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Gabrielle

Strikes

Gold

Her latest role doesn't come with a ready-made script or handy stage directions. As a new mom, Gabrielle Union is writing her story as she goes—and learning what it means to raise a strong daughter.

*(HINT: LEAVE THE JUDGMENTS AT THE DOOR...)*

BY JESSICA HERNDON

PHOTOGRAPHED BY PEGGY SIROTA

FASHION EDITOR: THOMAS KIKIS





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She welcomed her first child just eight days ago, but Gabrielle Union shows no sign of sleep deprivation. Easygoing in jeans, a red plaid shirt, and a pair of Fear of God sneakers, Gabrielle looks fresh and flawless as she arrives at one of her go-to local haunts, a beer tavern near the Sherman Oaks, California, home she shares with her husband, Miami Heat star Dwyane Wade.

She comes in for a hug before sliding into the corner booth, and though she's quick to admit she got a bit more rest than usual last night, the actress-producer—who, this April, stars alongside Jessica Alba in the new television series *L.A.'s Finest* (a *Bad Boys* spin-off)—says her new normal is “like that second day in Vegas where you're all, ‘I'm not sleeping Saturday away. I'm going to day-party and rally!’ But your body is like, ‘Are you crazy?’ You're exhausted and you kind of start to feel a little ill because you haven't slept.” But she's not complaining. This is part of being a parent, and it's just one of the many phases she's up for, following a lengthy struggle with infertility.

Before the arrival of her daughter, Kaavia James Union Wade, who was born via surrogate, Gabrielle suffered some eight or nine miscarriages and underwent three years of failed IVF treatments, all of which she chronicles in her 2017 memoir,



*We're Going to Need More Wine*. Last summer, she revealed she'd been diagnosed—after years of searching for answers about her body—with adenomyosis, a condition that can cause intense periods and an enlarged uterus. It could be the reason she was unable to carry to term. “There's nothing more that I wanted than to cook my own baby,” says the 46-year-old, who helps raise Wade's nephew and two sons from a previous marriage. But once she was down to three embryos, surrogacy seemed like the best option.

“The idea of it felt like surrendering to failure,” Gabrielle says, when speaking about welcoming a surrogate into their lives. Yet she pushed past those emotions and shifted to focusing on finding the right woman to carry her baby. “Some people care about the race, religion, or food habits of their surrogate. I was like, ‘I want a reader.’” When Gabrielle met a potential surrogate who shared her love of books, she knew she'd found the one. “She said, ‘I love the smell of the pages,’” remembers Gabrielle. It was the sign she needed.

Imagining the public's reaction was a tough hurdle too. “People want to see the bump, hear that you got hemorrhoids—they want to know you're like them. I was like, ‘This is going to seem like the most Hollywood shit ever. Will I be embraced as a mom?’ It's terrifying.” But when her baby finally arrived, those feelings were replaced by ones of fierce love, loyalty, and a serious sense of protectiveness. “I was like, ‘Oh my god, this is my baby,’” she recalls. “I wanted to fight everybody in that room for various reasons and no reason.”

Though she'd been trying for years, becoming a parent in her 40s ended up being the right timing for Gabrielle, whose breakout role in *Bring It On* in 2000 was followed by films like *Think Like a Man*, *Breaking In*, and the BET show *Being Mary Jane*. “Any earlier and the FOMO would have greatly influenced how I parented,” she says. “I've

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**Previous spread:** H&M tank, \$25, [hm.com](http://hm.com); Heroine Sport jacket, \$225, and shorts, \$138, [heroinesport.com](http://heroinesport.com); Jennifer Fisher earrings, \$495, [jenniferfisherjewelry.com](http://jenniferfisherjewelry.com); Ariel Gordon necklace, \$875, [arielgordonjewelry.com](http://arielgordonjewelry.com); Missoma necklace, \$167, [missoma.com](http://missoma.com).

**This page:** Gabrielle Union Collection at New York & Company anorak, \$100, [womenshealthmag.com/sweatshirt](http://womenshealthmag.com/sweatshirt) for more from Union's New York & Company line, and joggers, \$60, [womenshealthmag.com/joggers](http://womenshealthmag.com/joggers); Nike sneakers, \$90, [nike.com](http://nike.com) for similar styles



“

I need sun. I need vitamin D on my face. Give me a trail, a park, a walk down the street with the dogs, a breeze, rain.”



**Milly** anorak, milly.com for similar styles; **American Apparel** bodysuit, \$38, americanapparel.com; **Roberto Cavalli** sneakers, \$550, robertocavalli.com; **Gag&Lou** bracelets, \$61 each, at select Club Monaco locations

#### BEAUTY TIP

x Mist dry hair with Flawless by Gabrielle Union Shine Spray (\$19, ulta.com) and not even a gust of wind will dull its glow.



## BEAUTY TIP

Go ahead, embrace the sun—just protect your skin first. Supergoop! Unseen Sunscreen Broad Spectrum SPF 40 (\$32, at Sephora) blocks out UVA and UVB rays. Plus, it goes on clear, so no need to worry about chalkiness.

seen it. I've done it. I've done it well. I've gotten all the T-shirts. Now I'm in the right mindset and mental space, and I'm open to being the best mom I can be."

Gabrielle has picked up plenty of tools to keep her mind right over the years. One of them is to occasionally indulge in "eating what the hell I want and not thinking about it," she says, while nodding at the table where her order of garlic Parmesan fries, chicken wings, and beer sits. Her self-care routine also includes finding a moment alone to enjoy some quiet time ("I appreciate silence"), reading ("Let me just get a chapter in"), and listening to *Affirmation Pod* by Josie Ong. Whipping out her phone, Gabrielle reads the titles of a few episodes she's played recently: "Motivation for a New Beginning" and "You Are Worthy and Deserving." "I'll listen to these while I'm brushing my teeth or getting a facial," Gabrielle says. "She always drops some nuggets."

Maintaining an active lifestyle and getting plenty of fresh air are also keys to Gabrielle's well-being. "I need sun," she says. "I need vitamin D on my face. Give me a trail, a park, a walk down the street with the dogs, a breeze, rain. I'll go hike. I'll get a lawn chair and sit outside my trailer so I'm not trapped inside." When she's in Miami, where she and Wade also have a home, she'll jump on Jet Skis or

**Milly** top, milly.com for similar styles; **Adam Selman** sweatpants, \$250, adamselman.com; **Ancient Greek Sandals** sandals, \$270, shopbop.com

**Gabrielle Union** Collection at **New York & Company** top, \$70, nyandcompany.com; **Cynthia Rowley** bottom, \$95, cynthiarowley.com for similar styles; **Pierre Hardy** sneakers, \$595, pierrehardy.com; **Gag&Lou** bracelets, \$61 each, at select Club Monaco locations

hit the gym with the kids. "Training together, struggling, failing, trying to get better—it's been a cool thing that doesn't feel like, 'Let's go talk about our feelings.' It's like, I'm a cool mom!"

Approachable is exactly the kind of parent she hopes to be for her daughter. "I want to let her be free," says Gabrielle, who wrestled with identity issues after moving, at a young age, from a mostly black neighborhood in Nebraska to a primarily white one in Pleasanton, California. "I want to instill in her morals, values. And then I want to give her space to fill in those gaps, fall on her ass, and make mistakes. Get an F because she didn't study. Pick the wrong dude. Pick the wrong friends and figure it out. I don't want to be super judge-y."

Gabrielle knows the entertainment industry can be just that, so when she acknowledges some of the sacrifices she makes to keep herself camera-ready, it's with an "it is what it is" attitude. While on set during the week, she drinks a gallon of water a day, eats good fats, and is gluten-free, dairy-free, and low-sodium. She first implemented this type of diet in early 2018 while dealing with IVF side effects, including intense bloating. "My face looked like the surface of the moon, small chunks of hair were falling out," she explains. "At 9 a.m. I had a flat stomach. By noon I looked like I was five months pregnant."

To help get her body on track, she consulted Alisa Vitti, a functional nutritionist and women's hormone expert. "She said, 'Cut out gluten, dairy, alcohol, and caffeine and see if the swelling alleviates and it helps with your skin and hair,'" says Gabrielle. "I felt like she was trying to torture me." But after only a few days, she noticed a big difference. "So I did it for six weeks," she adds. "Then I was like, 'I need a drink!'"

Drinking is something she won't be giving up again. But sticking to a healthy eating pattern and adding 15 to 20 minutes of daily cardio, plus strength training and Pilates, keeps her body fit and her head clear. Morning sweat sessions jibe best with Gabrielle's schedule, but she'd much rather pull the covers back over her head when the alarm goes off. "You know how you swing your legs off to the side of the bed?" she asks. "That's when you really think about life's decisions: *How much would it cost if I cancel? What does traffic look like? Should I go back to sleep?*" It's usually cold-brew coffee and the guilt of canceling last-minute that gets her going. "I don't leave people hanging." (Editor's note: Spoken like a true workout buddy!)

In fact, part of the thrill of having her own production company, I'll Have Another, is helping others realize their dreams. "Creating opportunities, especially for creatives of color, to start careers, advance, get paid—it's the best," she says. As a dedicated mom, wife, actress, and boss, Gabrielle has plenty of knowledge about being a strong woman to pass on to the one she's raising.

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Hair: Larry Sims at Forward Artists using Flawless  
Makeup: Fiona Stiles at Starworks Artists  
Manicure: Tom Bachik for Chanel

