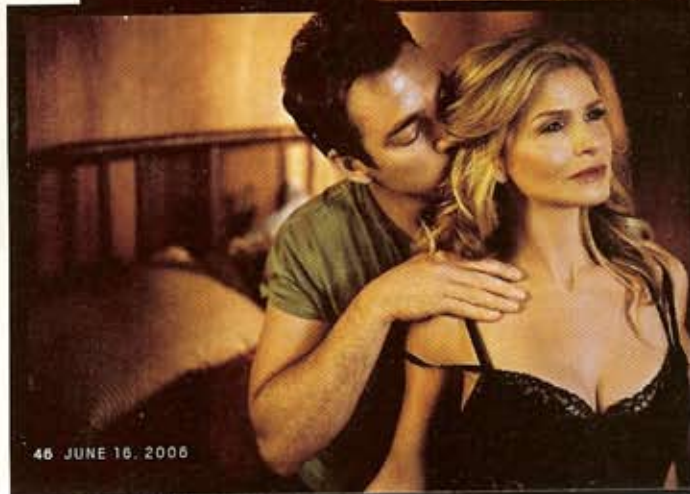


KYRA SEDGWICK is back to elicit more true confessions as the feisty, fabulous master interrogator in TNT's summer hit **THE CLOSER**



There are plenty of times when Kyra Sedgwick, who plays the Georgia-born detective Brenda Leigh Johnson at the center of TNT's hit police drama *The Closer*, will purr "Thank you" in that distinctively sultry, Southern-fried voice of hers and actually mean it.

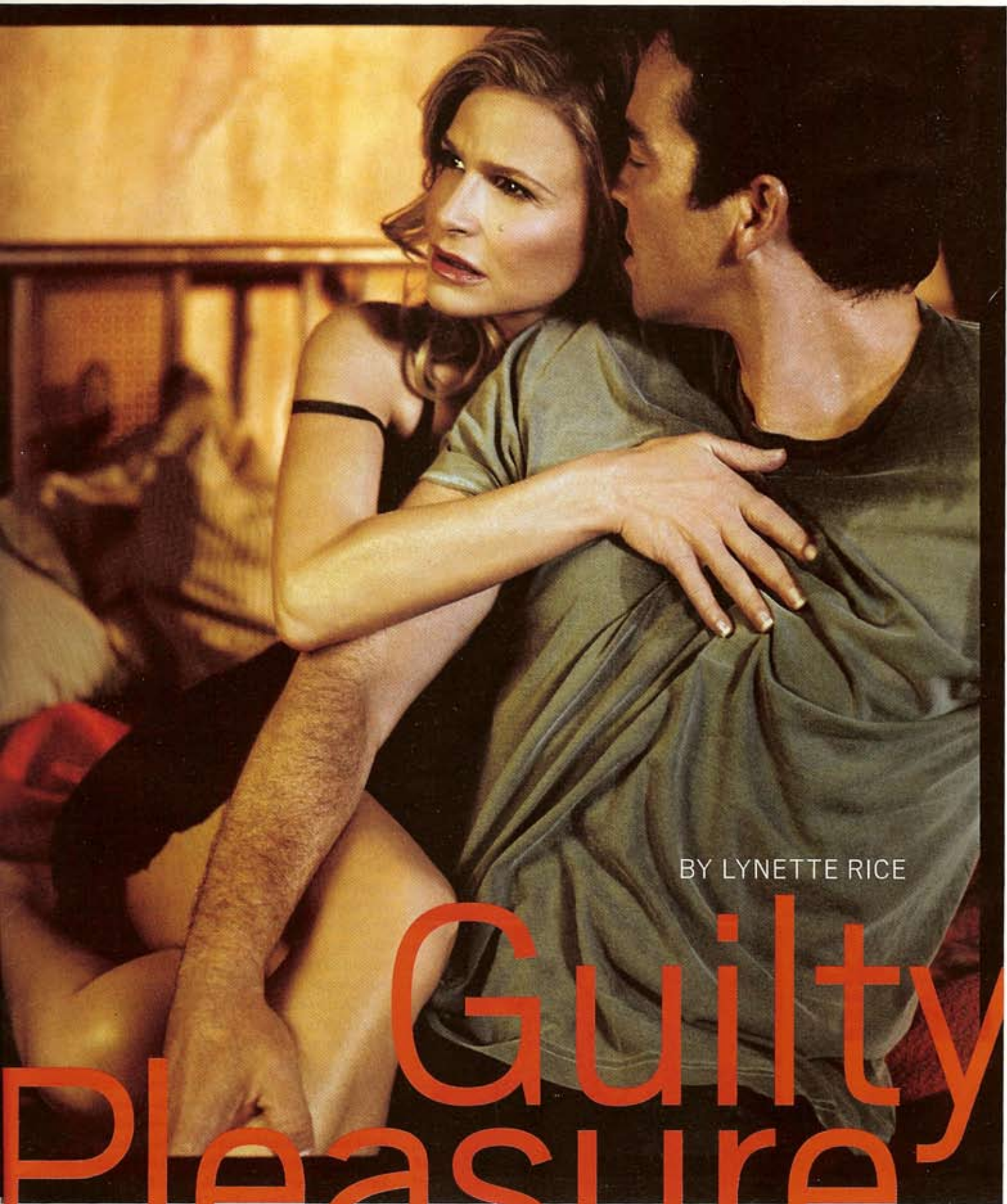
This isn't one of those times.

Inside a large L.A. sound studio, Brenda's underling Detective Lieutenant Provenza (*Police Academy's* G.W. Bailey) is trying to apologize to colleagues for abandoning a crime scene to catch a baseball game when Brenda hits him with an acid-tipped version of her now-signature phrase. "Lieutenant Provenza, thank ewwww for that apology...which was short, sweet, and entirely insufficient."

A few days after she laid down the law in the squad room, costar J.K. Simmons—who plays Brenda's chrome-domed boss and ex-lover Will Pope—can't help but appreciate the subtleties that Sedgwick

THE CLOSER'S KYRA SEDGWICK AND JON TENNEY

photographs by Randall Slavin



BY LYNETTE RICE

# Guilty Pleasure

# Inside The Closer's Cop Shop

**Deputy Chief Brenda Leigh Johnson**

(Kyra Sedgwick)

Tough interrogator with a passion for the truth and a soft spot for Ding Dongs.



**FBI Special Agent Fritz Howard**

(Jon Tenney)

Brenda's patient boyfriend may be excellent in bed, but he's even better with inside info.



**Assistant Police Chief Will Pope**

(J.K. Simmons)

Brenda's controlling boss and former lover still carries a torch for the steel magnolia.



**Commander Taylor**

(Robert Gossett)

A perpetually bitter man, Taylor never got over the fact that Pope passed him over for Brenda's job.



**Det. Lieut. Andy Flynn**

(Tony Denison)

Jaded, tooth-pick-chomping homicide-unit copper who has wisely developed a grudging respect for Brenda.



**Detective Lieutenant Provenza**

(G.W. Bailey)

Another one of Brenda's curmudgeonly underlings who should have retired, oh, 15 years ago.



injects into her portrayal of the quirky Southern belle. "Her 'Thank you' is like an aloha," he explains, laughing. "It can mean a thousand things."

And for nearly 5.5 million viewers, it's reason enough to keep their sets tuned to TNT again this summer. A year ago, the drama's bow set a record for scripted basic-cable-series premieres and was seen by 7 million viewers. Now the show—about the CIA-trained Johnson, who supervises a resentful, mostly male LAPD homicide unit while using her eccentric charms to wheedle the truth out of perps—is back for a second season (premiering June 12 at 9 p.m.). While it makes the perfect companion to TNT's rerun-heavy lineup of procedurals like *Law & Order* and *Without a Trace*, the network (surprise!) insists *The Closer* is more than just a cut-and-dried cop series. "We sell it as a character drama," says Steve Koonin, exec VP & COO for TNT and TBS. "We loved the idea that the shows resolved themselves [in each episode] but were smart and accessible, and [that] the stars would become our viewers' friends."

Yet it was Koonin's desire for an original lead-out from those *Law & Order* reruns that prompted a meeting with James Duff, a jovial writer who'd worked on far less violent projects like The WB's teen-centric *Felicity* and *Popular*. Together with

*Nip/Tuck* executive producers Greer Shephard and Michael Robin, Duff turned a lifelong fascination with the CIA—his uncle was the Air Force's chief of internal intelligence in Vietnam—into a pitch about a brilliant female interrogator who can extract confessions that stick. "I thought it would be a nice switcheroo to have the Southern belle who is also pretty smart," says Duff, a Texas native with a twang of his own. "Brenda uses it to her advantage. People automatically downplay you when you have a Southern accent. I know that from experience."

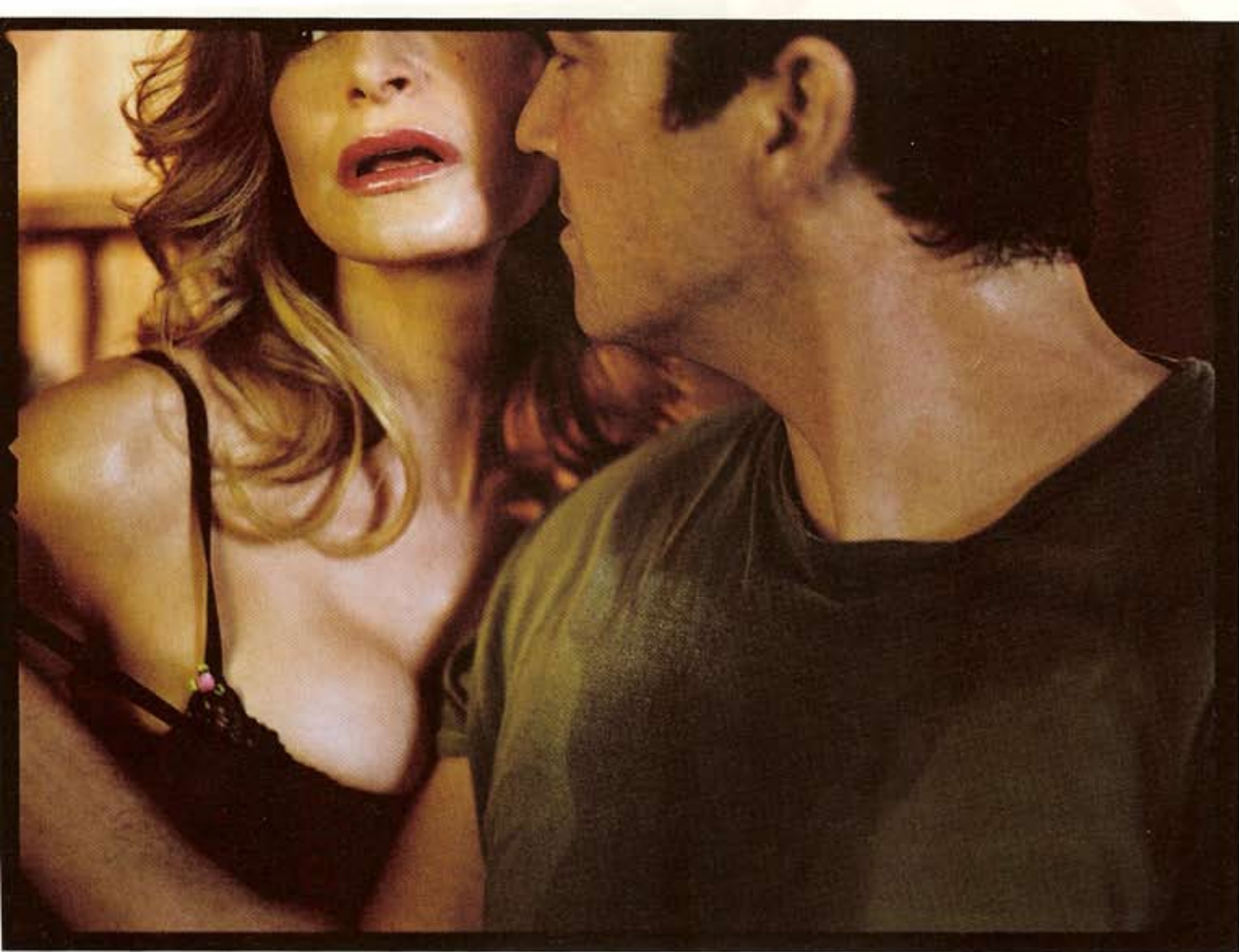
The key was finding the right person who could utter those *thank ewwwes* with aplomb and force. Enter Sedgwick, the 20-year film vet (*Something to Talk About*, *Phenomenon*) and Manhattan native who had, incidentally, been offered roles on procedurals before. "I didn't think I would be good at it," she confesses. "I ran screaming in the other direction." What's more, she wasn't much interested in a West Coast gig that would take her away from the New York home she shares with her husband, actor Kevin Bacon, and their two children, Travis and Sosie Ruth. But that was before she read Duff's script and immediately fell in love with the brainiac divorcée with a near-debilitating weakness for high-calorie treats and frumpy floral attire. "I think [the clothes] come from JCPenney and Sears, but I love it and don't want it to be different," says Sedgwick, who stays true to her character by keeping See's Candies in her trailer (though it seems unlikely that the petite 40-year-old would ever touch the stuff). "She's not going to be wearing the butt-crack jeans or the suits. She's a fish out of water. And that makes her look different."

Sedgwick's willingness to get down and dowdy was an added bonus for the cast, which includes Robert Gossett (*Dark Angel*) as Brenda's nemesis Commander Taylor, Tony Denison (*Prison Break*) as resident cynic Det. Lieut. Andy Flynn, and Jon Tenney (*You Can Count on Me*) as Brenda's sexy love interest, FBI agent Fritz Howard. "She just digs into it," says Tenney. "Not only with the accent and her quirkiness but the way she embraces that wardrobe, which is just hideous." Adds Bailey: "There are very few leading characters like Brenda. She has the social skills of a Gila monster, but she knows how to find the truth."

She also knows how to attract personal drama. Now that life with her once-bitter staff has cooled considerably ("It's no longer them against her," explains Sedgwick), Brenda's new complications in season 2 include a visit from her mom, Willie Ray Johnson (*ER*'s Frances Sternhagen, who—given her TV-mom track record—can be expected to be nothing less than a royal pain), and Pope's surprising decision to divorce his wife. Though Brenda's planning to shack up with Fritz, she's also confused by her boss' breakup—especially



Sedgwick (top, with Gossett; bottom, with Bailey) enters the dead zone



“I never want it to become soap opera-y,” says Sedgwick. “People love the crime aspect of this show. And whatever the crime is...my character is never forgotten.”

since she suspects that he never really recovered from their relationship. (As for her real-life lover? Bacon is open to a guest appearance, but so far none has been planned).

If all of this is sounding a bit too much like an episode of *The Young and the Restless*, Sedgwick shares your concerns. “I never want it to become soap opera-y,” she admits. “People love the crime aspect of this show. And whatever the crime is, it’s personalized for Brenda. My character is never forgotten.” This season’s first episodes find her helping to solve an officer-involved killing and cracking a case about the mysterious death of a juror involved in an Armenian Mob trial. But honestly, must she always get her way? Can’t Little Miss Perfect ever slip up? Sedgwick wants to see it happen—and soon. “I would like her to make a

mistake this year,” she confesses. “I would like her to be wrong.” She might just get her wish in the July 10 episode, when Provenza and Flynn make a colossal blunder in a murder investigation and Brenda spends the entire time, according to Sedgwick, “trying to cover their ass. They left a crime scene to go to a baseball game and when they came back, the body was gone!”

Which brings us back to that Los Angeles studio. When they finally finish shooting their scene, Sedgwick and Bailey bust into an impromptu waltz that’s sweet enough to make everyone forget she was giving him a verbal butt-whupping just a few seconds earlier. It’s all in keeping with Brenda’s deceptively sugarcoated style. “That is the Southern way of masking things,” notes Sedgwick with a smile. And thank ewwww for that. ■