

MM

# EXPLODING GIRL

ZOE KAZAN TAKES CONTROL OF HER WHITE-HOT CAREER

**B**UTTERFLIES IN THE stomach rarely plague Zoe Kazan who, unlike many actors, looks forward to the auditioning process. "I'm a very 'take the bull by the horns' type of person," says the 25-year-old California native. "There's so much about this business that's out of your control. Auditioning is the time when you do what you can do, how you want to do it. Nobody else is in charge."

Since Kazan made her major feature debut in *Fracture* in 2007, she has most certainly taken charge of her auditions and her career. Alternating between the stage (*Things We Want*, *The Seagull*) and screen (*The Savages*, *Revolutionary Road*), she has steadily carved a place for herself beside A-listers like Meryl Streep and Leonardo DiCaprio.

Of course, it seems inevitable that she would pursue such a career, given her family tree: Elia Kazan was her grandfather and screenwriters Robin Swicord and Nicholas Kazan are her mom and dad. Still, the Yale graduate harbors no illusions about the challenges of acting and appreciates the benefits that come from such a pedigree.

"This is an extraordinarily hard job to have," she says. "There's so much heartbreak and competition, but I've been very lucky. I won't deny that people were more willing to meet with me at the beginning because of my last name, but I've never gotten a job because of it and I've never asked my parents for help. All my contacts are my own."

As are her choices, one of which involved shedding her clothes for her first professional theater role in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and in Sam Mendes' *Revolutionary Road*, but insists she considers doing nudity on a case-

by-case basis. "Looking back at *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, I wasn't really ready to do it, but I wanted the part so badly. It's not something I'm staking my reputation on. It affects the way you think about yourself and sometimes your acting can get overlooked."

Nowadays, Kazan's prowess at pretending is anything but lost. She recently took home the Best Actress Award at the Tribeca Film Festival for her starring role in *The Exploding Girl*. The film was written for her by director Bradley Rust Gray, who came calling after a failed audition by Kazan a year earlier. Also on deck are Rebecca Miller's *The Private Lives of Pippa Lee*, Nia Vardalos' *I Hate Valentine's Day*, Richard Linklater's *Me and Orson Welles* and Nancy Meyers' *Something Good*. The last, a big-budget romantic comedy

in which Kazan plays the daughter of Meryl Streep and Alec Baldwin, is "the cushiest job" she says she's ever had. "I've done so many small films with tiny budgets, this feels like the Taj Mahal. Our clothes are beautiful, the food is better and the trailers are nicer."

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Kazan loves being on set, but she has also been honing her writing skills. Her first produced screenplay, *Absalom*, premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays this past spring.

"I'm just getting to the point where I have to make difficult choices about what I'm going to do next," says Kazan. "I've kept myself open to do a movie when I was offered a great theater role, and I've had to turn down films to do stagework I really wanted to do. I feel more pressure now to be strategic in my decisions." **MM**

