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SANAA LATHAN

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“When you get to that place of celebrating yourself, someone good will come join the party.”

—Michelle M. Hammond, page 200

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ON THE COVER Photography by George Holz. Sanaa is wearing a Versace dress, Stephen Dweck choker and David Yurman ring. Hairstylist, Kimberly Kimble for Margaret Maldonado Agency. Makeup, Dean Bryant, Christian Dior for ArtistsbyTimothyPrano.com. Manicurist, Eile for ArtistsbyTimothyPrano.com.

ON THIS PAGE Michael Kors dress, Vera Wang necklace. See Where to Buy for details.

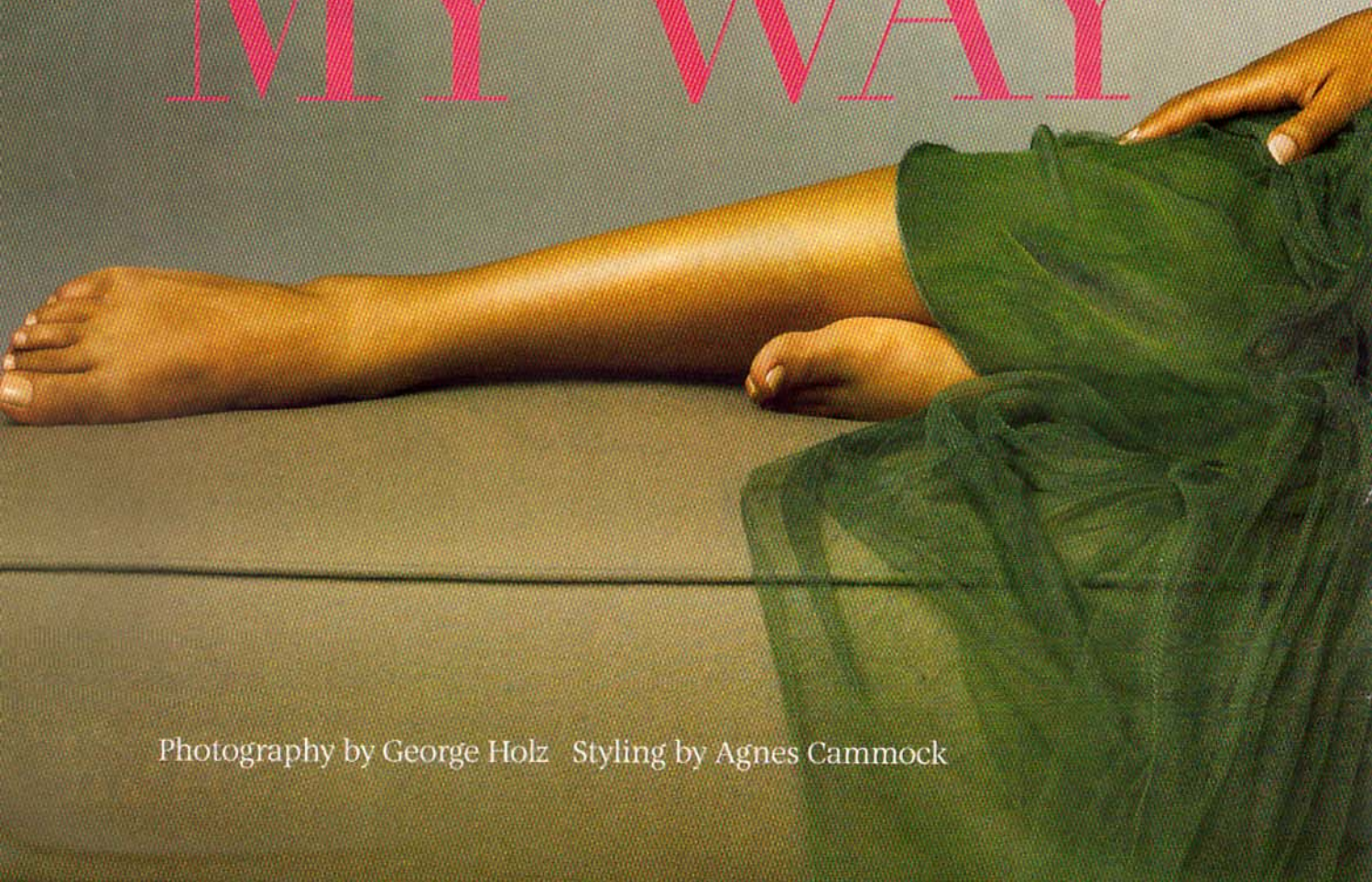
HAVING IT

Sanaa Lathan channels her inner seductress for the sexy cable show *Nip/Tuck*. But don't let her wicked grin fool you. As West Coast Editor **Regina R. Robertson** finds, Sanaa's still more sugar than spice

The late August sun is ablaze over the Farmer's Market at the corner of Third and Fairfax in Los Angeles, and Sanaa Lathan is running late for her one o'clock interview—but with good reason. Tomorrow night is the fourth season premiere of FX's monster-hit series *Nip/Tuck*, on which she's now starring as an enterprising, couture-dipped mysterious young woman married to an aging businessman played by Larry Hagman (yes, it's J.R. from *Dallas*). Sanaa's consumed with pulling together her red-carpet look, which took longer than she expected. At half past noon, her publicist calls to request a 15-minute reprieve. Then at 1:17 p.m., a remorseful Lathan herself calls from her car phone. "I'm just crossing Melrose," she explains. "I'll be right there."

When she pulls up at a few minutes shy of 2:00 p.m., the only hint of makeup on her heat-flushed face is the crimson gloss on her lips. Dressed in an orange, yellow and green V-neck sundress and wearing sandals, Lathan, chewing a piece of gum, apologizes for her tardiness and leads the way to *Ulysses Voyage*, a quaint little Greek restaurant. As we get settled at a corner table on the patio, we realize that we're sitting along the path of a >

MY WAY



Photography by George Holz Styling by Agnes Cammock



Sanaa Lathan wears a
Vera Wang dress.

“I won’t do something that I’m not passionate about. It’s hard for me to work just for money, which I’ve paid for in the past. The work is more important; the money will come.”

kid-friendly trolley, but fortunately, all the commotion seems to evaporate when our flaming cheese appetizer arrives. “This is like a grilled cheese sandwich—without the bread,” Lathan says with a laugh as we both dig in, “but I have to stop!” After all, she’s got to squeeze into a strapless fuchsia dress, courtesy of Escada, in just 24 hours.

It’s not been quite a decade since the New York-born, bi-coastally raised Yale School of Drama alum landed one of her early film roles as Wesley Snipes’s mother in *Blade* back in 1998. Lathan, 35, has done her time in “the girlfriend” zone. She began warming us up to her cool-sister-next-door charm in 1999’s *The Wood* opposite Omar Epps and *The Best Man* opposite Taye Diggs. Within a year, she was reading for meatier roles, like spirited hoop star Monica in *Love & Basketball*; aspiring singer-songwriter Zora in *Disappearing Acts*; and ambitious magazine editor Sidney in the hip-hop-inspired flick *Brown Sugar*. In 2003 she steamed up the screen with Hollywood’s finest, Denzel Washington, in the romantic thriller *Out of Time*, and the next year she slew extraterrestrials in *Alien vs. Predator*. “I created a rule for myself early in my career,” she says. “I won’t do something that I’m not passionate about. It’s very hard for me to work just for money, which I’ve paid for in the past. The work is more important; the money will come.”

Race Matters

The daughter of legendary producer-director Stan Lathan and Broadway actress and dancer Eleanor McCoy, Sanaa Lathan ranks boredom and complacency high on her list of pet peeves. That type of thinking could explain why she’s unabashed about taking risks. Case in point: her starring role in the interracial romantic comedy *Something New*, released last February. Although U.S. box office receipts topped off at a mere \$11.5 million, Lathan’s on-screen pairing with Aussie hunk Simon Baker got Black women talking and thinking about broadening their own horizons, romantically speaking. “I think the film was a breath of fresh air for Black women, because it gave us permission to step outside the box and follow our hearts,” Lathan says.

Now with her 12-episode run on *Nip/Tuck* under way, she’s bound to have more explaining to do when cable junkies get a full dose of her character, Michelle Landau. A thirtysomething “educated hustler” with a mind for business, a body for

sin and a wardrobe to die for, her character is married to a wealthy White venture capitalist. She’s not the least bit shy about satisfying her sexual appetite, but not necessarily with her septuagenarian husband. “It’s all acting,” she says of her risqué turn on the plastic-surgery-obsession-driven drama. (Oh, and for the record, Lathan says she doesn’t plan to tamper surgically with what God gave her.) With her head bowed and brow raised, she adds slyly: “Michelle has some...secrets. I don’t know how viewers will respond to her, but they’ll definitely be entertained.”

If you’re wondering about her flavor du jour, Lathan, who fell in love with and dated a White man for two years during her grad school days at Yale, insists she doesn’t have a type. She does have a preference, though. “I don’t discriminate, but I tend to gravitate toward Black men,” she admits. “Maybe it’s something that they have, like their weight and rhythm, but being with a brother just feels like home to me.”

Admittedly single and currently dating, she’s vowed to stay open and pace herself in matters of the heart. “I’m finally understanding that it takes a long time to get to know someone, because we always present our ‘best self’ to other people,” she says. “I’ve met somebody recently who I really like, but we’re not exclusive. I’m making an effort to go out more, so, who knows, maybe I’ll meet someone else tomorrow.”

Working Girl

By month’s end, Lathan will have wrapped production on *Nip/Tuck* and be on her way to Toronto to join her castmates from the 2004 Broadway production of *A Raisin in the Sun*. She, Phylicia Rashad, Audra McDonald and Sean Combs are set to shoot the small-screen version of the classic stage play for ABC. “I think the network is going to do a big event like they did with *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” she says, beaming at the memory of her Tony Award nomination for her performance in *Raisin* two years ago.

Lathan’s enthusiasm is contagious when she speaks of her upcoming projects, including her budding desire to slip behind the scenes as a producer. She’s equally intense when lamenting the flip side of the entertainment biz. “As an artist, you’re just so free and grounded and together when you’re employed, but the minute you find yourself without a job, you feel crazy,” she shares. “My mom’s friends have even asked, ‘What happened to her?’ It’s like, ‘I didn’t go anywhere. I’m right here, hustling to get another job and trying to have some integrity.’”

Our waitress delivers the check just in time for Lathan to make a mad dash to her 4:00 P.M. meeting with her stylist. But she pauses to reflect on just how she’d like her own story to unfold over the next decade or so. “My life will be a well-oiled machine,” she states. “I will have won two Oscars and maybe an Emmy and a Golden Globe, and I’ll do two films a year. I’ll be the mother of a couple of young kids and be happily married to my husband, who will be my best friend and will stimulate me mentally, physically and emotionally.”

And where will she find this man? “Girl, I don’t know,” she says, laughing. “Let’s hope he finds me.” □

Native New Yorker Regina R. Robertson now lives in Los Angeles.

HAIR: WIMBELY KIMBLE; MAKEUP: MALDONADO AGENCY; MAKEUP: DEAN BRYANT FOR CHRISTIAN DIOR ARTISTS BY TMOUHYPRANO.COM; MANICURE: ELLIEN BETHCOUW FOR PRANO.COM; PROP STYLIST: LINDEY MAREMIS ARTISTS BY TMOUHYPRANO.COM; FRANCIS CHAMBERY TOOD HASE; LEATHER OTTOMAN: RACHEL ASHWELL; @S: RRP BY DM.



Sanaa wears a **Chanel** dress and **Christian Louboutin** shoes.

Beauty Note
You, too, can glow like a star with **Jergens** Skin Smoothing Cellular Renewal Moisturizer.

For details, see **Where to Buy**.