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A TURN FOR THE By Jim Colucci

NURSE

Former *Sopranos* star Edie Falco leaves the mob behind for a healthy dose of dark comedy in her new Showtime project, *Nurse Jackie*.

A decade ago, Edie Falco became a household name as big-haired, blond mob wife Carmela on HBO's groundbreaking hit *The Sopranos*. Earlier this summer, her latest series, a darkly comic drama set in a New York City emergency room, debuted on Showtime. In *Nurse Jackie*, Falco, who turns 46 in July, sheds her mafiosa drag to embody an imperfect but highly competent RN chasing her own demons.

We caught up with the actress as she finished filming *Jackie*'s first season to find out more about the new and fabulously flawed lady with whom—if Falco's enduring turn as Carmela is any indication—we'll be fascinated for many years to come.

Watch!: After *The Sopranos*, you could have gone on to do anything. Why another series?

I was as surprised as anybody else that I ended up loving series work as much as I did. It just suits my lifestyle. The work is hard, the hours are long, you get very involved and you get to play the same character for a long time. And I can make the stipulation that I stay in New York, which I got to do on *The Sopranos*. It's the closest thing to having a real job that you can get in my line of work. But the truth of the matter is, it's also so hard to find something that made me feel excited. I've gotten very picky, because the writing was so good on *Sopranos*. I took some time off and read plays, movies and series. *Nurse Jackie* was the first thing that really grabbed me.

W!: What appealed to you about this character?

She's unapologetic, she's passionate, she's driven, and she doesn't spend a lot of time worrying about the way other people perceive her. All of that was very interesting and attractive to me.

W!: Attractive how? Is that liberating, in terms of acting out more than Edie ever would?

That's the best part of being an actress. You get to step inside all these personalities and lives without the actual ramifications. It's definitely therapeutic and liberating for me, because on a real day-to-day basis, I would not necessarily want those characteristics, or I guess I'd already have them. But to temporarily live these things out is great.

W!: As research, did you spend any time observing real nurses?

I'm not very big on doing research. I think I do my own kind, without actually knowing what I'm doing. I find myself wandering to certain types of books, and then I realize, "Oh, I see, this is the kind of book

my character reads." But for this I did go to emergency rooms, thinking that was the right, "actor-y" thing to do. It was very troubling, frankly. It didn't feel right being there. First of all, I was too self-conscious. Not that I was recognized, although I may have been ...

W!: People were probably saying, "That's Edie Falco, hanging out here in the emergency room!"

Exactly. And they're thinking, "I wish she'd get out of here. My leg fell off!" People were going through such horrible things, and I'm standing around with my notepad—I just felt so obtrusive. I spent far too much energy worrying about that, and not enough in actually learning for my show. Anyway, we have real nurses on set who talk us through the logistics, because with the technical nursing stuff, I need to look like I've been doing it for such a long time.

W!: It must be challenging, because while you're emoting, you also have to do these medical "bits of business" much more complicated than everyday tasks like folding a towel or making a bed.

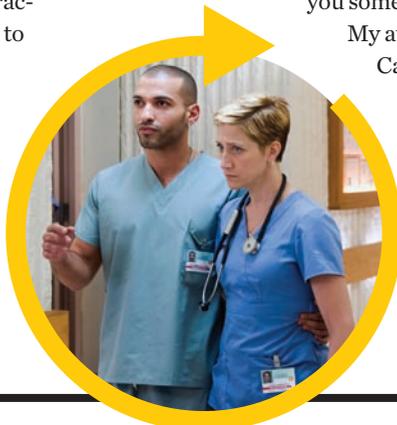
Yes, it's a complicated situation, but I love it. And I think for the most part, from the footage I've seen, you end up not paying that much attention to that stuff, thank God. I did have one day that could have been awful—I was taking blood pressure, and it was as awkward as I've ever felt in front of a camera. Luckily, I'm surrounded by so many fantastic people, who were laughing along with me in real life, so it ended up just being funny.

W!: How does Jackie compare to Carmela?

Hardly at all. It's hard to imagine them ever, except in an emergency room, even having contact with one another. Their lives are so different. And their personality types are different, although they're both strong. Carmela plays a lot more within the rules. Even though her rules may not be everybody's, she is very comfortably ensconced in a particular society. I think Jackie is less so. I'll tell

you something funny though:

My aunt, whose name is Carmela, is a nurse.



W!: When you decided on series TV, is that something you were looking for, to distance yourself from Carmela?

I don't know how to do that strategic stuff. I go by a gut instinct. It was more from a "heart" place than a "head" place. If for some reason I had felt like there was more to explore with Italian-American wives, I would have gone that way. But I'm done with that for a bit.

W!: *Is Jackie another Italian-American character?*

No, certainly not Italian-American. I think Irish-American, although we've never spoken of it. Her last name is Peyton, and I don't know her maiden name. It's part of her back story that, so far, we've never discussed.

W!: *We do know, though, from her Catholic background, she's obsessed with saints and the concept of their goodness. Is that something you can relate to?*

In my real life, not at all. I'm half Italian-American, and there's certainly religion in my family, but not for a number of generations has it been quite that strong. I think religion is an old solace for Jackie, but I don't know how up-to-date it is in her daily life. She's traveled a great distance from her days in Catholic school, but she certainly still

does wear that religious necklace. There are life-and-death issues to both nursing and faith, and I think you have to find a place to get through the days.

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W!: *With her short, simple 'do, suitable for a nurse on the go, Jackie has a different look from Carmela.*

Yes, and for one thing, it's simple as that it requires less time to prepare when I get to the set. The interesting thing is that the look is much closer to the real me than Carmela ever was. With *The Sopranos* that was a good thing, because it meant I was able to walk anonymously through the city. I don't look anything like Carmela without the nails and the hair.

W!: *In this new show you're reunited with the actor Paul Schulze, aka The Sopranos' Father Phil Intintola. He plays your lover on Nurse Jackie. Is that supposed to be a nod to Sopranos fans, for us to see that Thorn Birds relationship consummated?*

Isn't that hysterical? That had never even occurred to me. The truth of the matter is that Paul has been one of my closest friends for 30 years. We have done so many plays and movies and TV shows together, where we've played brother and sister, and lovers, and friends, and every possible thing that a boy and a girl could be. But I forget that a lot of people saw *Sopranos* and have some attachment to our relationship, so I suppose this will be some kind of closure for some people!

W!: *Lately, cable series have been specializing in series with flawed "antiheroes," which is a trend that a lot of people trace back to The Sopranos. Is Nurse Jackie another antihero?*

I guess that is a way to put it. But to get remotely philosophical, everybody is in some way an antihero. I think we're all to some extent doing the best we can while battling some major character flaws. Maybe it's more that people recognize, and writers are willing to create, people struggling with all their different character traits, good and bad. It shows that people are, for the most part, very complicated.

W!: *In Nurse Jackie's pilot, she flushes the severed ear of an accused rapist down the toilet before it can be reattached. It's a satisfying scene, but not necessarily a very moral one.*

Exactly. If we're very lucky, people will be asking that question about morality and maybe not come up with an answer. We can live with that question and let it remain. I think that's sane and healthy, frankly. The show is not your typical TV fare—not by a long shot. And I think people will be thrilled. 🍷