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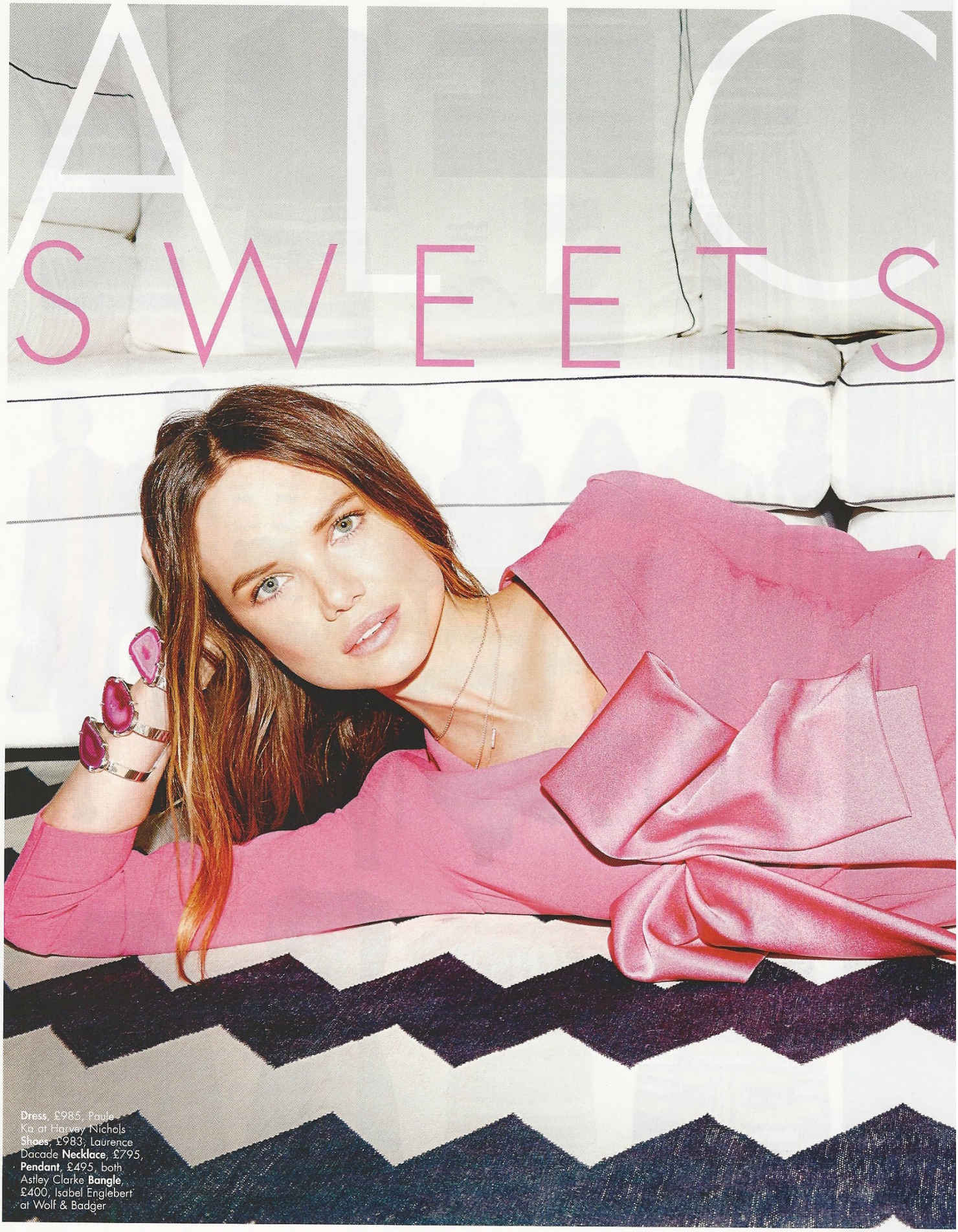


Dress, £985, Paule Ka at Harvey Nichols **Shoes**, £983, Laurence Dacade **Necklace**, £795, **Pendant**, £495, both Astley Clarke **Bangle**, £400, Isabel Englebert at Wolf & Badger

IA'S UCCESS

Supermodel, businesswoman and restaurateur ALICIA ROUNTREE talks growing up on a sugar plantation, overcoming shyness and her next career move

WORDS: Julia Neel PHOTOGRAPHS: John Rhodes

Meet Alicia Rountree: the Mauritius-born Victoria's Secret model, accomplished restaurateur and tech entrepreneur who's built an empire of snazzy sandwich shops in New York – and launched her own ballet-based fitness app. 'Vapid model' clichés certainly do not apply here. One of a new breed of multi-talented, so-called 'slashies', Alicia has the chutzpah to get things done and the kind of charm that makes her success seem somehow effortless.

Yet, this mesmerising beauty is also a bit of an enigma as we discovered on the HFM cover shoot. A photographer's dream, she incrementally adjusts her limbs, head, face and expression each time the shutter clicks, requiring almost no direction. After 12 years of 'werking it' in front of the camera, she knows exactly what to do.

At one point, she drops a shoulder, lowers her chin, slightly parts her lips and delivers a wink into the videographer's camera that is equal measures playful and seductive. "Was that OK?" she asks. "I can do another one." She needn't have worried; it was perfect. She is a winker of Olympian standards.

Even so, that almost subversive wink comes as something of a surprise, at odds with the polite young woman who has been silently messaging friends in between shots and outfit changes, then shifting into gear when the lens is once again trained on her. She may not be a prima donna but she is unafraid to let her personality shine through.

Dress, £2,260, Michael Kors Collection **Coat**, £795, McQ Alexander McQueen at Harvey Nichols **Earrings**, £395, **Necklace**, £1,950, both Astley Clarke

It's her self-contained yet spirited professionalism that has landed her campaigns for the likes of L'Oréal, Ralph Lauren, Gap, Uniqlo and Guess, the latter placing her in the same league as Adriana Lima, Kate Upton and Gigi Hadid. She's also a Victoria's Secret veteran – her first shoot for the lingerie giant was in the Caribbean ten years ago, alongside another budding young model, Miranda Kerr. "I remember getting the call sheet and seeing my name on it and not believing it," she recalls.

Up until recently, Alicia, 30, a former girlfriend of actor Jude Law, was based in New York but now divides her time between LA, where she rents a home in West Hollywood, and London, where she lived when she first began modelling. "I came back last summer to renew my visa for the States and it took three months, and then I just fell in love with London again," she says, dressed for our interview in a classic model-off-duty ensemble of washed-out black skinny jeans and a cult Rotten Roach T-shirt (by her friend Marissa Montgomery).

While living in London in the early Noughties she met her ex-boyfriend, French-born Nicolas Dutko, who she dated for seven years and with whom she founded Tartinery, a chain of New York restaurants specialising in French-style, open-faced 'tartine' sandwiches and which labels itself a bistro moderne. Alicia describes the restaurants as a "sexier version" of Le Pain Quotidien. "We toast our tartines, they don't. They taste better toasted," she explains.

She was introduced to Nicolas, who is still her business partner, by her parents. "Mum kept saying 'You have to meet this guy, he can show you around Paris'. I was, like, 'No, I'm fine!' When I eventually met him, I realised I should have taken her advice," she laughs.

She moved to New York soon after that and it was there that her modelling career really took off after being signed by modelling agency IMG. "My look, being more healthy and sun-kissed, was definitely more suited to the American market," she agrees. In-between assignments, she opened the first Tartinery with Nicolas in 2010, but the process wasn't as smooth as they would have liked. "We cut our teeth big time on [the first restaurant]!" Alicia remembers. "We'd never opened a restaurant and the space was the worst choice because we had to redo all the floors and put in a kitchen. The construction [workers] walked out and the permits took forever. It cost about five times as much as we'd planned, and then took four times as long to complete. But we learnt for all the rest." They now have three bistros in New York with plans to open in Miami, Los Angeles and, potentially, London. "I think Tartinery would do well in London as I don't think a concept like ours exists [here] yet," says Alicia, who is also hoping to open a hotel in Mauritius.

'GROWING UP IN MAURITIUS WAS HEAVEN, BLISS. I WANT THE SAME FOR MY KIDS'

Her love of food can be traced back to her birthplace, where, as the youngest of four children, she was raised in a tropical idyll on her family's sugar and potato plantation. "Growing up there was bliss, heaven," says the fiercely proud eighth-generation islander. "We used to go and pick vegetables straight from the garden for dinner. My parents wanted to create a little paradise for us, where we could live and be self-sufficient."

It's her happy place, you can tell. When she talks about her childhood, her smile widens. "I want the same for my kids. We were outdoors all the time; running around, jumping in the sea, making sand castles. I used to make cakes out of sand and have my 'bakery' for my parents to come and buy cakes," she says. Now, when she goes back, she ▸

Dress, £305, Boutique Moschino **Shoes**, £895, Christian Louboutin **Necklace** (top), £325, **Necklace** (bottom), £90, **Ring**, £75, **Bangle**, £45, all Pebble London

ALICIA'S STYLE

LEFT TO RIGHT: At *The Martian* film premiere; polished at a London Fashion Week dinner; rocking lace at an amFar gala; at an Elton John Oscar-viewing party in Hollywood

goes "swimming, kayaking and water-skiing." Idyllic indeed.

Alicia wanted to be a model for as long as she can remember, pouncing on her stylish mother's copy of *Vogue* as soon as it arrived each month. When Alicia's preschool class was once asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, she stood up and announced: "I want to be a top model." She was scouted several times before her mother, Elizabeth, a former model herself, finally relented and agreed to let her move to London and start modelling when she turned 17. It helped that man-about-town and interior designer Nicky Haslam was a close family friend and he took the teenage Alicia under his wing, escorting her to parties and clubs. "I first met Nicky when he came to our house for the weekend with Lee Radziwill [sister of Jackie Kennedy Onassis]," she recalls. "I got along really well with him so when I was in London he took me out." On one such night in 2001, she was spotted by a modelling agent and promptly signed up.

She began hanging out with other new faces like Alexa Chung, Brazilian model Izabel Goulart and stylist Anya Ziourova. "We all started together at the same modelling agency; it's nice to see how well they are all doing and how far they have come," smiles Alicia.

While her London life today may be a whirl of film premieres and fashion parties, Alicia insists her disco days are firmly behind her. "I used to love going out but now I'm so over clubs – urgh no!" she groans. "I would rather just be with friends and have a nice glass of wine. I get too tired if I go out, it's like my brain doesn't work anymore." She's more likely to be found at wholesome locales like The Good Life Eatery or The South Kensington Club, both of which are close to her London flat.

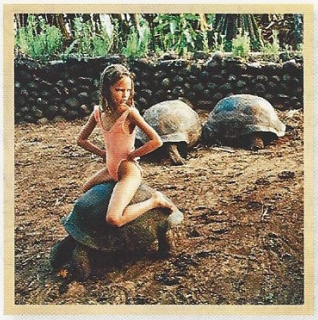
Jumpsuit, £695, Vanessa Gounden at Wolf & Badger
Shoes, £495, Christian Louboutin
Necklaces, from £495, Astley Clarke

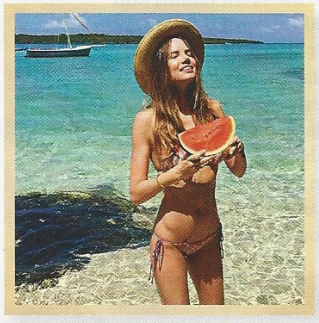
Top, £1,030, Fendi
Skirt, £249, Victor Xenia London at Wolf & Badger
Rings, from £45, Pebble London

'I DON'T WANT TO BE JUST THE MODEL-LOOKING GIRLFRIEND IN A ROMANTIC COMEDY. I'D LOVE TO [PLAY] A SUPERHERO'

On our shoot, she complains of sore muscles after working out for two days solid in Verbier while filming online fitness tutorials for Skinny Bitch Collective (SBC) founder Russell Bateman. She's a big fan of his classes and also trains with him privately in London. "I like to feel like I've worked out properly," she says. "The classes are tough. I won't lie; it's non-stop but it's fun. You're doing moves that you don't usually do, like jumping on the back of a girl while she does squats."

Alicia's Instagram feed is peppered with videos of her and Millie Mackintosh performing SBC exercises, which she





TOP TO BOTTOM: Making friends with the wildlife in Mauritius, aged seven; showcasing her beach style in Santorini, Greece, in 2015

complements with gentler forms of Pilates, yoga and ballet, the latter of which she once considered taking up professionally. In fact, it was her love of ballet that helped inspire her fitness app, Supermodel Ballet Body, launched last year with celebrity personal trainer and former ballet dancer Robert Brace, tailored to people's travel schedules. "As I was travelling all the time, we wanted to do an app that people could use when they're away," she explains. "It's simple ballet moves that target your legs, butt, abs and arms – all in ten-minute sessions that you can do in a hotel room or at home."

Alicia's accent is hard to place. It's a bit French and a bit posh English, with certain vowels echoing the ten years she lived in New York and some words sounding straight out of LA. Kind of pan-European, but also not. She was raised speaking French, Créole and English, and at 15 was sent to The American School In Switzerland, an exclusive co-ed boarding school in Lugano. "Everybody in my family has a British accent; I used to have one but it's totally messed up now and I go home sounding a bit Americanised," she says, sounding not very British at all.

That vocal ambiguity is another thing that will propel her in her next career ambition – as an actress. She's been training since she moved to New York, taking classes at Stella Adler and, more recently, studying in LA under renowned coach Margie Haber, famous for coaching the likes of Brad Pitt, Halle Berry and Vince Vaughn. But she's aware that the route to leading lady may not be an easy one. "It's tricky with acting because, obviously, it's a lot of hard work, but coming from being a model and wanting to act, people always think, 'Oh, it's just another model who wants to act', you know?" says Alicia, who once starred in a Heineken ad. "I don't want to be just the model-looking girlfriend in a romantic comedy. I'd love to [play] a superhero or get really fat for a role – I would love that." ▸

Dress, £1,895, Burberry **Shoes**, £795, Christian Louboutin **Necklace** (top), £90, **Necklace** (bottom), £120, **Bangle**, £60, all Pebble London

Surely ex-boyfriend Jude Law, whom she dated in 2013 and whom she describes as "a really, really great guy", has some golden words of wisdom for her? "He's such a great actor but I'm too shy to ask," she demurs. "I remember one time I did an audition and I was like, 'I had this audition…' and he said, 'Oh, great. Rah, rah, rah…' but I just couldn't talk about it."

Despite the A-list chums and her 30,000 Instagram followers, she wasn't always at the top of the popularity index at school. "I was pretty shy. At school, I was really little and super skinny and, actually, the kids weren't very nice when I was quite young. The girls used to make fun of me and for nothing. Then I turned 12 or 13 and things kind of changed."

'YOU CAN EAT KALE EVERY DAY BUT IF YOU'RE IN A TOXIC RELATIONSHIP THEN YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BE HEALTHY'

TOP TO BOTTOM: Alicia at one of her Tartinery restaurants in NYC with business partner Nicolas Dutko, right, and his brother, Serguei Dutko, left, the bistro's CFO; with her ex-boyfriend Jude Law in New York

Dress, £1,875, Holly Fulton
Necklace, £360, Pebble London
Rings, from £70, Astley Clarke

It's an unfortunate attitude that she's had to contend with in the modelling industry, too: "You get bitchy looks from some girls but at the end of the day it's not rocket science. It's not that serious – be nice! I have a few really good friends who are models but I also have lots of friends outside the industry. I think it's important to not be all fashion; not constantly talking about shoes and things like that.

"I'm not shy anymore; I'm very much at peace with everything," continues Alicia, whose new beau is not someone in the public eye. "I think the older you get the more comfortable you become. And the thing with modelling is that you're constantly judged on your looks, so that can make you feel a little bit insecure at times, like when maybe the photographer is talking about you as if you're not there. But it's part of the job. Now I'm just, like, 'Whatever'."

Any shyness evaporates when she starts talking about nutrition, a subject she's truly passionate about. Her personal interest in the subject led her to enrol in an online course with the New York-based Institute for Integrative Nutrition, which gradually turned her into a fully fledged vegetarian and a certified health coach. "I used to have a chicken club salad every day, then I started reading a lot about nutrition and, gradually, I didn't feel like eating meat anymore." And she hasn't looked back. "I just feel like my brain is so clear."

Now she wants to take what she knows to the world. "I have all this knowledge I need to share," she smiles. "I was thinking of doing a coffee table book about living a balanced life."

But don't expect a tome exalting the life-giving powers of deprivation and lentils – you can still have chocolate in Alicia's world. "My rule is, whatever you want to eat, just eat the best quality of it. I don't like milky chocolate but I love dark chocolate. Don't eat a tub of ice cream, have one scoop. It's all balance, balance, balance."

That word is a bit of a mantra for the model. "Everything needs to be balanced. You can eat kale every day but if you're in a toxic relationship or if you hate your job, then you're not going to be healthy and you're not going to ever be happy."

With her work/life balance clearly sorted, there's no doubt that Alicia is one happy lady. HFM

STYLIST: MARY-ANNA KEARNEY FASHION ASSISTANT: LAURA WEATHERBURN HAIR: LOUIS BYRNE AT THE LONDON STYLE AGENCY USING HAIR REHAB MAKE-UP: JUSTINE JENKINS USING DELILAH ADDITIONAL PHOTOS: REX FEATURES, SPLASH NEWS, INSTAGRAM/ALICIA ROUNTREE

Top, £940, **Skirt**, £2,600, both Delpozo **Shoes**, £105, Tommy Hilfiger **Necklace**, £795, Astley Clarke **Rings**, £75, Monica Vinader; from £70, Astley Clarke