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Another Woman

By DAPHNE MERKIN

[Diane Keaton](#), who the critic Pauline Kael once suggested "may be a star without vanity," is fretting about her makeup. Keaton sits on an elevated director's chair in front of a large mirror in a bare dressing room, worrying that an indiscernible powdery dab on her nose will show up on camera - she's about to shoot a public-service announcement on behalf of the dogs and cats left homeless in the wake of Hurricane Katrina - if she doesn't locate some putty-colored foundation to cover it. The actress, who will turn 60 in January, returns to the screen in December in "The Family Stone," an ensemble drama in which she plays the dying but buoyant matriarch of a large and strenuously colorful brood. Keaton is deeply attractive in a way that you don't see much in Hollywood anymore (or on the Upper East Side or in any upscale area, for that matter): she looks, that is, the way a woman her age might look if pre-emptive cosmetic surgery for actresses over the age of 30 hadn't somehow become the law of the land. Keaton's slightly Nordic-looking features and good bones are still very much in evidence, but if you peer closely you can see a faint tracing of lines etched around her unplumped-up mouth and at the corners of her slanted, blazingly alert hazel eyes.

"Does anyone have any concealer?" she asks as she continues to cluck and make faces at herself in the mirror, her naturally droll inflection infusing the question with a note of comic desperation. ("She doesn't 'do' funny," her friend and "Father of the Bride" co-star [Steve Martin](#) observes. "She's just Diane.") Despite the fact that Keaton has defied the fetishization of youth endemic to celebrity culture, she will readily admit that her appearance - the visual impact she makes - has always been acutely important to her. This fixation goes all the way back to her girlhood, when she would hunt with her mother for the right plaid fabric from Goodwill to be whipped up into clothes based on Keaton's own designs. "When I was younger," she told me, "I was very concerned with how I looked, with a fantasy of what I wanted to look like." She mentions a pink suit that she and her mother bought from Ohrbach's that, she says, in her self-amused, mordant way, "I undoubtedly thought was the answer to everything." She adds that she worked in J.J. Newberry's bra department during high school: "I was very excited by bras."

Still, this brief glimpse of backstage vanity makes her seem poignantly ordinary rather than hopelessly shallow or self-absorbed. For one thing, it is immediately clear that Keaton's concern about a potential blotch on her face is less an indication of the narcissistic anxieties of a movie star - one whose formidable lineup of ex-lovers includes [Woody Allen](#), [Warren Beatty](#) and [Al Pacino](#) and whose on-screen interests have included [Albert Finney](#), [Mel Gibson](#) and [Liam Neeson](#) - than of the "Oh, my God, what now?" insecurity of a woman who has never been quite sure of her physical allure. (Make of it what you will, but Keaton claims that the persistent disinclination of her mother, now 83, to acknowledge her oldest daughter's fetching looks while she was growing up is the source of her drive. "I could never get her to say I was pretty," Keaton says ruefully. "That fueled my ambition.") Keaton has by general consensus grown, if anything, more beautiful over the years, her broad-planed face having gained in elegant angles what it has lost in round-cheeked "Annie Hall" dewiness. And, as finally became clear during her split-second nude scene in "Something's Gotta Give," she can lay claim to an amazing body, one that is kept in willowy shape by lots

of walking and swimming. All the same, she insists that she has never liked her own reflection. "It's not fun to see myself in the movies," she says. "It's not fun to see myself in the mirror."



The sun is high in a cloudless sky on this late September morning in Los Angeles, but inside the cavernous, windowless studio on Sunset Boulevard it might as well be midnight in a bomb shelter. Keaton is dressed in one of her usual obscurantist get-ups, in shades of blackness - with the exception of a pair of gold hoop earrings - from the ribbon band on her gray flannel bowler hat to the pointy toes of her high-heeled Gucci boots. Although it is a warm day, she wears a black turtleneck under a fitted black velvet jacket over matching pants that emphasize her slim, long legs. Given that she also sports tinted glasses, there is not that much left of her to see when she actually sits down in front of the cameras. But then she flashes what a critic once described as her "ravishing, clown's smile" and begins to speak her piece in her distinctive ripe voice, and you suddenly realize that her most steadfastly glamorous asset is her megawatt personality, bursting out of her like an uncontrollable force of nature, a geyser of quirkily endearing traits that fall on the air and lend everything around her a momentary sparkle.

Keaton, as I learned when I first met her some years ago on the set of "Hanging Up," the movie based on Delia Ephron's novel that Keaton starred in and directed, is a consummate professional. This aspect of her has been noted by everyone who has ever dealt with her, from Betty - who once characterized her to me, in terms that made her sound like a Girl Scout leader, as "industrious" and "punctual" and the sort of person who "makes plans and

sticks to them" - to her former agent John Burnham, who says that underneath her charmingly self-effacing persona Keaton is "organized and tough and smart." Today, true to her reputation, she sits uncomplainingly under the hot lights, holding Spike, the winsome hound (a mix of basset and beagle) that has been flown in from an animal sanctuary in New Orleans, in her lap and does take after take - at least 15 in all - without a murmur of protest. After what seems like the nth impeccable delivery, the actress obligingly adjusts her tone yet again, injecting it with more seriousness or greater enthusiasm at the director's request, all the while keeping up a funny, slightly lewd patter about the developing intimacy between Spike and her. (She jokes about her hand brushing up against the dog's genitals, his "package," she says coyly.) In between laughing heartily at her own shtick - "She has the most ingratiating laugh," Allen observes, "it's fatal" - she hugs and kisses Spike. Although I have grown fidgety with impatience, as have many of the 20-odd crew members standing around me, Keaton remains unruffled until the end. Gracious as a Southern hostess, she bids everyone a warm goodbye before swinging her oversize woven-leather black bag over her shoulder and striding out into the day.



After the shoot, Keaton and I repair to lunch nearby at Lucy's El Adobe Cafe, a Mexican eatery decorated with a brick wall, Formica tabletops and out-of-season Christmas lights that Jerry Brown used to frequent in its heyday. The restaurant is hip in a counterchic way and, perhaps more important from Keaton's perspective, cheap. Despite her well-oiled lifestyle, which employs enough people to run a small luxury hotel, a certain hard-nosed attitude toward money is one of her many old-fashioned virtues. On the walk over to Lucy's, for instance, she happily informs me that the Tom Ford pantsuit she is wearing was a freebie acquired on a celebrity trip she took to Las Vegas when she was up for a Best Actress Oscar two years ago for "Something's Gotta Give." "I was only one of two nominees to go," she notes almost proudly. Then, of course, there is her skill at trading up real estate - or, rather, her obsession with renovating houses - at which Keaton has demonstrated nothing less than a Midas touch. She recently sold her deconstructed hacienda-style house in Bel Air, which she bought for \$6 million, for \$16 million. She lived in it for less than two years after working on it for almost double that time, and it sold practically minutes after it appeared on the April cover of Architectural Digest.

When I first met her in Los Angeles six years ago, I spent hours in rapt contemplation of the fine-tuned Southwestern sensibility on display in the house she lived in at the time.

From the outside, the residence was an unprepossessing Spanish Colonial, but a dazzling yet austere sanctuary awaited inside. She had filled the rooms with Monterey furniture (not to be confused with Mission) and Navajo rugs, against which vivid touches - a collection of silver-and-turquoise jewelry, six graduated urns burnished with a turquoise-green glaze - stood out. When that house landed on the cover of Architectural Digest, it was snapped up by [Madonna](#). Like a master shoemaker who hobbles around in worn-out slippers, Keaton has suffered the fate these last years of living for long periods in a rented house, as she does now.

The thing about Diane Keaton is that she has more energy than anyone under the sun - "She uses the time in her day like no one I've ever seen," John Burnham says - as well as the boundless curiosity to go with it. [Jack Nicholson](#), who starred with Keaton in "Reds" in 1981 and in "Something's Gotta Give" in 2003, describes her as "crackling" and appears to be in genuine awe of her Energizer-bunny stamina. "Energy is the most amazing thing about Diane," he drawls over the phone. And then, audibly chuckling at the memory, he recalls that during a three-day break while in Paris filming the end of "Something's Gotta Give," Keaton managed to trot over to Spain while he barely left his hotel room. "Her basic unit of energy is so enormous," he says. "It's hard to decipher."

Nicholson seems to have forged a uniquely strong bond with Keaton, one that enables him to get her in the way few others do. "We talk a pretty fast shorthand on deep subjects" is how he puts it. Nicholson was the solitary male among a bevy of female friends, including [Meg Ryan](#) and [Lisa Kudrow](#), who was invited to her 59th-birthday party. Keaton claims that she asked him to the party, which was held at her friend [Nancy Meyers's](#) house (she describes Meyers, who wrote and directed "Something's Gotta Give," as "the only comedy writer in the world who wants to tell stories about middle-aged women's love lives"), because "I knew he would make it an eventful evening. I knew he would stir things up. Not that an evening full of females is his kind of fun." Nicholson, in his turn, admitted that he did feel "severely male, yes," but says that he found the invitation "both enticing and odd." I am struck by the way the two of them talk about each other in the same curious tone of erotically charged admiration, which leads me to wonder whether their relationship might have blossomed into something else - if only (he weren't an inveterate skirt-chaser) and if only (she weren't so confoundedly full of high standards). And indeed, when I ask Nicholson if he's surprised that Keaton is romantically unattached, he ducks the question - as well as the ambiguous nature of their connection - by referring obliquely to "the particular nature of her refinement." Pressed to explain what he means by that quaintly Jamesian phrase, he succeeded in only deepening the mystery: "She's complicated enough that at this point she's not going to be involved with someone as a halfway measure. She at least knows what she doesn't want."

Then again, there are many things Keaton is sure she does want in her life, although these days they have little to do with either romance or the trappings of fame. Like a perennial extracurricular student, Keaton has always been captivated by more than one subject, especially by those that call upon the meticulously honed aesthetic that permeates everything from the scrapbooks and other oddities she likes to collect to her famously idiosyncratic way of dressing. Keaton has enormous, if peculiar, style, which is as unmistakably hers as it is difficult to describe. It usually includes some combination of the following: a hard-edged touch by way of a belt or footwear, a Charlie Chaplinesque bow tie or hat, some appropriation from street fashion in the form of gloves or hosiery and a nod or two to the layered look she popularized in "Annie Hall." "She wakes up every morning," a longtime friend of hers, the art dealer Daniel Wolf, told me, "and she sees her clothes like paint coming out of a paint tube: What am I going to mix today?"

Many of Keaton's interests are too intensely pursued to be categorized as mere hobbies. They range from photography (she has edited four collections of photos on offbeat topics like hotel lobbies, salesmen and grisly tabloid shots from The Los Angeles Herald Express) and architecture (she's on the board of the Los Angeles Conservancy and is currently editing a book on Spanish Colonial architecture for Rizzoli) to music (to the consternation of some filmmakers she has worked with, she is in the habit of listening to [Bob Dylan](#) or Linda

Ronstadt on her headphones until the moment the director says "Action!") and politics, about which she is surprisingly well informed. (She is a CNN addict and told me that one of the high points of her career was meeting [Bill Clinton](#) at a screening of "Hanging Up.") [Sarah Jessica Parker](#), who plays the detested girlfriend that the oldest son has brought home for Thanksgiving in "The Family Stone," assumed that she would never get the chance to know Keaton, whom she has always admired as an iconic figure in the way that many younger actresses, like Kudrow and Ryan, seem to. "I was worried she'd think of me as a terrible, vacuous superficial blonde," Parker confides. Instead, to Parker's delight, the two of them found themselves alone in a makeup trailer every day of the shoot for a solid two hours before they were called to the set and ended up talking about everything from clothes to real estate to children to that day's news. Parker is particularly admiring of Keaton's self-discipline, noting that the older actress came to work promptly at 5 in the morning dressed in "cinched-waist skirt, heels, hat" while "the rest of us were in sweat pants." Then she adds, sounding more like Miss Manners than Carrie Bradshaw, "You can't be a woman and gotten where she's gotten without showing up on time."

For the last decade, ever since Keaton chose to take on motherhood at the age of 50 and proceeded to make it, however belatedly, first and foremost among her priorities, her schedule has been even more packed than it once was. These days, her large, well-staffed household revolves around her 10-year-old daughter, Dexter, and her 4-year-old son, Duke, and their attendant play dates, outings to the Pomona Fair, parent-teacher conferences and pediatrician appointments. It helps that Keaton has always been an early-to-bed, early-to-rise kind of creature. (Bill Robinson, her friend and partner at Keaton's Blue Relief production company, once characterized her as "a Pilgrim nightmare, up at dawn and in bed at 10.") Keaton is indeed up at 5 to answer e-mail and troll the Web in search of items that stir her eclectic visual imagination ("I love the computer," she declares. "I wish I were partners on eBay"); she then prepares lunch for the kids and gets them ready for school. Dexter and Duke attend the University Elementary School (U.E.S.), a progressive, socioeconomically diverse lab school affiliated with the graduate school of education at the University of California at Los Angeles. Having considered herself "a neglected student," Keaton is particularly impressed with the teachers at U.E.S., "who," she says, "are constantly trying to find new ways to be creative about stimulating children to learn."

It was during her 40's that the actress discovered a growing baby hunger in herself - "the need to participate in being part of a family." Having tried and failed to become pregnant and never having made it down the aisle despite her many romantic liaisons, Keaton decided to adopt. Both Dexter, a towheaded girl who stares out from the tiny black-and-white snapshot Keaton pulls from her bulging date book with a slightly wary gaze, and Duke, a fair-haired charmer of a boy, were adopted when they were infants. Keaton's eyes still gleam with pleasure when she talks about her first week snowbound in a hotel room in New York with a 6-day-old Dexter newly arrived from a Texas agency.

She is by all accounts a deeply engaged mother who eats dinner with her kids every night, gives great birthday parties and is intimately acquainted with her children's friends and the other parents at U.E.S. Ann Carlson, an environmental-law professor at U.C.L.A. School of Law whose daughter has been close pals with Dexter since they were in prekindergarten together, describes Keaton as remarkably "in there" with her children and as a "direct and in some ways no-nonsense" but also "love struck" mother for whom the experience of parenting has been "life-altering - it's changed her in ways that she probably never anticipated."

Keaton would undoubtedly agree with this assessment. "To have a child," she says, "you've got to stop messing around." She has, of course, often played mothers, including the wonderfully textured performance she gave as a betrayed wife and devoted mother of four in 1982's "Shoot the Moon" on through her latest role as the crusty but heroic mother in "The Family Stone." In real life, Keaton's relationship with her own mother, whom she describes as "irresistible," is a pivotal one. Over another lunch, this time at Blvd, a swanky restaurant in the Beverly Wilshire, she talks about her with an almost fierce passion. In answer to my question as to whether any of the men she was involved with was the One, she states unequivocally, "There was no love of my life except my mother."

Keaton grew up in conservative Orange County, Calif., the oldest of four siblings (she has two sisters and a brother) in a tight-knit family. Despite the suggestion of tony WASP breeding about Keaton's disciplined approach to life and the air of reserve that underlies her friendly accessibility - she has been described as being as guarded as Garbo, which may be an exaggeration, but it is undeniable that she has managed to preserve a rare zone of privacy in the fishbowl atmosphere of Hollywood - her own background is not markedly patrician. Her paternal grandfather was a barber who was murdered in a labor dispute; her maternal grandmother worked as a janitor. Keaton credits her father, Jack, a civil engineer who designed the Olympic-size pool at Santa Ana College, with instilling in her quick reflexes, a "deep, instinctive ability to run." Her mother, Dorothy, was a housewife who once won a "Mrs. Los Angeles" contest and was "the dominant person" in her children's lives.

Although Keaton sees bits of her father in her own "sappiness," she identifies overwhelmingly as her mother's daughter. It is Dorothy to whom she owes her limelight ambitions - "She was the best audience anybody could have," Keaton observes. "I developed all my skills through her" - and her abiding interest in the artistic preservation of memories, the storage of history in various forms, from old buildings to scrapbooks. Her mother has kept 40 years' worth of journals about the family - "collage after collage, page after page" - and Keaton proudly points out that the photo of her as a young woman that is the final image in "The Family Stone" (it has been doctored to make her appear pregnant) is, in fact, her mother's handiwork. "The photograph," she declares, "is the best damn acting I've ever done." Since her face in the photo is the face of a woman to whom life has not yet happened, I'm not sure what she means by this assertion, but I sense that it is her way of linking her own accomplishments with her mother's unsung talents.

We continue our conversation that afternoon as she drives me back to my hotel in her recently acquired hybrid Lexus after we have stopped to visit a cluster of art galleries in Santa Monica. I ask her if she ever gets flak for being an older mother. "No one will say anything to me because I've taken a stance," she replies. Still, on some larger level, it clearly bothers Keaton - who referred to herself in an e-mail message as "twitchy, demanding, not fully grown-up" - that she feels herself to be something of a late arrival at the gates of motherhood in particular and adulthood in general. She is touchingly candid about her regrets, enumerating them with the stoic self-awareness of someone who has put in many hours on the shrink's couch. "I wish I could have been braver. I wish my limitation with intimacy hadn't been so crippling. I wish I had taken more risks. I wish I had started earlier addressing these things." Keaton is a firm believer in analysis; she considers it "a huge privilege" she intends to take advantage of as long as she can. "I've been talking my life away about deep conflicts that don't go away," she says of therapy. "I'm never leaving. It's like going to church. Whether I'm helped or not is not the issue. It's about trying to understand more about why something is the way it is, about my own participation in a problem."

The biggest problem in Keaton's life, as far as either of us can determine, has been with men. "Being in love," she announces, "brought out the worst in me. The thing for me with men has probably always been *How much do they love me?* As opposed to *How much do I love them?*" Nicholson characterizes this "I never got to choose anybody, they always chose me" plaint as "Diane's chapter heading on what the past was like." Keaton discusses her amorous history with a kind of pained but succinct retrospective wit - as if it were a phase of her life that she has sadly but firmly put behind her. Which, in fact, as evidenced by her persistent state of uncoupledness, she may well have done. By her own admission, she hasn't been seriously involved with anyone since her breakup with Pacino 15 years ago. (When I asked her about rumors of a relationship with [Keanu Reeves](#), she responded with a disbelieving yelp.) Some of her troubles seem to stem from the way her parents' "difficult but passionate" marriage colored her own perspective on relationships. "They were a little in love and a little enraged," she says. "I viewed them in a romantic light. I wasn't prepared for complexities." Then, as befits an actress who has been remarkably skilled - notwithstanding her overriding screen persona as Woody Allen's darling flustered muse - at portraying shy, self-conscious women overcome by the power of their own awakened eroticism in films like "Looking for Mr. Goodbar," "Reds," "Mrs. Soffel" and "The Good Mother," she expounds on the mysteries of the flesh and the incongruousness of desire: "So much of romantic love is selfish and underdeveloped and doesn't grow. I couldn't love someone and like him at the same time. Sexual drive is such a big thing, it's attached to such specific requirements for me. Do you think I wanted a nice guy to come home to? I'm really happy I didn't have a child with any of the men I was with."

Men may have taken up a lot of Keaton's energy, sometimes to the slighting of her career - like the period during the 80's when she seems to have dropped temporarily out of sight after the making of "Reds" - but she has actually spent very little time in domestic setups with any of them. "Maybe Woody," she says, "for a short period. He was the only one who would live with me while walking on eggshells, as he claimed I forced him to do." Keaton sounds as if she finds the very idea of an opposite sex both inherently fascinating and inherently objectionable, as if men were alien creatures to whom she has been drawn against her own better judgment. "I have ordinary affection for women," she explains, "but I don't have ordinary affection for men. I have extraordinary feelings. I was either so excited, so enamored and swept away by them, or I wasn't interested in them at all. Instead of seeing them as people, I saw them as more extraordinary. They don't want anything to do with that," she adds, chuckling. "It's a nightmare for them."

Of course, there is always the possibility that rather than there being anything irredeemably wrong with either Keaton or the entire male species, there is something wrong with the specific sort of man she picks. Her producing partner, Bill Robinson, says, "Even if she had been a cashier at Woolworth's, Diane would have been drawn to the wrong men." By "wrong men" I suppose he means wrong for the long haul - what another friend calls (with the exception of Woody Allen) "pretty men" and what yet a third friend of hers describes as "titular boyfriends, the football star or the class president."

In any case, Keaton appears to have made her peace with falling in love the way she can most readily tolerate it - on-screen, where she has always been able to "get in there deep," as Nicholson describes it, but she has also been able to get out, stay on top of the situation, be in control. ("She is a raw nerve," Sarah Jessica Parker says, "but she is practiced. Her emotions are available to her, but make no mistake about her: she has technique.") Perhaps it goes back to a certain spacious quality of self-invention that her mother encouraged, the fantasy of "finding an audience for your life" that helped inspire her daughter. "She let us

explore our strongest wishes," Keaton points out. She says she believes that the "fake situation" of being in a movie romance is "underappreciated by actresses" and that this particular kind of magic, this make-believe rapture, is, in fact, the biggest perk of the job. "You're in bed only in the best possible way," she told me. "You're not paying the price for being in love." She pauses for a minute, as if sifting through her mind for an irrefutable piece of evidence to back up her position, and then says, as if it were the obvious icing on the cake, "I got to kiss Jack Nicholson a lot."

Keaton, of course, is referring to her role as the deferred but triumphant love object in "Something's Gotta Give," the money-milking hit of a fairy tale (for which, in the unmisty-eyed, bottom-line world of Hollywood, Nicholson was reportedly paid several times what Keaton was paid) that was supposed to give the definitive boost to her career after more than 40 films and put her on the map once and for all as the box-office catnip that Woody Allen has always perceived her to be. "If she had wanted to," he told me, "Keaton could have been the most popular female star in America, another [Lucille Ball](#)." After a first act as Allen's ditzy foil, a second act as a gifted and erotically nuanced character actress, a third act as an appealing maternal figure in "Father of the Bride" I and II (or, take your pick, a woman's woman with a sexy edge in "The First Wives Club"), Keaton was ready for her moment.

And here's the odd part, the part that sets people to shaking their heads, from Nicholson to Parker, tsk-tsking about the limitations of the business, the glaring paucity of roles for older women, the neglect of more mature audiences. After the excitement of "Something's Gotta Give," nothing gave. Literally, nothing happened. Her moment was gone before she could say hello to it. "There's no call for me," she says. "I got a lot of attention and money - and then I went right back to where I was before, a TV movie once a year."

Everyone I talk to agrees that Keaton's talent has been strikingly underused and that the situation is more a reflection of the film industry than of her place in it. Meanwhile, Keaton remains a Great Actress in Waiting, a kind of hipper [Katharine Hepburn](#) - an old-time leading lady from an age when, as she says, "elitists didn't do TV," before the red-carpet stratagems of celebrity and the synergistic manipulations of personal publicists (she has never had one, except for the two weeks many years ago that she hired Bobby Zarem) took over the landscape. Would she have gotten further if she had compromised more, been less picky, stooped to more commercial vehicles and smaller roles? "She likes popular success," Allen says, "but she won't move an inch for it. She works on her own terms."

Keaton's terms are remarkably complicated ones, having to do with what Warren Beatty once astutely referred to as her "subtextual inner conflict" - the multiplicity of impulses that rattle around in her and play themselves out, finally, in a general ambivalence about being taken seriously and the nature of her own ambition. One minute she's perversely insisting on her ordinariness; the next she's gleefully leading with her idiosyncrasies, as if she figured out long ago that the deliberate cultivation of oddness is the key to endearing yourself to a potentially hostile world. What you discover about Keaton the longer you're around her is that she's always disappearing inside her complicated self-presentation, leaving you empty-handed. Craig T. Nelson, who plays her husband in "The Family Stone," sums her up as well as anyone. "There are so many multifaceted people inside of her," he says. "All of them are very well rounded. I think you can meet her and think you know her and only get to know one of those people within the multitude she carries in her."

I suspect this is just the way Keaton wants it to be, the whimsically opinionated and ultimately baffling impression she prefers to leave in her wake. It would explain why, at the

end of the day, after she has tucked the children in for the night, she beds down together with her multitude of selves in front of the TV. "We're isolated creatures," she explains, "living our lives vicariously. The sense of community is so reduced." She claims that her "most profound moments have been spent watching the news with Miles O'Brien during the hurricane." Keaton breaks out one of her captivating smiles as she says this, the effect of which is to make whoever is on the other end want to linger in her company for just a little longer. "He's not knowable," she says of the CNN newscaster, adding, after the briefest of pauses, "like me." For a moment, the woman who describes herself as "basically negatively inclined" sounds positively jubilant.

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