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# Frenzy over an everyday story of unfaithful folk

By SANDRA LAVILLE

NOT since Jolene lathered Sid in the shower has an event been so eagerly anticipated.

For more than 12 months Brian Aldridge, the smug and wealthy landowner in the fictional village of Ambridge, has been conducting an affair with the beautiful Siobhan Hathaway.

While some 4-75 million listeners to *The Archers* on Radio 4 have heard the intimate details of his romance, which a few weeks ago resulted in the birth of a baby, Brian's wife Jennifer lives in blissful ignorance.

But on Friday, fans of the BBC's longest-running soap opera heard Brian's stepdaughter confront him about his affair and love child.

In the cliff-hanging episode, Brian, played by Charles Collingwood, promised to confess everything to his wife "in the morning". Last night,

millions tuned in to hear him crawl. On the *Archers Addicts* website, fans could barely control their glee during the countdown to 7pm while more than 6,000 people sent e-mails to the BBC website.

In recent years the soap, first broadcast in 1951, has turned its attention away from farming problems towards plots that one critic has labelled "hayseed porn".

There was Sid Perks, overweight landlord of The Bull, in a passionate clinch in the shower with the country singer Jolene. Shula Hebden, the churchgoing widow, deceived her village vet boyfriend to have sex with the GP in his surgery. Even the vicar, Janet Fisher, has been indulging with the doctor's replacement, Tim.

None of these, however, has held the appalled interest of the audience quite as much as Brian's liaison with Siobhan, played by Caroline Lennon. The story has produced the best viewing audiences in a decade.

Caroline Lennon plays Siobhan, whose affair with Brian Aldridge has intrigued *Archers* fans