

Bunty Bagshawe

(and her toy boy)

Bite Back!



NOBLE / DRAPER / PHILIP IDE

NEW DAWN: Sarah Kennedy, at home in London and enjoying the more relaxed pace of life after bidding farewell to early-morning radio, and, inset, with her partner Adrian McGlynn, who was known to her fans as 'Much Beloved'

drinking vodka to avoid smelling of alcohol was the 'Sarah Kennedy get-out'.

'I've never met them but they'd believed what they read in the papers and reinforced the myth. I was more cross than upset,' she says. 'Friendly fire doesn't help when it's a couple of boys being bitchy at my expense. It was another nail in my reputation's coffin.'

She believes someone at the BBC may have exacerbated the rumours. 'A lot of the criticism about things I was meant to have said came out three weeks after my show had gone out, which was odd. You'd have thought I'd have been hauled up on it straight-away. Someone wanted to cause trouble and I couldn't carry on working in that environment,' she says.

Then, over the summer, several family members and friends unexpectedly passed away. Sarah – who earlier in her career didn't take time off after her parents died – was grief-stricken.

'When my parents died it was gradual and they were ready to go,' she says. 'This was shocking. I didn't know what to do so I went into work. I didn't take time to get over it and started sleeping badly. Everything piled on top of me.'

Given the stress she was under, it is hardly surprising that by the time Sarah went on holiday to Majorca with Adrian in August, she had reached the decision to resign, and did so in characteristically spontaneous fashion.

'I knew something had to change and I wanted to spend more time with Adrian,' she says. 'It wasn't planned. The timing wasn't ideal but once I'd decided I was going there didn't seem much point in coming back.'

'Of course I regretted not being able to say goodbye to my listeners, but I'm doing a series of An Audience With theatre shows so I'll be able to do it then.'

She has thousands of letters of support from listeners and harbours no animosity to the BBC, but says she hates parties. There will be no leaving do. The fact she has left has barely had time to register. 'I'm still waking up at 3am, and whenever something happens to me – like meeting those rude girls on the train last night – I see it as a link to put in my show.'

'I have all these links and nowhere to put them,' adds Sarah. 'But I'm enjoying not having to plan.'

If she is guilty of anything, it is of being herself in an age when political correctness is all-pervasive and executives are gripped by fear of their presenters offending their audience. Others have got away with far worse and the criticism levelled against her seems disproportionate.

As she puts it, sadly: 'All I tried to do was my best. At least I'm out of it. With any luck, now I've resigned, hopefully all those who have criticised me will go away.'

● *An Audience With Sarah Kennedy is at the Little Theatre, Leicester, on October 29, and Epsom Playhouse on November 13.*

started. Sarah has never been pictured falling out of a nightclub or swigging from a whisky bottle. There is nothing but fruit juice and coffee in her living room today and she says that in recent years she has developed acidity in her throat that has prevented her from drinking.

'My doctor told me to cut out alcohol, so I've barely drunk recently anyway,' she says. 'I had half a glass of rosé yesterday. Even if I was drinking, how could I go to bed at 7pm and then be drunk on the radio the following morning? I have never been anything other than sober at work and I can't understand why people would tell such hideous lies about me.'

Most damningly, she was labelled a racist. On one occasion she was reprimanded by the BBC for telling listeners she could not see black people in the dark. 'We were running a campaign encouraging listeners to put their bicycle lights on,' she says wearily. 'I said that nobody can be seen in the dark wearing black, and that we should all wear white.'

'That wasn't racist – it was inverted racism to suggest it was. The whole thing was so stupid. If people didn't like what I was saying, why couldn't

they turn their radio off?' She was later chastised for claiming that disgraced anti-immigration politician Enoch Powell was 'the best Prime Minister this country never had'.

I was commenting on a newspaper review and mentioned Enoch was "said" to be one of the best Prime Ministers we never had. That wasn't my opinion. I was four when he was a politician. Immediately it was claimed "Sarah Kennedy's a racist".

Despite her critics, her bond with her audience strengthened. To her listeners, Adrian – the Eton-educated director of horseracing administrators Weatherbys – became known as her 'Much Beloved'. They met at a wedding in 1997 at which she was a guest and Adrian the best man.

Sarah, who was married briefly to an Army officer in her 20s, was smitten. She praises what she sees as Adrian's Seb Coe-like good looks and unflinching support. He, in turn, gives her confidence and conviction.

'She can be so coy about how highly regarded she is,' he says. 'And her sense of fair play is powerful. If she

sees injustice she's liable to do something about it. I joke one day she'll get walloped for her troubles, but that doesn't deter her. I'm secretly proud of that.'

'She's a tough girl, too. I took a day off work when my cat died but she didn't even tell BBC bosses when her parents passed away.'

He adds: 'I wish she'd defended herself from the criticism sooner and stopped the rumours that she was a racist drunk before they spiralled out of control. But she thought by answering her critics she'd fuel their beliefs. I had to respect that.'

Both united in their reluctance to marry or have children, their unconventional relationship was made all the more unlikely by Sarah's anti-social working hours.

On weekdays, she stayed alone at her London flat. At weekends she would drive to Adrian's house in the Bedfordshire village of Melchbourne. 'Sarah would still wake up at 3am on a Saturday. I can count on the fingers of one hand how many times we went out in the evening,' says Adrian.

'Every year or two, when her contract was renewed, we discussed the

