

The Big Shoot

by Karen Moline

Achieving the right look for public consumption requires lots of makeup and a seismic psychological shift.

THINK OF ELLE, I TOLD MYSELF, TRYING TO look demure for the camera and remembering my recent interview with Ms. Macpherson, during which she rolled around on a bed, clad only in bra and panties, pouting at the photographer as she blithely blabbed about distribution outlets for her Australian lingerie business. Such insouciance before a long lens is incomprehensible to us mere mortals. Few of us have any idea what we really look like. Even fewer—superstars and supermodels excepted—really want to know. See a snapshot and the habitual “I look terrible!” trips off our tongue. Indeed, our worst fears are confirmed: here we are, world, frozen for posterity with our mouths full of food or our eyes glinting alien red, clad in what we thought was sophisticated but rather makes us look like a piece of uncomfortable upholstery.

Being a writer, I typically outfit myself in a shapeless T-shirt tucked ever-so-chicly into baggy shorts; my makeup a smear of lipstick in case Federal Express shows up. But because strangers so often judge us solely on appearance, there comes a time when an image makeover is desperately needed. For me, that time is now. Having just returned from Britain for the launch of my first novel, *Lunch*, (and steeling myself for the U.S. publication next month), I am still recovering from rounds of interviews, photo sessions and—the very worst—live television appearances. British newspaper photographers, not the most tactful species, invariably ask with a smirk, “Is that what you’re wearing?” They should talk, yet I furtively examine myself for stains, spots, rumples, and telltale panty lines.

Ironically, the most accurate articles resulted from telephone interviews, where my appearance was irrelevant; my best portraits were taken either when I

was too tired to care—and therefore appeared calm, even serene—or when a professional makeup artist’s expertise made me feel invincible before the lens.

Nowhere is the disparity between self-image and self-delusion more evident than when it comes to the dreaded author book-jacket photo. Many authors confuse seriousness with a stiffly posed, poorly lit head shot that they think telegraphs a pensive intellectualism when in reality a large dollop of matte foundation would do wonders. What we wear, how we style our hair,

and how we apply our makeup dates us forever (although plenty of writers continue to snooker the book-buying public with 20-year-old shots).

“The problem with most author photographs is that they don’t want them to be about themselves, but about the book,” says photographer Deborah Feingold, who shot mine. “Writers don’t want anything to get in the way of being taken seriously.”

Since *Lunch*, being of a sexual nature, is not likely to propel me into roundtable discussions of Trollope’s literary merits—though, frankly, I don’t see why it shouldn’t—I hope that what I project is at least in the same galaxy as my own tiny pocket of self-image, aided by Karl Lagerfeld’s sartorial splendor and as much makeup as I can slather on. Believe it or not, photo sessions are getting easier, if only because I’ve learned what outfits shoot best, at what angle to tilt my head, and how

not to look like I’m smirking when I’m trying to smile.

And when, after everything, I still think I look really awful, I console myself with a few words from Kafka: “Photography concentrates one’s eye on the superficial. For that reason it obscures the hidden life which glimmers through the outlines of things, like a play of light and shade. One can’t catch that even with the sharpest lens.”

Thank you, Franz, and pass the eyeliner.



DEBORAH FEINGOLD