

The real Lena Lyons: on style, strength, and success.

L*ena* **L** *Lyons* is one of those actresses you find yourself admiring without wanting to.

It would be easy to dislike her. For starters, there's her looks. Her six-foot stature and waif-like proportions remind us she's not like us mere mortals. A decade after retiring from the modeling catwalk, she doesn't appear to have gained a pound.

Cerulean blue eyes, prominent cheekbones, and an alabaster complexion complete her powerful on-screen currency. Lena's perfection is blinding. There's a sense of the otherworldly about her, like she's slipped off a cloud and landed here on earth to teach us a thing or two about grace, style and etiquette. Amid the constant barrage of reality television and Kardashian media coverage, Lena's presence generates a collective sigh of relief.

Others claim Lena's unique star quality is reminiscent of another time. She's been compared to Hollywood's Golden Age actresses like Grace Kelly and Audrey Hepburn, and it's a comparison that seems to fit.

Then there's her acting. Lena has built her career playing strong female characters. She's excelled at deeply dramatic roles—her portrayal of Celia in *The Long Night* recently winning her a Golden Globe, and finally silencing critics. With true grace, Lena recognized the support of her soon-to-be producer ex-husband, Duncan Moore, and credited his talents with allowing hers to grow. The model-turned-actress has received harsh ongoing criticism during her rise to fame for that

relationship. Her acknowledgement appeared gracious, with no hint of bitterness — which likely infuriated her critics further.

The heartfelt reference to her deceased mother also surprised the world. It was clearly an emotional win for her, and the first glimpse into an intensely private life she guards carefully.

And just when we thought we might be starting to understand her, Lena stars alongside Hollywood heartthrob, Jacob Swan, in what's been described as a '*sweet, predictable, deliciously indulgent*' romantic comedy. It's a side we've never seen to her before, and one that most of us admit we quite like (even if we won't admit to enjoying romantic comedies).

With that under her belt, Lena's due to start filming a 1960's gangster flick alongside rising star, Benjamin Eales, who is ten years her junior.

So once again, we're left wondering. Who is the real Lena Lyons?

Maybe she's not an otherworldly creature or a product of yesteryear, but simply a natural chameleon. Whatever it is, there's an enigmatic quality to the actress that continues to keep us captivated.

In a small cafe in the Hollywood Hills, I get my chance to see if I can learn more.

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When Lena walks into the cafe, there's no ripple of recognition. Despite her stunning looks, there's a quiet calm to the actress that allows her to arrive unnoticed. It's only after a few double takes that the other patrons realize who they're in the presence of, and then the murmuring starts.

Lena plays down their interested stares and excited reactions. Before they can gather their wits, she waves to them as if they were friends and offers a warm smile as she breezes past.

As she walks towards me, I'm struck by how elegant she is. I expected her to be, of course. But Lena Lyons in the flesh is something quite different to her on-screen presence.

To my surprise, she's startlingly human. Not that I can quite believe it.

When she arrives at my table she offers me her hand as if to prove the point, gives me a wide smile that feels genuine, and slips into the seat opposite me.

Wearing a simple floral shift dress it's hard not to notice those legs. This is a woman who's comfortable showing some skin, but not in an overtly sexual way.

Her bare arms and legs add to her effortless grace, and for a moment I'm reminded of a teenage girl—an ingenue.

All that soft, pale skin decries the bronzed Hollywood Barbie dolls types so regularly found here. I wonder if she is the 'Queen of the Angels' the city's founders talked about when they named Los Angeles.

Like her, the dress is understated, and I compliment Lena on it. She offers me a another smile and explains it's '*a Valenti*.'

She should be smiling.

Fashion designer, Allegra Valenti's recent rise to fame, is in no small part to Lena. Best friends from childhood, Lena debuted Valenti's designs at the Golden Globes and Oscars last year, and the American-Italian's designs have been in demand ever since.

I get the sense Lena is wearing the *Valenti* not out of loyalty to her friend, but because she's quite taken with the dress. When I query her on it, Lena nods, still smiling, and says it was her friend's innate sense of style that led her to support the label.

I can't deny the observation. The dress, like Lena, is understated and exudes the same sophisticated charm of its wearer.

But I didn't come here to talk about fashion, and I discover Lena isn't one for small talk. She waits patiently for me to start the interview, apparently comfortable with silence. And that's the first thing I learn about Lena Lyons: this is a woman who only speaks when she has something to say.

In the last eighteen months you've played an eclectic range of characters: a nineteenth century Englishwoman who settles in Africa amidst social unrest; an overly serious neurosurgeon who falls rather amusingly for a patient (Jacob Swan); and now a 1960's gangster wife. What drives you take such varied roles?

The first thing I consider—before genre, the setting, or anything else—is whether or not the character is an admirable woman. If she is, then I'll assess all the other aspects to determine if I'm going to be a good fit for the role.

Hang on. You sound a bit like a casting agent instead of an actress. Surely you have to have an emotional connection to the character?

Oh, of course. If I don't get that, I won't go for the role. For me, that connection usually lies in who the character is as a person.

So what makes an admirable woman? And if you don't mind me pointing out your current role, Jean, is the wife of a notorious gangster . . .

(smiles) Jean is layered. Yes, she's involved in a life of crime, but I admire her for so many reasons. She's a woman ahead of her time: determined, ambitious and brave. As for what makes an admirable woman, I suppose strength of character and an ability to grow. I like to journey with a character to discover a new part of themselves.

That's a tall order in this town. A study recently revealed actresses only hold 30 percent of the speaking parts in Hollywood, which has remained unchanged since the 1940's. And that in the last ten years female protagonists have fallen from 16 percent, to 11 percent. How do you feel about that?

Concerned, obviously. There's so many talented actresses. They deserve roles with depth and meaning, like our male counterparts. On one hand I count myself incredibly lucky. I also think playing complex characters is a protest of sorts, because it shows the industry and the audiences what we're capable of.

You spoke of your mother publicly for the first time recently. You lost her to cancer when you were a teenager. In what ways was she an admirable woman?

Strength is a big one. Watching her battle illness taught me a lot about strength at a young age. The power of the human spirit too. Even while her body was failing, my mother's spirit remained strong. I think it became stronger toward the end, and that taught me a lot too. I guess you could say I look for a little bit of my mother in every role I play.

The critics have suggested the roles you've chosen were largely dictated by your ex-husband and producer, Duncan Moore. What do you say to that?

Usually I don't feel the need to say anything. While Duncan and I were together, we'd discuss the opportunities that came my way. Obviously he has many years of experience to draw from, but the decisions were always my own.

Even the movies where you played starring roles in his productions? And would you still act in his productions?

Yes, of course. It was always my choice, but let's be honest — Duncan is one of the most renowned producers in the business, and if he had faith that I was right

for a particular role, that carried a lot of weight. None of that changes because of our divorce.

Acting in one of his movies earned you a Golden Globe. Is this where you saw yourself ten years ago?

Ten years ago I was modeling, and acting wasn't even on my radar. Once I became comfortable with where my acting career was heading, an award nomination was certainly something to aim for, but it's never been my focus.

You're known in the industry for being incredibly focused. Outside of acting, what is your focus?

My friends, my relationships, those are my main focus. I'm at a point in my career where there's not much time for anything else, and I try to be grateful for that because I'm doing something I love. I also try to give back. I'm an ambassador for cancer research because of my mother, and also animal welfare.

We understand why cancer research is so important to you. Can you explain why animal welfare is another cause close to your heart?

I've always wanted an animal. That's sounds a bit sad, doesn't it? We moved around a lot when I was a kid, and then Mom got sick, so there was never the opportunity. Now I'm so busy I'd feel guilty about having an animal in my life I'm never home for. So I put my energy into supporting organizations who care for animals instead.

You also put quite a lot of energy into exercise—one activity in particular. Can you tell us about that?

(Smiles) Sure. I used to hike with my Dad as a kid, and then I sort of got hooked on it again after I participated in a hike to raise money for a cancer foundation ten years ago. Now I try to go off the grid at least once a year for a few days at time, usually more, if I can.

What do you enjoy about hiking so much? And do you still go with your Dad at all?

The freedom, nature, the solitude. No, Dad and I no longer hike together.

Reports have suggested you had a falling out after your mother's death. Are you prepared to talk about that at all?

We lost touch after my mother passed away. He travels a lot for work and then when my modeling career took off, we grew apart. There's not much to tell.

Do you ever get lonely? You work a lot and you don't have a lot of close family.

I'm an only child so I'm used to my own company. I actually crave it if I don't get enough of it. On set, I'm surrounded by people all the time, so some alone time can be a good thing.

Do you see yourself having a relationship again? Maybe a family one day?

It's too soon for me to be thinking about any of that. I'm focusing on my career right now. Being alone has never scared me.

You married quite young. Do you feel like you've been there, done that?

I never expected to get married young. Marriage wasn't ever something I really aspired to, and it just turned out that way. I'm not the sort of woman who is waiting for a knight in shining armor.

Has a failed marriage changed your view of the institution?

I try not to think about it as a failed marriage. We grew apart, certain things changed, and it wasn't right anymore. While no one goes into a marriage expecting it to end, I can accept that nothing lasts forever, so my view of marriage hasn't really been damaged.

Name five of your best qualities.

(A long pause) Oh gosh, you've caught me off guard. Well, I suppose I'm determined, which can be good. I can act, that's two, right? I'm patient. I'm loyal. And, let's see, I like to help others.

Now five of your worst qualities.

Hmm. You saved this one for last didn't you? That's sneaky. I guess my determination can turn into stubbornness, but I like to think of it as tenaciousness. I rarely yell. No, seriously, it's a bad thing, trust me. It can really upset people because they think I don't care about things, and I usually have to really work myself up on set if a role requires I shout or yell. It's a real pain. OK, so that's only

two. Let's see, I can't sing to save my life. You don't want to hear it, just ask my friends. I'm too focused sometimes, to the detriment of other things, and I trip over when I wear flip flops. Every time. High heels? No problem. Flip flops and I'm a danger to myself. Is that it? Good.

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So it turns out Lena Lyons is human after all, and she's a lot more candid talking about her faults than her personal life. But something tells me she won't be wearing a pair of flip flops anytime soon to prove it.

And despite our in-depth chat, I find myself left wanting. I feel as though I only caught glimpses of the real Lena. Some people might mistake her for being aloof. From this meeting, I can honestly say Lena isn't aloof at all. She's warm and charming, but there is a degree of self-containment to her that's difficult to define.

Maybe that's what gives her the air of mystery?

It doesn't matter what it is. I'm hooked. I can't wait to see what Lena's got in store for us next.

Don't miss 'Love Sick' starring Lena Lyons and Jacob Swan, currently screening in cinemas everywhere.

HEARTBREAKER, Book 2 in the **Hollywood Hearts** series, will be released in mid-2017. For more details, head to [Belinda's website](#).

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