

THE POUTING girl in the loo shimmered, unremarkable legs squeezed into Lycra tights and see-how-far-you-can-go skirt hitched high. "Go on, you're next," she said. "It's your turn."

"I don't want any," I say.

"It's coke." She proffers a razor blade packet of snow provocatively from the palm of her hand. Outside, blissfully unaware, Mrs Toilet Attendant, sixtysomething, loses her rag: "Hurry up. We're B-U-S-Y." She spells out the word. Nearby stands a dish of peppermints, *le pre snog* preparation that the management tous propose, and a mound of make-up left behind.

Thus begins a night at Tramp, the London nightclub in which Pamela Bordes picked up Sunday Times editor Andrew Neil.

"How lovely to see you again," says one of the staff. How piquant that he should remember my face from when I went to the loo five minutes before. "Bellissima," intones another, who later—and inscrutably—takes it upon himself to call me Pamela. I am, after all, wearing hair by Hari, jacket by Paul Costelloe and what my dad told me are legs from Harrods—giving it my best shot.

An ageing bimbo sits at the bar flicking her hair back into my face every so often; a particular style for punctuating her nearly word-free conversational skills, perhaps. There are signs of the zodiac on the walls in the restaurant part of the nightclub. Presumably they act as cue cards. ("I bet you're Taurus," he'd murmur softly over his permanent sun tan. Can't you just see it?) Her Chanel handbag stands on the counter, its authenticity guarantee card placed posing out of the side pocket in a scarcely intended touch of wit.

Blouse

Pamela Bordes was assiduous in the way she established her hit list of eligible men. And her research—answering questions of the Is he married? What is his wife like? variety—into the rich and influential was impeccable. When she first set eyes on Andrew Neil, she slid into a chair beside him with the words: "I find you very attractive."

A dashing good-looking man in his early thirties came in. He wore an emerald cotton shirt with 501s. I summoned my courage—this is the time to close your eyes and think of ... journalism—and said: "I find you very attractive." He looked at his dockside, then at my face. "Thank you. I take that as

Tramp and the ladies

CAROLINE PHILLIPS goes nightclubbing in the footsteps of Pamela Bordes, and tries whispering in a male ear: 'I find you very attractive'

a compliment." The flicker of a smile crossed his rugged features. The son of a surgeon, he is a financial whiz kid with a lavish Chelsea residence and ready humour.

He later recounted the story of a 37-year-old woman, let's call her Miss Blonde, who he met in Tramp four months previously. He took her to Le Suquet for dinner, with the memorable words "Do you like the way I'm dressed?" she undid her blouse: an eyes-on-corset job, apparently.

On another occasion he went to take some exercise with a dame he pulled at Tramp—only to find that she kept a boa constrictor in a cage *chez elle*. The management of Tramp once locked his oh-too-drunk friend in the closet until he sobered up.

We are sitting in a room decorated with panelling, chandeliers and Eurotrash. This is the venue for fossilising rock stars. Bill Wyman is a frequent visitor, as are many long-haired men with pinched faces. A Bay City Rollers close enters, tartan waistcoat first.

A Khashoggi lookalike sits with his girlfriend who is working hard to perfect her technique for drinking champagne.

The dance floor is thrusting and thriving, with just enough room to swing a dingbat. People don't dance cheek to cheek; after all, this is where I once saw a Sunday newspaper editor dancing crotch to crotch. When I leave after my second visit at 2am, people are queuing upstairs to get in. No Tramps without Birds—geddit?—the notice says.

One of London's socially elevated characters—with the look of a dissolute surfer and a name that comes straight out of Barchester Towers—sits in priority place close to the restaurant door. Regulars call it the yuppie table. Tonight we have here a rare sighting of Tramp Glamour, akin to bird-watchers seeing an emu in the New Forest: the table boasts Jermy Street shirts and black Valentino dresses on nipped waists.

When I met Bungalow Bill at the Cartier International polo lunch,

he regaled the assembled company with lengthy stories about his middle leg. Coincidentally Andrew Neil also turned up on our table, *mit Pamela*, in time for tea. When I return, days later, to Tramp, Bungalow has taken over the yuppie table—ratio four (men) to two (nymphettes). Times must be hard, in a manner of speaking. Tonight, they say, is not a happening night, whatever that might mean.

"We've already been to Freds, Life and Browns." So speaks Sharon—I have her red printed business card to prove that that really was her name—who is in PR. "But tonight is Cafe de Paris night." Membership at Tramp costs £200 a year—a paltry figure to most of those present. One fellow on the adjacent table has a £30,000 a day gambling habit and lives in a penthouse that spans four period Belgravia houses. The chap opposite, a genial hotel

manager, raises four fingers in the air in a variation on Churchill's theme: Nightspeak for "I want some Ecstasy". Someone should raise two fingers in more common parlance. "Can I have a line?" alternates with "Can I have your phone number?" as the most popular questions in this place.

"I don't believe a word of this or anything you say about our ladies' toilets," protests William Offner, director of the company that owns Tramp. "Someone must have been having an amusing joke. The members of this club don't take drugs—most certainly not! If someone brings something in in their pocket, obviously we don't know. But we vet members scrupulously—the waiting list is longer than the number of members."

My table has drunk two bottles of champagne—house champagne is Krug in Tramp—a bottle of

(warm) Perrier, two coffees and a Coke; a small jug of unordered orange juice has been consumed too. How much does it cost? How much could it possibly cost?

The Maitre d' presents me with a bill for £156. "Champagne £52 a bottle," he says churlishly and flounces off. It's past two in the morning. Could he itemise the bill?

Reduction

It's 2.40am. I plead with another waiter to itemise the bill. "Champagne £44 a bottle," he says; at least it goes down in price at an estimated rate of £16 an hour.

A lady at the next table—who comes here once a week—decides to follow suit and queries her bill. The management explain that she is wrong.

At 3am I spend 15 minutes arguing with waiter number three in an attempt to get the original bill stamped "Not paid".

After a wearisome battle of

words, he grudgingly admits they have overcharged me. I get a reduction of £16, no apology and a hefty and compulsory so-called voluntary service charge whacked on.

Perrier in Tramp is, incidentally £9.90 a bottle. Steam is coming out of my silks, I am so boiled with rage. "You look so purposeful," remarked a Champagne Charlie I'd never met before, lurching towards me seductively. I wanted to tell him the one about the two old ladies who went for a tramp in the wood. (He got away).

"Every bill is done by machine," Mr Offner intones later. "I've never heard of anyone complaining."

The next time I go to Tramp, I order bangers and mash. Rude food par excellence, it is—phallic shaped mash with two tomato balls. And the *coup de grace*? The sausage bears a message in carefully crafted pieces of cheese. "Pamela Bordes sat here," it read. I wondered whether she could sue for libel. Then I ate the evidence.



Caroline Phillips at Tramp: "How lovely to see you again," they said after she returned from the loo. Picture by ANTHONY STEIGER

‘This is where I once saw a Sunday paper editor dancing crotch to crotch’