

THE GOLDEN AGE

The breakout star of 'Gossip Girl' on HBO Max. Jordan Alexander is proving she's so much more than a pretty face.

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A lot of ink has been spilled over Jordan Alexander's hair. Or, you know, the current lack thereof. Just about everyone who has interviewed the 28-year-old star of HBO Max's *Gossip Girl* over the past few months has asked about her signature shorn look. And here I am, the latest hack to bring it up. Except, I'm trying to get at something else; namely, what it's like to have this very personal choice about her appearance constantly questioned, commented upon, and made into some kind of avatar for her entire personality.

For generations, women—and especially Black women—have labored under the heavy weight of critiques, expectations for, and literal manipulations of their hairstyles. Alexander shrugs it off. “That was happening before people were interviewing me,” she says over Zoom from her Brooklyn apartment. “I would literally be working in a shop and people would be like, ‘Oh my god, you cut all your hair off! What did you look like with hair?’ I got asked that last night: ‘What did you look like when you had hair?’”

(Slightly depressing fact: If you type “Jordan Alexander” into Google, the second autofill is “...

with hair.” As if that were nearly the most interesting thing about her.)

“Since I’ve done it, it has been a topic of conversation, kind of no matter where I am. Which I find so fascinating because I feel like it’s not that uncommon?” she continues. “It’s quite common for Black women, and I think women in general are feeling freer to do it. But yeah, all types of people ask me about it. Most of the time what happens is: ‘Oh my god, you cut your hair! I’ve always wanted to cut my hair!’”

To Alexander, these conversations just show how pervasive—and restrictive—beauty norms can be. With so many avenues of creative expression to explore, it’s something she decided not to make time for.

“I was like, *This is a lot of work! It’s a lot of work to have hair!*” she explains. “And feeling pressured like you have to. I mean, it’s one thing if you enjoy it. Some people just enjoy that experience. It’s a connection to yourself, potentially a connection to your heritage, you know? But it’s a lot of work. It can be a lot of money as well. Like, I don’t even buy shampoo.”

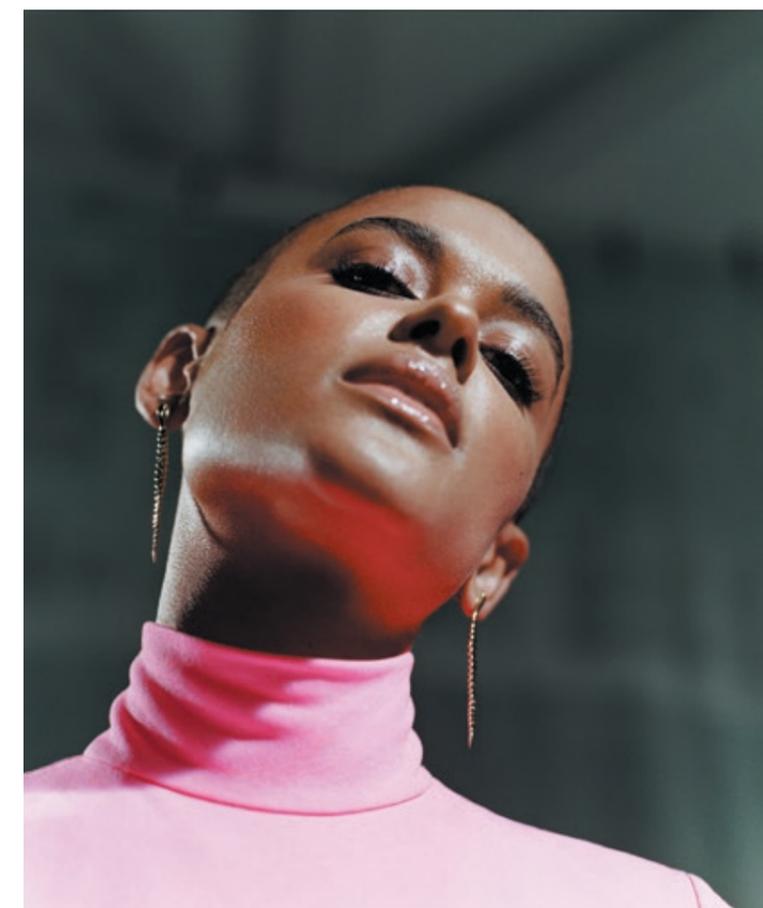
She pauses, smiles mischievously: “I’m gonna take back what I just said.” And then we have a good

laugh about all the celebrities who have inexplicably come out as non-bathers recently. “I think bathing is important!” she insists, laughing.

This is Jordan Alexander in early September 2021: relaxed, unguarded, quick to laugh, excited about life, eager to just chat. I happen to have caught her on a randomly auspicious day: She’d just wrapped the very first season of the *Gossip Girl* reboot the night before. There was a party afterward outside of Brooklyn’s Steiner Studio, where the show is filmed. “They just put food trucks in the parking lot, set up karaoke, there were balloons. It was so amazing,” she says. “We took a massive group picture.”

Today—the day she and I are speaking—also marks one year since Alexander arrived in New York to quarantine before filming began on the revival of the soapy teen drama. It goes without saying that a lot has changed since then. Apart from moving to a new city in a different country (Alexander is Canadian) she’s lived on her own for the first time. She’s filmed a highly anticipated television series during a global pandemic, and in the months since *Gossip Girl* premiered in July, her public profile has increased exponentially. She’s gone from relative obscurity to *It Girl* in a matter of months.

Schiaparelli headpiece, price upon request, available at Schiaparelli boutique-salons; Tiffany & Co. Knot Drop Earrings in Yellow Gold with Diamonds, \$5,000, tiffany.com.



Marc Jacobs bodysuit, \$1,600, bergdorfgoodman.com; Vintage gloves; Schiaparelli boots, price upon request, available at Schiaparelli boutiques; Tiffany & Co. Elsa Peretti Snake earrings in 18k gold, \$2,700, tiffany.com



Givenchy cape, \$13,685, givenchy.com; Fleur Du Mal bra, \$98, fleurdumal.com; vintage gloves, stylist's own; Brother Vellies boots, \$1,100, brothervellies.com; Tiffany & Co. Knot Drop earrings in yellow gold with diamonds, \$5,000, Tiffany Knot Double Row hinged bangle in yellow gold with diamonds, \$20,000, Elsa Peretti Diamonds by the Yard continuous necklace in 18k rose gold, \$20,500, tiffany.com.



Givenchy dress, \$2,459, shoes, \$1,250, shop similar at [givenchy.com](https://www.givenchy.com); Tiffany & Co. Elsa Peretti mesh necklace, \$30,000, Tiffany Knot Double Row ring in yellow gold with diamonds, \$5,200; Tiffany Knot Ring in yellow gold with diamonds, \$1,700, [tiffany.com](https://www.tiffany.com).

Dolce & Gabbana top, \$945, available at Dolce & Gabbana boutiques; Tiffany & Co. Elsa Peretti mesh scarf earrings in 18k gold, \$2,500, tiffany.com.



“It’s funny how time works,” she muses. “Depending on what happens, it’s either like a very eventful moment or, you know, just another couple of months. My life, last year and this year, has changed more than it has in my entire life. So this period of time, in terms of change, can account for maybe five years of change [compared to] what I was used to previously, when things were changing at a very slow rate.”

On *Gossip Girl*, Alexander plays Julien Calloway, a wealthy teen influencer for whom life moves incredibly fast: sponcon, fashion shows, gala benefits, scandals galore. But prior to being cast in the role, life could not have been more different for the actress. Alexander grew up in and around Vancouver, the second of three daughters. She and her family moved around a lot, which meant that she changed schools frequently. Whereas Julien has her clique of loyal friends and hangers-on, Alexander had to get good at walking into unfamiliar situations. “I feel like it kind of prepared me to be an artist,” she says. “Like a nomadic artist. You’ve got to be ready to pick up your entire life in a week and move to New York, you know?”

Instead of DUMBO Hall—the show’s stand-in for Brooklyn’s exclusive, members-only DUMBO House—Alexander and her friends frequented pubs and hung out outdoors. Her first job, which she loved, was at a taco restaurant. She waxes poetic remembering the view from Vancouver’s SkyTrain. There was the usual teen drama—she unwittingly kissed a friend’s secret crush in the 11th grade, and the next day everyone in her class had conspicuously moved their desks away from hers—but there was nothing that even remotely compares to *Gossip Girl*’s baroque scheming and tabloid intrigues. As for performing, Alexander just thinks it suited her personality. “I’m pretty outgoing. I don’t get shy,” she says. She’s also never been afraid to try something new. She began playing guitar after seeing a friend playing and writing songs and thinking, I wanna do that! “I’d sign myself up for little singing competitions and things like that,” she recalls.

One such competition earned her a spot playing Toronto Pride. She and her then-girlfriend had moved to the city and Alexander was focused on music. She and her sisters had appeared in commercials here and there as kids, and for a while she’d pursued acting as a young adult. But she was over it. “I just kinda switched lanes,” she explains. “That’s kinda how I like to do things. If I feel like doing something, I’m gonna do it.”

Her older sister was not over it. She insisted that Alexander needed to get back into acting and began sending her Instagram photos to agents in Toronto. “Which definitely probably isn’t what you’re supposed to do,” Alexander says with a laugh. “I don’t know that I’d recommend that.”

Except it worked out. She landed a role opposite Juliette Lewis and her future *Gossip Girl* co-star Emily Alyn Lind on Facebook Watch’s *Sacred Lies*. Then came *Gossip Girl*, and New York City, and photo shoots, and people recognizing her on the street. “Sometimes people are confused,” she says. “They’re like, ‘Are you...?’ And I’m like, ‘Possibly? It depends on what you’re talking about. Did we meet in real life or is it something I did?’”

She says the newer, browner, queerer show is reflected in the fans she meets, which is gratifying because representation, diversity, and social consciousness are all incredibly important to Alexander. She’s part of a new generation of performers, many of whom have never even considered staying closeted for the sake of their careers. If anything, she insists, being queer has given her opportunities she may not have had otherwise—playing Pride for instance. It’s a hopeful, optimistic perspective in the context of a world that’s more dangerous than ever for queer people, and especially Black ones.

Still, she admits she’s felt pressure to “keep her private life private” and not make her work “all about being queer.” She bristles thinking about it. “What the hell? What the hell! I think people just don’t understand how steeped in heterosexuality our society is. So they literally feel like any time somebody deviates from that, they’re like, Oh it’s all about that! No no no no. This society is all about heteronormativity.”

“It’s just so funny,” she continues, “when people are like, ‘Keep your private life private.’ I’m like, ‘Straight people don’t!’”

Jordan Alexander in September 2021: unafraid, unapologetic, and stirringly certain in her convictions and her identity. Unlike her influencer character, Alexander is less interested in projecting a perfectly curated version of herself than she is with connecting with people—authentically. “I know who I am. And if people don’t understand that, or if they get a different version of me, I think that’s OK,” she explains. “I don’t really worry too much about that.”

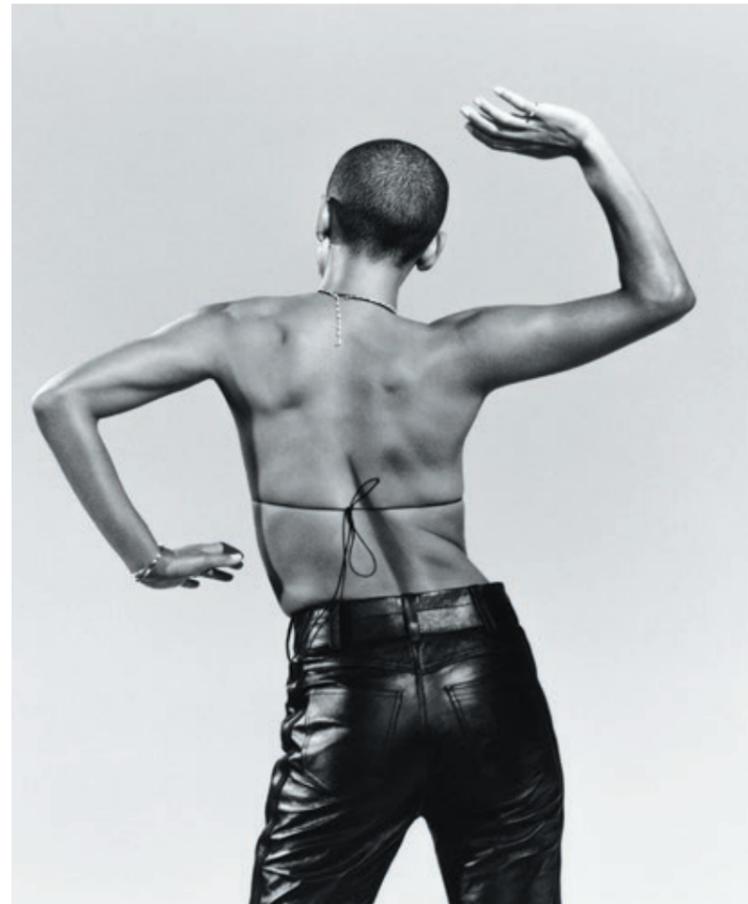
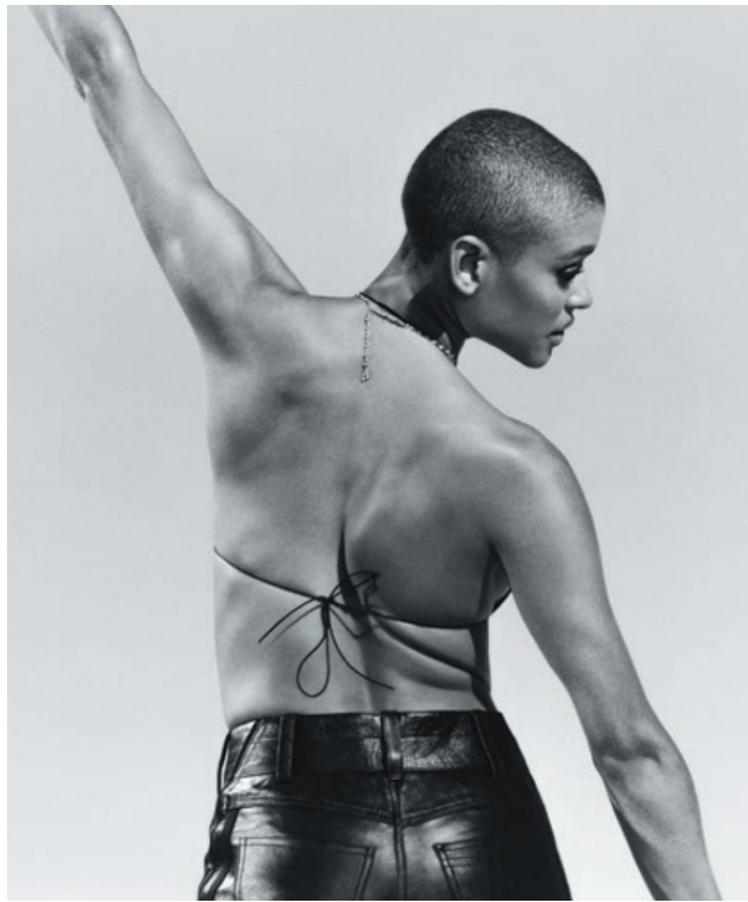
By the time the final six episodes of *Gossip Girl*’s first season premiere in November, Alexander will have left New York. She’s heading back to Canada, eager to reconnect with family and friends after navigating the past whirlwind year more—or-less on her own. She plans to spend time with her grandparents, to go camping with her girlfriend, model Shane Homan, and to go see movies with her sister. She’s got an album’s worth of new demos she needs to figure out what to do with. She mentions a recent audition, so it’s possible there will be more acting roles on the horizon. (There certainly will be more *Gossip Girl*. HBO Max has announced they’ve signed the show to a second season.)

Good things are out there. Alexander knows from personal experience. She’s spoken before about “manifesting” her breakthrough role on *Gossip Girl*, by which she simply means that she stopped beating herself up over small failures. She made herself aware of toxic self-doubt and made an effort to recalibrate. It’s a process she recommends for anyone.

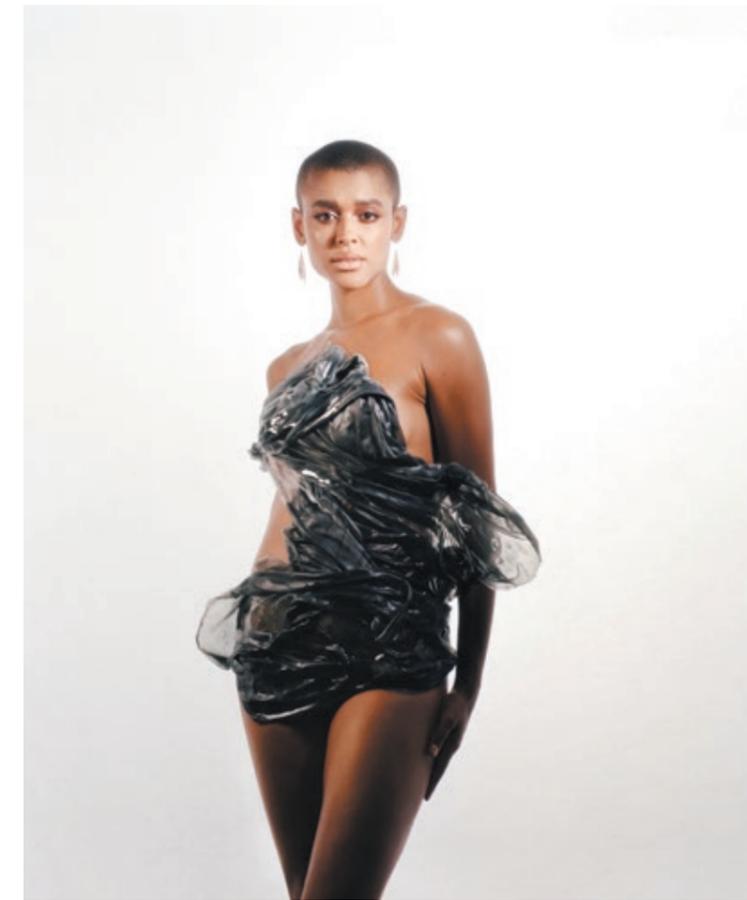
“I want other people, if they’re interested or if it’s something that resonates, to do this,” she says. She started telling herself that she could do things, she does deserve good fortune. Call it affirmations. Call it improved self-esteem. “It wasn’t like I was specifically like, I want this acting role. I moreso felt like, I am open to goodness, whether that be a kind stranger on the street or whatever. I’m believing in that. I believe in goodness for my life. So it must have been that!”



Hey, Upper East Siders: Join us on set as we spend the day with Jordan in our exclusive behind-the-scenes video—with one quick scan of your phone. XOXO.



Alexandre Vauthier top, \$288, alexandrevauthier.com; Louis Vuitton pants, price upon request, boots, \$2,060, louisvuitton.com; Tiffany & Co. Knot Drop earrings in yellow gold with diamonds, \$5,000, Tiffany Knot Double Row hinged bangle in yellow gold with diamonds, \$20,000, Tiffany Knot Double Row ring in yellow gold with diamonds, \$5,200; Tiffany Knot Ring in yellow gold with diamonds, \$1,700, Elsa Peretti Diamonds by the Yard continuous necklace in 18k rose gold, \$20,500, tiffany.com.



Kim Mesches dress, \$5,000, kimmeschcreative.com;
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mesh scarf earrings in 18k gold,
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Knot Ring in yellow gold with
diamonds, \$1,700, tiffany.com.
Hair by Dana Boyer. Makeup
by Ernest Robinson. Manicure
by Rita Remark.