



Blouse by Chanel,  
\$16,780; earrings  
by Catbird, \$184

# FALL RISE

Emma Watson is the child star the world never wanted to become a woman. But her explosive HeForShe speech on gender equality at the UN last year has changed all that. In her most revealing interview to date, the newly anointed feminist icon talks to documentary-maker and fellow Brit *Lucy Walker* about how she's finally okay with being bossy, prioritizing "just feeling awesome" and what she makes of love

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*Photography by Cass Bird Fashion editor Alex White*



“I was *terrified* by the level of *interest* in me...  
I used to have to *go numb* just to get through it”

Sweater by Isabel  
Marant, \$905,  
at Net-A-Porter.  
com; shorts by  
AG Jeans, \$275



Coat, \$2,516, and bikini, \$419, both by Balenciaga; ring by Inez and Vinoodh, from a selection at Net-A-Porter.com

**I**n Emma Watson's breathtakingly bold and brilliant speech on gender equality at the UN last September, she confessed: "You might be thinking, 'Who is this Harry Potter girl and what is she doing up onstage at the UN?' It's a really good question. I have been asking myself the same thing..." And indeed she has. The 25-year-old actress's journey from Hermione Granger to HeForShe has been one of deeply questioning everything, most of all herself. So here I was, wanting some answers. Who does this Harry Potter girl think she is?

And who am I? A documentary maker, not a journalist. And apparently that's precisely why she wanted me to interview her. I make documentary films and I love interviewing people, but as I drive to our meeting in Bel-Air, I realize I'm not used to doing it without a camera rolling. She sits down opposite me, face glowing without any makeup, in a dark botanical dress that sits perfectly in the lush candlelit garden, as naturally beautiful and supernaturally alive as the supersize palms that frame our conversation. I hit my phone's voice recorder and double-check it nervously, "Sorry, I'm not a journalist, I don't actually know how to do this."

She laughs and says she loves that I don't know. And this flowers into the theme of our conversation... of becoming comfortable with not knowing. "I have a sister called Emma," is what comes out of my mouth first. Laughing again, she comes back with "And I have a sister called Lucy." And so this is how we set off, two English girls with bog-standard English names who have traveled a long way from Oxford, where she grew up and I went to university, to a beautiful patio on this dusky Indian summer evening that is October in Los Angeles. Our conversation spills over the allotted hour, runs into dinner, and rolls into an authentic evening spent sorting out the many things we share and care about, starting with being feminists, to how she has grown up from taking on Lord Voldemort to taking on the world.

There are few people who don't know who Emma Watson is, that she was cast as Hermione Granger, the only female lead in the eight-part Harry Potter film franchise, at the age of nine. It took eight auditions before she secured the role, and since then she has accomplished the rare feat of growing up in the public eye without so much as a drunken stumble or romantic fiasco. When David Letterman (creepily, by the way) presented her live on air with a giant photo of her most egregious wardrobe malfunction (when her dress fell open at the London premiere of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* in 2009), she laughed and fired right back, "Well, at least I was wearing underwear." She has seemingly never put a foot wrong. David Heyman, British producer of the Harry Potter movies, says that what is even more impressive is that she was coping with a lot more than anyone even knew, working on a male-dominated set and bearing family stress (her lawyer parents divorced when she was five and she and her brother divided their time between them.)

Emma and I have actually met before. The first time was on the set of the third in the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. She was 13 and my friend, its director Alfonso Cuarón, introduced us. I remember him remarking how much she'd blossomed since the first two movies and how he found her mature beyond her years. He was very respectful, but her puberty was the talk of the set; a subject which her fame had made it impossible for her to escape from. *Saturday Night Live* featured a skit where Hermione, played by Lindsay Lohan, returns to Hogwarts with a newly developed cleavage and Harry and Ron, still prepubescent boys, gasp at how much "happened over the summer".

The next time we met, she was 20, on a night out in London that started at the BAFTAs and ended up at the opening party of burlesque club, The Box. I vividly recall seeing her demure face framed by her not-a-hair-out-of-place pixie crop. I wasn't sure where to look, and I was not the most famous girl in England. But her expression was like a >

"It's much easier to *play it safe*. To be *polite* and to do as is expected. But to take a chance, to piss some people off, to stand up and to *speak your mind* - regardless of the consequences - that is the definition of *bravery* and the sign of a *true artist*. Emma planted her flag firmly in *new and trepidatious ground* and *refused to be defined* by anything but her own *heart, instinct and voice*, and reminded us all that with *every moment* comes an *incredible opportunity*. It's just up to us to *do something meaningful* with it."

*Jared Leto, actor and HeForShe activist*



Blouse, \$2,033,  
and shorts,  
\$3,232, both by  
Louis Vuitton;  
earrings by Dior,  
\$394; ring by Inez  
and Vinoodh, from  
a selection at  
Net-A-Porter.com

mask, 100 percent self-possessed, revealing nothing, as if she was at a royal christening rather than at a raunchy show.

I'm curious how she has coped with fame and what the effects have been on her life because she has always seemed so together, so knowing. Daniel Radcliffe (who played Harry Potter) has candidly discussed his teenage struggles with alcohol, which he says helped quell feelings of self-consciousness (he's been sober since 2010), but Watson, unlike many other young stars who have struggled with fame, has never betrayed anything other than composure. But there was a lot going on underneath that mask, she now admits. "As a young person that feeling of not being comfortable in my own skin was exacerbated by the microscope I was under," she says. "The level of questioning I was under, coming at such a young age. People asking me, 'What do you think of this? Who are you, who are you, who are you?' I felt so inadequate because I just didn't have answers yet. I had so many friends who had a clear sense of self. Who knew that they liked certain things, like the smell of grass, or what their favorite color was. I envied those girls because I was so unsure of myself. I questioned everything. I was terrified by the level of interest in me. I spent most of my time trying to convince everyone I was incredibly boring because I needed privacy and a minute to figure myself out. I used to have to go numb and close myself off, for example on the red carpet, just to get through it."

Her handling of fame demonstrates a preternatural level of self-discipline and strength. In 2011, the moment Harry Potter ended, she enrolled at Brown University in Rhode Island, the most creatively inclined of the American Ivy League colleges. It was as far away as she could get from Hogwarts. She studied everything from 'plein air' painting ("clambering around with a giant easel, coming home with paint in my ears, so much fun") to American history ("fascinating"), generally "worked her ass off", and acted in a student production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* ("I loved the camaraderie").

She admits "there were times when it felt very lonely, moving to the other side of the world, to where I had no support, when I was on the side of buses everywhere. But I'm so glad I did, it was the best thing I could have done, putting myself in that furnace," she says. "It gave me this place of refuge, this space I could negotiate for myself, and time to figure out who I was. I'd spent more than half of my life pretending to be someone else. While my contemporaries were dying their hair and figuring out who they were, I was figuring out who Hermione was and how best to portray her. I learned so many important lessons."

America gave her new perspective on certain British characteristics she didn't fit in with: of constantly doing oneself down and not looking as if one is trying too hard at anything. "It's a really bad lesson that we learn in England and it has to stop," she says. England also represented a place where she had found it particularly hard to escape the "fixed idea" people had of her. But it wasn't just about leaving England, she was also naturally drawn to the American spirit, something her mother calls "oomph". For emphasis, she recites President Roosevelt's seminal quote about doing versus spectating: "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles... The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena... who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly..." Even though it is just us, she gives an Oscar-worthy performance and I want to cheer.

She never stopped acting while at college and found time to make a few cleverly chosen films (including *The Bling Ring*, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and a smaller part in *My Week with Marilyn*). She recalls 2014 starting quietly; she was still in incubating mode: "I was living in New York writing a thesis to finish my degree and I felt like there was just something missing," she says. "I spent a year thinking 'What is it? What is this thing that I feel is missing?'"

She knew that she wanted to do something that involved women, and how she could bring them together. Her a-ha moment came later in 2014 when the UN asked her to become a Goodwill Ambassador. She jumped at the chance to take an active role on issues that she'd already been thinking about constantly, and, she says "it all clicked into place. It felt as if I'd been building that speech in my mind for a very long time. I had this wall of different things I'd written over the previous six months and ideas going back even further than that."

She was finally taking off her mask, and it was happening on the world stage. "The day before I was very emotional because it honestly felt like I was about to stand completely naked in front of the world," she says. The speech was an instant game changer. It has been watched millions of times, has generated more than 30 million Facebook followers and will inspire women and men for decades to come. She didn't just announce the launch of HeForShe, she invited men and boys to join a solidarity movement for gender equality and eloquently declared her own path to feminism, always sensitively acknowledging her own privileges. A great deal of the power of the speech lies in the authenticity of her voice, grounded in the story of her experience and her own awakening to gender inequality, such as: "...when at eight I was confused at being called 'bossy' because I wanted to direct the plays we would put on for our parents – but the boys were not; when at 14 I started being sexualized by certain elements of the press; when at 15 my girlfriends started dropping out of their sports teams because they didn't want to be 'muscly'; when at 18 my male friends were unable to express their feelings..." Her words made us listen. Countless high-profile figures have since come out congratulating Watson on the bravery of her message.

She gave her vision for her hopes of a gender-equalized world and she expertly discussed the stigma surrounding the word feminist before heartily embracing it herself. Looking back, she says, "I was encouraged when I was writing the speech not to use the word 'feminism' because people felt that it was alienating and separating and the whole idea of the speech was to include as many people as possible. But I thought long and hard and ultimately felt that it was just the right thing to do. If women are terrified to use the word, how on earth are men supposed to start using it?"

After all those years questioning and exploring herself, she finally hit on something she cared deeply about. And it wasn't just a favorite color. It was gender equality and human rights. And she won't be stopping there. She was supposed to have taken today off (she's in the middle of filming *The Circle*, an adaptation of Dave Eggers' dystopian novel), but instead she tells me she's spent all afternoon scribbling notes for HeForShe covering "the side margins of the book I'm reading because I didn't have any of my writing stuff with me".

Everything about Emma's story reminds me of research I've done into highly creative people; how they can initially appear indecisive, overly questioning and extremely broad in their curiosity, before they have that crystalizing eureka moment. But when they are inspired to create a specific project, they become highly convergent and focused, and lose track of time as they are immersed in their work. "It takes a while for people to realize that I don't care if I don't

get any sleep, I don't care if I'm freezing cold, I don't care if I work a seven-day week," she says. "The only thing I care about is leaving nothing on the table. I don't know why I have to push myself, but I just don't know how to be any other way. It's just the way I am made."

One of her challenges has been learning how to switch off, which was imperative as the Harry Potter phenomenon became ever more insatiable. She loves painting, doing workout dance routines with her girlfriends. "We probably burn more calories laughing than anything else, but what a great way to stop the thoughts and get into my body. I don't want my body to just be this thing that carries my head around." She practices Ashtanga yoga and when her beloved teacher suggested that the best way to learn was to become a teacher, she took the advice. The training demanded three intensive silent retreats. "I'm not religious," she says, "but it's given me some of the pinnings of the things that I believe in and helped shape my understanding of things."

She brings her consciousness to everything with admirable rigor. When I ask how she reconciles being a feminist with her relationship with fashion, she answers with equanimity: "I think using fashion as a means of expression is brilliant," she says. "One of the ways I became a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador was through my interest in fair-trade fashion. Because so many women design and make the clothes we wear, it's primarily the working conditions of women that are affected by the decisions we make, so fashion is a feminist issue." Today she looks like the perfect English rose, in a floral midi dress by designer brand Reformation, her go-to label. She gushes about their sustainability, carbon-neutral production and female management team, rather than what its fashion status means to her.

How clothes are made is not the only thing that's evolved about the way she now thinks of fashion. "When I was younger I remember being told 'no pain no gain'," she says, "but recently my willingness to wear something that makes me freezing cold or that I can't walk in has changed. I want to feel fabulous and comfortable and sexy and strong and beautiful. And if it's making you uncomfortable, don't do it. It's so sad if you need to go home just because you need to sit down! Moving forward, I'm prioritizing just feeling awesome."

"Now at 25 for the first time in my life I feel like I have a sense of self that I'm comfortable with. I actually do have things that I want to say and I want to be my most authentic self. I don't want there to

be a big separation between the public and the private person. It's definitely the harder road to tread, but without a doubt, ultimately the most rewarding. And the women I really admire are the ones you feel you're getting something truthful from. It sounds like a ridiculous thing to say, but I'm very interested in truth, in finding ways to be messy and unsure and flawed and incredible and great and my fullest self, all wrapped into one. When you watch the work of someone like actress Emma Thompson, you feel like you're seeing something true, and I aspire to that."

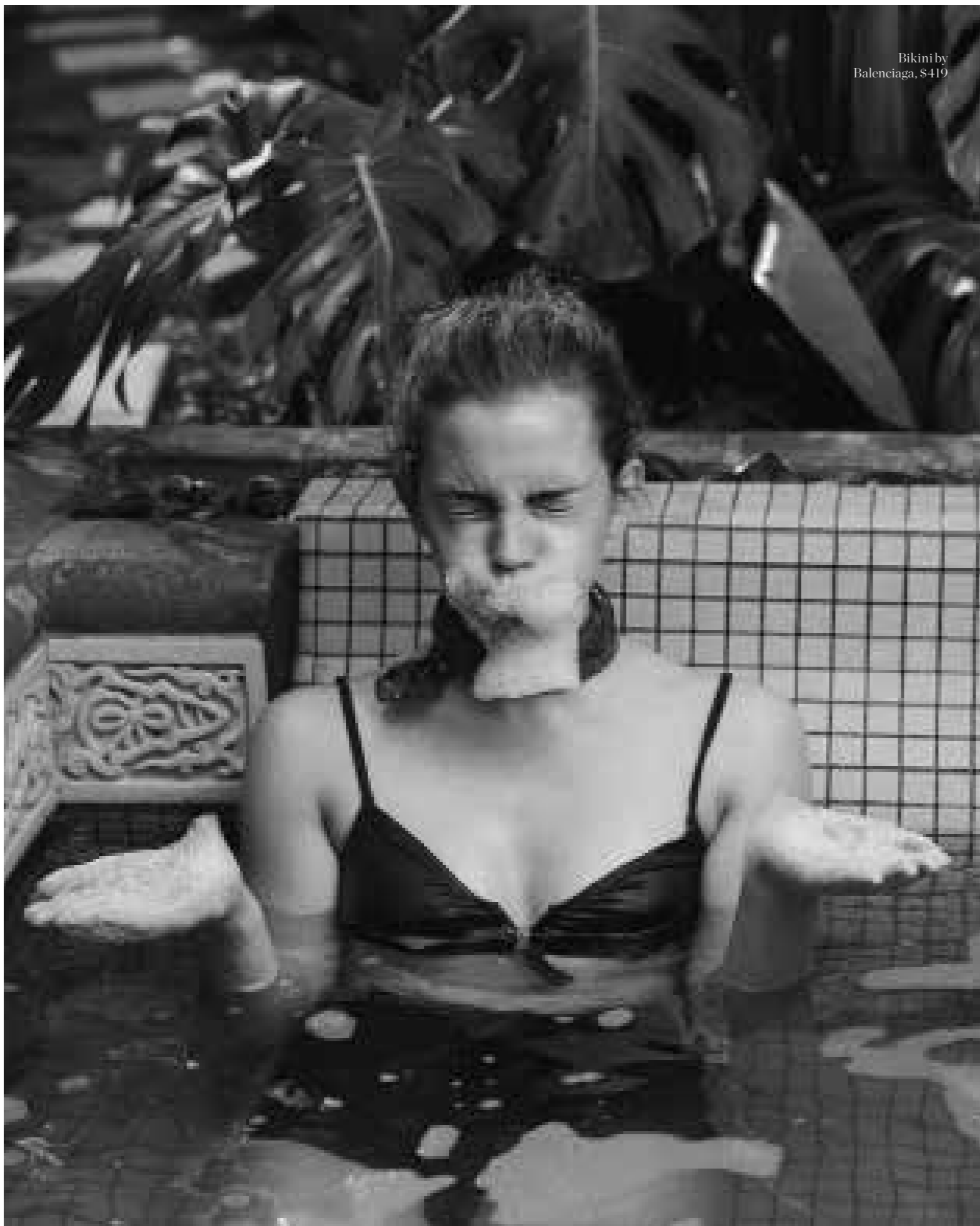
The conversation turns to love, something which she references as another tool for growth (there have been two well documented relationships, both with Oxford University students: the first, Will Adamowicz, lasted three years; the second, Matt Janney, less than a year). She tells me that another of her favorite courses at Brown was The Philosophy and Psychology of Love. So what are her tips? "Well, as a child of divorce I am endlessly fascinated with finding the perfect formula for making it work," she smiles. "But I think the biggest lesson I learned is that there aren't any rules." She recites another favorite quote, this time from Indian spiritual leader, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh aka Osho: "Love never becomes wise, and that is its wisdom."


So what advice does she have for young women? "Sit with the discomfort. Don't run away from it. Lean into it, take your time with it. So many people jump into things just because they can't stand the discomfort of not knowing." Advice she can finally take herself. Because she doesn't know what's next, and she's fine with that. Her film choices continue to reflect her personal agenda: in her next movie, indie drama *Regression*, she plays a girl who accuses her father of sexual abuse; next year's *Colonia* is both brave and topical, the true story of a young woman's attempts to extract her boyfriend from a cult in Chile in 1973; and 2017's *Beauty & the Beast* has a strong feminist narrative – think *Maleficent* with singing. There are possible theater projects in the pipeline, too, and lots of ideas for HeForShe. But she mostly just wants to incubate and see where that takes her, with no anxiety or striving for a particular thing. And while that may seem disappointingly vague, it's ultimately a more grounded, impressive answer. I think this is in the spirit of pure oomph which she so identifies with. Watson is, to feminize the Roosevelt speech that she'd quoted earlier, a woman "daring greatly". ■

“Emma is like an octopus with many arms. She manages to *balance all her identities* - movie star, actress, student, activist, friend and daughter - and she uses her *celebrity* for good, not profit. With HeForShe she delivered a speech that didn't vilify anybody; she explained how it makes no sense for men to feel bigger by making women feel smaller. It *inspired me* in a very *personal way* by bringing me instantly closer to my daughter. I suddenly *saw her future* through Emma's words.”

*Stephen Chbosky, writer and director of The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

Bikini by  
Balenciaga, \$419



A woman with long brown hair, wearing a black beret and a long-sleeved blouse with a small black and white polka-dot pattern, stands waist-deep in clear blue water. She is looking slightly to her left. In the background, a city skyline is visible across a body of water, and a white building with a blue roof is partially visible on the right. The lighting is soft, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

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I feel like I have a *sense of self*  
that I’m *comfortable* with”

Blouse, \$1,290, and  
belt, \$1,190, both by  
Oscar de la Renta;  
hat by Etoile Isabel  
Marant, \$175, at  
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Makeup Dotti at  
Streeters, Nails Nettie  
Davis at The  
Wall Group, Prop stylist  
Daniel Graff for Mary  
Howard Studio,  
Production Joy Asbury  
Productions. Shot on  
location in Los Angeles  
on September 20, 2015