



by
PATTY ADAMS MARTINEZ

photography by
RANDALL SLAVIN

*One half of the
Magic City's
hottest power
couple, actress
**Gabrielle
Union** rules
both the big and
small screens in
BET's Being
Mary Jane
and the
Sundance
smash *The
Birth of a
Nation*.*

STATE OF THE UNION

Jacket, *Altuzarra* (price on request), *altuzarra.com*. Marissa swimsuit, *Norma Kamali* (\$150). *Atrium*, 1931 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, 305-695-0757; *norma kamali.com*. Small chain-link earrings (\$385) and 14k blackened gold and pavé white diamond small arrow ring (\$4,500), *Jennifer Fisher*, *jenniferfisherjewelry.com*. 36.5mm stainless steel Angel Lady watch, *Invicta* (\$495). *Aventura Mall*, 19501 Biscayne Blvd., 305-690-7398; *invictawatch.com*

**Last night,
Gabrielle
Union**

wasn't able to make it to husband Dwyane Wade's Miami Heat game. As much as she likes to be courtside to cheer on him and his team, she loves that her other half understands her need to have her own life, too. "He appreciates my independence, and my high credit score, and the fact that if I want a Chanel bag, I'm not asking for his Amex; I've got my own," she says, letting out a loud laugh.

If there's one thing you need to know about Gabrielle Union, it's that she's a self-made woman—always has been, always will be. And though she's been a Hollywood star for a while now, she has never forgotten how to hustle. On a break from filming her hit BET show, *Being Mary Jane*, and still on a creative high from January's Sundance Film Festival—where her movie *The Birth of a Nation* was sold for \$17.5 million, the largest deal ever made at the festival—Union is chilling in jogging pants and a Bob Marley T-shirt, taking a much-needed, and seldom had, moment to relax.

A former model and UCLA student with her eye on a law degree, Union is a rare breed. She was able to transition seamlessly from small roles in ensemble casts (as in her first big break, *Saved by the Bell: The New Class*, in 1996) to larger parts in teen staples like *Sister, Sister* and *7th Heaven* and films like the cult favorite *Bring It On* and the rom-com *Think Like a Man* (and its sequel) to now, 20 years after her screen debut, the starring role.

On *Being Mary Jane*, returning for its fourth season this fall, Union plays the title character, an ambitious cable news anchor—not your cookie-cutter female protagonist, but a woman who's rather flawed, especially in the relationship department. "She's challenging, complicated, messy," Union says. "She progresses and regresses, which at times as a viewer is frustrating. One minute you're rooting for her, the next you're rooting against her."

Like her character, Union is anything but cookie-cutter. As a full-time wife and stepmom, she's becoming much more choosy about the roles she's willing to take. "For me to leave my home and my family, it has to be worth it," she says. "I have to be touched and moved by the experience, the words, the story. I definitely can't go back to cash grabs anymore."

According to Union, the most life-changing film of her career so far—in which she plays a small but pivotal part—is *The Birth of a Nation*, the true story of Nat Turner, who led a slave rebellion in Virginia in 1831. "Careerwise, it gets no better than this," she says. "It's by far the smallest role I've ever taken, but easily the most challenging and the most rewarding."

Union plays Esther, a married field slave who is sometimes called upon to work in the house. On one such occasion, she catches the eye of one of the plantation's white guests. "He sees her and feels entitled to her body," Union explains. "What happens to her is one of the things that sets in motion one of the most successful slave liberations in the history of our country."

"I definitely didn't want to be the chick from *Bring It On* to screw up this incredibly important, powerful film," she continues. "I just really wanted to—not only as an actor, but as a sexual-assault victim myself—convey the powerlessness that one feels, the voicelessness, the terror, the heartbreak, the physical, emotional, spiritual devastation. This experience was extremely powerful and moving, and it happened at the right time in my life, when I needed to find more purpose in my work. And I found it."

This isn't the first time that Union has spoken out about being raped at age 19, during a robbery at the store where she worked. She has lobbied for increased funding of rape crisis centers across the country and has testified before Congress about her experience. When she sees a problem, she's not afraid to point it out, such as her recent criticism of Hollywood's lack of diversity. "Half the time, [African Americans] don't even get the opportunity to fail," she says. "At least let me audition, so you can say I just wasn't good enough, but most times black actors can't even get in the door. The idea that the playing field has ever been equal is a farce. With leaps and bounds of advances, it's still grossly unequal—and that goes for the Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, and LGBT communities as well. We've made strides, but if Hollywood is really going to mirror the world that it's catering to, we have a long, long way to go."

In fact, diversity in all its forms—racial, ethnic, musical, culinary—is the main reason that Union loves Miami so much. Even before marrying into basketball royalty,

Alexandra suit, **Solid & Striped** (\$158). *Everything But Water*, Aventura Mall, 19501 Biscayne Blvd., 407-351-4069; solidandstriped.com. Shirt (around waist) (\$3,200) and skirt (\$4,300), **Chanel**. *Bal Harbour Shops*, 9700 Collins Ave., 305-868-0550; chanel.com. Earrings, **Prada** (\$515). *Miami Design District*, 180 NE 40th St., 305-438-2280; prada.com. Franco bracelet (\$410), **Vita Fede**. *Saks Fifth Avenue*, *Bal Harbour Shops*, 305-865-1100; vitafede.com. 36.5mm stainless steel Angel Lady watch, **Invicta** (\$495). *Aventura Mall*, 19501 Biscayne Blvd., 305-690-7398; invictawatch.com. Sandals, **Giuseppe Zanotti Design** (\$1,125). *Bal Harbour Shops*, 305-868-0133; giuseppezanottidesign.com



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Dress, **Emilio Pucci** (\$3,360). *Miami Design District, 178 NE 39th St., 305-576-1830; emiliopucci.com.* 18k gold icon black sapphire and black jade earrings, **Dolce & Gabbana** (\$1,950). *Bal Harbour Shops, 9700 Collins Ave., 305-866-7676; dolcegabbana.com.* 18k white-gold and diamond ring, **Yepprem** (\$11,000). *Neiman Marcus, Bal Harbour Shops, 305-865-6161; neimanmarcus.com.* 14k rose-gold and black diamond cage ring (\$1,232) and pinky ring (\$1,365), **Kismet**. *Neiman Marcus, SEE ABOVE.* Sandals, **Jimmy Choo** (\$1,195). *The Village at Merrick Park, 358 San Lorenzo Ave., Coral Gables, 305-443-6124; jimmychoo.com*

she had been coming to the city for years, and she reminisces about how driving down Ocean Drive for the first time felt like being on an episode of *Miami Vice*. She also admits to “fangirling” over local sightings of icons such as Gloria Estefan, Madonna, and Jennifer Lopez. Now, of course, the tables have turned, with Union and Wade thrilling tourists when they’re spotted on double dates with the likes of John Legend and Chrissy Teigen, Carmelo and La La Anthony, or Chris and Adrienne Bosh.

Although Union is a Nebraska native, Miami has embraced her as one of its own, both inside AmericanAirlines Arena and out, perhaps because she was a follower of the game (and the Heat) long before her fateful first meeting with the star shooting guard at a Super Bowl party in 2007. And maybe it’s because she was a fan of the team before becoming a supportive wife that she finds it perfectly okay to heckle her husband after a particularly lame play. “Last night he took an incredibly bad shot,” she says. “It went off of the side of the backboard. It didn’t even come close to the net!”

In the early stages of their romance, she was no less critical. The poor guy almost didn’t have a chance. Union can laugh about the fact that she once called Wade “a fetus” for being nine years her junior. When he was trying to court her, she “couldn’t take him seriously,” until one day “he finally wore me down,” she says with a laugh. “It was very *When Harry Met Sally*. One day I just thought, Oh, I guess you could be an option.”

But even before falling madly in love and tying the knot, she says, there was always a friendship and a willingness to open up to each other. “If you have good, effective, honest communication, you can handle any issue or problem in a relationship. D is literally my best friend. We really, really enjoy spending time with each other more than anybody else. Well, with D, maybe I’m tied with LeBron! But I’m definitely his favorite female! If you have the chance to marry your best friend, I would highly recommend it.”

Much like Brangelina, for Union and Wade—who were both married once before—his children played a big part in their marriage plans. “D and I could have gone on for a long time as boyfriend and girlfriend,” she says, “but the kids were the driving force in wanting us to be a legitimate, like, real—and I’m using my finger quotes—family in their eyes. We got on board with it, and it’s the best decision we could have made—not just for us as a couple, but for our family.”

While running quick errands isn’t a problem for most Miami families, being out in public is still a bit too crazy for this team. “One of D’s favorite things to do as a family is go to Walmart,” Union confesses, adding that the family can be more anonymous in Los Angeles. “We really enjoy Walmart, Target, going to the grocery store. He loves to take the dogs to the car wash. He’s the guy with the Maltese at the car wash! But in Miami, it’s more challenging. He’d never make it through Walgreens. Although I have

attempted to send him for tampons, he won't do it! Can you imagine?"

Instead the family settles for quiet trips to the iPic Theater for a movie ("We go there and get dinner, and I have cocktails, and we relax and watch a movie. We saw *Deadpool* there and loved it!") or dinner at Komodo ("Dave Grutman is a close longtime friend and always creates a fun, magical, fly environment, and the food is killer") or MC Kitchen ("This place is one of our staples. We are obsessed with Dena [Marino], the chef and owner, and the short rib is delicious!").

Back on the work front, Union has a busy slate ahead: In addition to doing promotion for the upcoming season of *Being Mary Jane*, she is adding fashion designer to her résumé. In February she inked a deal with the Hollywood, Florida-based watch company Invicta to create a collection for the brand, Gabrielle Union for Invicta, a collaboration that gives her another way to express her creativity and unique point of view, she says. "Fashion has been an important part of my career. It's become such a fun outlet for expression." Later in the year she'll appear in the films *Sleepless Night*, alongside Jamie Foxx and Michelle Monaghan, and *A Meyers Christmas*, opposite Danny Glover.

Out of the limelight, Union and Wade take turns playing good cop and bad cop to their kids. "We literally keep track," she says. "There's basically an imaginary chart: 'I was bad cop last time; now it's your turn. You have to be the jerk who doles out punishment for missed homework assignments or talking on the phone after curfew.' With the older boys, they come to me with girl stuff, homework. Or if they're trying to butter up dad, they definitely come to me to soften me up first. I'm the line of defense, I guess, before dad."

As they say, behind every great man is a great woman—and Union brings it on strong. **OD**

**"IF YOU HAVE
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A woman with long dark hair is standing on a sandy beach. She is wearing a blue sleeveless top and a long, high-slit skirt with a red, white, and blue floral pattern and fringe. She is also wearing blue and white striped high-heeled sandals. The background features several palm trees and a clear sky. In the distance, a person is riding a bicycle on the beach.

Swimsuit, Norma Kamali (\$250). Atrium, 1931 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, 305-695-0757; normakamali.com. Skirt, Marc Jacobs (\$9,000). Miami Design District, 3930 NE Second Ave., 305-864-2626; marcjacobs.com. Light gold drop earrings, Oscar de la Renta (\$325). Bal Harbour Shops, 9700 Collins Ave., 305-868-7986; oscarde la renta.com. Platform pumps, Gucci (\$1,100). The Village at Merrick Park, 358 San Lorenzo Ave., Coral Gables, 305-441-2004; gucci.com

OPPOSITE PAGE: Top (\$2,275) and shorts (\$995), Dolce & Gabbana. Bal Harbour Shops, 9700 Collins Ave., 305-866-7676; dolcegabbana.com. Small Loop cuff, Jennifer Fisher (\$375). jenniferfisherjewelry.com. Tassel ring, Eddie Borgo (\$240). Bloomingdale's, The Falls, 8778 SW 136th St., Miami, 305-252-6300; bloomingdales.com

Styling by Thomas Kikis
Hair by Larry Sims at Forward Artists for Smooth 'N Shine
Makeup by Rachel Goodwin at Starworks Artists using Chanel Makeup
Manicure by Karen Gutierrez for MAC Studio Nail Lacquer at Nailing Hollywood
Location: Viceroy Santa Monica