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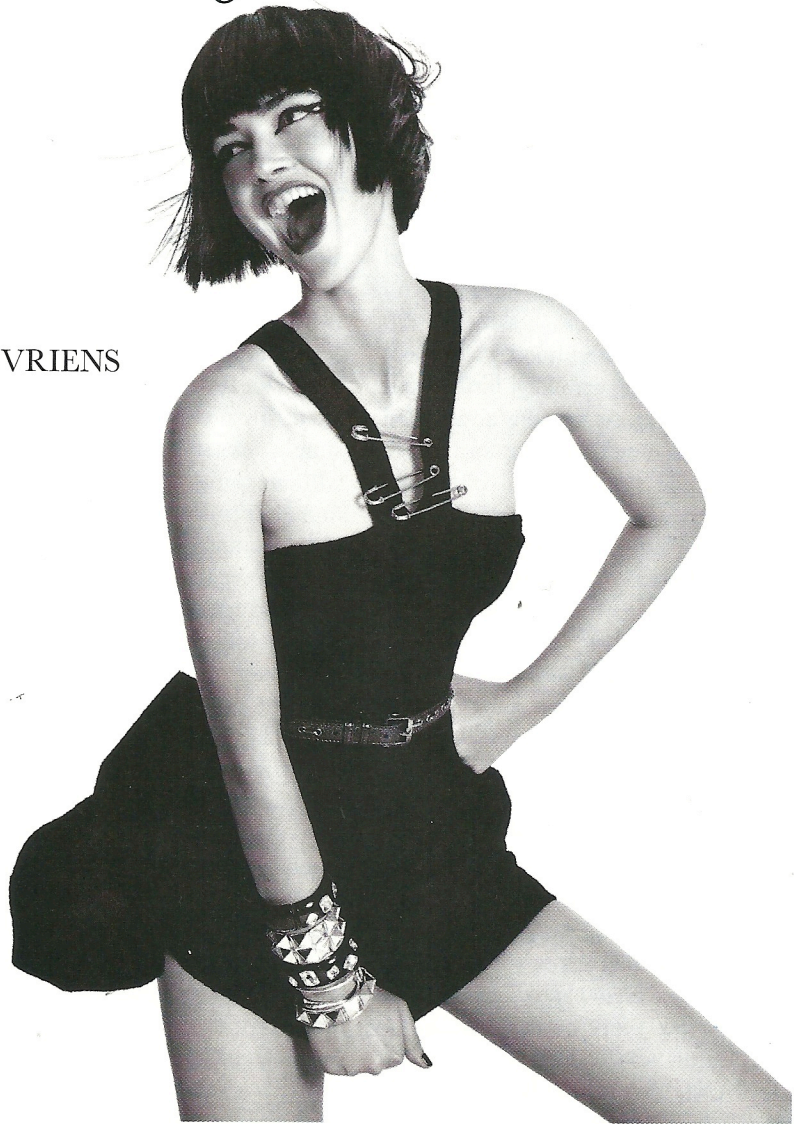
How To WEAR it

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Photograph by MATTHIAS VRIENS



I spent most of 29 bracing myself for the end of irresponsibility. I wanted to grow up. Every society has clearly marked milestones that are meant to forge adults from adolescents. 16. 18. 21. In the US, should you have dodged all those other numbers, we even have 25: the age at which one can legally rent a car. What's more adult than that? Wasn't it just yesterday people were baby-proofing their coffee tables for you? Now look! They'll risk letting you destroy their property by ramming it into a tree. And yet even after these major birthdays were met and passed, even after I could drink and vote and drive automobiles off the side of the road if I pleased, I still had the sense that real adulthood wouldn't be necessary until 30. I could be an extraordinarily tall child at 29, but at 30 there would be no denying it. I would have to grow up. I mean, 30. That's half way to 60. Ask anyone.

There's not an empire in the history of the world that hasn't crumbled, and so it must be for my days of drinking on a school night, of paying my utility bills late, of lying in the sun with only SPF 15 and, yes, of relying too heavily on spellcheck. If my early twenties were about letting go of my teens, my late twenties were about embracing my impending thirties. I appreciated my twenties in the moment, but they were also a kind of training programme. Some days I felt like a responsible adult, with the job-having, the wine-uncorking and the relationship-navigating. Then the next day I'd forget to buy toilet paper and eat M&M's until I was sick.

And then it came. The day last August that brought me to 30 and, sorry as I am to >

TURNING 30: ONLY ADULTS ALLOWED

Mortgages, alcohol moderation and SPF 45 — are your thirties the decade you finally leave your childhood behind? US author Sloane Crosley thinks not

disappoint those who have not yet reached this milestone, nothing happened. This is the dirty secret of turning 30.

Did I think I was going to wake up with a mortgage, wearing pearls and spotting errors in the phone bill? Well, actually, kind of. I thought of 30 as The Mother of All New Year's Eves. As much as I spent 29 bracing myself for adulthood, I also spent it staying out later, travelling farther and experimenting more. I secretly anticipated 30 as a kind of shutdown of my former self.

Beyond the simplicity of birthdays, today's society expects us to cross invisible thresholds into responsibility and adulthood. One hundred years ago, by now we'd all be married with three children, lacing up our corsets. Actually, we only need go back to the 1960s, when having a home and children was tantamount to collecting Girl Scout patches. However, it did come with one useful perk: clear life instructions. Granted, they were instructions to the wrong game – one with a high rate of alcoholism and divorce – but there must have been some comfort in having your life mapped out. Because though the pressure is off publicly now, it's still lurking. The result? Every woman I know is making her own rules. But every woman I know also has a difficult time following them.

As I write this, I have been 30 for six months. In that time I have found myself recalling the advice of a college professor, advice that I was unable to fully absorb in my late teens. A short story of mine was to be published in a literary journal. Sadly, the journal folded before my piece was printed. I was devastated. I thought it was proof that I'd never produce a good story again. I was 19. My professor smiled, rays of wrinkles rushing from her eyes to her temples, and said, 'Your problem is you haven't figured out you're going to live for a very long time.' I had no idea what she

was talking about. And, as much as I like to think of myself as sage when it comes to my own life, I still don't know what she's talking about. Not fully. Taking things in one's stride is certainly a part of ageing. But aren't women also meant to be conquering the world about, oh, now? Sometimes, it seems near-impossible to be breezy and brazen at the same time. I can only hope that in the decades to come, my professor's simple observation will become even more applicable, giving me the courage to start over in tough times and to appreciate what I have during great ones.

Right now things are looking up. This is the inevitable fact of ageing. One doesn't shrink older, one grows older. I live in New York, a quirky city that I love, and I work in book publishing, an even quirkiest industry that I love. These statements were as true five years ago as they are today, but with each passing year I feel a little less like I'm renting my life. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, I am beginning to genuinely own my choices.

In the meantime, this 30 business sneaks up in the most surprising ways. Sometimes the events of the past three decades seem evenly spaced, like hangers on a rail. Life seems orderly and logical. But all it takes is the tiniest trigger and time becomes deformed. I'll be walking down the street and turn to a friend and say, 'I used to date someone who lived in this building.' And there it is. A whole affair summed up in one sentence. Have I lived long enough to explain a two-year relationship just like that? Apparently. Or I'll be at work and find myself as one of the go-to people regarding matters of office lore. So I impart the wisdom, find the file – still a bit fascinated that anyone takes me seriously.

In the end, 30, like anything else, is what you make of it. For better or worse, we create our own milestones to reach and our own corsets to lace. What will and won't we do next year? Sometimes I sense the 27- and 28-year-old versions of me are

'With each passing year I feel a little less like I'm RENTING my life. Gradually, imperceptibly, I am beginning to own my CHOICES'

lined up behind me as I stare into the canyon of the next decade.

'What do you see?' they say. They have big hopeful eyes.

'It's too blurry,' I want to say, 'and I've only just arrived.' But they demand certainty. So I look out into the future as best as I can.

We have a faltering global economy. Women are changing the world with one hand and injecting stroke medication into their foreheads with the other. For every role model we have working in the White House, there are a dozen women crying their eyes out over this week's celebrity break-up. As for the universe as I know it, the future is uncertain. I am far away from having a mortgage. Far away from moving in with a member of the opposite sex. Far away from turning off the spellcheck. But I can still plough through an entire pack of M&M's in a minute. Am I an adult yet?

'Tell us what you see!' the younger ones say, adding 'and it had better not look like *Bridget Jones*.'

I want to tell them to go home. Put on SPF 45 and get their beauty sleep. Because maybe the trick to 30 is to stop waiting for signs of adulthood when you're standing dead smack in the middle of it. Perhaps being an adult is as simple as not letting the rest of the world say when. That seems about right, doesn't it? If it's not, I still have a while to figure it out. After all, I'm going to live for a very long time. ■