

# Ali

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# Laughing at Life Larter

## A one on one with Philly's own Hollywood "It-Girl"

By Jill Johnson

In 1996, before she had even set foot on a movie set, Ali Larter appeared on the cover of *Esquire* alongside bold print that read: "Here's Hollywood's Next Dream Girl." Although the cover and article within gave Ali the fictitious name "Allegra Coleman," a rose by any other name is still a rose—and the story, meant to be a spoof on the Hollywood publicity machine, brought this beautiful young model and fledgling acting student a lot of attention. Larter, a Cherry Hill, New Jersey, native, had been in Hollywood less than a year when she landed the modeling gig "posing" as Allegra, and the ensuing hype soon brought her an agent and a manager.

Now, five years later, Ali's movie credits are a testament to *Esquire's* prophecy. Larter made her feature film debut less than a year after her *Esquire* career jumpstart in the blockbuster hit *Varsity Blues*. She played an overly-ambitious, precocious cheerleader who would do anything—even don a bikini made of nothing but whip cream—to try to get herself out of her sleepy Texas hometown. Larter then appeared in Warner Bros.' *The House on Haunted Hill*, a remake of the original Vincent Price horror classic, opposite Taye Diggs, Geoffrey Rush, and Peter Gallagher, and Fox's *Drive Me Crazy* opposite Adrian Grenier. More recently, Larter starred in New Line Cinema's psychological thriller *Final Destination*.

If that doesn't sound like enough to fill five years of this dream girl's life, 25-year-old Larter has three movies coming out in the next few months. She stars as the female lead of the action-comedy *American Outlaws* alongside Colin Farrell and Scott Caan in May. After that you can catch her in the comedy *Legally Blonde*, opposite Reese Witherspoon (July/August). Then look forward to *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* from brilliant writer Kevin Smith (*Clerks*, *Chasing Amy*), to be released at the end of the summer. Seems the girl barely has time to catch her breath between starring roles. But she does find time for some deep breathing in yoga class.

JJ: A lot of people are probably jealous of your unique, lightning fast launch into Hollywood with that famous *Esquire* cover. What an amazing story. When you went to the casting, did you know what it was all about?

AL: I didn't. I had worked with the photographer when I was about 14 years old for a teen magazine. And he remembered me from back then—that I was just kind of full of life and running around the set—and he thought I would be perfect for the little farce. I don't think any of us expected it to turn out as big as it did. It just caught on like a storm.

JJ: Was it a big jumpstart for your career?

AL: I had been in acting class for about a

year and a half, and at that point, it was time to get in the real world and play ball. There's only so long you can stay in class, and then you have to test fate and see if this what you're supposed to be doing with your life. So the doors opened and I ran right through them. I found a manager and an agent through it.

JJ: Do you think that PR plays a big part in success in Hollywood, or does true talent get recognized anyway?

AL: I just did a cover of *Maxim*—it comes out at the end of this month—and I'm interested to see the effect on Hollywood. I've actually tried to keep myself under the radar, because I don't feel like I'm at a point in my work where I really want to be put out there yet. I don't want to be this hot thing, because then the only place to go is down. I'm trying to take slow steps up the ladder. But I do think PR plays a big part. In a perfect world you want to believe you get a job because you're the best actress for it, but there's so much politics and so many things involved in who gets cast in a role.

JJ: I'm sure a *Maxim* cover will bring lots of exposure. Actually *Maxim* covers are known for another kind of "exposure;" is the cover racy?

AL: I signed on to do it because Claudia, the art director, is great, and there are no bikinis. It's sexy—there are some little tops and shorts and things—but it's not like pushing your boobs together.

JJ: Was *Varsity Blues* your first movie?

AL: I'd done a couple scenes in an independent before that, but that was my first big role. I was like a puppy with big paws. I didn't even know how to block; I was just thrown in the water and had to see if I could float. Luckily I had Amy Smart, who's been my best friend for about eight years now, with me. It was amazing that we got to do our first big job together.

JJ: Were you a cheerleader in high school?

AL: Not really, I did it for about a year in junior high, but I didn't have the dance moves. It wasn't my forte.

JJ: Which high school did you attend?

AL: Cherry Hill West.

JJ: Did you date any football players?

AL: No, no football players.

JJ: Your character is pretty spunky. She even dresses up in a whip cream bikini to try to score a guy. What's the craziest thing you've done to win a guy?

AL: I'm actually just a really honest,

commercial. I just had the all-American look. But it was never the end-all for me. It was a way to make money and figure out what kind of person I wanted to be.

JJ: Was acting a goal?

AL: Not at all. When I was in New York doing commercials, people tried to get me into acting and it just wasn't something I was interested in. I was planning to go to NYU and become a news broadcaster. When I moved out to Los Angeles, I was just kind of dipping my fingers into everything. Amy Smart was an actress and asked me to check out her class. I audited it and absolutely fell in love. Once I got onstage, I knew it was what I was supposed to do. It just felt right.

JJ: That takes a lot of guts. Were you confident?

AL: Well, I was still straight from Jersey and I think I was naïve enough to believe that I could make it. I was just laughing at life. I was really happy and thought, okay, let's just go for it. And then of course

*Legally Blonde* coming out with Reese Witherspoon. I play a girl named Brooke Taylor who invented "Brooke's Buttbuster Workout." She's the infomercial queen, and gets framed for her 63-year-old husband's murder. It's an over-the-top comedy—I think high school girls are just going to love it. It's a different role for me because I'm not playing a younger girl, and I had a great time doing it. Robert Luketic, who directed it, was great and we had a lot of laughs. Then in August, we have *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*. If anybody knows Kevin Smith, this one is the third in the trilogy with *Clerks* and *Chasing Amy*. It's the most excited I've been about a project, because I think he pushes the envelope. He doesn't conform to what society and Hollywood tell him to do, and I admire him for that. And he's the most kind, gentle man, which no one would believe when watching his movies—they come off so vulgar, and especially this one, but it's really funny.

I'm actually just a really honest, straightforward person. If I like someone I'll just go up and tell them.

straightforward person. If I like someone I'll just go up to them and tell them. I believe in true love and love at first sight. My parents met on a blind date and got married five months later. They just celebrated their 30th anniversary.

JJ: You started modeling really young. Did you have a normal adolescence?

AL: I started going to New York around age 13. For me, it was great because I was never really into high school, and by going there, I was around all these amazing, creative artists—the photographers and the flamboyant hair and makeup people—and their world was so intriguing to me. I actually left my senior year of high school and went to Camden County Community College for a semester, which was fantastic because my parents wouldn't let me start traveling until I had my diploma. So I left for Japan as soon as I got it, then went to Italy, Australia, Miami and ended up in Los Angeles.

JJ: I think we were in Miami at the same time. Was your modeling career going well then?

AL: I was never tall or skinny enough. I was the one to get the catalog jobs or the

fear, insecurity and doubt come a couple years later and you say, 'Oh my God! I'm horrible at this, what am I thinking?' And then you come back to base.

JJ: I read that you are planning to study in London?

AL: If the actor's strike happens this summer, I'm going to go to the eight-week program at RADA (The Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts). Who knows if I'm going to like it, but I'm interested in all aspects of my craft. It may be something I take a ton of things or one thing from, but I don't want to just sit on my butt this summer.

JJ: Tell us about your upcoming movies.

AL: First, there's *American Outlaws*, which is going to come out late spring or early summer. I play Jesse James' wife. She's a feisty, independent girl. The reason I was interested in the project is because she's not just a girl on the arm. She's not subservient to the men. She does exactly what I would do if I were put in that day and age. All the boys in it are fantastic. I'm excited about it and hope everyone enjoys it. I know my dad's going to like it because I look like a little sweetie—no whip cream in this one! Then I have

I'm just going for it in this movie and trusting him, and I think a lot of people are going to laugh at this one too.

JJ: So you're just on a roll!

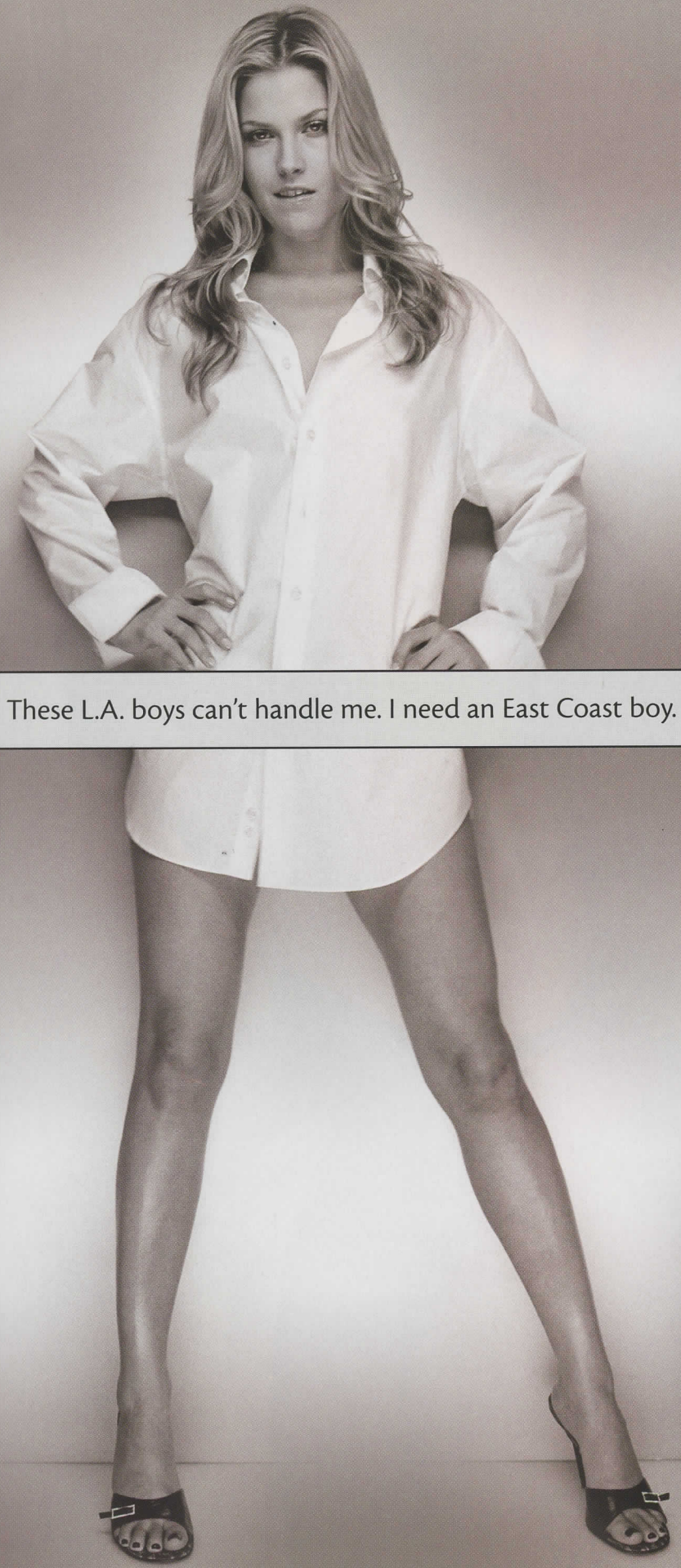
AL: Yes, it's been a busy year. I took some time off after *Final Destination* because I wanted to wait for the right project. I came to the realization that there are maybe five good projects a year, and I'm lucky if I get one of them. After doing these, I'm just taking a seat again and waiting for a little while. I only want to work if there's a great writer, a great director, or a great actor in it that inspires me.

JJ: Your favorite role thus far?

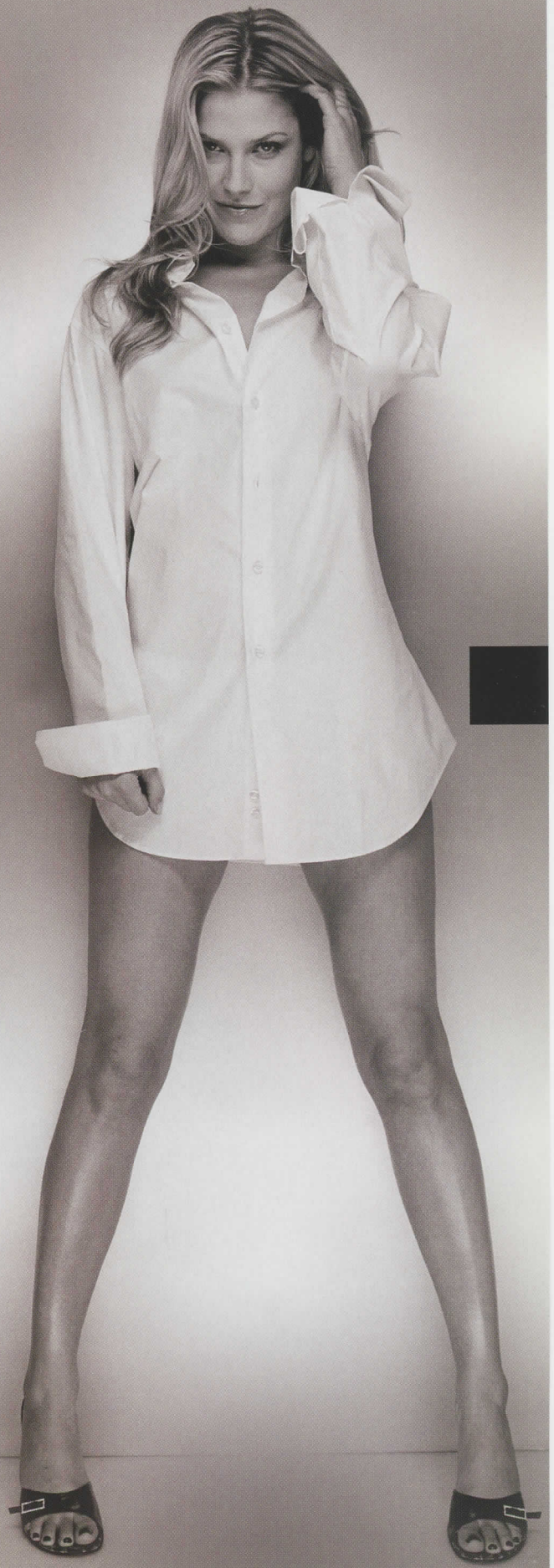
AL: I loved *Drive Me Crazy*—Dulcie. I loved playing her. It was great fun. I had the punk rock red hair and I played this alternative animal rights activist. Coming off of *Varsity Blues* where I played this blonde thing, she was just the antithesis of that. It was great that Hollywood could see me in a different light.

JJ: Who are your idols?

AL: Bette Davis—she pushed the envelope too, amazing. I also look at Susan Sarandon and Michelle Pfeiffer, who are able to have a family and a career, which



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is quite a feat in Hollywood. There are so many people I want to work with in this world. I feel like I'm literally on my first step. But I'm looking at this *Taxi Driver* poster I have, and I would love to work with Scorsese.

JJ: Let's talk about L.A. versus Philadelphia.

AL: I deal with L.A., but I've always threatened to move back to New York. It's my favorite city in the world. But Philadelphia is a really cool city. It's got this underground, artsy environment, which I love. I have to say though, when you're having a bad day in L.A., you just walk down to the beach, watch the sunset, and everything's possible. Everything can be okay. It's nice to get away from the bad winters and the super hot summers. It's just so beautiful here, and you can go snowboarding two hours away. It's really good living here.

JJ: Your favorite thing to do in Philly?

AL: I don't eat cheesesteaks anymore, but I miss 'em. When I'm in Philly, I go get cheese hoagies, tasty cakes and pizza. They cannot get pizza right out here! And, I love Italian ices.

JJ: Do you have siblings?

AL: I have an older sister who lives in Indiana and is a sixth grade teacher. She's my angel. She keeps me real. I go into her class once a year and speak to kids, and it's so brilliant doing that.

JJ: Do you have a boyfriend right now?

AL: No boyfriend. These L.A. boys can't handle me. I need an East Coast boy.

JJ: What qualities are you looking for in a man?

AL: Someone who makes me laugh, and is confident in who they are. Someone who's going to hold my hand and walk into a party and they don't care who's there or what's going on, so we can have fun wherever we go. Especially in the business I'm in, I try as hard as I can not to take it seriously. I mean, we're only making movies here. Look at my sister, who is teaching the youth of America, you know? I want someone that's just going to keep it real with me.

JJ: Perfect date?

AL: Someone who holds my hand and just takes me walking on the beach. Then we'd open a bottle of wine and sit back

correctness bores me. I like people who will rise and fall with their beliefs.

JJ: Hamburger or veggie burger?

AL: Veggie burger.

JJ: Ice cream or French fries?

AL: French fries.

JJ: Dance all night at a club or dinner and a movie?

AL: Dance all night.

JJ: Cat or dog.

AL: Dog, all the way! Big dog. I'm not a cat girl.

JJ: Fame or fortune?

AL: Neither. Fuckin' happiness! Nothing matters if you're not happy with who you are.

JJ: Favorite beauty product?

AL: I'm really into Surf Spray by Bumble & Bumble right now. It's this salt water you put in your hair and it makes it all messy and you can just go.

JJ: Favorite designer?

AL: Gucci.

JJ: Favorite movie?

AL: *All About Eve*.

JJ: Favorite book?

AL: One that always makes me smile is

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JJ: What aspect of life is most different in L.A.?

AL: The people. I'm such a Jersey girl. I'm incredibly straightforward and honest. California people like to beat around the bush. Sometimes my mouth gets me in trouble, but I wouldn't change that for anything. I try to get back to the East Coast at least five or six times a year because I need a dose of reality. People out here get a little flighty. It's so materialistic and superficial. There are so many blondes with big fake boobs who don't eat and go to the gym every day. So much is based on how you look. Looks last for five seconds, but the substance to a person is if they can make you laugh, if they inspire you. Somehow, that gets lost in L.A.

JJ: What do you miss the most from home?

AL: My family, without a question. I'm incredibly close to my mom and dad. I talk to my mommy every day. That would be one of my reasons to get back east, to be closer to them.

and talk. I'm pretty easygoing. I like to have fun though. I like to hang out with my girlfriends a lot, which is probably one of the reasons why I don't have a boyfriend. When I get married, I want it to be forever, and if I settle down right now, I feel like I might get bored later on. I want to sow my oats and just have a great time so I'm ready in a couple years to settle down.

JJ: Do you want kids?

AL: Oh, without question. Can't wait.

JJ: If you could date Brad Pitt or Mel Gibson, who would you pick?

AL: Brad Pitt.

JJ: If you could meet Monica Lewinsky or Hillary Clinton?

AL: Hillary Clinton.

JJ: Did you vote for Gore or Bush?

AL: Uh, can't go there.

JJ: Okay, let me rephrase that: Do you think they should have allowed the recount?

AL: Yes, I definitely think so. But I'm not very interested in meeting any of those political people because their political

*She's Come Undone*.

JJ: How will you spend the rest of your weekend?

AL: I'm actually going to see Stravinsky tonight with the L.A. Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl. I'm really excited about that. And then I'm going over to the Whiskey Bar at the Sunset Marquis to meet my friends and have a glass of wine. I stayed in last night because we're working fifteen-hour days on the movie right now. Friday night, I usually pass out and Saturday it's nice to go and do something special.

JJ: How would you spend a dream weekend?

AL: On the beach in Tahiti surrounded by friends and family, with a bonfire, cocktails, the barbie going, Reggae, fresh flowers. It's gotta be friends and family though.

JJ: Anything else you want to say to your fans in Philly?

AL: Just that I grew up ten minutes from Philly and I love where I grew up. I have really fond memories of it. •