

**T**IME LORDS, ACCORDING to the Doctor, live “practically for ever, barring accidents”. A single year means nothing to them. For the beautifully human Jenna-Louise Coleman and her complex, bubbling puppy riot of a character, Clara, however, a single year can turn your whole world upside down.

In the 12 months since Steven Moffat’s press conference confirming that Coleman would play the Doctor’s companion alongside Matt Smith, both Jenna-Louise and Clara have shot from obscurity to international stardom and become the subjects of intense media attention – on and offline. Real-world snaps of Jenna gracing the red carpet with her actor boyfriend, *Game of Thrones* star Richard Madden, jostle with acres of analysis by devoted fans of the show – sometimes known as Whovians – desperate to understand the mystery of the Impossible Girl. Who is Clara? Why was she on the Daleks’ prison world? How did she reboot as a Victorian governess? And, given that both incarnations died, why does she keep turning up in his life?

When we meet in her trailer on the *Doctor Who* lot, overlooking the sprawling new build of Cardiff Bay, she cheerfully dodges as many questions as she can on plotline and personal life with such effortless charm that it’s tempting to think the Tardis has thrown a reality distortion field around her. Sadly, the field isn’t keeping her warm. It’s the first sunny day since the dawn of time – or at least, it feels like it’s been that long – but she’s still got a heater on and perches on her bench wrapped in a long black fluffy cardigan. Or “coatigan”, she explains with a laugh: “The dress and ankle boots are Clara’s outfit from Topshop but the coatigan is ‘model’s own’.”

She’s chilly – and has time on her hands – because she’s finishing her final scenes on November’s 50th anniversary special, filmed in 3D. The technology may delight, but filming drags – 3D cameras are huge and each scene takes a lot of setting up. Previous Doctor David Tennant, Billie Piper and Jemma Redgrave appear, so she had company to begin with. Now, though, it’s literally only her on set, so there’s lots of hanging around and reading.

On the table there’s a copy of George Orwell’s *Down and Out in Paris and London*, bought because she lives near the former bookshop in Hampstead where Orwell once lived, and it’s surrounded by the mess from the average 27-year-old’s life – cups, make-up, scraps of paper and magazines. She seems, as the Doctor has spent this series discovering, to be just a normal girl. But that’s no longer possible.

“Matt warned me that there’s nothing that can prepare you for it,” she gives a wry smile. “All I can do is enjoy it. I’ve noticed some changes – nothing huge. I have a really cool job and get to do these crazy things and you do have so many ‘pinch me’ moments. I’ve just been sent emails with pics of the Clara doll, which is kind of...” she trails off. “That isn’t completely normal, is it? People do come up to me, but so far they’ve >

# WHO IS THE REAL CLARA?

She plays the Doctor’s mysterious companion, but how is Jenna-Louise Coleman coming to terms with tabloids, boyfriends and fame?

“Clara is probably the closest to me that I’ve ever played”



◁ really engaged with the show and the character and just want to chat. Yesterday a little boy walked past and said, "You all right, Soufflé Girl?" Which put a smile on my face. So it's not obtrusive."

She has had her first experience of tabloid monsterring. At the start of April the *Daily Mirror* splashed on stories of bullies at school and her parents' financial woes – dad Keith and mum Karen's family business Coleman Interiors Ltd was hit by the crash in 2007, they had to move out of their five-bedroom house and the couple were declared bankrupt last year, although joiner Ken still works for his son Ben's shopfitting firm. The piece quoted family friends and it's clear the way her parents were treated still hurts.

"It's difficult when it involves your family," she says carefully, hesitating a little. "I know there was a lot of knocking on neighbours' doors and lots of friends approached on Facebook – all kinds of stuff like that. That's quite unsettling, it really is. Mum and Dad were absolutely great about it and we're just relieved that it went out early and hopefully might mean nobody is going to be knocking on their door any more."

**S**HE'S ALSO HAD a less brutal but still awkward brush with the press in an interview where she talked about Richard, and how the couple have become part of the Primrose Hill scene that includes Matt Smith, playwright Polly Stenham and Channel 4's head of drama, Piers Wenger.

"I'm a bit embarrassed," she physically curls up and hides, her dark hair falling across her face. "I'm quite a chatterbox. I could chat all day about my boyfriend, but when I see it in print there's something that makes me feel shy all of a sudden. I think it's the idea of being, 'Hey, everybody look at me!' I don't like it looking as if I'm talking about myself a lot, as if I think I'm great. Although we're doing more and more press so it's... difficult."

She finds it hard to improvise when just showing up as herself. With Matt she has to do press conferences and appear on TV and chat to camera, all without the actor's comfort of a script or a character. She even finds playing Clara with her natural Blackpool accent a little exposing – "Clara is probably the closest to me that I've ever played – especially over the last few years – and I find that hard. Doing an accent is much easier."

She's a natural mimic, able to slip between cockney for her chambermaid role in ITV's *Titanic*, cut-glass poshness as prim Susan Brown in *Room at the Top* and middle-class received pronunciation in Stephen Poliakoff's *Dancing on the Edge*, which is all the more impressive without formal drama school training. Growing up in Blackpool, she got the acting bug appearing as a ten-year-old Italian bridesmaid in an end-of-the-pier version of *Summer Holiday* starring Darren Day ("I loved leaving school early to do the matinee"). Her tiny Victorian secondary school in Lytham St Annes – only eight pupils in her entire year –

## WHAT'S NEXT FOR WHO?

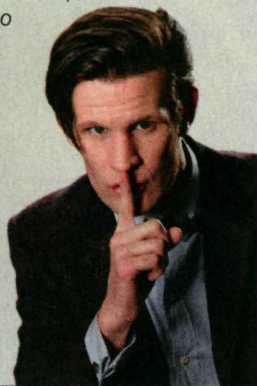
### The 50th anniversary

David Tennant, Billie Piper and John Hurt join Matt Smith and Jenna-Louise Coleman for the 50th anniversary special. And there's Mark Gatiss's origins of *Doctor Who* drama, *An Adventure in Space and Time*.

### And beyond?

Matt Smith is filming with Ryan Gosling in America and back on set in September to shoot the *Doctor Who* Christmas special.

But will he go straight into filming the next series or is the draw of other work becoming too powerful? "I'm attached to the show for the next year," he told *RT* recently. "I take it year by year – I think that's the only way you can take it."

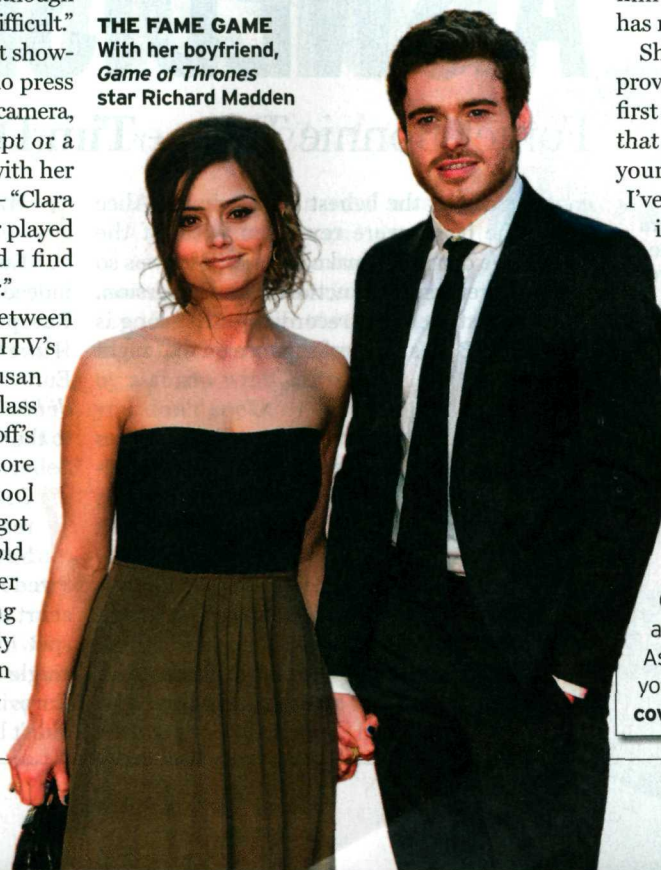


didn't offer much scope for her burgeoning talent so, aged 14, she persuaded her parents to move her to a nearby private school. It was the best and worst thing for her, and she credits the move with her current wariness at outside world attention.

"If I'm with a group of people I'm OK, but actually I'm quite a nervous person if I'm just one to one with somebody," she smiles. "I've got a lot better as I've got older. I think it was going from eight people in a tiny, tiny school to being

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**THE FAME GAME**  
With her boyfriend,  
*Game of Thrones*  
star Richard Madden



surrounded by loads of people. I shrank away, surrounded myself with quite loud friends. I'd never been on a date in my life ever because the idea of just being sat with one person..." she breaks off and laughs. "I'm making myself sound socially inept here and I'm absolutely fine in a group of people but I am quite shy."

She's kept those loud friends close – after landing a part in *Emmerdale* post-A-levels, she's raced between London, Leeds and Manchester until the stability of *Doctor Who* meant she could move in with three old schoolfriends in a Hampstead flat. "We all know each other so well because we've been friends since we were 14," she grins. "One is a stockbroker, one is a celebrity assistant and the other is a company PA. If we're all out together it does get quite loud – and our house is a riot."

**O**NCE FILMING'S OVER she'll be joining them on a holiday in Croatia – indeed, as you read this she's soaking up the sun. And by the time she comes back the mystery of the Impossible Girl will be known to all – which she will find an enormous relief. Keeping Clara's ultimate mystery completely hidden for an entire year – nothing to a Time Lord, but an eternity in the spoiler-filled entertainment industry where thousands of websites tease through clues and comments on an hourly basis – has been a feat of superhuman discipline, possibly aided by the fact that she missed out on *Doctor Who* while growing up and comes to the show as a pure professional.

She hints at the finale – "in the beginning we see a Clara in the 60s, 70s and the 80s so there are a lot of costume changes, which I love. Always one for a bit of dressing up, me. Love a red carpet," she cackles. "Richard E Grant is back with his evil Great Intelligence, the Doctor's greatest secret is revealed, all of his friends rally round to protect him and we finally understand why the Doctor has met Clara so many different times."

She loves working with Matt Smith, who has provided endless support over the past year: "His first advice was never Google yourself and, now that I've got a three-month break, he said take your time and choose your next role carefully. I've read loads of scripts but nothing I'm really in love with." It's a welcome change from her pre-*Who* days when she was struggling for work. So, like Clara she knows she can never go back to a more innocent time, but for the Impossible Girl it now seems like anything is possible. *Stephen Armstrong*

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