

I'M THE MISTRESS WHO CAN'T WAIT TO BE A MUM

She may play away in her latest BBC series but as Sarah Parish turns 40 she couldn't be more settled with a new husband and baby on the way

by **Rachel Porter**
and
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LIFE on screen for Sarah Parish is fraught with heartbreak and betrayal. As Katie in the BBC's fantastically scandalous drama *Mistresses*, the death of her secret lover drives her into the arms of his son.

As in previous roles, on which she has built a reputation as one of our

best-loved and respected actresses, it makes for gripping television. But off screen, life for Sarah has never been so sweet or so settled.

Less than a month after marrying James Murray, her hunky *Cutting It* co-star, comes the news that the couple are expecting their first baby. Spotted shopping for maternity outfits in London this week, Sarah, who prefers to keep her private life private, gave her agent the go-ahead to confirm the rumours: "Yes, Sarah is pregnant. It's great news. She and James are delighted."

Having achieved so much professionally by the age of 39, Sarah revealed just before falling

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pregnant that motherhood was her last burning ambition.

"Approaching 40 you're reminded your biological clock is ticking," she says. "And women these days have to be everything. We have to earn a living, look fantastic, keep fit and be the perfect person."

"Equally, men are under pressure to be the breadwinner and be in touch with their feminine side. As you get older you become more realistic and accept that compromise isn't a dirty word."

"I made a conscious choice to wait for the right person to



children with. It's a big deal bringing a child into the world. My mum didn't have me until she was 40, so I haven't given up hope that kids will be a big part of my future."

But turning 40, as Sarah will in November this year, is a milestone for many reasons.

"I'm both dreading and looking forward to it," she says. "It's my time to look at what I've done and think about what else I want to achieve. Already I'm stressing about things I can't do, such as speak another language. But to be honest I think it's the pressure of the build-up that's making me panic. Once I am actually 40 I think I'll be fine.

"Of course I have ups and downs and wobbles," she continues. "But I've become more comfortable with who I am now. A couple of years ago I was working in America [shooting the pilot for a sitcom which, to her relief, was never turned into a series] and I felt like a heifer.

"I was probably a size 8 but felt I was enormous compared to the other actresses, not just in height but my bones, the way I'm built.

"Everything was different about me and I felt like an alien. It's a shame we're so obsessed with looks and weight. Maybe it's because women are under enormous pressure to look gorgeous that so many resort to plastic surgery. Personally,

I'd be too scared to go under the knife. I'd rather get a good bra to hoick up my boobs as they're quite big. And I'd get my teeth done, as I have a mouth full of fillings."

HER no-nonsense approach to life and work, which often shines through in her performances, has after many years hard graft delivered serious small screen success.

"It has been an amazing few years. I feel really blessed," she says. "If I ever get tired, I say to myself: 'For goodness' sake, Sarah, people like what you're doing.'

"I'm not very big on moaning – you can't in this business. You get driven around everywhere, someone puts on your clothes and make-up for you and you get paid

quite a bit of money for it. What on earth is there to complain about?"

Had she made it when she was 25, she admits, she would have taken it for granted and blown her earnings on shoes. Instead, after training at the Academy Of Live And Recorded Arts in London, it was years before acting would pay the rent, let alone stretch to luxuries. She worked as a cleaner and sold cheap jewellery to make ends meet until, little by little, her star began to rise.

In 1994 she was cast as the babe with the heavenly body and the heavy Mancunian accent in the Bod-dington's ads, who loved "a good rub down with chip fat".

Sarah landed a couple of plum roles in the West End, including the temptress in Ben Elton's Popcorn, which led to her big break as a regular on Peak Practice. Since then she has filled her CV with prime-time successes such as Hearts And Bones, Cutting It, Blackpool and Doctor Who. Yet she has never allowed herself to get too comfortable.

"The funny thing is, I'm more nervous now I'm older. There's never that blind confidence you have when you're younger," she says. "Every time I get a job I find myself thinking, 'God, what if I get found out and I'm suddenly wrestled off set by huge men?'"

She is still haunted, she says, by "every actor's nightmare". It's "waking up alone, aged 84, in a bed-sit in Peckham, smothered in cats". And she claims to have made some "terrible blunders" in choosing jobs. "Obviously, I can't say what they were. One ITV drama wasn't great. I know now, though, that you can't get away with that."

But her mistakes are far from

obvious. Even her decision to play a giant red spider in Dr Who – the Empress Rachnos – was a masterstroke.

She is perhaps best known for playing Ally Henshall in Cutting It, a hard-nosed hairdresser who pursued an illicit relationship with her

ex, who just happened to be married to the owner of the rival salon across the street.

ON SET she met her husband James, 32, who now stars in the fantasy show Primeval. After two years together, during which they bought and renovated a ramshackle watermill in Hampshire, they became engaged in September and married just before Christmas.

They held the reception in the garden of their home and guests included Amanda Holden (who also starred in Cutting It) and David Tennant of Dr Who. It was, of course, a perfectly romantic occasion. But in the short months between the proposal and the big day, she confessed to a few pre-wedding worries.

"I like the idea of marriage and I think it's important but I've got a phobia about weddings. And my sister's husband is a vicar," she laughed. "Maybe it's got something to do with being an actor. I come to work every day and get dressed up, have my make-up done and pretend to be somebody else. So to me, the thought of going to a wedding is almost like going to work.

"I know it seems unromantic because it's supposed to be the happiest day of your life but getting married shouldn't just be about the

day. It's two people saying they want to make a commitment to each other."

Falling in love hasn't dampened her ambitions.

She has recently set up her own production company and made her directorial debut. But, understandably, her priorities have shifted.

"Living in London, I had a great social life," she says. "I had a close-

knit group of friends and we all lived near each other. It was exciting but the thrill of nipping out to Soho till four in the morning just doesn't hold the same appeal for me that it used to.

"The business I'm in can make you selfish. You become very self-contained only looking after one person the whole time.

"I started to question whether this was how I wanted it to be for

the rest of my life and I recognised I want to spend more time with my family, friends and husband James. I've realised that getting older means making allowances and not necessarily in a bad way.

"Now when I'm not working I want to relax. I prefer to walk our dogs, Pig and Jake, or do the gardening to going out partying.

"I have a bit of a cleaning fetish," she confides. "Maybe because I can switch off and do something productive without engaging my brain.

"And I guess I'm a country girl at heart. I was brought up in Yeovil, Somerset – my parents still live there – and I think of it as home, even though I've lived in London for 21 years and everyone thinks I'm a northerner."

She thinks living in the middle of nowhere will take some getting used to. So will marriage and motherhood. But with a new life dawning as she approaches her 40th birthday, she says: "It's just time for a new phase."

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