

Life's a bitch

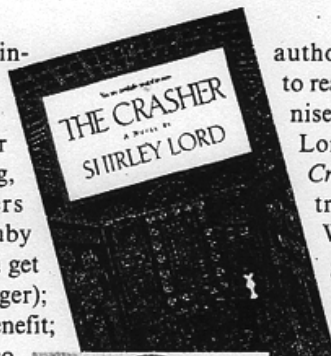
by Karen Moline



'It's a nice round figure,' said my agent. Luckily for me, she was referring to the advance for my novel *Belladonna*. Gloating in delight about a nice round figure is applicable only to a million bucks, not to the shape of my posterior – and as I'm about to go off on a book tour where women will be sizing me up faster than I can say 'foundation undergarment', it's time to take drastic action. Not that I'm unfit – I'm just not buff (which is Yank-speak for muscular or polished). And author buffedness is crucial in a competitive marketplace where quick decisions about a book's cover can mean the difference between bestseller and pulped fiction. Would

eye: the snazzy red hair (maintained by Schwarzkopf Color Care shampoo); the ultra-fab Vuitton Belladonna-red leather Doc fountain-pen for signing, daintily clenched in fingers with nails painted in red Ruby Slippers nail polish (hint: if you get fake tips, a manicure lasts longer); the dewy red cheek-stain by Benefit; the scarlet lipstick from Trucco aptly named Blood – you get the picture. To think that I spent most of my time writing clad in a T-shirt and grubby shorts, and the only time I ever roused myself to dab on some blush was when FedEx was trudging up the stairs with a package.

Now I've progressed to Rebecca. She has biceps the size



authors are usually not invited to readings in case fans don't recognise them. Beauty guru Shirley Lord, whose latest novel is *The Crasher*, solves that problem by trotting down to Dr Patricia Wexler, Manhattan dermatologist to the stars. Dr W is known for her ability to freeze away frown lines. 'Much better than the knife,' Shirley says. To say nothing of providing an instant level of facial buff.

Edwina Currie, on the other hand, asked Anna Harvey of British *Vogue* – who'd worked with Diana, Princess of Wales – to restyle her with a buff look for her latest tour to promote *She's Leaving Home*. 'I had 14 years of Thatcher-type clothes in my

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Sebastian Junger's *The Perfect Storm* have been snapped up by pixie-eyed girlies if he didn't look like stud-muffin supreme on the back cover? Hardly. Most pixie-eyed girlies are not interested in drowning in the Atlantic unless Leonardo DiCaprio is coming to their rescue.

The first step was the buff author photo. People say: 'It doesn't really look like you.' Of course it doesn't. It took three hours of lighting, four hours of make-up and three hours of retouching to make my complexion look glowingly wrinkle- and freckle-free. When I went to the retoucher to pick up the shots, a notoriously buff movie star was having her padded hips erased. I went

right out and ordered a slice of pizza with extra pepperoni, with a cheesecake chaser.

Next came the accessorising to distract the

of the Queen's handbags, thunder thighs and an irrepressibly perky manner, which is useful as I spend most of my time with her moaning and groaning. That's because she's in my house three times a week to torture heretofore-unknown muscle groups into a state of buff being. When she told me we'd be boxing, my first question, naturally, was: what about my nails? The second was: do boxing-gloves come in red?

I throw hundreds of punches at her target mitts, which I must admit is deeply satisfying, especially if you picture the face of a badly behaved ex-beau in the little white target circle. 'Wow,' she said today as I was lying on a bench hoisting weights, 'your triceps and your lats are really getting cut. Take a look.' I couldn't look; I was too busy trying not to croak.

Some writers have come up with other ways of finding desirable book-selling buffedness. A few helpfully supply portraits that are decades out of date. These

closet, so out went the mumsy matron and in came the smart casualwear, as well as a great haircut and a lot of moisturiser,' she says.

Tom Holland didn't have to worry about his skin, only about what to wear. To match the tone of his novel about Lord Byron, *The Vampyr*, he borrowed an extremely buff

Romeo Gigli suit for his moody author shot and discovered that changing into it in the pee-soaked loo of a speeding train on the way to Byron's ancestral home was not a suave move. 'The whole point was to look pale and interesting – and not smell like I'd just pissed myself,' he says.

Jennifer Egan, author of *The Invisible Circus*, had another problem. 'I had such a horrible public-speaking phobia that I started taking beta-blockers,' she says.

For all these writers, getting buff is a state of mind. In my case, well, I'd like to hope that it's only a punch away. □

Belladonna is published by Little, Brown at £9.99

