glittering banks of flawless dentistry that went on for miles; he really was drop-dead gorgeous.

As a modest tribute to this rare, fragile beauty, I had an enormous, eight-foot poster of him on my bedroom wall, flanked by a crucifix and some horse pictures. In aesthetic terms, of course, Christ in *extremis* and any number of steaming, snorting examples of equine perfection could not detract from the vision of loveliness that was Cassidy, resplendent in denim-effect shirt and uncompromising loon pants.

At the age of 11 or so, my eyes were on a level with his splendidly defined crotch. But don't get me wrong; it was all very innocent. I'd kiss him (or, rather, the area roughly approximating his trouser flies) moist goodnights, weep in time to his second-rate records — "How can I be sure/How in a world that's constantly changing/How can I be sure/Where I stand with you?" — and scream at the telly during what I now acknowledge to be truly risible attempts at acting in 'The Partridge Family'. As I say, all very innocent, if a little foolish.

With the onset of puberty, the relationship between me and the looming wall-poster changed, but I couldn't quite work out why. I searched Cassidy's face for answers. He gazed back from his position up there with the cobwebs and the bogs of redundant Blui-tak, wearing his usual look of limpid vacuity; the same sort of expression that I imagine prompted legions of grown men to enjoy sexual fantasies about Marina, the deaf mute puppet in 'Stingray'.

But while Marina undoubtedly had a good excuse, Cassidy couldn't fool me with his silent act. During the daytime, his presence above my bed was comfortable, natural and his gaze registered nothing more sinister than benign, knockabout cheeriness. But by night — face shadowy and thrown into spooky relief by the nits and troughs of the blistering anaglyphic landscape — he changed. I watched him turn leery and suggestive. Predatory eyes would follow me round the room. Even under the bed, I could feel those bankably flirtatious two pools of desire boring a route through the winter-weight candlewick. I got to the stage where the simple act of getting undressed at bed time embroiled me and Cassidy in some major sexual mindgame.

He always came out on top. Failing to find an adequate hiding place, I was forced to beat a modest, gingerly path to the bathroom, where I would clamber into my pyjamas in the dark, well out of range of those searchlight eyes.

In retrospect, the Cassidy experience was probably the first sign that Catholicism, men and sexual desire were not notions that you could entertain simultaneously and still expect to enjoy a swift and incident-free passage to heaven.

But despite the suppressions that the disapproval, the ignorance, and the agonies of an adolescence spent under the illusions that love, sex and procreation were privileges enjoyed by a small, select (and greatly envied) group of randy gerbils used by the school biology lab to illustrate reproduction, I was determined to find my own David Cassidy.

It didn't take me long to realise I'd got a fairly tough search on my hands, and would have to cast my net a good deal wider than Sutton Coldfield parish and the Church of the Holy Trinity.

I mean, what sort of religion was it that, at every opportunity, had its menfolk wearing frocks? All right, so Cassidy was no beefcake, but at least he knew what trousers were for. Where I came from, men tended to flounce around altars in surplices and what looked like special-occasion dolbies. Even boys from school, who you'd seen desperately attempting to affect shandy-inebriation at youth club the night before, had their labored attempts at cool negated the next morning, when they'd appear as church altar servers in frilly smocks, their hair splatted down by mum's spit.

Nevertheless, in my community it was every mother's most ardent wish that her daughter would meet and marry a Good Catholic Boy — ideally

a friend of the family with a rock-solid medical history, aspirations to a mediocre future in bank-clerkery and assurances of fertility demonstrated by ever-expanding flocks of siblings. There is still a gaping hole on the dining room sideboard at home, waiting to be filled by a tearfully taffetaed me, fresh from being joined in joyous Christian union with some pious dork in a tailcoat. But it will never happen. Catholic boys weren't for me; nor indeed were they for my two sisters or any of my Catholic friends, all of whom married atheists and agnostics.

I can't say I blame them. Unless you liked halitosis, beige anoraks and wonkily side-parted hair, GCBs were a major turn-off. It was a fairly safe, if a touch cruel, bet among my circle that GCBs would end up gay, psychotic or both. That, or they married Good Catholic Girls; and where I came from the latter were pretty thin on the ground.

It was a matter of priority with me and my girlfriends that the characters of the boys we fancied were as flawed as possible. Smokers were a catch, as were compulsive swearers and habitual shoplifters. Projectile gobbing from the top of the school bus was, I recall, a highly attractive trait in a man. Serial belching met with fulsome applause, and the ability to

fart to order was as good as a proposal of marriage.

Progressing from schoolboys, our options opened up considerably. Out in the real world, there were any number of really glamorous misfits, guaranteed to make your parents cringe. Black men (remember, we're talking about deepest Sutton Coldfield here), ex-convicts, heavy drinkers and androgynes were sought-after consorts. Once I took a Goth to church, and the thing that really caused a stir wasn't the pink sunglasses, the black net evening gloves or the aura of Elnette that danced around his hair, but the traces of pink lipstick he left on the chalice while accepting Holy Communion.

No, the only time a prospective boyfriend showed any interest in religion was when, during a renewed bout of godliness some years back, I was helping out at a church-based drop-in centre on Saturday mornings, making great mountains of margarine and jam sandwiches for the homeless. Such was this man's desire to impress, he said he'd come along to help. Alarm bells started ringing. The last thing I wanted was for a perfectly facile bastard to turn nice on me. Come 6 am the following morning, he didn't show. I've been with him ever since.

— Guardian Weekend

Oh, sister Herbivore
shame on you!



Leigh HOBBS

the Best ILLUSTRATION

Artist **Leigh Hobbs** cartoon in the Good Weekend in August commented on a vegetarian's right to occasionally lapse into carnivorous behavior.