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IN DEFENSE OF SHAMELESS PLEASURES



ANNIE WELLS *Los Angeles Times*

POP GOES THE QUIZ

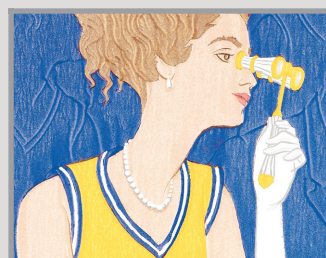
If you know these answers, then 'you're beautiful,' says James Blunt. **Page 4**



OLIVIA DE BERARDINIS

THE MODERN PINUP

Playboy turns to a self-assured woman artist for its naughty portraits. **Page 5**



ALEX NABAUM

WHY NOT THE BEST?

When it comes to elitism, the arts shouldn't have all the fun. **Page 8**



TYRONE TURNER

MORE CONFESSIONS

Tribute bands playing the way they were. Self-help books. And that plucky ukulele.

JAY L. CLENDENIN *Los Angeles Times*



Stop pretending you don't read Jackie Collins. She has 400 million reasons to know better than that.

By WILLIAM GEORGIADES
Special to The Times

"IT'S NICE here, isn't it?" Jackie Collins said in her clear, measured, L.A.-by-way-of-London tone. Jack Black and Dr. Phil were sitting nearby on the terrace of the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel, but it was Collins' arrival that created the stir. A large diamond sparkled on her left hand, enlivening her appearance in a simple, tailored black suit, offset with dramatic hoop earrings. "I like to sit here where you can see everyone."

In person Collins is much like the content of her books — chatty, funny, irreverent and knowing. Mostly, though, she is endlessly enthusiastic — she will stop in mid-sentence to declare her various excitements over a singer ("Isn't Amy Winehouse amazing?"), TV shows, movie stars, friends or just her lunch. She ordered the Neil McCarthy salad. "This is the most delicious salad ever," she announced. [See Collins, Page F6]

SHAMELESS PLEASURES

Jackie knows how it goes

[Collins, from Page F1] This summer saw the publication of Collins' 26th book, "Married Lovers," which centers on a woman named Cameron Paradise, a personal trainer, and a trio of men: a director, a screenwriter and a late-night talk show host, all set in the Hollywood of today.

It is pointed out that all the eligible men in her new novel are aged 40, while the heroine is 25. "Well that's this town, isn't it?" She laughed. "And all these women who are 40 are always with these guys who are 75 or 80!"

As she looked around the Polo Lounge, Collins recalled the point at which she decided to conquer America. Twenty-six years ago she wrote "Chances," the bestseller featuring Lucky Santangelo, the heroine who grows up in the mob and takes over the family business.

"If you wish to be successful," Collins said with the authority of an author whose books have reportedly sold more than 400 million copies, "there is a place you should be at a certain time. And Los Angeles in the 1980s was it. My books were quite successful around the world, but I couldn't quite crack America — they would only be on the bestseller lists for a couple of weeks. So for 'Chances,' I wanted to be here to promote it. And it was the 10th-best-selling book in America that year.

"We embarked on a tour across America — me, my husband and our three kids," she recalled, digging into her salad with ladylike gusto. "We would have brought the dogs, but that wasn't possible then. We took the kids out of school and everything. One of them was 9, one of them was 12 . . . oh, I'm not very good with ages, including my own — it's all a horrible blur!"

"Anyway, my publisher was paying, because it was a promotion tour, and we started in New York and moved across the country. Finally we arrived here at the Beverly Hills Hotel, and after a while it wasn't a tour anymore and so the publisher stopped paying our hotel bill, and we kept moving to smaller and smaller rooms till we were down to just two rooms. And we just stayed. We lived here for about six months, and then we rented a house Stevie Wonder had just vacated. And then we bought a house, and I've never left!"

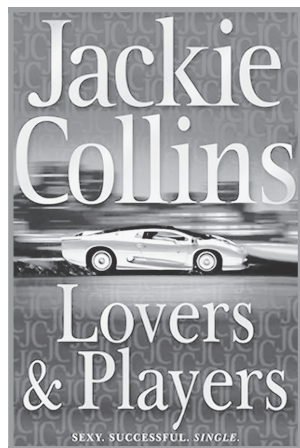
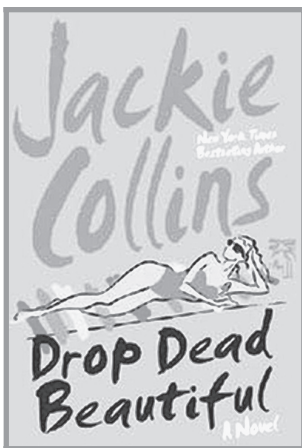
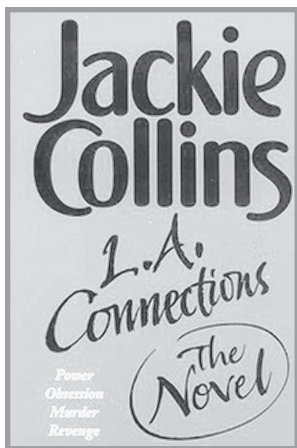
All those Hollywood wives

IT WASN'T until her next book, however, that she became a household name. "Yes," she agreed. "I didn't become established until 'Hollywood Wives,' which I wrote after I had lived here for a while and observed those women. Oh, my God! They were scary in the '80s!"

How did those Hollywood wives react to Collins when she was new in town? "They kind of ignored me," she said, laughing. "Then I wrote 'Hollywood Wives' and they kind of hated me. Now they're all nice because everyone loves success."

In "Married Lovers" there is a very funny scene in which some Hollywood wives go out to lunch. Collins describes their look: True Religion jeans, James Perse white T-shirts and the Birkin bag. "It's 'Hollywood Wives,' the next generation," she writes. "There's a new thing now," she said with a conspirator's smile, leaning in. "They've all got the same lips and they've all got the same cheeks because they have all this stuff pumped into their face. It all looks very baby-bottomish. They all puff up and then they have this long, straight blond hair and a bordering-on-anorexic figure, except for the boobs, which are always enhanced. . . ." She paused to take a breath. "It's kind of amusing," she drawled.

Collins raised three daughters in L.A., and it sounds as though her exposure to Holly-



Associated Press

BIG TIME: A prosperous-looking Jackie Collins in 1984, post-"Hollywood Wives"-publication.

Her guilty pleasures

DVR addict: "I have six TiVos, and I TiVo everything and skim everything."

Favorite shows: " 'Dexter' — and not the sanitized version on CBS!" "Rescue Me" "The Riches" "Breaking Bad" "The Real Housewives of New York City" — "the funniest reality TV show I have seen"

Top of the list: "Reese's Peanut Butter Cups — I love those!"

wood wives made her a cautious parent. She stresses that she was "a very strict mother. I took them to school every day, cooked their dinner every night — before I went out to the nightclubs — and made sure that they were in bed and fed. I am very lucky; I have three great daughters. I made sure I was there for them, that they had a mother to come home to. You cannot just give children a Porsche and a credit card."

Continuing on the subject of Hollywood wives, she said: "They don't do anything. They're into maintenance, nails and skin. It is kind of boring. Then they have a book ghost-written or something and then they'll pretend to be a writer for about five minutes and they'll think that that will change everything." She paused for a moment. "If I didn't censor myself I could really skewer this town. But I couldn't do that because I have a lot of good friends here. But I think I do capture this place the way it is. People deny it, but people have always denied the casting couch exists. Of course it exists!"

She added, pointedly: "Most Hollywood novels are written by failed screenwriters. And failed screenwriters never get into any of the good parties."

Many of the good parties those failed screenwriters don't attend are thrown by Collins herself. She prefers not to go out to lunch "because I go out to dinner every night." She mentioned one party she threw for Michael Caine's recent birthday, at which she arranged for Scarlett Johansson to sing "Happy Birthday," "you know, à la Marilyn."

Six months ago she changed agents, and four years ago she jumped from her longtime publisher, Simon & Schuster, to St. Martin's Press. "You've got to switch up every now and then. Before, I was perceived like a wife, and they perceive me like a mistress now."

David Vigliano, the high-powered agent who wooed Collins for several years before signing her up six months ago, explained her lasting appeal over lunch in Manhattan. "A few clods in publishing felt Jackie was stuck in the '80s, but the reality is that all of her books are very much of the moment. She is one of the world's most gifted storytellers. That's timeless and rare. I pursued her because I've loved her work for a long time, and I wanted to bring the perception of Jackie in line with the reality of the work that she is doing and her enduring popularity."

A sign of her importance is that a request to speak to her editor is instead routed to the president and publisher of St. Martin's, Sally Richardson. "Nothing succeeds like success," Richardson said by phone. "And that gives you freshness and energy; it enlivens you."

Richardson said that St. Martin's had been very excited to publish Collins. "We changed the time of publication for her books from the fall to February," she said. "It was about timing and packaging and having a huge campaign for her. We wanted to make the point that this is not your mother's Jackie Collins." (This month the author supported the publication

of "Married Lovers" by touring the country in Mariah Carey's former tour bus, in a deal sponsored by Harrah's Casinos.)

A husband's encouragement

COLLINS began life in London, where she grew up with her sister, the actress Joan Collins. She was thrown out of school at 16, for smoking ("That was the last cigarette I ever had"), and drifted into appearing in films. "I was never a starlet," she said clearly. "I was always a writer, an out-of-work writer."

She married young, had one child, got a divorce, then married again, and it is clear that while she considers herself blessed, she has shouldered her share of tragedy. She tells certain stories about her past that are more hair-raising than anything in her novels.

"My first husband was a drug addict," she said, "and unfortunately he overdosed just after I divorced him. His psychiatrist had put him on methadone for depression, and then his psychiatrist also killed himself. A nice story. That was England in the '60s," she said.

Her second husband, Oscar Lerman, was a nightclub and gallery owner. "He was 20 years older than me," she said. "He had a lot of life experience. He saw my picture in a magazine, and the first time we went out he asked me to marry him. He said, 'I came to England for you.' " The two were married in 1966 and were together for 26 years, until Lerman's death from cancer in 1992.

Collins credits Lerman with the beginnings of her career. "There was someone who really encouraged me," she said. "I'd done these stupid roles in films — I was always the Italian girl — and he asked me what I was doing, and I told him that I was working on a book. That was 'The World Is Full of Married Men.' He read it and said, 'This is fabulous, you have to keep doing it,' and I had already abandoned it, because I had so many ideas that I never finished anything. I just knew from being thrown out of school that no one would ever take me seriously as a writer. But my husband did."

She completed the book with an act of discipline. She went to Montauk, on Long Island, with a rough draft. "I remember I wanted to sit in the sun all the time, but I told myself I had to write 10 pages a day before I allow myself to sit in the sun. And that's how I finished the book. That's 10 pages longhand," she added.

That sense of discipline and purpose has continued. Collins writes her books right up to the production schedule, so that very little editing can be done to them before publication. "They made a couple of suggestions," she smiled. "But if you're going to fail, you have to fail on your own mistakes. I sit down and write the book and prefer they don't ask me any questions until the book is finished."

She writes in longhand, then gives the pages to her assistant, who types them up. "We go back and forth like that about 10 times a day, like a little tapestry. I love it!" she declared.

'I am not a snob'

THE LEAD character in "Married Lovers" is a personal trainer with dreams of opening her own gym someday. Does Collins exercise or have any experience with the gym world she so ably writes about?

"No," she laughed. "I don't work out. I swim occasionally. I have a nice pool." She designed her own home and has lived there for 15 years. She mentioned that her fiancé at the time, who died eight years ago — "I can't believe it," she said quietly — did work out, and so she put a gym in her house. "It's the most incredible gym, but it's at the end of the house, like a block away, so by the time I get there I feel like I've worked out already," she said.

"I swim," she said. "That's exercise. And I play pingpong. But really, work is my hobby because I really love what I do. I think if you wake up in the morning and love what you do, it makes a big difference in your life."

Asked how she feels about being viewed as a guilty pleasure herself, she was resigned. "Quite frankly," she said, managing to be both imperious and charming, "I don't give a crap. I know I have fans who see me on all different levels — whatever they want to think is fine by me. My biggest critics are the people who have never read me" she added, shrugging.

"I am not a snob," she continued. "I'm happy to say I love popular books and TV and music. I don't know why people hide behind this cloak of, 'Oh, well, I'm only going to read this serious book by Umberto Eco,' but secretly I know they're reading me. What's wrong with having fun?"

With that, she checked her iPhone, swept through the lobby of the Beverly Hills Hotel, greeting people along the way, and was ushered into her champagne-colored Jaguar. Its license plate: Lucky77.

IN DEFENSE OF LIL WAYNE

All of those bleeps can overshadow his raw talent

SEXIST, homophobic and trashy in ways that are not just politically incorrect but indefensible, Lil Wayne doesn't make it easy for his middle-aged fans to feel proud. Yet in an age of so much corporate radio treacle (be it DJs with chain-store individuality or hip-hop that sounds as if it has been manufactured by computer programmers), there's something about this ribald imp from New Orleans that's refreshingly raw.

Weezy — as Dwayne Michael Carter Jr. is also known — has been scratching his thug attitude into the collective unconscious all summer with "Lollipop," the infectious chart-busting single that seems written to test how much of a song can be bleeped and still get played incessantly on mainstream radio.

If you compare "Lollipop" with Usher's smooth and seductive "Love in This Club," another Billboard supernova released earlier this year, you might get a better handle on Wayne's edgy appeal. Young Jeezy, the rapper who's featured on Usher's R&B cut, may be up for a hookup in the club's bathroom, but there's nothing on their record that's as dangerously witty as Wayne buggin' at his own libidinous prospects. With its grinding adoles-

cent loop — "I like that!" — you're transported (even against your will) to those early gaga moments of adulthood's upside.

Lyrically, Wayne is sly, sexually insidious (in a manner that forces you to embarrassingly wonder whether your imagination is dirtier than his) and too swaggering to strive after clever Kanye-like perfection.

But for those who know him mainly as a sneaky sidekick on such freeway rolling fare as Lloyd's "You," it may be surprising to hear that, beyond all the self-puffery, Wayne's capable of breakneck ironic twists, psychological bull's-eyes and zany sendups of himself and others (including Rihanna, with her ridiculous "umbrella, ella, ella . . .").

His long-awaited studio album "Tha Carter III" might not have made good on his barrage of overinflated promises. But with tracks featuring Dr. Carter wittily diagnosing other rappers' weak flow and an amusing scenario in which a policewoman falls under his pheromonal spell (that is, until he asks for her number and she replies 911), one thing should be clear to all but the most prudish: Wayne's originality can't be reduced to a raging id.

— CHARLES McNULTY



JONATHAN MANNION Universal Music Group

HIP-HOP STAR: Lil Wayne can make some listeners cringe, but songs such as his infectious hit "Lollipop" can also transport them to places they didn't know would be a pleasure to visit.