



VANESSA VANDERPUYE



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Meet the actor and model who's making waves – and finding success on her own terms

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TODAY, VANESSA Vanderpuye is one of the most exciting new talents in the UK, but there was a point when the British-Ghanaian actor wondered if she wanted to continue working in the industry. 'I was at a chapter in my life where I was thinking – am I going to keep acting and struggling, and not having a regular paycheck?' She stuck with it and it's a good job she did: parts in the multi-award-winning web series *Dreaming White Black* (a whip smart comedy, now adapted into a BBC Three drama) and Sky's crime drama *Bulletproof*, alongside *Top Boy*'s Ashley Walters, followed, putting her firmly on the map.

'Getting the call that I'd landed the part in *Bulletproof*, I didn't know how to react. When the moment you've been waiting and dreaming about for years finally arrives, it is so surreal,' she says. 'Especially working with someone as esteemed as Ashley, someone I've admired and watched since he was in *So Solid Crew*; I can still repeat all the lyrics from *21 Seconds*.'

This autumn Vanderpuye starred in *Mrs. Sidiq Investigator* with the legendary Meera Syal. It follows Vanderpuye's first lead role in a feature-length film – the horror-fantasy *A Song From The Dark* – for which she won Best Actor at the

Star on the rise: Vanessa Vanderpuye

American Black Film Festival. For the role of Ashionye, she had to learn a new dialect. 'I speak Ga but I was playing a Yoruba spirit hunter, so I'm not speaking in my native tongue. That was a really exciting challenge.' And that's exactly what she is looking for in her roles: 'Anything that challenges me is more rewarding, anything that takes me out of my comfort zone.'

Although her passion for acting started at a young age, Vanderpuye studied for a degree in criminal justice. 'Growing up in an African household, being the first child, my mum would not let me go to acting school. She told me to study something academic and, if I still wanted to act afterwards, she would support me. But once I got a taste for acting, I couldn't shake it off. Since then, a determination to succeed has spurred Vanderpuye on throughout her career, both as an actor and model. 'It takes a lot of self-discipline, with each hurdle you have to ask yourself, am I going to keep going?'

She was scouted by a photographer outside Topshop in London. 'I tried editorial modelling and runway and I realised I didn't really like that. I don't have the body type for it. So I said to myself: OK, I have an athletic body, I have a great smile, I have great skin. I had to pick out the things that I love about myself and use that to my advantage.'

This year Vanderpuye started working with PROSPR – an agency with a mission to 'bridge the gap between diversity and luxury', co-founded by Aletia Adjei and Rayane Feghali Faran. 'To make it in these industries, which can be quite transactional, you need to have the right team around you,' explains Vanderpuye. 'People who are going to authentically champion you – be honest with you and hold you accountable.'

The next step in her journey? Moving to LA. 'A lot of my audition tapes are for African American women, so I know there is a space for me in the US. I just need to take a leap of faith,' she says. 'I'm trying to manifest a Marvel role. Or be the first Black Lara Croft.' Hollywood, take note. Follow Vanessa Vanderpuye on Instagram @VVbrownSkin

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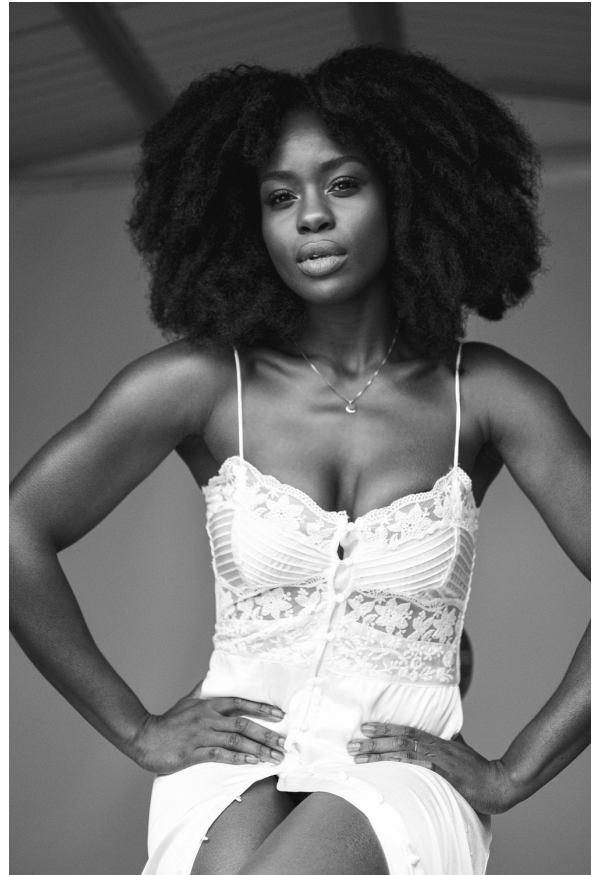
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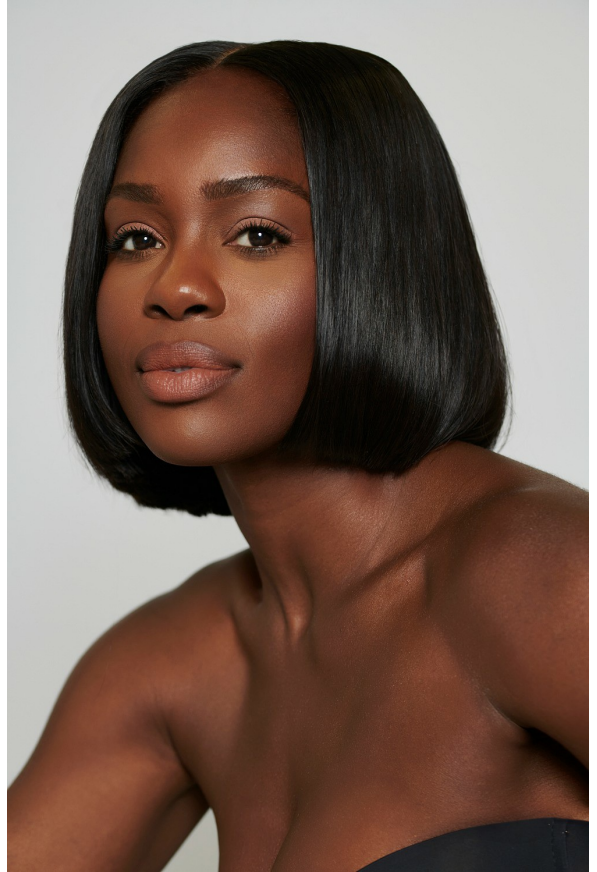


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