

AS MICHAEL CERA'S NEW LEADING LADY,

REBEL

PORTIA DOUBLEDAY IS AN INDIE QUEEN-IN-WAITING.

WITH A

BY DAN CRANE. PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRIGITTE SIRE

CAUSE

stylist: fifi powell. hair: aviva perea for themagnetagency.com using nexus. makeup: stephen sollitto for the magnetagency.com using benefit cosmetics. retouching by wet noodle. dress by d&g.

"I FEEL LIKE
IF I'M NOT
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dress by issa, shoes by
dr. martens, watches by
diesel, ring by circa sixty
three, her own bracelets.



IT'S THE NIGHT BEFORE HALLOWEEN,

and Portia Doubleday and I are strolling through the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Running over to one of Jeff Koons's shiny, enormous cracked-egg sculptures, the porcelain-skinned, wide-eyed actress quickly elicits suspicious glares from a nearby security guard. "I want to sleep in that so bad!" she says. "When I was little, what I hated so much about museums was that every single thing I saw, I wanted to play with." She turns and runs over to another Koons piece—a coruscating ceramic dog in the style of a balloon animal. "Don't you want to ride on that?" she squeals. "Fun!" It sounds like an innocent suggestion, sure, but she's the kind of girl who could easily lure any potential suitors into action.

This January, Doubleday's playful nature can be enjoyed in the film adaptation of C. D. Payne's cult novel *Youth in Revolt*. In the movie, she is Sheeni Saunders, the Jean-Paul Belmondo-obsessed romantic *raison d'être* for Nick Twisp, played by Michael Cera. Sheeni proposes that in order to woo her, Nick must become more "dangerous." So with the help of a devil-may-care French alter-ego named François Dillinger—also hilariously played by Cera (avec tight, white pants, pencil-thin moustache, and ascot)—Nick sets fire to part of Berkeley, destroys several cars, fakes his own death, and gets Sheeni expelled from boarding school—all in the service of courting his obsession.

In real life, Doubleday, 21, is not really that similar to her character. She is self-deprecating and not self-conscious. She giggles often. She frequently refers (with thick irony) to how cool she is. She has a beguilingly warm charm to her that instantly makes you wish she were your best friend or younger sister. She lives with (and loves) her parents. She doesn't speak French, even a little. And yet she beautifully embodies the role of the enigmatic, complicated, and mischievous Francophile Sheeni Saunders.

"I had a rebellious phase in high school—a wannabe phase," Doubleday says. "It was quite pathetic." She confides that her most seditious act during this period was—wait for it—dying her hair black. "I was this white, white, *white* girl with blonde eyebrows and black hair, so I looked really cool, obviously," she says, facetiously. "It was such a disaster that I got it bleached and then it turned fire red, and I was too embarrassed to go to school that day!"

So how did someone so ebullient and good-natured, whose only prior role had been 1997's *Legend of the Mummy* (she was eight years old at the time), become *Youth in Revolt*'s femme fatale—one of the more coveted young female roles of the year? She's not entirely sure herself.

"No audition was ever this way for me," she

says. "The material was just so real, and it kind of fit right. I went in there and felt really at ease with it. I'm still pinching myself because I'm just, like, Did this really happen? How did this happen?"

To get into the role, Doubleday followed director Miguel Arteta's advice and watched Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless*, her character's favorite movie. "After working with Miguel a bit and watching Godard, I started to fall in love with her and her obsession with Paris. I came back and worked with him and Michael [Cera], and everything seemed to kind of fit."

Doubleday admits that just about everything about the film intimidated her. First, there's the stellar ensemble cast, which includes not only Cera, but Ray Liotta, Mary Kay Place, Zach Galifianakis, Fred Willard, and Justin Long, who plays the part of Sheeni's older brother and coincidentally dated Doubleday's older sister in real life. There's also Steve Buscemi, who plays Nick's divorced dad. "I told my mom about Steve Buscemi, and she paused. And I got really scared. Then she said, 'Are you kidding me? Alright, I'm coming down to the shoot on those dates!'"

And then there's Sheeni, the central motivation for all of Nick's mishaps in the film.

"Before we even arrived, I emailed Miguel and said, 'Help me!'" she says. "I was really scared." His e-mail back, which Doubleday says she'll save forever, told her to simply trust her instincts, "because that's really all you have."

The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, garnering great reviews, yet it was an experience for which she felt entirely unprepared. "Q and A's?" she says. "Hell, hell, *hell!*" (She has a tendency to repeat things three times for emphasis). "I was a big, flustered bird. Usually I'm really centered, and I think I'll talk my way out of it. But you know what, I wasn't that way at all. It was awkward and frightening!"

Though both mom and dad have been actors—her mother taught theater for nearly 20 years, and Doubleday likely boasts the only set of parents who have both appeared, separately, in episodes of *CHiPs*—nobody warned her what promoting a movie entails. ("I didn't know what a press junket was until I went. I was mad! Why did no one tell me I would be doing interviews? What, what, *what!*?")

Prior to Toronto, Doubleday felt she was naïve. She realized acting was what she wanted to do through her admiration of favorites like Johnny Depp and Marion Cotillard—"Not in an 'I'm going to be an actress' way," she says, drawing out the word *actress* with Shakespearean gusto. "Just having an understanding of what they were doing and being inescapably drawn to it."

Since shooting *Youth in Revolt*, Doubleday has gone back to school and is considering pre-med ("I'm back taking classes and doing all that crap... that I enjoy. It keeps me collected. I feel like if I'm not constantly stimulated, I don't really have anything to offer.") She was also cast as the lead in *18*, a beautifully melancholic short film directed by Joy Gohring, which premiered at the Director's Guild of America and is making the festival rounds. She may also head to London for an acting program.

We could talk for hours. But the museum is closing, and we finally get kicked out. LACMA is on a somewhat sketchy stretch of Wilshire Boulevard so I offer to walk her to her car, but she tells me she's going to put on her iPod and listen to the Ting Tings on the way. "Wait—don't put that in. That's too cliché and commercial!" she says. "Let me give you a cool indie band, so I look more cool." She laughs and thinks for a moment. "Who's really hip? La Roux maybe? That was on *The Hills*, so it must be cool, right?"

So Portia Doubleday puts some La Roux on her iPod and heads off into the evening.