

# ABOUT TOWN

Photographed by NEIL GAVIN

## THE POETRY POWERHOUSE

### Allie Esiri

Allie Esiri has friends in high places. Seriously high places. The charismatic former actress is best pals with Samantha Cameron, acted alongside Nick Clegg and was directed by Sam Mendes while at Cambridge. After graduating, she was a regular face on *The Bill* and *A Touch of Frost*. 'But,' she says, 'one day I woke up and thought, "I must remember to get married."' So she did. Her husband, Mark, is a venture capitalist and they have three children: 10-year-old Eliza, eight-year-old Rosie and three-year-old Jack. They live in Notting Hill, but the Shepherd's Bush end – or 'the frontline', as she refers to it. Now she's tackling the e-publishing world and last year launched *iF Poems*, an anthology app with more than 200 poems for iPad or iPhone. Beautifully illustrated by the artist Natasha Law, it's properly cool. There are readings from Helena Bonham Carter (Esiri's South Hampstead High School chum) and Bill Nighy, and you can even record your own version in your huskiest voice and email it to your lover. If you don't have a lover, email it to your mum. But lose the voice.

The app's been a huge success, selling in 38 countries (it even outsold *Angry Birds* on its opening weekend), and is published this month in book form – of course, these days, you need a bestselling app before they'll even think about giving you a book deal. Brilliant but bashful, Esiri doesn't take all the credit.

Her business partner is her neighbour, the former *Times* journalist Rachel Kelly – 'It was definitely convenient that she lived round the corner, as we made the whole thing from my kitchen table' – and she had help from a few others along the way. Like her buddy Tim Burton, who provided the recording studio, and Roger McGough, who reads for them at festivals. Even Michael Gove has lent his support. 'I just asked everyone,' she says. 'Luckily, I got a good response. I guess people like poetry.' *Luciano Bellini iF: A Treasury of Poems for Almost Every Possibility* (Canongate, £20) is out now.

