

A Day in the Life of a Supermodel Armpit Makeup Artist

by Con Chapman

Supermodel Gisele Bundchen had “to hold really still whilst makeup was applied to her armpits.”

The Boston Herald

It was 6:30 a.m., and my CD player-alarm clock sounded the opening notes of Albeniz's “Asturias,” which is familiar to 60's drugheads as the intro to The Doors “Spanish Caravan.” It fit my mood; anxious, edgy—depressed.



Some of my early work.

I'd been out of work as an armpit makeup artist for three months following a disastrous shoot for “American Girl” magazine. I had prepped precocious Cindy Hammer for a feature on Camp Pa-He-Tsi in Winnisquam, Michigan, using every tool in my portable makeup kit; styptic pencil, upper armpit blusher, highlighter.

Then the little twerp went and switched from a side pose to a full-frontal/arms-extended look, exposing her wispy alfalfa-sprout armpit hair to view. Scoutmaster Mary Louise Fernald had told me we didn't have time to prep both armpits on all the girls—they had Junior Life Saving at 1:30, gimp necklaces at 2:00. I'd been caught leaning the wrong way.



No, don't!

When the proofs arrived back in New York, the editor 86'd them and told me not to bother calling him anymore. Needless to say, I didn't get a nomination for the "Harrys"—the armpit makeup industry's prestigious annual awards—and my name was mud from Manhattan to Hollywood.

Still, I forced myself to get up every morning. They say that's essential when you're out of work. You've got to be just as disciplined when you're unemployed as when you're working; shower, shave, make breakfast (the most important meal of the day), scan the want ads and make some calls. If you don't, you'll end up sleeping on a heating grate in a couple of years as the inexorable downward undertow of self-pity drags you . . .



The phone! Maybe a call-back! I knocked over my bowl of Special K—the lightly toasted, lightly sweetened rice cereal by Kellogg's that is high in flavor but low in calories—lunging to answer it.

"Hullo?" I said into the mouthpiece, trying to sound eager, but not desperate.



Excellent source of 11 vitamins and minerals.

“Is this Duane Fontana?”

“That’s me.” Dammit—should have said “It is I”, I thought, remembering the telephone-answering skills I had learned in 4th grade English class.

“Dov Lemuelson here—how are you?”

“Fine, fine—just fine Mr. Lemuelson.” I was talking to the head of Dov Modeling Service, one of the largest agencies in Southern California.



Duane, not Wayne

“Keeping busy?” he asked, and a tremor of fear shot down my spine. I couldn’t sound like I was *too* busy, but I also couldn’t let him sense how far I’d fallen. “Sure,” I said after I composed myself, “but never too busy to work with you, one of the top . . .”

“Skip the obsequies.” I think he meant “flattery”, but he’d probably been taking a “30 Days to a More Powerful Vocabulary” course and had assumed that the word for funeral rites was derived from “obsequious”—i.e., fawning attentiveness. I started to correct him, but on second thought bit my tongue.

“Ow!”

“What's the matter?” he asked.

“I jutht bit ma tung.”

“Terrific. Say, I've got a supermodel out on a spread for Marie Claire—”

“The publicathion that women turn to for infomathion on fashion, thtyle, beauty, women'th ithues and careerth?”

“That's the one. Anyway, the armpit makeup artist just walked off the job. I need to get someone out there quick, before they cancel and I'm stuck with nothing but a 'kill' fee and have to pay Frederica out of my own pocket.”

As he spoke, I'd been bathing my tongue in the remaining milk in my bowl to ease the pain of my self-inflicted bite. By the time he'd finished, I was ready to pounce.

“Just give me the address, and I'm on my way.”

“3820 Buena Boca Feliz Navidad Boulevard.”

“I'm already gone,” I said as I slammed down the handpiece.



“Please hurry—I can't hold my boobs like this forever!”

By the time I reached the scene, the structured atmosphere of your typical high-fashion photo assignment had descended into chaos. Up against the adobe wall of the San Luis Obispo mission lay the shattered fragments of a Mitchum Smart Solid deodorant container, apparently hurled in a fit of pique by Duchess Frederica von de Velde, one of the world's most temperamental supermodels—and that's saying something.

“Hello,” I said as I walked up to her. “My name is Duane Fontana—Dov sent me.”

"Then you know who I am," she said, with a bitter tone.
"Everybody does. I have no privacy!"

An odd complaint for someone who makes a lot of money spreading her bony ass and leggy body all over glossy magazines, but I let it pass.

"I'm here to help, Ms. von de Velde."

"Please—let us not stand on these silly formalities."

"Okay."

"Call me 'Duchess'."



Bo Diddley: "Nice pits, babe."

So she wanted to maintain a professional distance between us. Fine. I made small talk while I unpacked my bag. "Didn't Bo Diddley have a sister named 'Duchess'?"

"Who is this Bo Diddley of which you speak?" she asked in the stilted English she had learned in European boarding schools.

"He's dead. Rock 'n roll pioneer—'Shave-and-a-haircut—two bits' beat."

"Oh," she replied blankly. I understood that she did that a lot.

I held up my light meter and took some readings. Bright sun called for a #4 armpit masque, with just a hint of groin shadow on top to give that *chiaroscuro* finish that female readers respond to by renewing their subscriptions early.

"You have really nice pits," I said as I went to work.

"No I do not," she said. "They are ugly. I got them from my father's . . . how you say—jeans?"

"No, 'genes'."

She gave me a look that would have dried a prune. “I know that all of you makeup types are homonymphos, but please—do not pull your homonyms on me.”

“Sorry,” I said, “just trying to help.”

“Do your job,” she said with disdain as she lifted both arms over her head.

“Okay,” I said as I took out my Dust It Mineral Makeup Brush.

She may have been a bitch, but she was a pro. She held herself stock still, and in five minutes she was camera-ready with a pair of armpits that most women would die for.

“All set,” I said as I poofed her with a glistening atomizer to give her that last touch of musky moistness that a man forced to flip through next month's issue as he waits for his wife in a women's clothing store might find a tad erotic. “It's been a pleasure working with you,” I said, and I meant it—if only for the money.

“Thank you,” she said as she walked over to the photographer's umbrella, her arms akimbo to keep her pits in picture-perfect shape until the shutterbug was ready. “I am always happy to bring pleasure into the lives of little people like yourself.”



She walked away and, as I stood there admiring my work, a thought occurred to me.

“Duchess?” I said timidly, causing her to turn around.

“What?”

“Would you . . .” I hesitated, unsure of myself.

“Yes?”

“I'd like to have a memento of my work with you.”

“Like a publicity photo?”

“No. If you don't mind—would you autograph this dress shield for me?”

*Available in Kindle format on amazon.com as part of the collection
"Bad Girls."*

