


STYLE



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ALL ABOUT LILY

HOW ACTRESS
LILY JAMES
CONQUERED STAGE
AND SCREEN

HOROSCOPES
YOUR YEAR AHEAD
BY SHELLEY VON
STRUNCKEL

THE DEVIL WEARS
LULULEMON
CAN EDITRIX
LORRAINE CANDY
LEARN TO
LOVE YOGA?



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TOP, £305, MSGM;
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OPPOSITE SHIRT, £910,
SKIRT, £3,300, BLACK TIE,
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THE SECOND ACT OF



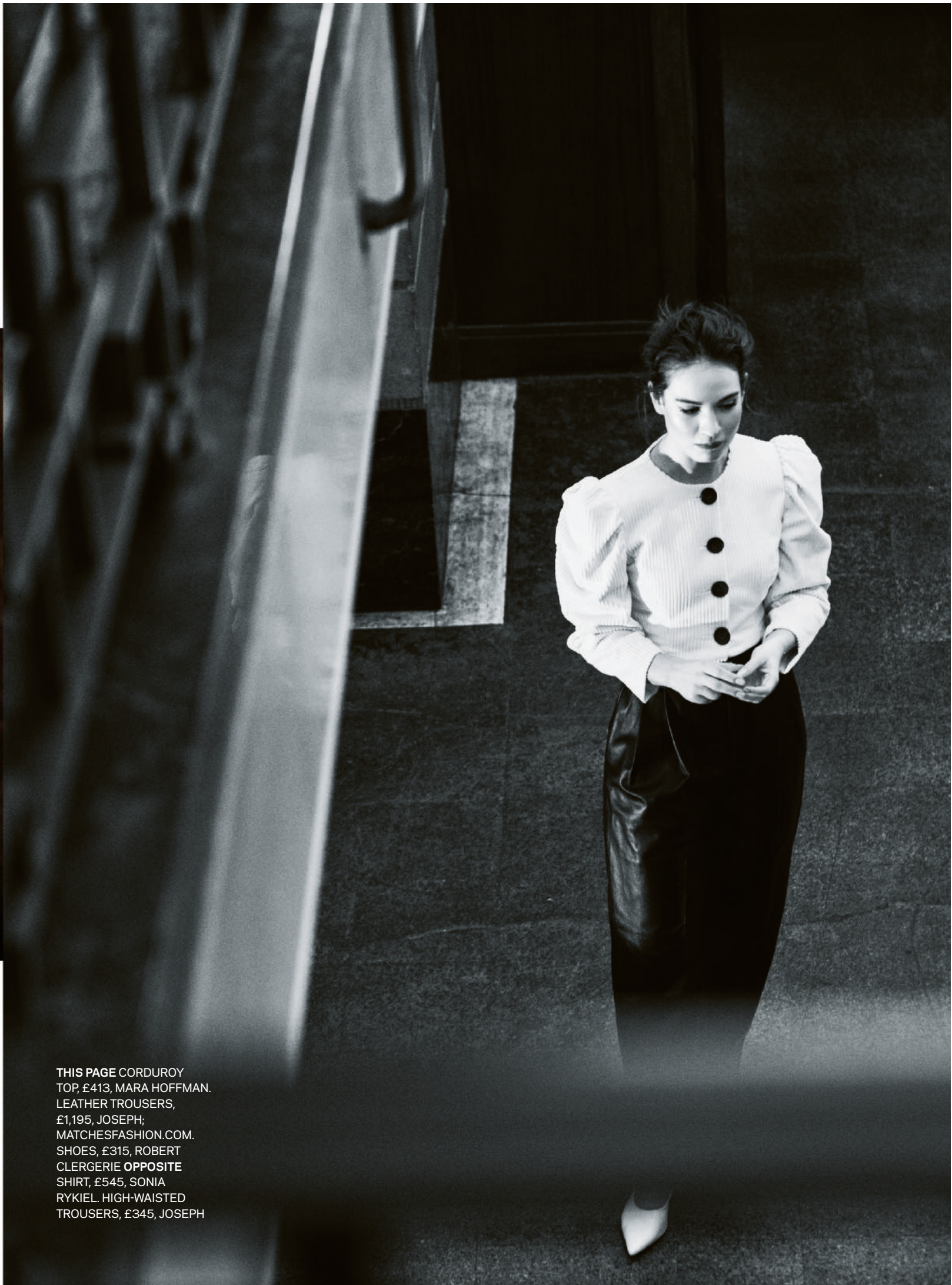
LILY JAMES

*The girl from Surrey has won over Hollywood – now Lily James is taking to the stage in the role of a lifetime. She talks to **Scarlett Russell** about karaoke nights in north London, house-hunting with Matt Smith and going on a secret sabbatical*

Photographs **Lucian Bor** Styling **Flossie Saunders**



THIS PAGE AND
OPPOSITE RUCHED
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£1,195, JOSEPH;
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SHIRT, £545, SONIA
RYKIEL. HIGH-WAISTED
TROUSERS, £345, JOSEPH

In an old, grade II* listed town hall in north London, Lily James is being photographed through a revolving door. A small crowd gathers around her: a glam squad poised with make-up brushes, hairspray and safety pins, assistants adjusting overhead lights and a few passers-by — a couple tentatively holding out for an autograph — peering over to glance at one of Britain's most bankable actresses. Thanks to the global popularity of Cinderella, Downton Abbey and Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again, James's razor-sharp cheekbones and big brown eyes are world famous. It's not every day that a Disney princess comes to a community centre in Crouch End.

"I don't feel famous," James tells me the following day over coffee. "I never feel particularly observed or watched." She's being modest. That week alone the celebrity sector of the internet was littered with snapshots of James and her boyfriend, the former Doctor Who actor Matt Smith, in New York. The morning of our interview, more pictures surface of the couple, this time at a fundraiser for the National Youth Theatre the previous evening. This is a woman very much in the public eye, even if she hasn't quite grasped it. "I'd gone to that event pretty much straight from the shoot, and I kept my hair up and my make-up on, but I had to go to the gym because I'm training hard at the moment," she says. "So, I did weights at the gym trying not to f*** my hair up, then had half an hour to change. Matt didn't explain to me that Prince Edward was going to be there!" She breaks into a laugh. "It was a really posh gala, my trousers were too big and I hadn't even showered."

James, 29, shot to fame as Lady Rose in Downton Abbey. She was still filming that when Kenneth Branagh offered her the part of Cinderella in his 2015 live-action remake. Other lead roles followed: Natasha Rostova in the BBC's epic War & Peace, Elizabeth Bennet in a Jane Austen adaptation with added undead — it was apparently on the set of Pride and Prejudice and Zombies that James and Smith met. There followed a supporting role in the Oscar-winning Second World War drama Darkest Hour and last summer's blockbuster Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again, which grossed more than £310m worldwide. Critics raved about her. Beauty blogs obsessed over her hair. Meryl Streep called her "amazing".

"I feel pressure in a much greater way than I used to," James says of her success. "I tend to retreat inwards at too much attention. When I was younger

I was just kind of fearless and got on with it and analysed things less." This is perhaps why, after a period of nonstop filming and relentless press tours, she recently took six months off. "I've been slacking a bit," she says. "I live in north London, where there are some of the best pubs, and I like to go out and dance every so often. I just went out to Rowans, the bowling alley in Finsbury Park with karaoke booths, for a friend's birthday and did some very bad singing of Cher songs with my mates. I've been in a long phase of not looking after myself, so now I'm getting myself together again."

Next month, she starts work in a West End adaptation of All About Eve, the 1950 classic movie starring Bette Davis as Margo Channing, a celebrated theatre actress who is so flattered by the young, star-struck fan Eve, she employs her as an assistant. Eve weaves her way into all aspects of Margo's life, not only emulating her career but stealing it. In this version, James is playing Eve opposite Gillian Anderson as Margo. It's set in the present day, with music scored by PJ Harvey.

Eve is a total departure from James's usual worthy, likeable heroines. "You think she's warm and lovely, but there's such a steeliness to her," James says. "She's stealing this person's soul!" Yet she hesitated before signing on. "Only because I'm anxious about doing a play for such a long run," she says. "I know that sounds stupid, because actors do runs for years on end and this is only 14 weeks, but I did a play for 12 weeks and found it really hard. But too much of this was exciting. We [the cast and director Ivo van Hove] talked about there not being any such thing as privacy now and analysed what celebrity and fame and ambition are today. In the end I couldn't stop thinking about it."

James is part of a generation of successful Brit actors. Her previous co-stars include not only her boyfriend, who is currently filming the next Star Wars, but Douglas Booth, Sam Riley, James Norton and Ellie Bamber. Richard Madden, her love interest in both Cinderella and Romeo and Juliet at the Garrick Theatre, became a household name this year thanks to BBC1's Bodyguard. "I still haven't seen it, which is so bad of me!" James says. "But we all stay in touch and see each other when we can. Laura Carmichael [who played Lady Edith in Downton Abbey] lives down the road from me."

James and Smith share a rented flat, and I ask about the rumours that they are house-hunting.

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POLKA-DOT SHIRT,
£1,710, BALENCIAGA



DRESS, £1,280,
DAVID KOMA

HAIR HALLEY BRISKER
AT THE WALL GROUP

MAKE-UP MARY
GREENWELL AT PREMIER

HAIR AND MAKE-UP
NAILS JENNI DRAPER
AT THE WALL GROUP

“I do like looking at houses,” she says. “London is so full-on, eventually I’d like to have a little place in the country. But that’s a few years away. I want to settle here first.” The couple have been dating for about five years. Is a wedding on the cards? “I’ve gone through different phases of wanting and not wanting to get married,” she says. “I don’t know where I sit with it now. What matters is the relationship and how you feel about each other.”

Smith told an interviewer last year that he’d love to start a family with her. Would she? “I’m definitely not answering that,” she laughs (she laughs a lot — big loud laughs when she’s being self-deprecating, or smaller, awkward laughs when she wants to move the conversation on). “But I come from the most incredible family, so that means a lot to me. Eventually, sharing your life with a family is the most important thing.”

James grew up in Surrey, the middle child with two brothers. “I love them so much. They’re incredible,” she says. Charlie, 30, is a sports journalist in Melbourne, and Sam, 27, sells wind farms to developing countries. “He’s going to change the world,” she says. “We were really close as kids, partly because we’re so close in age. Charlie and I basically look like twins.” But their happy childhood was tainted with tragedy. When James was 19 and studying acting at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, her father, James Thomson, died after a battle with cancer. She changed her original surname to honour her late father, who was an actor and a musician. I suspect acting makes her feel closer to him. “Yeah,” she says quietly. “Who my dad was as a person, then losing him, has defined who I am. I always try to feel closer to him.” Two significant scenes in her career, in *War & Peace* and *Cinderella*, show her character either at her father’s funeral or learning about his death. They must have been excruciating to film. “Sometimes, when things are closer to home, it’s harder to access it in your work,” she says. “It almost feels like too much. But I do find acting so cathartic. There’s so much shit, so much of your life you’re exploring through your characters.” It’s clear that her father’s death had a profound effect on her. “I still get emotional when I talk about him. Not always, but I’m quite tired at the moment.” She begins to laugh. “I’m in that state of mind, like, can’t deal!”

She is extremely close to her mother, Ninette, who was visiting on the day we meet, as James was off to Australia the next day to see her brother Charlie. “She came to help me. Hand-washing clothes,

packing clothes! I’m easily stressed. The smallest thing can make me feel like the world is collapsing. I was stressing about trying to get everything done before I go.”

Christmas is a cosy family affair at her mother’s house, where they watch *Love Actually*, their favourite film. It’s apt, perhaps, that James’s next movie is set to be an as yet untitled comedy written by Richard Curtis and directed by Danny Boyle. “I told Richard after quite a few glasses of wine how much I love *Love Actually*,” she laughs.

Little Woods, another of her yet-to-be-released films, could not be further from this. It’s a gritty low-budget indie co-starring Tessa Thompson. Few actresses can go so seamlessly from playing a princess to a drug dealer, but it’s precisely this that makes

James appealing, not only to the film world, but also to the fashion industry. She is a face of Burberry and loves Erdem and Emilia Wickstead. Her look today is grungy-meets-pretty: leather bomber jacket, heavy black boots, oversized black jumper and floral maxiskirt. “I spend so much time dressing up for work,” she says. “Even doing press, I’m often put in beautiful clothes. But I lost a sense of what to wear on a day-to-day basis, and I became a bit bland. I’m beginning to think that it’s really lovely to take pride in what you wear. It’s all you have to show off a part of who you are.”

James is also a contradiction in real life. On the one hand, she’s all goofy smiles and girl-next-door charm, talking about wanting to take up pottery. On the other, she swears frequently and listens “over and over again” to the deeply dark and explicit satirical podcast *Dear Joan and Jericha*. She has admitted to bouts of spiralling stress, yet seems remarkably well adjusted. It’s as I’m thinking this that I realise we’ve been talking for much longer than our allotted hour (James is far too polite to cut me off): she has a gym session to attend, a Christmas tree to put up and a holiday to pack for. But before we part, she shares one last memory of her dad: “There’s a Buddhist retreat in Scotland we went to a couple of times. And in my early twenties I questioned everything, believed in the power of that spirituality and the strength you gain from that. I sort of lost my way with it a bit. It’s something I’ll come back to for sure. I’m just not as searching as I was then.” ■

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EVENTUALLY,
SHARING YOUR
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THING***

All About Eve is at the Noël Coward Theatre, London WC2, February 2 to May 11; book tickets at allabouteveplay.com