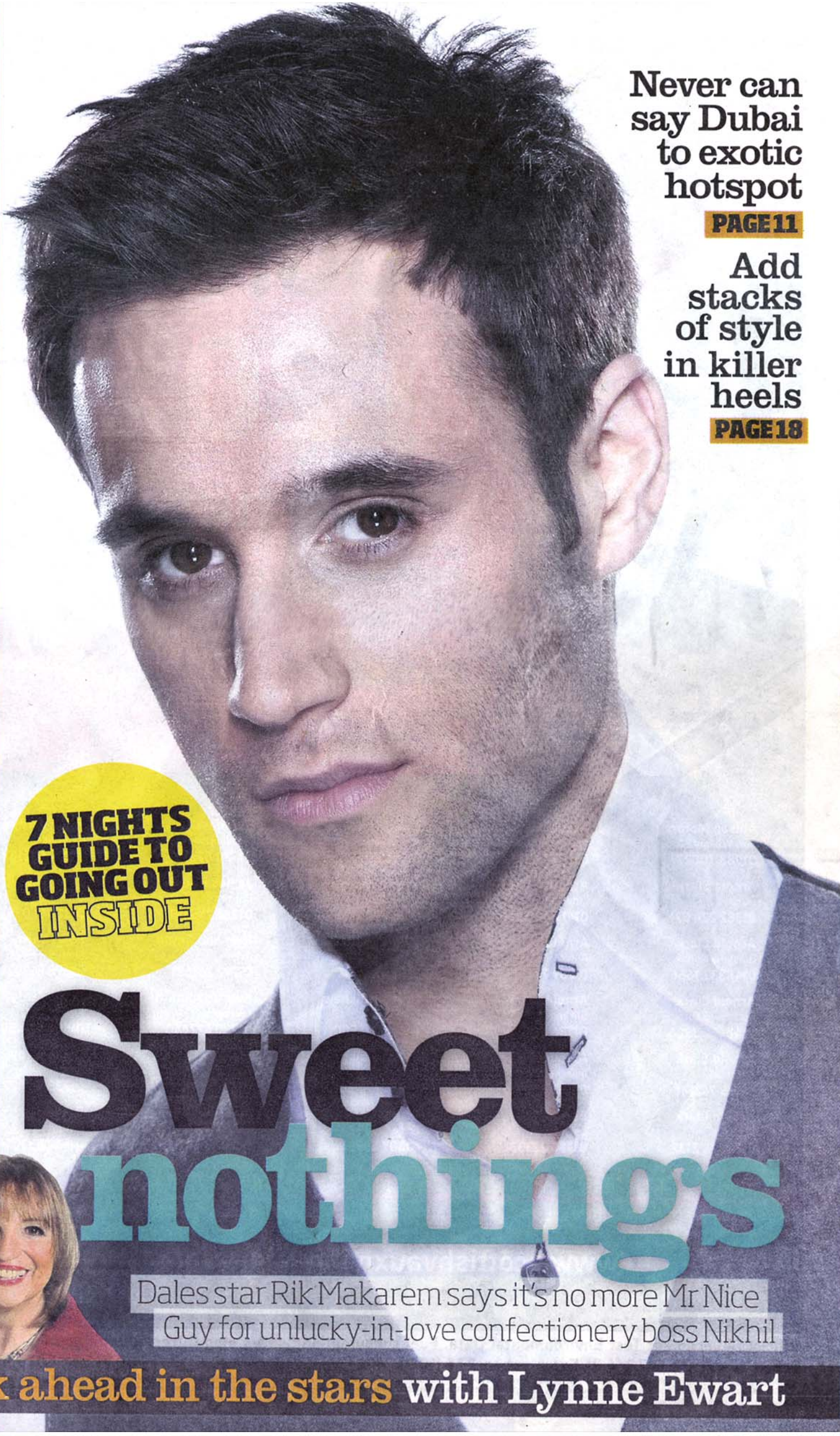


Sweeten days

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Never can say Dubai to exotic hotspot

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**7 NIGHTS
GUIDE TO
GOING OUT
INSIDE**

Sweet nothings



Dales star Rik Makarem says it's no more Mr Nice Guy for unlucky-in-love confectionery boss Nikhil

Your week ahead in the stars with Lynne Ewart

Good guy Rik's role reversal

Emmerdale star is relishing the chance to be the bad guy for once

BY STEVE HENDRY

Playing an out-and-out villain is a long-term ambition of hunky Emmerdale star Rik

Makarem.

But he looks to be on his way to achieving it after nice guy Nikhil Sharma turned nasty. The factory boss had been dating Chastity Dingle but her half sister Gennie has fallen in love with him.

When Chas dumped him, Gennie confessed her feelings to him but he rejected her, breaking her heart as he branded her plain and boring during a slanging match.

While Rik, 29, is full of sympathy for Gennie, played by Sian Reese Williams, he admits he can't help rubbing his hands at finally getting to play dirty.

He laughed: "I've always said I'd love to play a villain because it's so far removed from the way I am normally and I'm certainly getting a little taste of it just now."

"What is he doing? He's graced with this very loyal girl, the only person who really understands him, and he's putting her through the mix. She's had to watch her sister and the man she thinks is the love of her life getting it on."

"It's great stuff to play. To make sure the fall for Gennie is dramatic, we have had to really make a colourful impression of how passionate the romance is between Chastity and Nikhil."

"What Gennie can see is Chastity is not fully investing in this relationship while this sensitive guy is willing to offer all this love." For some, the story has Bridget Jones overtones. For Rik, it's a little Shakespearean.

He said: "It's a bit like Orsino in Twelfth Night, this character who is in love with the idea of being in love and he is projecting all this on to Chas when she is not the right girl and he can't see what is right under his nose."

"Bridget Jones? I don't know if I would compare myself to Hugh Grant or Colin

Firth. A hybrid, is probably the safe answer." The actor also admits the scenario has a touch of real life to it for him, although he is reluctant to bare his soul.

He said: "What we have to go through just now is Nikhil's conflict of what is right for him, until he understands that chasing the wrong thing won't get him anywhere."

"He's been in previous relationships where he's the one investing and getting nothing back. I know people like that and I admit maybe there was a time when I did that."

"I really invested in something which wasn't true. It wasn't in harmony and it doesn't offer the best parts of your personality, it doesn't give you ownership of yourself."

"Nikhil has to make that decision of what is right for him and maybe accept somebody like Gennie is more suited to him. I think he deserves someone to love him and to see what that would do to him."

While the love triangle has its twists and turns to come, it's only the start of a testing period for Nikhil. There is trouble brewing at the factory and the boss will have to deal with a strike.

It reflects growing unrest throughout the country as the economy struggles to recover but the seed for industrial action is sown by another Dingle, Charity (Emma Atkins) who is dating his screen sibling Jai (Chris Bisson) and doesn't see eye to eye with Nikhil.

He said: "Nikhil has a chance to run things on his own and, with his need to feel strong and to feel like he is in ownership of everything, this is a perfect opportunity for him to let loose and play the boss man. But with some negative engineering from Charity it backfires terribly."

"He's kind of like, 'What the hell are you doing and get back to work.' But he realises it is his fault they are all leaving the factory and rejecting what he is asking and he feels really badly about it."

"I don't think anyone will feel sympathetic towards him initially. He's not being very intelligent with his actions. He is rubbing people up the wrong way but I think because he's not really like that at heart."

"It's been interesting to play. He's trying to be strong, trying to show a hard face but



PRESSURE...
Gennie makes life difficult for Nikhil in the factory



TOUGH TIMES... Maisie Wyld rejected Nikhil's proposal, left, while Cain Dingle bound and gagged him

deep down he's very soft. When someone feels very insecure and at risk of having something taken away, they get their back up and behave with a certain aggression or energy to try to maintain a certain status or control.

"This unconditional love Gennie has for him feeds into that too."

Despite Charity's involvement, Rik has taken inspiration from the battles real workers are facing throughout the country to hold on to their jobs.

He said: "You draw upon the things you are seeing - people being sacked, left right and centre."

"We are seeing people go on strike, facing job cuts and kicking off and showing their unhappiness about it."

"For me, the challenge is trying to humanise the person having to make those decisions. It's not black and white and it's not simple."

Rik is enjoying the

challenges being offered up by Emmerdale. If they get too much, however, he returns to his spiritual home north of the Border.

Despite growing up in Derbyshire, he is something of an adopted Scot.

He trained at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, modelled at the Dressed to Kill event during Tartan Week in New York in 2009 and has been a regular at the Sunday Mail Great Scot Awards. He remains a frequent visitor.

He said: "Absolutely. It's that thing once you become an honorary Scot you can never really lose it."

"I visit the country regularly, a lot of my friends are still in Edinburgh and Glasgow and it's always a great honour to come and present an award at the Great Scot Awards."

"I do see myself at some point living there and wanting to go back to living there. I had a happy four years working and training at the RSAMD. It's where I felt most at home and that is the truth."

In the meantime he is very much heading south, all the way to Albert Square and EastEnders in fact, in the name of charity.

He has teamed up with friends and co-stars including Tom Lister who plays

Carl King and James Thornton who stars as John Barton for the Macmillan Emmerdale to EastEnders cycle ride in August.

He said: "We are in training for an epic 200 mile, 24 hour endurance ride, which as you can imagine is one of the most difficult things you can do on a bike."

"No changes, no swapping about, it is just a straight 200 miles, which is a bit crazy. Tom keeps falling off on his cleats but we are doing all right. We are pushing 50 miles every time we ride just now, heading for 70."

"Hopefully we will be welcomed into the Queen Vic for a cheeky beer - we'll probably collapse, mind."

He is happy in Emmerdale but admits he has ambitions beyond the show, eventually.

He said: "Every actor wants to try different things and I make no secret of my aspirations to do some great theatre or try my luck across the pond but I feel very blessed to be playing this character on this show. It's a wonderful job. Who knows what the future holds but I am very happy playing Nikhil."

In the meantime, like Nikhil, he is single and looking for love.

He laughed: "I'm on the look out. If there are any lovely ladies, give me a call."