

Budding starlet **Sophie Gorman** casts her net in search of a role in the film of Angela's Ashes and finds her dreams of fame turning to dust

Hi, diddley dee . . .

no actor's life for me

Wanted: Males/Females aged 25-80 with extremely characterful, comic, striking, arresting and noticeable faces. All shapes and sizes. Auditions for Alan Parker's Production of *Angela's Ashes* in Dublin's SFX Centre from 10am to 5pm.

Being in possession of a striking comic visage — an unconvincing compliment if ever I've heard one — I decided to join the queue.

In my one act of diligence, I set the alarm early enough to hear the dawn chorus, leaving enough time to perfect the impoverished 1950s Limerick look of Frank McCourt's well-documented childhood.

Eventually, having overcome such dilemmas as whether or not to wash my hair; maybe to rub some mud into the follicles; shoes? or barefoot?; I decided I was ready, though whether or not the casting crew were ready for me had yet to be seen. The task ahead loomed large: to act like an actor acting.

Once I arrived at the SFX Centre, I realised the truth behind my undercover mission lay a long stretch from my faith in my thespian skills. By ten o'clock in the morning — the official anti-social starting time — the hordes outside the hall for this open casting already resembled an unruly mob. I was going to have to play the waiting game.

In the middle of this higgledy-piggledy, predominantly male, mix there was a recognisable gaggle of pushy parents, dragging often unwilling children as young as two (even though the notice stipulated that children should be no younger than five), hoping their progeny may be the ideal 'Young Frank'.

In front of me in the queue was 12-year-old Tony, who'd come from Clontarf with his best mates Simon, Damo and "little Markie". Not a cossetting guardian in sight. With personalities overflowing, these were the real stars of the future.

Although three of them boasted that they hadn't made the slightest effort preparing for this possible launch into stardom, "little Markie" eventually admitted that the tracksuit he was wearing was quite new. The tracksuit paid off. While the rest of us were quickly shuffled away at the end of our try-outs, he was the one called back to see the director himself for a one-on-one audition.

Back in the queue, some tears were being shed. There was discon-



encouraging smile. When eventually it was my turn to receive the small purple square, I noticed with horror that it read '187'. Even though I had arrived comfortably before the official starting time, 186 people would have their chance to say their piece before I even got to touch the audition stage. A sense of fatality took hold in my gut.

When I finally got through the doors, there were six casting directors on stage. The panel included both Ros Hubbard and husband John, the most important casting agency in Ireland and England, who also sniffed out talent under the most impenetrable bushels for Alan Parker's previ-

heaven and my personal hell: the casting stage.

Distraction came when we were all handed a section of script to practice. Suddenly, there was feverish activity all around. Parents diligently coaching their offspring, older hopefuls silently mouthing their lines — even my Clontarf musketeers ran through their lines a couple of times, although frequently their rehearsals ended in guffaws of laughter at Damo's dodgy Limerick accent.

Just when I thought my fleeting moment in the spotlight was nothing more than a distant dream, a hand disturbed me from my concentrated endeavours and a voice asked was I going for one of the adult roles.

Yes! I gleefully bade farewell to my young colleagues after over three hours of close companionship, and was led up to one of the two casting scouts responsible for the more senior roles, thanking my lucky stars that there was less competition for the adult roles.

Still clasping my script, it wasn't until I was sitting opposite my ticket to fame that I realised, in my determination to appear nonchalant, I hadn't even read the first line.

As I tried to casually study it while simultaneously answering basic questions (name, age, hopes and the like), I made my fatal mistake. When asked what passed for my career when I wasn't in front of the cameras, I replied that I was fond of a bit of writing.

With a distinct narrowing of my by-now tormentor's eyes, she paused for the merest of seconds before



Acting up: Sophie Gorman, above, joined the auditions for the film of *Angela's Ashes*, but failed to make the cut as author Frank McCourt's filmic mother

same Sophie Gorman who wrote for this newspaper.

In a true case of Sod's Law, the question came at the one time when the consequences could prove disastrous. My cover blown far away, I said I occasionally submitted articles, but really, my heart lay in a starring role on the big screen.

Refusing to be convinced, she continued with what had now truly become an audition ordeal.

After "performing" the short scene several times, my acting aspirations now lying in shreds around my ankles, I had even failed in my initial aim . . . to act like an actor.

Looking bemused and ever so slightly contemptuous

seemed like an eternity before she asked me to repeat the embarrassment one more time — *in front of a camcorder!* Barely able to say my name properly at this stage, let alone the few words in the text, I mumbled and spluttered my way through in my role as Frank's mother.

Surrounded by a wave of potential talent, this fishy candidate was about to sink without a trace.

Slinking back across the stage as fast as I could to escape this humiliating experience, my tormentor's final, vaguely humorous, line echoed around my head: "You don't need to contact us; we'll be in touch if we need you for a call back."

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tent among this early-morning gathering as the numbers multiplied. But with one swift move, casting director Ros Hubbard and her team of professionals transformed bedlam into order, and good humour was restored.

Arriving into the now orderly (though terrifyingly long) queue, you were handed a number and given an

ous Irish project, *The Commitments*.

Refreshments were noticeable only by their absence . . . a serious complication for someone who'd long been feeling the effects of caffeine deprivation. Even the seemingly unstoppable high spirits of my four compadres started to lag after the first hour had passed and we were