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Title: Actress was immune to George Clooney's charms

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BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — There is an elephant in Anna Kendrick's hotel room, and it looks suspiciously like a vampire.

Although the young actress was here to discuss her role opposite George Clooney in the film "Up in the Air," it was near-impossible to ignore her other role — the one in the blockbuster "The Twilight Saga: New Moon."

At the time of this interview in Beverly Hills, the teen vampire movie had been open only one day, but was already causing a media sensation because of its showing at the box office.

Kendrick, who appeared in the first "Twilight" movie and has already finished her work in the third installment of the franchise, plays the ditzy Jessica, who is a close high school friend of Bella, Kristen Stewart's character.

Kendrick's character in "New Moon" is entertaining, but certainly not meaty enough to be memorable. The same cannot be said for her performance in "Up in the Air."

If it's possible to steal scenes from George Clooney, she has done it, and there is considerable Oscar buzz swirling around her performance.

Clooney plays a frequent business traveler with one of the worst jobs imaginable — he works as a roving hatchet-man, hired by companies to fire people. He doesn't necessarily take pleasure in his work, but he loves the nomadic, airborne lifestyle.

Into his carefree existence comes a humorless, by-the-book efficiency expert (Kendrick) with a plan that threatens to upset the status quo.

The 24-year-old actress, who may be a new face to movie audiences but has been in the business since she was a child (she was the third-youngest Tony nominee in Broadway history), insisted that she was not intimidated working with Clooney, but blushed a bit when the subject of Oscars was broached.

We talked about working with Clooney, the prospects of an Oscar and, of course, the elephant in the room — the elephant with the fangs.

Q. I am unable to ignore the 800-pound vampire in the room. What are your thoughts today as your movie goes through the roof?

A. It's cool. I mean it's cool to be in a movie that people see. I've been involved in a lot of smaller films that I'm really proud of that not a lot of people have seen. It's nice to be in something that's a phenomenon.

Q. With the "Twilight" movies on your resume, what is the impact on your career?

A. You know, I only have 65,000 people following me on Twitter. That's it. I didn't get this job because of "Twilight," and I didn't get my next job because of "Twilight." It all goes back to "Rocket Science." All the directors I've worked with recently, including Catherine Hardwicke ("Twilight") and Jason Reitman ("Up in the Air") said they hired me after seeing "Rocket Science."

Q. There is no impact whatsoever from "Twilight"?

A. I get a couple more girls coming up to me in airports to ask me for autographs, but other than that, my day-to-day life is exactly the same.

Q. I suppose that's better than being chased down the street?

A. Oh, I am very grateful that I don't get photographed every time I leave my house.

Q. That's one of the occupational hazards of being in the movies. Did you ever consider not leaving theater for the movies because of the downsides of fame?

A. No. I was lucky enough to have a perfect transitional film called "Camp" about musical theater. The director came from the stage, and all the actors came from the stage, so it was easier to wrap my head around the beast.

Q. What was your original ambition in this business?

A. When I was a child?

Q. Yes.

A. I just wanted to be on stage. I didn't know why. I wanted to sing and dance and perform. Why does anyone want to do anything? I wanted to perform, and had no idea why.

Q. How did you get this role?

A. Jason asked me to come in and read, but I had no idea that he had written the part for me. But he didn't tell me that until much later, and I thought I did horribly at the reading, so I assumed I wouldn't get the part. He was showing absolutely no emotion during the whole session.

Q. Why didn't he tell you that he had written it with you in mind?

A. He said he didn't want to psyche me out. He told me he didn't want me to know that he had written it for me so I shouldn't feel like I had messed up.

Q. But you had no idea he had written it for you?

A. Not at all. He told me at a cast lunch, and I acted as if that sort of thing happened all the time. I was pretending like I wasn't out of my league at all.

Q. What was it like acting with George in every scene?

A. The great part was that it wasn't a romantic relationship, which made this movie so unique. It was so much fun to work with him, and not be drawn in by his charm. I liked our contentious relationship.

Q. Could you describe your first meeting?

A. We met at a camera test, and he immediately made fun of my hair.

Q. What did he say?

A. I had my hair in a ponytail, and he said, "You're not going to wear your hair like that, are you?"

Q. How did you respond?

A. I said, "I see how this is going to be, but I'm game."

Q. And it went well after that initial meeting?

A. Yes, he made fun of me all day, every day, and I made fun of him right back. He didn't pull his usual pranks, but you couldn't get away with anything in front of him.

Q. What was it like acting with him?

A. He is so concerned with your performance, and how you're doing, and I think a lot of that has to do with him being (also) a director. He tries to stay so present, and tries to help Jason draw a performance out of you. He's even willing to alter his own performance to help you with your performance.

Q. Did you decide how you were going to look in this movie?

A. (laughs). Oh no. It was dead-on, but it certainly wasn't what I'd pick. You can't help but want to look your best in a George Clooney movie. I wanted to kill someone for making me look like that. My hair was teased into submission every day.

Q. How do you describe your character?

A. I love all the people I play, even Natalie. People come up and tell me what a brat she is, but I don't see it. I think about how she arrived here, and I think a lot of the way she is comes from the frustration of being female. She isn't taken seriously, and that frustrates her. She deals with it by trying to conquer the man's world. If she can outrun the thing she views as a handicap, then she can survive. I love her for all those things.

Q. I don't want to jinx you, but I assume you've heard that there is an Oscar buzz about your performance?

A. I keep hearing that word, and it makes me want to shut down. My brain just goes away.

Q. Do you give the same amount of thought to a character like Jessica in the "Twilight" movies?

A. Not at all. I know what my purpose is in those movies. I'm a device to move along certain scenes. I don't need to do extensive investigation into the character's background. But I do feel like I am a piece of the puzzle, and I have to do my piece right or the puzzle doesn't work.

Q. With your theater work, and the smaller independent films you've picked, I'm guessing that you are more comfortable in films that don't have the box-office heft of the "Twilight" movies? Is that a fair assessment of your career goals?

A. If I could figure a way to get through my career successfully without being famous, I would. But I know that's the price for doing what I love.

Q. Would you turn down a role if you knew it would lead to Kristen Stewart-type fame?

A. Hmm. That's my nightmare. But I believe strongly in never saying never, so who knows?