TIMES2

Supermodel, supergeek

The double life of the Victoria's Secret star who's an app developer

The top model who codes in the bath

Lyndsey Scott is a catwalk star but she's happiest when doing her other job — building apps. By Helena de Bertodano

When someone tells you that they're the chief technology officer of an app company, a certain image pops into your head — and it is not the image sitting before me. "People get a little confused when they meet me," Lyndsey Scott says, laughing. "They don't necessarily treat me seriously — at least not at first."

Dressed in funky trainers and a tiny miniskirt that shows off her long legs, Scott is certainly not your regular geek. She has a very successful career as a model — for Calvin Klein, Victoria's Secret and Prada among others — and is also an actress.

However, she considers herself first and foremost a coder — the ultimate cool girl millennial model occupation. The supermodel Karlie Kloss has set up her own coding company and Lily Cole created the social networking site impossible.com. If you want to stand out in the ebb and flow of beautiful faces, you need another career and to be a coder/model is as impressive as it gets. Brains and beauty — it is the headiest cocktail of all.

Scott is no dabbler in coding. She has built apps including iPort, a portfolio app for models and other artists; Educate!, aimed at developing young leaders and entrepreneurs in Africa; and The Matchmaker, a social networking app for "love, friendship or business".

Her latest app, Ryse Up, is the most successful of all; it has just been featured on the Apple App Store, the ultimate accolade. "It's like *X Factor* meets Snapchat," she says. "We're connecting established creatives with up-and-coming artists. It's about rising up and knocking down the barriers that are currently in place when you want to get involved in any sort of creative industry; until now, most people have been limited by class or connection or location. Ryse changes all that."

Scott, 32, is the chief technology officer and senior engineer of Ryse Up. Fluent in Python, Objective-C, MIPS, Java and C++, Scott says that Swift is her programming language of choice. "I almost exclusively work in Swift, MIPS is kind of obscure at this point. There are probably 20,000 to 50,000 lines of code in the current project."

I have to admit that I have absolutely no idea what she's talking about. But when she walks me through the app itself, I can see that it looks very slick and professional. As I sit next to her on a sofa under a mural outside her office in Venice, Los Angeles, the traffic roaring past, she starts to record a video of us as if we are auditioning. "Hey, we'd be good singers for varsity because we're cool…" She giggles. I try to duck out of the frame. "OK," she says, flicking to the next page. "Then we can add pictures, upload a track, add interests — and as soon as you submit you're on the channel." To my relief, she doesn't take it that far.

Scott has not found it easy to get where she is today. Growing up in New Jersey, the eldest of four siblings, she was bullied at school. "The other kids used to call me 'monster'. I was really skinny and lanky and awkward. They used to say, 'I want to be skinny but not Lyndsey skinny.'"

The only African-American in a private school, she says her classmates would sometimes taunt her by inviting her to parties, then uninviting her. "If I tried to sit with someone at a table in the dining room, they'd say, 'Who told you you could sit here?' I was miserable." She laughs ironically. "It's funny: some of those same people who wouldn't talk to me then have suddenly started contacting me."

It makes her cynical about people's reaction to her — having experienced

> ## People don't always treat me seriously at first

Lyndsey Scott coding on her laptop, and, right, parading on the catwalk

what it is like to be perceived as both unattractive and beautiful. A few years ago she wrote about how "jarring" it was to have people treat her so differently. And now that she's beautiful, of course, people assume she's "an airhead". "No one deserves to be treated differently based solely on their appearance." Today she sighs when I bring up the subject: "I know not to value certain things. I know that looks aren't the most important thing, because people might treat you one way when you look one way and another when you look another way, it's not real."

She channelled her unhappiness into her studies and graduated from Amherst College in Massachusetts with dual majors in theatre and computer science. She finds the two equally compelling. "When I'm doing one there's always this craving to do the other. I like to work the different parts of my brain. I couldn't imagine not performing, acting, modelling. And I couldn't imagine not using my brain so logically."

After college, she was determined to pursue a career in modelling but was rejected by every agency she tried. Eventually she posted images of herself online and was signed by an agency. At first she didn't get much work and was reduced to handing out flyers on a street corner in New York for a low-paid promotional job. Then late one night she had a call from Calvin Klein. "It was like a dream. They just called me in and it was between me and another girl and they chose me."

She became the first African-American to win an exclusive contract from Calvin Klein and soon after she was booked by Victoria's Secret, then Prada.
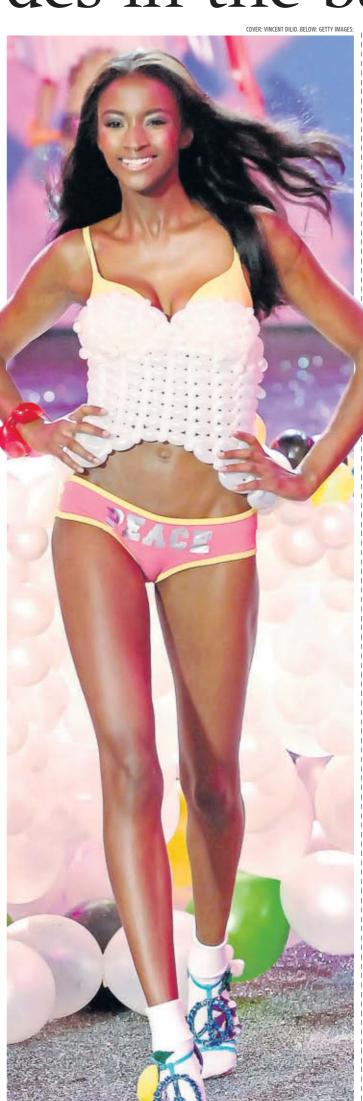
Now she thinks that the misery of her teenage years was a blessing in disguise. "I think a lot of my determination comes from those days when I wasn't happy. I think I developed a fight in me to maybe prove something — and then at a certain point that fight became part of me. I have a different appreciation for my own happiness, and it definitely made me a better person."

The abuse at school also prepared her for some of the abuse that came her way as a model. Agents would tell her she was too black, too commercial, too short — she is 5ft 9in. "The worst was 'too boring'. I know I'm not a boring person and any of my friends can tell you that. But a lot of the agencies push girls to hang out with certain photographers and casting directors and go to certain parties, and to try to network in ways that maybe I didn't seem open to. Anyway," she adds with a nervous giggle, "they just told me that I wasn't fun."

When she is modelling or acting she feels she has no say at all. "You don't always get the best treatment by agents or casting directors. Once, when I was travelling, I came back to find out that my agency had gotten rid of me while I was away without telling me."

Why, I ask. She shrugs. "It's the sort of industry where they don't need an explanation. You just have to accept it." Of course the tech industry can also be a tough environment. The recent high-profile resignations of the Uber chief executive Travis Kalanick, whose company was dogged by allegations of sexism and harassment, and the venture capitalist Dave McClure, who publicly apologised for being "a creep", have shone a spotlight on the difficulties of being a woman in tech. Scott, however, says that when she is coding she feels in charge. "When I am programming, I have such control over the technology."

These days, she says, she couldn't be happier — except for one thing: earlier this year she lost her beloved father. A computer programmer himself, he was diagnosed with leukaemia in February and died a month later. She loves talking about him and scrolls down through his text messages to her, which she often looks at on her phone.

They texted every day and she passes her phone to me to show me them. He would always say goodnight to her. "Look, here he says, 'I'm so proud of you.' I called him and said, 'Daddy, why are you proud of me?' And he said, 'I'm just proud of you.'"

During his last few weeks he had two brain surgeries and became so ill he didn't recognise those around him. "Once he said to me, 'Who's your father?' And I'm like, 'Daddy, you're my father.' And he said, 'I like that.' He liked being my father even if he didn't recognise me." She blinks away the tears and is too overwhelmed to continue talking.

A minute or two later she bounces back and says that she finds talking about him helps her to grieve. Besides, she says, she feels he is still with her. "I knew him so well that I always knew what he was going to say about anything. Now I just have to imagine what his response would be."

Scott lives alone in an apartment in Beverly Hills and does not have a boyfriend, although she has a lot of friends. "I'm quite a homebody. I love watching classic movies." She rarely switches off from

> ## I was skinny and awkward — kids at school called me a monster

work. "I don't usually sleep through the night. I'm texting at 3am and writing emails."

She thinks it is an absurd cliché to assume that most models do not have brains. "I know so many intelligent models, so many models with depth. I think probably people are intimidated by these beautiful girls. And a lot of them can be shy. But once you get in there to talk to them and learn about them, you realise that a lot of them have something they're passionate about beyond fashion or modelling."

Jason Crilly, the company's chief operating officer, credits Scott with the success of Ryse. "I met Lyndsey less than a year ago, but instantly I could tell she was one of the best developers I had ever come across."

How, I ask. "As an engineer you just know — it's probably like two doctors who are surgeons: you start using a bit of lingo and terminology. Lyndsey and I have a really dope way of talking in really abstract complex language, without spending time on minutiae. It would take a team of six developers 18 months to do what Lyndsey and I were able to do together in three."

The day before we meet, Scott has posted a picture of herself online, tapping on her laptop as she lies in a Jacuzzi in the Venice office. Crilly laughs. "She's like a mermaid, she has to code from a body of water — sometimes she even codes from her bathtub."

Even when Scott sleeps, she doesn't stop working. "I spend all day trying to figure something out, then I go to sleep and when I wake up I realise I have just dreamt up the solution."