



What the

DICKENS



We've had great expectations for actress FELICITY JONES, and as the star of three major movies, including Ralph Fiennes's hotly awaited Dickens biopic, it looks like this is her year. *Elaine Lipworth* meets the Brummie girl who's about to go global

PHOTOGRAPHS
Danielle Levitt

FELICITY WEARS DRESS,
Alexander McQueen

rs, *felicity!*



Felicity's favourites

STYLE I'm such a tomboy and find the red carpet quite difficult. I always think, 'Can't I just turn up in my jeans and no make-up?' Which I guess I should do.

DESIGNER I wore a lovely Burberry dress the other day. My favourite designer changes but I always love Proenza Schouler – their clothes are androgynous and contemporary yet beautiful at the same time.

STYLE ICONS Audrey Hepburn and Patti Smith, who are quite different. I love how stylish Audrey Hepburn was in her films and she set her own tone.

MAKE-UP I won't leave the house without my black kohl eyeliner.

CURRENTLY READING *Sleepless Nights* by Elizabeth Hardwick. It's actually because I'm in New York and it's about her experience in her late 20s living there.

FAVOURITE NEW FILM *Blue is the Warmest Color* is amazing. You can't see the acting, it feels like they are just being. The lead actress Adèle Exarchopoulos is incredible.

SAVING UP FOR A hamper of Aesop's products. It's an organic Australian skincare brand that I love.

COTTON TOP, Atlantique
Ascoli. SHORTS, L'Wren Scott

I WAS A VERY boring young girl,' announces actress Felicity Jones cheerfully. I find that hard to believe. The engaging Birmingham actress, who got her start as a teenager playing Emma Grundy on *The Archers* and stars opposite Ralph Fiennes as Charles Dickens's secret mistress in her latest film, *The Invisible Woman*, strikes me as anything but dull. But she insists: 'It's true, I was very earnest and focused from quite a young age – and geeky.'

Geeky is not a word that springs to mind either; observing the wide-eyed actress, who is 30 but looks 20, when we meet on a snowy New York afternoon at the hip Bowery Hotel. Felicity has modelled for Burberry and today is luminous in a Band of Outsiders blazer over a crisp white shirt and J Brand jeans.

'At school I was called a swot. I always thought that if you just put your head down and got on with work you'd get away with far more [mischief] than if you were being explicitly naughty, so I studied,' says Felicity.

Her mother, who worked in advertising, and father, a journalist, split up when she was three and Felicity lived in Bournville with her mother and older brother. 'I'd see my dad every other weekend; I've always had a relationship with both of my parents.' A stellar pupil at the girls' school she attended, Felicity studied drama at an after-school workshop, began acting professionally aged 11 and landed the role on *The Archers* four years later. She won a place at Wadham College, Oxford, where her time was divided between literary pursuits ('my passion was Virginia Woolf') and her flourishing career.

She started going out with Ed Fornieles, an artist, while at Oxford, but when I comment that the relationship must be unusual to have lasted throughout their 20s, Felicity pauses and, with a half smile, replies, 'Yes. It's unusual and it's over. We broke up last year. It's so unusual that it's over.' She shrugs her shoulders. 'It's tough when your relationship ends. I'm taking it day by day; so much of your identity is a part of the [other] person. I'm still processing it.'

Felicity's journey from Ambridge to Hollywood has included TV roles in *Doctor Who*, *Northanger Abbey* with Carey Mulligan, the British romcom *Chalet Girl* and *The Tempest* with Helen Mirren. It was her thrilling breakout performance in the indie film *Like Crazy*, about a doomed transatlantic relationship, that caught the attention of leading American directors.

In *The Invisible Woman*, based on Claire Tomalin's book of the same name, Felicity is terrific as 18-year-old actress Nelly Ternan, who begins an affair with the much older author; played by Ralph Fiennes (he also directed). Dickens is painted as a brilliant but self-centred man. He effectively abandons his wife Catherine, the mother of his ten children, to conduct his affair with the enchanting Nelly, whom he banishes to a house in the country to avoid any scandal.

'Dickens was like a politician,' says Felicity. 'He had a strong sense of being presented as a benevolent, avuncular figure in public. But in truth he was a man who had passions that ran contrary to his image. Dickens and Nelly lived in a time when there was a sharp divide between public and private life. Now it's so different with Facebook and Twitter.'

It's interesting that Felicity is about to become highly visible herself this spring, with the release of *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* (she stars opposite Andrew Garfield as Spider-Man). 'Well, that's the irony, isn't it?' she smiles. 'The more famous you get, in some ways it makes [acting] more difficult

because you're more known as yourself. There's more of a narrative about you rather than about the character.'

Following the actress's first comic-book blockbuster, there's another more cerebral British role: she plays Stephen Hawking's ex-wife Jane in *Theory of Everything*, alongside Eddie Redmayne as the renowned physicist. Felicity has appeared in a lot of dramas about intense, ill-fated relationships. What has she learnt about love along the way? 'That it's painful,' she laughs.

I hate to think of Nelly as Dickens's bit on the side. I don't think that's what she was. She was proud, his intellectual equal. She loved writing, she was passionate about the literary world and was his collaborator in many ways, but she made a sacrifice to be with him. Much of the story is seeing this woman wrestling with that sacrifice. I felt I had to understand Nelly, who'd been almost entirely eclipsed by history. For both of them it was important to keep the relationship private so that she wasn't a scandalous figure in society. When you are in love you want to keep a sense of yourself and who you are but you also want to give yourself to the other person, and the film explores that.

To be an actress was morally looked down on in the Victorian era. Acting was considered a bawdy, crude world. I love that these women [Nelly and her sisters and mother had a family acting troupe] wanted to act and enjoyed the independence it gave them. They earned their own money and had a strange freedom that wasn't open to other women at that time.

Ralph and I would talk about Dickens in the trailer before going to work. We both read *David Copperfield* and then discussed *Our Mutual Friend*. He didn't give me a reading list. He wasn't dogmatic in that way. It felt like an incredibly productive and collaborative working relationship.

At first you're, like, 'Oh my God – it's Ralph Fiennes.' But I found working with him very straightforward. He's not pretentious at all, and he doesn't patronise you in any way. I've grown up watching his work and love the passion with which he plays every part. I find the people who are really great at what they do are extraordinarily humble people.

Charles Dickens was a flawed person and that's often the case with people who produce great works of art. But the film is a very truthful portrayal of Dickens. All the characters are complicated and the film isn't trying to judge anyone. Love often cuts through any sort of boundaries you have. Dickens was a lot older than Nelly, but I wouldn't want to make generalisations about that. People fall for each other and it's up to the individuals.

My favourite Dickens book is *Great Expectations*. There's so much of Nelly in his portrayal of Estella. I've always had a strong image of Miss Havisham – in the cobweb-filled house with the sadness of being jilted. I remember when I was a girl asking my mum why Miss Havisham is so unhappy? My mum said she was in love and it didn't work out.

On my own in my trailer I'd jump around in my corset listening to Jay-Z and MIA. Dancing to loud music before going ▶

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The story shows Nelly wrestle with the sacrifice she made to be with Dickens
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Felicity with Ralph Fiennes as Charles Dickens in *The Invisible Woman*

LMK MEDIA. PHOTOGRAPHS: DANIELLE LEVITT AT CLM. STYLING: LESTER GARCIA. MAKE-UP: KATEY DENNO AT THE WALL GROUP. HAIR: ALEX POILLO AT MAGNET

◀ on set really energises me. As a kid I loved ballet, modern and tap. I had a tutu and ballet shoes but I was really bad at it – I was not destined to be a dancer!

Helen Mirren is not starry in any way. She's fantastic. She is totally self-sufficient and doesn't have loads of assistants around her. In *The Tempest*, she said, 'I'm not going to wear any make-up in this film.' She's such a brave actress and she'll take risks. I learned from her that as an actress you always have self-doubt. She said, 'You have to put something out there and let what will happen, happen.'

My earliest childhood memory is getting into a sleeping bag with my brother and sliding down the stairs. It was like sledging. You just need a slippery sleeping bag, then you both get in and push yourself down the stairs.

My dad's family is Italian and we always had Italian food at my grandmother's house (she died six years ago). She used to cook urns of minestrone soup and when people dropped by they'd be given a ladle of soup and some bread. So I feel I am home when I can cook for friends and family.

I read Nigel Slater's cookery books as though they're novels and my mouth will be watering. He does a lovely pasta with tomatoes stuffed with garlic, cream, olive oil and a sprig of basil, which you mix with farfalle pasta and serve with salad. It's so simple.

There is no way when you're having breakfast that you want to listen to yourself on the radio. That would be horrific. Whenever I heard my episode of *The Archers* come on the radio on a Sunday morning I'd say, 'Turn it off!' My mum had listened to it for years so it was very much a part of our household. It was a great way of learning about acting because obviously your face isn't exposed on the radio!

I hope Emma Grundy [now played by Emerald O'Hanrahan] is still causing trouble somewhere – she is the rebel of Ambridge. I spend a lot of time in the States but I still listen to *The Archers* when I am in London. Radio 4 reminds me of growing up. That's what I miss about England.

I don't own a flat. I own a suitcase. I'd like to make London my base, but as an actor you spend a lot of time on your own doing different jobs, so I'm a bit of a nomad. I'm at a point in my life where I can say yes to things as I don't have any responsibility, so I'm enjoying being spontaneous.

Looking young is kind of good now, but when you're 16 or 17 it's the worst thing in the world as all you want to do is look 25. But I've always looked so young for my age that I could never get in anywhere, especially clubs.

If the right person comes along that's great but I'm happy to be single. All my friends seem to be single and in their 30s. I think we're lucky – this is the best time to be a young female. I definitely want a family sometime – if it's the right person and the right situation – but at the moment I'm enjoying my freedom.

I turned down a film audition to go to Oxford University. I knew that it [the job] would conflict with uni and looking back I'm so glad I didn't go to

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it because I loved Oxford. I made my best friends there and got to enjoy three years of my life when acting wasn't the main focus.

I want to apologise to my tutors for my terrible essays. I was still doing *The Archers* when I was at Oxford. I used to travel to Birmingham, record for two and a half hours, then travel back – life was too hectic to do my essays!

Making *Theory of Everything* was life changing. It was very emotional. Stephen Hawking and Jane [his former wife] are phenomenal people because of what they've survived. They were so young when Stephen was diagnosed with motor neurone disease – she was 18, he was in his early 20s. They were told he was only going to live for two years and he's now in his 70s – I think a lot of his survival comes from sheer personal drive and Jane is still an incredible support. Without sounding too dewy-eyed, Jane had such a capacity for love. I wanted to tell her story. For anyone who's caring and being cared for it is a tough situation. But the whole story is rooted in love.

Eddie Redmayne and I went round to Stephen Hawking's house in Cambridge. Stephen is charming and incredibly charismatic; he has a very dry sense of humour. At one point we were talking about star signs: his birthday is on the same day as Galileo's and he wrote, 'I'm an astronomer not an astrologer', which I thought was very funny.

I wasn't great at physics and I hate maths. So at first I was a bit intimidated about the idea of trying to understand his theories, but that's the great thing about *A Brief History of Time* – Stephen has made them accessible.

I'd love to do an action film. I like the fact that Angelina Jolie was in *Salt* playing the role originally intended for Tom Cruise, but she was just like, 'Let's make it a female part.' I want to make lighter films because I've made very serious, heavy films. If someone wants to offer me a job where I get to jump out of an aeroplane, yes, *please!* Anything where there's no crying involved! 🍷

The Invisible Woman will be in cinemas in London and key cities from Friday and nationwide from 21 February



DRESS, Vika Gazinskaya