



“This is all very personal.” She pauses. “But let’s go. I’ve recently become a grandmother and understand the order of things; everything has fallen into place. It’s an extraordinary experience, looking down on this tiny little baby which is looking up at you and there are two things on its face: love and trust.”

Her green eyes crinkle at the corners. “So I’m feeling fine about the invisibility thing. Though on the other hand I still really want to kick people sometimes.” She cups her hands around her mouth. “Er, hello!” she mock yells. “I think I was in the queue before you!”

As to whether she has finally come down on one side of the Channel or the other, she no longer seems concerned: “Oh, I’m still chopping and changing,” she says breezily.

She first decamped to France to work as an au pair after a teacher at her London drama school told her she’d never make it as an actor, “but the first English job I got was to play Lady Brenda in [1988’s] *A Handful of Dust*, which is the most English thing you could get. It’s been a huge advantage, being able to step back and see things at a distance.”

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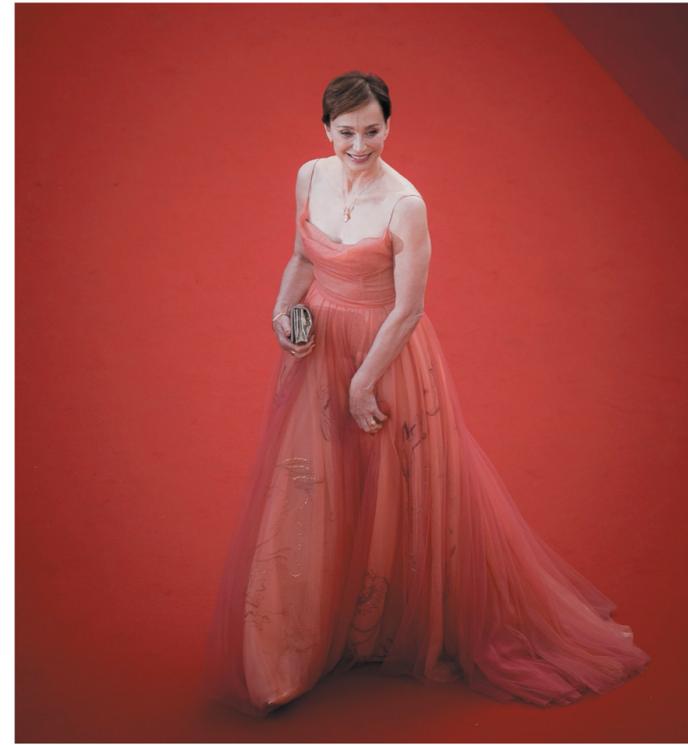
Clockwise from top left: Kristin Scott Thomas with Prince in *Under the Cherry Moon* (1986); *The English Patient* (1996); with Gary Oldman in *Darkest Hour*; *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994).

Photography by AAP, Alamy, Getty Images

Her first English-speaking role, however, saw her playing a French heiress opposite the rock star Prince in his widely panned 1986 vanity project *Under the Cherry Moon*. She was 26, fresh from studying theatre in Paris and rumour has it that Prince was so dazzled by her beauty that he cast her as his love interest on the spot. “He was a genius, fascinating and slightly odd, as geniuses are,” she says. “I will never forget that he gave me my first job, my first chance.”

With her cut-glass cheekbones and ability to convey every emotion from infinite sadness to haughty disdain with a glance or a raised eyebrow, it is easy to see why Kristin has very often stolen the spotlight, even in smaller supporting roles. And while the vagaries of her love life are off-limits – she has briefly dated Arpad Busson, Elle Macpherson’s ex – she has an openness and warmth in person that doesn’t always come across in her roles, though her joy in playing the upbeat Clementine Churchill is palpable.

“Because of the great knowledge we have of her, she was a character I could approach from the outside in,” she says. “This was a woman who was so chic and wonderful, with this extraordinary style.



She used to work in a hat shop, so she’d make these confections that were similar to the turbans and things worn by women in the factories, who were making tremendous sacrifices.

“She’d wear a fur coat and paisley head scarf to go and visit a bombsite with her husband, who was six inches shorter than her. They had a very loving, very volatile relationship, and Gary is just so extraordinary in the role. We had such a laugh on set; you’d have Winston Churchill sitting there, then suddenly Gary would pipe up with something unexpected and hilarious.”

While there is a lot more to be told about Clementine Churchill – and Kristin would happily reprise the role in a dedicated biopic – the opportunity to play a woman who looked and acted her age was part of the appeal. “Things are changing slowly in film,” she says. “There are lots more things being written for mature women, and about time; maybe we’ve been ignored because we are at our most powerful at this age.

“Our most powerful,” she reiterates, smiling. “Which is exciting, isn’t it?” •

Darkest Hour opens on January 11.