The prized possession you value above all others... A copy of the Gormenghast Trilogy by Mervyn Peake, which the actress Harriet Walter gave to me after I played her daughter in Channel 4's The Price when I was 13. It reminds me of a life-changing experience. I loved acting but I didn't pursue it because so few actors succeed.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... That I've not written a novel. I'm terrified of committing to the page, but I'll be sorry if I come to the end of my life and haven't written one. The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd wake up with my partner Dominic and our three sons – Sam, ten, Finn, nine, and Jack, seven – at the Cipriani hotel in Venice, then we'd head to the Hollywood Roosevelt hotel in LA for breakfast. I'd have scrambled eggs with asparagus, spinach and avocado, followed by pancakes with fruit and whipped butter. Then we'd hang out by the pool. Later we'd have a picnic lunch in the dunes at Camber Sands in East Sussex and play on the beach. In the evening, Dom and I would have margaritas and burritos at the Puerto Alegre Mexican restaurant in San Francisco with a mariachi band playing.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Checking Twitter. It's endlessly fascinating, but it's also a black hole for your time and energy.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte. It spoke to me as a teenager and I marvelled at its complexity in my 20s and 30s, but now I'm 42 and it's still the most... I want us to do it our way. Since then I've learnt a lot. He's very powerful. In my alternative universe, I'd be doing housework otherwise! By family and friends, as someone who loved unconditionally. By viewers, as the American writer Dorothy Parker

The poem that touches your soul... Still I Rise by American poet Maya Angelou, which is about her fighting oppression to make a success of her life. The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I hate my commute to Salford. I spend 21 hours a week travelling from London, but I relish that time and get lots done. And I'd be doing housework otherwise! The event that altered the course of your life and character... Becoming editor of my student newspaper Epi-

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: BBC Breakfast’s Susanna Reid

The film you can watch time and time again... Bugsy Malone from 1976. I always cry during You Gave A Little Love, the song at the end.

The person who has influenced you most... My partner, Dominic. I was a commitment phobe until we met, but since then I've learnt a lot. He's very supportive and accepts why I don't want to get married. I had a choppy childhood after my parents divorced when I was nine. I want us to do it our way.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... The American writer Dorothy Parker. She was a clever, glamorous, witty and acerbic poet.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... The same Goethe quote my mum passed on to me, ‘Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.’ It’s basically saying you can do anything, just get started.

The unhappy interest that engages your imagination... Hip-hop music. There's something primal about the beat. In my alternative universe I'm a DJ in a hip-hop nightclub!

The drink that means most to you... Mexican restaurant in San Francisco

The order of service at your funeral... To ensure that my children have happy and fulfilled childhoods. The philosophy that underpins your life... Whatever it is that you do, do it with passion. The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... That I didn't pursue acting but I didn't pursue it because so few actors succeed.

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