

She's the next big thing: Ashleigh's about to star in a blockbuster with Nicole Kidman.

Westside

ASHLEIGH HEARNS

Cheryl's lost her baby

Stroking her flat stomach, *Westside* actress Ashleigh Cummings confesses to *Woman's Day* that she's missing her baby bump. Although it was a prosthetic, the blonde bombshell adored being "pregnant".

"I loved the belly so much, I never wanted to take it off," laughs Ashleigh, who plays the young Cheryl West, a character made infamous by Robyn Malcolm in *Outrageous Fortune*. "The costume ladies would ask if I wanted to remove the belly for lunch and I'd go, 'No, it's OK!'"

And though it may have been all pretend, it hasn't made the 25-year-old star any less clucky. The Aussie actress – who has also starred in hit shows *Puberty Blues* and *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* – admits babies are definitely on her horizon.

"I don't really hold myself to one particular idea of what my future will be, except that there will be children," says Ashleigh, who has been dating *The Shannara Chronicles* actor Aaron Jackubenko for two years. "I'm very adamant about that."

However, Ashleigh's fictional pregnancy has also given her a sad insight into the lives of parents whose babies don't make it. Avid *Outrageous* fans will be aware that before Van, Jethro, Pascale and Loretta came along, there was Helena.

As we saw at the end of the last season of *Westside*, Cheryl became pregnant to boyfriend

e waterworks

GH'S BABY TBREAK

y – and Ashleigh is feeling it

Wolfgang West, much to his parents' disgust. But in this week's episode, there's tragedy for the couple when their first child, Helena, is stillborn.

"It's horrific, but whatever lengths I go to in my craft to reach that depth of emotion, it doesn't even come close to the magnitude of emotion that actual people have to go through in their real-life experiences," says Ashleigh of acting out a stillbirth.

"I did a lot of work to create Helena and imagine all my dreams for her, so when that's taken away, it's not hard to access that emotion at all. There was definitely a part of me that had to grieve this fictional character and, at the same time, grieve for all the people who have to go through that."

Ashleigh hopes the storyline will bring light to a tragedy

that so many families suffer first-hand, adding that though she didn't physically experience the trauma, "on a scientific level, your body can't distinguish between real and fake emotion, so technically, my body went through some version of a stillbirth".

Big things ahead

When we catch up with Ashleigh on set, she's in between scenes, having just walked down the aisle in her own big, bad *Westside* wedding. Although the actress is sworn to secrecy on the details of Cheryl's frock, she's allowed to tell us it's "very '80s" – and she won't be taking inspiration from it if she gets hitched herself!

"There's a bit too much revealing of, well, everything!" Ashleigh giggles, adding that she won't necessarily ever tie the knot. "Aaron and I are aware we are going to be together, but for us, the idea of



Westside's characters are based on Robyn Malcom and Grant Bowler's *Outrageous* parts.



Reef Ireland and Ashleigh play the younger versions of Wolf and Cheryl.

a ring representing a marriage isn't necessary. But it would be great to have all our family and friends together in the same place."

Ashleigh admits to feeling a huge amount of pressure in stepping into her iconic character's leather boots after beloved Kiwi actress Robyn.

"I really wanted to do Cheryl justice and honour Robyn's work," she says. "It has been really interesting because I have to make very conscious decisions of when

to take parts of Robyn's character and implant them in my work, and when to trust my own instincts."

It was a similar situation when she had to take on the role of Keira in last year's remake of the legendary road movie *Goodbye Pork Pie*, which was a smash hit in Kiwi cinemas. But there are bigger things on the horizon for the actress, who's set to star alongside Nicole Kidman and her idol Sarah Paulson in the big-screen adaptation of Donna Tartt's best-selling novel *The Goldfinch*, which has a \$60 million budget.

"I get a bit dizzy thinking about it and I'm so excited," says Ashleigh of her big Hollywood break, but the rising star insists she will always stay loyal to the cast of *Westside*.

"No-one here is a diva," she smiles. "Everyone is just here to help and support each other. It's a real community, which is really special to find. I love *Westside* – I would do it all year if I could!" #

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Below: Cheryl and Rita (played by Antonia Prebble) butt heads in *Westside*. Right: Ashleigh and her partner Aaron.



TEXT: FLEUR MEALING.

