

January Jones

Text by Roberto Croci

“Nobody likes Betty Draper, not even me. And yet she’s an interesting character, fun to play, even though she’s a dreadful mother, highly emotive, unpredictable, and smokes too many cigarettes in front of her children”

Dubbed “the heiress to Grace Kelly”, the former country girl is now a mother and an actress loved by her fans. Her secret? She likes risk. In life and in style

The austere lines of the Sunset Tower Hotel in Hollywood, give way to the warm interiors and typical five-star foyer: the soft twilight slowly reveals sofas of orange velvet, Venetian chandeliers, mirrors and crystal; only a triangle of bright light reflecting from the pool cuts through the calm. Then the silence is replaced by a burble of voices, the tranquillity is disturbed by a constant coming and going of staff and customers: January Kristen Jones has arrived. “It’s not my first rodeo”, I say to myself, but when I see her, I can only admit that she is very beautiful: ruffled blonde hair frames her sculpted face, with its classical features and deep blue eyes. She is wearing a light pink suit and looks statuesque thanks to her Louboutin shoes, sending out an air of sophistication and sensuality not seen very often any more. “I’ve always loved the name January, ever since I was a child,” she begins. “It’s mysterious, ideal for my job as an actress.” Often dubbed the heiress to Grace Kelly, she would have been the perfect muse for Hitchcock as “master of suspense”, although the concept of “American beauty” has changed with her: no longer tall and glacial, but a country girl brought up amid bisons and fields of sunflowers. She is called January not just because she was born on 5th January, but also because of January Wayne, the restless character played by Deborah Raffin in “Once is not enough”, with Kirk Douglas. “My father had a fixation for the letter ‘J’ (ed: January has two sisters, Jina and Jacey), but don’t ask me why.” Her childhood was the perfect rural idyll in a classic small village, Hecla, 300 souls, near Sioux Falls in South Dakota. “I don’t think I could have been happier. I knew everyone, I felt protected, not like now, when even letting children go for a pedal on their bicycles is a problem. We had no mobile phones: I would call my friends from the phone in the kitchen, which had a long cord and reached as far as my room.” Marvellous memories. “My parents, Kevin and Marvin, both teachers, adore the cinema, especially Walt Disney films. My favourite? ‘White fang’, the film that taught me that cinema is excitement.” And which she is happy to watch with her three-year-old son, Xander. “Like all moms, I’m very proud of my little boy. I love everything about maternity, including the pregnancy, one of the most relaxing periods of my life. I was always happy, living in a dream. Being a mother is an incredible experience, sometimes ancestral, especially in the relationship you create with your child.” January is a single mother and makes no mystery of the fact: “Even though I’m on my own, I’m proud to be

able to act while maintaining a constructive relationship with Xander.” All a question of balances calibrated between work and home. “My favourite moment is in the evening, when we read a book: those are magical moments. My son talks about himself in the third person, saying: ‘Xander Dan Jones wants to eat, now’.” He counts, knows his alphabet, has already begun to read and knows all his favourite books by heart; he can always anticipate the dialogue before I read it. He’ll be the perfect partner for working as a double on the dialogues of my scripts.” Despite having appeared in some important and very different films (“I like playing characters who are different to the way I am”), her role as Betty Draper in “Mad men” is still something hard to shake loose, although it has made her one of the most popular and sought-after actresses by her fans. “Nobody likes Betty Draper, not even me. And yet she’s an interesting character, fun to play, even though she’s a dreadful mother, highly emotive, unpredictable, and smokes too many cigarettes in front of her children.” The period she spent in New York as a model was useful for her in preparing for the part: “A chaotic mixture of a thousand cultures and races, a cacophony of sounds, art and music have prepared for the development of Betty, her passage and transformation from model to wife and witness of the most famous decade in American history: the 1960s.” Even though she does not like her, Betty is in a certain sense the creature of January: “When I did the first auction with Matthew Weiner, the creator of “Mad men”, Betty didn’t exist. Matt had no intention of talking about the domestic life of Don Draper. No part had been written for his wife, who was only mentioned at the end of one scene. I was chosen for the part of Peggy, which I tried twice alongside Elisabeth Moss, who subsequently got the part. Only after I got the part of Betty did I know that Matt had written in the role: he had invented Betty especially for me. I accepted the part, trusting him, despite a plot that was practically non-existent and approved only after the script had been modified.” Tools of the actress’s trade: method actress or spontaneous acting? “I don’t follow any method, but I’m a keen reader. And when I evaluate a script, I read it as though I really had to play the part”. Who would she like to resemble? “I try to imitate Cate Blanchett: it’s impossible to go wrong when I try to act like her.” I discover an innate sense of fashion in January, understood as conceptual freedom. “I like taking risks. Especially when I choose designers who are not yet mainstream. I invent new looks, but only to make the media talk about me, and I don’t worry too much if my choices are a bit suspect and no-one likes them. I admire women who take risks on occasions like the Golden Globes or the Met Ball. This year, the theme of the gala at the Metropolitan (ed: held in May) was punk style, and for fun, I went over the top. I was dressed in Chanel, but for my hair and make-up I thought of Siouxsie Sioux: I was very chic, but absolutely wild. I love vintage unique pieces, but I’m mean: I like to haggle over the price. I only spend serious money on shoes and jackets, but I always hope that designers lend me their creations. I don’t spend \$2000 on a bag unless it’s for a special occasion. For my birthday, for example, I gave myself an incredible ring with diamonds. Of course, when I go out with Xander, I dress appropriately: no heels and no overly-expensive clothes. In general, I wear jeans and T-shirt, even though I always try to have an interesting look; I don’t want to become

the classic tired and bored mom who doesn't care what she wears. For me, getting ready in the morning and dressing my clothes means feeling good about myself, having an extra reason for living life to the full." Among the various collaborations, January recalls the experience with Versace as being the most important: "Years ago, I did a photoshoot for Donatella, and we have been friends since then. When I asked them to become a Versace girl, they took me immediately. I'm proud and honoured that they chose me, although they had supermodels and marvellous women available." Among the many roses, a few thorns: "They've called me irritable, stubborn, uncontrollable, difficult. If you're a woman, they call you a B-I-T-C-H, whereas if you're a man, you're ambitious. I can't stand double standards. All sorts of things have been written about me, including that I have an obsessive compulsive disorder: I haven't been diagnosed with that pathology; I'm simply very organised. I have no assistant; I prefer to do things alone. My house is very clean, although I'm not a freak in that department. I remember that when I was a child, my friends' rooms were always topsy-turvy, with books, papers, shoes and clothes all over the place, and I thought it was really cool, because in mine there was nothing out of place, not even the bed, which was always perfectly made. I was worried that I wasn't normal and that being untidy was the norm. I've tried lots of times, but whenever I began to see too many clothes in the wrong places, I felt a physical need to tidy everything up." She considers this a moment and then adds: "OK, perhaps I am a bit compulsive, but I don't feel at all guilty about it. I am the way I am."