

MILLION DOLLAR BABY

FORMER CHILD STAR, EVAN RACHEL WOOD, IS ALL GROWN UP AND TACKLING A SLEW OF ADULT ROLES INCLUDING A PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY TAXING TURN IN THE MUCH LAUDED, *THE WRESTLER*. SHE TAKES A BREATHER TO CHAT ABOUT GROWING UP IN HOLLYWOOD AND HER OBSESSION WITH CLASSIC LOUNGE SINGERS

text Adam Keleman—photography Matthew Welch

“THE FIGHT SCENE, we did it all night,” recounts an animated Evan Rachel Wood in a cubicle-sized wardrobe room in the Rossmore Hotel in Downtown LA. “[I was] just screaming and crying and exhausted. I cut my finger open. I was bleeding.” As she recalls the experience, she waves her finger in the air for effect, and I suspect she would recreate the entire episode were she not bound to the makeup chair. No, she’s not describing some late night brawl, but her physically demanding role in Darren Aronofsky’s new critically acclaimed film, *The Wrestler*, where she stars opposite Mickey Rourke. The film is about an amateur wrestler finding his way back to the top and reconnecting with his estranged daughter after suffering a life-changing heart attack. Wood’s scenes with Rourke were often brutal, requiring a level of dedication that verged on the hazardous. “[They said] ‘We can call an ambulance. We’ve got crazy glue.’ [But] Mickey’s right there, and I want to look tough. He’s like, ‘shove your finger under hot water.’ And I’m like, ok!” Wood’s perseverance, and just plain spunk, demonstrate her gutsy commitment to character—and she has the scars to show for it. That’s the actress in a nutshell: at a mere 21 years of age and with 15 years of experience in Hollywood under her belt, Wood has transformed into an exquisite tomboy, never afraid to get dirty when the part calls for it, though, still ravishing.

Dolled up in Christian Louboutin boots and vintage YSL, Wood resembles a young girl who has evolved into an emerging

starlet. But it is still quite evident, especially in her enthused speech, that she’s retained some of the child-like qualities and playfulness that often recede when aged child-stars feign adulthood. “The older I get, I always think ‘I hope one day I don’t grow out of this,’” she says. Wood then lets out a large gasp when the subject of cartoons is brought up, asserting that all fans of a certain childhood favorite, *All Dogs Go to Heaven*, can find a place next to her on the couch anytime. It is refreshing to see a girl who started out in television so young, in the much-loved *Once and Again*, be so grounded and aware of her place in all this. “I don’t regret anything. The better it gets, the harder it gets. I look back and I can’t believe half the stuff I’ve done, the people I’ve worked with. It’s a trip,” she says. Wood looked to her parents early on for career advice. She says, “That’s one thing my parents were really, [mentors]. They were both actors, and they have good taste. They taught me a lot about movies.”

Having tasted success in the television world at age 12, Wood burst onto the film scene with the provocative teen drama *Thirteen*, opposite Holly Hunter. This film, no doubt, tore into that innocent image of an adolescent daughter from her role in *Once and Again*. At 15, she was already making brazen choices as a budding actress. “I realize how young now I was when I go back... I see why people freak out, because I was a baby,” she reveals, uncompromisingly, about her role of a coming-of-age teen diving into drugs and sex. It was a film about the truth of





what girls really face growing up, and Wood wanted to tell it. "Honestly, at the time, I had never felt that passionate about a script until that one." Her mother was often a presence on set, as required by law, but trusted Wood to make her own choices. "I lived with my mom most of my life. One thing she was really cool about was letting me do whatever parts I wanted to do. She wasn't pushing me to make an album, or make studio films," Wood says as she stops for a moment to look for a cigarette. Shuffling through her bag, she finishes that last thought: "Luckily I was allowed and trusted enough to choose all the projects I wanted to do. It's worked out."

The freedom to pursue more challenging roles led Wood to films that flirted with controversy. She knew, however, exactly what she was getting into. "I was never really scared by it," Wood reveals, openly discussing her sexually uninhibited characters in *Thirteen* and *Down in the Valley*. "I hate calling myself mature," she winces as the makeup artist begins to apply blush to her pale cheeks. "I was kind of mature about sex at an early age for some reason. I got it, and had my own point of view and boundaries about it. And was always comfortable about it—my sexuality." But although, she may have built a reputation out of playing

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sexually aggressive teen roles, it's a phase she's happy to out-grow. Those days are over, as she points out, "I just want to get out of the rebellious teenager thing."

Now breaking free from another set of expectations, Wood can concentrate on much bigger things, like who she is going to work with next. As a self-proclaimed "film geek," her list of favorite filmmakers is quite lengthy. "I saw *Requiem for a Dream* for the first time in the middle of [shooting] *Thirteen* and it made me totally up my game, change my whole perspective about everything." She points out: "Ever since then I wanted to work with Darren..." The role of Stephanie Robinson in *The Wrestler* came to her after a meeting with the highly praised filmmaker Darren Aronofsky. But she would only agree to it if Mickey Rourke signed on. "I didn't want to do it if Mickey didn't want to do it either. Nobody else could play the part but him," she adoringly imparts.

Wood plays the daughter to Rourke's down-and-out wrestler character. Her character may show contempt towards her elusive father, but Wood yearned for the respect of the actor, no matter how strangely acquired. "I'm just going to have to go in there—somehow emotionally—in a conversation, figure out



VINTAGE RED LEOPARD PRINT DRESS YSL FROM THE WAY WE WORE IN LOS ANGELES; STOCKINGS WOLFORD; RED PATENT LEATHER SHOES JIMMY CHOO; RING SWAROSKI LEFT PAGE; JUMPSUIT TADASHI SHOJI; NECKLACE IPOLITA; BRACELET FROM THE WAY WE WORE; GLOVES LA CRASIA; BOOTS CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN; OPENING PAGE: VINTAGE BLACK OSTRICH FEATHER JACKET BILL BLASS FROM THE WAY WE WORE IN LOS ANGELES



a way to punch him in the face. That's the way you bond with Mickey. You just go up to him and kick his ass, and he's like 'you're ok.'" This logic seemed to work, as their relationship transcended the screen. Wood remarks, "If two actors connect enough, you have a bond that no one can understand." After the film walked away with a Gold Lion win at the Venice Film Festival this year, Wood hopes it will lead to kudos all around later in the awards season, especially for Rourke. "If Mickey doesn't get nominated, I'll lose all faith... that's the biggest thing." His performance is astonishing, and she desires that Hollywood fully acknowledge it, further adding: "I just hope Mickey comes back properly."

Sitting in her seat with curlers in her hair, Wood dishes on her current obsessions. "I'm obsessing over older lounge singers, glamorous women—Billy Holiday, Peggy Lee, Patty Page," she resoundingly proclaims. "The songs and their voices and just everything... I'm learning to sing like that." Her voice sinks down to a childish whisper with encroaching glee. "Nobody has voices like that anymore," she says. Dabbling in music herself with both Julie Taymor's *Across the Universe* and next year's *Spider-Man* musical, Wood has always had an affinity towards singing in her own company, if not publicly. "I make my living off acting, and I

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like it and it's fun. But music is just for me," she affirms. "I don't want anybody to touch it." Scarlett and Lindsay would be apt to heed such sober advice.

The experience of the child star is something she can't fully leave behind, prompting her to search out kindred spirits. Luckily, in a meeting with Jodie Foster about an upcoming project, Wood found a Hollywood ally and mentor. "I told her straight up. You have no idea. You've been this weird presence in my life. This thing hanging over my shoulder, this weird expectation everyone had for me. I kind of hate you and love you at the same time," she says cautiously as if disclosing some long-held secret.

Still, the many years under the heated spotlights of Hollywood, haven't soured Wood's love for acting. She reflects on this candidly as she is hurried off for another turn before the camera, "I don't know, if I ever have kids, I would let them start acting when they were really young. I just feel really lucky. I just came at the right time."

ABOVE: GOLD SEQUINED GOWN ROBERTO CAVALLI; SHOES SERGIO ROSSI; RING JOHN HARDY FINE JEWELLRY
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