

ALL EMBRACING

By Dave Pescod (UK)

You must wear something formal, black. Not a tight skirt, as you may need to run. Look smart and professional. Find a large group, the larger the better. Watch from a distance to see if there is some lack of organization, a relaxed approach to the order of events. More organized parties do not work.

I wear pink lipstick, never red, my hair down, well brushed. I often take a discreet photograph of the group at this early time, to keep in my album and look at on long winter nights. I've begun my second album, and the photographs remind me of the most memorable occasions.

Heathrow is not suitable, people are too tense there, preoccupied with the fear of flying or purchasing duty frees. Railway stations are best. Waterloo, Kings Cross and especially Liverpool Street with the Stansted Express. Here, it's easy to see when the moment is right, as most of the groups will be going to the airport, and the times are well advertised on the notice boards.

About ten minutes before departure, I make my move, joining as one of the latecomers, when they gather by the ticket barrier. The atmosphere will change as the moment becomes imminent. Shyer members will hide at the back, while bolder ones preen themselves. They will make their moves, and the others will follow their example, becoming emotional and vulnerable, not wanting to be left out. This is the moment. You must move quickly. Be positive and smile as you approach the first embrace. Hold them firmly, as you would someone you care for. Listen to their breath, and smell the scent of their perfume. Be quick, but don't rush as you pass on to the next person. Occasionally, you will need to say how wonderful it has been, and how much you will miss them, but you will hear the others, and it's best to follow their examples. Sometimes they use Christian names to reassure each other. I never kiss, as it is over familiar, and could jeopardize your position. They will be pleased to embrace you, even if they do not recognize you. They will presume you are someone working behind the scenes, as anxious as you about the farewell and proper etiquette. After the embraces, it is best to make an excuse and depart before they have time to confer about your identity.

It is easy to be seduced by the warmth of the embraces, but discipline is called for, to avoid over indulgence. In some early operations, my timing was wrong and I was pursued; once losing a Gucci shoe at Waterloo. But, I learnt self-control, and the need to withdraw early, knowing I can savour the moment at home, later.

When you hold someone; I think you hold a little bit of them forever. You hold their past and their future, and by the way they embrace you, they reveal their vulnerability and their strength. This makes me feel warm, part of something bigger.

I have no family in this country and only a few acquaintances. For me, it is not easy to make friends and yet it is only natural to need some physical contact with other humans. This method has no complications. A woman in my position finds it reassuring, while I hope it brings some comfort to them. My London flat is well positioned for the stations, and I still set out once a week to be embraced.