

When Malamud's novel hits the screen with the force of a romantic myth, Close literally glows

Glenn Close, Screen Angel

IN *THE NATURAL*, WOMEN ARE SAINTLY OR SEXUAL—AND THEY'RE ALL IN LOVE WITH ROBERT REDFORD. HERE, THE INSIDE STORY FROM ITS WOMAN IN LIGHT

BY AIMEE LEE BALL

Glenn Close is one of the founders of a self-formed, free-floating, almost incestuous repertory company of actors who work and play together (Kevin Kline, Meryl Streep, Mandy Patinkin) and sometimes share names (Mary Kay Place, Mary Beth Hurt, William Hurt, John Hurt, John Heard). But her first repertory company was "The Fingernails—The Group with Polish," a small band of renown at the preppy Rosemary Hall school in the 'sixties. Close comes from a proper Connecticut Yankee family and her acting career was at first thought a little disreputable. She redeemed herself with two Oscar nominations for *The World According to Garp* and *The Big*

Chill. And this year she became, as they say, star of stage, screen, and television: in *Something About Amelia*, the something being incest, one of the most watched TV shows of the season; in *The Real Thing*, the wildly acclaimed Tom Stoppard play on Broadway, co-starring Jeremy Irons; and in this month's film of Bernard Malamud's novel *The Natural*, with a blond named Redford.

Close has an easy laugh, particularly about herself, particularly about men. She's switched habitats from Greenwich, Connecticut, to Greenwich Village, New York City, where her new apartment is, after months of neglect, beginning to feel like home: antique lace, a sister's painting over the mantel, family photos all around, and—she admits almost sheepishly—her first doorman.

Aimee Lee Ball: Do you want to talk about the Fingernails?

Glenn Close: It was kind of an early *Saturday Night Live*, only all girls. We did a version of "Splish, Splash, I Was Taking a Bath" that started with "Moonlight Sonata" while I did this quick, compact description of the Fall of the House of Atreus.

ALB: Were you a weird kid?

GC: As a child I felt very much on the outside. Greenwich was our heritage, but my parents never felt comfortable there. They vowed they would have a life that would add to the world. And what it's meant for them is that my father is a dedicated doctor who was in Africa for sixteen years and now runs a county clinic in the middle-of-nowhere Wyoming. My whole childhood, I saw very little of him.

My parents spawned independent children. And there's a big streak of adventurer in my family. My mother's father was a larger-than-life man who went with Perry on some of his expeditions and to Arabia to look for Arabian horses. My father's father

ran the American Hospital in Paris for many years. My two grandfathers died quite a long time ago, but I had two extraordinary grandmothers—very strong women, women to contend with.

ALB: There are some disturbing things in "The Real Thing" about relationships between men and women. You betray your husband, Henry, and yet he capitulates because he just needs you so much.

GC: It seems cruel, and it's a difficult moment to understand. Henry has said exactly the same thing: "I love you, therefore use me. Be indulgent, negligent, preoccupied, premenstrual—your credit is infinite." And my character, Annie, actually takes him at his word. She says: "I have to choose whom I hurt, and I choose you because I'm yours." It's so honest that it's shocking.

ALB: There's a lot of heat up there. I felt bad for Jeremy Irons's wife when she came from London to New York for the opening.

GC: I felt bad for her, too. I'd be terribly jealous if I were her. That's the hard part of

this business, that if you're with somebody, you have to trust each other very much. If you're on a film location like *The Big Chill* and your mate comes to visit, it's very hard. And I don't mean that everyone has relationships because they don't, but you're a special group. It can be hard for somebody who isn't actually of the group to come and not feel left out and insecure. I've been on both sides, and it's hard.

ALB: What made you want to do "The Natural," a film about baseball and the imaginary "New York Knights"?

GC: Fate made me take it: something else fell through. That's the truth. But when I first read the script, I got a lump in my throat. It's such an extravagant story.

If you just take the lines off the page, Iris is kind of a skeleton, and to begin to make her a human being was a task. But I thought: what would it be like to find out I'm pregnant in Nebraska in 1924, and I'm not married, and I can't find the father? Imagine the bitterness and confusion. She's probably tried to (Continued on page 115)

(Continued from page 110)

find someone else, never thought she could love anyone the same way, had her heart broken several times.

I think because of the kind of woman she is, which is basically a fierce mother, she'd be very careful about whom she'd bring into her life. I assume she just hasn't found anybody. It fits the bill, right? I can draw on my own life—there's nothing to act.

ALB: Redford's character, Roy, and yours, Iris, are in love—but isn't the real romance about baseball?

GC: It's a great, classic, heroic, anything-is-possible story. And there's also enough wistfulness, enough of dreams *not* obtained, to make it not just like a Walt Disney movie. It's a romance in the true sense. And there are goodies and baddies. The women are employed like mythological figures—I'm very much the woman in light. They literally devised a lens they shot me with. There are two other women who are in dark.

ALB: It's as if one woman is total sex and the other is love and family . . .

GC: . . . which has nothing to *do* with sex! It's a very 'fifties idea. I'm the good woman and there's a woman who, when she comes into his life, makes his game start to fail. She's the bad woman—she seduces him. Of course, I kept saying, "Don't I ever get to *touch* him? Gimme a break."

ALB: Well, don't you?

GC: We have this kiss in the barn when we're young—very chaste. And then when he comes to my apartment, I just hug him. I kept saying, "This is the one man who's everyone's fantasy, and she never even gets to kiss him." But—that's my image.

ALB: When Redford was directing "Ordinary People," Mary Tyler Moore said he'd be saying something important, and she'd be listening, and then she'd say, "Omgod, look at that face," and she'd be lost.

GC: I love it. There's a scene where Iris and Roy go on this long walk and end up back in her apartment, and there's that inevitable moment when they kind of look at each other, and you get the feeling he wants to stay, and she says, "No, you have to go." I asked him afterward, "Have you ever done a movie where a woman has actually thrown you out?" And he said in one movie a woman tried to throw him out but he ended up raping her, so this is the first time. I'm very proud—I'm the only woman who's actually asked Robert Redford to leave.

ALB: Your leading men have all been hunks, haven't they?

GC: Sickening, isn't it? I've had my fair share of them. I don't like perfect-looking men, I like men who look flawed—flawed but interesting. I think Jeremy's handsome, but his face is quite lived-in; I like lived-in

faces. I like men who are sensual, who are in tune with that side of themselves and not uptight. At one point in rehearsals, Mike Nichols said that a moment when Jeremy faced the audience was "beautiful but dangerous, like Rio de Janeiro."

ALB: How do you feel about the way you look on film?

GC: I'm pretty much always self-conscious about the way I look. In *The Natural* I wear a lot of dresses, and I don't feel comfortable in a dress, especially with stockings and high heels. I was brought up tailored, but I don't feel tailored.

When I was growing up, we never went shopping for the entertainment value, so to this day I feel attractive when I don't have to worry about what I'm wearing. But I think a lot of times when I feel attractive, it isn't necessarily what other people think is attractive, namely men.

ALB: Most people feel more secure, more blessed in one particular arena of life—either you've got cutes or smarts. Do you feel pretty enough or smart enough?

GC: No, because there's always somebody prettier and smarter, if you start comparing yourself with people. I rarely feel pretty, although more often now than I ever have. Smarts? I'm smart enough, but there are a helluva lot of people smarter.

ALB: This from a Phi Beta Kappa?

GC: I'm basically a quivering mass of insanity and nerves. I feel terribly insecure a lot of the time and it's exhausting. I'm a very competitive person, but I really don't believe in competing with individual people because it's self-destructive, especially in this business. The best piece of advice I got, on the first job I had, was: Never compare your career with anybody else's. You'd jump out of a window.

ALB: Your group of actors works in a very unusual way. First Meryl Streep works with Jeremy Irons in "The French Lieutenant's Woman," then she works with Kevin Kline in "Sophie's Choice," then she's directed by Mike Nichols in "Silkwood." In the meantime, you work with Kevin Kline in "The Big Chill," then you work with Jeremy Irons in "The Real Thing," directed by Mike Nichols. I could go on . . .

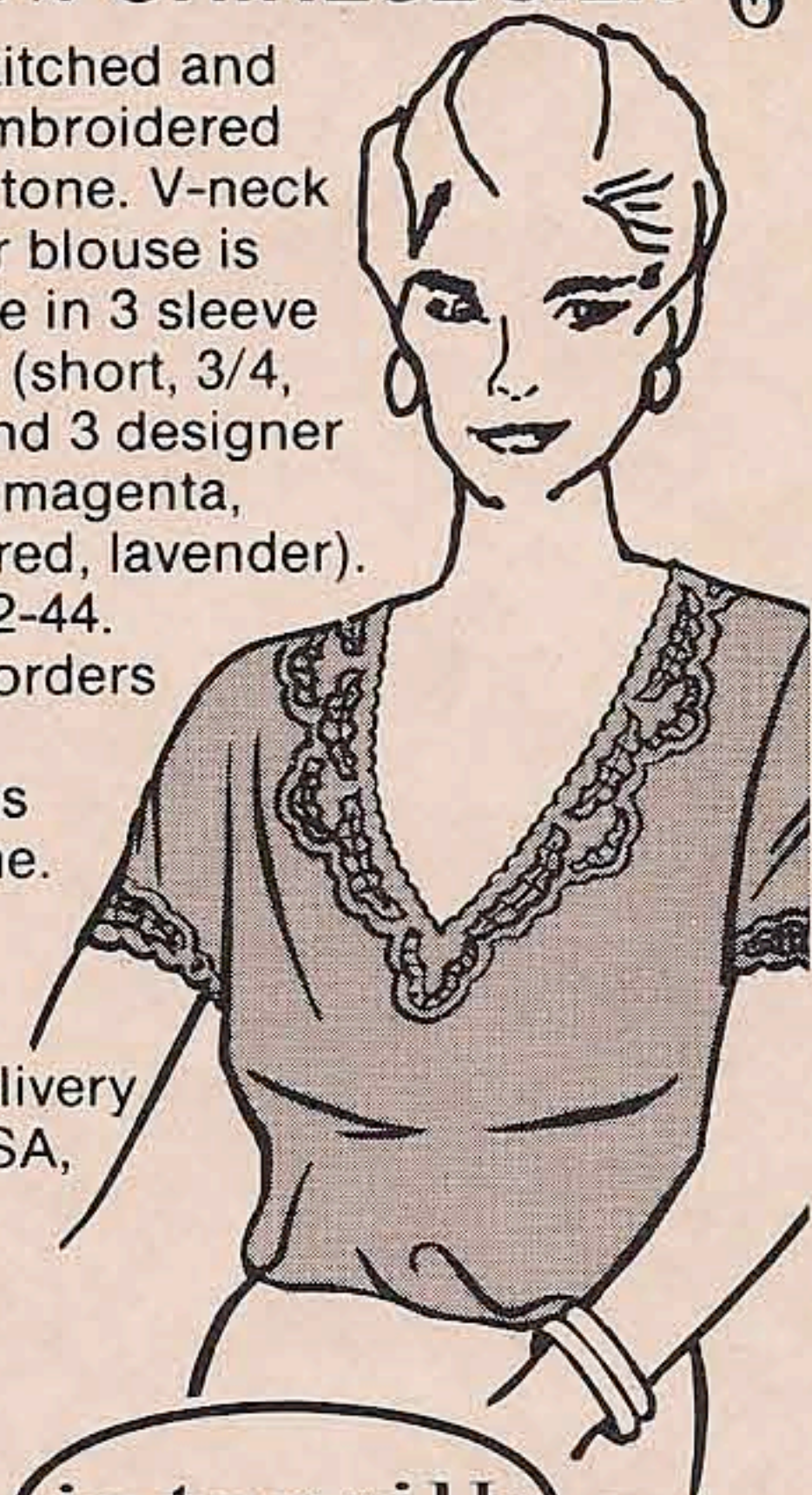
GC: Um-hmm. And we're all friends too. I'm so excited that we *found* each other. And I think it's just the beginning; we're just starting to reach our stride. If we can keep on the pulse and remain true to ourselves, then I think we'll be addressing again and again things that are on people's minds.

ALB: Walter Matthau once said that stage acting is like tennis, film acting is like Ping-Pong, and television acting is like marbles. But in terms of what you give to the performance and your responsibility, it can't be any less for "Something About Amelia" than for "The Natural" or "The Real Thing."

GC: No, it's not. As far as trying to find something truthful, there's no difference. When we started (Continued on page 118)

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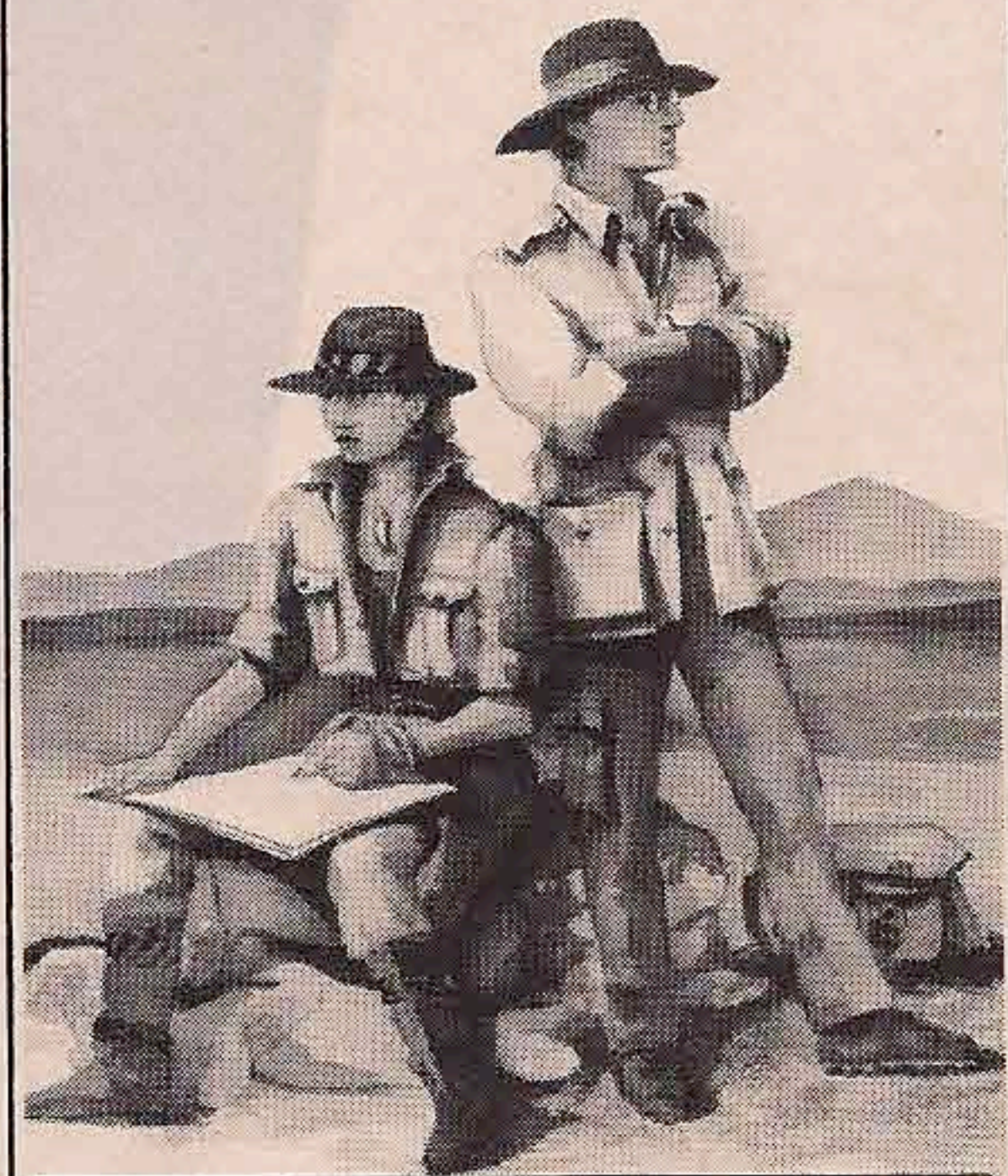


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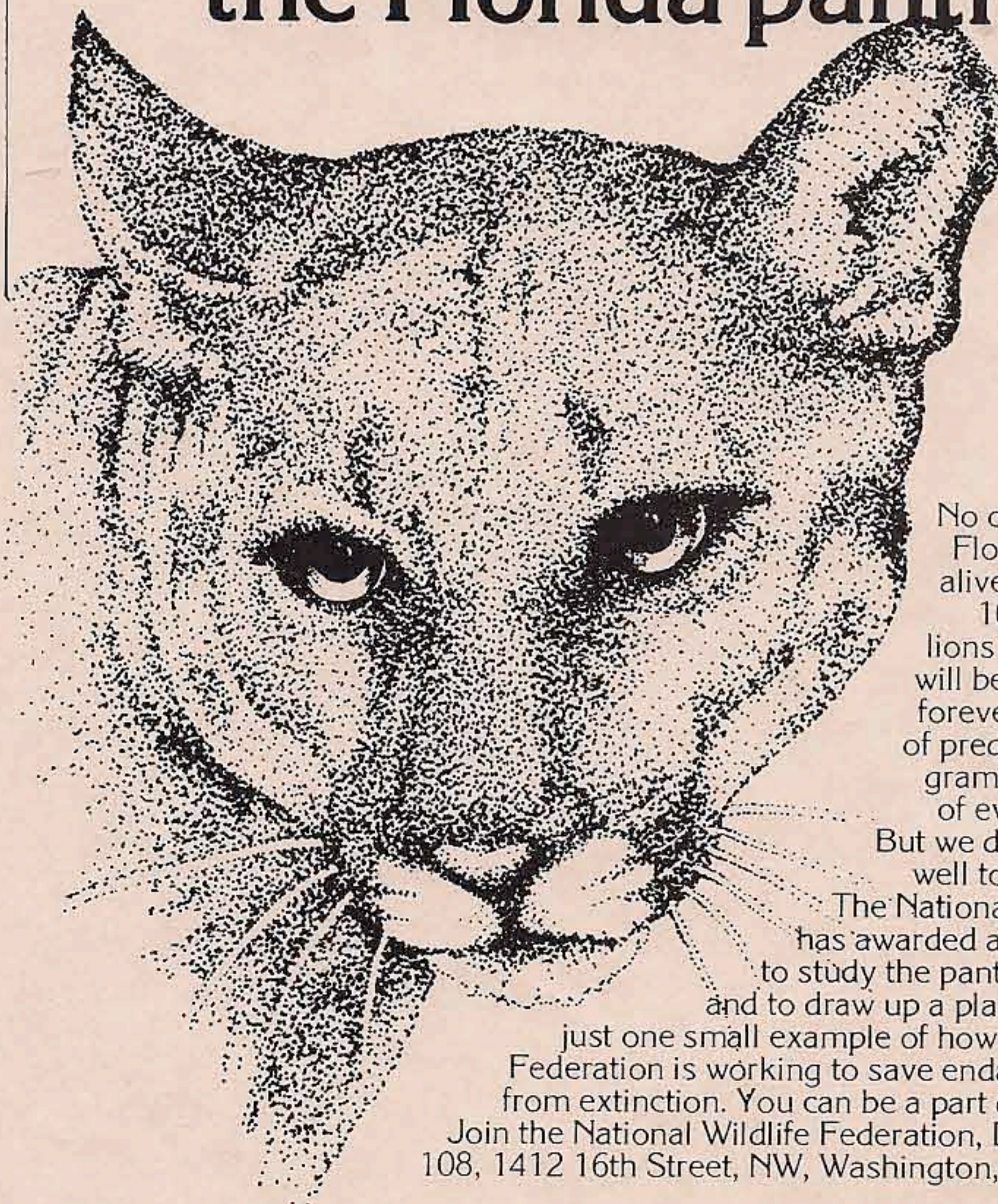
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GLENN CLOSE

(Continued from page 115)

"Amelia," I couldn't even say the word incest—I called it sexual child abuse. I didn't know anything about it, and I played a character who didn't know anything about it, and my only way of getting to her was to try to reconstruct in my imagination what life had become in the family and then, when the bomb dropped, not to play what I didn't know. Like when I'm called home and told what Amelia has said about her father, I think: What could she possibly have done? I know she's not doing well in school, I find her a difficult child. Was she caught cheating? Drinking liquor? I don't know what it is, but it's not incest.

ALB: None of your roles lately has given you the chance to sing—people probably don't know you're a lyric soprano. Do you at least sing for your friends?

GC: When you don't know how to play an instrument, it's not that interesting. Also I have a lousy repertoire. I only know Rodgers and Hammerstein songs. I think they're pretty, but everyone else has heard them twenty billion times. Twice I sang the anthem at Shea Stadium. It was when I was living with [the actor] Len Cariou, and he knows a lot of sports people, and one day somebody said to me, "Do you want to do it?" and I said, "Sure."

It was terrifying. I forgot my pitch pipe, and I started too low, and I forgot about the echo. You go out in this field, and the mike is right behind home plate, and there are all these millions of people. You start singing, "Oh, say can you see," and you don't hear anything for a second and a half, and then you hear, "OH, SAY CAN YOU SEE," and you're already on the next line.

ALB: You have a lot of ties to baseball. . .

GC: I've always loved baseball. My moment of triumph came when we were night-shooting on *The Natural* and somebody said, "Hey, Glenn, why don't you hit a few balls?" And I hit every one. I just slugged the shit out of the ball. They couldn't believe their eyes. And from that moment on, I had respect from everyone.

I always hung out at the set because I love watching—I haven't got bored with that yet. Also when you're working with people like Robert Redford, you're *dumb* if you don't watch—he knows so much. If he wants a closeup, he can maneuver it for himself. The first scene I did with him, I noticed that as the camera got closer and closer, he got more and more interesting. And to me that means the scene should be done mostly in closeup.

We had a great time with the crew. We'd get ice cream and Doritos and Oreos and go up to our rooms and put on music and pig out. My idea of a great time—Doritos.

ALB: Is there anything about making movies that you just hate?

GC: Styrofoam cups. ▽