

My double take date with William and Kate

Impossible! Quite outrageous! Bryony Gordon joins Alison Jackson, our best known spoof photographer, for her latest wheeze.



Alison Jackson photographs her William and Kate lookalikes, mimicking the couple's engagement photograph. | CREDIT: Photo: CLARA MOLDEN

It would be a pleasure to be able to bring you the world exclusive of Prince William and Kate Middleton looking... well, how do I put this? Relaxed? Given that the most casual picture we have seen of the future King involves him undoing the top button of his shirt, that may well be the case. But readers of a nervous disposition will be relieved to learn that no hanky panky was actually involved in the making of this photograph.

Under the covers, everyone is clad. If the subjects look hot, bothered and seem to have a slight blush on their cheeks, it is only because the hotel room was quite warm, and the duvet tog quite high. And my bed companions are not the future King and Queen, but 28-year-old Simon Watkinson, a civil engineer at the Olympics site, and Bianca Bowie-Phillips, a 26-year-old English Literature student.

The picture was taken by Alison Jackson, who is famous for her paparazzi-style shots of celebrity lookalikes getting up to no good. Over the years she has depicted Lord Mandelson in ermines, stockings and suspenders, the Miliband brothers arm-wrestling, the Queen doing the washing-up, and the Duchess of Cornwall in her wedding dress drinking a gin and tonic.

Jackson's work is pure carry-on and totally tongue-in-cheek - that tongue usually being lodged firmly in someone else's cheek. So realistic are the pictures that upon seeing one, Victoria Beckham remarked that she couldn't remember posing for it. One foppish Hollywood actor, a Brit to boot, allegedly went to one of Jackson's exhibitions, and when he saw a picture of "him" on a sofa with his girlfriend, he quite literally hit the wall, causing the photo to fall to the floor.

One can only hope that William and Kate see the funny side of this particular project - Jackson has been told that a couple of royals actually have her books - because the nuptials are rich in comic potential. "When their engagement was announced I just thought it was fabulous," says Jackson. "We'd been waiting so long I never thought it would happen but what great timing, to cheer us up during these days of austerity."

And so it is that I find myself in a Kensington hotel room about to play the part of blonde harlot caught in bed with William and Kate. William - or should that be Simon? No, I feel that we should be getting into character here - has just come from another job for a television show, and he says he was mobbed. The pair are nothing if not busy at the moment. Kate (Bianca) has worked with various Williams, and her first shoot with Simon, a few weeks ago, required them to jump into a giant gold bed together for a steamy clinch. Simon's quite new to the game of lookalikes, "so it was a bit odd, but my girlfriend is quite understanding and she was the one who suggested I become a lookalike anyway."

Jackson, who started doing her racy brand of photography in 1997, says she often finds herself running after potential models in the street. That's fine if she is telling them that they look like Angelina Jolie, not so much if they resemble Andy Gray - last week, Jackson mocked up a photograph of the shamed sports commentator, in which he was seen running after a glamorous girl with his trousers around his ankles.

"When I go up to them I usually say 'you don't *really* look like so and so' to try and soften the blow, but they are almost always offended." A Jeffrey Archer doppelganger was "incredibly rude" when she made her approach (not surprising), and when she went up to a Jack Straw, she was embarrassed to learn that it was actually him. "I do that quite a lot. I did it with Nicholas Cage, too.

Jackson is an astonishingly glamorous and tiny blonde in her early fifties. She was born in Gloucestershire and privately educated, studying sculpture at Chelsea College of Art. She has a Bafta for her series Doubletake, and while she won't reveal much about her buyers, she does say that Lord Mandelson bought a picture of himself (though not the stockings and suspenders one), and it is rumoured that Sir Elton John paid £350,000 for a mock photo Jackson did of the late Diana, Princess of Wales and Dodi Al-Fayed.

Anyway, it's clear her work sells for a fair few bob (she has also done ad campaigns for Schweppes). She takes her pictures of 'William and Kate' in skyscraper D&G boots, clambering on coffee tables and beds to get the right angle. She wears a D&G jacket too, and bright red lips - she is quite the sleekest thing I have ever seen, a no-nonsense pocket dynamo with a dirty laugh. "Hop in!" she says gamely, pointing to the bed, and me, William and Kate do as we are told.

The pictures will appear in a new book Jackson has done to coincide with the royal wedding. She is obsessive in her attention to detail. "Shouldn't they be drinking champagne or something?" she says to her assistant. "Don't pull the duvet up so high, Bryony, you look as if you are clinging on to it for dear life!" (I am).

Later, Jackson tells me that most lookalikes actually only look like a celebrity from one side or angle, "so we spend hours rehearsing how they should position themselves." She often shoots through an empty glass - it gives the pictures their blurry, paparazzi-style quality.

Jackson says she knows of a "couple" of celebrities who have become cross about her pictures, but "generally I avoid celebrities at all costs. I'm not really interested in famous people; what interests me is our absolute fascination with them. In a way we are horrified by all the private moments that seem to worm their way into magazines, but we can't help ourselves and want to look at them. We're all voyeurs really."

Interestingly, Jackson has found it difficult to find many girls to play Kate Middleton. "She's just a different breed of woman. She has this great smile and is beautifully camera-ready at all times. So I have several Kates, all of whom have different qualities. One has her face, another her physique, and then I have a Kate who is happy to do slightly more controversial scenes." That would be Bianca then.

Jackson never really found a suitable Gordon Brown, possibly because nobody is quite as permanently grim-faced as he was. "There was one towards the end, but just as I found him Brown stepped down." She has a "reasonable" Ed Miliband, a "very good" David Cameron but her Nick Clegg recently moved abroad. "Tell your readers I need a new Clegg! He is quite difficult because he has such a very long neck."

Who else is she missing? "Julian Assange, and he's a tough one because he's permanently changing his look." Her previous William shaved all his hair off just before the announcement of the engagement, but thankfully she found Simon soon after. "And I'm looking for a good Silvio Berlusconi. I think I might have found him when I was at a Tango club in Buenos Aires". That's not as ridiculous as it sounds - her Barack Obama is a shopkeeper in Bangkok - but I think I'll avoid that particular photo shoot.