



How
to be a
Hepburn
in a Hilton
World

The Art of Living with Style, Class, and Grace

Jordan Christy

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Introduction

Stupid Girls

“Girls can be stupid.” —*Becky Christy*

It would be naive to think we could ever again have a woman exactly identical to Jackie O., Audrey Hepburn, or Mother Teresa; we live in a different world now, and like my mom says, “It was a simpler time then.” We don’t typically gather the family around the transistor radio anymore or get asked to go steady by a Wally Cleaver, but just because we’re surrounded by BlackBerrys, miniskirts, and *The Real World* doesn’t mean we can’t take some of those graceful, sophisticated, old-fashioned values and implement them in our everyday, modern-girl lives. Let’s be honest: our current female landscape is embarrassing, flippant, and shallow. We need to start representing a new type of It Girl—a successful, stylish, smart girl who still maintains classic ideals and values. Is that possible, you ask? Yes. Yes! YES!

My mother is a very wise, beautiful, and funny woman. Over the years, she has taught my sister and me invaluable life lessons and passed along nuggets of wisdom, such as, “Don’t stick any knives in the toaster while I’m gone.” One of her most comical and ingenious statements came a few years back when I was home from college, rambling about how I had found there were very few girls I actually wanted to hang out with—it seemed to me that, in general, the majority of our gender were capable of only superficial attitudes, boy-obsessed rants, and dumbed-down speech. In response to my tirade, she accurately and simply summed up my sentiments, saying, “Well, girls can be stupid.”

I think it’s safe to say we all know a Stupid Girl or two. They’re tossing their hair by the water cooler at the office, they’re sporting silky thongs with low-rise pants in the grocery line, and there’s at least one in every good reality show. They crash their BMWs in Hollywood, excessively use the word *like*, and drape themselves all over the nearest male. They’re obnoxious and, for some reason, always the center of attention. Why? Because smart, classy, and successful ladies’ slots on the local news have been supplanted by a play-by-play of Paris’s clinkworthy antics and Lindsay Lohan’s spiral into rehab. Even when the limelight finally shifts away from one Stupid Girl it only shines on another one who is all too willing to sell her self-respect for a little “free” publicity. Our girl-world has become saturated with fishnet hose and unflattering f-bombs, and thanks to the vicious media cycle of contagious celebrity gossip and endless barrage of Girls Gone Wild horror stories, it appears as though the majority of our female generation is being represented by a couple of skinny airheads out in LA.

I think we can agree that while most of us don’t even begin to consider those girls to be accurate representations of our kind, much less role models, it is somewhat vexing that they dominate the headlines day in and day out. Clearly, scandals sell, and these girls certainly provide more than enough fodder for news outlets, so while they may not have one valid exploit or commendable achievement to claim, they are definitely making someone a whole lot of money. Before the Stupids came to power, gossip rags had to resort to “Four-Headed Alien Baby” and “Polka-Dotted UFO

"Sighting" headlines, but these girls have eliminated the need for fabricated news—their exploits are ridiculous enough to sell millions of glossy tabloids every week! And thanks to our culture's reality-TV-induced obsession with drama and incessant need for water-cooler small talk, we continue to put these girls in the spotlight by engaging in the round-and-round cycle of celebrity gossip and constant enthrallment with shallow, scandalous news. Even if we balk at their actions and roll our eyes at their lewd behavior, the ad dollars keep cha-chinging while their scandalous outings keep them in our face 24/7. It's hard not to participate in discourse about their conduct, but if we want to begin cultivating a culture of class, style, and grace, we'll have to stop focusing on the Stupid Girl captions and start making our own Smart Girl headlines.

There's no getting around it, my mom was absolutely right: girls can be stupid. Pink's commentary on this current mindless epidemic in her hit song "Stupid Girls" is all too perfect. She has said in response to the controversy over the video, in which she portrays celebrities such as Jessica Simpson, Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, Lindsay Lohan, and Paris Hilton doing everything from shopping and tanning to awaiting cosmetic surgery and just being painfully thin, "Smart and sexy are not oil and water," and she explains the song title: "My definition of stupid is wasting your opportunity to be yourself." So many girls are indeed wasting their opportunity. We live in a free country with rights, freedoms, and opportunities that women would have killed for a hundred years ago—and instead of voting, getting the CEO spot, going for a doctorate, or volunteering at a women's shelter, many young women today are too busy shaking their badonkadonks in short-lived music videos and diligently bedazzling their cell phones with more pink rhinestones.

Even more sadly, our society has placed girls like this on a reality-television pedestal and kicked classy and well-spoken ladies to the curb. Think about it. Have you ever heard of Nancy Alcorn and her international organization that freely houses thousands of at-risk females? Or Cathleen Black, the "First Lady of American Magazines" and one of *Forbes's* 100 Most Powerful Women? What about Sarah Ratty's groundbreaking eco-conscious clothing line, Ciel? Of course not! Let's face it—it's high time some extraordinary young women brought self-respect, intelligence, and true beauty back to the female gender.

Do you remember your first encounter with a Stupid Girl? Ah, what an unforgettable moment. The first Stupid Girls I recall meeting were Mandy and Heidi in my seventh-grade class (names have been changed to protect the ignorant). When they weren't busy making out with the better half of the JV basketball team, they would start malicious rumors, rip off the smart kids' essays, and periodically banish core members from their exclusive clique—all while proudly displaying their junior high goods in the tightest Abercrombie shirts money could buy. Their demure and tactful sides would particularly shine through during any event or rally that required the ascent of bleachers, and I specifically remember hearing about the classiness of the weekend that they discovered Pabst Blue Ribbon. They were your classic Stupid Girls.

Now, I was perfectly content flipping through Delia's catalogs, listening to Bruce Hornsby and *The Joshua Tree*, and writing amateur pop songs on my keyboard after school every day, so I never really got the appeal of the Stupid Girls. I remember noting all of their antics with mild amusement and silently wondering what on earth they would turn out like as adults, but I can't honestly say that their whole shtick appealed to me. In fact, it actually revolted me more than anything and eventually became my catalyst for trying to represent a different type of young female—a successful, smart, stylish girl who didn't give away all her dignity. When given the choice to go out boozing or stay home and watch *Steel Magnolias* with my mom and sister, I always opted for the latter. If I had the choice between dinner and good conversation with my best friends or hitting the party circuit to meet

up with less-than-desirable high school males, I would end up splitting a pizza every time. I discovered that I didn't have to participate in the Stupid Girls' ~~cruising-the-strip-smoking-and-hollering-obscurities~~ antics to be liked, to get ahead in life, or, most of all, to be a happy, fulfilled person.

Now, perhaps Mandy and Heidi turned out to be really sweet, refined, well-rounded individuals. I haven't kept up with either of them, so I can't say for sure, but I'm guessing they're still manipulative and selfish and using their feminine wiles to get what they want (which would only add to my best friend's comical theory that anyone who was popular in junior high is doomed for failure in adulthood). Perhaps they eventually found their groove and individual passions, but there seemed to be a whole lot of unnecessary idiocy during those crucial years between puberty and college.

Actually, on second thought, I think I *can* almost guess what kind of people Mandy and Heidi turned out to be: the kind of girls that make headline news every day on MTV—and I think we all know of whom I speak. Even if we don't pick up *People* in the grocery store line, we can catch the Stupid Girls' most recent fender benders, lawsuits, or jail time on the evening news. Sure, it's easy to laugh about a pop star's latest run-in with the law over lunch with our friends and read about the latest hook-ups in *Us Weekly* while we're at the beach, but when all is said and done and the next generation of young women grows up not knowing anything different, we are going to have a problem on our hands. Intelligent and refined girls are by far the exception these days—shouldn't it be the other way around?

Hopefully this book is more than just a humorous personal guidebook—with any luck, it will also serve as a call to action. Let's stop groveling and making idiots of ourselves around guys. Let's start walking and talking with style and poise. Let's stop letting a few infamously twiggy icons dictate our dress and diet. Let's make intelligence look attractive! Can we do it? Again, I say, YES! But first, you must know what you're up against in a Stupid Girl world. It's easy to slowly slide into stupidity with just a few small, bad choices, so we need to be on the lookout for them ahead of time. Otherwise, in the moment, it can be extremely tempting to give in to mojitos that are too strong, skirts that are too short, and men that are too stupid. Enter exhibit A.

Let's imagine a typical social scenario—you've just arrived at the local club. You've got a table, chair, a drink, and an audience. This shouldn't be a socially fatal equation, but for many girls, it is. There are two ways this scene could develop—the good way and the not-so-good way.

In a good scenario, you would simply continue to sip your drink, order some mozzarella sticks, chat it up with your friends (and possibly the waiter), and thoroughly enjoy yourself. In a not-so-good scenario, you would be scaling the cocktail table, ripping your skirt, spilling that drink, and making a fool of yourself singing an off-key version of "American Pie." For many girls, the question of what to do in this situation is puzzling and proves to be their ruin, but it's really not that tricky; the minute you hoist that stiletto heel up onto the barstool upholstery, you have crossed into Stupid Girl territory. Whether it be getting jiggy with it during happy hour at the local bar or scaling the speaker system at an outdoor Kiss concert, decisions like this ultimately determine your reputation as a charming young lady or a cheap floozy.

Exhibit B. Here's a for-instance that many of us probably encounter almost daily: the guy-I-have-a-crush-on-just-stopped-and-talked-to-me scenario. You're at the gym, sweating profusely and tripping down off the elliptical machine on your way to the Pilates mats, when *he* walks in. You've already predetermined that if he came in today you would say something to him (but are now seriously reconsidering after spotting the amount of sweat pooling off your forehead and onto your iPod). What to do next? Well, there are two ways this could play out—the good way and the not-so-good way.

In a good scenario, you would simply continue on your way to the yoga section, flash him a big sweaty grin, and possibly offer up a “Hey” on the way there. If he’s interested, he’ll take it from there. In the not-so-good scenario, you would jump said crush and flood him with small talk, compliments, and subtle marriage proposals. There’s simply no need to pounce all over the poor sap; coming on like a crazy, desperate lady will only scare the poor boy away. What you really want to do is lure him in with mystery and intrigue... which we will talk more about later. In a word, the good scenario just might end in victory, with an exchange of numbers and a date invitation, while the not-so-good scenario might end in utter disaster with him slowly backing away from your overpowering approach not to mention foul gym smell.

Another one of the big hurdles we encounter in our current Stupid Girl world is the issue of dress. With so many see-through tunics and threadbare halter tops, our options for overexposure appear to be endless, and judging by most billboards and ad campaigns, heck, we really don’t even need to wear any clothes at all! But in reality, conscientious and chary planning yields the greatest outfits. For example, let’s envision a common shopping dilemma—what should we wear to Saturday’s social outing? Enter exhibit C.

In a good scenario, you might carefully choose a lovely knee-length dress that will look stunning on you at the big Saturday night event *and* still leave something to the imagination. You will be smiling confidently, knowing that you have made a good choice. In a not-so-good scenario, you might purchase a dress that’s missing the middle half to conveniently leave your midriff exposed, in addition to a skirt that provides your cheeks the opportunity to make an appearance at some point during the evening, as well. To sum up, the outfit would most likely cause you to look like a hooker. You might be smiling when you arrive, but you won’t be for long, since you’re about to get kicked out of the party for being underdressed!

These are just a few of the many grueling conditions we’ll be up against in the fight against the Stupid Girls. It’s like that old Persuaders song “Thin Line Between Love and Hate,” except I think in this case it’s a big, thick line between smart and stupid. But rest assured that each time we make the right choice, it will get easier and easier. Sometimes it might seem more convenient to just give in and act, talk, and walk like them, but we need to try to think long-term here (as if anyone really needs to remind us to do that—we’ve all had our wedding colors picked out since kindergarten). When all is said and done and we’ve fought the good fight and run the good race, what would we rather have our headstone say? “Beloved Wife, Mother, and Friend,” or something more along the lines of “A Lot of Poor Choices Here”? I think the decision is clear.

I have learned that Stupid Girls are going to be everywhere. If it’s not Mandy and Heidi in seventh grade, it’s Kaylie in high school. Then it’s Samantha in college and Caroline at your first job. And the list goes on. We’ll probably never be able to escape them or change them, but we can certainly step up our game and provide a glowing example of what an It Girl really should be—confident, chic, and clever. It can be tempting to fall into their trap of “like, I don’t even know what to do tonight” lingo or hours of mind-numbing *Real World* marathons, but if we continue to surround ourselves with other stimulating people, ideas, and activities, we’ll successfully navigate the muddy waters of stupid together.

Correct me if I’m wrong, but I think that you and I are a lot alike. Rather than stumbling along the trail of tube tops, hangovers, and jail time, we would like to find success, style, and love—the classy way. Even though it goes against almost every depraved and self-indulgent trend in our current culture, we are uninterested in contributing to the mucky wasteland of fake boobs and hair extensions and would instead like to, if at all possible, attempt to leave the world a slightly better place than

when we found it. We're even a little old-fashioned at heart and think that if that's a problem, it might be a good one—a problem that other young ladies in our generation could use more of today! Well, I'm here to tell you that we're not alone.

The adorable and talented Hayden Panettiere says, "I think that, now more than ever, young girls need a good role model. My mom always says, 'You are the books you read and the people you surround yourself with.'" Famed singer-songwriter Suzanne Vega has said, "I think people are sexy when they have a sense of humor, when they are smart, when they have some sense of style, when they are kind, when they express their own opinions, when they are creative, when they have character." And the gorgeous and witty Lauren Graham says, "Perspective is the most important thing to have in life." There are millions more of us out there, too, and it's time that we stand up and be counted. We've sat on the sidelines for too long while our trashy counterparts scooped up all the local and national headlines with their buffoon-like antics and shockworthy scandals.

I'm not sure exactly how or when we got to this point (a mere fifty-some years ago, Lucille Ball's TV network wouldn't even allow her to be shown pregnant on TV—it just wasn't done!), but it is indeed a different world than Audrey's bygone era of pretty dresses, classy speech, and charming behavior. Rather than having a humble, gracious attitude toward fame and beauty, most girls these days throw every last piece of dignity out the window at the first sign of stardom and apparently find sex tapes just about as productive as an acting audition. Instead of pursuing dreams and goals with hard work and integrity, many fellow females feel a sense of entitlement and privilege and wind up shopping, partying, and sleeping their lives away. And while girls can be sweet creatures, I have little to no tolerance for the "spoiled princess" act. If you aren't familiar with this recently adopted royalty persona, check out MTV's *My Super Sweet 16* and be prepared to gouge your eyes out. Nothing is more unattractive than a rude, bratty, self-absorbed girl flashing her goods around the neighborhood and barking orders to her spineless parents and minion friends. Yeek!

Famed producer Julie Leifermann has said, "Having known Audrey, I have less tolerance for the star thing... if Audrey Hepburn can live on the road for three months, and be more talented than 99.9 percent of anybody on this planet, and come in and be on time and know her material and be delightful and professional and give you gold on camera—when I come across the behavior now, I have a really hard time with it. Celebrities today need to go to the Audrey Hepburn School of How to Be a Star."

So, what is it that motivates girls to act like deranged monkeys in tutus? Did their mothers pull their pigtails a bit too tight when they were little? Did some boys reject their second-grade love notes? Did they catch a glimpse of Madonna in her pointy-bra getup and go batty? Somehow, in the last five decades we went from Eva Marie Saint daintily shimmying up the side of Mount Rushmore in a pintucked dress in *North by Northwest* to every quasifamous reality star "accidentally" leaking a sex tape online. It's actually a tad frightening when you think about it—in a mere fifty years, our legacy as levelheaded, engaging creatures has become twisted and warped to the point that the female gender (and the idiotic two or three who represent it most loudly) is almost laughable.

Parenting tactics have undoubtedly come into question with the glamorization of said celebrities' own blood relations, including Lynne Spears's unpublished memoir, the bizarre rise of Dina Lohan's own star, and the dubious actions of dozens of mothers on *The Real Housewives of Orange County*. Peer pressure is undeniably more intense than ever, and the widely accepted popularity of underage boozing and drug use certainly can't help the situation. The list is endless, and to be honest, I'm not sure that anyone knows exactly where we went wrong, but I am convinced that all hope is not lost.

Through hard work and high standards, we can become class acts that outshine the cheap stars. We can turn in our tube tops and gum chomping for pinstripes and promotions. We can ditch the party

hats and all-night benders for burgeoning careers and real friends. As we step up to the plate, become more informed, and begin to influence those around us for the better, we will begin to see headline news stories that sound more like the following:

WOMAN DISCOVERS CURE FOR CANCER
GIRLS DOMINATE THE BUSINESS WORLD
HOLLYWOOD RETURNS TO OLD-SCHOOL CHIC
FEMALES LEAD THE POLITICAL MACHINE
FASHION MAKES A CLASSY SHIFT
ANOTHER NOBEL PEACE PRIZE
AWARDED TO LEADING LADY

This current rubble of mindless glitter girls and senseless nitwits has become the norm, and it would be easy to simply fall in line and conform to the times. No one expects much more out of you women these days, and when one does distance herself from the masses and present a respectable feminine image, she shines brightly above the rest. It wouldn't take a lick of effort to follow suit with the Stupids, but it will take guts and smarts to go beyond the status quo. Why? Because very few attempt to do exceptional things anymore. Not many put in more work for less pay. Rarely is anyone willing to be considered foolish and unpopular for the sake of dignity and self-respect, and a very select few dare to rise above the good to get to the great. So when we do exceed what's expected of us it's only natural that we will stand out in the crowd.

I'm convinced that our new classy standards can raise the cultural bar and turn more heads than the Stupids' exposed bra straps. I am positive that our hard work and long hours can put to shame the popular purse-dog-shopping-and-sweatsuit-wearing. And I know that our witty, well-informed words can speak louder than the Stupids' collective strain of "OMG!" We do live in a different world from Audrey's time of pearls, full skirts, and record players, but I don't doubt that we can put style, class, and grace back on the map again. We *can* be Hepburns... even in a Hilton world!

Chapter One

Keep Your Chin Up and Your Skirt Down

“You have a good many little gifts and virtues, but there is no need of parading them, for conceit spoils the finest genius... the great charm of all power is modesty.” —*Louisa May Alcott*

Self-respect is one of the greatest assets a girl can possess, and yet it’s one of the biggest things we’re lacking these days. Oh, the shame that’s been documented by reality TV crews all over the world! And the drunken party pics that have been posted on MySpace pages all across the Web! Not to mention the countless cleavage-baring, club-hopping tops that have been purchased on clearance! But despite the constant news coverage, no one actually wants to see crotches flashed while females climb out of limousines and boobs spilling out at the Oscars. Somewhere along the way, we’ve lost the art and mystery of self-respect. So how do we get it back? Believe it or not, there are many ways to be an A-list hottie without giving it all away. It starts with leaving something to the imagination, asking yourself if this is what you want to be remembered for, navigating the muddy waters of “new peer pressure,” and finding out what guys *really* want. (Surprise! It’s not what you think.)

One of the fastest ways to gain (or lose) respect is with your image. Think about it: when Mariah Carey tries to squeeze everything into that double-zero miniskirt from seventh grade, words like *classy* and *admirable* don’t usually spring to mind. But when Jessica Alba dons an elegant, floor-length golden number that successfully covers all controversial body parts at the Academy Awards, she positively commands attention. Before we even open our mouths to speak, our clothes will always do the talking for us, announcing loudly whether or not we respect ourselves. It’s true that you never get a second chance to make a first impression, and many of our first impressions are crucial ones—interviewing for a big job, meeting future in-laws, making an important business contact, going on a blind date. The first impression should be memorable... but in a good way!

We rarely hear about someone being judged for covering up too much skin, but when an attention-seeking star steps out in a see-through, low-cut dress, we all get to read about it in the next day’s headlines. Wardrobe successes and taboos are always points for conversation, and when things are too tight or too small, when boobs are loosed and crotches are exposed, rest assured that people are going to talk. And in this case, it’s best to be on the receiving end of flattering remarks and glowing compliments rather than getting the short end of the apparel stick. When in doubt about an outfit, err on the side of caution. People would be hard-pressed to find something bad to say when you look modestly glamorous.

So what is *your* image saying about *you*? Take the Hepburn Guide to Self-Respect Quiz to find out!

1. It’s girls’ night out, and you’re doing dinner and a movie. You:
 - a. Change into some Seven jeans and a cute new tunic
 - b. Slip on a denim mini and a halter top

- c. Pull on your stand-by scrubs and sweatshirt

2. While you're waiting in the lobby for your big interview, you:
 - a. Read *Elle* and try to sit up straight
 - b. Make a beeline for the bathroom to apply more lipstick
 - c. Suddenly realize that you shouldn't have worn flip-flops
3. After a successful first date with rich, handsome, has-to-be-The-One, you:
 - a. Settle for a good-night peck on the cheek and wait for him to call
 - b. Jump him before he has time to think twice
 - c. Figure he'll never call back, and down a pint of Ben & Jerry's
4. When asked to strip naked for the new MTV reality show, you:
 - a. Politely decline and wait for your next fifteen minutes of fame
 - b. Don't waste a minute shedding those layers
 - c. Say no because you're positive you would look horrific
5. The celebrity you admire the most is:
 - a. Reese Witherspoon
 - b. Pamela Anderson
 - c. Kirstie Alley

Now tally up the answers and check the Hilton–Hepburn spectrum below. Are you closer to being an Audrey or a Paris?

If you picked mostly A's: With just a few tweaks, you could be a certified Hepburn! For the most part, you think Paris and her cohorts are ridiculous, and you aspire to be anything *but* that. You always work what you've got but never flaunt it to the point of excess. You have a classy sense of style, and you exude confidence wherever you go. You're smart, successful, and know what you want. Guys respect you for respecting yourself, but occasionally they might mistake your confidence for arrogance. Just don't forget to let down your guard every once in a while and take some chances in style, life, and love.

If you picked mostly B's: It seems that your Hepburn certificate may be temporarily revoked, but that's okay. We can work with that. You might own a few tops cut down-to-there, and you seem to always find yourself in an endless circle of bars, boys, and broken bra straps. The world of Paris, Lindsay, et al. reminds you a lot of your own life, but you're not sure if that's a good thing. To start attracting the type of guys you'll want to date and the kind of girls you'll want to be real friends with, you need to start with developing some self-respect. With a little image tweaking and some old-fashioned words of wisdom, you'll soon have a newfound confidence and become an It Girl.

If you picked mostly C's: You could probably not care less about being a modern old-fashioned girl right now. You're smart, headstrong, and are not usually impressed with social requirements and trends. You're not concerned with Paris or her friends and don't really care what outfit fits best in the bust or if the shoes match the bag. You have a healthy measure of self-respect; it's just not being channeled into the image you project. But by the end of this book, you won't be able to contain your new poise, and you'll discover that Hepburn style can be surprisingly comfortable *and* chic.

Thanks to the fact that we're diverse, the smart, sophisticated girl-world is going to look a little different to each of us; we wouldn't want it any other way. Not one of us is going to look exactly like Audrey Hepburn, and that's just fine. We can pursue class, style, and grace in our own distinct ways. The legendary Judy Garland said it best: "Always be a first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of somebody else." We're all starting out at different points on the classy, stylish

and graceful spectrum, but no matter where you're at, you can simply make small changes. Whether you're still shopping at Abercrombie or already completed debutante training, there's no such thing as too far gone.

The great thing about living with class, style, and grace is that it has nothing to do with wealth. Being classy is an attitude and outlook on life; the art of gracefulness is how we behave and act when no one is watching; being stylish is how we present ourselves to others. It might involve our clothes, but it's not defined by designer labels. It might include our job, but it doesn't matter if we are white-collar or blue-collar. It might entail a different set of social obligations, but it's not dictated by where we were raised. Why? *Because class is not defined by our circumstances—it's our reaction to those circumstances that defines who we are.* It doesn't matter if you work at McDonald's or the Trump Tower—are you punctual and courteous? It is not a matter of whether you went to an exclusive private institution or a free public school—did you make the most of every opportunity given to you? It doesn't make a bit of difference whether you're designing clothes for Vera Wang or working in the fabric section of Wal-Mart—are you attentive and accommodating? No matter what your upbringing was, what your current friend situation looks like, or what your yearly income is, you can do this. I don't care if you're living in a 550-square-foot apartment in Lincoln, Nebraska, or in a penthouse on Park Avenue. It doesn't matter if you're scraping by on minimum wage or raking in a six-figure income. You can live with style, class, and grace no matter where you are, who you know, or what you do.

One of the greatest benefits of living with confidence and self-worth is that we don't need to constantly rely on others for fulfillment. Many of our lady counterparts feel the need to tinker about the teensiest tops known to man for attention, or be constantly snookered or high to have fun, but when you naturally feel good about yourself, you can focus on being the fabulous female you are, rather than seeking approval from every Tom, Dick, and Harry. Journalist, essayist, and novelist Joan Didion very accurately said, "To free us from the expectations of others, to give us back to ourselves—there lies the great, singular power of self-respect." It's a freeing mind-set to no longer have to derive our value from others.

So how do you start implementing a modern yet old-fashioned level of self-respect in your life? Author Stacey Charter says, "Don't rely on someone else for your happiness and self-worth. Only you can be responsible for that." Clearly, if we didn't get it from our parents earlier, they probably aren't going to start doing it for us now. Our friends can provide support, but they can't be the instigators (although it would be a fun concept to try together!). And as much as we are trained to believe that guys will bring fulfillment to our lives, they won't bring everlasting happiness, either. We won't find it in short skirts or catcalls or lap dances or one-night stands—it has to start with us. If you don't respect yourself, no one else will.

One of the best ways to cultivate a healthy self-image is by celebrating your positive and unique qualities. Try a few of the following exercises to further confirm your lovely, distinct traits and characteristics.

- 👉 **Take a personality test.** I'm obsessed with taking personality tests—you can discover so many fun facts about yourself, new facets that you may not have seen before. Whether it's a Myers-Briggs or a "9 types" test (my personal favorite), take a minute to answer a few questions—you might be pleasantly surprised!
- 👉 **Ask a friend.** Get a close friend or family member to list some of your most admirable gifts and unique traits. I think they called these "warm fuzzies" in elementary school.

- 👉 **Identify other positives.** List the characteristics of someone you admire, whether it be a first lady or your grandma. Which of those characteristics do you see in yourself? What areas do you want to improve on?
- 👉 **Find your niche.** Identify something you have to offer the world that no one else can. At the risk of sounding like a hokey self-help guru, I am convinced that every person has a unique set of gifts specifically designed to contribute to the world, and if those gifts aren't used, a void will go unfilled.
- 👉 **Get out.** One of the best ways to instantly boost your mood and self-image is to get a little fresh air. Especially if you're experiencing the day-in-and-day-out buzz-kill of fluorescent office lighting, just half an hour of natural sunlight will do wonders for a sagging attitude.
- 👉 **Educate yourself.** To quote the old Saturday morning PSAs, "the more you know," the better you feel about yourself. Get informed on political issues, global needs, current events, and even new books and movies, and feel your confidence expand.
- 👉 **Give it away.** Do something nice for someone else. Surprise a pregnant coworker with a baby gift, help an elderly neighbor take out the trash, take your mom on a lunch date—nothing will boost your self-respect more quickly than a random act of kindness.

Now that we're committed to putting self-respect first, what's the next step? Like we determined before, our outward appearance makes the first and strongest impression, so let's go there.

First things first: we all need to have a debriefing on our wardrobes. I'm unsure of the exact origin of the phrase "leave something to the imagination," but I *am* sure that these are words of wisdom. I know it's enticing for us to show off our young, hot bods, but never underestimate the power of some cleverly concealed skin. Many of my well-endowed friends have said that they're continually tempted to prop up the girls on a virtual V-neck shelf, so we went in search of a more flattering fit and found it! Try on a scoop neck for size instead of your usual plunger (J.Crew has them in a myriad of colors). Or perhaps you're a compulsive short-skirter? Try branching out with a sleek and sophisticated pencil skirt (Banana Republic has yet to fail me in this department).

If you really insist on going up-to-there on your lower half, why not add a full-coverage, flowy blouse on top? (Hit up BCBG for one of these.) Or try a kitten heel (Target, baby!) once a week in place of your five-inch stilettos and your feet will thank you, too. And if you're going to exercise your right to bare arms (and cleavage) on top, opt for a wide-leg trouser pant or tailored pair of dark-rinse jeans on the bottom (Anthropologie's selection of wide-leg pants is unrivaled, in my opinion). Rather than putting it all out there, let's leave the people wanting more. When in doubt, don't let it all hang out!

Next, we ladies need to stand up straight. Good posture instantly inspires respect and gets attention. You won't believe what good posture will do for your image (think Nicole Kidman). So pull those shoulders back and hold your head up high. You'll feel like you've undergone an instant makeover, and you'll look like it, too—great posture can make you instantly appear five pounds slimmer! And not only will you *appear* more confident, you'll *feel* more confident.

To make things easier, when you leave the house each morning, make a mental note to walk taller (or leave yourself an actual note on the door). Then try replacing that stiff executive desk chair at the office or at home with a core-strengthening, posture-improving exercise ball (I recommend the FitBALL Plus in Pearl—it doesn't pick up dust bunnies!). Then sign up for a yoga or Pilates class with a girlfriend, and within a week you'll feel inches taller and be gliding along the sidewalks like Gwyneth Paltrow. Add a two-inch heel and you may well be truly unstoppable.

Lastly, work on making eye contact. It's just a tiny detail, but it could make the difference between being just another shifty-eyed shrinking violet and getting that big job! I work in the music industry and have conducted countless media-training sessions with artists and bands, and one of the first rules of thumb they are taught is to maintain eye contact with the interviewer or audience. I have personally seen the positive effects of eye contact (Faith Hill is great at it) and, likewise, the adverse effects of little to no eye contact. One particular artist (who will remain unnamed) actually looked down and texted his manager throughout the entire course of an interview with a major music publication. Not surprisingly, his next album did *not* receive a good review from that magazine!

Good eye contact personally connects you with your audience and cuts physical distance in half, so make it a point to lock eyeballs with friends when they're talking, with dates over dinner, and with your boss while he's giving you an assignment. Whether you're at an interview or a cocktail party, eye contact with fellow conversers will communicate intelligence and aplomb. Not only will you appear more personable, you'll have an instant air of confidence and self-possession. Confident girls who conduct themselves with style and grace are memorable, and when you make eye contact with those around you, you'll be hard to forget.

In the eternal words of Momma Aretha: R-E-S-P-E-C-T! Besides being a flat-out brilliant song (as well as the obvious anthem for any self-empowerment campaign or story), the message is still clear and relevant, forty-some years after its release date. Aretha did it, and now we're going to find out what it means to us!

Our current shopaholic/clubaholic/talkaholic culture is very different from our grandmothers' world of sock hops and petticoats. It can take years to build up trust and gain respect from others, and those gains can be lost entirely with just one bad move. Between all of the get-famous-quick reality shows and drunk-and-disorderly MySpace pics, it's easy to do some irreparable damage with just one lax step. For example, thanks to YouTube, Miss South Carolina will forever be known as that girl who flubbed the map question. Not to mention the endless stream of *The Bachelor* contestants that have made permanent champagne-'n'-hot-tub spectacles of themselves on national television. And, of course, Paris Hilton has yet to live down her infamous "night in Paris." These respectability slip-ups, however, do not have to happen to *us*. Respect and self-respect stem from discipline, and discipline is all about the little (and big) choices we make every day. And the big ones might not be as difficult to make as you think.

First of all, we need to always ask ourselves what we would do if our grandmothers were here. Would Grandma approve of that audition tape for *The Real World*? Doubtful. How about the miscreant boy you dragged home last night? Probably not. Or how about a Coyote-Ugly-tabletop birthday dance? Definitely a no. I've finally figured out that somebody is always watching, always judging our actions, and sometimes that someone turns out to be our boss, our little sister, or, yes, our grandmother. After years of building our reputations as hard workers, intelligent students, and the world's greatest daughters, why would we want to throw it all away for one impulsive low?

When it comes to understanding consequences, Anne Hathaway, teen princess turned red carpet staple, sets a great example: "I really don't drink, I don't do drugs. I feel like right now I've been given so many opportunities I don't want to mess it up with those things." I have concluded that no opportunity is so worthwhile, no circumstance so urgent, that it should make us ditch our values and convictions. It may be tempting to post those pictures on MySpace, but many employers now scan potential employees' profiles and make decisions based on what they see. It can be tons of fun to go

out clubbing until the wee hours on a Wednesday, but does your job depend on you being on time in the morning? And as much as I love reality TV, I've realized that I don't really want to be remembered for an embarrassing, short-lived stint on VH1 or YouTube. Whatever you decide, just make sure that you set your standards high and stick by them no matter what.

Now, we're respectable dames, but that doesn't mean we can't have any fun. Call us what you will—do-gooders, prudes, goody-two-shoes (do people still use that term?)—the quintessential good girl always get a bad rap for being dull, priggish, lame, and stuffy. But I've got a lot of friends who could give Tina Fey and Amy Poehler a run for their comedic money. Just because we aren't letting it all hang out on national television or getting sauced and making out with the copier repairman in the break room doesn't mean we can't have a good time! So in celebration of our tasteful craziness, I've listed a few (tried-and-tested!) classy, graceful, and stylish alternatives that will solidify your It Girl status yet leave you feeling regret-free the next day.

1. The next time the gang goes out for the night, try springing for a virgin Bellini during rounds two and three instead of the usual martini. It's one of my favorite nonalcoholic drinks (my husband used to be a bartender, so I've made him fix me every yummy nonalcoholic concoction in the book). This sweet, peachy/beachy drink is fun, tasty, and pretty to look at. But best of all, you'll remember how you got home! Try it during your next night out, and even if the girls are coming over for a fun night in, whip up the quick, easy recipe at home.

Virgin Bellini

1 part peach syrup

3 parts Sprite

Ice cubes

Dash of cherry grenadine

Maraschino cherries (optional)

1. Pour peach syrup and Sprite into blender with ice that is equivalent to the liquid level. Blend.
 2. Pour into tall champagne flutes and add a dash of cherry grenadine for flavor and color.
 3. Serve with maraschino cherries (optional). Bottoms up!
2. The next time *Rock of Love* comes on (I'm sorry, that has to be one of the worst reality shows of all time) and you start seriously contemplating lowering your IQ for a brief fifteen minutes of fame, flip over to something expletive-free and halfway stimulating, like a do-it-yourself home-makeover show on HGTV. Take a quiz at their online Web site to discover your own interior style, and register you and your roommate for a shot at the show and an interior-design makeover. They won't even make you take off your clothes!
3. If you're like me, when you're not working at your computer, you're probably on there IM'ing, or Facebooking, or online shopping. It's only natural to be occasionally tempted to upload last spring break's racy late-night pics to your Facebook profile. But rather than giving in to idiocy when you get the urge, head on over to your e-mail account instead and

type up a quick message to your best friend from high school that you haven't said boo to in ages. Chances are you have stuff to catch up on, and it will make her day to hear from you!

4. Have you recently been contacted by a sleazy K-Fed sort (who you would usually never give a second thought to, but you're lonely)? Don't let yourself give in to desperation! Otherwise, you'll soon end up like Michael Scott on *The Office*: "What's it like being single? I'm optimistic, because every day I get a little more desperate, and desperate situations yield the quickest results." Nooooo! There is absolutely no reason whatsoever for someone as classy and fabulous as you to stoop to desperate lows just because you're beginning to lose hope in the male gender. Rather than spending the night with some deadbeat, show him the door and go buy that great pair of boots you've been wanting (feel free to sing *R-E-S-P-E-C-T!* on the way to the store).
5. It can be disheartening when it appears as though every normal young lady now has the boobs and behind of a Greek goddess. Have you even been feeling tempted to enhance the girls, along with Heidi Montag and so many other females? When those of us who *have* stuck with what nature gave us start to feel like chopped liver, certain options can begin to be appealing. But rather than blowing all your savings on a shoddy boob job, just pick up a few push-up bras from Victoria's Secret and spend the rest on a cruise to the Bahamas. You'll be tan, happy, and silicone-free!

If we think that we are the only ones who benefit from our classy choices, we're wrong. One of the rare tactful, graceful, and stylish girls in Hollywood today, Reese Witherspoon, has said, "Creating a cultural icon out of someone who goes, 'I'm stupid, isn't it cute?' makes me want to throw daggers. I want to say to them, 'My grandma did not fight for what she fought for just so you can start telling women it's fun to be stupid. Saying that to young women, little girls, my daughter? It's not okay.'" Self-respect isn't just for us, for the now. It's also for the preservation of the dignity, class, and fabulousness of femininity for future generations of young women.

My younger sister said to me a while back, "If we think female role models are bad now, can you just imagine what it's going to be like when we have kids?" Yeeek. Do we really want our little nieces to have no better example to look up to than pole dancers and Hooters calendar girls? Who will our own daughters beg for an autograph from? Some rogue Disney Channel actress who freely offers up naked cell phone pictures? To ensure that our nieces, our little sisters, and our future daughters don't grow up to be Girls Gone Wild, let's keep our self-respect levels high and give them something to look up to.

The next time we're confronted with a sticky situation, we need to ask ourselves—is this really what I want to be remembered for? Is this what I want my kids to remember me for? My parents? My grandchildren? Horace Greeley, an American newspaper editor in the 1850s, said, "Fame is a vapor, popularity an accident, and riches take wings. Only one thing endures and that is character." Let's muster all of our newfound self-respect and make our lives count for something more than silly shenanigans and late nights at the club.

If the personal benefits of self-respect aren't initiative enough to up the class factor, then the lure of a potential boyfriend always seems to do the trick! While it appears that, many times, guys can't see past the short skirt in front of them, most men (well, the ones who are worth your time) are more perceptive than we give them credit for. Would an average red-blooded male really pick a self-respecting girl over a slutty one? Survey says: Yes!

Most of us have been tricked into thinking that all men are simply in it for the legs, boobs, and sex, but you might be surprised to find that the majority of guys have more in mind than just patches of exposed skin. I just heard that, if given the choice between meeting the love of their life or having great sex for six months, almost every single guy would pick meeting the love of his life. John Mayer (I'm going to go ahead and say right now that *Room for Squares* pretty much got me through the eleventh grade) has said, "Every guy wants a girl and a relationship with... real trust." He later went on to say, "I'm looking for my ideal soul mate. That is somebody who is confident enough to feel love at a moment when love is not being given. A lot of times, I feel like I'm on the road to support a family I don't even have yet. I don't have to tour as much as I do, but I want to for that future family. We're not the only ones who dream about finding "the one" and settling down with 2.5 kids and a nice picket fence!

Though it may not seem like it at times, many other guys would also prefer a smart, self-respecting girl they could take home to their mom, as opposed to Rhinestone Barbie. One of my closest guy friends even told me once that "most guys aren't actually interested in cheap girls." He went on to disclose that while they might be "fun for a while," they will probably never make it home to Mom, because guys ultimately want an interesting, self-respecting girl who can hold a halfway intelligent conversation.

Out of curiosity, I posed the question to several other guy friends and coworkers in a casual, informal environment (and was certifiably shocked by my findings!). I asked, "When given the choice, would you prefer a girl who is simply nice to look at from behind, or one you could take home to your mom?" To my pleasant surprise, *every one of them* said they would prefer the girl next door. This did satisfyingly shock me and slightly rejuvenate my belief in the male gender—the majority of guys really might prefer a smart, down-to-earth girl with a sense of humor to a busty airhead that will give it up on the first night. Bravo, boys! You guys really *can* tell the difference between a girl with self-esteem and smarts, and a pinup with a short skirt and an airbrushed manicure.

So if we want their undivided attention for about 2.4 seconds, we should keep wearing our glittery minis and doing the bend-and-snap. But if we want a real relationship with a real gentleman, we should just keep being our smart, classy, fabulous selves and they'll be beating down our doors in no time.

But what about those guys out there who are just in it for the mindless sex? Well, I don't know about you, but I personally wouldn't want to be with a guy who doesn't respect me, let alone care if I respect myself. These idiots are obviously not worth your time. For those who feel some kind of bizarre need to jump in the sack to prove just how much you love him anyway, a good note to keep in mind is that *if they don't want us without the sex, they're not going to want us with it*. Feel free to tap that to your bathroom mirror and read it every morning. If they're not really into you before hooking up, hopping into bed with them is not going to change anything. A jerk is a jerk is a jerk. It's time to stop being stupid and giving it up on the first date—it severely docks those classy, stylish Hepburn points!

If there's one thing that we intelligent, beautiful, and funnier-than-heck girls are *not*, it is desperate. A Hepburn doesn't need a piece of arm candy to walk tall or a strapping boy to make her life complete. No woman should ever have to convince a guy to want to be with her—*ever*. If a guy isn't into you, who cares? It's his loss. Cut him loose and move on already. The lovely Jennifer Aniston has said, "A relationship isn't going to make me survive. It's the cherry on top." Sure, I've blubbered for a few days over a lost love, but that was from a breakup that I instigated; in no way do I advocate crying into bowls of Ben & Jerry's for weeks over a rejection that came from someone else.

—any guy who has driven you to that point isn't worth your precious time, emotions, or Kleenex!

Case in point: ~~One of my old interns would often chat with me about her continuous cycle of boy woes, and after a particularly pathetic and painful conversation, I realized it was time to slap some common, self-respect sense into her. She spouted off the following discourse, proving once and for all that desperation is attractive on no one:~~

So, try to make sense of this one, Jordan. I called this guy Jake to ask if he would like to go out to eat on Friday and he said that he was busy studying. So, I asked how long it would take him to study and he said it would probably take all night long. But I figured he would probably need a break and want some food later on. So I called him later, around nine p.m., and asked if he was done studying yet. He said he was still really busy and couldn't go, but I decided just to drive to his house and surprise him anyway. So, I drove out to his house [author's note: said boy lives *thirty-five miles* away] and he said he still couldn't go! But I dragged him out of the house and drove him to a restaurant and can you believe what he said? He said, "You know, I like having you as a friend, but I just don't want to hang out this much." And I was like, "Well, we don't actually hang out that often, I've been trying to call you for a week and you're always busy." And he said, "Yeah, I'm just really busy right now and should get back to studying." Jordan, can you believe that? It's not like I'm asking him to marry me, I just like hanging out with him!

Ohhhh, where to start? Besides being obnoxious, she was practically waving the big red "I'm desperate" flag in this sweet boy's face. She was groveling and pleading—not a pretty picture. Her first clue to stop should have been that *she* had to call *him* (which we'll talk more about later). Next, his "Friday night studying" excuse should have immediately tipped her off. (Have you ever known a guy who chose to spend his Friday night studying rather than hang out with the love of his life? That's what I thought.) Then, his endless stream of "thanks, but no thanks" responses should have indicated that she'd crossed the line into desperate-weird-stalker territory. And finally, his "I just want to be friends" speech was the nail in this relationship's proverbial coffin.

After tactfully suggesting that she stop calling and beating down this poor boy's door, I hinted at how unattractive desperation is. This boy was obviously becoming smothered by her constant clinging and lack of self-awareness, and it's difficult for guys to want more when we won't give them a minute to breathe. (We'll talk more about that later, too!) I can see why lover boy chose to give her the cold shoulder. It is highly possible and strongly Jordan-recommended to keep that self-respect intact by not begging for affection. A Hepburn doesn't *need* that guy and shouldn't lower her standards by becoming embarrassingly desperate. And if you think that guys can't tell... well, apparently they can.

One of my good friends, Brett, was the object of every girl's desire in school. He was one of those dark-haired, blue-eyed, naturally tan specimens that attracted the kinds of girls who would line up to fall over themselves in front of him. I always found it a comical scene and was especially intrigued by the fact that he never showed the slightest interest in any of them. So one day over lunch in the cafeteria, I finally decided to broach the subject.

"Why don't you ever date one of these girls?" I inquired.

"What girls?" he asked cluelessly as he dug into his salad.

"Oh, I don't know... just the horde of girls that follows you around drooling and hanging on your every word," I said, more sarcastically than I'd intended.

“Ohhh, *those* girls. Well, I don’t like any of them,” he stated matter-of-factly and went back to shoveling in ranch-covered romaine.

“You don’t like them? Why not? They’re all obviously in love with *you!*”

“Well, Jordan, that’s kind of the problem.” He shrugged in a nonhelpful, matter-of-fact manner.

“Why is that a problem? Don’t you want a girl that’s interested in you?”

“Well, yeah, but they’re beyond interested. I think they, like, really like me. And that’s not fun for a guy. You want a girl that makes you work for it a little bit. Those girls just all seem desperate.”

A-ha! A lightbulb went on in my head that morning during lunch with Brett. Boys *can* tell. So the next time you become tempted to one-up the next girl at the club with a show of cleavage or call that boy for the sixth time in one night, it’s imperative that you put away your boobs and your phone. Is desperation *really* the message you want to put out there? Let’s display some classy, old-fashioned self-respect and refrain from doing either!

So you’ve been doing everything a good modern old-fashioned girl should—holding your head high, exuding confidence and poise, dressing with class and style, not throwing yourself at that boy at the bar—and you have yet to meet Mr. Right. Starting to wonder if any exist? Well, I have dug up several for inspiration and would like to share them with you.

James Marsden, the dimply actor/husband/father of two, is always eager to talk about his down-to-earth home life with his wife and kids: “I am always in the mood for my wife. Always.” And of course there’s the quiet Canadian boy who can actually make a dirty, scrappy beard look hot, Ryan Gosling. Of his relationship with Rachel McAdams he has said, “I mean, God bless *The Notebook*. It introduced me to one of the great loves of my life. Rachel and my love story is a hell of a lot more romantic than that.” Honestly, Ryan, could you be any more perfect?

The same goes for Lifehouse’s hunky front man, Jason Wade. On whether or not it’s weird being viewed as a teen sex symbol, the blond rocker has said, “I guess it would be if I viewed myself like that, but I really don’t. My wife doesn’t, either. So we live this normal life. We don’t really get caught up in that stuff.” Josh Kelley, the singer-songwriter husband of Katherine Heigl (another modern, old-fashioned girl herself) has also said, “Now that I’m older, I draw from things like getting married and relationships.” Kelley says that he used to find inspiration in other musicians, but on his most recent album, the southern boy talks “about the process of becoming a real man, getting married and taking the plunge.” Hooray for real men!

Lastly, my favorite example is my husband, Drew. Besides being wildly funny and devilishly handsome, he is the epitome of a real man who isn’t afraid to step up to the plate. Even though I barely knew him (and had already rejected him twice because I was convinced he was too quiet and shy!), I received a real letter in the mail from him that said, “Hey, Jordan, I know we just met, but I would really like to get to know you better. I think you’re the most fun and amazing girl I’ve ever met and I’d love to take you out to dinner or a movie sometime. I’m going to call you later to see if you’d be okay with that.”

Well, that about did it for me. Maybe I’ve read a few too many Jane Austen novels, but any guy who writes old-fashioned letters scores big points in my book. So don’t get discouraged by the entourage of males that just hooted and hollered at you on the way back from your lunch break, or the creepy guy reading *Penthouse* in the store; there are plenty of classy, honorable boys out there. Just keep being your fabulous self, and before you know it, you’ll find him.

Having good old-fashioned self-respect is undoubtedly the biggest hurdle to cross, and once we’ve

got it, it will also prove to be the key difference between being a Hepburn or a Hilton. Self-respect is exactly what it says: respect for yourself. No one else can muster it up for you, but the minute you begin to tap into it, others will immediately take note, as it is a rare attribute these days. When we do respect ourselves, it's only natural that our attitude, wardrobe, and outlook on life will begin to stand in stark contrast to the cheap, disreputable Hilton world we live in. People will want to know what's different about you, so be prepared to tell everyone else the secret.

Chapter Two

Words, Words, Words

“I think, with never-ending gratitude, that the young women of today do not and can never know at what price their right to free speech and to speak at all in public has been earned.” —*Lucy Stone*

Great women like Abigail Adams, Ella Fitzgerald, and Anne Sullivan, who contributed so much to society and made so many advances for our gender, would probably be rolling in their graves right now if they could watch an episode of *I Love New York*. The sheer number of *likes* and *whatevers* would be enough to push anyone over the edge, not to mention the vulgarity and idiocy that accompany the majority of the verbal exchanges. Lucy Stone was right—we don’t truly know the price paid by those who went before us. If we did, perhaps we’d try a little harder to squeeze an intelligent quip or two into conversation every once in a while! Perhaps we’d attempt to educate ourselves more about the political issues facing our generation. Maybe we’d step outside our comfy social bubble and learn about a different language, country, or culture. We might even begin to speak up about and work for issues that matter to us. Our voices are incredibly powerful tools, and we need to make the most of them!

Whether or not we realize it, people are always listening and judging the words that come out of our mouths. Your boss could be just around the corner while you gab in the break room about your wild weekend. Your impressionable niece might pick up an ugly phrase or two while you’re candidly talking on the phone to a friend. And that date on Saturday night might not be so charmed by excessive usage of the f-bomb. All of these people (and more!) are constantly making assumptions about our character based on our daily tête-à-têtes, our uncensored musings, and our friendly chitchat.

So, how do you begin to rein in your words and sound intelligent? Mandy Moore is on the right track, having once said, “I want to go to college to study journalism. I want to speak French fluently, to travel. My mom was a journalist and it’s in my blood.” However, she may be a rare exception. It’s certainly not trendy to speak well these days, as evidenced by any good *America’s Next Top Model* episode. The current Hollywood-rich-girl mentality comes with its own neatly packaged vocabulary lesson, and any girl worth her Manolo Blahniks knows how to talk the talk and walk the walk. Most of our peers aren’t making it a priority to improve their speech. It’s a toxic, vicious cycle of “ummm, yeahs” and “like, totallys,” and one of the only ways to break it is to get out of our cushy verbal comfort zone.

Carrie Fisher once said, “I was street smart, but unfortunately the street was Rodeo Drive.” That could not be truer of today’s young female population. The “as if” outlook on life portrayed in *Clueless* by Alicia Silverstone was once just an entertaining teen comedy, but it sadly seems to be more the norm now. Sure, Cher and Dionne were an amusing big-screen duo, and Jessica Simpson’s tuna-chicken bit was worth a laugh, but I think we would all agree that life imitating art may not be the best thing—not when the art in question is a cable show with female characters under the age of twenty-five. Similarly, if we find ourselves being sucked into *Laguna Beach* vernacular around our friends, it may be time to break away from the posse for a while and search for more intellectual higher ground. Warning: this will not be easy. They will try to lure us back in with promises of mani-

pedis and gossip magazines. But stay the course! Soon you'll be speaking like a Yale scholar. And when you're tempted to slip back into your old ways, just remind yourself, "If I wouldn't say this in front of my grandmother, I probably shouldn't say it at all."

To kick off our wordfest, take a crack at some of the following Smart Girl activities to get yourself thinking (and talking!) outside the box.

- ✎ Do a crossword puzzle every day over your lunch break.
- ✎ Pick up a learn-a-word-a-day desk calendar.
- ✎ Check out a foreign-language instructional CD from your library and pop it in during your commute to work.
- ✎ Play word games either online or with friends. My personal favorites are Scattergories, Catch Phrase, and Scrabble.
- ✎ Tape yourself talking—note any unnecessary or, like, filler words that you should, like, maybe not use.
- ✎ Intersperse some stimulating nonfiction books in your usual *Glamour* magazine and chick-lit routine.
- ✎ Read the dictionary during *Lost* commercials. That may sound extreme, but I actually used to read the dictionary for fun when I was little. Yes, I am *that* dorky.

Polite, respectful speech is a whole other dilemma. Boys get cruder with every *American Pie* movie, and ladies seem to stoop to new verbal lows every day. Novelist George Eliot once said, "Blessed is the man who, having nothing to say, abstains from giving us wordy evidence of the fact." I've met many girls who have nothing constructive or edifying to say yet average more words per minute than anyone I know. Evidently only a rare few are raised to employ etiquette or give gracious compliments anymore; if they were, reality shows would all but dry up due to lack of drama and sheer ridiculousness.

Now, I live in the South, so I actually do still witness some courteous actions and proper etiquette on a daily basis. Boys are still taught to open doors for women, pull out chairs, and say, "Yes, ma'am" and "No, sir" from day one. Young women are still taught how to properly host a dinner party (we'll touch on that later!), how to decorate for the holidays, and how to make a mean batch of biscuits. (Side note: one of my best friends actually has to wear skirts every time she goes to visit her grandmother in Alabama because Mrs. Mabel still thinks it is "com-puh-lee-tely imprah-puh for a young lady to wear-uh showt pants.") I'll admit it—one of my favorite magazines is *Southern Lady*, whose target reader is probably about twenty years older than me; I can't help it—I love it. But I've been on the New York City subway enough times to know that respectful speech, polite manners, and proper etiquette aren't the requirement everywhere!

While you don't necessarily have to start using "Yes, ma'am" and "No, sir" on a consistent basis, a couple of easy, gracious phrases to implement are "please" and "thank you." It sounds like a kindergarten rule, but surprisingly few people use these simple, rudimentary manners anymore. I was particularly appalled while recently handing out Halloween candy to young trick-or-treaters at my in-laws' house. One boy around the age of ten (who wasn't even wearing a costume, by the way—come on, all you have to do is cut two slits in a white sheet!) came to the door and greedily reached into my pumpkin basket and pulled out a full-size Kit Kat bar, then proceeded to dash off without so much as "Trick or treat," let alone "Thank you." Not two minutes later, he was back ringing the doorbell, and

when I commented, “Weren’t you just here?” he replied, “Yeah, but I want some more.”

~~Right then, my mother-in-law came to the door and sweetly replied, “Sorry, we have lots of kids coming tonight and we need to save candy for them.”~~

The little rat then proceeded to retort, “Well I don’t even like what you gave me before. I hate Kit Kats. Can’t I have something else?”

At this point, I was about to lose it, but I calmly replied, “We only have Kit Kats or Hershey bars

I figured that would close the case, but the ungrateful ankle biter only continued: “Well, I don’t like those Kit Kats. How about I trade you something from my bag for a Hershey bar?” I was this close to reaching in his bag and taking that Kit Kat right back, but I refrained. I settled for simply letting him root around and pull out a Hershey bar in exchange for the aforementioned Kit Kat. Besides being miffed at his blatant ungratefulness, I couldn’t believe the audacity and rudeness coming from such a young person. Besides determining to revisit every good and proper manner I’d been neglecting lately, I also silently vowed to teach my own kids the importance of etiquette and manners when the time comes!

In the meantime, etiquette can start by simply reinstating a “please” the next time you ask a coworker to hand you the stapler. You can offer a sincere “Thank you” to the waiter who brings your food. Try being a gracious driver and letting the car ahead of you into the traffic-jam line.

Compliment the grocery-store cashier on her manicured nails. Offer an elderly person or pregnant lady your seat in the waiting area. These are such rare occurrences and expressions these days that it just might make that person’s week!

In terms of proper and not-so-proper speech and language, I’m afraid that other common southern phrases, such as “We’re fixin’ to leave” and “I got a hankerin’ for some grits” might cancel out the properness of formalities like “Yes, ma’am” and “No, sir” here in the South. It seems that we folk below the Mason-Dixon Line are continually searching for middle-ground lingo somewhere between the formal sweetness of Scarlett O’Hara and the blatant grossness of Jeff Foxworthy. Many of my friends have even made it their goal to ditch the accent entirely, but you certainly don’t need to go that far and completely lose that congenial southern charm. You can stay true to yourself and still polish up your speech. Same goes for Yankee girls!

My husband is from Minnesota (or as they say, Minnes-o-o-o-ta), and now, after having spent lots of time there (I pretty much make him drive alternating routes between the Mall of America and the nearest Caribou Coffee), I’ve come to find just as much amusement in their extreme-north vernacular as I do in southern speech: “Ya sure, you betcha,” “O-o-h that mo-o-vie was super great,” and “Yer gonna hafta see this!” Again, I would never want them to fully lose their Minnes-o-o-ta-ness. We can all make some painless improvements to our current patois to clean up the edges.

Honestly, when was the last time you heard someone talk and thought it was really beautiful? A mere twenty-some years ago, Margaret Thatcher eloquently stated, “We are coming slowly, painfully to an autumn of understanding. I hope it will be followed by a winter of common sense.” But, of course, very few have ever heard those words—we only get bombarded with Paris Hilton’s riveting statement from 2004, “That’s hot.” Margaret’s words sound like pure poetry, while P—well, let’s just leave it at that.

So how do you avoid the Stupid Girl persona and cultivate a vocabulary that extends, like, past your *Us Weekly*? We’ll delve into more details later, but you can start by turning off the TV, picking up a book, making a Smart Girl list, and staying informed. You can also try deleting a few “I dunnos” and inserting a couple more “I would be honored tos” in your daily rhetoric, just for good measure!

While television is without a doubt one of the many marvels of technology, it is also one of the quickest ways to rot the brain—it's called the boob tube, for crying out loud! They say that knowledge is power, and I'm pretty sure that one of the first steps toward gaining knowledge is turning off the TV. Don't get me wrong, I could easily talk myself into a *Hills* marathon any day of the week and, in all honesty, watch nothing but reruns of *Gilmore Girls* and *Seinfeld* for the rest of my life and be perfectly happy. But sadly, having the ability to list all of Rory's boyfriends in chronological order and do a mean impression of Elaine Benes isn't going to get me very far in life.

The other day, I had an epiphany. My sister and I grew up without cable and thought we were really roughing it, since our only two entertainment options were usually the local PBS telethon or *60 Minutes*. We pined for luxuries like the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon, and we listened with sheer incredulity to tales of a magical airwave called Cartoon Network. Typically, one of our friends would finally take pity on us and invite us over to spend the night, and we'd hungrily consume hours upon hours of *Clarissa Explains It All* and *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* Recently, though, I was talking about childhood stories with one of my favorite new bands that I work with at the record label. The group consists of four brothers in their twenties, and they actually grew up with *no* TV. Not just "we-only-had-one-in-the-family-room" or "all-we-had-was-a-black-and-white-set-in-the-kitchen" no TV. *Nothing*.

Now, these four guys are some of the most hard-working, competent (not to mention attractive) young people I've met in a long time. I asked them the reason for their familial musical ability, and the lead singer, David, said to me, "Well, actually we're just really thankful that our parents didn't have a TV. Instead of plopping down in front of the television after school, we were forced to get creative—play instruments, practice, learn techniques from other musicians. We would never be where we are today if we would have had a television to watch." Well! That certainly gave me a new perspective on my own upbringing (I don't exactly have a record deal to show for my cableless childhood creativity, though, just a bunch of papier-mâché books about my two cats, Justin and Fluffy). It also made me think about how I might one day similarly discipline my own children. If cutting out a little *Rugrats* and *SpongeBob* makes my kids turn out half as smart (or good-looking) as those boys, my kids aren't gonna be allowed to so much as darken the door of a Disney store!

If you haven't quite reached the antimedia stage, I completely understand. And to be honest, I'm not at the point where I've eliminated *all* TV—I indulge in a *Lost* episode with my husband every now and then and still pop in an old *Friends* DVD every time I'm good and depressed. But it's easier than you might think to set small TV goals for yourself. If you're a daily consumer, try paring down your viewing to just a half an hour each day. If you watch only two or three shows a week, try just one. You'll be amazed at how many other things you have time for! But what do we do with all that free time? The possibilities are endless, but it can be tricky getting started.

When I first tried cutting out TV, I remember plunking down on the couch and staring vacantly at the blank screen, waiting for instructions as to what I should do next. It took me several weeks to get into a groove of doing *other* things first, rather than zapping on the tube pronto when I walked in the door. The easiest thing I found, and my first recommendation, is to *read a book*.

Several first ladies have advocated for book reading. The timeless Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis said, "There are many little ways to enlarge your child's world. Love of books is the best of all." Laura Bush is also passionate about promoting reading, saying, "A love of books, of holding a book, turning its pages, looking at its pictures, and living its fascinating stories goes hand-in-hand with a love of learning. Every child in America should have access to a well-stocked school library." But

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