

'I tried Botox once, and I looked demented. My mum thought I'd had my ears pinned back'

New *Spooks* star Laila Rouass, 41, talks sex on a table with Robin Hood, plastic surgery, and why she's working hard to get to the top

It's hard enough interviewing gorgeous celebrities when they're all glammed up with full hair and make-up. But at least you can kid yourself they'd be nothing without the three hours in hair and make up, attended by an army of pamperers. We'd all look amazing, too, if we had access to the pros who get stars ready for their close-ups. Right? Unless you're sat opposite Laila Rouass, in the shadow of Battersea Power Station, the venue for our cover shoot. Even with her hair in rollers and face clean of slap she still manages to look camera-ready. Grrr.

Last time we saw the actress, 41, on our telly box she was strutting her stuff on *Strictly* and became immersed in 'AntonGate', the scandal that erupted when dance partner Anton du Beke joked about her looking like a 'P*ki' after a tanning session.

'It was just banter,' she says. 'I'd never have accepted his apology if I thought Anton was racist. You have to understand, you're with this person for so many hours every day, you get on each other's nerves and you learn to banter to get rid of the stress. By the time the press got hold of it, it was two weeks old already. We'd dealt with it.' Now Laila is back as the new star of *Spooks*, playing a doctor and ex-girlfriend of super-spy Lucas North (*Robin Hood's* Richard Armitage).

And she reveals exclusively to *Celebs* that after finishing her role in *Primeval*, a personal crisis forced her to take time out from her acting commitments.

'I had to take a break after *Primeval* because I was dealing with the break-up from my daughter's father so everything was upside-down,' Laila admits, describing the aftermath of her

**LAILA
ROUASS**

Spies, sex and her life of excess

Dress, £45, Dorothy Perkins;
ring, £35, The Ring Boutique;
belt, £6, Peacocks; shoes,
£80, Miss KG at Debenhams

relationship with multi-millionaire Nasa Khan, with whom she had Inez, now three.

'I went through a really bad patch,' she explains. 'Every break-up is unique. But when there are children involved you don't know where to turn. You don't know what your rights are, what your children's rights are.' Laila finally found support from single-parent charity Gingerbread. 'They're great with the technical stuff, but also just to ring up for a chat and to cry down the phone,' she explains. And she now wants to champion the needs of single parents like herself, having become one of the charity's ambassadors. 'There's just not enough help there, in any way – with maintenance especially,' Laila explains. 'There isn't enough done to get money to the child and it's a crying shame. I really think they should do what they do in America and name and shame parents who don't pay up. It's not all about money – but it flipping helps. There are so many kids living in poverty because of this issue.'

'I'm the sole provider for my child, I don't get any help,' Laila tells us. 'I'm not saying we're poverty stricken, but it does mean I have to work hard.'

Having remained resolutely single for two years while she recovered from the split with Inez's father, Laila is now back on the market.

'I'm dating someone at the moment and it's going well, but I don't have any big plans for marriage and I don't know about having more kids. Sometimes I do, but then I think, "Do I really want to be in my 40s looking after a baby?" If I got pregnant again and it was an accident I'd be as happy as Larry,' Laila explains. 'Inez wasn't planned – I didn't even know I was pregnant until I was three or four months gone. But, look, I come from a Moroccan family of seven. When a baby happens it just happens. You don't sit there planning it for years and making sure you have the big house, the great job and a nice car with a million in the bank in case you want to send them to private school. You give birth and you deal with it. I come from a working class family. We barely had anything. But I don't remember that, I remember that I had a really good childhood and that's what I want Inez to remember, too.'

'I wasn't surprised by the strength of my feelings when I had her,' Laila recalls. 'I knew this was it, this was going to be basically what I've lived for. But it's not easy. Sometimes you wonder if you left them outside the mosque, would somebody good pick them up,' she laughs. 'Inez will wake up and the first thing she does is to say, "Good mawnin' Mummy," – we're living in Essex, remember. Then she'll say, "So I'm wearing my dress, but without my top or my leggings, yeah?" And I'll tell her she can't because it's cold outside. So then I get, "Oh purleeeease," before she starts crying and I'm thinking, "Lord, I haven't even got out of bed yet and it's started."

'Everyone tells me she's a mini me, but she's not, she takes after my mum. When she goes to the loo, she goes, "Mummy, there aren't any boys outside, are there? Because they can't see my cho-cho. It's alright for girls, but not boys, OK, Mummy?" That's my mum. And she's got an imaginary husband called Jamie. The other day I went to sit next to her and I wasn't allowed because Jamie had already taken the seat.'

'My 3-year-old says, "So, I'm wearing my dress today, without leggings, yeah?" We live in Essex...'

Her daughter was also one of the reasons Laila says she took part in *Strictly Come Dancing*.

'Inez loved it. She watched it every Saturday, really disappointed if I didn't wear a pink dress. She'd try and dance, but all she learned was one, two, cha-cha-cha.'

Laila admits the show also hasn't exactly done her profile any harm, either, on top of the parental brownie points. 'My career has taken off this year,' she concedes. 'But did I get *Spooks* because of *Strictly*? I'm not sure. Doing reality TV is such a difficult decision to make



Dress, £160, Monsoon; belt, £7.99, Missguided.co.uk; shoes, £95, Dune

as an actress because it can really work against you,' Laila explains. 'But I've always been conscious not to stick to one thing for too long. Even with *Footballers' Wives*. I asked the producers if I could leave in the third series because it was such a big show, so larger than life, I didn't want to end up pigeonholed. Nevertheless, if they decided to make another series now, I'd do it in a heartbeat. It got slated a lot in highbrow newspapers, but I thought it was just a sign of the times. It was so clever, so funny, so OTT. Yet it wasn't any more exaggerated than what footballers do and how footballers' wives live.'

'I don't know if I'd like to be a WAG,' Laila tells us. 'I've had experience of that life of excess. But I love the fact I earn my own money and I live within my means. That's rewarding. I don't know if I could go shopping every day and spend four grand on a jacket.' And neither will Laila be lavishing her cash on cosmetic surgery.



With daughter Inez, three

'I tried Botox once and I looked demented,' she says. 'My mum thought I'd had my ears pinned back, my face was so tight. It looked wrong, awful. It's really difficult not to think it's OK just to have the odd little thing tweaked. But then there are women like Julia Roberts and Angelica Houston who haven't had any work done and I love the way they look. I'm not saying I wouldn't do it,' she adds. 'But I don't want my arse hitting the floor while my bazookas are up in the air. That looks ridiculous. 'Anyway, I love getting older,' Laila adds. 'Maybe when I'm hitting 50 I might start hating it. But physically it all went to pot when I hit 30 anyway.'

I don't get chatted up any more. Sometimes if I'm dressed down in my jeans with a cap on, I might get an 18-year-old who thinks I could be around 23. If they knew, they'd be horrified. But I'm still here, I'm still working – and I'm not doing rubbish stuff, either. So I'm not complaining.'



Dress, £100, Peekaboo; earrings, £65, The Earring Boutique; ring, £8, Asos.com; shoes, £95, Dune

I SPY...

Who do you play in *Spooks*?

A doctor called Maya. She's the ex of Lucas North (Richard Armitage) who comes back into her life and turns everything upside down. She's the love of his life and he's the love of hers. Their relationship is dynamic and explosive and it makes them both question certain things – he has to make some serious decisions.



Are there any strip searches?

It gets hotter. There's one scene where we get together in the kitchen and the director was like, 'Come on, let's be honest, you haven't seen each other for years, you're not going to get all romantic, you're going to shag her on the table,' and I must have looked a bit nervous because Richard whispered, 'Don't worry, I'm not really going to shag you on the table, you'll be fine.'

Would you like to have him under surveillance?

Well, of course I fancy him. Everyone fancies Richard. All my friends love him. He's adorable. I met him a few years ago in LA when we went up for the same audition and we'd got down to the last two. When I heard his accent I grabbed him and was like, 'You've got to stay with me, I haven't met any English people for months'. We went to lunch and he calmed me down. I love him.

