'I was a hairdresser – now I'm a Hollywood star!'

Kathleen McDermott, 25, has won rave reviews for her part in Brit flick *Morvern Callar* – not bad for a hairdresser who had never acted before

"I clearly remember the day I got approached by the casting director for a new British film called *Morvern Callar*. It was Boxing Day 2000 and I was shopping in the sales in Glasgow with my older sister, Karen. At the time, I was at college training to be a barber, working two days a week in a barber shop called Milano's, and in the evenings, I was doing cabaret in a local Chinese restaurant, Shanghai Shuffle (it was my job to get everyone up to do karaoke and dance on their tables – it's not your normal Chinese restaurant!). Anyway, Karen and I were just outside Prince's Square shopping centre when this man came running over and said, 'Excuse me…'. I thought he was trying to sell us something, so straightaway I told him I wasn't interested. He's like, 'No, wait, I'm not selling anything,' but I still kept saying, 'Don't care, not interested.'

He asked if we'd heard of the film *Ratcatcher*. We hadn't. Then, he asked if we'd heard of a short film called *Gasman*. We both said no. Then, he asked if we'd heard of the Scottish film director Lynne Ramsay, and we said no again! He just laughed and handed me this piece of paper saying he'd like us to go to an open audition where they'd take a Polaroid and interview us on camera.

I took the paper and then totally forgot about it, until about a week later, when my sister and I were shopping at our local supermarket. I asked her if she was going to go and she said she wasn't bothered, but I decided I fancied it. I thought it'd be a laugh, and, as my mum said to me later that day, I had nothing to lose.

As soon as I arrived at the audition, I realised it wasn't for me. Everyone was sitting around on the floor in jeans and T-shirts, and then there was me, the odd one out, in colour co-ordinated boots and jacket. I was just about to walk out when this woman stopped me. It turned out that Des Hamilton, the casting director who'd stopped me in the street, had gone to the toilet, seen me and run straight back to tell one of the casting people not to let me leave.

I was interviewed on camera – they asked me things like where I went out and what colour describes a Saturday afternoon for me. Throughout it, one woman kept saying, 'She just *is* Lanna', but I had no idea what she was talking about, I didn't even know what the audition was for. Des gave me a scene to take away and read through and told me to come for an audition the next day. I went to the audition; in fact, I did three auditions over the next few weeks and then, Lynne Ramsay, the director, phoned me and asked me to go for a coffee. Part of me was thinking I must be getting close, but most of the time, I really didn't think I'd get it – I don't think my family did, either.

Kathleen (*right*) with Samantha Morton on the set of *Morvern Callar*

'MY DAD KEPT STARING AT ME, GOING, "I CANNAE BELIEVE MY DAUGHTER'S IN A FILM!"'

Auditions and Oscars

I met up with Lynne and we chatted, but she didn't even mention the film. Then, the next day, she phoned again to say she wanted me to meet Samantha Morton, who was the lead in the film. I didn't know who she was, so I phoned my sister to tell her and Karen's going, 'Kathleen! Samantha Morton's been nominated for an Oscar! She's excellent!' I went along, expecting to meet this really famous lassie, and she comes in wearing a puffa jacket with her hair tied back. I was like, *You're* Samantha Morton? Her first words to me were: 'Hiya! Are you a Taurus?' I said yes and she screamed, 'So am I!', and then we had a laugh and totally got on.

It's probably better that I didn't know who she was, because if I had, I'd probably have been more nervous about getting the part. I never thought of Samantha as famous, because I was a bit like, Look, if she was famous, I would know about her! That day, we just chatted and did one scene together and Lynne said she'd phone me that night to let me know if I'd got the part.

In the taxi on my way home, I was sitting up front telling the driver all about the audition – and that's when I got the phone call. The driver looked at me and went, 'Your phone's ringing', so I picked it up and it was Des, and – I'll always remember this – he asked me what day it was and I said '6.20pm'. Then, he said, 'Remember this moment for the rest of your life, because you've got the part!' I just couldn't believe it – me and the taxi driver were screaming and he was saying how he'll be able to tell people I was in his cab when I got the part!

When I got home, I actually went in and had my dinner before I said anything to my parents. After dinner, I just went, 'Guess what? I got the part.' And they both said, 'Aye, right! They were going to phone and the phone's not gone.' Fortunately, Lynne then phoned to congratulate me – and to tell me Lanna wasn't just some wee extra part, it was the second lead role.

My mum and dad were jumping about, then my dad called my gran to tell her. My dad kept staring at me, going, 'I cannae believe my daughter's in a film!' I was like, 'You cannae?! This is happening to me!'

After that night, everything happened dead fast. I had two weeks to sort out time off work and then I was doing the film. It was weird – I never thought I would act, and I didn't know what to do, so I just kind of did it and hoped Lynne liked it. Lanna's really different from me – she takes drugs, which I don't, so I had to watch people and see how they act on drugs. I watched *Trainspotting* to get an idea of how to act off my face. I know it sounds strange, but I wasn't nervous at all, I wasn't even shaking the first day. I don't know why – maybe I didn't think it was going to be such a big film, I thought it was just going to be a wee thing!

I had my own trailer – with my name on it and everything! It was really funny when they knocked on the door and said, 'You're on set in 20 minutes, you need to be in >

Kathleen still loves being a barber and intends to go back to it

Kathleen in Cannes; and with co-star Samantha Morton and director Lynne Ramsay (*below*) at the Edinburgh Film Festival

make-up in five.' That was excellent! It was like, I've seen this on telly and now I'm doing it. I would lie in my bed at night thinking, I can't believe I'm doing this. This is the weirdest thing ever!

Some days were hard. On the second day of shooting, I had a naked scene in the bath. I was wearing a bathrobe with nothing underneath – I walked in and there were loads of people, and I just burst into tears and said, 'I can't do this.' None of the crew realised I wasn't a proper actress, so they were quite surprised when I started crying.

Lynne took me into a room and said, 'I totally forgot you've never done this before.' They put milk in the bath, so you couldn't see through the water, but it was still the hardest thing I've ever done. I had to shoot a threesome, too, but it's not in the final film. It was really funny, I was in the green room chatting to two guys, asking, 'So, are you in the film?', and they're like, 'Aye, we go to this party with two girls and both end up in bed with one of them.' I was thinking, 'My God, I've just met the people I'm going to bed with tomorrow!'

From karaoke to Cannes

About a year after we finished filming, I went to a cast and crew screening in London with my mum, dad and sister. I was worried beforehand, because it's quite an art-house film and my family don't watch those. So, I got *Ratcatcher* out on video so they'd know what to expect.

I had goosebumps at the beginning, then, my name came up in big letters and I was going, 'That's me!' I was nervous of my dad seeing the film – I did explain to him that I'd had to do naked and bedroom scenes. But I never swear in front of him and in the first scene, Lanna says 'bastard' – fortunately, he just laughed.

'AT CANNES, LEONARDO DICAPRIO WAS HAVING A PARTY TWO BOATS DOWN FROM OURS!'

I've loved all the things I've been able to do thanks to this film. I just totally loved going to the Cannes Film Festival when *Morvern Callar* was shown over there – I wanted to go to all the VIP parties, so I could see all the stars. Samantha went to a party that Leonardo DiCaprio was also at – I was going, 'Why didn't you phone me and get me to come meet you?!' She was laughing and saying I wouldn't have liked it, and I was like, 'Aye, I would!'

It was my 25th birthday while I was in Cannes. We had a big party on a boat and two boats down, Leonardo DiCaprio was having a party, so I was trying to get people to go down and tell him it was my birthday and ask him over. I did meet Robert Carlyle, though. Everyone calls him Bobby – someone asked, 'Have you met Bobby, Kathleen?' and I'm like, 'Er, no', so, they introduced me. I told him about me getting spotted when I was walking along the street and he kept saying 'That's brilliant!' and I'm like, 'Aye, I know!'

The premiere of *Morvern Callar* at the Edinburgh Festival was hilarious, too – my mum and dad were on holiday in Benidorm, but I took Karen, my cousins and my gran. I had this gorgeous dress I'd been given by Amanda Wakeley, got my hair and make-up done – I felt a million dollars. My sister told me that when my car pulled up at the premiere, she could hear all these people going, 'Here she is, she's driving up, she's coming out of the car…' I thought that was just hysterical, it's not like I'm famous! I was first out of the car and all I could think was, 'God, I hope no one can see up my dress!' Then, I had to walk up the red carpet and I just went to walk straight into the cinema and Lynne's shouting, 'No! Come back! You're meant to stop and wait for photos!'

It was amazing, I felt like I was at the Glasgow Barra's [huge, hectic street market] with people on both sides shouting, 'Kathleen, over here! Can we get a picture over here!' My gran was crying and going 'Oh, hen!' Then, the next day, I found out I'd won an award – I got Best Scottish Newcomer from the *Glasgow Herald*. I couldn't believe it – I had to go to a ceremony, stand up and make a speech.

Kathleen at the Edinburgh Film Festival, wearing her Amanda Wakeley dress

I really don't think it's sunk in. My gran has collected all the newspaper cuttings of stories about me – she bought seven copies of *The Sunday Mail* when they had a big story on me and was taking copies of it to the bingo to show everyone. I can't believe someone phones me up and says, 'Your flight's at this time, then you need to be here…' All this schedule stuff – I've never had a schedule in my bloody life! I don't think I've changed and, if I get more acting work, I still don't think I will. All my pals say I don't act like I've made a film. But anybody who says they don't enjoy the attention is lying – it's brilliant! I love getting recognised and my pals love it, too – they spend all their time going, 'Aye, it is her!'

I'm still working at Shanghai Shuffle, which I love. I've been given two months off from Milano's while all the madness around the film is going on, but then I'll go back there. I've done an episode of *Taggart* – only a wee part, but it's a start; I've had some auditions in London and signed up with an agent, but my main ambition has always been to get my own barber shop. When we were filming, the crew would ask me what I wanted to do when this was over and they couldn't believe it when I said I wanted to own a barber shop. I mean, I don't have to run it, I can always get someone in to run it if I need to go off and do something else." C