



# YOU KNOW YOU LOVE HER

From *Gossip Girl* to movie star to singer, Leighton Meester *really* can do everything.

**W**e wouldn't wake up at 4.30am for just anybody, but Leighton Meester isn't just anybody. Because of the time difference between Sydney and New York, CLEO's interview with this month's covergirl falls in the early (early!) morning, but, hey, a chat with Miss Meester isn't really something you can just snooze through. And as we talk to the actress during a break filming *Gossip Girl*'s new season, she totally wins us over. Not only is she hanging out with her new puppy (a long-haired dachshund named Trudy), she even apologises for getting us up so early to do the interview! Totally endearing, no?

Since she first hit our screens as Blair Waldorf on *GG*, Leighton has managed to make her mark beyond just playing her headband-wearing, Chuck Bass-smooching, ridiculously well-dressed alter ego. Not only has she recently been named the global ambassador for Herbal Essences, she's also been writing music, and has two new films due for release, *Country Strong* with Gwyneth Paltrow, and *The Roommate* with *Twilight* hottie Cam Gigandet. We chat to the star about taking fashion risks, being a massive Nicole Kidman fan, and why she wants a *Gossip Girl* wedding badly.

**A lot of our readers look to you as a style icon. How would you describe your personal style?**

"I love versatility and taking risks. I don't think I could ever stick to one look in particular, and I think that's the beauty of

fashion. Sometimes I'm more into being comfortable, layered and cosy, especially in the winter months. And other times I like to go all out; even just heading to work, I'll put on heels and a dress, or a cute jumpsuit. I'm obsessed with bags and shoes, so that's a huge part of my wardrobe. I could just be wearing jeans and a black sweater, and an amazing pair of heels or bag will just set it off perfectly. I love to have fun with fashion."

**Was *Gossip Girl* like a crash course in fashion at the start? Were you into fashion prior to the show?**

"To be honest, I always appreciated and loved fashion, but I never fully understood it till I came to New York. Of course, working on the show I've realised a lot about personal style, and playing a character who's super fashionable has helped me – I'm much more understanding of trends and different designers now. And I think that living in New York has enhanced my courage to walk out in experimental fashion, because the city is the epicentre of trendsetting."

**What does the show's wardrobe look like? We heard it's, like, storeys tall.**

"It's a huge warehouse in the stages up at Silvercup [Studios, NY] where we shoot. If you go through there, you can see everything over the past few years that we've worn, because sometimes [the wardrobe department] likes to go in there and get something that we've worn two years ago and bring it back because it was so great. Or sometimes we have flashbacks. You just never know."

**You've been named the global ambassador for Herbal Essences. Why do you think they chose you for this important role?**

"I'd used their products growing up, and was reintroduced to the brand by my hairdresser, Charles. I thought it made sense. I want to represent a label that I actually use, trust and love."

**The best perks of the role?**

"I travel a lot to talk about the brand. I've gone to Spain and England, and I'm also heading to Italy. So it's really fun and I get to use the products all the time."

**This is our party issue, so what do you recommend as the best party hairstyle and how do you achieve it?**

"I don't generally get to go to that many parties because I'm working all the time, so I need something that's easy to put together. I really love that tousled soft look, and you can get it with the [Herbal Essences] Tousle Me Softly products. It makes your hair look touchable, messy and very sexy with just the right amount of waves, and it can go from day to night really well." ➔

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**We've heard that - not surprisingly - you're quite different from your character, Blair. How much fun is it to play someone with that catty, scheming side to her?**

"It's the most amazing thing to come to work each day and play this super-fun role. I'm really lucky that they write the character so well and I'm saying these really [unreal] things as Blair, and, yes, being very catty. It's great. Just because I know, in my life, I'm very different. Of course, I didn't grow up the way

Blair did and we have many differences. I try to bring as much of myself as I can to the role, or at least experiences I've had with people like her. It's almost like revenge against the bitchy girls."

**Are there any similarities between you and Blair?**

"I like to think so. I look up to her in a lot of ways. Personally, one of my biggest downfalls is that I'm fearful of confrontations and I avoid them at any cost. I like peace and she prefers to stir

**"I LIKE PEACE AND [BLAIR] PREFERS TO STIR UP DRAMA."**

up drama, but sometimes that assertiveness is a good quality and it definitely leads to her getting what she wants all the time. She's also very fashionable, so I admire that. But I also like discovering different things about her. She's very human and has a lot of insecurities that I think we all have. But where we're very different is that she lets her problems take hold of her and make her do these crazy, not-so-nice things. She has issues with her mum and her pretty best friend, and, for me, growing up and becoming a woman, I've discovered I'm not like that at all. I don't feel that competitiveness to be the prettiest girl or the best at everything. I'm much more content in myself."

**If you could give Blair one piece of advice, what would it be?**

"Blair is a few years younger than I am [Leighton is 24] - although it seems a lot less now than when I started because I was playing a high schooler back then - and if I could even just say to the high school version of me 'Don't be so wrapped up in this' or 'Don't be so insecure about that', it would've saved me a lot of tears later on. If I could give her some advice, I'd suggest she be less stubborn and not jump to conclusions, but that's just me and my level-headed, trying-to-keep-the-peace mentality."

**Where would you imagine your character being in 10 years?**

"We've come to a place in the show where she's discovering who she is and who she wants to be as a woman. Blair's going to Columbia, a very prestigious Ivy League school, and there's a lot of pressure. I'd like to see her as a lawyer or political leader. That'd be really fun. ➤"

I'm also a huge fan of Chuck and Blair as a couple, so I'd like to see them together. I want them to get married. Ed [Westwick] and I say it all the time!"

**You've had some great guest stars on the show. Who would be your dream person to work with?**

"I just did a movie [*Monte Carlo*] that Nicole Kidman produced and I didn't get to meet her. I was really looking forward to it because I adore her and I think she'd be an amazing role model for Blair on the show."

**You graduated high school early and, from looking at your jam-packed CV, it's obvious that you're very ambitious. What drives you?**

"I am blessed and I love working, so I continue to do that and the work just keeps coming. It doesn't seem ambitious to me because I just take it a day at a time. What drives my goals is having my family and friends close to me in my life, and staying inspired and wanting to do right by them because they've always supported me. I feel that makes me want to continue and stay happy."

**The track you did with Cobra Starship, *Good Girls Go Bad*, was a big hit over here in Australia. Any more musical plans?**

"I recently did a song with Steven Jerzak called *She Said*, which is a very cool song to dance to. And I have a movie coming out called *Country Strong*, which I sing country music in. It's a different side of that [music] world I didn't know about, but I love it. Also, I've been writing a lot of music and working with a band called Check in the Dark. I'm just having fun with that right now and seeing where it leads."

**Can you tell us a bit more about *Country Strong*? Were you nervous working with Gwyneth Paltrow?**

"She's wonderful. She is, of course, very giving and very funny, and my character is supposed to look up to her, blindly at times. It wasn't very hard to play opposite her as a character because I really do look up to her, and, getting to know her, she's very down to earth. And in the role, she took my breath away."

**The other movie you've got coming out early next year in Australia is *The Roommate* - have you ever had to deal with a friend who stole your style or asked too much of you?**

"I don't know a single person who hasn't had a nightmare roommate story. I used to live with other people till I moved to New York, and some are great and some are just awful. This person I portray isn't just eating your food out of the fridge, she goes beyond what some roommates do in trying to steal your boyfriend and talking about you behind your back. My character's really disturbed!"

**What's still on your life to-do list?**

"In the next five years, I'd like to buy a house and see my puppy grow up. I want to continue writing; it's a passion of mine - I love writing music, and singing and performing. And maybe fall in love." □

## THE BLAIR NECESSITIES



**Leighton's beauty essentials:**

1. Herbal Essences Touse Me Softly mousse.
2. Mario Badescu face cleanser and toner.
3. O.P.I nail polish (she loves the darker shades).
4. An eyelash curler.
5. L'Oréal Paris Bare Naturale Mascara.
6. Evian spray water.



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