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STARTING FROM SCRATCH

IT'S A TOUGH LIFE WHEN YOU'RE A MODEL-TURNED-ACTRESS. BUT YOU HAVE TO START SOMEWHERE. MEGAN GALE TALKS TO GILL PRINGLE

PHOTOGRAPHY STEVE SHAW STYLING VANESSA GELDRACH

MEGAN Gale has been up since 4am for our shoot at LA's Chateau Marmont, yet she still looks fresh-faced and dewy-eyed as she swags herself in an Australian flag and reclines on the bed in a room of the world-famous hotel.

The early start has done nothing to dampen her vivacious mood, even though she still has to go to auditions and then catch a midnight flight to Sydney for the start of fashion week – and a film announcement.

She has been in LA for a frenetic round of auditions and meetings but is looking forward to getting back

"LA is such a seductive town. When you first land here you feel the buzz"

home to Australia and the breaking news of her film role.

The "announcement", *Grazia* can reveal, is that Megan is to star in the Aussie rom-com *I Love You Too* alongside lead actors Brendan Cowell (boyfriend of actress Rose Byrne) and *Six Feet Under*'s Yvonne Strahovski. Filming is due to start in Melbourne on May 4 and director Daina Reid told *Grazia* Megan has a "small but viral" role.

The comedy has been written by *Rory* comedian Peter Helliar and while low-budget, it is already creating a buzz in Hollywood film industry circles as potentially the next big Aussie hit.

While Megan cannot talk about the movie at all for contractual reasons, she is clearly relishing the prospect of the role after making the huge decision last year to swap her successful modelling career for acting at the relatively old age (in LA terms) of 32.

She says: "I wasn't nervous giving up the catwalk because I'd thought about it for so long beforehand."

"I'm starting from scratch with acting. It's like going back to square one because, as far as modelling goes, I haven't been to a casting in years and you do work hard to get to a position where you can be automatically booked for something. I'm definitely nowhere near that in terms of my acting."

When she first made the career switch, Megan appeared to effortlessly hit the big time with the announcement that she was to star as Wonder Woman in George Miller's superhero movie *Justice League*.

But with no news of when the project might start filming – and rumours she is to be replaced by Megan Fox in the role – there have been spiteful mutterings recently that the Aussie actress's film career is going to be over before it's even begun.

Megan herself is pragmatic about the gossip concerning her career, saying that "as far as I know" she still has the Wonder Woman role but admits it has been tough cracking a new industry.

"LA is such a seductive town," she says. "When you first land here,

you definitely feel that energy and buzz about the place. You feel like anything can happen. But it's also renowned for chewing you up and spitting you out in a minute."

"You need a very thick skin and be able to not take it too personally, like dwelling on why you didn't get a particular job. I'm very philosophical. While I'd like to do well, I'm not desperate to succeed."

"I think what would be worst would be to have never tried. I don't want to be sitting here at the end of my life wishing I'd had a go and regretting it if I didn't."

So is it hard to compete with Hollywood starlets who are more than a decade younger?

She laughs, "Look, I'm no spring chicken. But I wouldn't say I'm worried about age because I try to look after myself as well as possible."

"Most of the producers I met with this week thought I was about seven years younger than I am. One even said he couldn't cast me as a mum because I was too young!"

She says she no longer reads the criticism of her career. "I read quite a few things along the lines of, 'Oh she's going to be a shocking actress because she's a model...'" which is kind of unfair since nobody has seen what I can do yet.

"If they'd already seen me act and didn't like it then that's fine, but to criticise me before I've even had a chance is a bit premature." ▶



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Whenever Megan gets discouraged by gossip or has questions about her new career, she has a strong ally in fellow Australian actress Teresa Palmer.

"Teresa is lovely. She lives here now and is doing so well. She's really down-to-earth and it's so great to have a friendly face over here."

And Megan also has the support of her boyfriend Andy Lee (of radio duo Hamish & Andy).

She says: "I'm with someone who is just so amazing and supportive."

"He 'gets' what I do. A man with a great sense of humour is extremely disarming and essential for me."

"You can have the most gorgeous guy in the world, but if he can't make you laugh and can't laugh at himself, then it's meaningless. But Andy is cute too and his personality is amazing. He makes me laugh and he's just got such a big generous heart."

"I'd love to explore motherhood when that time comes, but there's just too much I have to do right now"

So could marriage be on the cards? "No, not at all," she says decisively. "It would be absolutely too much for Andy and I to do right now."

And children?

"I'd love to explore motherhood and when that time comes, I'm sure it will be a really wonderful phase in my life."

"But there's just too much I have to do right now. Maybe it's me being a bit selfish but there's still a few things on the list that I need to tick off."

For a start she is contracted to David Jones (until 2011) and has no plans to move full-time to LA, preferring to base herself with Andy in Sydney and fly in and out for auditions.

"I love Australia so much and moving to Hollywood is not something I'm planning right now," she says. "It's such an unpredictable industry."

And with that, she pops off to her next audition. She may not be Wonder Woman yet, but she's certainly a force to be reckoned with. ■



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