

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

HILARY SWANK

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FIGHT

BY AMY BLOOM

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL THOMPSON



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ilary Swank is not America's Sweetheart. She is not adorable. She is not the cutest, goofiest, naughtiest little thing you ever saw. And she is not one of those cool, scowling indie girls who can act but doesn't want to work too hard, too often.

Really, Hilary Swank is Johnny Depp. Striking, diffident, different, hard to pigeonhole — and getting better all the time. She lives to make a good life and to act, to make a great big, deep acting career that lasts, and she's dead serious about it.

Keeping It Real, Within Reason

We're walking toward Fanelli's in SoHo, which is full fledged hamburgers and french fries, the kind of food Swank missed when she was training for her role as a boxer in *Million Dollar Baby* — for which she would soon win the Golden Globe for Best Actress. Once we get there, she wants a milkshake but doesn't get one. Craving something liquid and sweet, she orders hot chocolate, which even I can see from across the table arrives as horrible, watery sludge. Swank chokes on it. The waitress, starstruck and sweet, inquires a few times throughout the lunch whether the hot chocolate is OK. "It's great, thank you so much," Swank says with true warmth and appreciation in her voice and eyes.

Swank is lovely in person, with movie-star skin and waterfall hair. She is often beautiful in still photos. But on the big screen, she is almost never pretty-pretty. She doesn't have that gleaming, drown-in-my-face quality that many stars have. Her smile is not the predictably glorious fireworks of Julia Roberts' smile — it is not an event. Swank's smile is fresh and genuine and rooted in her character's life.

So when she gives the waitress a flash of teeth, it feels real. The nearly full mug is ignored, the waitress is thrilled, and I almost forget that I just saw this woman gag.

Later, when Swank and I are looking for a few Christmas presents for her family and mine, we are shopping like old pals. We stop in at the Hat Lady, and when the owner nearly genuflects, I get

to see the celebrity-devotional response in high gear. Though Swank is very gracious, it doesn't look like that much fun, and when I say so, Swank sighs. "Look, when you're at the beginning of your career, you hope for attention, you hope for photographs. And you can't get it," she says. "Now, people come and take pictures of me while I walk my dog. Paparazzi crouch down and take photographs of the dog's poo and then of me scooping it up."

The Last Laugh

There is a lot of Hilary Swank in Maggie Fitzgerald, the boxer she plays in *Million Dollar Baby*. Swank sees it, too. "I know that girl," she says. "I'm tough. And I don't take no for an answer." We get to see Maggie the boxer, her scrappiness, adamant desire and athletic physicality — all of which is Swank (erstwhile Junior Olympic swimmer, ranked gymnast and current skier, snowboarder and skydiver). Swank got bigger and more powerful as she trained for the movie, and she loved it. You see it in the film, in the leaping, in the speedbag work, in the way she hammers the hell out of the big bag until you want somebody to stop her before she breaks an arm. Most of all, the body Swank developed for the film illuminates her character; when Maggie Fitzgerald lands a huge right hook on opponent after opponent, knocking out one after another, what you see on her face and in her body is the triumphant exuberance of physical power and skill. In most movies with female leads, you see that look, that joyous leaping, on a woman's face when she receives a diamond ring, or you see exhausted physical triumph when she gives birth. With Swank in *Million Dollar Baby*, there is joy of the body for its own powerful, glorious self, and it is not in the service of sex, babies, relationships or winning approval from powerful men. The sweat flies off her face and flicks from her shoulders and hair; blood streams down her face like a river, and it is, as the character says, the defining moment of her life.

But Maggie Fitzgerald is the last smart, scrappy, vulnerable girl Swank plans to play. In the upcoming film *The Black Dahlia*, she'll star as a femme fatale opposite Josh Hartnett. And she can't wait. She's done "with the young girls, with characters who are just realizing their dreams, just beginning to figure things out," she says. "I get scripts now, great scripts sometimes, that I'm just too emotionally mature for."

Who's That Girl?

We are on our way past the big window of a stylish boutique and Swank grabs my arm. "Look," she says, quietly and with unmistakable pleasure. "Gee, look. It's me." We both stop and stare at the giant Hilary Swank posing seductively in a Calvin Klein lingerie ad. Tousled, streaky hair; fierce, playful eyes; big, sexy lips. She looks, in passing, like Brigitte

READ MORE OF AMY BLOOM

The fascination with what's hard to pigeonhole and a ceaseless devotion to character mark not only Hilary Swank's appeal, but the courageous and often messy truths in the writing of acclaimed author Amy Bloom. Her work includes the novel *Love Invents Us*, the story collections *A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You* and *Come to Me* (a National Book Award nominee) and a book of nonfiction, *Normal* (ALL AVAILABLE FOR \$12 EACH AT BN.COM).

Bardot or Jane Fonda, but I look again, and she doesn't look bought or blank or brainwashed. You can see in the ads that underneath the sensuality and sexy good looks is a determined, intelligent woman — a strength that hasn't been hidden for the purposes of advertising underwear. It is the crazy idea that an intelligent, talented woman might get a kick out of doing these ads and that she doesn't have to be drooling, bound or tugging on her knickers like a cocked-up hooker to get men and women to be interested in her or in Calvin Klein's lingerie.

When an interviewer recently asked Catherine Deneuve about the whispers in Paris that she had done L'Oréal commercials for the money, she laughed and said, "I need money — who doesn't? But as long as I don't lie to the public, I don't see what's wrong with it." Hilary Swank doesn't lie in these photographs. She tells me the money wasn't that great; she did it for Calvin Klein, who appreciated her before most other people did, for Steven Meisel, the photographer, and for her own pleasure.


For the Record

In the days before billboards, before the Oscar, Swank was making her way in and out of *Camp Wilder*, *Growing Pains* and *Beverly Hills, 90210* and hoping for more television work. She remembers a network president telling her — and this she delivers in a full smug-mogul voice — "Swank, I love you, you're wonderful, but you're just too...too...half-hour."

Of course, two hours suit Swank just fine. After all, she doesn't watch television, except for occasionally *Animal Planet* or *Letterman*.

Later, she says to me, "I just want to add something." It's the only time, over the course of a couple of days, that she asks to go back, to shift the tone, to correct something she said. It's the television comment. "I don't want to sound like a snob," she says. "Like watching television is beneath me or something. I grew up in a trailer. I lived in a car for a while. It's not that; it's just not what I do."

She doesn't want anyone to think she's a snob about IV. Other than that, they can think what they like.

HOW TO		TRAIN LIKE HILARY SWANK													
<p>THE WORKOUT </p> <p>Hector Roca, of Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn, N.Y., showed Swank the ropes for three months, turning her into a bona fide boxer. To get as buff, expect to train for two hours each morning, six days a week (\$25 PER HOUR, GYM FEE \$70 PER MONTH; 718-797-2872).</p> <p>Warm-up JUMP ROPE: Four 3-minute circuits, alternating speed. TREADMILL: 30 minutes (5 minutes set at level 3.5, 15 minutes at 3.5 and 10 minutes at 5).</p> <p>Main event SPAR: Eight 3-minute rounds in the ring. Watch your opponent's shoulder, not eyes, to anticipate the next punch. PUNCH THE BAG: Six 3-minute rounds. WORK THE SPEED BALL: Five 3-minute intervals.</p> <p>Cool-down "There is no such thing," says Roca.</p>		<p>THE MEAL PLAN</p> <p>Nutritionist Oz Garcia tested Swank's discipline with a strict diet. She ate five meals, consuming 2400 calories per day. Good luck. (SIX-MONTH NUTRITIONAL CONSULTING PROGRAM, \$6000; 212-362-5569).</p> <p>Breakfast 1 cup of steel-cut oatmeal with nuts (pecans, walnuts, sliced almonds) and a drizzle of honey.</p> <p>Lunch 1 Niçoise salad with 1 can (1 to 6 oz.) of tuna and olive oil (which can also be used in the dishes below).</p> <p>Dinner 6 oz. of halibut or tuna — grilled or steamed. 6 oz. of sashimi, salmon, halibut, sea bass, tuna or shrimp — grilled, broiled, poached, steamed or stir-fried (Swank doesn't eat beef or chicken). 6 oz. of a steamed vegetable (legumes, kale, cabbage, asparagus, cauliflower, tomatoes). 4 oz. of a low-glycemic carbohydrate (soba noodles; 1 baked sweet potato with cinnamon).</p> <p>Snacks <i>(Before and after workouts)</i> 1 or 2 hard-boiled eggs. Protein bar (Zone, Balance, PowerBar). Seven-grain bread with nut butter and Sorrell's jam.</p> <p>Supplements and vitamins NutriCology multivitamin. Pro-endorphin powder (1 to 3 packets per day, for energy).</p> <p>Beverages 1 to 4 cups green tea per day. 1 or 2 protein shakes as a meal replacement. At least 1 liter of water. No coffee. No alcohol.</p>													
<p>SWANK'S POWER SHAKE</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>• 2 large scoops designer protein</td> <td>• 8 oz. almond or rice milk</td> <td>• 1 tsp. flax oil</td> <td>• 2 to 4 oz. water</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• 1 scoop Ultra Clear rice protein powder</td> <td>• 1 tsp. nut butter</td> <td>• 1/2 cup berries (strawberries, blueberries, blackberries)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>• 1 tsp. high-fat yogurt</td> <td></td> <td>Combine in a blender.</td> </tr> </table>				• 2 large scoops designer protein	• 8 oz. almond or rice milk	• 1 tsp. flax oil	• 2 to 4 oz. water	• 1 scoop Ultra Clear rice protein powder	• 1 tsp. nut butter	• 1/2 cup berries (strawberries, blueberries, blackberries)			• 1 tsp. high-fat yogurt		Combine in a blender.
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