

# What a pretty girl does when she is hungry

IN THE last 10 months, Joanna Lumley, arguably the best-looking actress on TV today, has led a pretty dangerous existence.

She has indulged in some vicious karate fights, leaped cat-like over a 10ft. high jagged fence, and climbed a rope-ladder which was loosely suspended from a helicopter. She has also scaled a few walls where one false move, she assured me, might have resulted in her falling to her death. But most taxing of all was the series of army manoeuvres she has undergone; manoeuvres so physically demanding that few men of her acquaintance would have managed to stay the course.

Why does she do it? To bring a touch of authenticity to the tough-girl role of Purdey in TV's New Avengers series. And, of course, the sort of money Miss Lumley is earning for the first time in her life makes the rough-and-tumble of it all more than worth while; though money, she says, is not all that important to her.

by Clive Hirschhorn

## RADIANT

"Mind you," she said, "there were occasions in the past when I remember not having the ready cash to buy a decent meal and wondering what the hell I was going to do about it."

And what did she do? What any fairly good-looking girl would do. I set my sights on a fellow, flashed him a radiant smile, like this," she said, and demonstrated, "and when he invited me out to dinner, I accepted. And once I was satisfied that he could afford it, I'd eat as much as I could to keep me going for at least three days. And when he wasn't looking I'd slip a few rolls or whatever else remained on the table, into my bag.

Yet she started off not as an actress but as a model. "I started off as Walter Mitty. From the age of about seven I was an incredible day-dreamer. I'd create elaborate fantasies for myself in which I was Carruthers, an ace pilot who managed to land a biplane on half an engine and one wheel, having successfully and single-handedly bombed the whole of Germany.

"You know the sort of thing. I became that pilot, and in acting out my fantasies, I was having my first taste of what it was like to 'perform'." "But of course, you're right," she said. "The first professional work I did was as a model. I don't know why, I suppose because I'm basically lazy, and I thought that modelling would be easier, which, in a sense, it is. "If you've got the right physical equipment, you're three-quarters of the way there. On the other hand, it's quite difficult too. When I first became a model, round about 1965, the word 'model' had some rather unfortunate connotations. The Christine Keeler case was in full swing, and she and Mandy Rice-Davies also called themselves models. "Well, need I say more? "when I told my father I was going to be a model, his hair-line receded about 8in from



JOANNA LUMLEY—"I faint at the sight of blood."

shock! But once he saw it was a perfectly respectable profession for a young girl, he accepted it. Just as he's accepted everything else I've done in life. Both my parents are pretty good that way. "Anyway, for a while it all went very well, particularly the travelling around, which I loved. But the thing about modelling, I found, was that you soon become very obsessed with yourself. You have to. Everything depends on the way you look, and after a while you find yourself looking into a mirror 20 times a day.

"Also, I learned, once you've been a model, you have one helluva time trying to convince producers and directors you can also act. They just refuse to take you seriously. Fortunately," she said, "I persevered and have been lucky." "Extremely lucky. "Well, yes. In fact, I still can't believe what's happened in only ten months. For the first time I'm getting hundreds of fan letters a week and people are actually treating me like a star. "And is she impressed? "The Purdey side of me is

very impressed," she said. And Joanna Lumley, the real me, who is a completely separate person is very pleased for her. Now, if this sounds like I have a split personality, well, in a sense I have. I keep my private life completely separate from my professional one. "So much so," she said, "that when I see my name in print or hear it on TV or the radio, I actually get embarrassed." She paused. "A lot of people are terribly disappointed when they meet me, you know. They expect me just to be like Purdey. And when I tell them that there's nothing 'bionic' about me, that I'm the most gentle, docile creature in the world, and never drive faster than the law allows and faint at the sight of blood, they won't accept it. "I've even done some TV interviews in London when they've cut all that out when I mention it. Through the Avengers, people have a preconceived idea about me and when I don't live up to it, you can see the disbelief on their faces.

## CAREFUL

"Maybe," she said, "I should just pretend to be more like Purdey in real life. That would be the sensible thing to do, imagine-wise." She shrugged her shoulders. "Maybe I just haven't learned yet to cope with fame."

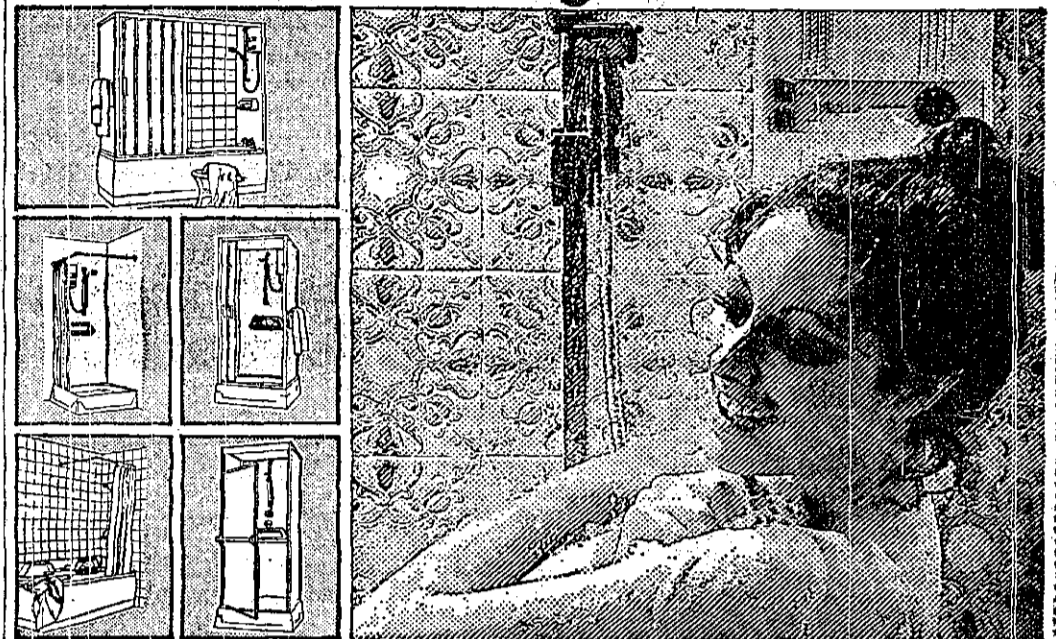
What about fortune? "I'm still paying off my overdraft," she said. "So while the money's good, I haven't actually managed to save any. Anyway, my only real extravagance is shoes. Apart from that, I'm pretty careful with cash."

"My main concern will be to see that my son James (who is nine) has a good education. Before the series came along I wasn't so sure this would be possible." For the past two years, Joanna has lived with Michael Kitchen, one of the National Theatre's most impressive and accomplished young actors. Her past boy friends include Patrick Macnee and Rod Stewart. When she was 21, she married actor Jeremy Lloyd. The marriage lasted eight months.

Lloyd is not the father of her son and to date she has refused to say who it is. "All that matters is that James and I are happy. Which we are."

Will she marry Kitchen? "Maybe. Who knows? It's not important. We like being with each other and in our different ways, give each other quite a lot. Is there a rivalry between us? No, because when you love someone as deeply as I love Michael, all you wish for them is success, and more success. "Besides," she said, "he's a man and I'm a woman. Let's face it, we're never likely to be offered the same roles, are we?"

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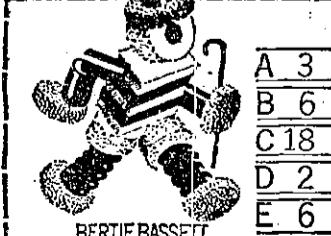
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