

Starstruck

One of the more interesting things about living in London's fashionable and arty Notting Hill, as I did for about a year, was the number of famous people I used to see going about their business. Hardly a day would go by without my catching sight of some celebrity or other. One day it was a famous pop star taking his dog for a walk, the next a top politician browsing in a bookshop. It was an undeniably entertaining aspect of those London days and did come in quite useful when my mother called me for a progress report:

'Have you met a nice girl yet?'

'Well..er...no, but I did see Hugh Grant eating a banana in Hyde Park.'

'Really? Tell me more!' (Subject successfully changed, thanks Hugh!)

I never approached the stars of course but one lunchtime in my local supermarket an extravagantly dressed couple came up beside me in front of the Indian ready meal section. A quick peak revealed them to be the (at the time at least) ultra-famous Liam Gallagher and Patsy Kensit. What first struck me was that Liam's designer clothing didn't really go with the basket he was holding and the expensive sunglasses couldn't have helped him to distinguish between the birianis, bhunas and rogan joshes.

I can't say I have ever been a huge fan of either but I was overwhelmed by a sudden desire to eavesdrop on their conversation. I had never heard two celebrities talking to each other before. What did people as famous as this say to one other in their off-duty moments? I feigned interest in a packet of chicken masala nearer to their end of the fridge, leant in and cocked my ear.

'Which one do you want?'

'I dunno. Which one did I have last time?'

'I dunno. I think you had the prawn.'

'Well, I'll have that one then.'

'Alright.'

What a disappointment! I don't know what I had expected but certainly nothing as banal as this. But my instant feeling of disenchantment was quickly replaced by a blush of shame at having trespassed on a, probably all too rare, moment of privacy. I retreated to the yoghurts. After all, it wouldn't do to appear too starstruck.

'Starstruck' is a word to describe someone with a burning interest in celebrities, or 'celebs' as they are commonly referred to these days. The word might be applied to the majority of the British population right now, judging by the success of a host of glossy magazines devoted to the doings of the great and the good. Chat, OK and Hello are some of the best selling and most avidly read publications in the UK at the moment.

The constant stream of celeb related stories these magazines have generated has popularised an array of expressions to rank the famous and assign them their appropriate position in the celebrity pecking order.

For instance 'A list' describes the most sought after and highly paid stars while 'C' and even 'D list' are used pejoratively to mark out those at the bottom of the food chain:

'I wouldn't bother with that party: it's strictly D list.'

'Up and coming' or 'The next big thing' describe exciting new talent likely soon to enter the A list while 'has been' is a cruel expression for a former A lister whose best days are behind them.

London is of course the most fruitful hunting ground for the starstruck. Watch out for movie premieres especially. I went to one hoping to meet Warren Beatty (I'm old) but happily settled for a (very firm) handshake from Jacky Chan instead. Also star-studded are marquee sporting events such as the Alfred Dunhill Championship, a pro-celebrity contest held in St. Andrews in October and frequented by the likes of Michael Douglas, Johann Cruyff and fruit fan Hugh Grant.

So good luck star spotting in the UK but if you do find yourself within earshot of a couple of mega-stars, don't expect to hear any scintillating conversation.



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