CHEMISTRY LESSONS

THREE GIRLS STAR MOLLY WINDSOR TAKES ON FORENSIC SCIENCE IN HER LATEST CHALLENGE

GIVEN the intensity of the roles Molly Windsor has taken on – a child in the care-home system in 2009's The Unloved, her Bafta win for 2017's Three Girls, in which she portrayed a victim of the Rochdale child sex-abuse ring, and her hypnotic turn as vengeful student Rose in last year's Cheat – you might expect the 22-year-old to carry some baggage. On the contrary, she's open, friendly and a thoughtful listener.

It was that last quality that actor/writer Amelia Bullmore noted when she was trying to convince the

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A FORENSIC APPROACH TO CRIME DRAMA

THREE GIRLS AND CHEAT ACTRESS MOLLY WINDSOR TELLS **PAUL SIMPER** ABOUT NEW DRAMA TRACES AND BEING A MASSIVE FLEABAG FAN-GIRL

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rising star to join Traces, a smart six-part thriller about forensic scientists set in Dundee, alongside Laura Fraser and Jennifer Spence. It's based on an idea by crime writer Val McDermid.

Bullmore recalls Windsor 'calmly listening with those clever blue eyes' before accepting the part.

'Amelia told us the whole story so beautifully that at the end of it we all couldn't breathe for about 20 minutes,' says Molly. 'I was hooked.'

Her character, chemistry graduate Emma Hedges, has moved back to Dundee for the first time since she was seven and finds unnerving similarities between an online course she is studying and the unsolved murder of her mother.

On top of that, there's another investigation involving a businessman, played by Line Of Duty's Martin Compston, with whom Emma becomes romantically involved.

When it comes to choosing work, Windsor appears to have finely honed instincts.

'I'm at a kind of interesting age,' she says. 'I look young but because my first job was 11 years ago I've gone from playing children to getting these roles like Emma, a young woman in her 20s – which is a whole new dimension.'

Was she sent a lot of gritty drama scripts after Three Girls?

'Three Girls will never be just a job to me,' she says. 'It was a lot more than that. So when people offered me similar jobs off the back of it I thought, "You don't understand what that was."It wasn't about, 'Now we're going to be really gritty.' It was about we need to tell this story.

'That's my approach to each script. You can sniff it out when someone's being lazy. I quite like a challenge.'

What makes Traces intriguing is the relatively unexplored world of forensic science in which the story is set – populated by academic women who also appreciate a good slice of cake.

'All the women we met who our characters were very loosely based on were fascinating,' adds Windsor. 'I think they were amused by us. It's their job so us coming in and being interested by every single little thing they're doing has got to be weird.'

Val McDermid – who has a long-standing connection with forensic scientists through her teaching at Dundee university – has a walk-on part.

'I'd read her case studies book, Forensics,' says Windsor. 'I had it in my bag when she came on set and she has since given me a signed copy.'

Although she's already bagged her first Bafta, Windsor admits she's rubbish when it comes to approaching those actors she admires most while at award ceremonies.

'I was at the Women In Film And TV awards in the same room as Phoebe Waller-Bridge,' she says. 'I thought Fleabag was so original and so brilliant but I've not met her.

'I'm awful in those situations – I always think I need something really intelligent to say. I don't want to go over and gush, "I really love you." I'm terrible. I'm a massive Fleabag fan-girl and I would absolutely love to do a comedy one day.'

And it's not just comedy she'd like to have a crack at.

'I was half joking about this to my family the other day but my grandparents took me to am-drams when I was younger,' she says. 'One of the ones I loved was Calamity Jane. I think there should be a gritty British version and I could see me doing it!'

Traces is on Alibi from Monday

Inspiration: Phoebe Waller-Bridge

Romantic link: Molly Windsor and, inset, alongside Martin Compston in Traces