

Sweet/Vicious Star Eliza Bennett on Jules' Strength, and the Importance of her Relationship with Ophelia

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MTV, a channel known for its overall lighthearted (some would say juvenile) content has just earned a seat at the big kids table with *Sweet/Vicious*. The new series follows the unlikely duo of chronically stoned hacker Ophelia (Taylor Dearden) and exuberant sorority girl Jules (Eliza Bennett), on their quest to teach accused rapists on campus a lesson- with their fists, and sometimes tasers. The show is one of those hidden gems I stumbled upon at the end of last year- binge-watched the first few eps and BAM, I was hooked. If the writing wasn't enough to reel you in, English actress **Eliza Bennett** sure as hell will. With an uncanny resemblance to the original BIB (badass in black), Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Bennett is no joke when it comes to playing the bubbly college goer by day, and total freakin' badass by night. Oh, and her impromptu dance parties are the bomb, if you're looking for an added bonus.

But seriously, *Sweet/Vicious* goes there. It's unapologetic, raw, hilarious, and undoubtedly sparking important viewer conversation across the internet. First of its kind, the campus-rape driven dramedy is not something you'd normally recommend for a binge night with friends, but it's definitely one you should be adding to your list. The rookie series is not only showcasing some snarky women doing brave things, but also highlights (with class) a very real, and very serious issue.



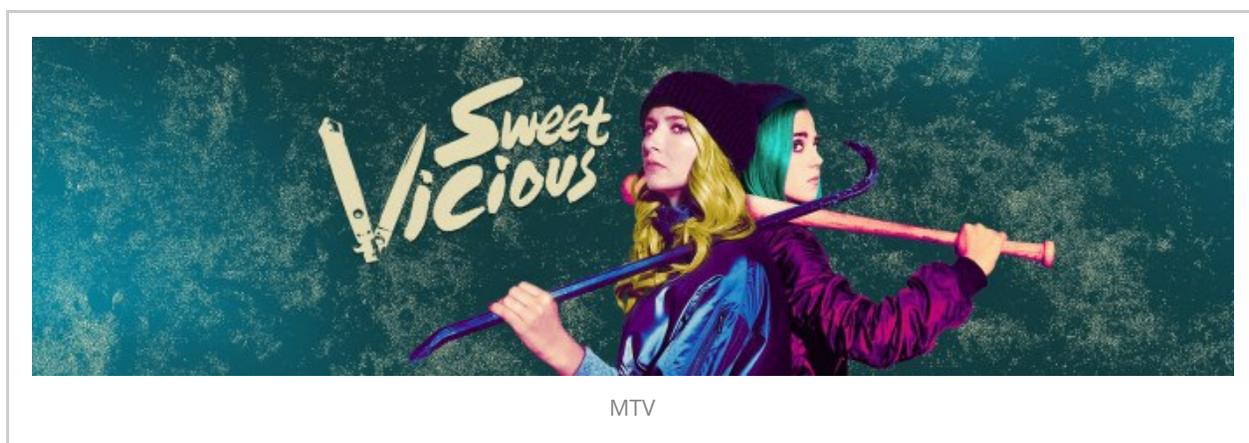
Stemming from her own rape and crippling feeling around her assailant, Jules, at first a solo

vigilante, is on a mission to persecute accused rapists on campus. An offense that way too often goes overlooked at colleges across the country. **SPOILERS!** We recently saw Jules confront her attacker, during a harrowing episode. Bennett, who heroically took on this character in order to shed light on the injustices the system perpetuates, and to empower women around the world will forever be known as the actor who wasn't afraid to take risks. To speak up. Now that's what a *true* superhero is in MY book.

Still not sold? Well, you're crazy- but let me tell you... *Sweet/Vicious* is so much more than learning how to taser an attacker in the crotch and getting revenge. That's all well and good, but ultimately, it's about giving survivors of rape their own narrative. Their own voice. Making it less about doing harm to those who have harmed you, and giving control back to those who have lost it. A concept creator Jenn Kaytin Robinson executes flawlessly.

I recently had the opportunity to chat with Bennett, who went into detail about portraying such a complex character, and what's to come for Jules' relationships moving forward. We even discussed a potential romance between Jules and Ophelia (Team Juphelia, bitches!), okay, I'm stretching that one a *teeny* bit. From her game-changing scene, to working with an all female creative team, no stone goes unturned, and not even the incomparable Eliza Bennett can go unscathed by my infamous donut question. Ha.

Without further ado...



MCKENZIE MORRELL: So for those who haven't seen *Sweet/Vicious* yet — which, they need to get on it ASAP — can you tell those readers about the show and your character?

ELIZA BENNETT: *Sweet/Vicious* focuses around these two girls. One is kind of a weed-dealing computer hacker. And the other one is Jules, who I play, who is a sorority girl by day, but you find out she's moonlighting as a vigilante who is avenging sexual assault victims on campus. It's a mashup of genres. It's a very dark comedy. But Jules is this very broken, badass fighter. It's about female empowerment. It's about bringing attention to this incredibly important topic. And [it's about] female friendship, really.

MM: What do you admire most about this character?

EB: Oh, my gosh. Jules is pretty awesome. I'm in awe of her. After something so horrific has happened to someone, like sexual assault, it's hard for her to feel like she's not defined by that. But without that on the table, Jules is funny and goofy and incredibly kind, sweet girl who loves her friends and supports other women in her sorority. And then this thing happens to her and it changes her forever, but she's still all of those things while struggling with a level of trauma that's unspeakable and paralyzing for her. She channels it into fighting for other women's injustices because she feels like she can't fight for her own. On the flip so, she's this kickass, incredibly strong martial artist who does this on the side. So, yeah, she's awesome. I think when she meets Ophelia it brings out this other side to her and helps her become whole again.

MM: As you said, it's a dark comedy, and there really is a fine line between comedy and drama. The show does a great job at having that dark, humorous feel while staying true to shedding light on the injustices of sexual assault. Coming into this project, did you have any reservations about how the audience might receive the show—like maybe they would take it badly?

EB: We definitely felt our responsibility in telling the story. And I know we wanted to tell it truthfully. But I think in previous television programs, rape is often used as a backstory for women, and it sort of happens in an episode and then it's never spoken about again. And we didn't want that to be what *Sweet/Vicious* was. We wanted to tell this story properly and talk about what happened before all this trauma, what happened when the sexual assault happened, and her journey afterward. I really trusted our creator Jenn Kaytin Robinson, and our showrunner, and our producers, I really trusted them. In that fact, I didn't worry in any way that we might be exploiting the topic because I knew that's not who they were and that wasn't the story they were telling. But the only thing I think you feel conscious of is that in some ways it might be triggering for survivors. That was something we were very conscious of. But our response from survivors has been the most overwhelming positive part of the show airing. It has been the most rewarding and emotional part about people watching the show. [*Sweet/Vicious* creator] Jenn and I text so often about messages we receive about how people feel less alone. You never really know what the reaction is going to be of a show while you're filming it, so we couldn't be happier with how people are responding to it.

MM: That's great. I know I've seen a lot of responses that are overwhelming positive. So it's great that you get to see that unfold as the show progresses.

EB: It really has been the best part of being on the other side of this.

MM: The entire creative team on *Sweet/Vicious* is women. How big of a shift is that from other projects you've worked on?

EB: Oh, it's so nice. Honestly. I don't know how many female directors I've worked with before. I think when we were doing the pilot, we had a female director, Rebecca Thomas, and our showrunner, and our creator, and our exec producers, and our producers, and the two leads: we were all women. And I think that's the first time that's ever been done on a show before. We only found that out afterward. I can't believe it. It works unbelievably well. I've never worked in a group where I felt more supported and empowered. I'm working with the most smart and funny women that I've ever worked with before, so it's just incredible. And we've had male directors on the show, too, who are just amazing — Todd Biermann, Joseph Kahn, and Brian Dannelly, the three men directors that we worked with and they were just amazing. It's crazy. You work with women, and then you wonder why on earth this isn't happening all the time. Why can I only count the amount of women directors I've worked with on one hand? You can't really fathom why it's taking so long for that to shift. But it's been an absolute pleasure. I hope one day it won't even be a question. I really hope one day it'll just be the norm.

MM: That's what we're hoping for.

EB: Yeah.

MM: I also see this show a whole new breed of superheroes. How have you felt being compared to superheroes or comics taking on this very important topic and serious issue?

EB: It has, obviously, always been a dream of mine to play a superhero. I'm a huge fan of superhero films and TV series, so it would be an honor. But *Sweet/Vicious* is slightly different, and it has more of a *Kick-Ass* aspect to it in that these girls have no power in any way. She's self-trained in martial arts. Things go wrong sometimes, you know? Sometimes she gets overpowered. We see that in episode one. And we see in five and six that things go wrong. The fact that they're human is a really important part of the show because we wanted these girls to be relatable to the men and women watching it. We wanted women to watch and say, "Oh, that could be me. I could do that." Not that we are saying to become vigilantes, but we wanted these two girls to be relatable. On a day-to-day side of it, it's been amazing; we got to train in martial arts. I've played the damsel in distress so many times, it was kind of liberating to play someone so badass and in control of fight situations most of the time. I was always being saved by a burly man. So, yeah, it's been amazing.

MM: Last week, you had a pretty pivotal scene that really blew everyone away. Jules finally confronts her attacker for what he did to her. That was such an important moment for the character. Do you think from Nate's perspective, deep down, he knows what he did was wrong and nonconsensual or is he that naïve to think they had sex?

EB: I think that's definitely up for debate. Definitely on Twitter, it has been up for debate. We didn't want to make Nate a black-and-white villain because often that's not what's happening. Often it's a problem with consent being a grey area, which it absolutely should not be and I hope one day we live in a world where this is black and white. But whether Nate has convinced himself that it was consensual and has begun to believe his own lies or has deep down shoved the truth so, so far down that he doesn't even know what's real anymore — I think there are many arguments. There are so many times in headlines where men in rare cases are convicted and they still don't seem to show any remorse for what they did. I think that feels very shocking and very hurtful for people who are reading that. We wanted to make sure that we show that story. We show very different sexual predators on the show, and some are black-and-white villains, and some are remorseful afterward, and some seem to go into an overdrive of defensiveness afterward. We wanted to make sure we showed many sides of that because not all sexual assault survivors are the same and not all predators are the same. There are moments in *Sweet/Vicious* where Nate is a good person. There are moments where he lets Kennedy down and when he apologizes to her you really feel that he's heartfelt and that he loves her and is a good boyfriend. So often these people are not one thing. We just wanted to tell it as truthfully as possible. We have the rest of the story to tell with Nate, and he definitely kicks into overdrive one way or the other. I think we see by the end of episode six that he has decided to go into survival mode and defend himself and throw Jules to the wolves. I think Jenn felt it was important for this issue not to feel black and white for Nate, for it to feel grey, so we can show that's what's happening and that should not be happening. Episode seven, we really dig into what really happened with Jules. We show it's grey for Nate, and then I hope in seven we show it's not.

MM: Nate's decision to throw Jules under the bus was devastating. His actions set so much into motion, including another heart-wrenching scene between Jules and Kennedy, is that friendship going to be broken? Is there any hope for them in the future?

EB: Yeah, I don't know. It's not the end of Kennedy and Jules. We have four episodes left, so we really dig into that story more. But I know a lot of people were upset that Kennedy didn't immediately believe her. There's a side to Kennedy's story; she just lost her boyfriend who she loves and her best friend in the same night, and what she's going through is awful. Jules has been very deceitful for a long time, and I think it's understandable. A lot of people don't believe rape victims. We wanted to make sure we showed that side of the story too. But Kennedy is a smart and wonderful and female-empowering character on the show, and we have more of that story to tell. It's not easy. It's not easy for people who are going through this in real life. I'm just glad that Jules has Ophelia, that's all I'll say. She really is incredible.

MM: The friendship between the unlikely pair between Jules and Ophelia is definitely a reason [to watch]. Are you shocked by fan reactions to that?

EB: Yeah, I fell in love with them when I read the script, so I totally relate to why people have fallen in love with them. They're *the* unlikely couple. They're the odd couple. In any other context, their paths would have never crossed. A lot of the lightness and the levity of the humor in the show comes from the oddness of their friendship. There's a line in the show where Ophelia says she feels she was predisposed to darkness, and Jules had it thrust upon her, and they're two dark sides of this one being. I think that's a beautiful thing, because when you first meet Jules she's lying to everyone and is feeling misplaced and not herself and she needs their friendship. I'm just so happy everyone fell in love with them. They set the friendship bar really high, but they're awesome. I have amazing women in my life, so I'm glad we're showing women who are empowering and support one another. I think maybe we're a little tired of showing women who are catty and mean to each other; I don't think the majority of us are like that.

MM: How would you describe your costar to strangers? I feel like you guys have a blast on set.

EB: She's the best. By the end of the pilot, I remember saying to her, "If our show doesn't get picked up, it was worth it just so that you and I could have met." We bonded so fast. The easiest part of shooting was the fact that we didn't have to work on our chemistry in any way, shape, or form. Everything on that front came totally naturally. I laughed so hard on this job. I think we needed that. There's heaviness on this show. I'm truly grateful to have done this journey with Taylor [Dearden, who plays Ophelia,] because she was the most supportive person. She's become one of my most valued friends.

MM: That's amazing to hear. Your fearless leader Jenn mentioned a few love interests for Ophelia if you guys get a season two.

EB: I know, they keep hinting, don't they?

MM: Right? Do you have any thoughts for the fans who are really hell-bent on seeing the vigilante duo in a romantic relationship?

EB: The thing is Taylor and I would always joke while we were shooting that there was this sexual tension between us. Sometimes when they're shooting, the camera is really, really close to you. But on camera it doesn't look like you and your costar are that close together. So often we would finish a scene and Taylor and I were face-to-face, really close together. Like, unnaturally close together. And they'd hold the take for a ridiculously long time. And Taylor and I always felt like we were meant to kiss because we're like why are we this close? I understand. I think Jules is heterosexual. Ophelia is bisexual. *But* I feel like if Jules would turn for anyone, maybe she would turn for Ophelia. They have a really perfect partnership. I wouldn't be against it, but I feel like Tyler is a dream for Jules apart from the fact that she helped dispose of his stepbrother's dead body — that's kind of a mood killer. The thing is

I'm in love with Evan as well, who is Ophelia's love interest. So I want him and Ophelia does as well, but Jenn is hinting at a love triangle. So who knows? But I feel if another woman came into Ophelia's life, I think Jules might get a little bit jealous. It would be interesting to read those scripts.

MM: Ooh! That would be exciting. Also, I had a question or two for you that I asked Jenn to provide on Twitter. The first one is: Who are you favorite badass female characters?

EB: I was a big *Buffy* fan when I was younger. I kind of grew out of it a little bit, but when I was really like 8 or 9, I *really* looked like a young Sarah Michelle Gellar. People used to say it all the time. I was a massive *Buffy* fan. I watched a lot of that. And I think there's a little bit of *Buffy* in our show. I really enjoyed *Jessica Jones*. I watched that this year. I think that's another example of a woman being written not as a stereotype, but complex. I think that's always interesting to watch. So, yeah, I *loved Buffy*. I think we have a bit of *Veronica Mars* in our show as well. I love Scarlett Johansson as Black Widow in *Avengers*, you know? I'm a big superhero fan; I think she's amazing. I'd like to see a Black Widow film. We haven't had a female *Avengers* film, and I don't know why. I think that would be awesome.

MM: That would be *super* awesome. The second question is: What inspired you most while filming *Sweet/Vicious*?

EB: Probably two things. Firstly, ridiculously inspired day in and day out by Jenn Kaytin Robinson. I just think she is a force to be reckoned with and she is a unique voice. *Sweet/Vicious* is a genius product of her genius mind, but I feel like she has so much more to tell. Secondly, when it comes to doing the show and playing Jules, it's honestly been talking to hundreds of survivors that we have been able to talk to. Some of those women are women in my life. Some of my closest friends have inspired me through this journey. And just watching women empower other women has been a huge inspiration in my personal life and in the show because it's such a common thread in *Sweet/Vicious*. This show has a lot to do with female empowerment, so there's a common thread in all of the things that I am saying and women seems to be the most common thread. It's been the most amazing journey. It has heartened and strengthened most of the amazing relationships with women in my life, and taken them to a different level of talking about these issue after being friends with them for so many years and not having spoken about them. Just in my life, it's changed conversations and made certain things not taboo anymore.

MM: That's really great to hear. We're getting toward the end, and I like to throw my signature question into all of my interviews. If you had to pick a doughnut based off Jules' personality, what kind would it be and what toppings would be on it?

EB: I think she would have a normal glazed doughnut. It would probably have a chocolate topping, and the sprinkles on top would either be pink or rainbow colored. Or probably pastel colored. Jules really does love her pastels. But Jules has two sides of her personality. So I feel like that would be her sorority one, and her vigilante doughnut would probably have jam inside because I feel like that resembles blood. *[Laughs.]* It would probably be a darker doughnut. I'm a massive doughnut fan.

MM: Sounds delicious! That's what I like to hear! Can you tell us what's to come, just to wrap things up?

EB: I think Tyler — it's heartbreaking in episode six for Tyler because he is such a wonderful man. We have a few episodes left of the show, so it's not the end of any of the stories yet. But I think if Tyler found out the truth, he would 100 percent stand by Jules' side. I don't think he would go for a second without believing her, because that's just the kind of guy he is. Jules has a journey to go through in order to be ready to tell her story. It has to happen organically. With Kennedy, she is going through a lot herself with losing the boyfriend she loves and she feels like she lost Jules a long time ago and has been struggling to get her back and then finds out that story that she doesn't know whether to believe or not. I will say that Kennedy is an incredible woman, and she is an amazing friend, and she's smart. So it's going to take healing from all parts, but I don't know how much I can say. All I can say is that you have to keep watching, I think.

MM: Right, and we will. It's a great show and I can't wait to see it Tuesday. Hope you guys get another season!

EB: Yeah, so do we! Everyone just needs to tweet MTV and tell them.

Watch *Sweet/Vicious* Tuesdays at 10/9c on MTV
