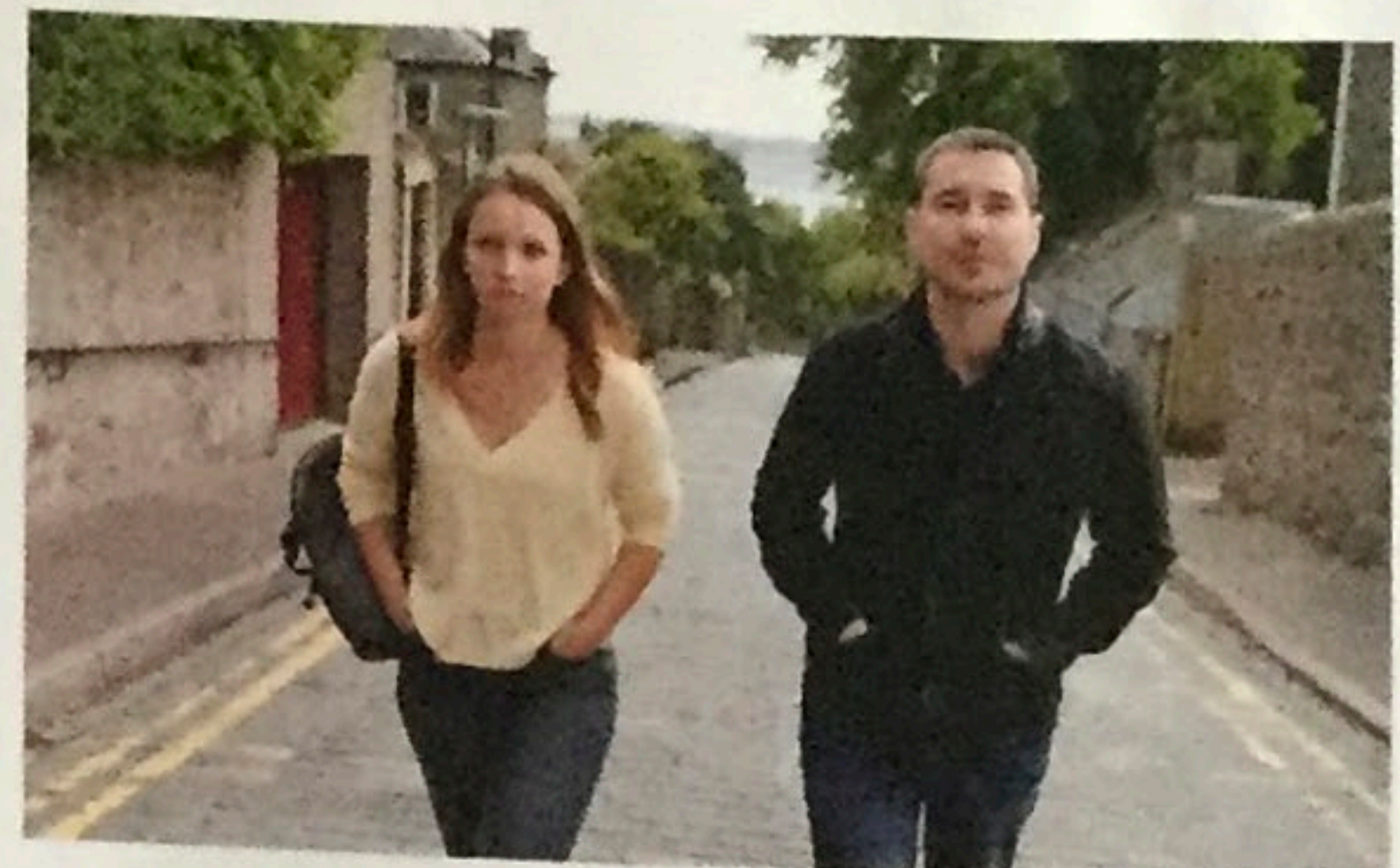


FORENSIC DETAIL

# TRACES

Writer Amelia Bullmore on why combining forensic science and sparky female chemistry is a winning formula in her new thriller

Clockwise from main: Identity parade: the *Traces* cast; writer Amelia Bullmore (centre) on set; Emma (Molly Windsor) with love interest Daniel (Martin Compston); Professor Sarah Gordon (Laura Fraser); not impressed with the lunch option in the staff canteen.



has female forensic pathologists at its heart, the scientists in *Traces* feel fresh to television with strong performances by all three leads. "On paper a lot of people might read the character of Professor Sarah Gordon as a bit boring," suggests Bullmore. "She is unswervingly rigorous about the work. She won't be drawn to speculate. She's a true scientist. Not maverick at all. But Laura Fraser plays this geek with a fabulous joie de vivre so you've got a kind of infectiously upbeat nerd. It's very winning to see somebody so into their job and so stubbornly doing it by the book but not being a stuffed shirt with it."

Then there's Professor Kathy Torrance: "We've seen characters like her before who are high status and have intellectual certainty, but Jennifer Spence brings a speed and a wry, dry quality. She's flawed and very funny. These women are not brainy and cool. They're brainy and human."

The audience's way in is through BAFTA-winner Molly Windsor as chemistry graduate Emma. After starting a new job as a lab technician, she encounters a case that contains a number of striking similarities to the murder of her own mother.

Emma is scientifically

smart and emotionally savvy with an impulsive and impetuous streak, which makes Windsor's piercing intelligence and fearlessness as an actor a perfect fit.

"I'd seen *Three Girls* so I knew she was fantastically good," says Bullmore. "Then I did a bit of Google snooping and saw her interviewed when she got her BAFTA. I just thought, 'You are quite something.'"

The other task for writer Bullmore and directors Rebecca Gatward (*Dublin Murders*) and Mary Nighy (*Silent Witness*) was bringing the science to life onscreen in a visually exciting way.

"Rebecca has done a fantastic job of setting the show up with clarity and elegance," says Bullmore. "Mary has the task of letting rip as the story intensifies and the stakes are raised. She's been able to push things visually a bit more because of that."

The final storytelling element is a romance between Emma and Martin Compston's Daniel, whose family business is under investigation.

"I had no idea Martin Compston could be so emotionally powerful," marvels Bullmore. "To see him in the middle of a love story. It's revelatory."

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WHEN WRITER/ACTOR Amelia Bullmore (*Gentleman Jack*, *Scott & Bailey*) visited Dundee University to meet the real-life forensic scientists, mainly women, who are the inspiration for smart new drama *Traces*, she asked them what their pet hates were concerning how their profession is portrayed.

"They said, 'Don't make us dollybirds,'" says Bullmore. "They would also hate it if the science was rubbish and there was gratuitous violence. Then they said, 'If you do one thing, don't ever say 'forensics'. It's forensic science.' Forensic means 'for the court' so 'forensics' means nothing".

Ironically, it was a book

of real-life case studies by celebrated crime writer Val McDermid called *Forensics* that first prompted Red Productions (makers of *Years And Years* and *Happy Valley*) to wonder if there might be a TV series in it. McDermid devised a story for Bullmore to adapt.

The result is an engaging, pacey, character study of brilliant, sparky, truth-seeking women led by Molly Windsor (*Three Girls*) Laura Fraser (*Breaking Bad*) and Jennifer Spence (*You Me Her*) wrapped up in a couple of murder mysteries and a romance involving Martin Compston (*Line Of Duty*).

What makes the women of *Traces* fascinating is the range of their day-to-day work. "As academics they are engaged in teaching," explains Bullmore, "But they also work for the



Crown as expert witnesses and for the police on cases."

There is plenty of detailed technical jargon zipping back and forth as evidence ranging from fire-damaged toasters to skeletal remains is analysed. But the

ace for Bullmore as a writer is that it's a profession which relies heavily on the scientists communicating with others outside their fields of expertise.

"One of the women's key challenges is that the science

doesn't get shrouded in mystery. They worry, for instance, about the telly effect of everybody thinking that DNA is magic, that all you have to do is get a bit of DNA and it's job done."

Although *Silent Witness*