

Shot to fame

Alison Jackson has made faking it an art form with her photographs of celebrity lookalikes, says Camilla Long

Were you a naughty schoolgirl?

I was very mischievous and endlessly in trouble. I constantly teased the teachers – I remember wrapping one up in loo roll. After one incident, they even moved me to the headmaster's house. I ended up nearly getting expelled for talking to his sons late at night. They were very good-looking.

What's your ultimate fantasy?

Sleeping and being with celebrities. I'm doing some new work: pictures of me with celebs I fancy – snogging David Beckham in the back of a car, riding pillion behind Brad Pitt, with my arms around his big, hunky muscles.

Do you fancy a lot of people?

I'm gathering footage of me approaching random people I fancy on the street. I film them a bit beforehand, while they are checking me out too. Then I go up and tell them I fancy them. Most people find it incredibly flattering. But it's the getting away that's the problem – they might ask you out. There was one married guy I cornered on an aeroplane where things could have got a bit... interesting.

What has been your most controversial moment?

The Dodi and Diana picture with the black baby. When it came out, it was at the beginning of the sacred myth. It raised all sorts of questions: was she in love with Dodi? Was she pregnant when she died? Was she murdered? It caused a national sensation. I was still a student at the Royal College of Art at the time, which was very difficult. On the one hand, my tutors were very excited about it – on the other, we had The Duke of Edinburgh and Lord Snowdon as patrons. The Duke was even due to open the show. I had lined up photographers to snap him passing the picture. But right at the last minute there was a change of plan and he didn't open it.

Any regrets?

Hundreds. But you mustn't dwell.

Has it made you rich?

Not rich enough!

What has been your cheekiest picture?

I've done some really full-on, rude, naked pictures with celebrity lookalikes, but I'm worried I'll get sued.

Have you ever been sued?

No. My work's not about the celebrity – it's about our perception of them. We feel we know them.

Do you approach people on the street?

I'm always looking for lookalikes. Some get furious. I once ran with two heavy Tesco shopping bags after this man because he looked like Jeffrey Archer. When I finally got to him, I was worried about saying who he looked like as I thought he might be upset. So I said: 'You look like someone famous...' He said:



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'Who? Who?' Then he started guessing. When I told him it was Jeffrey Archer, he flew into a hideous rage and said he had never been so insulted. I thought it was hilarious that someone who looked like Jeffrey Archer was being so abusive.

Any other angry lookalikes?

I was in Capri, staying in a swanky hotel. Out one day I saw a man who looked exactly like Nicolas Cage, so I approached him and asked if he would be in one of my pictures. He hit the roof. Later, back at the hotel, I saw him at the bar and realised that it was Nicolas Cage. He tried to apologise but I was too furious and didn't accept. I also approached the real James Hewitt once, by mistake. He got irritated and said I couldn't afford him.

Do the lookalikes appreciate their own celebrity status?

I went everywhere with my Beckham lookalike – we got chased by hundreds of people. In a restaurant in Madrid one evening, fans rushed the place, knocking over tables and everything.

The fake Tibetan monk was soon pulling up his robes and flashing

Girls were trying to sit on his lap and I noticed he had his hand rather far up one thigh. I gave him a disapproving look and he just winked and said: 'It's a great job.' The best was in New York with a Richard Gere lookalike. We were in a restaurant, on separate tables. I kept pestering him and the waiter eventually came up and said: 'Please could you stop harassing Mr Gere.' I said: 'Oh, don't worry – he's my friend.' But the waiter went over and asked if I was harassing him. For a laugh, he said: 'Yes, she is.' So the waiter threw me out. We went back to the hotel bar and suddenly were surrounded by a swarm of blondes. Within seconds, he had girls licking his face. They kept telephoning their friends, saying things like: 'If you don't hurry up, Mitch is going to get him.' I have to say one girl showed her breasts. We still had a fake Tibetan monk from the day's shoot with us, complete with prayer book and robes. He was, in fact, gay and up for a laugh, so he was soon pulling up his robes and flashing. I went and got my camera. The hotel suite the next day looked like a bomb had hit it.

What happens when you meet celebrities you spoof?

I go uncharacteristically quiet and mumble my name.

Who's the most difficult person to find a lookalike for?

Gordon Brown. Those looks are unique.

What's your greatest extravagance?

Until she died recently, Slipper, my spaniel. She had an army of carers. My hair is now my greatest extravagance. I've gone blonde and the only place I can get it done is Fred Segal in LA. It's funny how different I feel as a blonde – people are much nicer. I get called 'girl'.

Were you brought up to be a girlie girl?

Yes, my school was very backward. We were taught darning and dancing. I remember school dances with the Bryanston boys. Everyone was so reticent – then there was a sudden rush and everyone was in the rosebeds. I remember watching the headmistress's stockings as she passed.

What was it like sleeping with 'Prince William'?

Ohmigod! How am I going to answer that? I have to say something nice.

Was it...

Yes.

Confidential by Alison Jackson is published by Taschen at £20.

