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ROLE BY ROLE,
SHE'S SHINING
A LIGHT IN
THE DARKNESS

WORDS ELIZABETH AUBREY

Camera Press/Rachell Smith, Getty

HAYLEY SQUIRES' BREAKOUT role in Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake* introduced us to what the actor does best: giving a powerful voice to those on the margins. Earning a Most Promising Newcomer BIFA in 2016 for her role as single parent Katie in Loach's exploration of the UK's punitive benefits system, Squires' emotive portrayal brought humanity and truth to a story we rarely see beyond statistics in the news. Since then, she's kept on searching for the kind of stories that are seldom told. Most recently, the now-shooting Apple TV+ series *The Essex Serpent*, in which she will play Martha: a Victorian housemaid who is politically minded, a fierce socialist and trusted confidante to her boss, transcending the class barriers of the time.

"You could look at Martha and say, 'Oh, that's just the maid,' but I looked at it and saw all these other things," Squires tells *Empire* during a break in filming. "There are so many different parts to her — there's who she's in love with, there's what she does for a living, her morals, her values..."

Squires loves playing complex, three-dimensional characters, which is why she relished playing adult-entertainment star Jolene Dollar in last year's Channel 4 series *Adult Material*, which started a national conversation about consent, abuse and the male gaze in the #MeToo era. "The reason Jolene was so, so good was because she was many different things," says Squires, praising screenwriter Lucy Kirkwood's rich creation. "She was complex; she wasn't there to serve as a narrative stepping-stone. She was never, ever just one thing, or a cardboard-cut-out of what we think roles with certain women should be."

The actor enjoyed tearing up pre-conceived



stereotypes about her character and welcomed the challenging conversations the show initiated. "If you look at *I May Destroy You*, *I Hate Suzie* and *Adult Material*, there's a common theme in all: the exploration of abuse," she says. "And all three have a central character who isn't willing to be quiet. Hopefully it shows people running the channels that there's no need to be scared of shows like this. These stories need to be told."

Squires' sense of social justice is strong, as is her commitment to playing characters forgotten by governments or shunned by society. "I'm very proud of that film," Squires says of 2016's *I, Daniel Blake*, in which, in one stand-out scene, her character eats the contents of a tin of beans in a food bank with her bare hands, after being driven to near-starvation through Kafka-esque, nightmarish bureaucracy. "We did the research to find out the truth about what was happening to people. I have a feeling it's always going to be relevant in Britain."

Being from a working-class background herself, one of the toughest things Squires experienced at the start of her career was class-typecasting. "The weird thing that happens with working-class actors, particularly if you do a Ken Loach film, is that people forget you went to drama school, that you haven't just been picked up off the street to come in and do it." But she's quickly made a huge impact. Squires credits her work at Rose Bruford College as turning her into a "thinking creative", someone who could "recognise complex characters" and who "understands whole projects from writing through to directing". Indeed, her training inspired her to start work on writing her own screenplay seven years ago.

"Funnily enough, I've actually got the pages open in the background on my Mac right now," she laughs. "We're really hoping that it's going into production now next year. It's taken seven years, but we're there."

That story, about three generations of working-class women from Kent, promises to see Squires shining a light on more marginalised voices, with the complexity, care and courage for which she is known. One day, she may even direct. "I hope it will happen," she says. "It's always about good projects, good storytelling, good people and great characters. I'm open to everything, though I'm not sure there'll ever be a musical. But you never know." If she does go all-singing, all-dancing, we're pretty sure it'll still pack a punch.

THE ESSEX SERPENT IS COMING TO APPLE TV+

Left, top: Playing adult-entertainment star Jolene Dollar in *Adult Material*. **Bottom:** At breaking point as Katie in *I, Daniel Blake*, alongside Briana Shann (as daughter Daisy) and Dave Johns (Daniel Blake).



MORFYDD CLARK

The star of *Saint Maud* has risen... and risen

For Morfydd Clark, things started to go a little crazy after the 2019 London Film Festival. Before that, she'd been a jobbing actor — bit-parts here and there, but nothing huge. That LFF, however, saw a seismic change. "It was so weird," she recalls. "The only other time I'd done a red carpet [before that], I turned up and everyone thought I was someone called Charlotte."

At the festival, there was no such confusion. She was the breakout star of the event, with four roles in three films: Armando Iannucci's *The Personal History Of David Copperfield* (where she played the title character's love interest and his mother); Craig Roberts' *Eternal Beauty* (playing a younger version of Sally Hawkins' character Jane); and Rose Glass' debut horror *Saint Maud* (as a God-fearing nurse with an increasingly violent faith).

What followed was a blaze of attention and high-profile casting, but the Swedish-born Welsh actor has managed to stay level-headed. "It all escalated in such a weird time," she says. "I'm quite glad that I didn't get a big part when I was younger — I now realise I was totally unequipped for it."

The "big part" she's alluding to is in Amazon's billion-dollar *Lord Of The Rings* TV show, for which the actor has spent the past two years filming in New Zealand. Instructed by the Amazon elders to keep it secret, keep it safe, Clark cannot even confirm who she's playing, though it's been widely reported to be a young Galadriel.

"I've always found a huge amount of comfort in fantasy," she says. "I love watching gritty and realistic things — but sometimes I just want to watch something with dragons." And having moved to New Zealand for early prep in 2019, Clark has fallen in love with the country, which sometimes reminds her of home. "It's kind of Welsh," she says. "It's just phenomenally beautiful. I think [the Peter Jackson films] meant, to me, that New Zealand became this place where beautiful, amazing things are made."

Global recognition beckons. But Clark hopes her future is on home turf as much as Middle-earth ("I'd love to do a play in Cardiff") — plus, with luck, re-teaming with Glass again. "I'd love to," she says. "I feel so lucky to have met her. Me and Rose felt kind of like babes in the storm together." That storm around her keeps growing. Just don't call it Hurricane Charlotte. **JOHN NUGENT**

THE LORD OF THE RINGS IS COMING TO AMAZON PRIME VIDEO