

KEIRA

HOW TO BE A WOMAN

Wool coat and sequined silk-organza dress, both Saint Laurent by Hedi Slimane. Leather boots, Rayne. Acetate sunglasses, Chloé

*From shy newcomer to celebrated beauty, **Keira Knightley's** life has taken many different turns. The new chapter is the best yet. **Annabel Brog** meets an actress coming into her own*

Photography **Thomas Whiteside** Fashion **Anne-Marie Curtis**



This page: Velvet, lace and Lurex brocade dress, Dolce & Gabbana. White gold and diamond ring, Chanel
Opposite: Green silk-mix dress, Miu Miu

A surprising confession: before I even turn on my dictaphone, after a day spent observing her in front of the camera, I like Keira Knightley enormously. I didn't expect to like her so much. While I have admired her - aesthetically and professionally - I have never really warmed to her on screen or in interviews, so I didn't expect I would fall for her to such an extent in real life.

It helps that she turns up for our cover shoot 15 minutes early (average talent arrival time: 30 minutes late); that she is on her own (average entourage: three); that she is in and out of hair and make-up in just over an hour (average grooming time: 2 hours 45 mins); and that we have two looks shot before lunch (average morning shots: not even one). To wit: she is undemanding, easy-going and professional. This is something to celebrate, believe me. One ELLE cover star showed up a whole day late.

Then there's Keira's personality. She's funny: you don't typically find a whole shoot team, including the talent, howling with laughter over inappropriate celebrity behaviour on aeroplanes. She is self-deprecating: when I comment that she's one of the few actresses who can 'open' a film, she remarks with deadpan ease: 'Not very well,' and laughs. And, primarily, Keira is a girl's girl. Girl-friends are 'the f*cking best. Once you've got that family of women, generally speaking, it's forever'. When discussing her friendships with both Benedict Cumberbatch - more of whom later - and his ex-girlfriend, she hastily clarifies: 'But they're still close friends, so it's fine.' And she claims being dumped by a girl mate is much worse than being dumped by a boy: 'I swear, I still haven't gotten over when that happened to me.'

And yet women - at least, those who have never met her - don't warm to her, something Keira attributes, in part, to her reaction to finding herself aged 18, after filming *Pirates Of The Caribbean*, hounded by 'around 30 guys shouting, "You're a whore," and sh*t like that, 24/7'. Keira was a bookish, conformist girl ('You get those amazingly headstrong teenagers - "I've got all the answers, the world is wrong, I'm right" - but I was *completely* the opposite of that. Everything frightened me up until the age of 25'), and it made her cry, then erect a defensive wall significantly thicker than that of most other celebrities.

'I know I can be very... I have an on/off switch and, when I'm doing publicity, I'm absolutely OK, but when I'm not working and people come up to me, I've not got the head on to handle that,' she admits. 'I don't give off a nice energy and that makes me feel awkward.'

She also believes that people can be pretty awkward back. 'I think it's dreams and fantasies. People want you

to be a specific kind of person and if, in the flesh, you're not, that can be tremendously disappointing. They can get quite angry, aggressive, be like: "Why are you here?" [when I'm] sitting in a park or cafe. The first time, you're like: "Woah, what was that?" But then it makes sense; you're meant to be living on cloud celebrity - of course, that doesn't exist - and it can be quite annoying for people that you're trespassing in their world. I don't like being places where people will notice that I'm an actress and they might find that either exciting or weird.'

As a result, she hasn't always enjoyed interviews either ('It's difficult not to feel completely defensive, then you act defensive, and people think, "Oh well, she's the bitch I thought she was." It's a self-fulfilling prophecy'), but there's no hint of wariness or bad energy today.

We are chatting over white wine in The Union Club, London's most relaxed private members' bar, and Keira, now 29, gives the appearance of a woman entirely, enviably, comfortable in her own skin. I really think things have changed for her in the past couple of years, not only in her private life (she married Klaxons' James Righton, 30, in May last year) but also professionally. Where once she tackled spiky, aloof characters in period

films like *Atonement* and *The Duchess* - a conscious choice, she jokes, because, 'If you play likeable parts, people think they can come up to you on the street, and I don't like people coming up to me on the street' - this year, her roles are all contemporary, approachable and, well, likeable.

'Actually, a friend of mine said of my husband and me: "You're a great couple because he makes people have a great time and you make people cry."' She laughs. 'And I thought: "That's so awful, maybe I need to do something a little bit more joyful."'

'Joyful' kicked off in January, with Keira playing the 'girlfriend role' in action movie *Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit*. Cathy was a smart, modern, American woman and Keira was both believable *and* likeable. The US accent probably helped, and this autumn she'll be playing an American again, opposite cult actor Sam Rockwell, in the highly anticipated, critically lauded *Laggies*. Next month, she can be seen in a truly charming, surprising, indie romcom, *Begin Again*. Keira holds her own as Greta, the dumped girlfriend of newly successful singer Dave (played by Maroon 5's Adam Levine), who goes on to record her own album with a drunk, divorced, recently fired A&R scout (Mark Ruffalo).

Keira sings in the film, which was agony for her, as singing in public is among her least-favourite pastimes. 'I hate karaoke. Like, I really, *really* hate it. I have to be so drunk I'm nearly about to fall down before I sing in front of anybody. It just terrifies me. But, also, among the people you go with, there will be somebody who secretly >

Wedding dress number two was made for her by Valentino. 'Would you like to see a picture?' she asks



Cashmere-mix cardigan, Lurex bra and knickers, and PVC and metal embellished skirt, all Miu Miu

Wool, leather and crystal-embellished dress, Gucci



has an amazing voice, and you're just like, "F*ck off!" The last time she did karaoke, she says, was with her friend and *The Edge Of Love* co-star Sienna Miller: 'We sang a duet of *I Will Survive*.'

So she plays a rock star's girlfriend and, at the time of filming, Keira was a rock star's girlfriend. Keira bats the comparison back. 'In *Begin Again*, it's about success for the first time and what that does to a person,' she says. 'Whereas, you know, James has been in the band for over eight years and they've won lots of awards and sold god knows how many records. I've never experienced being with somebody who is [finding fame] and I shouldn't imagine that's such fun.'

There's a line in the movie when Greta and Dave are in a meeting with his record label, where she's viewed with commercial suspicion, and she says: 'Oh, I'm just tagging along.' Given that Keira is an Oscar-nominated actress, she hasn't been through that humiliation while on the road with James. 'I mean, as far as tagging along, I do a bit, as far as it's fun,' she says. 'But no, no. I mean, I'm so careful not to be in the rooms I shouldn't be in.'

Keira met James through a mutual friend - 'Not Alexa Chung [as reported], but a friend of ours called Tim.' It was not an instant attraction, she says, but whatever it was, it worked. She's still giddy with happiness over her recent nuptials - repeatedly referring to her 'hubby' and talking without reservation about the day itself. They had their first dance to Paul McCartney's *Ram On*; they had two ceremonies; for the first (the civil ceremony), she wore an old Chanel dress, because 'every time I've worn that dress, I've had a fantastic night, and if you've got a dress where you've always had a fantastic night, it's worth having another fantastic night in it.'

Dress number two, not captured by the paps, was made for her by Valentino. 'Would you like to see a picture?' she asks in manner of newlyweds the world over, and whips out her phone. It has long, layered lace skirts and tiny pink flowers embroidered all over it. She wore it 'for the ceremony we had just for our friends, in a wood, because you have to have flowers on a dress in a wood.' In the picture, Keira is laughing up at James, whose smile is so wide it looks like his face is going to split in half. Two happy bridesmaids are hugging them.

I get the impression that the people who know Keira

love her a great deal. She has a 'very small but very tight group of friends who've always been very protective', many of whom aren't in the industry. Benedict Cumberbatch, an old friend from the set of *Atonement*, famously 'joke'-punched a journalist who dissed Keira, the recollection of which still makes her grin.

'When I saw him again, I said, "Did you punch a journalist?" and he was like, "I f*cking did,"' she says, with absolute glee. 'Everybody needs a friend like that.' She acted opposite him again recently, in *The Imitation Game*, playing Joan Clarke, the friend and one-time fiancée of the Enigma codebreaker Alan Turing. It was a joy, she says, not least because she didn't have to snog him (Turing was gay). 'He's my mate and urgh, urgh, urgh.' Has she ever done a sex scene with a friend? 'No, thank f*ck.' Would she avoid a role if it required her to? 'I honestly think that I might, yeah.'

If Keira's roles have moved from period to contemporary, from drama to romcom, she has not yet been

offered that rite of passage for all beautiful actresses: playing ugly. She tells me she tried to 'mess her face up' by distorting it during the S&M scenes in *A Dangerous Method* (for the record, co-star Michael Fassbender wasn't a friend before filming, though he is now: 'I love him. He's completely sensational and he makes everyone feel unbelievably at ease. Sienna Miller's very similar, a people person. She's glorious'), but I have to say it didn't really work, because she is just *so damn beautiful*.

She is also 100 times prettier in real life than on screen. Her off-camera smile is cute and goofy (if I sound like I fancy her a bit, it's because I do, and I'm straight). Interestingly, the fact that her big-screen beauty is different and unapproachable is no accident. Apparently, certain roles are deliberately 'beauty roles' and require an actress 'to be stuck in a beauty lighting booth, a very intense thing, which takes forever [and] means you can only really act in one position - and you have to keep your face in a certain place so that you're beautiful.'

Anna Karenina, for instance, was a beauty role - 'That was essential, she's a very vain creature' - as was the Duchess of Devonshire in *The Duchess*. Elizabeth Bennet (*Pride & Prejudice*) wasn't meant to be, but she was in the booth a lot anyway, as 'they ended up having to light me very specifically because of [my] acne.'

Her beauty is also the reason she's been cast as the face of Chanel's Coco Mademoiselle fragrance for the past seven years, as she certainly didn't win Karl Lagerfeld over with her fashion choices. Off-duty, Keira always dresses down. 'I didn't know I was meeting him, and I was so jet-lagged I didn't know what was going on. I was in jeans and had acne - you know, the kind where nothing is going to cover it - so I put a hat on. I remember somebody making a [negative] comment about it and I just thought' - she whispers - "'I'm wearing a hat because I've got acne.'" She has a real soft spot for Karl, who she feels is 'terribly impressed by the people who do make an effort, and recognises those of us who just can't.' Keira considers herself firmly in the 'can't' category; these days, when she meets Karl, she's often in dungarees.

Keira is relaxed about the future. She's not planning on having children yet: 'In a theoretical sense, I want children, but I don't want them now.' When she does have them, she won't be encouraging a teenage daughter to take up acting. 'Oh, 100%, I'd absolutely tell her not to. I would 150 million trillion per cent be totally discouraging of [her] doing anything like that. I think you need to be, actually, because if the kid is going to do that then they have to do it on their own. And I would say teenage years should be done privately. You should be going out and getting unbelievably drunk, getting into ridiculous situations, making mistakes. That's what that time of

life is about and we should do that privately, one million trillion zillion per cent.' She pauses, then adds: 'Saying that, I don't regret it - I wouldn't do my life any differently, but having lived through it... There was a very long time when [interviewers] were all: "Well you're a sh*t actress and you're anorexic and people hate you," which, for a teenager or somebody in their early 20s, is a very strange thing.'

Professionally, Keira is keeping it easy. She is happy to appear in a *Jack Ryan* sequel if one gets made, even if the girlfriend role is downgraded to a bit of fluff ('That would be *fine*,' she whispers, jokingly); but equally, she would love to act opposite Natalie Portman or Scarlett Johansson. When we start dreaming up her fantasy film script, she says the cast is 'all f*cking girls' because 'that's an interesting dynamic already', and it will be about 'the horrendous issue of trying to have a baby when you can't. I've seen friends who've been through this, it seems like one of the most dramatic things that can happen to half of the population - and,

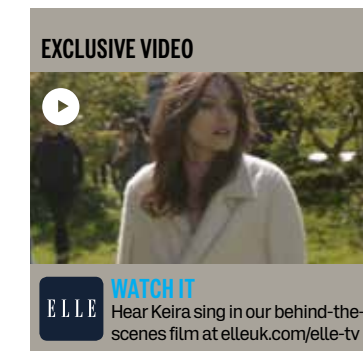
actually, the other half as well because, my god, the unbelievable toll it takes on male partners - and there are no good films about it.'

It bothers her that the film industry doesn't reflect women's lives enough. 'There is an under-representation of our stories, just as there is an under-representation of us in politics and in business and everywhere. That's what feminism is [to me] right now, the recognition that we are still not equal.' Then, worried it appears she's man-bashing, she adds: 'I absolutely love guys, I love hanging around them - well, not all of them, some of them are d*ckheads - but, you know, the ones that I love, I *love*. But you have to recognise that the playing field isn't even yet - and it does have to be even. And you can still like clothes.'

You don't really like clothes yourself though, do you? I ask. She laughs. 'I don't. I'm really not that fussed.' When she leaves (to meet her hubby for dinner), I feel a bit sad. It's been fun. ●

Begin Again is out 11 July

*'When I saw Benedict Cumberbatch, I said: "Did you punch a journalist [for me]?" And he was like: "I f*cking did!"'*



Photography: Thomas Whiteside. Hair: Luke Hershenson at Julian Watson Agency. Make-up: Sally Branka at Julian Watson Agency using Chanel Les Beiges Healthy Glow Fluid and S2014. Manicure: Adam Slee at Streeters. Seamstress: Philippa Howden. Behind-the-scenes film: Jamie Jones. With thanks to: JJ Locations. For shopping details, see Address Book.