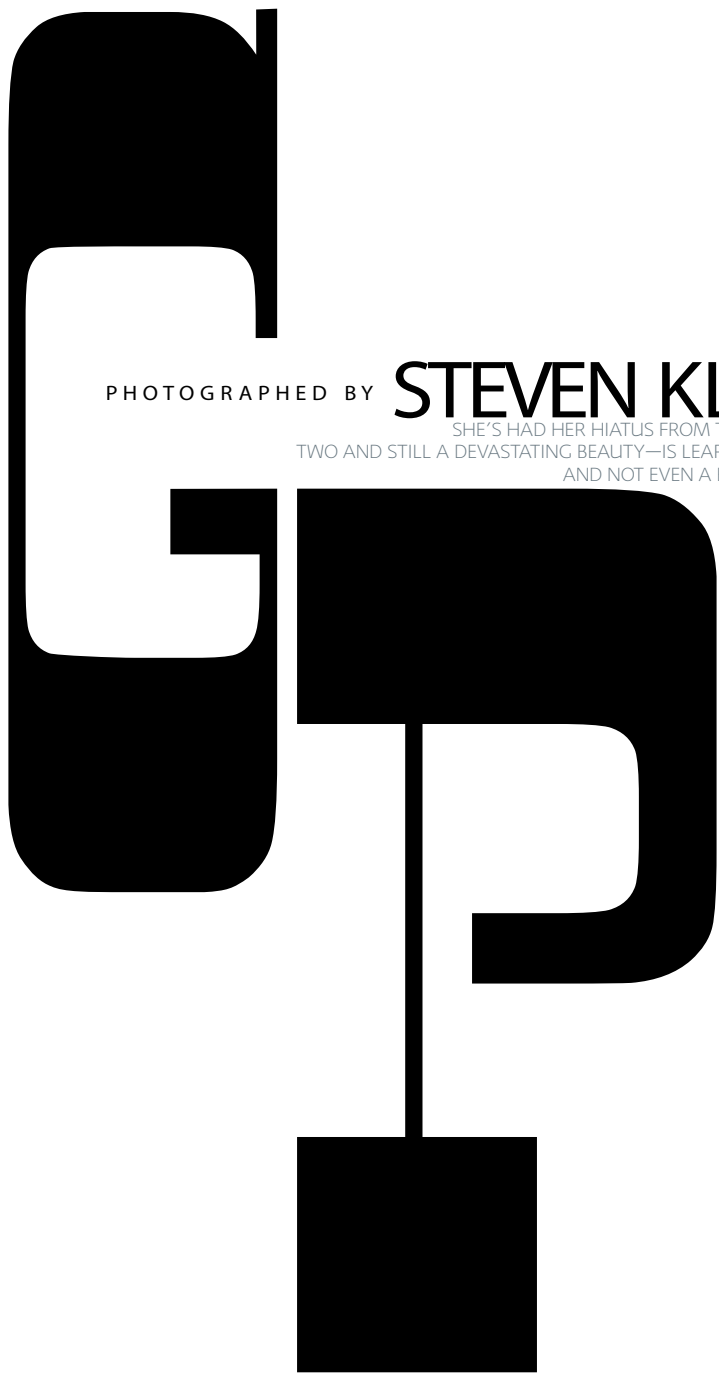


*gwyneth***paltrow**



PHOTOGRAPHED BY **STEVEN KLEIN**

SHE'S HAD HER HIATUS FROM THE HOLLYWOOD HUSTLE, BUT NOW **GWYNETH PALTROW**—MOTHER OF TWO AND STILL A DEVASTATING BEAUTY—IS LEAPING BACK INTO THE FRAY WITH A PAIR OF NEW FILMS. AND NOT EVEN A BUM KNEE IS GOING TO SLOW HER DOWN.

BY **CATHERINE HONG**
STYLED BY **ALEX WHITE**

Gwyneth Paltrow is wearing Balenciaga's viscose, polyamide and polyester dress, by Nicolas Ghesquière, at Barneys New York, New York. David Yurman ring; Wolford garter belt; Funn stockings.



Stella McCartney's silk dress,
at Neiman Marcus; Bergdorf
Goodman, New York; Stella
McCartney, New York and
Los Angeles.









Dolce & Gabbana's silk dress with Swarovski crystal detail, at select Dolce & Gabbana stores, 877.70.DGUSA, dolcegabbana.it. Lanvin ring and shoes.

Prada's silk faille dress, at select Prada stores, 888.977.1900.



Lanvin's silk top with pearl buttons and silk pants, at Barneys New York, New York; Susan, Burlingame, California. Impasse 13 by Alexis Mabilie headband.

Hair by Orlando Pita for Kérastase Paris at Orlo Salon; makeup by Peter Philips; manicure by Deborah Lippmann/Lippmann Collection/The Wall Group. Production by Tracy Doyle. Prop stylist: Andrea Stanley/The Wall Group. Photography assistants: Sharif Hamza, Sebastian Mader and Chris Bisani. Fashion assistants: Kathryn Typaldos and Martha Violante. Special thanks to Brent at Briese.



Her son in her arms,
a phone tucked
under her chin,
Gwyneth Paltrow is
hopping on one leg
toward the fridge.

Now she's hopped to the counter and is pouring a glass of pineapple juice as the golden-haired tot, who's got to weigh at least 25 pounds, straddles her hip and tugs at her loose blond ponytail. Now she's hopped to the opposite end of the kitchen and is quickly checking something on her laptop while balancing gracefully on one bare foot.

It's an overcast July afternoon, and Paltrow—busily tending to 15-month-old Moses at her summer digs in the Hamptons—is trying to maintain life as usual while recovering from knee surgery. Her husband, Coldplay frontman Chris Martin, is in the city for the day, recording, and the nanny has gone out to pick up three-year-old Apple from day camp. So it's just mother and son right now, and Moses, a solidly built lad with an adorable toothy grin, keeps trying to pull ice out of his mom's glass. "Bubba!" she clucks when he spills some of her drink. And—hop, hop, hop—she springs back into action in search of a paper towel.

Even on one leg, Paltrow makes motherhood look surprisingly easy. "I'm supposed to be able to walk on it in another week," she says brightly. And in the meantime, she has gotten so good at hopping that she hardly needs her crutches when she's in the house. There are, of course, a few concessions she's had to make. For one, she was supposed to be on a plane yesterday en route to Valentino's 45th-anniversary gala in Rome. "But I can't carry a bag, so that meant I would have had to bring someone, and then go attend the party in a gown and crutches!" she says, shaking her head. "It was too crazy." So she decided to just stay home.

Staying home is something she's done a lot for the past three years. After the death of her father, Bruce, in 2002, her marriage to Martin in December 2003, and the birth of Apple the following May, Paltrow decided that she was going to put the brakes on her career to focus on family. "I just sort of got to the point where I had worked too much, so I stopped completely to be home," she says. "It's nice to get out of everyone's face for a while." Although the actress took on a couple of blink-and-you'll-miss-her roles—a cameo in the opening scene of *Infamous*, the Truman Capote biopic directed by her friend Doug McGrath, and a small part in *Running With Scissors*—she hasn't had a star turn since her Golden Globe-nominated performance as the tormented daughter of a late math genius in the 2005 movie *Proof*, which she filmed while pregnant with Apple. The Paltrow the public has glimpsed since has mostly been a London yummy mummy-about-town, strolling around Belsize Park with a yoga mat under her arm, or hand in hand with Apple, her dimple-faced mini-me. She's been so absent from the Hollywood scene that earlier this year, when she walked the red carpet of the Academy Awards clad in salmon pink Zac Posen, she seemed almost like a visiting dignitary—one from a totally different universe than that inhabited by the Jessica Biels, Jennifer Hudsons and other It girls of the moment.

But Paltrow, who turns 35 in September, is gearing up for a comeback. "It's been a long time since I've done a big part in a movie, and I'm very excited about work now," says the actress. Dressed in slim-cut black shorts and a sleeveless white cotton blouse (Rodarte for Gap) that shows

off her flab-free upper arms, she appears strong, lean and well rested. Her normally pale skin has just the barest hint of a tan, and she looks poised even perched on the floor next to Moses, who is playing with a bowl of ice, occasionally shooting a cube across the floor.

One might expect Paltrow's return to the spotlight to come in the form of a highbrow romance, perhaps a period piece or a literary adaptation. But instead the actress signed on for a pair of quirkier projects. The first, opening in September, is *The Good Night*, written by her younger brother, Jake Paltrow, who is making his directorial debut. Paltrow plays the alternately sarcastic and tenderhearted girlfriend of a washed-up pop star. The second, the comic book-inspired action flick *Iron Man*, is due out in the spring. Paltrow is Pepper Potts, the secretary-turned-love interest of the superhero title character (Robert Downey Jr.).

When the first photos of the actress on crutches appeared earlier this summer, most people assumed that Paltrow had injured her knee on the *Iron Man* set, perhaps during some sort of intense stunt sequence. But in truth, she explains, "I bashed it on some furniture." On Memorial Day the family was visiting Steven Spielberg and Kate Capshaw ("Uncle Morty and Aunt Katie," as she calls them) in Malibu. "The kids were sitting on stools with legs that sort of protracted out. I turned to do something and I just whacked it," she says, grimacing slightly.

Paltrow had unknowingly fractured her tibial plateau. But she didn't see a doctor for three weeks, during which time she continued working on *Iron Man*. "It was only after I was doing a scene that involved running when I said to the director, 'Uh, you know, I think I did something to my knee.'" The doctor ordered her to stop walking on it and scheduled her for surgery. Fortunately, she had only a few days' worth of shooting left on *Iron Man*. "I filmed the rest sitting down," she says. "And one scene I did standing on one leg."

"She was a super trouper," says Downey. "She was like, 'Yeah, it's a little uncomfortable.' Then we hear her X-ray looked like a broken egg."

Although the actress allows that the injury in some ways has been "a nightmare," she's also determined to turn the setback into an Oprahish "aha" moment. "When I went back to work, I felt guilty about not being with the kids," she explains. Overcompensating for her absence, she thinks, may have kept her from seeking medical attention sooner. "I always try to do everything all at once, and to do it perfectly," she says. "I think it was the universe saying to me, 'Just stop. You don't have to make yourself crazy.' It made me realize that I need to be slightly easier on myself and just be imperfect, or a mess, and it's okay."

Truth be told, Paltrow seems far from a mess, so the concept of imperfection should be considered only in relative Gwyneth terms. Fractured tibial plateau or no, she has a pretty charmed life. There are the two beautiful children and the rock-star husband (about whom she declines to say much, in line with their agreement not to discuss each other in the press); the homes in London, New York and the Hamptons (the house they're staying at now in Sagaponack is actually a friend's place, which they're living in while their own \$5.4 million abode undergoes renovations); the lucrative Estée Lauder contract; and the continuing adulation of the fashion community (she was voted best-dressed woman in Britain last year by British *Harper's Bazaar*).

And Paltrow seems to surround herself with those who've been equally blessed. In London her bosom buddies include Madonna and Stella McCartney. The couple's closest New York pals, Christy Turlington Burns and Ed Burns, are out in the Hamptons this summer too, and Apple and three-year-old Grace Burns are "best friends" at camp. Paltrow and Martin are also tight with Michael Stipe, Helena Christensen, Beyoncé and Jay-Z. Last year, in what had to be among the strangest pairings in hip-hop history, Paltrow performed at a Jay-Z concert. "Jay was

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playing at the Albert Hall on my birthday, and he said, 'Will you sing on this song?' she recalls. "At first I didn't want to do it!"

Still, Paltrow insists that in most ways she and Martin are just like any other thirtysomething pair—"When Chris gets home, we're not going to do anything other than what any regular couple does"—and that she has plenty of nonfamous friends, "but nobody writes about them."

One such (relatively speaking) non-boldfaced intimate is producer Alison Owen, with whom she formed Go Go Pictures three years ago. "She's one of the most loyal people I know," says Owen, who was a producer on *Proof*. "She's fairly instinctive about her friendships, and once she forms an opinion about someone, it's hard to budge her."

As a mother of three herself (one of her children is singer Lily Allen), Owen says she respected Paltrow's decision to take time off, but she's relieved to see her friend taking on projects again. "She's such a terrific actress—one of the best actresses of our generation," she says.

That talent is certainly on display in *The Good Night*, widely considered one of the standouts at this past winter's Sundance Film Festival. "I read the script, and I was like, Please let me be in this! It's so weird and real and amazing," says Paltrow, who shares the screen with Martin Freeman of the BBC's *The Office*, Penélope Cruz and Danny DeVito.

Paltrow's role is decidedly unglamorous. She wears a heavy brown wig and brown contact lenses, and the opening scene has her dressed in oversize men's pajamas, spitting toothpaste into the sink. Asked whether she was at all worried about making her return to the screen with a film in which someone else plays the hot babe, she shrugs. "I never read a script and think, What will the impact be on my career?" she says. "I just love how the film depicted a long-term relationship and what happens when you don't communicate. I found it so realistic and frightening."

Not, of course, that the relationship onscreen resembles her own. "Oh no!" she says, laughing. "I mean, of course there are just things when you've been with someone for so long and the first blush has worn off."

Paltrow says that she and her brother, whom she calls a "brainiac," have always been close. The two even shared an apartment in SoHo in the mid-Nineties, when she was just starting to get big roles. Says Jake, 32, "As a first-time filmmaker, I was a little nervous, and it gave me a great sense of security to know that there was someone who cared as much as I did."

He did have some initial hesitations about his famous sister stealing his thunder. "I thought it might bring too much stuff—that she and I doing this together would seem bigger than the movie," he says.

But Gwyneth kept pushing. "I wore him down," she jokes.

In general, things tend to go Paltrow's way in the end. For instance, when she was desperately looking for a suitable place to stay while filming *Iron Man*, she ended up renting her childhood home in Santa Monica, where she lived until age 11, when the family moved to New York. Her mother had sold the house in early 2007, but coincidentally, the buyer's fiancée was *Iron Man* director Jon Favreau's sister-in-law. "So they convinced him to let me rent it," she says happily.

And when you're Gwyneth Paltrow, the usually intractable things like school admissions protocols get thrown out the window. For the four months they were in town, she was able to enroll Apple in the same nursery school that she and Jake had attended. "They made a space for us," she acknowledges. "I felt incredibly lucky. I would go and pick her up, and she would be barefoot, covered with paint, her hair turned superblond."

The front door suddenly bursts open, and a little voice shouts, "Mommy!"

"Baby! Hi!" exclaims Paltrow, beaming as Apple tramps up the stairs. Clad in a graphic pink T-shirt dress, with the remains of purple polish on her toes, the chatty tot is clutching some crafts she made at camp, including a CD case with an apple painted on it and a pair of sticks painted

green, each clearly marked with her name. "Look, Mommy. My name is on here," she says excitedly, pointing to the APPLE.

Though she's clearly enamored of her offspring, Paltrow isn't sure she wants more. "I don't think so," she says when asked, but then reconsiders. "Well, definitely not right away. I have a dream version where I think, maybe in four years I'll have two in a row really quickly again—how fabulous to have a whole bunch of them! But then at that point, when everyone's potty-trained and sleeping through the night, are you really going to go back? I'd also like to work now a bit. My husband really wants to adopt. So I don't know; I'm sort of open for anything."

Open-mindedness might be her new career watchword too. Not long ago, a big-budget popcorn movie like *Iron Man* would have been the last place you'd expect to see Paltrow. But she says she was won over by the people involved—notably Favreau and Downey—and the desire to have some fun. "Robert called me and he said, 'This is gonna be fun, and this is gonna be good.' And then he said to me, 'Don't you want to be in a movie that people see?' And I was like, Whoa! What would that feel like?" she recalls, chuckling. "And he's right. Moviemaking is not supposed to be a masturbatory exercise; it's supposed to be shared by other people."

Whether the multiplex masses will pay to see Paltrow as a superhero's leading lady, however, remains to be seen. For all her acting ability and natural glamour, she has never exuded the easy likability of Cameron Diaz or Reese Witherspoon. There's nothing goofy or girl-next-door about her. She attended the poshest of posh Manhattan private schools; she's a champion of gloomy art-house fare (think *Sylvia*); she's talked in the past, at length, about her devotion to all things detoxed and macrobiotic; and she's an ardent Anglophile who, for the past few years, has spent the preponderance of her time in Martin's native England.

This last bit seems to irk American audiences most. Last December, for example, she took a lot of heat in the press after a Portuguese newspaper quoted her as saying that "the British are much more intelligent and civilized than the Americans" and that she preferred the English way to the "capitalistic" American lifestyle. "I went nuts over that," says Paltrow, who insists she was misquoted. "I love America, and I'm an American through and through. But the conservative media won't let it go.... People love to give you a moniker and then, you know, they've designed this hole for you that you have to fit in."

These days, she's all about defying those labels. Though she doesn't eat meat, for example, she's far from macrobiotic. Last night's dinner out included fried shrimp and onion rings. And while she still does yoga, she sounds more excited about the Hybrid Body Reformer, a souped-up version of a Pilates machine invented by her trainer, Tracy Anderson.

Being unpredictable in both her personal and professional lives, it seems, is not only her best defense against the pigeonholers, it's also her way of enjoying the success she's earned. In September the family will be back in London. But in October and November, she reveals, she'll be making several trips to Spain for her latest project—believe it or not, a PBS food show that she's cohosting with Mario Batali. "We'll be in a car, road-tripping," she says with a grin. (When she was 15, Paltrow, who speaks fluent Spanish, spent a few months with a Spanish family in Toledo and considers the country a third home.) She and Batali are (surprise!) friends, and when he told her he had this show in the works, "I told him, 'I'll go with you.' Later, he was like, 'Are you joking?' And I was like, 'No, I'm actually not joking!'"

Gwyneth Paltrow, the former queen of brown rice and seaweed, hosting a PBS show about the lusty cuisine of Spain? "I eat all that stuff," she brags. "The crazy fish things, the eels, I love it all." And what about the country's famous love of pork? Well, this is still Gwyneth we're talking about. "No, I won't eat that," she admits. "I'll have to skip the jamón." ●

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