



Teenage Dream

At just 16, Oscar-nominated actress Hailee Steinfeld is already on Hollywood's most-wanted list.

By ELIO IANNACCI
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WHEN THE CASTING CALL FOR *TRUE GRIT* WENT out in 2009, more than 15,000 girls between the ages of 12 and 17 sent digital screen tests to the Coen brothers in hopes of landing the leading role. YouTube houses a number of audition reels from aspiring actresses vying for the part of Mattie Ross—a wise-beyond-her-braids frontier girl determined to see her father's murder avenged. Suffice to say, co-director Ethan Coen had a hard time sifting through the candidates. He noted, "99.9 per cent of the people we saw couldn't even handle the language." Just 15 years old, Hailee Steinfeld's brawny delivery put her at the front of the queue.

"She was studying her lines for Mattie for over a month with her acting coach," says Steinfeld's mother, Cheri, an interior decorator, on set at her daughter's first Canadian magazine cover shoot, for *FASHION*. "The whole family just stood back and supported her." (Steinfeld's dad, Pete, is a personal trainer and her older brother, Griffin, is a race-car driver.) "But she earned that part on her own. I've never seen her work so hard."

Steinfeld's prep time paid off in spades. Her bio now boasts a performance so intricate and consistent that she is one of the youngest nominees for an Academy Award—for Best Actress in a Supporting Role in 2011, for *True Grit*.

"The conversations I had with Matt [Damon], Josh [Brolin] and Jeff [Bridges] on set totally changed my life," Steinfeld

says of the *True Grit* cast. It's days before her Sweet 16 but she sounds as articulate as a veteran actress. "They changed the way I approach acting. It was an incredible education. I kept a journal on set that carried through the first month. We took over 4,000 pictures—I was looking through them last night and I got chills."

Since Steinfeld's big Oscar moment, keeping track of the scripts she has signed on for—at press time we counted seven—is something even *The Hollywood Reporter* has trouble with. She's a rebellious teen in a film adaptation of Alice Munro's *Hateship, Friendship* (alongside Kristen Wiig, whom Steinfeld says can command the energy in any room); a gifted child in the sci-fi flick *Ender's Game* (co-starring Harrison Ford and Viola Davis); and Kevin Costner's estranged daughter in the thriller *Three Days To Kill*.

Of all the projects she's secured, it's Steinfeld's turn as Juliet (she of the star-crossed/death-marked teen lovers) in *Downton Abbey* creator Julian Fellowes' big-screen version of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* that has her most excited. "After I read the script, I actually ended up having to read the book for school," says Steinfeld, who admits she was addicted to *Downton* while shooting the movie in castles throughout Rome and Mantua. "During our first read in Italy," she says, switching into a Madonna-like British accent, "Mr. Julian »

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Fellowes pointed to me and said, ‘Your generation deserves its own *Romeo and Juliet*.’”

Steinfeld assures that literature’s most ill-fated pair will not be Facebooking or Instagramming their passions in this new version. “Oh, no, this will be a classic take, not a modern one,” she says, laughing. “Nothing like Baz Luhrmann would do. We are keeping everything to the original period.”

To guarantee the R&J lookbook was historically accurate, Fellowes lured Oscar-winning costume designer Milena Canonero to supervise wardrobe, as she has done with groundbreaking costume dramas such as Sofia Coppola’s *Marie Antoinette* and Stanley Kubrick’s *Barry Lyndon*.

“I was intimidated when I met her,” says Steinfeld, who was fitted in tight Capulet couture by Canonero. “She’s like this legend in Hollywood! I was in awe of her and her process but I got past that and found out she’s really the coolest person ever. The dress she got for Juliet’s burial almost made me and my mom cry. It’s made with the most incredible gold and it has Swarovski crystals on it. It’s the most elegant piece Juliet wears in the film.”

On set for another upcoming film, a music industry dramedy called *Can a Song Save Your Life?*, Steinfeld found herself asking Catherine Keener and Mark Ruffalo (who play her parents) for pointers during the cast’s downtime. “I was always catching the back end of their conversations and trying to put it all together when they kept referencing old films so I asked them to make a list for me,” she says. They ended up buying her more than 30 DVDs to watch. “I was honoured that they did that. I have a lot to catch up on”—her stack includes *Annie Hall*, *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* and *The Breakfast Club*—“and a lot to educate myself on.”

Beyond film, Steinfeld has been getting schooled by some of the world’s greatest fashion designers. She takes a deep breath before recapping an evening she spent with Miuccia Prada, who asked her to be the face of Miu Miu’s Fall 2011 campaign. “We went out for dinner in Paris and she asked me to sit beside her. They cleared out the restaurant—she’s like royalty there,” Steinfeld says. “I didn’t want to say much because I just wanted to hear

her. Listening to Miuccia’s stories was kind of magical. Being a part of her world, even if only for a moment, made me feel cooler.”

Another fashion influencer Steinfeld has hung out with is blogger and *Rookie* editor Tavi Gevinson. “The way she views things is just so straight-up and that’s what I love about her,” says Steinfeld. “She doesn’t tip-toe around things. She kind of just says it like it is. You kind of become who you surround yourself with, and hanging out with Tavi you feel very spunky.”

Steinfeld is also a self-proclaimed Prabal Gurung devotee and confesses to being choosy to the point of crazy when picking out dresses for the red carpet with Vancouver stylist Karla Welch, whom she shares with none other than Justin Bieber. Steinfeld’s fastidious fashion choices have afforded her a handful of spots on best-dressed lists—and a few eleventh-hour crises, including one could-have-been-disastrous outfit for Hollywood’s own adult prom. “My Oscar [outfit] started as a wedding dress with a 20-foot train. That was changed. Karla and I looked at it and had drawn a picture of what I had in mind for Marchesa. They worked on it so much and dyed it more than 10 times in different shades of pink until it was the colour I wanted. We ended up literally pinning on the [sheer panel] because my mom didn’t want me to wear strapless. So we built up a dress that was very Audrey Hepburn-esque as I was literally walking out the door. It was nerve-racking but fun.”

The next intriguing developments in Steinfeld’s career are rumoured to include a Civil War drama called *The Keeping Room* with Olivia Wilde, and three more literary adaptations: the young adult novel *Why We Broke Up* by Daniel Handler; *Rosaline* (a novel based on *Romeo and Juliet*) by Rebecca Serle; and a biopic about the intersecting lives of Joni Mitchell (a part Taylor Swift is gunning for), Carly Simon (possibly Allison Williams) and Carole King (a role Steinfeld is said to have in the bag).

Steinfeld also wants to write and direct someday, and she feels optimistic about the future of women in film. “There’s a new generation of women writing great roles and directing,” she says excitedly. “It’s all coming up at once and I just want to be part of it.” □



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