



My image was always sexy, says Ann-Margret

by Clive Hirschhorn

ANN-MARGRET believes in miracles, and who can blame her?

Four years ago, at the height of her career, she fell 22ft. while on stage in Lake Tahoe, and the injuries sustained by her face and body were so great that her doctors were doubtful whether she would ever walk again.

Yet just 10 weeks later, she appeared at the International Hotel in Las Vegas where a crowd of more than 2,000 people applauded, not only her amazing performance, but her extraordinary courage.

Today there is no outward evidence of her fall, and even at 8.30 in the morning, when we met for breakfast, she still looks like the sassy, she is still a stunner.

"It's my job to look good," she said when I complimented her. "After all, it's what I'm paid a lot of money for."

NERVOUS

She took my coat, hung it up in the bedroom, and returned to the sitting room. "I may look fine from the outside," she said, "but there have been some after-effects all the same."

When I'm nervous, or tense or excited, my hand shakes. It's okay now," she said, "but you should see me before a performance! And I can't look over my left shoulder any more."

I'm not complaining. Not for a second. I've got so much to be thankful for, I don't even want to think about it."

A pause. "You know something? The best thing about the accident is that when I recovered from it, I wasn't as shy as I used to be. That was the second miracle."

"You probably don't know about my shyness," she said. "Well, it wasn't just bad. It was chronic. And it all began when I arrived in America from Sweden."

"I was six years old and I couldn't speak a word of English. And every time I opened my mouth at school in Illinois, where my parents settled, the other kids laughed at me."

"So you know what I did? I worked three times as hard just to prove to everyone. I was as good as they were."

And in the end I was better than most of them.

"I became the top speller in my class and won every spelling bee. Well that didn't make me very popular either. I tell you, it was tough!"

"And it was tough after I entered show-business," she said. "I was sort of discovered by the lovely George Burns, you know, way back in 1961, and for a while I couldn't put a foot wrong. I became the 'wunderkind of Hollywood', the 'new girl in town', destined for stardom."

"Then suddenly it all changed. 'Those very people who wrote such flattering things about me in their columns started to turn against me. I got what you might call 'a bad press'."

"They said I was cheap and tacky; that I had no brains and even less talent; that I was common and a slut; and that I thought nothing of showing off my body to any passing photographer."

"Oh, it was terrible, I can tell you. And not only for me, but for my parents who, after all, were ordinary non-showbusiness people leading ordinary lives."

"Can you imagine how mortified they must have been when they read those things about their only child? None of which was true. I assure you. My image was always a sexy one. I admit—but so what? Nothing wrong with that."

"Anyway, most of the time they pretended they hadn't seen the articles, but neighbours or friends would call them up and draw their attention to something that had recently appeared in a newspaper or a magazine. So, one way and another, they got to see everything."

"I remember," she said, "I never knew."

went home for a visit once, and my father, who was an electrician, was working in his garage one Sunday morning and I went in to keep him company. And under a pile of stuff I noticed a magazine which had a terrible article about me in it, accompanied by some quite sexy pictures.

"Well, I picked it up, and although I didn't say a word, my father just knew what was going on in my mind and he simply looked up from his work and said: 'Those are lovely pictures. I'm very proud of you.' I was moved by that and I never forgot it."

IRONICAL

"Fortunately," she said, "when I decided to go into show-business, I sat my mother and father down at the supper table one night and I told them I wouldn't use our surname (which is O'Keefe)—but that I'd simply call myself Ann-Margret."

"At least, I reckoned, that way they'd be spared the humiliation of the family name being dragged down if things didn't work out."

"Anyway," she said, "all that's over now. After I did *Carnal Knowledge* in 1971, which got me my Oscar nomination, I was suddenly okay with the critics again, though ironically the movie nearly ruined my marriage (to actor-turned-writer Roger Smith) because in it I played an impossible woman called Bobbie—and for eight months I behaved just as badly at home as Bobbie behaved in the movie."

"I got so engrossed in the part that I didn't care what woman, and it was pretty scary. I can tell you! How Roger put up with me, I'll never know."

"I had another bad patch round about 1970, and an even worse one in 1968, when all those nasty things were being written about me, but I had some analysis and, knock wood, things are going quite well right now."

"I've just finished two movies—Joseph Andrews for Tony Richardson, and *The Last Remake of Beau Geste* for Marty Feldman, which were both very therapeutic and a lot fun. And I've got more cabaret dates than I can handle. So it's all happening again as I was determined it would."

"It was sheer determination, you know, that got me back on my feet in only ten weeks," she said.

"My father was very ill with cancer at the time, and I was determined, before he died, that he'd see me fit and well. So I promised him that in ten weeks I'd be well enough to do my Vegas show, and by a miracle I was able to keep my promise."

Shortly after that, he died. But he knew I'd pulled through, and I was very happy about that."

Another pause. "You know, people describe me as 'courageous,'" she said, "but they're really using the wrong word. Courage is close to heroism, and believe me, there's nothing heroic about me!"

"All I am," she said, with a twinkle in her eye, "is determined."



ANN-MARGRET—Flattery, then insults

LOOKING WEST—THE BEAUTY FULL OF EASTERN PROMISE

THE DUSKY beauty from the Orient is lovely Shabana Azmi. And she is probably the busiest actress in the world. Shabana, who is 24 and lives near Bombay, is India's screen idol. And she is so much in demand that she is currently working 15 hours a day making a series of 25 new films. One of her movies, called *Night's End*, was shown at the Cannes Film Festival, and she hopes soon to break into international films. With those alluring looks, the sooner the better!

The letters from ladies that bother Gareth...

WHEN Gareth Hunt turned up as a footman in television's *Upstairs, Downstairs*, he caused quite a stir among the ladies with his masculine, strong-boned face and dark curly hair.

Now, to judge from his feminine fan mail, he is creating the same impact in *The New Avengers* and with a second series due next year Hunt, at 32, could well become television's heart-flutterer of '77.

After seven years as an actor in the theatre Mr. Hunt is naturally pleased with his new-found success, but he is not so enamoured with his sexy image.

HORROR

In his small Putney terrace house, where he lives with his girlfriend, a freelance wardrobe supervisor, he has been married, divorced, and has an eight-year-old son, he raises his eyes in mock horror when the subject is mentioned. "I've never ever contemplated being a sex-symbol," he asserts. "If you walk around thinking you are, you're in trouble. I honestly don't believe I'm good looking."

"My face is a bit lived-in, broken nose and all. When I get up in the morning I look horrible. And I'm sure my girl friend doesn't think of me as a sex-symbol."

by PETER DACRE



GARETH HUNT

"No, it's all in the minds of other people, and if they want to create an image, that's their concern."

In fact, Hunt wants to be acclaimed purely as an actor. So he is not over-keen, either, about the fan worship that he is now getting.

"When you start out as an actor, you never think about this aspect," he muses. "They don't teach you to handle it at drama college. I wouldn't mind going back to college to talk to the students about it."

"For when it happens your world suddenly gets smaller because of the limitations on your privacy. I thought once that I wouldn't be able to cope with it. When people pointed me out I tended to try to shrink out of sight."

I asked myself: "Do I really want this? But then I told myself: 'Come on, it's part of the job. You've got to learn to cope with it.'"

This attitude to the trappings of success is, perhaps surprising in a man who admits that he has wanted to be an actor since being a boy in Battersea, where his father (killed in the Second World War) and grandfather were coalmen.

"There was always an element in me that wanted to

entertain," he recalls. "I liked dressing up and making people laugh."

"I acted a lot in school plays, but you never considered you could become an actor. And you certainly didn't admit it to your mates—they would have thought it was pooty."

When he left school Hunt worked in a factory, but after two weeks, "I realised I could never work in a factory. I couldn't cope with the boredom."

So he joined the Merchant Navy and on his spells ashore worked as a baker's roundman, a van-boy and a butcher's assistant.

The latter job lasted two months and when he left, the butcher told him the profits had dropped while he was there. It was not surprising since Hunt, concerned for the welfare of certain ladies who came to buy mince, had been making it out of best fillet steak.

DEPORTED

As a seaman he had what he calls "a bit of a mad period" when he and two mates jumped ship in New Zealand, where he worked for a time in a car plant. But we were caught after a year and deported," he admits.

Back in Britain he became a door-to-door salesman, but still hankered after acting and worked backstage at various London theatres.

"Then I joined a theatre club and soon I was spending more time there than I was doing my job. In the end, I was given a choice: to be a salesman or an actor. I chose acting."

Hunt has never regretted the decision, despite the drawbacks of television fame. And talking of such snags, he remembers another one. "When you're in a successful series," he says, "everyone thinks you're a millionaire."

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