

JULIANNE HOUGH ON SUCCESS AND SEXY TIME WITH SEACREST!

ohhhhhhhh!

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MY GAY BEST
FRIEND"
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T h e



A GOOD DANCER MAKES IT LOOK EASY. JULIANNE HOUGH, FORMER *DANCING WITH THE STARS* CHAMP, CERTAINLY HAS THAT SKILL—STORMING HOLLYWOOD AND SCORING ROLES OTHER ACTRESSES WOULD KILL FOR. BUT SHE ALSO HAS A SECRET SHE'S FINALLY READY TO TELL....

By Logan Hill

1 d e n

G i r l

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s Superstorm Sandy descended on New York City, rain and storm winds rattled the windows of downtown's Crosby Street Hotel. Inside, actress Julianne Hough and her boyfriend, Ryan Seacrest—Hollywood's fast-rising, workaholic power couple—were stranded and alone. Their cell phones were, for once, strangely quiet.

So they curled up in a king-size bed and hibernated with fellow bears: the potty-mouthed comedy *Ted* on the hotel TV and an enormous canister of gummy bears open on the duvet. "We couldn't work," Hough says, the next day. "We just got to stay in our bed and in our pajamas—until the power cut out."

Dress: Paco Rabanne;
earrings: Scosha;
bracelets (on both
wrists): Chan Luu;
shoes: Roberto Cavalli

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARC HOM





Let's just say they probably never saw the end of that talking-teddy-bear flick. "It was great," says Hough, smiling conspiratorially. "We put on some candles, had some sexy time....Hal!"

Hough flashes her 500-watt smile and swoops into a chair at a long table in a new hotel, this one with hot water and electricity. She's in a great mood, despite one worry: "I haven't showered in two days. I hope I'm not smelling from this side of the table."

She looks perfect, of course, in a black cashmere sweater, slim black pants, and glossy leather flats from her new Sole Society collection. All expressive laughs, aw-shucks charm, and that broad showgirl smile, she appears exactly as her fans might expect: the poised young competitor who hustled her way to two *Dancing With the Stars* championships in 2007, sold a number-one country album shortly after, and went on to star in *Rock of Ages* and *Footloose*. Hough is the kind of triple threat you don't find much in Hollywood anymore.

That pretty-girl demeanor is one reason director Lasse Hallström nearly didn't cast her in the film adaptation of Nicholas Sparks' best-seller *Safe Haven*, opening February 14. He watched her audition with Josh Duhamel via Skype—Hough in

Los Angeles, Hallström in New York. "I had a perception that she was just a very light and charming girl that might not have the emotional range," he says.

Safe Haven is the story of Katie, a girl who survives horrific abuse at the hands of an ex-boyfriend. She escapes to North Carolina, where she eventually learns to open up and accept the love of a handsome widower. Duhamel, who plays the widower, thought she could do it. "I told Lasse, 'There is a sadness in that room, something more complicated that the character needed to have. And that's what she has.'"

Hough fought for a second audition and got the part. Hallström says he was surprised to find something different when he saw her up close: a woman who was "honest and direct and wonderfully fearless." He was even more surprised to find that his star, who seemed so perfectly composed on the surface, had her own painful, hidden story of abuse.

A SECRET PAST

When Hough was just 10 years old, she thought up a very detailed set of goals to work on—and then set about meeting them. "By the time I was 18, I wanted to be a professional dancer: I happened to be on *Dancing With the Stars*. When I was 19, I wanted to be a singer: At that age, I had my first record out. I said by the time I'm 22, I wanted to be a movie star...."

Hough is 24 now, and she's been working on those goals since she was a girl in South Jordan, Utah. All four grandparents and both parents were dancers, so Hough, the youngest of five kids, grew up performing with her Mormon family. Her parents divorced when she was 10. At the time, her brother Derek was studying dance at London's prestigious Italia Conti Academy of the Arts, and when a slot opened up, she joined him. She ended up winning a

five-year scholarship, training relentlessly, and rarely seeing or talking to her family. She became a world-class dancer...but at a great cost.

"I was 10 years old looking like I was 28, being a very sensual dancer," she says. A precociously seductive smile became her public mask—and she rarely took it off. "I was a tormented little kid who had to put on this sexy facade because that was my job and my life. But my heart was the same, and I was this innocent little girl. I wanted so much love."

With her parents an ocean away, Hough says the adults around her took advantage. "While I was in London, I was abused, mentally, physically, everything," she says. In what way or by whom exactly, she declines to say: "I'm a very forgiving person, and I don't want to hurt anybody. What's past is past." A ripple of tension tightens a face that is always so relaxed and bright, like a sheet being pulled tight. It got worse, she says, "when I started hitting puberty, when I started becoming a woman and stopped being a little girl."

"You can kind of hear the quiver in my voice...." She pauses but only a beat. She's going to nail this move, even if her ankle is broken and her feet blistered. "This is the farthest I've ever gotten into my London situation," she says. "I was told if I ever went back to the United States, three things were going to happen. One: I was going to amount to nothing. Two: I was going to work at Whataburger. And three: I was going to end up a slut. So, it was like, I can't go back. I have to be this person."

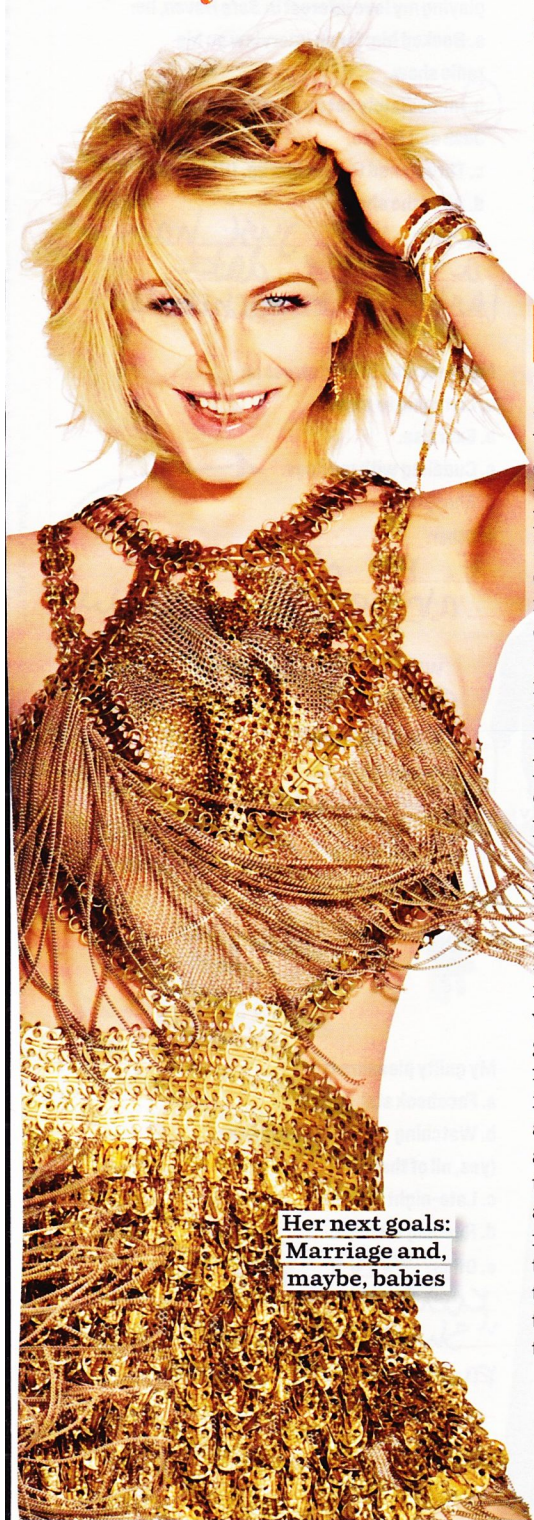
Hough saw her parents several times a year but never felt like she

In Her Shoes

HOUGH COLLABORATED WITH VINCE CAMUTO ON HER SOLE SOCIETY SHOE LINE. "I USED TO THINK FLATS WERE MOM SHOES. THEY'RE SO CUTE NOW!"



“While I was in London, I was abused, mentally, physically, everything,” she says.



**Her next goals:
Marriage and,
maybe, babies**

could tell them. Like so many kids who try to protect their parents during a divorce, she downplayed her own needs. “I’d rather take the pressure on myself,” she says. “To this day, I don’t want to be a burden.” And although the 24-year-old sitting at this table is poised and chatty and confident, it wasn’t always that way. “I didn’t talk unless I was spoken to. I would look over to see if it was okay if I answered,” she says. “I was so perfect—perfect to a fault.”

One night at age 15, she went to a concert and saw one of her idols sing a set of songs about being free and being yourself. That message gave her the courage to break away. “I was like, fuck that. I know who I am, and I don’t want to be this person who I am becoming,” Hough says. “I left two days later and never went back.”

HOME AT LAST

On the set of *Safe Haven*, Hallström called on Hough to improvise in ways she’d never done before. He even asked her to speak, in character, on camera, about “some of the horrors she had been exposed to in London” as a way of revealing her character’s painful past. So one night, in a small house in the woods of North Carolina, Duhamel and Hough took off their clothes and got into bed. As the cameras rolled, Hough spoke for nearly an hour. “I went from bawling to containing to laughing to crying again. Josh was crying. I think it was the most therapeutic moment of my life.”

Hough says the role has provided her with the right moment to go public with her past. She plans to increase her involvement with the Kind Campaign, a nonprofit that focuses on girl-on-girl bullying, and will soon launch her own charity for girls. “I don’t want pity,” she says. “To me, it’s more about being that voice for people who don’t necessarily have a voice....It’s important because there are a lot of girls who have gone through so much shit and sexual abuse, and they’re fine talking about it. They’re dead, straight-faced. Then the minute they break down is when they’re like, ‘I just wish I had a friend to talk to.’” Hough’s renewed relationship with her family is another

inspiration. “I have 17 nieces and nephews. The way that they look up to me is scary,” she says. “I’m like, ‘Oh crap! I better be an aunt they can be proud of.’”

She and her brother are also developing a scripted television drama set in the ballroom-dancing world. She’s lined up a new film with Diablo Cody, the writer of *Juno*. And, yes, she’s dating a self-made star who’s also become one of the smartest businessmen in Hollywood, earning a reported \$60 million a year. “I never wanted to feel content, but I realized *content* and *complacent* are two different things,” she says. “Now I want to feel content with my life, with my dogs, with my boyfriend, with everything.”

In Seacrest, she’s found someone just as uncannily driven as herself. “We love what we do. We take pride in giving it our all,” she says, “but then when we’re alone, we really focus on going to dinners and being extra romantic and affectionate and just being there for each other.”

Lately, they’ve been finding more time to play Ping-Pong, entertain at home, and cook together (“I gained 20 pounds, probably because we’re all or nothing!”). When they argue, it’s about music: “He really likes Top 40. I like something cool and more indie,” she teases. But they do agree on their song, the Ray LaMontagne ballad “You Are the Best Thing.” It begins, “Baby, it’s been a long day, baby / Things ain’t going my way / You know I need you here....You are the best thing / Ever happened to me.”

Hough turns 25 in July. Remember that plan she hashed out when she was 10? She also planned to be married “when I was like 25, 26,” she says. “And I’d have babies, like 28, 30. That’s kind of my dream. So you never know, but so far, so good.”

These days, she says, she isn’t so different from the character she plays in *Safe Haven*. “The movie’s about abuse, and it’s about being in a relationship you can’t escape until you’re strong enough,” she says. “Then you’re guarded for years until love basically sets you free.”

Hough says that’s also her story: not exactly a happy ending—but definitely a new beginning. ■