

PRINCESS PULP

Jackie Collins is mad. Not with the food: a low-fat, high-fibre, cold seafood salad with nary a kilojoule in sight. Nor the place: a high-profile table at Le Dome, the chic Beverly Hills watering hole for the rich and infamous, where we can dish the surgically enhanced stars surrounding us, some of whose faces have been stretched so tight by Dr Scalpel that they can barely smile, let alone eat. Jackie, on the other hand, is a study in understated chic, clad in a simple dark blazer, white shirt adorned with several dangling silver crosses, and black leggings.

Nor the conversation: venting very salty spleen at publishers' lack of promotional imagination. "I'd like to see them sell books the way they sell movies, but it isn't going to happen," Jackie says. "When I wrote *Lovers And Gamblers*, I went to my publisher and said, 'Look, I'm doing *Johnny Carson* [then the top-rating late-night chat show in the US] next week, and my book is nowhere.' And he said, 'Miss Collins, your book is going to walk off the shelves.' And so I said, 'It would if it was *on* the shelves but it's not on the goddam shelves.' It's so frustrating."

No, Jackie Collins is mad at a book critic of *The New York Times* who trashed her newest novel, titled *Hollywood Kids* (Pan Macmillan, \$24.95), in a recent review. "For one thing, he calls Jordana, one of my major characters, a slut, when she most certainly isn't," Jackie says, her eyes flashing. "And then he gives the entire plot away. I mean, what is the point? It just made me want to say, 'Fuck you, asshole. I've written all these books and they keep on selling and you don't get it.' My biggest critics are always people who have never read me."

She has a point. This is a woman who, in 25 years, has sold more than 180 million copies of her 15 novels in 40 different countries, and they're all still in print. "The only time I ever saw my agent, who is a cool Hollywood character, really impressed, was when he was on a trip in Africa, out in the bush in the middle of nowhere, and he met this tribal chieftain who insisted on showing

In her latest novel, Jackie Collins marries trash, flash and panache yet again.
By Karen Moline

him his treasures," Jackie says. "Well, his treasures were tattered paperback editions of all of my books." She laughs. "Isn't that great?"

Then she is instantly sober. "If I were a man, I would be taken more seriously."

Even if you don't like her books, Jackie in person is a hoot. Very funny, very sexy, very down-to-earth – and her gossip (so sorry it's *off* the record) is unsurpassed. As the world's foremost chronicler of Hollywood secrets – in novel form, naturally, darling – Jackie Collins is taken very seriously indeed. *Hollywood Kids* finds her, as usual, with a panoply of young degenerates as spoiled by fame and money as they are starving for love and acknowledgement. "I totally tone it down," Jackie explains. "Nobody would believe the truth. Nobody believes me when I say that my character, Charlie Dollar, is *inspired* by Jack Nicholson, but he isn't *really* >



> Jack. Jack is one of the most attractive men in town and I think it's great that a man his age can outsex all these young studs. But when there's a scandal about men, it's ignored; if it's about a woman, then everyone believes it. A woman screwing a man 10 years younger – how could she! A male movie star screwing a woman 40 years younger – they don't say a word. Because movies are made by men. Violence is acceptable and sex is not. You can see 52 murders in *Natural Born Killers*, but you can't see Bruce Willis's cock in *The Colour Of Night*."

Jackie loves anecdotes, like the one about the teenage offspring of a superstar who looked out the window only to catch dear old dad making love to an actor, clearly not his mother, in the emptied swimming pool. Without a moment's hesitation, he turned on the lights to provide dear old dad with the audience he so desperately craved.

"It will never change," Jackie continues, "when you have these career-obsessed stars over-compensating by giving their children credit cards and cars and money, when all their children want is affection and stability. These kids are very, very angry. I remember a movie-star friend of mine posed naked for *Playboy*, and she told me her son was the most popular kid in school as a result. Meanwhile, the kid was mortified. I'll never forget it – she's running around town saying, 'Oh, isn't it fun, I'm naked, doesn't my body look great? My kid's so happy', and he's saying that this is the

worst thing that's ever happened to him in his life."

Collins did not go to Hollywood with plans to expose the overexposed in such scintillating fashion. She went because of her parents. "They just wanted to get rid of me one way or another," Jackie says.

"I was a wild child, I would do anything."

As rebellious as her older sister, Joan, who made her reputation as Britain's best bad girl, Jackie grew up in a rather Bohemian household, with a father who was a theatrical agent and a mother who was very beautiful and gentle and had no idea from where these raunchy, uninhibited offspring came. By the time she was eight, Jackie's favourite book was Enid Blyton's *The Naughtiest Girl In The School*, and she was charging classmates to read the dirty limericks she had copied into her notebooks. At 15, she was expelled for truancy and smoking and put into the "care" of her movie-star sister, who promptly gave her the keys and disappeared. Jackie was thrilled and immediately had a fling with Marlon Brando, who thought she was 19.

Jackie tamed a little after meeting and marrying agent Oscar Lerman, when aged about 25. She has three daughters, Tracy (a London-based make-up artist), Tiffany (a Los Angeles-based designer)

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and Rory (who recently married). Her first book, *The World Is Full Of Married Men*, was published in 1968 and was an instant bestseller. This was followed by such successes as *The Stud* (1969), *The World Is Full Of Divorced Women* (1975), *Lovers And Gamblers* (1977), *The Bitch* (1979), *Lucky* (1985), *Hollywood Wives* (1983), *Hollywood Husbands* (1986) and *Lady Boss* (1990).

The World Is Full Of Married Men shocked readers because Collins wrote about a wife turning around and cheating on her unfaithful husband. Men were particularly miffed because Collins scotched the myth that wives were always faithful and girlfriends only wanted a wedding ring. "That double standard is still around," she says. "My

advice to my daughters was, men are pigs. And there are different degrees of piggery. They can find a nice pig, or a rich pig, or a smart pig—but just remember, he's a pig!"

It goes without saying that Jackie's kids are not your stereotypical 90210 brats. "I was determined to be there for them," Jackie says, "and not allow them to think that life was a photo session." By all accounts, her long marriage to Lerman was a happy one, ending only with his death from

cancer nearly three years ago. "He was 25 years older and we had a wonderful life together, and he's certainly somewhere better than here.

"I lost some very good friends who thought I was going to fuck their husbands on sight just because I was a widow," Jackie continues with a sigh, pushing away the remains of her salad. "It was so stupid and very hurtful. One ex-friend is married to a movie star who would jump on anything that walked – and did, in fact, try and jump me on several occasions, and I knew how to get rid of him. However, the wife goes, 'Well, now that Jackie's single, she'll definitely be after him.' It's got nothing to do with him, of course!"

"Men simply aren't treated the same way if they lose their wives. But what was I supposed to do – enter a nunnery? I had a fantastic marriage to a great guy, but life isn't over when your partner dies. I didn't realise how difficult it is if you're a well-known woman to have a >

> relationship. My sister has had the same problem. So now I try to keep my personal life private; I'm involved in a relationship with someone who's not in the business, thank God!"

Although she has no real financial need to write, Collins cannot imagine life without it. "I write for myself, not for an audience. I write exactly what I want to," she explains. "I don't consult my publisher—I give them a title and a date when I'll deliver, and what they get is what I'm happy to publish."

"I love what I do, but from nine in the morning till seven at night, I'm going to be in prison, so I do go out every night. During the day, I walk around the house a lot. I go to the fridge to see what's there—there's never anything but champagne, caviar and vitamin pills—and then I shut the door, and then I open it again, hoping!"

Between books, Collins writes and produces the mini-series based on her novels. "Producing is so much fun, because I control it," she says with a wicked smile. "And the casting. But these clichés are alive and well and walking around Hollywood. Men and women will screw anybody to get into a movie. Most of them are just assholes in Ferraris."

But let's get back to writing. "My characters are a lot more complex than people think. There's a lot of underlying humour, which not everybody gets, and a lot of uninhibited, very real and flawed women. So many people talk about my

writing, and the amazing thing is that they all think they're going to be me if they do it.

They don't think they can do brain surgery, now, do they? It's very amusing. Every year, there's always the 'new Jackie Collins'..."

So Jackie will continue to write and produce and party. Eat at Le Dome. Publicise her latest novel. Hide away and write the next one. Enjoy her life. And why not? As a woman in Holly-

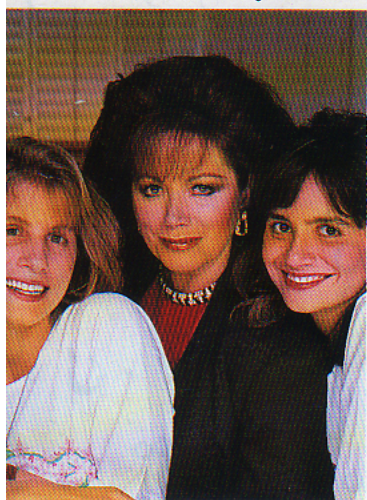
wood, she's earned the right to do exactly what she wants, which is more than just about any other star, her sister included, can say. Nor does she have any plans to leave the tarnished tinsel behind. "I love Los Angeles; it's my kind of town," she says. "I love the excitement, the sprawl, the beach and the sea, that in a day's drive you can go skiing or gambling. So, okay, it's a little on the edge... I've been held up with a machine-gun in my face..." She shakes her head and drinks some tea. "It was in Beverly Hills, in my face, this guy saying, 'Don't you move, bitch, or I'll blow your fucking head off.' At the time, I was writing the mini-series of *Lucky* and I thought, 'What would Lucky do?', so I hit the accelerator and took off and he was left holding the gun. There was so much hate in his voice. It wasn't that he wanted my car or my jewellery—he just wanted the power. It was a horrifying experience and it did change my life."

"For about six months I was really scared, I couldn't go anywhere or do anything without looking in the rearview mirror or over my shoulder. And then I woke up one morning and went, 'Oh fuck it', and I learned self-defence and how to shoot. I would defend myself. I would sooner be killed than be a victim."

"You know, nothing riles me anymore," she goes on, "not even that kid with a gun. I get mad, like at this *Times* critic, and then I blow it off. I'm very sanguine—you have to be. Otherwise it's destructive energy, and I strongly believe in karma—what you put out you get back. When people would do you harm, I don't hate them anymore. They do get theirs. Life is what it is—an adventure—and I want to live that adventure to the hilt. And I do, I really do. My children are now grown and I don't have anyone to answer to, and it's kind of cool and very liberating. Obviously I wouldn't have chosen it this way, to lose my husband, but I did. And so the adventure continues."

With that, she shakes back her hair and we stroll leisurely out, Jackie stopping to chat with the dozens of people she knows in the room before waving goodbye and driving off into the California sunshine.

Jackie Collins is not mad anymore. Screw *The New York Times*. What do they know that she doesn't? Not enough to fit between the covers of a book. □



Jackie Collins with her daughters, Tiffany and Rory (right).

BOOKS

A FAMILY ROMANCE

Anita Brookner

Brookner has made the small world of human relationships a genre all her own. The reader enters her universe on the first page and lives with the characters until the very last—you either love this type of novel or you don't. This is the tale of the quiet Jane and the charming aunt, Dolly, neurotically bound to each other over the course of a family's life. It sounds insubstantial fare for a novel, but Brookner makes every detail exquisite and compelling. (Penguin, \$13.95)

THE INFORMERS

Bret Easton Ellis

After the media storm that accompanied *American Psycho*, Ellis was going to have to change gear noticeably to regain critical ground. He hasn't. As he admits himself, he was shocked when his editors accepted the manuscript to *The Informers*. More drugs and S&M and under-age sex and vacuous, rich-kid LA lives. (Picador, \$24.95)

THE HOT ZONE

Richard Preston

Imagine a virus more devastating than AIDS, whose effects are similar to nuclear radiation, destroying all internal organs, devastating the immune system, killing within 10 days. The virus exists and it is called Ebola. Preston tracks the true story of an outbreak of Ebola in Africa in the Eighties, its transportation to the US for study and the struggle to contain it within the laboratory. This fictionalised history is a gruesome, cautionary tale. (Transworld, \$34.95)

THE STRANGER INSIDE

Procured by Red Symons

Symons asked 10 writers to deliver a chapter of erotica. Each had only a character sketch from the preceding chapter to go on, and were asked to introduce one new character. The result is a loosely anonymous serial erotic novel. Contributors include Bryce Courtenay, Lee Tulloch, Red Symons and Jennifer Byrne, but are not identified by chapter. It's a guessing game and a way of ensuring the authors could let their imaginations run free. The book is never patchy and, at times, seriously raunchy. (Text, \$16.95)

SLEEPWALKING

Julie Myerson

True stories as novels seem to be making a marked re-appearance, and here is another. Based on her mother's prediction that their family breakdown would be a good subject for a book, Myerson writes with the energy that comes from emotional disturbance. How else could she, a mother of three young children and a full-time worker, have written the book shortly after her father's suicide? It sounds grim and, indeed, the book is about unhappiness and the cruel vengeance of a "betrayed" father. Myerson's insights into family dynamics are acute and tender, and will ring bells. (Picador, \$14.95)

Megan Le Masurier