

## *Lincolnshire Strand*

It's MTV's most popular new reality show, and though the first season isn't yet complete, already it's attracted an enormous following. The premise is simple: four young men and four young women—from disparate backgrounds, but all members of the same fascinating social milieu—spend a summer living together in the same beach house. It's another reality show on the winning *Real World* model, but its immense popularity can only be accounted for by the striking personalities of the eight characters. I'm talking, of course, about the new show *Lincolnshire Strand*.

The eight young specimens of nobility who stay in the Lincolnshire country estate were chosen by the producers with the utmost care: Edmund Amadour Eldridge FitzMarmaduke, 8<sup>th</sup> Earl of Tisbury; Miss Jane Babington-Reiss, or 'J-WOWW'; Marie Honorée Bellefoy-St. Martin, Marquise of Mont Piaget; Colonel Lucretius Hopworth; Mr Alistair Overington, or 'The Ineluctable Circumstances'; Miss Agrippina Cavendish; Charles d'Artigny, Count of Coeur-de-Coulombe, or 'Charlie D'; and Lady Florence Tyrwhitt, relict of the late Sir Bartholomew Tyrwhitt, or 'Twickie'. With Miss Babington-Reiss's guilty letters to her absent fiancé, Mr Overington's curious habit of referring to his abs as 'The Ineluctable Circumstances,' and Miss Cavendish's vigilant attempts to prevent the gentlemen from enjoying themselves in any way, the combination is certainly a winning one.

Discord among the housemates began on the first night, when Lady Florence ('Twickie'), being as prone to overindulgence as she was diminutive in size, took so many glasses of sherry that she gave her card to every gentleman in the house and fainted away on a divan. Mr Overington (all the while referring to himself, and to his abs, in the third person, as 'The Ineluctable Circumstances') was observed to spend a great deal of time in animated conversation with the Marquise of Mont Piaget in a corner of the drawing-room. Later, when the housemates went walking on the beach, the Marquise remained on Mr Overington's arm. There is evident feeling between them.

Mr. Overington: 'It's hardly a question of *whether* the Marquise and I will hook up. Rather, it's a question of *when I determine* the Marquise and I should hook up. You see, every body in Lincolnshire knows the Ineluctable Circumstances. And every body *adores* the Ineluctable Circumstances. And if you don't adore the Ineluctable Circumstances—well, I shall *make* you adore the Ineluctable Circumstances.'

Tension rose next day, however, when several of the gentlemen, promenading in the expansive gardens, came upon three ruddy-cheeked peasant girls and invited them back to the house for whist. Paying no heed to Lord Tisbury's admonition that bringing strange girls home would only envelop them in unwelcome 'drama' from the ladies, the three gentlemen shut themselves in the breakfast-room with their new charges. The ladies were scandalized; Miss Agrippina Cavendish most of all.

'Lord Tisbury,' said the censorious Miss Cavendish when they were alone in the drawing-room, 'may I be candid with you?'

'I shall be honoured, Miss Cavendish, to have been judged worthy of your confidence.'

'What would you say, Lord Tisbury,' she went on, 'What would you say if I were to tell you that your companions Colonel Hopworth, Mr Overington and the Count Charlie D have not only abandoned the four ladies entrusted to their care, but also have

picked up three brazen hussies from the Strand and are even now playing whist with them in that pit of sin and depravity into which they have turned our breakfast-room!

‘If I may be candid myself, Miss Cavendish,’ returned Lord Tisbury, ‘I should say I wonder why it does distress you so.’

‘Why it distresses me! My dear Lord Tisbury, can a person of your sensibility and judgement fail to perceive how tawdry and vulgar an offence against us—to say nothing of the breach of trust by Mr Overington to the Marquise, which poor lady’s sufferings at his hands I dread to contemplate—is constituted in this reptile performance?’

‘Indeed I cannot fail to perceive it, Miss Cavendish; no, could not fail to perceive it were I deaf and blind and dull as a stone. I do not, however, see what benefit you confer upon yourselves by censuring our housemates, whose behaviour you neither can nor ought to control. Nor can I condone the decision of the Marquise and Miss J-WOWW to install themselves in a corner of the breakfast-room whence to observe the gentlemen disapprovingly. Such a course can only cause annoyance to the participants and anxiety to the onlookers. This is the Lincolnshire Strand, dear Miss Cavendish; the gentlemen will disport themselves whether it please you or no, and you must leave them to it.’

But Miss Cavendish and the Marquise were not to be consoled by the philosophical Lord Tisbury, and the incident still rankled in their hearts when the company, every coiffure having been styled with a prodigious amount of pomade, set out that evening for the Baroness Maplethorpe’s ball.

Lady Florence (Twickie): ‘Directly we arrived at the ball Miss J-WOWW began to refresh herself with sherry in rather greater measure than befits a lady of her station. All night she danced with the Count of Coeur-de-Coulombe, and she behaved quite shamelessly with him. I do not imagine she will post a letter to her fiancé very soon.’

The Count (Charlie D): ‘I do not scruple to make a cuckold of Miss J-WOWW’s fiancé. I do not scruple to be that fellow.’

Meanwhile the Marquise of Mont Piaget, moved to fury by Mr Overington’s hospitality towards the farm-girls, had transferred her attentions from him to Lord Tisbury, on whose arm she had been leaning and into whose eyes she had been darting glances of unmistakeable significance all evening. Mr Overington, having perceived this, was fuming, and had been glaring at the couple when he was noticed by Lord Tisbury, who approached him, accompanied by the Marquise.

‘I say, Mr Overington,’ began Lord Tisbury with a smirk, ‘were I not convinced of your imperturbable good-humour I should fancy you were not wholly satisfied with the proceedings of the evening. Pray assure me I have been mistaken in my impression.’

Mr Overington smiled bitterly. ‘Indeed I am not satisfied, Lord Tisbury.’ Here he turned to the Marquise of Mont Piaget, who still occupied her position on Lord Tisbury’s arm, and was smiling archly as if to deny her awareness of any understanding between them that Mr Overington might have supposed to exist. ‘Madame la Marquise,’ he said, ‘between your disregard for our understanding and your inexplicable attachment to the person from whose arm you are now depending, I should find it difficult indeed to say which of the two has occasioned me more distress. I am fortunate to have entangled myself no further with a woman who holds her commitments, not to say her honour, so cheaply.’

‘Wretch!’ cried Lord Tisbury. ‘Do you suppose I will suffer you to speak so to a lady in my presence?’

‘Do you propose to prevent me yourself?’

Lord Tisbury drew himself up. ‘I do.’

‘Very well. I accept your challenge, Lord Tisbury. Colonel Hopworth shall be my second, if he is willing. Send someone to my apartments to inform me of the time and place you choose. And Lord Tisbury: permit me to suggest that you spend the remainder of the evening making final emendations to your will and testament. I shall see you in the morning. *Bonsoir*, Madame la Marquise.’

Next week, on Lincolnshire Strand:

Mr Overington: ‘Yes, of course I feel good about the duel. Lord Tisbury doesn’t seem to realise with what Ineluctable Circumstances he shall presently be confronted. For once you’ve landed yourself in the Ineluctable Circumstances, you will soon find that for those Ineluctable Circumstances there is neither delay nor remedy.’

Also: When Miss J-WOWW’s fiancé visits the Strand, will she confess her indiscretion?

‘You know, my dearest Jane, that of all the virtues with which woman is adorned, it is loyalty I cherish most.’

And: When the Count of Coeur-de-Coulombe has an attack of gout, who will take his place at whist? All this to be resolved in the next instalment of *Lincolnshire Strand*.