



Sarah-Kate and Darren Scott's lives have been turned upside down by the news their baby son, Mark, has kidney cancer.

# PRAYING FOR A MIRACLE

Darren and Sarah-Kate Scott cling to their faith in the wake of devastating news of baby Mark's cancer

By GLORIA EDWARDS Pictures: LUBA LESOLLE

**S**HE was rocking her baby to sleep when she felt it: a huge lump on the right side of his body. She closed her eyes and froze. "The first thing I thought was, 'Please God, don't let it be a tumour.'" But just days later her and her husband's worst fears were confirmed: their precious 15-month-old son had cancer.

Now Sarah-Kate and Darren Scott's lives are a whirlwind of hospitals and doctors as their bewildered little Mark starts the treatment that will hopefully return him to full health.

But there's a long road ahead: Mark will need chemo, then surgery, then more chemo over the next six months or so. The Scotts, exhausted and terrified, are battling to come to terms with their new reality – a shocking blow just as they felt their lives were getting back on track.

The news hit shortly after the couple spoke openly to us about their reconciliation and the hell they'd been through following Darren's highly publicised K-word incident (YOU, 8 March). The controversy cost Darren his jobs at SuperSport and Jacaranda FM and, as he puts it, just about destroyed his life.

"But just when we thought things were improving this had to happen to us," Sarah-Kate says. "I started asking God why, especially now, this is happening. But Darren keeps reminding me we shouldn't question God's ways."

Because if there's anything to hold onto in the trying times ahead it's their faith that Mark will pull through.

**D**ARREN was planning the launch of his new online radio station, Ballz, on Monday 27 February when Sarah-Kate found the lump. When he returned home to Hartbeespoort Dam from the newly built studios in Johannesburg he faced a frantic Sarah-Kate.

"I've always been a neurotic mom, even with our dogs," Sarah-Kate admits. "I have all our doctors on speed dial and if Mark sneezed too hard I'd phone them and ask whether he was sick."

She's talking to us from Mark's hospital bedside, holding her son who'd spent most of the day crying, fed up from being poked with needles. She looks frail and drained, her eyes red from weeping, and the strain is obvious on Darren's face too – it's etched with exhaustion and sadness as he strokes his son's curly red hair.

He tried to reassure Sarah-Kate the night

she discovered the lump but they decided to contact their doctor just to be sure.

He told them to bring Mark for a check-up as soon as they could. But there was a problem: Sarah-Kate had sold her car to ease the family's financial pressures and didn't have transport. "Darren had an extremely important business meeting that couldn't be cancelled or moved," she says. "We can't afford for him not to be working."

They got Mark to the doctor as soon as they could and were told the little boy's liver seemed enlarged and they'd need to see a paediatrician.

The following day a paediatrician told them it wasn't Mark's liver but his kidney that seemed to be the problem. He underwent several tests, including an ultrasound, CT scan and chest X-rays.

"I couldn't believe there might be something wrong with our healthy child who was sitting there playing and laughing. I thought he was going to be okay," Sarah-Kate says.

A deeply religious person she fasted 12 hours a day, believing it reinforced the power of prayer as they waited for the biopsy results. She also shared the family's agony with her vast network of Facebook friends, many of whom assured her they were praying for them too.

"It was absolute torture," Darren says, swallowing back tears. "The waiting and not knowing. We were praying for a miracle."

The following Monday a paediatrician at Johannesburg General Hospital confirmed Mark had a cancerous tumour on his right kidney.

"I nearly fell off my chair when I saw the scans," Sarah-Kate recalls. Darren explains the normal size of a kidney for a child Mark's age is about as big as a R5 coin. Their son's right kidney was seven times bigger than his left one. He has nephroblastoma, a cancer also called Wilms' tumour.

"When the doctor broke the news it felt as if she was speaking to someone else. It was beyond a state of shock, just a numbing disbelief. I still feel so numb," Sarah-Kate says. Mark has since been admitted to the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre in Johannesburg for treatment and Sarah-Kate spends every hour at his bedside.

**M**ARK slept in his parents' bed from day one. "I told Darren it was not negotiable," Sarah-Kate says. Only on his first birthday did Mark get his own bedroom but his mom moved right in with him. "I'd rock him to sleep every night and fall asleep next to him. I can't take away that routine now."

Mark received a blood transfusion and a port was installed under his collarbone to administer chemotherapy. He will undergo four to eight weeks of chemo and, provided he responds well to treatment, his kidney will be removed along with the tumour. Post-operative chemo will follow.

However, this treatment can start only once the Scotts have sorted out a problem with their medical aid, which has declined Mark's bills. "It never rains, it pours. But you won't see God's rainbow without the storm," Sarah-Kate says tearfully.

"It may be an administration problem but in the meantime we need to pay cash," says Darren, who's spending his days running between the hospital and work. "Mark is my priority but Ballz can't wait. It's at a stage where we can't delay it. Luckily my team is there to support me."

He and Sarah-Kate are relying heavily on family and friends' support, Darren says.

Sarah-Kate's mom, Sally Seaward, has come from Durban and friends who live close to the hospital have offered their garden cottage to the Scotts. "Mark will also need a sterile environment to recuperate in and our house is far and full of dogs," Darren says.

"The number of messages we've received is overwhelming," Sarah-Kate adds. "It's so humbling to see people take time to pray for

our son."

Mark is in the hands of paediatric oncologist Professor Janet Poole who's upbeat about her young patient's chances. The cancer hasn't spread and his prognosis is good, she says.

"If the tumour is in the first stage, which can only be determined when we operate, the cure rate is 95 per cent."

Nephroblastoma is one of the most common childhood cancers, she adds. "It usually occurs in children under the age of three. There are no known causes but there are associated rare syndromes. Fortunately Mark doesn't have any of these," Professor Poole says.

"I wish we could just fast-forward to when Mark's healthy again," Sarah-Kate says.

"We're trying to stay positive," Darren adds, saying they'll tackle this problem one day at a time, just as they overcame their marital problems and he conquered his depression and drinking. ■

● THE SCOTTS HAVE STARTED A TRUST FUND FOR MARK. THE DETAILS ARE: VENEZIANO INCORPORATED TRUST ACCOUNT, STANDARD BANK, CASTLE WALK BRANCH, BRANCH CODE 014645, ACCOUNT NUMBER 411373749, REF: MARK SCOTT SPECIAL NEEDS TRUST FUND. CLOSE FRIEND DUNAY DARREN, WIFE OF SINGER KURT DARREN, HAS ALSO SET UP A FACEBOOK GROUP CALLED PRAYERS FOR LITTLE MARK (FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/361905447173249). ALSO READ THE ARTICLE ON CHILDHOOD CANCERS ON PAGE XX.



LEFT: Sarah-Kate refuses to leave her son's bedside. In the next six months he will undergo intensive chemotherapy and surgery to remove the tumour and his right kidney which is five times the size of his other kidney. BELOW: Despite his illness Mark is still full of smiles.

