



Towering talent: Jimmy Akingbola, Gemma Whelan, Tahira Sharif and Emmett J Scanlan join the cast



Tense: DS Sarah Collins must deal with an escalating drama in *The Tower*

# WHELAN AND DEALING

**M**AYBE she just has one of those faces. You'll have seen Gemma Whelan as the tough-as-nails Yara Greyjoy in *Game Of Thrones*, as the sister to Anne in *Gentleman Jack* and as Fiona Shaw's daughter in *Killing Eve* but in person you might be pushed to place her. Not that it bothers her, mind you.

'I don't get recognised an enormous amount,' she says. 'People tend to think that they went to school with me or that they just know me. I was at a swimming pool the other day and a lady said, "I know your face. I think it's from the train station, isn't it?" I said, "Yeah, probably the train station." I've never been to that train station in my life. And then we swam on. I'm not distinctive enough. But it means I can play lots of different characters, which is nice.'

All that might change with her first lead role as DS Sarah Collins in ITV's classy new police drama, *The Tower*, based on Kate London's series of Met crime novels. Not that the audition was plain sailing.

'Unfortunately, because we were having building work at our house I was perched on the end of my bed,' recalls Whelan. 'My husband, Gerry, who was brilliant with helping me prepare my three scenes, carried the kitchen table up so I could be Zoom-ready. I put it on a load of books, lit myself really nicely in the window and sent my husband and my daughter out.'

GEMMA WHELAN TALKS HER NEW ITV COP SHOW *THE TOWER* – AND WHY SHE'S COME TO TERMS WITH PEOPLE NEVER RECOGNISING HER. BY **PAUL SIMPER**

'After we finished the meeting I felt very good about it, regardless of whether I got it or not. I hadn't embarrassed myself, which is all that anyone wants, isn't it?'

Self-deprecation aside, *The Tower* is an exciting change-up from the usual coppering fare. It starts as an everyday story of policing in the capital but like the inciting incident that propels it – a neighbourhood dispute that may have involved racist language by one of the

police officers – what appears at first quite small rapidly escalates until the dead bodies of a 52-year-old policeman and a teenage Muslim girl are found at the bottom of a South London tower block.

Her co-star Jimmy Akingbola, brilliant as her fellow detective DC Steve Bradshaw, believes the script is what makes the show compelling.

'There is so much in this script,' says Akingbola. 'That's what makes this

show really interesting and special to me. *The Tower* isn't just about institutionalised racism in the police force. You've got stuff going on in the community. It's about not being able to communicate. It's about the abuse of power. It's got so many trigger points in it and then suddenly we find a young brown girl and a white police officer dead at the bottom of a block of flats.'

Does that also make *The Tower* an investigation into police corruption?

'No, I wouldn't say it's about corruption in the police force at all, because that's another

show,' says Whelan, giving the nod to *Line Of Duty*. 'What it's addressing is the zeitgeist of how we are not allowed to say things any more that might be dismissed as throwaway. It's the small things that are not small, which have huge consequences.'

'It's not territory we've navigated before out loud. It's about crossing the line within policing and whether those things are bendable or not.'

There is one DNA strand it does share with *Line Of Duty*. It is not to be missed.



Another world: Whelan as *Game Of Thrones*' Yara

*The Tower* starts at 9pm on Monday and airs across the week on ITV