



Story MARGOT DOUGHERTY
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GAME OF THRONES STAR LENA HEADEY

Lena Headey has a weakness for dogs. “It’s so hilarious,” says her friend Piper Perabo, who starred with Headey in *The Cave*, a 2005 sci-fi thriller shot in Transylvania. “She’ll go to a country and make a movie and come back with four rescue dogs and find them all homes.” At one point Headey had five of her own, including a Great Dane mix she found languishing at a Los Angeles shelter shortly after she discovered she was pregnant with her son, Wylie, now five. “The dog had one ear,” Headey recalls, making a tired flap with her hand in demonstration. “One tooth. He was 11. I don’t know what possessed me. I couldn’t not take him. He was majestic and broken.”

Headey, 41, mines that same compelling combination as the formidable and embattled Cersei Lannister on HBO’s huge hit *Game of Thrones*, in its fifth season. Watching Headey’s Cersei navigate the treacherous landscape is one of *Thrones*’ delights. She heard about the show through a friend Peter Dinklage, who

plays the patricidal younger brother, Tyrion. They were filming an indie comedy, and she noticed Dinklage reading a script. “It’s this fucking great pilot, it’s insane! And there’s incest, and you’d be my sister,” she remembers him saying. After meeting the show’s creators, David Benioff and Dan Weiss, Headey knew Cersei was her cup of tea. Falling-apart characters are more interesting to play, she says, admitting to a fondness for “dark, weird stuff, things other people would say, ‘Eww, I’d never do that.’ I don’t do what I do because I want to be pretty and drink Champagne,” she states. Dozens of actresses who auditioned portrayed Cersei as “a haughty ice queen, a villainess,” the show runners say in a joint email. “When we watched Lena’s audition, we were struck by the humor she brought to the role. We never imagined Cersei as particularly funny, but Lena makes us laugh in pretty much every scene.” The humor she employs is bone dry and crackling with intelligence.”

On her experiences with depression:

I haven’t had a spell in a long time. I think some people’s brains are just wired that way if you’re a thinker. People who never get anxious amaze me. The world could be breaking up and they’re saying, ‘Everything’s fine!’ Getting older and having kids, you learn how to become less serious about it all.

On her collection of strikingly feminine tattoos which epitomize a yin-yang dichotomy; her right forearm is decorated with an open birdcage, her left with small birds in flight; she likes boxing and yoga.

I don’t like closed doors. If I go into a room, the cupboards have to be open. I always want more tattoos. It’s a terrible thing. I’ll be outside a tattoo shop and hear the needle and think, I could just get a little one that nobody would see.

On her split from musician Peter Dinklage, the father of her five-year-old son Wylie, after six years of marriage:

It’s tough. There’s a lot of hurt and sadness and disappointment. Grief. Massive grief. It’s a mourning process, and yet nobody has died.

On her childhood in England:

I was a free spirit with ideals. I’d do things like smoke cigarettes in the garage, pretending to be cool but feeling ill ... but I never went to jail!

On ignoring traditional female stereotypes:

Sometimes you’re in a room that feels incredibly male-centric, which is hard. I can’t play that game and sometimes women can be misread if they have strong opinions. I can be very blunt. There are moments when I should shh myself. But I won’t.

Does her ferocity match that of her character.

Yes when it comes to my child.
(That protectiveness will soon be compounded as Headey is pregnant with her second child.

Headey was born in Bermuda, where her mother and father, both British police cadets, were stationed. When she was five, the family moved back to West Yorkshire, England. At 16, she and classmates wrote and performed in *The Coca-Cola Dragon*, a musical about the Vietnam War. Headey makes light of it: “Teen girls holding rifles [she cradles an imaginary weapon], saying, ‘I was a soldier. . .’” But it was one of nine plays selected for production in the National Theatre’s annual youth talent competition. “As a kid, it’s pretty amazing,” she says. “You go to London and work with a voice coach, then one night you perform on one of their stages.” A casting director saw Headey’s photo in the Olivier Theatre foyer and arranged an audition. “‘There’s that strange face,’” jokes Headey. “‘Let’s use it!’” They did.

Lena Headey also appears in MORE magazine online: <http://www.more.com/entertainment/celebrities-movies-tv-music/lena-headey-wicked-good>.