

CHICK LIT'S BIG STAR

WITH HER WITTY, SMART, AND REFRESHINGLY UNGLAM
NOVELS, AUTHOR **JENNIFER WEINER** HAS MADE HOLLYWOOD
RETHINK ITS IMAGE OF WOMEN. **BY CLARISSA CRUZ**

IT'S GOOD TO BE JENNIFER WEINER. "WHY SHOULD SKINNY girls have all the fun?" the effusive best-selling author says, between bites of edamame ravioli, lobster fried rice, and crispy duck salad at a trendy Philadelphia restaurant.

She has reason to be pleased. Weiner's novels, 2001's *Good in Bed* and 2002's *In Her Shoes*, have made her the biggest chick-lit success story since *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Not only have her books sold more than 2.5 million copies worldwide, Hollywood has embraced her tales faster than a fashionista spotting a Marc Jacobs jacket at a Barneys warehouse sale. Fox 2000 just wrapped the film adaptation of *In Her Shoes*, due this winter—about a gorgeous, irresponsible party girl and her frumpy older sister—with a dream team of A-listers that includes director Curtis Hanson (*8 Mile*), screenwriter Susannah Grant (*Erin Brockovich*), and stars Cameron Diaz and Toni Collette as the pretty and plain siblings, respectively. HBO is developing a series based on *Good in Bed*—chronicling a wisecracking, overweight single journalist in Philadelphia—produced by *Sex and the City*'s Jenny Bicks, who's approaching *Hairspray*'s Marissa Jaret Winokur to star. And though Weiner's latest book, *Little Earthquakes*—which follows three women dealing with the challenges of new motherhood—just came out this month, Universal Pictures has already bought the film rights.

Despite the success, Weiner is firm about keeping her characters real on screen: Collette agreed to gain weight to play her role in *Shoes*. "I don't want Gwyneth Paltrow in a fat suit," Weiner says. As she chats about her life, you soon realize how much the warm, quick-witted foodie heroines of her novels resemble their creator. Good thing, too, since it's exactly this conversational, humorous voice that makes her books unique. They feature very un-Hollywood (read: fat) protagonists, who—contrary to what Plum Sykes would have you believe—manage to get through life without glamorous jobs, weekly blowouts, and the latest Chanel tweed jacket.

"The honesty and the humor she brings to the character of Cannie [in *Good in Bed*] almost hit you over the head," says Bicks. "It struck me immediately that I had never seen a character like this, who was seriously overweight but not a pathetic loser. She's funny, she's got friends, she has sex, and you want to hang out with her. That to me is groundbreaking." Adds Weiner's longtime agent Joanna Pulcini: "It's smarter, more literary, more moving than you'd expect something labeled chick lit to be." Weiner, a 34-year-old Princeton grad and former *Philadelphia Inquirer* entertainment reporter who lives in Philly with her lawyer husband, Adam, and 1-year-old daughter, Lucy, chafes at the chick-lit tag. "From a marketing perspective it's very useful," she says. "But from a literary and feminist perspective, it's awful. Because it lets people speak very dismissively about women's books and about women's lives."

Maybe so, but people have been anything but dismissive about Weiner's books. It helps that her brother Jake Weiner, a manager at L.A. entertainment firm Bender-Spinks, submitted *In Her Shoes* specifically to female producers, the majority of whom immediately identified with the relationships in the book. Weiner remains modest: "Some of it is the water-

fall effect—if one thing gets picked up and made, it's like, 'Well, get me her next thing.' Even if it's, like, a total piece of s---, which I hope nothing is at this point."

In the meantime, Weiner is working on her fourth book, a mystery about a woman with triplets trying to solve a murder between feedings. ("The working title is *Momicide*. Everybody hates [the title]!" she says gleefully.) She's also getting a crash course in the strange ways of La-La Land. "L.A. scares me a little bit because you just know every waitress was the prettiest girl in their high school," she says. "And everybody's on some f---ed-up diet. Everybody has workout rooms in their houses and lap pools." Her feelings on lap pools aside, she's poised for a splash. ■

30-SECOND BIO

Hometown Simsbury, Conn.

"The WASPiest place ever," says Weiner. "Talbot's heaven." Siblings Jake, Joe, and Molly. "Molly is very pretty and she has to pay me \$5 every time I say that." On Curtis Hanson going from *8 Mile* to *Shoes*: "He's gonna have two movies that start with someone throwing up in a bathroom. That's the link!"

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