

A close-up photograph of Hugh Grant sitting at a wooden table. He is wearing a dark blue button-down shirt under a grey corduroy blazer. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. In front of him is a white ceramic cup of tea on a matching saucer, and he is holding a spoon, stirring the tea. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a framed picture on the wall.

TEA WITH...

HUGH GRANT

The star opens up about his silly side (a pirate movie!) and his surprisingly serious new chapter

BY LESLEY MESSER

Grant (photographed April 21 at the Crosby Street Hotel in New York City) marvels at the length of his decades-long career. "Pre-Internet days!" he says. "That's what's astonishing."

GROOMER: SANDY LINTER/rita.hazan@saloni.com

Hugh Grant voices an unhinged pirate captain in the new animated film *The Pirates! Band of Misfits*, but the performance he's really focused on one sunny Saturday afternoon is happening in real time: pretending to enjoy a cup of tea made by—horrors—an American PEOPLE staffer. “You put way too much milk in and made it truly disgusting,” he says, flashing his signature sly smile. “And you as a race, your tea mistake is not having the water actually boiling when you pour it on the leaves. *That's* unforgivable.”

Can't blame Grant for wanting a decent pick-me-up. On a quick trip to New York City, the London native has been spreading his indefatigable charm and self-deprecating wit at press events while trying to squeeze in time with his brother and friends like Sarah Jessica Parker. And he couldn't resist hitting up a new Manhattan hot spot like Acme, where he partied the night before. “I have quite a busy social life, as you can see from the bags under my eyes,” he says with a sigh. (In reality, it's hard to tell it's been 18 years since his breakout role in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.) “But I think it is time to cut back.”

It's official: Hollywood's consummate bachelor is all grown up. “I'm 51 and a father,” he says. What's more, he's ready to pass on his title as king of romantic comedies. “I've always had one foot in showbusiness and one foot out,” he says, “and I think my weight is slightly more on the out now.”

Instead, he's focusing on other pursuits: finally finishing his half-written novel (“It basically takes place in the boot of a car, mainly. And by boot, I mean trunk”), improving his golf handicap and, most importantly, helping to lead the charge against British tabloids and other news organizations that have been accused of phone hacking. “I had been ranting and rav-



“I have tea with milk but I prefer coffee,” he says. “But that makes me unpleasant. Or, more unpleasant.”



“ THE THINGS I'VE REALLY ENJOYED MOST IN MY LIFE WERE LITTLE DABS OF CREATIVITY ”

ing on these issues for a long time, and people basically thought I was mad, drunk or paranoid,” he says. “The battle is by no means over, but it has been a fascinating excursion. I think at a certain point in life it's good to do something completely different.”

That includes fatherhood. After Grant and Tinglan Hong, a Chinese actress, welcomed a daughter, Tabitha, last fall, things shifted. “I always assumed I'd end up having children, but I did, I admit, leave it rather late,” he says. “When poor Tabitha wants to climb trees with me, I'll be sitting in a wheelchair! But it's just lovely. [My life] is nicer. It's definitely richer, and I'm delighted to have her. I adore her.”

As for Hong, Grant says the two are “very friendly.” He has also gone to great lengths to protect her, filing a protective order against photographers, who are now forbidden from harassing her or their daughter. “Had I not been able to get that injunction, she would've gone home to China with my baby,” he says. But “she's well now.”

With all quiet on the home front, Grant focused on *Pirates!*, from the studio behind the Wallace and Gromit films. “It's just so clever and bonkers and sort of *Monty Python*-ish that it was right up my alley,” he says. “I signed up to do it before I knew I was a father, but it's nice to think that one day my daughter may see it.”

In the future, the only films he'll do, he says, are passion projects—which include the “strange” upcoming drama *Cloud Atlas*, directed by *The Matrix's* Wachowski siblings and Tom Tykwer. “I have truly been unbelievably lucky,” he says. But now, “it's just fun to be doing real life.” ●