

Books

**'I COULD FEEL MY
SANITY SLIDE
AWAY FROM ME'**

The farce show

When TV writer Jane Bussmann sought her fortune in LA, she ended up falling in love with a peacekeeper in Uganda. Anna Millar hears a tale of libel and kidnapping

You know you've arrived when Britney Spears snubs you and Nicole Richie congratulates you.' Journalist and comedy writer Jane Bussmann is smiling as she peruses the LA stomping ground, which so mercilessly provides fodder for her memoir, *The Worst Date Ever*. The premise for the book – subtitled 'War Crimes, Hollywood Heart-throbs and Other Abominations: A Lying, Cheating, Stealing Quest for Love' – is simple. A Brit journalist (Bussmann) journeys to Hollywood to change the world, develops a crush on a high profile peacekeeper and heads to Uganda in search of love. There, she inadvertently becomes a force for good, uncovering a war crime in the process.

Were it not for Bussmann's gregarious ability to spin a yarn with such honest, self-deprecating verbosity, it would be easy to believe her tome was little more than a work of fiction. 'I hear what you're saying,' laughs Bussmann, 'but the joy of LA La Land, is that there's never any need to make it up: it does the work for you.' Uninspired by the 'reality' jobs she was getting in Britain following successful stints writing for *The Fast Show*, *Smack the Pony* and *Brass Eye*, Bussmann foraged across the pond, in early 2000, in search of enlightenment. 'It was the age of reality TV in Britain and the idea was that it was the future for us all. The jobs just kept getting worse and worse, so I nobly got on a plane to Hollywood thinking I could change it all.'

The road to 'grown-up' journalism was, she admits, a little sketchy. From an accidentally libelous frisson with Ashton Kutcher to constructing pages of lifestyle

pap about LA's elite, Bussmann's raison d'être became filing puff pieces, which she describes with reckless abandon. She merrily balks at the memories. 'It felt like the only job I could get was interviewing the likes of Britney Spears for women's magazines. I could feel my sanity slide away from me.'

Then fate intervened. While flicking through a copy of *Vanity Fair* she spotted a story about renegade peacekeeper, John Prendergast. It was 'love' at first sight. 'I saw this man – the most handsome man I had ever seen – and I thought, "I'm going to make you famous and then I'm going to make you marry me".' And so Bussmann followed him to Uganda. So far so Hollywood, except that by the time Bussmann had arrived, Prendergast had left the country. Undeterred and in search of a story, she would go on to discover – albeit accidentally – an all-too-real war crime involving hundreds of kidnapped children, all of which is chronicled in the book and successful stage show, *Bussmann's Holiday*.

Plans are already afoot for a film version, the script for which Bussmann is currently working on. Indeed, she may appear to be one of Hollywood's prime naysayers, but she doesn't look set to journey back across the pond anytime soon. 'There's always the feeling that there's another great story to tell, you know. . . Besides maybe, just maybe, I'm a "Tina Turner" and enjoy getting the crap kicked out of me for a living. Who knows?'

The Worst Date Ever is published by Macmillan on Fri 3 Jul.

