



The DARLING GIRL

Hollywood royalty, breakout star of one of the biggest films of the decade, sensitive, wild, a rule breaker... DAKOTA JOHNSON, as she says herself, is complicated. By NATALIE EVANS-HARDING

*Photographs by LAURIE BARTLEY
Styling by TRACY TAYLOR*

Shirt and pants by
Sonia Rykiel; sandals by
Tory Burch; hat, flower
brooch, bracelet and
bag (on table) by Gucci;
(right hand) ring by
Delfina Delettrez; (left
hand) cuff by Marni



Top by Marni; shirt by Michael Kors Collection; pants by F.R.S For Restless Sleepers; hat, necklace and floral brooch by Gucci; sunglasses by Stella McCartney

If you watched her breakout movie *Fifty Shades of Grey* last year, you may think you know every inch of Dakota Johnson's body. But in the candlelit Sociale bistro in Brooklyn, New York, she is peeling back her The Row sweater to make a new revelation: tattooed in white, near invisible on her alabaster skin, is a quote, "Lightly, my darling," from Aldous Huxley's *Island*. Her sister, Stella Banderas, has the same.

"Some of the others I'm not so proud of," admits Johnson, pulling her sweater back into place. "I went through a phase where I loved tattoos, and I loved the feeling of getting tattooed. But now I've outgrown them mostly, and [because] I always have to cover them for jobs, God, they're annoying!" she laughs, showing off an endearing little gap between her two front teeth that the big screen doesn't seem to pick up. "Basically, I really should have listened to everyone. But therein lies my problem in life!"

Any preconception of Johnson, 26, being a gentle, lip-biting wallflower in real life, should be

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hastily revised. For as sensitive as she is ("I feel so much all the time that it's exhausting. I cried four times during the Golden Globes, and once was during the commercials..."), she is also smart, funny and refreshingly real.

"I'm a quiet observer," she supposes. "[Growing up] I was demure some of the time, but also outspoken... I was 'colorful,'" she sniggers, knowingly, in air quotes, at her private euphemism. "I didn't abide by rules very well. I was like a wild, feral little child."

At *ELLE*'s 2015 Women In Hollywood awards, Leslie Mann, who stars with Johnson in new comedy *How To Be Single*, quipped, "In real life, I feel like [Dakota] would eat Christian Grey. She would suspend him from the



Jacket and skirt by
Victoria Beckham;
top by Sibling; collar
by Michael Kors
Collection; glasses
by Cutler and Gross;
earrings by Erickson
Beamon; sandals by
Miu Miu; bag (on table)
by Gucci

ceiling and smack him open like a piñata.” When I relay this to Johnson, she alternates between giggling and musing how she should explain what Mann means, before resorting to a diplomatic, “I’m just not sure!”

Christian Grey is – should it somehow have escaped you – the ‘love interest’ of Johnson’s protagonist character, Anastasia Steele, played by Jamie Dornan in the movie adaptation of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. At the height of its popularity, the BDSM romance book was selling two copies a second before Sam Taylor-Johnson brought it to the big screen last year, directing the first part of the franchise. The director’s decision to cast the relatively unknown Dakota Johnson as her leading lady led to overnight global attention for the young actress, which was perhaps not altogether welcome.

“It almost feels like a free-for-all nowadays. There’s no more mystery, no more elegance,” she laments. “The Golden Globes, for example, used to be so special. It

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was a time when you got to see your favorite people, who were making your favorite movies, all interacting with each other; having some witty banter, being enticing and charming. You didn’t see actors unless they were on the red carpet; they weren’t publicly photographed all the time. Now anyone can take my picture, and I can take anyone’s picture, at any moment. I feel like something has been lost.” Alarming, Johnson looks as though she is on the verge of crying. “It’s like a little bit of magic is slipping away and I don’t know why.” It’s a modern trade-off for her job, after all, I mutter, hoping this won’t make tears cascade. “I know it is,” she says, both frankly and forlornly. “And, today, I don’t feel OK with that.”

Dress by House of Holland; hat and bracelet by Gucci; belt and cuff by Marni; ring by Alexander McQueen



If you hadn't already seen evidence of just what a fine actress Johnson is, you might not think it probable from meeting her. For while she attempts thoughtful answers to questions that she considers tiresome, her face invariably says it all. One such subject is 'celebrity'. She really doesn't like it. She left LA to get away from it. In fact, she gives me the wholehearted impression that she finds it immeasurably... tacky.

“I understood that my family was famous [her mother is Melanie Griffith],” she says. “I saw the way it felt from the inside, and that put me off ever feeling like I was capable of gawking at someone because they were famous.”

But then most of us didn't grow up in a Hollywood household. So it is engrossing, to us nobodies, to think of a little Dakota waddling around in her mother's spangled Oscar sandals, with the glam team unpacking their coiffing kits around the family in the kitchen. “I'd try on all her dresses beforehand,” Johnson admits. “I would watch her get ready for every Oscars and Golden Globes.”

Tunic and pants by Giambattista Valli; earrings by Erickson Beamon; (right hand) ring by Alexander McQueen; (left hand) cuff by Marni; bracelet by Gucci; ring by Alexander McQueen; ring by Delfina Delettrez





Sweater, hat and flower brooch by Gucci;
pants by Etro; *(right hand)* ring by Delfina Delettrez; ring by Alexander McQueen;
(left hand) ring by Alexander McQueen;
ring by Pomellato

Griffith was married to *Miami Vice* star Don Johnson, Dakota's father, and later remarried to actor Antonio Banderas. This 'fame' trickles down through three generations; Johnson's maternal grandmother is Hitchcock muse Tippi Hedren. Johnson had the rare opportunity to absorb their craft, following her parents' shooting schedule from film set to film set. "I was around for a lot of it and I would watch them. But there were also things I could see that I didn't want to, like watch my parents have sex with other people. And there was a scene where my mom got slapped in the face. I lost my mind! I couldn't deal with that at all." Johnson laughs, although it sounds distressing.

Despite this, she caught 'the bug' all on her own, and would watch films obsessively; rewinding *Mary Poppins* or *Home Alone* to see them for the third time that day. The VHS would be worn out by the end of the year. "I [wanted to know], 'What are they doing to make me feel these things?' So I'd keep watching. It [has to] be a really

"There were THINGS I saw [on film sets] that I didn't WANT to, like watch my parents have sex with other PEOPLE"

good movie if I'm not thinking about how they did it."

Perhaps what Johnson finds tedious about being asked who she holidays with (her mom's best friend Goldie Hawn and her daughter Kate Hudson, in Aspen, every Thanksgiving) and who she's friends with (Jaime King and Riley Keough, for starters), is that she hasn't relied on these connections in the industry. Prior to *Fifty Shades...*, Johnson had won small – although well-executed – parts in *The Social Network* and *The Five-Year Engagement*. Her tenacity in forging her own path has paid off; she'll next star opposite Tilda Swinton and Ralph Fiennes in *A Bigger Splash*, and has been nominated for BAFTA's prestigious Rising Star award. Johnson is Next

Dress and hat by Gucci; (right hand) ring by Alexander McQueen; (left hand) ring by Alexander McQueen





Dress by Miu Miu;
sunglasses by Thierry
Lasry; belt and bag by
Gucci

Generation Hollywood in her own right, no matter what the dynasty.

Now, she has just a few more weeks to “get ready to crawl into a hole for six months, say goodbye to my friends and my life, and stop dating bread” before filming back-to-back the next two installments of the *Fifty Shades...* trilogy. I ask if the first film’s reviews will affect the next chapters but, as it turns out, Johnson doesn’t read them. “Then it’s not fun,” she reasons. “If people are into my work, great. But I just want to enjoy my job.” She shrugs. “Artists are complicated and sensitive people, you know? At least, I am a complicated and sensitive person.” She smiles, content with the assessment.

Later, I Google Huxley and that secret tattoo: “So throw away your baggage and go forward. There are quicksands all about you, sucking at your feet, trying to suck you down into fear and self-pity and despair. That’s why you must walk so lightly. Lightly, my darling.”

How To Be Single is out Feb 12 (US);
A Bigger Splash is out Feb 12 (UK)

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