

I don't want to be perfect!

Glamour challenged Aisha Tyler, costar of the new TV show *Ghost Whisperer*, to watch as photo retouchers smoothed away her "flaws." The result? Movie-poster perfect...and devoid of personality. Below, why Tyler likes her looks better the *real* way.

i ONCE DID A PHOTO SHOOT FOR a big magazine that shall remain nameless. Even though I'm usually teeth-chatteringly nervous before photo shoots, in this case I was pretty excited because I'd been working out regularly, eating right (the occasional glass or three of champagne notwithstanding) and getting lots of rest (ever since I read that getting plenty of sleep can help you lose weight, I'd been lolling in bed like a hung-over college freshman). I walked in there thinking, *bring on the bathing suits! Bring on the hot pants (despite the fact that they're tragically outdated)! I'm ready for anything!*



BEFORE

Aisha Tyler started out gorgeous, but the typical photo retouching process would still see her as a work in need of improvement. Crazy! (Tyler was "floored" when she saw this.)

STYLIST: LAURA TIOZZO; HAIR: MICHAEL WARD; MAKEUP: HEATHER CURRIE; AMERICAN EAGLE OUTFITTERS TANK; CITIZENS OF HUMANITY JEANS; MICHELLE ROY NECKLACE; TRES LÉVIE BRACELET; COLIN STUART FOR VICTORIA'S SECRET SANDALS; BEAUTY QUICKIE; AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PLASTIC SURGEONS



AFTER

Sheer perfection! But could you have a conversation with this woman? "It's a bit creepy to look at a picture of yourself and wonder where your freckles went," says Tyler.

The shoot went fine. (Of course, there's no way to look slinky when you're folded up like a yogi in a modern wire chair—you can only look pained. That's why models look so vacant. They've gone to their mental "happy place" to escape the fact that the sculpture they're perched on is jammed dangerously far up their hoo-ha.) But as I was getting ready to leave, the photographer handed me a batch of Polaroids and said a handful of the most soul-crushingest words I have ever heard: "Don't worry—we'll retouch them." I smiled wanly. Gee, thanks for the monster karate chop to my self-esteem. What could be so terrible about the real me that the photos would only be acceptable after digital manipulation? The sundae I ate that night was as big as a toddler. (No matter what anyone says, ice cream makes you feel better. That's just the way it is.)

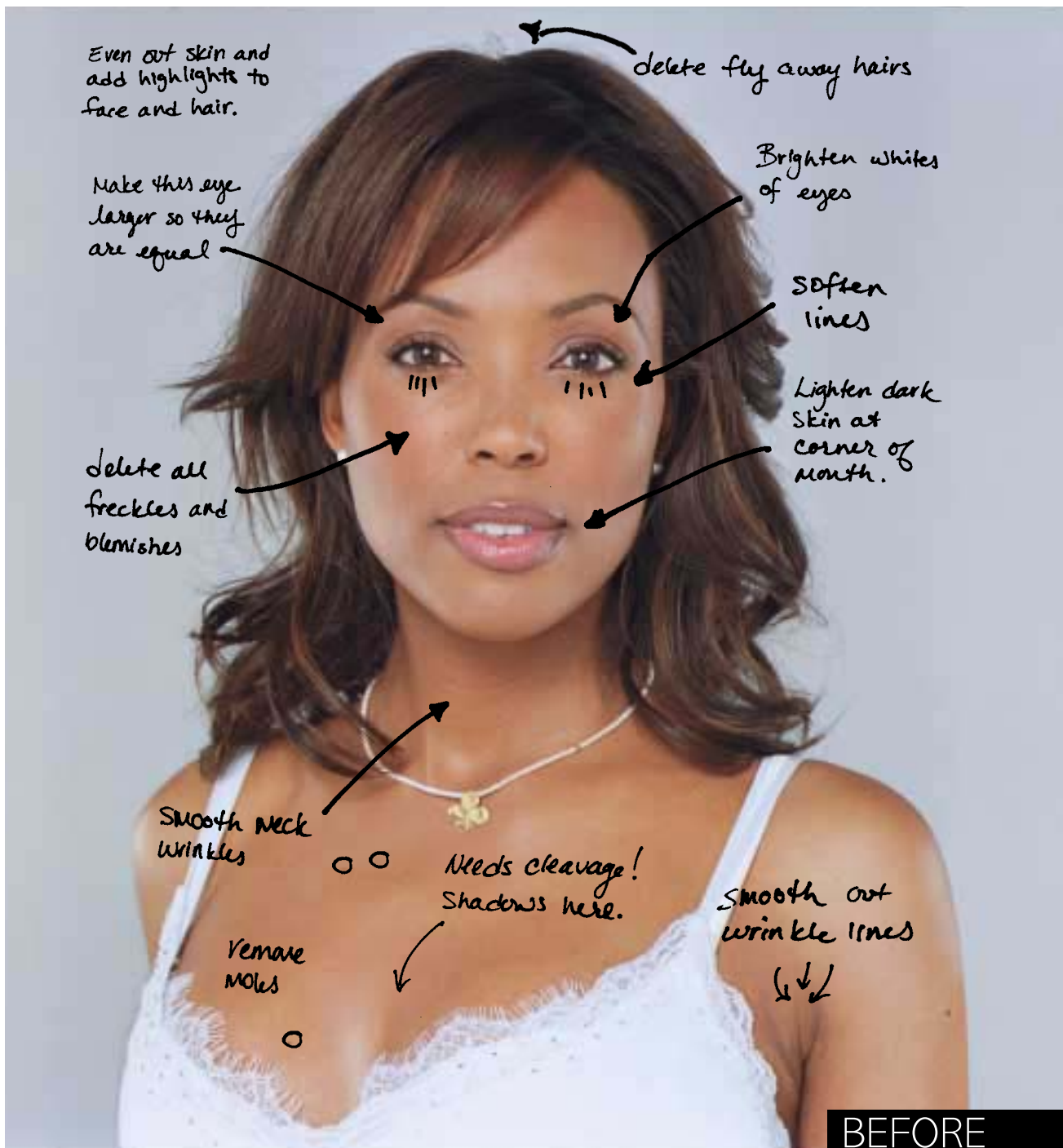
Now, I know what you're thinking: Good Lord, sister. Cry me a river. It must really suck to be you. But believe me, actresses are riddled with the same anguish and self-doubt as every other woman. We all wish our butts were rounder, our tummies flatter and that our second toe wasn't longer than our first (on the upside, I can pick up quarters with my feet). Actresses may look "perfect" in fashion magazines, where they've been pulled, pushed, pinned, posed, perfectly lit—and are sucking in their stomachs so hard they're in danger of denting their spleens—but the truth is, they obsess over their imperfections just like everyone else. *Unlike* everyone else, though, when they get a huge zit or an unholy lip rash, some sweaty paparazzo is waiting in the bushes to snap a nice humiliating close-up. There's nothing like seeing a photo of yourself in

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a tabloid, dressed in your "time of the month" sweats, to make you *pray* for a little retouching.

So when *Glamour* asked if I'd be willing to engage in an experiment to show how extreme the retouching process can be, I agreed warily, worried it would make me feel just as self-conscious and crappy as that earlier shoot. Even though I knew what I was getting into, I was still floored when I got the "before" pictures from the retoucher. They were *covered* in notes. Covered. I knew they were going overboard for the sake of this story, but it looked like some macabre all-you-

than ever to be perfect: Since 2002 the number of Botox procedures has increased a whopping 184%!



BEFORE

can-cut shopping list written by a crazed plastic surgeon. Then I pulled out the “after” photo. A mad computer scientist, high on beaker juice, had doctored it up, and voilà! Presenting: Robot Aisha.

Is Robot Aisha “prettier”? She’s a bit thinner, I suppose, and she certainly has “flawless” skin. But it’s a bit creepy to look at a picture of yourself and wonder what happened to your freckles and that mole you’ve had since you were a baby, or why your boobs look as if someone blew them up like inner tubes. Robot Aisha is glowing, but not from within. Glow has been meticulously applied through a software program. Robot Aisha looks as if she’d be sweet at first, lure you close, and then shoot you with a ray gun that popped out of her left breast. Between you and me, Robot Aisha is a little scary. If I saw her on the street, I’d look behind her to see whether the clone army had arrived to take over the city.

To me, beauty is the whole of a person, her flaws and imperfections, the way her smile is a little crooked (mine is) or her chin comes to a point when she grins (mine does) or the way one of her ears is just a little higher than the other one (it used to bother me but now I think it makes my head look jaunty!). And I love my freckles! How could something as sweet and personal as freckles be a *flaw*? It made me wonder: How skinny is skinny enough? How flawless should skin be? First you remove a freckle, then you even out skin tone, and next thing you know the person’s got no pores and her face looks like a department store mannequin’s.

Trying to achieve perfection means you miss out on someone’s sweet, crooked smile, the way her eyes crinkle when she laughs

Can you imagine what it would be like to see all your “flaws” pointed out like this? Aisha supposedly suffers from freckles, lines and beauty marks—just like nearly every woman on earth.



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AFTER

Presto! All gone. But where are the signs that this is actually a human face? “Robot Aisha is glowing,” Tyler observes, “but not from within. Between you and me, she’s a little scary.”

and, yes, those few extra pounds she gained in Miami on vacation with her boyfriend, drinking, having oodles of sex and eating Cuban food. Would we like to lose those pounds? Of course. Are we willing to give up *ropa vieja* and mojitos? Are you *kidding* me?

The “after” photo did get rid of those last five pounds I’ve been trying to lose since, I dunno, preschool. But it’s a hollow victory, because I didn’t earn it. And honestly, I’d like to earn it, but not at the expense of a full and fun life. I suppose I could spend every free minute I have in the gym, living on wheatgrass and water vapor, but that would pretty much suck, wouldn’t it? I want to be able to order dessert when I go out to dinner, have an extra glass of

wine on Friday nights and sleep in when I should be working out. And I want to wake up on Mondays and vow that *this* is the week I start going to the gym every day. Life should be like that: naughty, delicious and full of promising Monday mornings. Otherwise, what’s the point?

So the next time you see some model or actress with perfect skin, thighs like reeds and eyes like shimmering pools giving you the voodoo stare from a makeup ad or a monster billboard, remember: It’s all a big load of digital crap. You, too, could easily look like that if you had a squad of mad geeks fussing over you with retouching software. Remind yourself that she looks *nothing* like that in real life. Oh, and if you see Robot Aisha on the street, run for your life. The digital invasion has begun. ©