

BLAKE'S BIG YEAR

With three movies set for release—including this month's survival flick *The Shallows*, costarring a great white shark—

Blake Lively returns to the silver screen with a splash

S

itting at a wooden table at the country-chic Bedford Post Inn where she knows all the staff (“Can I take this honey butter home?” she asks the waiter), Blake Lively is talking about the number-one thing in her life: “All my eggs are in one basket, and that’s my family. That’s where my heart is. That’s where my everything is.” Her tousled hair cascades past the shoulders of her white sweater,

and there’s a rip in the knee of her faded blue jeans.

Her family, of course, is husband Ryan Reynolds and their 15-month-old daughter, James, “who looked like his doppelgänger for the first six months,” but now, she says, has finally picked up some of her features, namely, “She has my clammy hands!” Lively, 28, wails. “And my heavy eyelids, my meaty eyelids.” She pivots from self-deprecation to ebullience. “My family: That’s the thing that I feel most protective of and the thing that I feel is the most exposed when I feel exploited.”

As happily consuming as new motherhood may be, there’s a lot going on in Lively’s career these days—roles starkly different from her Upper East Side princess character on

Photographs by BEAU GREALY

By SHEILA WELLER

DRESS, PRICE UPON
REQUEST, ROBERTO
CAVALLI; EARRINGS, \$395,
JENNIFER MEYER.

FASHION EDITOR:
ALISON EDMOND



JACKET, \$4,390.
PANTS, \$2,890.
SONIA RYKIEL.
LINGERIE, \$588, LA
PERLA; GOLD-
SCREW RING, \$790.
RUBY-LIPS BAR
RING, \$2,680.
ALISON LOU.

ON FACE: L'ORÉAL
PARIS INFAILLIBLE
PRO-GLOW
FOUNDATION.

the popular CW series *Gossip Girl*. Her new movie *The Shallows*, opening June 29, is “a survival movie, an isolation story,” but also a commentary on the environment. Lively plays a surfer stranded 200 yards away from shore after a great white shark attack. “Because of climate change and global warming, what was once in the deep is now in the shallows,” she explains. “The danger with a film like this is that it taps into a primal fear, but it can also unfairly villainize this amazing creature intrinsic to our well-being. They’re one of the most overfished creatures in the ocean, and it’s important we protect them.” Reynolds had talked about the thrill of starring in a survival-isolation movie, 2010’s *Buried*, in which his character is buried alive in a coffin, so Lively’s reaction to *The Shallows* role was: “I gotta do that! It would be so much fun!” Plus, it would be a big change of pace from her last film, *The Age of Adaline*, in which she plays a woman born in 1908 who stops aging after a car accident at 29. (*Adaline* required a lot more wardrobe changes, for one.)

Shot in Australia, *The Shallows* was a huge undertaking. “It was 10 months after having a baby, and I had to be just in a bikini. So for vanity’s sake, that was an issue. My brother said to me a month after, ‘Why do you still look pregnant?’” She good-naturedly grimaces at his bluntness. “There’s a more graceful way to say that ... I say *now*,” she adds, laughing, “as I slather my cream cheese.” Then there was the arduousness. “They didn’t hire a stunt double until the last two weeks of shooting. So everything I did—underwater stunts, flipping off of a buoy—it was incredibly physically and emotionally demanding. Also, I had no costar. I only had my imagination to work off.”

She filmed two more projects post-baby. In July, she’ll be in Woody Allen’s *Café Society*, which opened the Cannes Film Festival. “That was such an incredible experience,” she says, and not just because she loved working with a cast that includes Jesse Eisenberg, Kristen Stewart, Steve Carell, and Parker Posey. It’s also because she was “so honored” to have been chosen by Allen. “Everybody was so geeked-out to be in a Woody Allen movie,” she recalls. “Nobody left the set. Even in scenes we weren’t in, we would hang out and fight over the monitor—and it was like four inches by four inches! Everybody was so present. You could be an extra and it would be cool.”

For the film, which showcases Hollywood and New York during their glamorous 1930s heyday, Allen needed to cast the part of a sophisticated, jazz-loving divorcée. “I had to find an actress her age who was very, very beautiful, very talented, and elegant,” Allen says. “It was the kind of role that, years ago, you would have cast Grace Kelly in, and that elegance is very hard to find today in girls Blake’s age. She’s a first-rate actress with an effervescent personality, a very winning personality—you like her on the screen.”

Her third upcoming film, which she finished shooting in mid-April, “is probably the biggest undertaking of all,” she says. Directed by Marc Forster, *All I See Is You* is about a blind woman who regains her

eyesight and the effect that has on her relationship with her husband, played by Australian actor Jason Clarke. “It’s a real examination of dependency and codependency, and of inner vision, as well as what you actually see,” she explains. Forster, whose directorial credits include *World War Z*, *Quantum of Solace*, and *Finding Neverland*, found Lively a joy to work with. “She doesn’t just think in regard to her character, but rather the story in its entirety. When you’re working with an actor who thinks like that, any kind of conversation leads to inspiration,” he says. “Because of her intelligence, she added great nuances and dimension to the character in a way that only someone who completely lends themselves to their craft could.”

Lively didn’t set out to become an actress—not as a kid raised in Burbank, California, just outside of L.A., anyway. “I didn’t want to be an actor, because they were all doing it,” says Lively of her parents and four siblings, all of whom were involved in the entertainment industry in one way or another. “When you’re the youngest of five

“MY FAMILY IS THE
THING I FEEL MOST
PROTECTIVE OF
AND THAT IS THE
MOST EXPOSED WHEN
I FEEL EXPLOITED.”

kids, you think, *Who am I? If this is who they are, and they’re shaping who I am so much, then who would I be?* You strive for your own identity. I had plenty of different passions, and I knew that education was important.”

Her father was an English professor, model, actor, and acting coach. Her mother was a talent manager with hardscrabble roots in Tallapoosa, Georgia, who made her own clothes from flour sacks, worked in a factory where the windows were painted black, and had a modeling career. (“My hardest day in my whole life will never be as hard as her easiest one,” Lively says.)

Despite her ambivalence toward show business, she had a few movie roles while attending Burbank High School, including 2005’s *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. In 2007, just as she was “dead set on going to college,” she was approached by the showrunner of a TV pilot based on a young adult book series about rich kids in Manhattan, narrated by a mysterious blogger who would verbally sign off each episode with “xoxo, Gossip Girl.” It would shoot in New York, and Lively was promised that she could take classes at Columbia University one day a week. But *Gossip Girl* got too big, too fast, leaving no time for higher education. Still, “If that conversation

hadn't happened, I probably would have said, 'No, I feel like my education is the most important thing.' And I'd probably be paying for my student loans."

By the time the show ended in 2012, she had played a drug-peddling single mom from South Boston in Ben Affleck's 2010 *The Town*, after which she got a pile of offers to do the same kind of hardened character. But she didn't want to be typecast. Instead, she starred in the DC Comics-based *Green Lantern* (2011), where she met Reynolds, the youngest of four brothers raised in a middle-class Vancouver family. "Ryan had a nice, normal upbringing, and we want our kids to have the same normal life that we had," she says. "We don't ever want to rob them of what we had, because then we'd feel really selfish." (She's pregnant with baby number two.)

"I know her [extended] family really well, and they're not really aware of this, but they're Mexicans! They're doers," says her

“THAT’S ALWAYS MADE ME THE HAPPIEST: TO FOLLOW WHAT I FEEL LIKE I CAN’T NOT DO.”

friend Mexican actress Salma Hayek, who cofounded Chime for Change, a global women and girls empowerment campaign that Lively supports. "They're very close—a big, joyous family. They love to gather around the kitchen and cook together and make jokes together. I feel at home."

Lively and Reynolds took their relationship slowly. "We were friends for years before we were ever involved romantically," she says. "And then we spent a bit of time being best friends before we started to date. A best friend just makes you happier. You can go from being silly to opening up and being vulnerable. You're surrounded by comfort in sad, painful times. And that's what matters."

She wanted to marry Reynolds when "I knew he would always be my best friend for my whole life. That was the biggest thing to me. I'd never known anything like the friendship that I had with him. I could like him as much as I loved him. You see people fall in and out of love with each other, but I can't imagine falling out of love with him." The usually cool, private Lively now lets loose: "I love him exponentially more each day." They're so simpatico, she jokes that she's going to announce that they have "irreconcilable similarities."

Their 2012 wedding on waterfront property outside of Charleston, South Carolina, was a well-guarded secret, though paparazzi found

out halfway through the ceremony and tried to swim up in scuba gear. "I'd rather not have to deal with it at all," she says. "But we knew the lifestyle we were getting into, and while it's hard, sometimes, to have that level of attention on you—you have bad days, and you have ugly days, and you have sad days—it's another thing when it's our child. She didn't have the opportunity to make a decision about what she wants."

They named their daughter James. "My husband's father's name was James. My grandfather's name is James. It shows up a lot in both of our lineages. And I have a boy's name, and my mom has a boy's name—Willie—although she goes by her middle name, Elain, because she was so made fun of at school. But Willie's her real name, and I love that."

At home in Bedford, New York, Lively loves to cook. So much so, she attended a special workshop at Paris' Le Cordon Bleu culinary school and did a stint with a pastry chef at New York's Per Se restaurant to learn the ropes. Hayek says, "I love Blake and I hate Blake for the same reason. I live in Europe, so we see each other in different countries, and she's done her research of restaurants. She orders five things to try, and she has the discipline to enjoy it and not devour the whole plate. Me, I move behind her like a vacuum cleaner."

Lively's interest not just in food, but in art (she and Hayek share a painting teacher), interior design, architecture, and fashion—and the stories behind them—was largely inherited from her mother, who reveled in creative domesticity with historical roots. "We would always go to flea markets and thrift stores and Goodwill and find things and refurbish them," says Lively, who launched Preserve, a company combining philanthropy, storytelling, and commerce, in 2014 and closed it last fall. She is sanguine about the reception it received and thoughtful about what it means for other entrepreneurs.

"When you try to do anything other than what people know you for, you get criticized," she says. "And when you do what people know you for, you get criticized. You just have to stop caring about that and say, 'What am I passionate about?' I will succeed at things, and I will fail at things. It's inspiring to see people wear different hats. For young women out there, putting limitations on anyone is dangerous and doesn't encourage women. You should feel free to try anything and everything you feel good about. It should be as celebrated to fail as it is to succeed, because that's life. That's always made me the happiest: to follow what I feel like I can't *not* do."

Earlier, I'd asked her about her vulnerabilities, and it goes back to the bedrock of her universe: "My parents, my siblings, my daughter, my husband, my nieces and nephews—that's where I get very mama bear. There are two ways to look at it. You could look at it as, *That's what I'm vulnerable about*. But also, *That's the thing that excites me in the world*. So I don't really think about them as my vulnerability as much as I think about them as my reason for everything." **mc**

PRODUCTION: JIN PRODUCTION INC. LOCATION: THE JEWEL SUITE AT THE TOWERS AT LOTTE NEW YORK PALACE



DRESS, \$4,790, RALPH LAUREN COLLECTION; TURQUOISE BANGLE, \$3,850, GOLD CUFF, PRICE UPON REQUEST, JENNIFER MEYER; RINGS, LIVELY'S OWN. ON HAIR: L'ORÉAL PARIS ADVANCED HAIRCARE NUTRI-GLOSS HIGH SHINE GLOSSING MIST. FOR STORES, SEE SHOPPING DIRECTORY.

HAIR: ROD ORTEGA FOR L'ORÉAL PROFESSIONNEL AT SOLO ARTISTS MAKEUP: ELAINE OFFERS AT EXCLUSIVE ARTISTS MANAGEMENT MANICURE: ELLE AT TRACEY MATTINGLY PROP STYLIST: COOPER VASQUEZ AT THE WALL GROUP