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CANADIAN STAR RACHEL SKARSTEN TALKS
REIGN AND *IMPOSTERS*

BY FATIMA SYED

With her girl next door demeanour and friendly smile, there's something truly Canadian about RACHEL SKARSTEN. The 33-year-old star, who hails from Toronto, is best known for playing Queen Elizabeth I on The CW's historical drama series *Reign*. Although the show wrapped up with Season 4 last year, the actress is now enjoying her own reign, with new roles, in addition to her fond memories on the show. For the bubbly, down-to-earth beauty, this means walking away from her royal onscreen experience with a host of fond memories.

"*Reign* itself was an opportunity to be so immersed in a character, to become someone so completely different from myself. I was actually playing someone who lived and breathed and was so instrumental in the history of the world," Skarsten tells us. History books aside, the star also formed an instant connection with her cast mates, who included Canadian actress Megan Follows and Australian star Adelaide Kane.

"Megan is a Canadian legend. I learned more from observing Megan and being directed by

Megan than I have from any other actor," Skarsten says. Meanwhile, 27-year-old *Reign* leading lady Kane quickly became a friend and beloved colleague of Skarsten's. "The minute it was announced in the press that I booked the job; she sent me a message on Twitter and welcomed me. She's one of those people where if you have a little cough, the next day there will be a gift basket of soup and NyQuil on your doorstep. She's one of the most thoughtful, generous people I think I have ever met," Skarsten enthuses.

Although her life may seem star-studded and glamorous now, Skarsten comes from humble beginnings. Her father, a Norwegian-born doctor, passed away when she was just nine years old. In a twist of fate, his early death led this

screen star to her present day life. Skarsten's father had been involved with Crossroads, a Christian organization that ran the *100 Huntley Street* daily gospel show. A few years after his passing, the show did a tribute episode for him, and invited Skarsten and her family on set. Aged 12, Skarsten sang a song on the show, which was noticed by a talent agent who happened to be changing channels and tuned in. The agent contacted the show, which contacted Skarsten's mom. Much like the plot of *Reign*, the rest, as they say, is history.

"My mom just said 'Do you want to do this?' When I actually went for an audition and booked it, it was a Honeycomb [cereal] commercial. I made \$3,000 or



\$4,000 and thought ‘This is why people do it!’” Skarsten says with a laugh.

So, how did this bombshell transition from artsy Canadian preteen to a talented star in her own right? At first, her mother was adamant about keeping acting and life in the spotlight as just a hobby, to be balanced with school and other activities. However Skarsten, who attended Toronto’s Claude Watson School for the Arts as a young girl, had bigger plans in mind. The budding thespian later booked her breakout role as Dinah Lance on The WB adventure series *Birds of Prey*, which aired from 2002 to 2003. As a teenager, Skarsten moved to Los Angeles for the part, where she discovered that television “was a business,” and not just a youthful interest of hers.

Overwhelmed by L.A and still very young, Skarsten moved home to Canada and enrolled at Queen’s University, where she studied English Literature and Classical Studies. But as fate would have it, this wasn’t the last that Skarsten would see of Hollywood fame.

“I went back after, with \$800 in my pocket. I lived in my car, cleaned houses, did the whole nine yards, and it was then that I realized that if I am willing to do this, then I must really love acting,” she shares. Two years after her auspicious move, the script flipped for Skarsten, who started getting steady work. Since then, she has played Tamsin on *Lost Girl*, appeared as Leah in the Aaron Sorkin film *Molly’s Game* and can now be spotted as Poppy Langmore on W Network/Bravo’s *Imposters*, in addition to her time on *Reign*.



While her characters may be different from each other, they all offered Skarsten a chance to depict strong women. Valkyrie and bounty hunter Tamsin was an edgy femme fatale on a sci-fi series, and Poppy is a polished, refined woman who is the sister of Marianne Rendón’s character, artist Jules.

On the dark comedy *Imposters*, Skarsten stars alongside former Real Style cover girl Inbar Lavi. Whether working with Lavi and the *Imposters* cast or looking back to her previous roles, Skarsten is quick to count her blessings.

“I have been fortunate enough to play a lot of very headstrong, independent female characters, who have spanned the scope of time and space. I’ve always admired actresses who are very much the masters of their own destiny and their careers,” she says.

Away from the screen, Skarsten describes herself as an “occupational extrovert,” who is outgoing on set but needs quiet time to recharge her batteries. So, how does she spend her downtime?

“I love to draw and paint. That’s my first love,” Skarsten shares. Also, she is currently mastering the language of love (and Canada’s second official language), partly due to a love interest of her own. “I’m learning French, because my boyfriend is French- and I’m also Canadian, so I should already know French!” she says.

Whether she’s dressed as a royal or playing a bounty hunter, Skarsten is certainly a Canadian darling to keep on your radar. All hail this queen, because her moment in the spotlight is just starting.