

# CHEAT

## PRESS PACK

A Two Brothers Pictures production for ITV



## **SERIES SYNOPSIS:**

Inspiring some of the brightest young minds in the country, Dr Leah Dale (Katherine Kelly) has always prided herself on her academic integrity. Exceptionally hardworking but scrupulously fair, Leah gives everything to her work, and expects the same from her students. It's a philosophy she's inherited from her father, Michael (Peter Firth), himself a lecturer at the same university before he retired. So, when undergraduate Rose Vaughan (Molly Windsor), submits a suspiciously top grade essay, Leah is quick to call her out.

But what begins as a seemingly open and shut case of academic deception, soon spirals out of control. Frustrated that her Head of Department Harriet (Neve McIntosh) appears won over by Rose's charm, Leah becomes consumed with exposing Rose as a cheat, causing tension in her already fractious home-life with Adam (Tom Goodman-Hill). But there's more going on than meets the eye, as Rose takes Leah's challenge as a personal affront. Aided by Ben (Burn Gorman), a college porter completely under her spell, Rose pursues a course of retaliation against her professor.

When Leah is almost caught making a serious professional transgression, she seeks advice from her mother Angela (Lorraine Ashbourne) and best friend Amy (Lara Rossi), leading her to attempt to de-escalate the situation. Yet despite her best efforts, things finally come to a head at a faculty party, where an embarrassing incident makes Leah doubt herself. But who is telling the truth? When Rose's father William (Adrian Edmondson) visits her at the university, it's clear Rose is a victim in their emotionally abusive relationship, William offering her no support. Is Leah being set up, or has she inadvertently involved herself with a deeply troubled individual?

The academic furore soon strays into both Leah and Rose's personal lives. Adam and Leah are trying to have a baby, but the cheating scandal begins to disrupt their relationship from many angles. Just as things are beginning to be resolved, a devastating development forces Leah to reconsider both her personal and professional values. The exhilarating cat and mouse game between Rose and Leah is reignited. With two fiercely intelligent minds each unwilling to acquiesce, the relationships in both the women's lives begin to unravel.

The truth is a ticking time bomb and it is finally exposed over the course of one explosive evening, resulting in consequences so devastating, they will change the course of both Leah and Rose's lives forever. For one final time, the two women come face to face and are forced to reconcile with the truth. With startling twists and turns along the way, CHEAT is a gripping, psychological thriller that explores how far we're prepared to go to stand up for what we believe is right - and at what cost.

## **CAST & CREATIVES Q&A:**

### **KATHERINE KELLY IS LEAH DALE**

#### **Q: What attracted you to Cheat?**

“The scripts. It had been a long time since I’d read such a page turner. Gaby Hull is a great storyteller. Cheat has all the hallmarks of a good thriller but the twists and turns don’t land where you expect them. The script is king for me.

“On the face of it Cheat is about a student essay that has been ghost-written by someone else. Perhaps! So to begin with it’s about plagiarism. But the story quickly moves on from there and explores the theme of being a ‘cheat’ rather than that particular incident.

“I believe that Cheat is a really great thriller. If people tune in and enjoy it up to the first ad break I think they will probably stick with it. It’s a very satisfying watch.”

#### **Q: Who is Leah?**

“Leah is a university professor in sociology. She is an academic from an academic household. Her father Michael (Peter Firth) is a recently retired university lecturer and Leah is also married to an academic. She studies the many theories and philosophies of human behaviour. Her grasp on life is all ‘in theory’. Leah understands the theory of a good marriage, having children, of how humans operate, their motivations, behaviour. But she doesn’t really know much about life in practice. She’s lived in a bubble.

“A student called Rose (Molly Windsor) bursts that bubble as she doesn’t fit any of Leah’s theories. The only certainty in life is change and people will always come along who challenge your policies. Leah has got to her mid-30s and suddenly someone comes along who threatens all of those ideas and ideals.

“I found it exciting to see that unfold. There’s an unpredictability to Leah, she is a mystery to herself not just to the audience. She’s never been tested. When her triggers are fired by Rose, what can and does that lead to?”

#### **Q: Leah stands up for what she believes in. But at a personal cost?**

“Leah at the beginning is a very well rounded, fine, upstanding citizen in the community. She lives a very pedestrian, predictable life; full of structure and routine. She leads a privileged life and she’s aware of that. In the early episodes you see her with her best friend and you catch a glimmer of her underlying spirit and determination. As the story develops, you really see what she is made of. Her husband certainly hasn’t seen that side of her before.

“So, Leah is not having it from Rose, who she believes has cheated in her essay. That’s exciting to see. It’s cat and cat this thriller rather than cat and mouse.

“Perhaps Leah is slightly naive because she believes she understands the motivations and behaviours of humans so well. But I enjoyed playing someone who stands up for what they truly believe in. She takes her job very seriously and is unafraid to take on the responsibility that comes with it.

“In terms of playing the characters, Molly, I and our director Louise Hooper wanted to make sure that Rose wasn’t the baddie. That’s what’s clever about this script. It’s not as cut and dried as that. Leah does some questionable things, as viewers will discover as the story unfolds.”

**Q: Did you feel the need to do any of your own research for the role?**

“I went straight to RADA at 18, so I didn’t go to university. Although most of my contemporaries from school did. I have spent a lot of time at universities visiting friends but not been a student myself. So, I did remind myself of that world. But I like to do that anyway no matter what the script is. Part of the joy for me is digging into that world.

“I spoke to a student who had just graduated from Cambridge. I like to know the details of day to day life. Not just what you can read on a website. Also, things change quickly. What people do now socially is not necessarily what they did almost 20 years ago when my friends went to university.

“I like to make sure we’re inhabiting that world as it is now, making sure everything is authentic and truthful. If an audience believe the world, they can relax and enjoy the story.”

**Q: How would you describe Leah and Adam’s relationship?**

“There’s a tension in their marriage about a lot of things. They are in their own little world and seem right together on paper. Their relationship ticks all the boxes. But in practice, they aren’t happy. They are trying to conceive, which forces them into having conversations and look at the truth of the situation. That actually they are not that compatible. Tom and I found it painfully awkward to play at times. I know marriages like that aren’t unusual, but I don’t think many people enter into a marriage anticipating that it’s going to end up that way.”

**Q: You had worked with Tom Goodman-Hill (Adam) before?**

“Tom and I were both in Mr Selfridge but we only had a few scenes together. We sacked Ria Zmitrowicz’s character together in the fourth series. Fun on screen but devastating off screen as we wanted her to be in the show as much as possible. She’s a sensational actress. But Tom and I did seem to spend time together off screen because of the nature of the show - a lot of hanging around in a muddy car park in Neasden. It was a joy to act opposite him in Cheat. Tom is a clever man and a very talented actor. He’s got great taste and has impeccable comic timing. In the wrong hands that character could be very unlikeable, perhaps dull. But in Tom’s hands, you want to see Adam on screen as much as possible.”

**Q: And working with Molly Windsor (Rose)?**

“Molly is magnificent. As you would expect of someone who has won the BAFTA for Leading Actress at such a young age. Just as important to me is the fact she is a fantastic human being as well. I really like her integrity and work ethic. She enjoys the art and wants everything to be the best, most interesting and authentic it can be. She is truly collaborative. I loved working with Molly and we’ve remained very good friends.”

**Q: What are your thoughts about the wider themes of Cheat?**

“You can’t point to a time in history when there weren’t liars and cheats. They just come in many different guises. Some are more transparent than others. I do believe that good eventually wins in the end. It’s often glacial. But I do believe that.”

**Q: What was it like to have Lorraine Ashbourne and Peter Firth as your screen mum and dad, Angela and Michael?**

“I met Lorraine on one of my first jobs out of drama school. We were in Othello together in 2002 at the Royal Exchange in Manchester. And her husband Andy Serkis was in the cast too. They had just got married. I admire Lorraine very much, she has been a mentor, really, for me for 20 years.

“We talked so much that Peter Firth said at one point, ‘Do you two ever come up for air?’.

“And I had just worked with Peter Firth in Strike Back in Budapest. We were baddies together! He tried to kill me!”

**Q: Leah plays tennis. Did you need any lessons?**

“Tennis is my favourite sport to watch. My mother was always obsessed with Wimbledon. I played at school and actually had to refresh my tennis playing in February 2018 for a film I did with Keira Knightley called Official Secrets. I had to play tennis with Matthew Goode in that. So that training worked for two jobs instead of just one.”

**Q: Leah also rides a bike to and from college. Are you a cyclist off screen?**

“I’m an 80s’ kid. I spent most of the time on a BMX. I’ve got two brothers very close in age and we lived out in the country. Most of my young childhood was spent Steven Spielberg ET style with our coats strapped round our necks like capes bombing up and down the road on BMXs. So, riding a bike for this was a joy.”

**Q: Leah is hoping to secure a permanent college post. Which is the opposite of the life most actors have going from job to job. Did you ever consider an alternative career to acting?**

“I never had a back-up plan instead of acting. I’m one of four kids from a family of freelancers. None of us have a boss. We all work for ourselves. So, I think there is a rebel running through the Kelly genes.

“For all the reasons people don’t enjoy being freelance and not knowing where the next job is coming from, I actually like that. I enjoy that freedom. I dread dull certainty.”

**Q: What sort of student were you at school?**

“My report always said, ‘If Katherine didn’t talk so much...’ I was a chatterbox.

“But I just loved the craic at school. I’m still very firm friends with half a dozen people I went to school with. I suspect I just dropped on a good bunch of people at that time. I thought school was one big social event. Which I suspect did annoy the teachers. I know that sadly, this isn’t usually the case. Many people have traumatic time at high school and I completely understand how that can easily happen. I just got lucky. I think it’s the luck of the draw and that’s down to the teachers and staff as much as the students themselves. So, yes, I’m very aware that I completely lucked out at school.”

**Q: Did you ever cheat at school?**

“I can’t remember a specific example but I’m sure I did. I’m not one to miss an opportunity. Back in the 90s when I was at high school they were starting to move away from exam-based results and moving into course work. I suspect course work was quite easy to collaborate on. But I don’t think I ever cheated in an actual exam. I didn’t quite have the nerve for that. But I’m sure my course work won’t have been completely my own work. I’d be very surprised if it was.”

## **MOLLY WINDSOR IS ROSE VAUGHAN**

### **Q: Why did you want to play Rose?**

“I was working on an independent feature film called Make Up in Cornwall at the time. We were doing night shifts, it was really late and we were all exhausted. Then the Cheat script came through for an audition. I was at the point where I thought, ‘I’m really tired. I don’t think I can handle doing any audition tapes or anything like that.’

“So, I read it late at night after a night shoot. Knowing I had to get an audition tape in the next day if I wanted to do it. And then I ended up staying up and reading all of the scripts they sent. Gaby Hull’s writing hooked me in right from the start. It was so intelligent and also about what is not said. There was so much room to play in. There were so many possibilities.

“I went from thinking it was a bit of a chore to, ‘I really want to do the self-tape. I don’t care if I’m exhausted tomorrow. I need to stay up and learn all of the lines.’ Your first gut reaction is the one to trust. And, for me, straight away it was an exciting project.”

### **Q: Who is Rose?**

“Rose is a student and a very intelligent young woman. She is a bit of an outsider at university and observes everything going on around her. She’s certainly feisty. Both Rose and her lecturer Leah (Katherine Kelly) underestimate each other.

“Rose thinks she knows who Leah is and believes she can play with her a bit. There’s this power struggle going on between them. But actually they are quite similar. It’s a complex relationship which changes throughout the series. Rose is quite intense.”

### **Q: Cheat appears to chime with our times. Do you agree?**

“If you wanted to you could apply a theme of Cheat to politics today. You see characters who feel the need to prove themselves. Who need to fight for power and control while suppressing other issues. Cheat is like all good drama. It is layered with many other things.”

### **Q: Did you feel the need to do any of your own research?**

“I have a couple of friends who have been to university. So, I chatted to them more generally about academic pressure. Because I think that’s huge. There are lots of little things you pick up on in day to day life.”

### **Q: What was it like working with Katherine Kelly (Leah)?**

“For the first two or three weeks of filming we actually didn’t have one scene together. Filming all out of order as usual. Then our first scene was pretty intense.

“It was really nice to act with Katherine because she is such a giving, talented actor that helped me so much. She is so professional in what she does. I think we worked well together.”

**Q: And with the director Louise Hooper?**

“Louise is brilliant. We became really good friends. That always helps when you work with a director you can trust. Then you take risks and you have a good time. That makes the work better. Louise is very intuitive in what she does.”

**Q: Did you ever cheat at school?**

“I never cheated. I was pretty much well behaved. Most of the time. I wasn’t academic at all. I was pretty average. So, jumping into making Cheat is quite a different world for me. I was able to see what that academic world was like for a while.”

**Q: There is a scene involving Rose on a rooftop. How was that to film?**

“That was fun to film. For me things like that are always really exciting. To get a crew on the roof. Obviously, it was all very safe. We were briefed beforehand. But there was an added layer of excitement and danger to the scene which I love and really get a buzz out of.

“We had a lot of fun filming but it can be a mad job when you stop to think about it. I was harnessed for one part of it. Hopefully it looks a lot scarier than it actually was to film.”

**Q: Rose works as a waitress at a college function. Did that bring back memories?**

“I waitressed for years. I worked as a waitress in the small village where I lived in Derbyshire. So, doing silver service in a scene set at a very prestigious university is very different. The location gave it a different edge. But I know what it’s like to dress up and play the role of a waitress.”

**Q: There’s an element to Cheat of living with secrets and lies. Can you understand how people do that?**

“When you’re acting you are playing the biggest game of ‘what if’? It’s incredible when you actually look at how many people are living with secrets. How many people have affairs. How many hide things from their past. It is quite astonishing when you look at what people do.

“Playing Rose I knew where the story was going and where we had to get to. In my head, I justified everything to make it real. And, hopefully, that communicates that this is a believable story. I think this kind of stories are exciting to watch or to read. They are the secrets of everyday life.”



**Q: Rose turns up late to lectures. How's your timekeeping?**

"I think everyone turns up late at some point. It's one thing to do that in your personal life. But if I'm doing something professional and on a job, I give myself way too much time because I know what I'm like. It's a trait that runs in the family.

"In a way, Rose thinks she is above the lectures. She doesn't really want to go to learn and is so relaxed in how intelligent she is that she feels she doesn't need to put in the effort. Rose being late to a lecture gets her noticed in terms of her lecturer Leah."

**Q: What are your memories of being awarded the Leading Actress BAFTA in May 2018 for your role in Three Girls?**

"BAFTA was incredible. Surreal. When we made Three Girls we just wanted to do it right. Everyone involved wanted to tell the story how they (the real girls) wanted it to be told. Then you go through a long period when it's being edited and before it comes out. As an actor, you are suddenly removed from it all and are not allowed to talk about it. Then suddenly it comes out and you have the nerves, thinking, 'Are people going to see it the same way that we did? Have we done it right?' Then to know that we had.

"I was still filming Make Up in Cornwall. It was another night shoot. And then at 5am I had to fly from Cornwall to London to make it there in time for the BAFTAs. All of a sudden to then see everyone from Three Girls was amazing.

"When Three Girls won the Mini Series BAFTA that was very emotional. Just the amount of support you felt in the room. For something that was from real life that you really care about. That gives you hope."

**Q: You've recently been on stage in Ibsen's The Lady From The Sea. Your stage debut?**

"The first job I've done as a professional actor on the stage. It's really exciting. A production with the Norwegian Ibsen Company. And very exciting to be an Ibsen play. With such a great company. So that's TV, film and stage jobs all coming together at the same time."

**Q: How do you reflect on your career to date?**

"I'm very fortunate. I've got lots of wonderful people around me that I've had a lot of guidance from. I've got a very good relationship with work and how I view it. Quite a healthy relationship. I'm very lucky because I've had the best foundations. We'll see what happens. But at the moment I'm in a really good place."

## **TOM GOODMAN-HILL IS ADAM DALE**

### **Q: What appealed to you about Cheat?**

“I liked the subtlety of the script. How it gently unfolds. It definitely doesn’t go in the direction you are expecting it to go. You imagine you are about to read a story about plagiarism and student-teacher trust. And it ends up being a dark and dangerous story about the breakdown of a relationship. The breaches of trust between two people who don’t really know each other as well as they thought.

“Cheat really keeps the audience guessing. The writer Gaby Hull has done a great job. You’re not just wondering what’s happening from one episode to the next. You’re wondering what’s happening from one scene to the next. You never know quite what the next move is going to be and who is going to do what.

“He manages to do that while keeping hold of all of the characters’ integrity. They are all behaving the way it feels like they might behave. But some of the choices they make are maybe the second choice they would make rather than the first. They are each making slightly bad judgement calls. There are some shocking and intriguing twists. You are fascinated to know more.”

### **Q: Who is Adam Dale?**

“Adam is a university lecturer in comparative literature. Although he is quite fusty on the outside he is driven by a modern approach to literature. He likes to think he connects well with his students. And that makes him feel younger than he is. Adam is the kind of man who believes he’s got a lot to offer both as a husband and a teacher. Also, when we meet them Adam and Leah (Katherine Kelly) are trying to have a child.”

### **Q: How does Adam view Rose?**

“One core of the story is how Adam responds to Rose. Not just in his own first reaction. But in what he then tells Leah about her. It’s those little increments that make it so interesting. Adam is lying to himself. He knows he is attracted to her. That there is something about her he can’t quite put his finger on. He knows there is something more interesting about her. Something magnetic about her. Something a bit dangerous. Against his better judgement he is attracted to that in one way or another.”

### **Q: You were a primary school teacher before going into acting. Is there an element of performance in being a teacher or university lecturer?**

“There’s no question. It wasn’t a very big leap between standing in front of a class and standing in front of an audience. They are two very similar things. Teaching, law and acting all seem to be pretty bound up together.”

**Q: The wider themes of Cheat appear to be very topical in today's world. Do you agree?**

"I think that's exactly what Gaby intended writing. I think of the reply the press got from David Cameron when they stopped him in the street in his jogging gear on the day the government's Brexit deal was voted down. He said he didn't regret calling the referendum but regretted losing it and the difficulties and problems since. And then went running off.

"It feels that his attitude to the politics he's unleashed on this country and the world is the same attitude he would have as a student. That he hasn't grown out of it. His march to becoming prime minister was so institutionalised that he never really thought about the wider repercussions of what he did would be in the real world.

"That's what Gaby is trying to get to the nub of. That you can be in this very cosseted, controlled, institutionalised environment and if you make decisions from any kind of intellectual standpoint and you don't think about the emotional or human standpoint or the wider effects, then you're in a very dangerous position. Because you're allowing yourself to make decisions without thinking of the repercussions.

"That is what Cheat is getting to the heart of. Every tiny decision you make, every little incremental half untruth you tell has a wider implication. And you have to be responsible for that.

"Leah stands up to Rose and people need to do that. People need to stand up for what they believe in. For what they consider to be true."

**Q: What was it like working with Katherine Kelly and Molly Windsor?**

"I knew Katherine from Mr Selfridge when she was Lady Mae and I was Mr Grove. We barely ever had scenes together. It was only in series four that we finally got to work alongside each other, which I thoroughly enjoyed. We said to each other as we finished Mr Selfridge, 'I hope we get to work together again.' So, it was great to get that opportunity. It's been brilliant.

"Molly Windsor, who plays Rose, has one of the most unnerving stares. She can hold you with her gaze and not flinch.

"One of the joys of Cheat is Katherine, Molly and I all have slightly different styles. We all work slightly differently. The fun has been respecting each other's individual approach to what we do and helping it to fit in with your own way of working. That's one of the reasons it works so well. The three characters are so different and our styles are so different. But somehow it works. The mutual respect the three of us had for each other was really enjoyable and a lot of fun to play with."

**Q: And working with director Louise Hooper?**

“Louise is just brilliant. She knew what she wanted right from the start. It’s also a complete joy having one director do the whole drama. I’m an enormous fan of that. It means everyone is on the same page from the beginning to the end. We always knew where we were at. The story arc is mapped very carefully. Each move was made carefully and portrayed as realistically as possible. So, you always believe what you are watching.

“Gaby, to his enormous credit, was always very happy for us to play with the script and to alter the cadences of the language, a word or piece of behaviour here or there. He was always very keen to say, ‘Whatever makes it work. Whatever makes sense on screen. Do it.’ So, between us all it was a dream to put together.”

**Q: Do TV dramas have to work ever harder to keep today’s audiences on their toes?**

“Audiences are so sophisticated today. When I look back at TV dramas I grew up with in the 1980s there are only about two that still stand up. *Edge of Darkness* and *The Singing Detective* are the only two I can think of that are still as good now as they were then.

“Even great stuff that I still love and still watch, I go, ‘Wow, it’s really dated.’ Or it’s really slow. Or that doesn’t make sense. There’s a huge plot hole there. You spot things that now you would just never forgive.

“The flip side of that is that in those days when you watched dramas like that, your brain filled in a lot of the holes. In a way that now, I fear, the brain that watches TV would be incapable of filling in those holes. So, there’s a point where you ask, ‘Are we being spoon-fed too much? Should we be being made to work a bit harder?’ I hope that’s not true.

“The standard of drama we are making now is sky high and the competition is so fierce. But I think that’s good. As long as there are still people out there who want to make it and want to watch. Audiences want to be treated with some intelligence and don’t want to be told everything right from the off.”

**Q: Did you ever cheat at school?**

“I didn’t cheat. But I did get into terrible trouble when I was about eight. I told my headmaster I had to leave a swimming gala early because I was going to a cocktail party with the neighbours over the road to celebrate a birthday. And he went, ‘Oh really. Are you?’

“The next day I went back into school and as I arrived the headmaster literally grabbed me by the ear and marched me up to his office. He said, ‘I was speaking to your brother yesterday.’ My brother was already a prefect in senior school.

“My headmaster went on, ‘I asked him if you had enjoyed the cocktail party?’ And my brother had told him he didn’t have any clue what he was talking about. I got into so much trouble for lying. Detention for a week. So, I learned at a very young age that it’s probably best not to do that.”

## **GABY HULL - WRITER**

### **Q: How did Cheat originate?**

“On a personal level I have friends and family who are academics. One of them told me about this incident when they were sure this person was cheating. But they couldn’t do anything about it because these ghost-writing services are so sophisticated. There’s no definite way of proving they cheated. It just struck me as a very interesting way into a story.

“You can’t turn on the news today without hearing about somebody cheating. Including institutions cheating the system. An indictment of the pressurised world we are living in. And how achievements are measured in these strict objective ways. Which leads us on to cheating.

“There is also something interesting about the way universities tend to be run. Because students are now paying all this money for courses, they are now paying customers. So, they have this power where universities are desperate to retain their students.”

### **Q: Who are Leah and Rose?**

“We have two characters in Leah (Katherine Kelly) and Rose (Molly Windsor). University lecturer Leah has this steadfast belief in integrity which maybe is at odds with this increasingly competitive world where cheaters do seem to prosper. And then you pit that against a student like Rose who has this kind of power because the universities don’t want to lose paying customers.

“That all struck me as an interesting dynamic to start a story from. It seems now that cheating has become accepted. That Leah is the anomaly. The one who is naive for hoping for something better than that. She encapsulates that frustration many of us feel now with the state of the world which is becoming increasingly based on the ends justifying the means. Doing whatever you can to get ahead.

“A lot of what is going on in the world at the moment is motivated by the egos of individuals as opposed to the common good. Much of it comes down to personal ambition which is frustrating when you consider the impact it is having on all of us.

“Leah is a throwback to a more innocent age. Her ethics draw her into this darker story. The much more sensible course of action for Leah to take would be to drop the issue of Rose’s potential cheating.

“But for Leah it’s a moment for her where she decides enough is enough. She is going to put her flag in the ground and believes someone has to stand up to this. Almost as if she is the last person who cares. It becomes very important to her. A desire for integrity. Along with the personal antagonism that makes everything feel much more important.

“As for Rose, it’s a difficult role to get right. But Molly Windsor plays it beautifully. She has a lovely vulnerability married to this quiet menace which sums up her character and works very well. I couldn’t have asked for a better cast.”

**Q: What did you want the audience to feel?**

“It’s a psychological thriller so we wanted it to be an exciting story with suspense. To deliver on those genre expectations and keep the audience guessing right to the end.

“But we also wanted it to be a relationship drama which explores themes of family and love. And the way in which our closest relationships both form and de-form our characters and personalities and who we are.”

**Q: Timeshifts are used right from the outset of Cheat. What was the thinking behind that?**

“TV drama audiences are so sophisticated today and they have so much choice. So, you have to come up with a hook that is going to keep people intrigued and interested from the start. With timeshifts you can release information in a way that feels exciting and keeps people guessing. It’s an interesting way to tell a story when you know what’s coming but you don’t know how or why or where.

“Hopefully once you have attracted people’s attention you allow yourself to build in more character and theme. It’s an exciting challenge. Jack and Harry Williams from Two Brothers Pictures are the best people to help with that. They know exactly how that process works. So, it was great working with them.”

**Q: What is it like seeing Katherine Kelly (Leah) and Molly Windsor (Rose) bring your characters to life on screen?**

“They were both brilliant. With a story like this you have to get a certain heightened tone quite quickly and try and maintain that tone. I thought Katherine and Molly were fantastic. Allowing it to feel both grounded and heightened. Walking that tightrope between melodrama and really bringing something interesting to the roles. Making the characters feel very real in this thriller.”

**Q: What’s your own background?**

“I started as a runner at Tiger Aspect. Then I script edited Benidorm and then did some co-writing with Derren Litten on it. That was how I came up through the ranks. Then I switched over into drama.

“Cheat is my first big TV drama. There couldn’t be a better time to be a writer. There are lots of opportunities for TV drama and the sophistication of screen drama is always improving.”

**Q: Did you ever cheat when you were a student?**

“I never cheated. I was certainly more Leah than Rose. I stuck to the rules.”

## **LOUISE HOOPER - DIRECTOR**

**Q: What were your initial thoughts when you first read Gaby Hull's scripts?**

"Since I was a child I have been addicted to thrillers. There is nothing more intoxicating than being immersed in a world full of danger and intrigue, witnessing the twists and turns of events to guess who committed the fatal crime and why. Ultimately thrillers expose the dark underbelly of how we tick. Cheat does this brilliantly.

"As a director I want to stimulate all of your senses, pull you into the story, make your heart beat faster and your skin to shiver. I want to give you the thrill of your life! As soon as I read Cheat, I knew it was the perfect series for me to do this.

"When I read Gaby's script I was immediately hooked. You know it's good when you forget the time of day and you're lost in the story. I was drawn to the two intelligent, feisty, strong, intriguing female leads. The fact that nothing is what it seems, and I found the setting of rarefied academia unusual and alluring.

"Cheat feels new, relevant and smart. I liked the way Gaby's script subverts often-seen thriller tropes. For example we don't start with a dead body, a police chase, or a dark world full of menace. It isn't Nordic / London noir, instead we are drawn into a blistering hot lazy English summer, with bicycles, students and sexual fantasies."

**Q: In general terms, what story does Cheat tell and how would you describe its themes?**

"Cheat deals with trust, betrayal, deceit, lies and fear. It exposes our deep-seated emotions -all those primal feelings that get you at the back of your brain, in your heart and in your stomach. Cheat is about all the slippery, tricky, tangled emotions we all feel. It pushes us to think about truth, duplicity, obsession, fear, commitment, rivalry, fidelity, ambitious, desires... What is it to fail, what is it to succeed? And at what cost.

"Cheat tells the story of two women; Rose an undergraduate student and Leah, her sociology lecturer. They are very different in their approach and outlook in life, but they are both smart, strong and stubborn, they both want to prove themselves to the world, yet they both have a sense of vulnerability and dissatisfaction with their lives.

"Gaby is brilliant at creating fully fleshed out characters, not stereotypical cardboard cut outs: Leah is feisty, intelligent, fiercely capable, strong, sure of herself, but she is also fragile, vulnerable and insecure. Rose is young but very self-confident, self-aware and self-reliant, yet this assuredness belies a fragile and insecure interior."



**Q: How does Cheat explore relationships and emotions?**

“Cheat exposes and unpicks Leah and Rose’s public mask to reveal what lies beneath. And it is this murky underbelly of who they really are that affects their behaviour... to devastating effect. Cheat is not a case of Cat and Mouse, but Cat and Cat.. two equals pitted against each other - both with a huge amount to prove and to defend. It is the story of what happens when no one is prepared to back down...

**Q: What approach did you want to take to realise this story? And what did you want the audience to feel?**

“I wanted to make Cheat as visually stylish and arresting as possible. Cinematic in terms of beautiful lighting and composition of shots, courtesy of wonderful DoP Ed Rutherford, but to have a bullet proof reality at its core. For me that is how tension can really ratchet up. To give the audience an unnerving mix of the very familiar, every day world, existing within a heightened reality.

“Our aim throughout was to create a real, authentic world but for that reality to be slightly intensified and stylised, to give a sense of unease. I wanted to create a feeling that there are forces at play which the characters can’t fully control. A sense of fate and impending threat...

“The amazing designer, Claire Kenny, ensured that all the locations felt real, lived in, personal. Our aim was to stimulate all the senses of the audience, to pull them into the lives of the characters, so much so that they can imagine what each room feels and even smells like. We discussed everything from the colour palette for each character, through to all the little details of what books they have on their shelves, to the pictures on the wall - all the lived in clutter that gives clues to their personalities.

“We used colours and motifs in each episode to mark the shifts in power and unease between Rose and Leah - for example Rose’s scruffy old red converse trainers and the yellow rose she picks to put on Leah’s desk. Somehow these normally innocent objects are loaded with a sinister menace.

“Cheat starts with Leah, played by Katherine Kelly, cycling to work. It is a glorious location; the lofty university spires and punts dreamily floating on the river. This world, throughout the four episodes, becomes steadily more claustrophobic and malign. We hopefully achieved this through the shots, locations, design and costume and make-up. An epic team effort from the truly brilliant crew and cast.”

**Q: Your thoughts about the way the drama is structured in terms of time shifts?**

“I love how Gaby bookends the start and end of episode one with Leah and Rose sitting opposite each other in a prison visiting room. This catapults right into the future, the weight of guilt and a crime hangs above them both - but which one is guilty, and who has been killed?”

**Q: What sort of look did you and Director of Photography Ed Rutherford want to achieve for Cheat and the main characters?**

“Ed Rutherford and I hugely admire the thrillers of Hitchcock and Polanski, so they were a point of inspiration for us. We used a mixture of steadicam, hand held, track, dolly and cranes to make the shots naturalistic, yet simultaneously composed and controlled. The use of top shots, odd framing, negative space and slow motion created an odd perspective to a recognisable world. We always kept the camera on the move to evoke a sense of sinister threat; in a way, the camera became a creeping witness to the events and how they are played out.

“We wanted this to be a sun drenched, hot, hazy summer thriller, not a cold, monochromatic urban noir. Ed’s lighting is stunning; he magically creates that odd afternoon sunlight that hits a wall but leaves the rest of a room in cool shadow. His lighting creates wonderful mood and atmosphere. We wanted to create suspense by filming a familiar reality that the audience can relate to, combined with a heightened sense of the world in terms of the shots we used and how we treated these in the grade.

“We wanted to pit Leah and Rose against each other, like two boxers in a ring, so we always gave them equal prominence in a shot. We used reflections, windows and mirror shots to echo their effect upon each other.”

**Q: How would you describe Leah and Rose and their relationship as viewers see and understand it in the first episode?**

“We know from the outset of episode one that a fatal crime has been committed but we do not know if it is Rose or Leah who is guilty. This, I hope, makes episode one engaging and compelling as you try to figure out each of their true intentions and character. Leah, as the lecturer, appears to hold the power, but we also sense cracks in her relationship and her life. Rose has a ballsy attitude and seems like she may be the perpetrator, but her vulnerability also makes us doubt that.”

**Q: What do Katherine Kelly and Molly Windsor bring to the roles of Leah and Rose?**

“The cast for Cheat is spectacular. I am really proud and privileged to have worked with such a talented, and downright lovely cast! Katherine Kelly, Molly Windsor, Tom Goodman-Hill, Lorraine Ashbourne, Ade Edmondson, Peter Firth, Burn Gorman, Jimmy Akingbola, Lara Rossi amongst others.

“Katherine Kelly is an extraordinary actress, so multifaceted, we can see so much going on in Leah’s life in every line and gesture. Katherine is so clever at showing Leah’s strength and pride whilst simultaneously giving clues to the vulnerability and self-doubt that simmers below.

“Molly Windsor is extremely talented and, like Kate, is an utter joy to work with. Katherine, Molly and I really loved working together, discussing the characters, their personalities and behaviour, their virtues and vices, and working out what their tipping points are.

“Molly has an astonishing hypnotic stillness, a self-confidence and attitude that brings a delicious sense of threat to Rose.”

**Q: As filming technology evolves I guess you have to keep a balance between using new tools and the basics of film making that have always worked in the past?**

“We wanted to use very graphic, symmetrical drone shots high above Leah and Rose’s university college. We then lowered them down into the quads / courts below, stealth like, slowly. We wanted this to feel like a pressure cooker, pushing down on the characters, making the world close in on them, to make the atmosphere stifling and claustrophobic.”

**Q: Cheat appears relevant to what is going on in the world today. Where people brazenly cheat and appear proud of it. What are your thoughts about the drama’s wider context?**

“Leah stands up for what she believes in. Even if it brings trouble to her door. She says: *‘What is the point in anything if we all just cheat our way to the top? It doesn’t help anyone. Every time I turn on the news that’s all I see these days. Bloody liars and cheats everywhere...running the country, the economy - and I’m sick of it.’* Cheat is also a study in power dynamics, how we influence and exert power.

“In episode one Leah teaches her sociology class and says: *‘How we behave, whether we are good or bad, trusting or deceitful, is influenced by our relationship to power. Power manifests itself in various ways - the way we respond to authority, to hierarchy, to financial incentives, and, more dangerously, to the use of force or threat. This of course is called coercion.’*”

**Q: What were some of the most memorable scenes for you from a directing / filming point of view?**

“We filmed for nine weeks over the hot summer of 2018, but it wasn’t until about week seven that Molly and Katherine had any scenes together - that was exciting to shoot. Over the weeks prior to this we filmed all their scenes alone or with the other characters and they both knew their roles inside out. Suddenly they were pitched against each other. We talked a lot about where we took their performance, and in each scene discussed who held more power, or how it shifted. They are both such incredible actresses, it was electric to see them work together.”

**Q: There is a scene involving characters on a rooftop? How was that to shoot?**

“There is a scary scene filmed on top of the college roof at night in episode three. I love this kind of scene as it was a challenge. We had to film on the real college roof, high above the city skyline, we then filmed another roof top another night and comped the scenes together with a little added visual effects. The second roof was just as high and we had to use a crane to get the dolly on the roof - as ever, an epic effort from the crew to pull off a spectacular scene. In addition, the actors involved, really did lean out over the parapet, so although they were safe at all times, it did feel real and full of electric danger!”

**Q: What sort of student were you at school and college - and did you ever cheat at anything?**

“I loved school and uni, I have to admit to being a bit of a swot but had way too much fun too.”

## **PRODUCTION CREDITS:**

Written by Gaby Hull

Directed by Louise Hooper

Produced by Lydia Hampson

Executive Producers: Christopher Aird, Harry Williams, Jack Williams

Production Co: Two Brothers Pictures, all3media company

## **CAST & CREATIVES BIOGRAPHIES:**

### **KATHERINE KELLY**

Katherine Kelly is an award-winning English actress whose diverse career has included poignant portrayals across both drama and comedy in film, television and theatre. She trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and has played leading roles at the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Donmar Warehouse. She played the role of Becky McDonald on ITV's CORONATION STREET, gaining widespread critical acclaim and winning numerous awards including a National Television Award for Most Popular Serial Drama Performance.

Her other television credits include the role of Lady Mae Loxley on ITV's popular period drama MR SELFRIDGE as well as featured roles in HAPPY VALLEY, THE NIGHT MANAGER and STRIKE BACK. Most recently she shot leading roles in the dramas GENTLEMAN JACK, CRIMINAL and CHEAT which will air later this year as well as the hotly anticipated feature film OFFICIAL SECRETS, in which she will play Jacqueline Jones.

### **MOLLY WINDSOR**

Molly Windsor is an English actress and one of our most promising rising stars. She was discovered by Samantha Morton and cast in a Channel 4 film called THE UNLOVED, directed by Morton, which shone a light on the care system for orphans and children in danger. Molly won the Best Actress award at the BAFTA TV Awards for her magnetic role in the compelling drama THREE GIRLS, based on the true story of three young girls who were groomed, sexually abused and trafficked by British Pakistani men in Rochdale the failings of the authorities to do anything about it. Windsor was also named a BAFTA 'Breakthrough Brit' in association with Burberry, following her performance in the three part series. She was one of 20 members from the film, television, and gaming industries to be recognised as a star of tomorrow.

Other notable roles include 'Rachel' in ORANGES AND SUNSHINE starring Emily Watson and Hugo Weaving, directed by Jim Loach and THE PRIEST, a film project collaboration between music icon Johnny Marr and Maxine Peake. Molly is currently making her professional stage debut in Ibsen's THE LADY FROM THE SEA at the Print Room at the Coronet until 9th March.

Then she will take the lead in *MAKE UP*, an independent feature opposite Stefanie Martini and produced by the people behind the multi award-winning films *I AM NOT A WITCH* and *GOZO*. Set on a remote caravan park in Cornwall, it follows 19-year-old Ruth (Windsor) who is forced to question her sexuality when she is stalked by another woman.

### **TOM GOODMAN-HILL**

Tom Goodman-Hill trained at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School prior to which he studied Drama and English at the University of Warwick. He has worked extensively in Television, Film and Theatre.

Tom is most recognised as series regulars Joe, in Channel 4's BAFTA-nominated *Humans* and Mr Grove in ITV's *Mr Selfridge*. He has also appeared in *The Secret Agent*, *The Nightmare Worlds of H.G Wells*, *Cardinal Burns II*, *Call the Midwife*, *Black Mirror*, *Ideal*, *Case Histories*, *Moses Jones*, *The Devil's Whore*, *Doctor Who* and *Spooks* among many others.

Film credits include *Where Hands Touch*, *Everest*, *The Truth Commissioner*, *The Imitation Game* with Benedict Cumberbatch and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* with Sean Connery. Tom recently wrapped a co-lead role in *The Visitor* opposite Aisling Loftus due for release in 2019.

Theatre credits include *Limehouse* (Donmar Warehouse), *Rabbit Hole* (Hampstead Theatre), *The Effect* (National Theatre), *Death and the Maiden* with Thandie Newton (Harold Pinter Theatre) and *Enron* (Chichester, Royal Court and West End). Tom received an Olivier Award nomination for Best Performance in a Supporting Role in a Musical for his performance in *Spamalot* as Sir Lancelot.

### **GABY HULL (Writer)**

Gaby began writing as a hobby while studying English Literature at University. After doing a masters in TV and film production he got a job as a runner in the comedy department at Tiger Aspect. He went on to script edit and then co-write on *BENIDORM* for ITV before switching to drama several years ago. *CHEAT* will be his first major series.

### **LOUISE HOOPER (Director)**

Louise is an experienced drama director making films for BBC, C4, ITV and Sky. Bafta nominated, Louise began her career at the BBC directing Arts documentaries, travelling the world and working with her heroes, including Arthur Miller, David Lynch, David Attenborough and Björk. She then turned her talent to drama directing and has worked with Brenda Blethyn on *VERA*, Jimmy Nesbitt on *COLD FEET* and was the first woman to direct on *STAN LEE'S LUCKY MAN*. She has worked with Tilda Swinton, Sigourney Weaver, Gwyneth Paltrow, Christian Slater, Samuel Barnett, Joanna Lumley, Dennis Hopper, Jonathan Pryce, Alan Davies, James Fox, David Harewood, Kate Moss & Griff Rhys Jones.