



Revenge
OF THE
HANDSOME
Women

THEY PROBABLY WEREN'T THE CUTEST IN KINDERGARTEN—OR THE PROM QUEEN IN SENIOR YEAR. THEIR JAWS WERE TOO STRONG, THEIR BUILDS TOO SLIM AND BOYISH. BUT THE GIRLS JANE AUSTEN WOULD HAVE DEEMED HANDSOME MAY HAVE THE LAST LAUGH: THOUGH AT 15 THEY MISSED THE “PRETTY” MARK, AT MIDLIFE THEY’RE AGING GORGEOUSLY

BY EMILY LISTFIELD

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JEAN FRANCOIS CAMPOS

There's a certain type of woman who seems to age with a bit more finesse.

And she's not the woman who races off to the plastic surgeon at the first sign of crow's-feet, tries to wriggle into her daughter's skinny jeans or clings to a froufrou look that worked for her when she was 20. (Then again, the woman we're thinking of probably never went for that look to begin with.) It's not that she's impervious to the years but rather that she stares time in the face, squares her (well tailored) shoulders and simply gets on with it. Need a visual? Try Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund, standing before a microphone with her perfectly cut suit and killer cheekbones; Carolina Herrera, with her immaculate white shirt and insouciant air; Trudie Styler, with her sui generis face and strong convictions; or Angela Bassett, with her fierce physique and take-no-prisoners vibe.

These are definitely not girly-girls. We're not crazy about labels, but for the sake of argument, let's call our subject the Handsome Woman. (For the record, Jane Austen considered being called handsome a great compliment—one more reason we love her.) The *Oxford Advanced American Dictionary* defines a handsome woman as "attractive, with large strong features rather than small delicate ones." (We'll throw in a chiseled jaw, a steady gaze and minimal curves.) This is a woman whose appeal does not depend on youth or conventionally feminine characteristics like a pert nose, big breasts and voluminous hair—which, let's face it, don't necessarily stand up well to the test of time. There is nothing "cute" about her. Make no mistake, though: She can be sexy as all get-out. In his best seller *Catherine the Great*, author Robert Massie uses the H-word to describe the monarch who was as famous for her sexual prowess as for her political acumen.

WHAT HANDSOME WOMEN KNOW

WOMEN WE CONSIDER handsome, such as Sigourney Weaver and Diane Keaton, often have highly individual styles: They may have long hair or short, prefer tailored pants or pencil skirts, but they share certain characteristics. "They keep things simple with hair and makeup. They stay slim and fit and wear fashion that is updated but age appropriate. Most of all, they have a lot of competencies that create confidence and a sense of purpose," observes Jacquelyn Foltyn, PhD, professor of sociology at National University in La Jolla, California. "They probably learned early on that they have distinctive looks but that their appearance was not going to be their *raison d'être*. Because they have other sources of self-esteem,

they tend not to be as devastated by the aging process." That confidence informs everything from how they dress (pared-down elegance) to how they walk into a room (standing tall). Sure, a good tailor and great cheekbones help (when do they not?), but more important is the attitude that goes with them. Rosemarie Ingleton, MD, a dermatologist with a regal air and close-cropped hair, says she has always had "an acute sense of self—even as a child. But with maturity, I've come to appreciate the way I look, and now I'm able to work it with a lot more confidence."

It's one thing to maintain that attitude when you're at the height of your powers—or at least grown up enough to be at peace with your looks; carrying it off during your insecure cookie-cutter teen years is another. "I was really gawky as a teenager," says Libby Edelman, 58, cofounder with her husband of the shoe line Sam & Libby. "I thought curvy was the only thing that appealed to boys and I was never going to be a hot babe. It took me until my thirties to realize what I have, how to accentuate it and enjoy it. That only happened when I stopped trying to dress like everyone else and settled on my own style, which is classic with a twist." Consider it revenge of the non-prom queen: The lankiness that caused grief back then now gives Edelman a Katharine Hepburn-like aura of grace and

style (evident in the April 2012 issue of *More*, or at more.com/libby-edelman). "I love how I look so much more now than I did when I was younger," Edelman says. Marie Josee Lafontaine, a makeup artist with a silvery pompadour and an androgynous aesthetic, concurs. "As a teen, I was just as awkward as other girls, and fashion wasn't on my radar. It wasn't until my twenties, when I was working in Paris, that I developed my 'simple chic' look. I credit a designer called Irie with helping me understand how practical yet elegant cuts brought out the best in me. And now I still rock that look: tight jeans or pants, loose tops, boots, a jacket, paired with simple jewelry and my vintage man's Rolex."

Other women, like Elizabeth Musmanno, the forty-something founder of the Musmanno Group and president of the Fragrance Foundation in New York City, were lucky enough to own the power of their looks early on. "As a teenager, I had my mom sew clothes that made me stand out, whether they were jodhpurs or metallic jumpsuits," she says. "I had a certain 'I don't care' attitude. I was never going to be the blue-eyed, blonde, buxom girl. But I liked the way I looked. And I liked the guys who were attracted to someone like me." Vivian



Sylvie
CHANTECAILLE

Diller, PhD, author of *Face It: What Women Really Feel As Their Looks Change*, points out that women who relied on more traditionally feminine attributes like lush hair, full breasts and thick lashes for their self-esteem often have a harder time later on because these are all assets that diminish with age. “Good posture, a great smile, the ability to engage someone with your eyes—these are attributes you can maintain for life,” she says.

While confidence and a heady dose of personal style certainly help when it comes to aging, there’s no denying that genetics plays a big role in the Handsome Woman’s midlife victory lap. “The more defined, dominant cheekbone that may be less attractive in youth will stand up better over time,” says New York plastic surgeon Adam Kolker. Dermatologist Patricia Wexler likens it to having better scaffolding, with more architecture for sagging skin to hang on to: “Strong bones, particularly in the cheek and jaw, help maintain the integrity of the face against the effects of gravity.” Those with weaker facial structures have less support for the extra, sagging skin that inevitably comes with age, making them more prone to jowls at the jaw or deep folds beside the nose and mouth.

AGING SMART

IT’S NOT ALL the luck of the jaw, though. The Handsome Woman may affect a look of effortless elegance, but beneath it a fair bit of maintenance is going on. “Even if you’ve won the genetic lottery, you still need to practice discipline and balance,” says Judith Sills, PhD, author of *Getting Naked Again*. “These women have acquired the lifelong habit of taking care of their health, watching what they eat and exercising. They still make the effort. But they balance it by gracefully letting go of the excessive enhancements of youth, whether it’s piling on too many accessories or wearing too much makeup, so that they can let who they are shine through.”

Edelman admits that a lot of work goes into her seemingly nonchalant style. “I take more time now than when I was younger to make sure I look pulled together,” she says. “I use a little bit more makeup because I’m not baking in the sun anymore. And long hair makes me feel sexier, but I know how to make it right for my age. I always blow-dry it or flatiron it; it’s not about just washing it and going to work.” Edelman also exercises with a personal trainer two to four times a week, does yoga once a week and walks her dog every day. She shuns red meat and most carbs, including bread.

Musmanno agrees that discipline is imperative: “You have to be careful because when you’re over 40, just looking

at a doughnut will make you gain 10 pounds, and getting too cuddly is aging. I take meticulous care of my skin, and I spend money on a good haircut.” Sylvie Chantecaille, a chic woman in her sixties who happens to be French and the founder of a cult-favorite, eponymous beauty line, has these rules for aging well: Don’t smoke, do drink vegetable juice and make sure your foundation isn’t detectable. (What counts is *appearing* au naturel, not actually *being* au naturel.)

HANDSOME A-LISTERS



ANGELA BASSETT
is Hollywood handsome: über-fit, with chiseled cheekbones.



CHRISTINE LAGARDE,
head of the IMF,
epitomizes simple,
chic styling.



CATHERINE THE GREAT
was powerfully
attractive but not
pretty.

STYLE MATTERS

WHEN IT COMES to fashion, Handsome Women embrace simplicity over fussiness. “There’s a dignity in not doing too much, but it’s critical not to be sloppy. It’s not about giving up,” says Musmanno. “There’s a huge danger in trying to hang on too tightly to how you used to look. It’s key not to go too bare. You can be sexy without showing too much skin. No one will ever see my arms again. My look right now is ‘gay boy.’ I’ve got big tortoiseshell glasses, and I wear clean, long, lean lines.” Instead of trying to go younger, Musmanno is a big proponent of going edgier. “Nothing will age you faster than being too ‘lady,’” she says. But don’t confuse a refusal to don frills or false eyelashes with a lack of commitment to maintaining sex appeal. “I always want to feel sexy,” Musmanno says. “Today I look like a female Johnny Depp, but I feel good. A woman looks sexy in a man’s shirt. You don’t have to show your cleavage.”

“Simplicity takes knowledge,” Chantecaille says. “It comes down to realizing what looks good on you, not what’s trendy. French women don’t overdress. It’s about delicate or tailored pieces that are close to the body and refined.” Edelman will not buy anything she can’t see herself wearing years from now. “I study fashion trends, but I adapt them to my body type. High-waisted pants may be the style, but they don’t work for me. I love

miniskirts, but I already wore them. I can still be sexy, but it will be in a longer dress. And I ignore messages about how you should look or act as you get older. I try to incorporate fun into everything I do.”

That kind of joie de vivre may be the most alluring quality of all. “Look at how gorgeous Christine Lagarde is,” says Musmanno. “The gray hair, the real face. You think that when the day is over, she has a glass of good wine and a really hearty laugh. She looks like a woman who has a life.” And isn’t that the secret to aging well for everyone? “After all the hard work, you end up with the ability to show the world who you are: a woman of discipline, taste and humor,” says Sills. “And you got there after a helluva journey.” ❁