



The Rachel papers

RACHEL MCADAMS, STAR OF NEW ROMANTIC WEEPIE *THE VOW*, IS A BEGUILING MIX OF OPEN CHARM AND STEELY DETERMINATION. JUST THE RIGHT QUALITIES TO TAKE YOU THE TOP IN THE FILM BUSINESS

BY TIFFANY ROSE

Rachel McAdams deserves an Oscar for making us cry in public. There was *The Time Traveller's Wife* in which her love for her husband (Eric Bana) was romantically challenged due to his incessant time-zone zapping; followed by *The Notebook*, opposite a then rising star, Ryan Gosling in which two people from different sides of the tracks were united in a touching full-blown "I can't live without you" love. This role catapulted the actress from relative obscurity to the dizzy heights of Hollywood, with her name suddenly on the lips of top agents.

If welling up is your cup of tea, then the 33-year-old actress's latest offering, *The Vow*, is guaranteed to set off the waterworks. In fact a mandatory box of tissues should be handed out when purchasing your cinema tickets.

Released to coincide with Valentine's Day, *The Vow* is based on a true story about a newlywed, Paige (McAdams) who loses her short-term memory after a car accident and struggles to rebuild her identity. Starring opposite the ridiculously handsome, Channing Tatum, (*Dear John*, *GI Joe*) she learns to fall in love with her husband all over again. Her perfect family is completed by Jessica Lange and Sam Neill who play her parents.

Looking every inch the movie star, McAdams totters in her 6in heels into the plush Beverly Hills hotel suite with an air of "I know the drill, let's get down to business." She's been to this journalist-celebrity rodeo countless times before and she's good at playing the game. Today her ever-changing hair colour is a golden blonde, highlighting her sparkling greenish-hazel eyes.

Smartly dressed and slightly on the thin side, like

most young Hollywood actresses, she's wearing a sparkly gold top by Italian designer, Etro (she insists I look down her back to check out the label) and tailored beige trousers.

We are perched on a couple of wooden chairs around a coffee table, and McAdams reaches across me to pour herself a glass of sparkling water. As she moves closer, I

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examine her features. They are delicate. The chocolate-box prettiness is evident, as are the creamy skin and defined bone structure. Despite wearing little make up; powder, blush, mascara and a slick of pink lipgloss, she is really naturally very pretty in the flesh. "I'm a bit of a crier too," she confesses with a smile that lights up the room. "I can be quite surprised by what makes me cry, but it's usually spiritual things."

She explains: "I was talking about this to a friend the other day... Did you see Darren Aronofsky's *The Fountain*? You know people were so divided by that film. I

remember the person sitting beside me was laughing and there I was bawling my eyes out. So I like those kinds of movies where it sneaks up on you and it's not necessarily what you thought would make you cry.

"But yeah, I cry quite easily especially on aeroplanes. I think it's because of the altitude, or maybe I'm crying because I'm terrified of flying?" Well, she should try flying in cattle class, she'd be bawling a lot harder.

The Canadian native is engaging, articulate and not at all precious. It's appealing how unaware she is that her celluloid charm transposes into her daily life. There are no airs or affectations, just plenty of humility which is always refreshing when talking to an A-lister. McAdams pursues her train of thought. "You know I never used to be a bad flyer, but I did start to have a fear of flying after I shot a movie where I was terrorized on a plane. I made Wes Craven's *Red Eye* (with Cillian Murphy). I don't think they're linked but it does make me pause and wonder if they are, so perhaps I will explore that in therapy some day." I think she's half joking.

McAdams is very selective when it comes to the roles she chooses to play, reasoning that she could be living with her character for up to four months, so she picks parts that truly resonate with her, such as Paige, in *The Vow*.

Not many movie stars abandon a top-notch career in favour of taking a sabbatical but then again, McAdams has never been one to follow the Hollywood herd. In 2005, after she had made a name for herself in *Mean Girls*, *Wedding Crashers* and *The Family Stone*, she took a year off to "regroup". "It felt like the right thing for me to do. If you want to tell stories as truthfully as possible, you need a normal, boring existence," she says, brows knitting. "I had been working on back to back movies without any breaks and I wanted my life back. So I had to trust that it would all work out." Clearly it has.

McAdams is a romantic at heart and was attracted to the incredible story of the real-life couple who inspired the film. She met Krickitt Carpenter, the 23-year-



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old woman on whose life the movie is loosely based. Though doctors initially doubted Carpenter would survive the car crash, she rallied, regaining consciousness. But the trauma to her brain caused retrograde amnesia, erasing virtually her entire memory of the previous 18 months - including any recollection of the man she had fallen in love with and married.

"The idea that this woman didn't know her husband after she came out of her coma and how they found their way back to each other was rather extraordinary,"

says McAdams, eyes wide. "She goes on this incredible emotional rollercoaster ride. In the beginning (of the film) we see this couple in love, and she is at her potter's wheel and all that is taken away in a flash."

She continues: "I also liked the idea that if you lose your memory then do you need your memories to be a complete person and to move forward?"

Despite the thought-provoking material, McAdams had comic relief on the Toronto set when she became the target of the practical jokes of her co-star, Channing Tatum. "What didn't he do?" she sighs with a smile. "There was something every day. I'd find these huge traffic cones in front of my trailer door so I couldn't get in to change and I'd have to find guys to move them for me."

Her eyes light up as she recalls another prank. "There's a scene after the accident where I'm learning how to live with my husband again and Channing walks out of the bathroom completely naked which is in the script. But to my horror, on this occasion he wore a really large prosthetic penis. So they filmed my initial reaction which made my job much easier because I didn't have to do much acting. But the scale of it was ridiculous."

Born in London, Ontario, to a non showbiz family - her mother, Sandra, is a nurse and her father, Lance, a retired truck driver - she's the eldest of three, with a younger brother and sister. McAdams claims she was never particularly academic and would often pull sickies to get out of school. She learned her strong work ethic from the age of four when she took up figure skating and continued to compete in the sport until the age of 18, winning regional competitions. In hindsight she says her figure skating disciplined her as an actress and "prepared me to be in tune with my body."

"Early on, it was skating for me, but not ultimately. My parents always said: "OK, you finish out this season and if you don't want to carry on, that's fine, but you have to finish what you started." So that was their only rule. When I told them I wanted to go to theatre school,

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I'm sure they were terrified, but they didn't show it and they were completely supportive."

She says of her move into acting: "I think I wanted some kind of outlet to express myself but I didn't know what that was. I found I was quite nervous in sports in a way that held me back, whereas I discovered that in acting the nerves propelled me forward. They got me on to the stage unlike figure skating where my knees would knock together and I thought I was going to be sick."

After appearing in amateur stage productions from the age of 12, her drama teacher told her a professional acting career was a viable option, so McAdams enrolled in a four-year theatre degree programme in 2001 while pursuing stage productions in her hometown of Toronto. She played a catty high schooler in her movie debut, *The Hot Chick* (2002), which led to her landing her breakout role of the bitchy queen bee, in the teen comedy hit, *Mean Girls* a few years later. It was that same year she began vaulting from one high-profile project to the next when the romantic drama, *The Notebook*, a film adaptation of the Nicholas Sparks novel, with Ryan Gosling became a sleeper smash. Life imitated art and the couple enjoyed a two-year romance.

Next McAdams proved her comedy chops playing Owen Wilson's love interest in the comedy, *Wedding Crashers* and in the same year, she shot the thriller *Red Eye*, which also did well at the international box office. Hailed as the new "Hollywood It Girl", McAdams was invited along with Scarlett Johansson and Keira Knightley to appear



Rachel McAdams with Channing Tatum in *The Vow*; above, McAdams with boyfriend Michael Sheen, inset; in *Mean Girls* (far right) opposite



on the cover of *Vanity Fair*. Upon arriving on set, she was asked to pose nude and she quickly left, firing her publicist for not informing her in advance.

Other roles include appearing in the lucrative *Sherlock Holmes* movies alongside Robert Downey Jr and Jude Law, and most recently, she teamed up with Owen Wilson again in Woody Allen's relationship comedy, *Midnight in Paris*, which is fast garnering Oscar buzz. "The experience will always have a great place in my heart," says McAdams fondly. No wonder as it was on this set that she was introduced to her current boyfriend, Welsh actor, Michael Sheen.

McAdams prefers to fly under the radar than live out her personal life under a microscope. But this only fans the flames of curiosity. She casually refers to Sheen, but doesn't reveal any details. When asked if it's refreshing to date a Brit, she smiles coyly: "I find British men very gentlemanly... like opening doors. There is a certain chivalry about British men which I like, and I'm a sucker for an accent."

The ever reluctant movie star, McAdams continues to live in Toronto, not far from her folks but far away from the celebrity circus in LA. It's a testament to her strong self belief. "I like living where we have socialised health care. I don't have to own a car. I can ride my bike around the city and I can potter about in my garden. The longer I'm there, the fewer reasons I have to leave," she shrugs.

A self-confessed romantic at heart, McAdams is still holding out for the fairy-tale ending. "I've seen a lot of couples who seem to have found that," she says. "I think a lot of people are with the one they're meant to be with. I see it watching my parents because they've been together for so long and are still very much in love. I'm just sort of in awe of that."

In *The Vow*, her character is wooed when her boyfriend spells out "move in?" with blueberries on her morning pancakes. So what lengths has a man gone to show his affection for her? Glancing around the room as if to gather her thoughts, she smiles: "A man once found out my measurements behind my back and had a dress made for me. We were walking past a shop window one night and I had stopped and gazed at this dress in the window. It was gorgeous." Hmm original, and did that gesture win her over? "It actually did," she giggles.

And with that McAdams pushes away her empty glass, politely thanks me for my time and sashays out of the room. A true movie star with an anti-diva attitude. Just how we like them.

The Vow opens in cinemas on 10 February. ■■■

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