



Left: With America Ferrera, star of *Ugly Betty*
Below: With her husband Terence Beesley and son Frankie



whisky. What you see is what you get. She appears unspoilt and down to earth, and talks of a simple, carefree, Scottish childhood, in Annan, Dumfries and Galloway, which revolved around beachcombing, impromptu after-school picnics and not being able to buy very much.

'It hasn't changed. It is still untarnished. The thing I miss most is fish 'n' chips wrapped up in newspaper. My friend John Pagan has a fantastic fish 'n' chip shop called The Cafe Royal in Annan. The secret is in the double frying. Fish and chips in LA just aren't the same. They are always disappointing.'

Then she is off talking about the weather and missing Scotland. I also notice that she is incredibly pretty, in a way that the camera fails to show, particularly for her role as Maggie. Did she mind? 'No! Not a wee bit of it. But let's just say I was in no hurry to take the wardrobe home,' she adds.

Ashley comes across as a private, but down-to-earth personality, and is wearing an organic T-shirt by designer Allegra Hicks, for the Environmental Justice Foundation's *Pick Your Cotton Carefully* campaign. 'I used to adore a bargain, until I started to think that clothes are cheap for a reason. Someone somewhere suffers when you can buy a T-shirt for just £5.'

Today, Ashley is here to talk about her exciting return to British television, and typically, she has chosen an explosive subject to set pulses racing: killing for

money. But this time there is no satire; no silky, hilarious punch line. She is deadly serious. 'The question is: could I kill a man for five million pounds? I want to say "no way", but when your child is dying of cancer and the money would pay for life-saving treatment, it isn't so simple, is it?'

This is the edge-of-the-seat moral dilemma and juicy leading role that tempted Ashley back from LA to return to her first love: serious drama. ITV's *The Reckoning* is programmed to air in the spring, and it makes perfect recessionary viewing.

It is a dark morality tale, where two very ordinary people are catapulted into an extraordinary situation and offered more money than they can dream of to kill a man they are told deserves to die. Ashley describes the experience as 'like living in an Edward Hopper painting – all darkness and light, and spare, empty interiors, as if to emphasise the stark choice between good and evil.' And, 'no, she can't

possibly tell me if there's redemption or a happy ending, because that would give the game away, ha, ha.'

While her legion of fans are more accustomed to seeing her dressed up to the nines and intriguing with the poor underdog Betty Suarez in *Ugly Betty*, or ludicrously turning down Orlando Bloom in *Extras*, Ashley felt it was time to flex her serious side. 'I told my agent I wanted to do something where I could find the truth in a line, and a moment, rather than the truth and the joke in the moment.'

In fact, she reveals that there was no great plan just to play comic roles after *Extras*, it was simply that *Ugly Betty* and, later, *Accidentally On Purpose* were big commitments and didn't leave time for her to pursue anything else – apart from getting married to her long-term lover, and fellow actor Terence Beesley, in a romantic ceremony in a wood near Big Sur in California, in 2007.

Ashley also made the delightful discovery that she was pregnant in early 2009, and is now mother to their one-year-old, Frankie. Now life revolves around making him laugh and doing funny dances, and agonising over whether she's green enough. 'Everything they say about motherhood and how it changes you is true,' observes Ashley. 'I would walk to the end of the earth for that little fellow.'

She also admits she likes living in LA.

'The weather in California is gorgeous, so I wouldn't want to give that up. Whenever we can, my husband and I take off with our wolf dog Barney, and go camping at Big Bear Park. Terry is really into bush craft. He rigs me up a rain shower between the trees and we have a cook-up under the stars – it always tastes like the best dinner we've ever had.'

'I do hanker after a more simplistic life. I love farmers' markets, for instance. And I've just done a pilot for the BBC, *The Accidental Farmer*, where I play a high-flying city slicker who gives it all up, including the Louboutins and manicures, to become a beef farmer.'

'In fact I come very low in the pecking order. First, it's the beautiful Yorkshire countryside, then the animals, and then me. But I understand the appeal of going back to the land; and one day I shall look forward to digging my own vegetable patch.'

And I'm sure she'll get the locals laughing, too. ◆

◆ **HYSTERIA**, directed by Tanya Wexler is due for release later this year.

◆ **THE RECKONING** will be broadcast on ITV1 during spring.