

## 2000/July LOUISE RENNISON - Publishing News

Some people write about fairy tales, and some people, like Louise Rennison, end up in their very own. Right about now she is on the *QE2* (ship, not bridge), setting out on a journey that will see her first fêted by HarperCollins in New York and then schmoozing with the studio execs in Los Angeles. All thanks to a couple of columns she wrote in the *Evening Standard* magazine.

In true movie/fairy story fashion one of the columns, called 'The Offside Rule for Girls' was spotted by Gillon Aitken, who subsequently became her agent, while Brenda Gardner, publisher of Piccadilly Press, was attracted by another. "That column was about dating for the over 30s," says Rennison, "which prompted Brenda to get in touch with me and ask me to write a book. She said she'd like me to do a teenage girl's diary, and I was flattered at first, but then she told me she thought I could do it because I was so self-obsessed!"

The end result of this creative confluence was a book that glories in the title of *Angus, Thongs and Full-frontal Snogging*, which is all about the intimate inner life of one Georgia Nicolson and was published last July. "The reaction was extraordinary!" exclaims Rennison. "It got great reviews, it was put up for prizes and I was just so busy with it...and then it started to sell overseas, which makes me laugh because the translations have been delightful - snogging being quite a challenging word in lots of languages!" The Danish version, she discovered, has the word 'Slut' writ large on the last page - not, as she first thought, an editorial comment on her work but Danish for 'The End' - and the US edition has a glossary of all the words deemed to need some kind of explanation. The literary equivalent of subtitles in the film *Kes*, I suppose.

Rennison is particularly happy with the cover of *Angus* in France. "It's called *Mon Nez, Mon Chat, L'amour et Moi*, which is great," she says, "but then they went and got Claire Brétécher, a French cartoonist who's my absolute hero, to do the cover!" Brétécher's name will only mean anything to you if you're of a certain vintage and sensibility, such as Rennison who

graduated in the Seventies from an Expressive Arts course in Brighton, which she describes as “a crap UK version of *Fame*”. “You had to perform, you were forced to,” she says, “and after I did my tutor told me that, even though I was obviously quite intelligent, she never wanted to see me on stage again. Being from the North, I took this as encouragement.”

This ‘encouragement’ eventually led to her first one-woman show called *Stevie Wonder Felt My Face*. And, yes, he did. “I had three friends nicknamed Scoop, Scrap and Snap,” explains Rennison. “Snap’s real name was Richard Young, now the society photographer, and he took me off to the Kensington Hilton, where Stevie Wonder was staying, because he said he knew the band. It was immediately obvious, when we got there, that he didn’t, but they let us in anyway and we were introduced to Stevie - who, being blind, felt my face.”

The show was a big hit for Rennison at the Edinburgh Festival (she’s not sure, but she thinks it was in 1988) and she went on to get a lot of radio work from the BBC. She still works for *Woman’s Hour*, John Peel’s *Home Truths*, Arthur Smith’s *Excess Baggage* as well as *Loose Ends*. “I’ve also been on the road, performing, for seven or eight years,” she tells me, “so sitting at home writing books is so different from anything I’ve ever done. But then my whole career has been a series of things I’ve never done before.”

Rennison has never ever written a film script, but now it looks like there’s a good chance *Angus* might be made into a movie, the producers have asked her to write the script. “I’ve discovered I’m quite good at dialogue,” she says, “and now I get to write about what I want, the way I want to do it, which is the very best thing about what’s happened.”

The only cloud on the horizon is that success has brought with it requests for her to travel, which Rennison is quite prepared to do as long as it doesn’t involve actually getting on any planes. The last time she tried it the result was a last-minute aborted take-off and an ignominious exit to the baggage hall, hence the trip to New York via the *QE2* and then Amtrak to LA - accompanied by a BBC-supplied tape recorder so she can do pieces for John Peel and Arthur Smith *en route*. No peace for the wicked, then, and heaven forbid she ever becomes big in Japan...

