

# Bruce Willis looked at me and said, 'I WANT HER'

Spotted by the legendary action hero, British actress HANNAH WARE is fast becoming one of Hollywood's hottest talents. She tells *Elaine Lipworth* about being a late bloomer and how sibling rivalry with singer-songwriter sister Jessie spurred her on

PHOTOGRAPHS *Karen Collins*

I am sitting outside a Santa Monica café with Hannah Ware, Britain's latest export to Hollywood. A former model, Hannah, 32, got her first break courtesy of Bruce Willis, who cast her in the 2010 Kevin Smith comedy *Cop Out*. She went on to play Kelsey Grammer's daughter in the TV drama *Boss* and appeared in Spike Lee's *Oldboy*. Now, in her biggest role so far, she stars in the action-packed blockbuster *Hitman: Agent 47*, opposite *Homeland*'s Rupert Friend and *Star Trek*'s Zachary Quinto.

It's a different experience from my usual interviews, because Hannah and her siblings (her sister is the 30-year-old Brit-nominated singing sensation Jessie Ware, and their brother Alex, 27, has just qualified as a doctor) are family friends. I grew up in Manchester with their mum Helena (known as Lennie) and cousin, TV producer Sarah-Jane Cohen, and it's been thrilling to watch both girls make it to the top of their professions.

'Hannah and I were both late-bloomers, which makes it that much sweeter to see her smashing it on the screen,' says Jessie. 'I don't think she is fully aware of how much people are going to fall in love with her: It's also no surprise that she's done all her own stunts. She's always been braver than me!'

Hannah - who is already well known in the US - hands all the credit for her career to her mum, a social worker. Lennie raised the children in Clapham, South London, after splitting up from their father, *Panorama* investigative reporter John Ware, when Hannah was in her early teens. 'My



Hannah (left) with sister Jessie, mother Lennie and brother Alex

mum made me feel if I wanted to become prime minister I could do it,' says Hannah. 'She thought we could do anything.'

'I was happy to support them whatever they wanted to do,' Lennie tells me. 'I'm proud of all three!' But she had no idea that Hannah was destined for a career in movies. 'She is an amazingly talented artist - I thought she would do something like design or illustration. I never thought she would become an actress, because she was so shy - but she's always been engaging and enchanting and maybe that's what you need as a film star.'

Hannah entered the spotlight aged 12, while still a pupil at Alleyn's private school in Dulwich, when her mother took her into Storm modelling agency 'for a laugh. My dad had taken pictures of me looking vaguely uncomfortable in the sitting room. And they took me on!' The youngest girl to be signed by the agency, Hannah modelled for L'Oréal and other brands, and appeared on the covers of teen magazines such as *Just Seventeen* and *Sugar*.

She read history of art at University College

London, then won a place at the Bartlett School of Architecture (part of UCL), before changing course and moving to New York. 'I was having a career crisis and my friend dared me to go to an acting class with him.'

In her new film *Hitman*, based on a popular video game, Rupert Friend is Agent 47, a genetically engineered assassin. Hannah plays Katia van Dees, a troubled young woman who finds herself dragged into a life or death struggle. Plot details are secret, but rumours are that Katia's life is in danger from a ruthless corporation intent on using her DNA to create an army of assassins.

In 2008, Hannah married skateboarding star Jesse Jenkins in Las Vegas, but they split up 11 days later and the marriage was annulled. (He was later engaged to Fearn Cotton, but that relationship ended in 2011.) 'It was the scenic route of avoiding a degree in architecture,' she says with a wry smile. 'It wasn't a marriage, it was an experience.' Currently single, she now lives in Venice, Los Angeles, and also owns a flat in London's Bethnal Green.

Here she tells us about family, religion, relationships and California life...

**I think all girls secretly want to be actresses because acting seems so glamorous.** But as a child I was always the villager who had one line in the school play. I was shy and I had a bit of a lisp.

**My mum is one of those selfless people who would do anything for us.** But she's also got ►

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◀ a great sense of humour. We fight – we're like the Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor of mothers and daughters – but we love each other ferociously.

**My dad's work ethic is inspiring.** He does everything with integrity, commitment and compulsion and I have learnt to do that from him. For example, I was really bad at maths and the year before GCSEs, a teacher said to my mum, 'Hannah is not doing well' and I thought, 'I *am* going to do really well.' My dad said, 'Go Han, you can do it!' Not only did I do it, I got the top mark for maths in the whole school.

**Something like your parents divorcing never quite leaves you.** What you thought was real isn't real any more and that changes your perspective. It makes you more wary, but also means you are better equipped to deal with challenges.

**I always saw modelling as a means to an end, a job to earn money, never as a career.** It afforded me independence and a curious mind, because I travelled so much and I was having experiences that 12-year-olds wouldn't normally get.

**I wasn't cool.** The girls at school just thought I was different. Why would you want to go to school with a girl who is in magazines? I wouldn't. I'd go to parties where occasionally girls I didn't know would say things that hurt. I was shy and sometimes that was mistaken for being conceited.

**I wanted to be like everyone else.** In my teens, every other girl was working in a shop at the weekend. So I used to do shifts at French Connection on the King's Road round the corner from the modelling agency, so I could be near my best friend who was working opposite.

**I am always talking about my sister** because I am so proud of her. Jessie is a really good person. We text every day. She lives in England, but she comes to LA for work, so I get to spend a lot of time with her. We have very similar mannerisms – watching *Hitman*, I noticed so many Jessie moments.

**There's never been any career competition between me and Jessie,** but we fought a lot as kids; there was competition for our parents' affection. My mum used to buy me a present when it was Jessie's birthday so I wouldn't feel left out, and Jessie would get one on my birthday.

**Jessie and I still get jealous of each other like any sisters.** She is given shoes and bags till they're coming out of her ears! For my 30th she was



From top: Hannah with Rupert Friend in *Hitman: Agent 47*, and with Kelsey Grammer in *Boss*

thinking about giving me a white Prada handbag – then she kept it for herself! Last week she got out a lacy cardigan, that is hers, from my wardrobe, and put it in her bag. I screamed, 'Please, Jessie, NO,' then we had a peace treaty. She went, 'That's fine, Hannah; you can have it for another six months. But we are going to trade.' She took my Santal [by Le Labo] perfume and said, 'I'll have this while you have the cardigan.' We shook on it.

**It is odd when your younger sister settles down before you.** [Jessie married personal trainer Sam Burrows last year in Skopelos, Greece, where the family has been going on holiday for decades.] But she has been with Sam since she was 17, so it felt normal.

**Growing up in South London,** we went to a school where there were not that many Jewish kids. I love being Jewish in LA; it feels really normal. The culture seems to be integrated into Hollywood. Everyone uses Yiddish words like schlep and schmooze. That's what I love about New York, too.

**We are a very close family. My sister and mum make me feel really safe.** They trundle through life in a lighter way and don't over-think things. My

brother makes me feel safe in a different way – it's great having a doctor in the family.

**I'm the odd one out of my family when it comes to cooking** – they're so good and I've been trying to catch up. Last night I made my own take on a Korean bibimbap – I used to live in Koreatown in LA – with rice, vegetables and a fried duck egg on top.

**I wouldn't have been a good architect.** It's a good thing I changed course. But I didn't know what to do with my life. I started acting incredibly late – I was 26 – but I think there are often meatier roles for women who've had more life experience.

**When I auditioned for *Cop Out* my friends said to wear a really knockout dress.** So I wore a black lacy one that I hoped might remind Bruce Willis of Demi Moore in *Indecent Proposal* [laughs]. There were girls lining up. Bruce arrived, got out of the car, looked at me and went: 'I want her.' In the film, Bruce puts a gun to my head and takes me hostage. It was great working with him. He was sweet and adorable.

**Boss [with Kelsey Grammer] was massive for me.** Getting the role was surreal. *Frasier* was part of my Friday night TV as a kid. It was amazing working with Kelsey – he is the nicest man and totally looked after me. He and his wife Kayte are now my friends. I go round to their house every year for Christmas.

**When you meet Katia in *Hitman* she is a loner who doesn't seem comfortable in her own skin,** but

she's got an acute sense of survival. She is a girl who doesn't know her place in the world and I think lots of people battle with that.

**I am very close to Zach Quinto.** He's so articulate and bright. He was my buddy throughout filming. We filmed in Singapore and Berlin, lots of night shoots, when you really bond with people. We're hatching a plan to write a spin-off about our experience on set, because we found ourselves in such peculiar situations, thinking, 'What's going on?'

**The action training was exhausting, because your body takes a real beating.** I learned martial arts and killing techniques from Chad Stahelski [a stunt coordinator and director who has worked on films ranging from *The Matrix* to *The Hunger Games*]. I managed to punch myself hard in the



face when we were boxing and was on the verge of tears; I looked at Chad for sympathy and he laughed and said, 'You better just man up. I know you can do it.' I became very focused – you become less of a wimp the more you train.

**Handling a gun was hard because I run like a girl!** I stick my bum out. I had to learn how to operate like a killer instead, in that stealthy, economical way they move. I was strung up in a metal harness in a studio in Singapore for eight hours [to facilitate the action special effects]. I had welts around my neck and my hands turned blue. I had to slide on my knees while shooting; I've still got bruises on my legs. The challenge was being specific with details, like the angle of the gun, and not blinking when you fire. It was tough, but I just thought, 'Give it your best go', as my mum always says.

**I am not very coordinated and was essentially trying to rival Quinn from *Homeland*.** You

can imagine I was at a huge disadvantage! Rupert is so good at disassembling and putting together guns.

**I know nothing about video games.** I've always viewed them as an obstacle to whatever I've been trying to do at a weekend. I had a boyfriend who was a very serious Fifa [video game] player. He projected it on to the wall of our tiny apartment in Brooklyn. I couldn't escape it! He'd get annoyed while I was hovering, because my silhouette on the wall distracted him.

**I never thought I would be living in a beach bungalow in LA; it is so exciting.** I see the world in a different way if it is sunny. There is something beautiful about the light in LA, and I love the smell of bougainvillea, which reminds me of Greece.

**I'm not one of those girls who has to have a boyfriend for the sake of having a boyfriend.** I

## A HIT WITH HANNAH

**PERFECT SUNDAY** I love having brunch with a friend and doing something on a whim, such as taking a drive along the coast.

**INDULGENCE** I have hot chocolate every night, because it helps me sleep (I'm an insomniac). My new thing is adding almond butter; it's a lovely treat.

**FAVOURITE HOLIDAY** I have been going to Skopelos in Greece with my family since I was 14. I spent my formative teens there and it's a piece of heaven.

**ON YOUR BEDSIDE TABLE?** *Sonnets to Orpheus* by Rainer Maria Rilke. I don't have a Kindle – it has to be real books.

**STYLE ICON** Bianca Jagger. She is cool and beautiful and there's something effortless about her.

**TREASURED POSSESSION** A white gold star necklace my mum bought me when I was 21, on holiday in New York. It is so pretty; I wear it all the time.

**LISTENING TO** 'Tezeta' by Mulatu Astatke and my sister's duet with Leon Bridges, 'Lonely Road', which is wonderful.

**MOTTO** My dad used to say you make your own luck. I don't quite believe that – but I want to.

like being in love but unless I'm madly in love I could do without it. I love living on my own. If someone cancels on me when I've arranged to go out, and I get to stay in, the sheer joy I feel is thrilling. I make dinner; have a glass of wine, listen to music, read and smoke cigarettes out of my window.

**I don't think anyone ever feels happy with the way they look, do they?** But I don't want to change anything. I know people in LA younger than me who have had plastic surgery, but I would never do it. I don't see that look as beautiful. I know looks have been my currency in terms of modelling, but I feel free to be myself.

**I love acting.** I think that if you are aware of time – whether you are on a date, or doing a chore – it's never a good sign. When I'm acting I lose track of time; it is like being in love. ■

■ *Hitman: Agent 47 will be in cinemas from Thursday*