

CLIMB AND CONQUER

For Salma Ismail, ain't no mountain high enough— with a fresh new perspective on life, a torrent of exciting opportunities coming her way, and a hike up Mount Kilimanjaro on her path, the sky's the limit for this beautiful Egyptian adventurer.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ETHAN MANN



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Salma Ismail is not a fan of drama. And we don't mean in the movie sense—she *loves* those—but rather, drama in her personal life. Even when you message her, she's not one for long, unnecessary, drawn-out conversations. I'm not [much of] a talker," she laughs. In essence, it's because she's not really into time-wasting, whether that's with her beauty routine (despite her glowing skin and glossy locks, she isn't into wearing too much makeup and the only things she swears by are the hair botox treatment at Blo-Out Beauty Bar, and the Clinique skincare line) or the way she trains. For instance, she doesn't like to cook, so uses a healthy meal delivery service, and if she does have to, she'll stick to simple dishes she *knows* work for her. She's also never been a fan of long-distance

running, and much prefers intervals. This attitude has really worked in her favour lately too, whether that's in the way she's had to modify her usual training for Ramadan—as a Muslim who observes Ramadan, she has to keep up with work and her own fitness goals while fasting—or with her preparation for her upcoming hike up Mount Kilimanjaro. It's a bold move—she's heading there almost straight after Eid Al Fitr, and it's the first time she's ever tried to climb a mountain. But then again, this is a year of big steps for her too.

Known to most people simply as Sal, the 29-year-old Egyptian is on the precipice of a major life change. She's been living back and forth between Dubai and Canada for about 7 years, and after becoming a well-known and much loved

figure in the regional health and fitness scene, she's decided it's time to shake things up and get out of her comfort zone.

Back in December last year, she was approached by an Egypt-based company called Wild Guanabana. They had sponsored one of her

bootcamps, offering up great prizes for participants, such as a 7-day walking and yoga tour through Nepal. "They're inspired by everything outdoors and related to nature," Sal explains, her eyes lighting up as she tells me about the company's founder, a fellow Egyptian called Omar Samra, the first Egyptian to climb Everest, 7 summits, and ski to both poles. Sal says she's just honoured to be working with such an inspiring team. "For me, hiking a mountain is definitely out of my comfort zone. It's not something I'd think of wanting to do myself. So when they came to me with that idea, I thought, you know what, this is something that I'd



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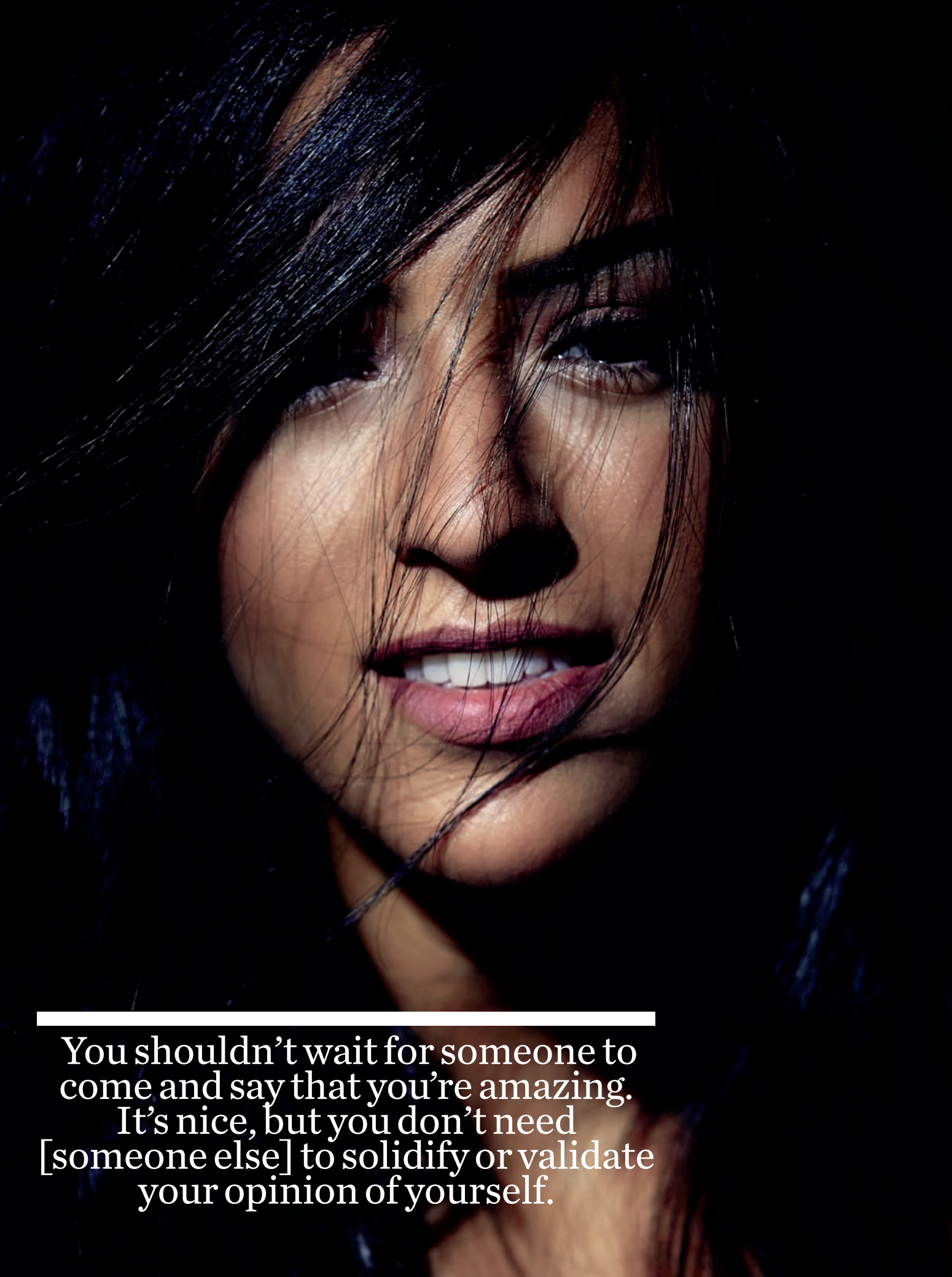
HAIR AND MAKEUP: DOLLY CHIN, NISHANI PANGODA AND MAHESHI AT BEAUTY BY EDGE (BEAUTYBYEDGE.COM). FASHION DIRECTOR: YI-HWA HANNA. STYLING ASSISTANT: ALYSSA THERRIEN. ART DIRECTOR: RENE ANDREW. PREVIOUS SPREAD: TOP AND BOTTOM, SAL'S OWN. EARRINGS: DHS69. ALDO ACCESSORIES AT SIVVI.COM. RING SET: DHS40. ALDO ACCESSORIES AT SIVVI.COM. THIS SPREAD (LEFT): DRESS, SAL'S OWN. (MIDDLE): TOP, IVY PARK AT NAMSHI.COM. (RIGHT): CUT-OUT CROPTOP, DHS145. MISS CUFF BRACELETS: DHS60. TIPS: AT NAMSHI.COM. THIS SPREAD (RIGHT): CUT-OUT CROPTOP, DHS145. MISS SELFRIIDGE AT NAMSHI.COM; MID-RISE LEGGINGS: DHS315; IVY PARK AT NAMSHI.COM.



never to do my own. I took it as an amazing challenge for me mentally more than anything, since I'm a person who would rather sprint than run long distances. And the last year was... I had so many ups and downs, mostly downs, it wasn't a great year for me. I feel like I needed something to challenge myself mentally, to bring me back and get know myself better again," she says.

One of Sal's number one focuses for the past year has been fighting against negative influences in her life in order to try and break down the external influences causing her downs, and a huge part of that has been learning to deal with her insecurities. As a woman who just likes to find solutions to problems rather than letting them simmer, even she seemed surprised at how little she'd noticed how it was holding her back. "Unfortunately I've had a lot of self doubt throughout the last year of my life, so starting up everything fresh and new... sometimes you think, can you really do this on your own, can you go through it, and you know what—once I decided to shut out any negativity in my life, I was so excited. Doors started opening," she says. Sal accredits the negativity to not being in the best environment, where people around her didn't necessarily believe in her, and she had to learn to stand on her own two feet and face things on her own a little more. "I had to do a lot of soul searching, if you want to call it that—to realise that 'you are great, you should go, you should believe in yourself and not have self doubt'. It was nothing other than me being attached to certain things in my life and not being to experience it on my own. You shouldn't wait for someone to come and say you're amazing. It's nice, but you don't need them to solidify or validate your opinion of yourself. Once I decided or was aware of that, I was ten times happier. I started being able to take on other opportunities.

HAIR AND MAKEUP: DOLLY CHIN, NISHANI PANGODA AND MAHESHI AT BEAUTY BY EDGE (BEAUTYBYEDGE.COM).
FASHION DIRECTOR: YI-HWA HANNA. STYLING ASSISTANT: ALYSSA THERRIEN. ART DIRECTOR: RENE ANDREW. THIS
SPREAD (LEFT): PINK CAGED BODYCON DRESS, DHS165, HIGHSTREETS AT SIVVI.COM. LEATHER JACKET, STYLIST'S
OWN. RING SET, DHS40, ALDO ACCESSORIES AT SIVVI.COM. CARPET: WITH THANKS TO FARAH ZOGHBI.



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Everything happens for a reason, so I disconnected from any negativity in my life and started fresh, even if it was from the bottom,” she says.

It’s not the first time that she’s taken a massive risk to embrace a new beginning: That’s actually how she got into the world of fitness in the first place. Formerly a digital media planner who was stuck at a desk job that wasn’t really making her happy, Sal actually studied Advertising and Public Relations at university. She hated how the job made her feel—“I just felt like I couldn’t function. Anything that I did would make me breathe heavily and I was completely non-athletic”—so she decided it was time for a change. After getting her qualifications as a trainer, and realising that working full-time while doing that on the side was taking too high of a toll on her, she quit her job to do it full-time. And believe it or not, her first-ever client never even showed up. Naturally, Sal panicked, but it all worked out in the end, and now, 80% of her clients have been with her for 3-4 years. In addition to her Kili climb, she’s now also looking at some exciting new projects for the year ahead: Earlier this year, she launched a Booty Blaster class that did so well it’s now becoming a regular fixture in her life, along with a recently rebranded version of her famous bootcamps (find out more on her Instagram at @salbroutine), as well as a

collaboration with Get Fit Chicks, a programme designed for women by women that she’s partnering with a friend, Kirsteen Thain, to run. It will offer training along with healthy meal plans from one of Sal’s favourites, Healthy U, for all participants. Sal is very passionate about empowering women, so that’s a driving force behind her excitement. “I am glad that women don’t just aspire to be runway models. It’s not how women think anymore, and I’m very glad. You should embrace your curves and the booty that you

for instance, she’s cut strength training down to bi-weekly sessions done after iftar, and has upped her circuit training just before breaking her fast instead. And she doesn’t go wild with the meals either—she’ll have some dates, then her Healthy U meal (or another meal consisting of rice and protein, since that’s what works for her body’s digestion habits), then a protein shake after. For suhour, she has eggs, oatmeal, fruit, and a lot of water. Her prep for the hike has involved a lot of interval training: “This helps me keep my muscle mass. I get on the treadmill for 45 minutes but I’ll do tabatas. I’ll walk on a speed incline for 10 mins, then do tabatas all the way through,” she says. Sal has got the fitness side down pat, but if there’s one thing that truly freaks her out about her upcoming trip—especially after watching the movie *Everest*—

aside, she seems surprisingly calm about the ballsier aspects of the trip, including the fact that she’ll be doing this extremely intimate experience with strangers she’s only meeting once she arrives. One thing she knows she’ll have is her family’s support: While they weren’t too keen on it when she first dropped the corporate life for fitness, when her dad showed up at her first Dubai Fitness Championship competition, he understood what it meant to her and was exceptionally proud. Just talking about it makes Sal beam with pride. She now trains with her family when she’s at home in Toronto, including her dad, her twin sister—yup, she’s got an identical twin called Sara—her older brother Mohammed, and her three younger siblings, Omar, Seif and Sofia. With this

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have. It’s about keeping fit and active. The truth is for me it was never about how I looked, it was about being able to do something with my body that I couldn’t do before. That’s also why I always focused on strength training,” she says.

It’s been hard for her, then, to cut back on the strength training during Ramadan, but Sal’s become quite the expert at letting go of what isn’t working and embracing a solution that actually does. During Ramadan

it’s the idea of altitude sickness. Mainly, she explains, it’s the idea that she’ll be physically unable to complete the hike due to factors completely out of her control, regardless of how fit she is. It’s also going to be one of the most gritty things she’s ever done in the great outdoors, but she is clearly more excited than nervous about it, especially when I tell her about a dry shampoo that doesn’t require an aerosol can, which could be her answer to the one girly anti-home comfort she’s really not looking forward to: Totally raw hair.

“It’s the one thing I get really fussy about!” she laughs. Jokes

much support behind her, we’re pretty sure she’s going to nail the climb, no matter what happens up there. “When I went and bought all the stuff I needed for it, it became really real. But everyone I’ve asked who has done anything similar, said the first time you do it you’ll want to do it again. I’m excited to experience how I would handle this mentally. I think it’ll be a great experience for my mind,” she says. ■

