

CHAPTER 1

A BAG OF LAUGHS

“Do you want a bag?”

A bored, robotic voice interrupted my ‘to do list’ thoughts.

Well, yes, I *did* need a bag – pretty obvious really, as I was only clutching a small bumbag and my wire chemist’s basket was full. So unless the girl behind the counter thought I was some closet kangaroo with a handy pouch, (oh so convenient for those many purchases) then a bag was a definite must.

A sarcastic response rose to my lips but was suppressed with a sigh of resignation. Good old-fashioned customer service seems to have evaporated, subjected as we are to an obsessive bag culture. No “Good morning” or “Hello” – just a determination to ascertain one’s bag requirements ASAP.

Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m all for saving the planet and doing my bit. I consider myself to be an avid recycler at home. However, I do object to being made to feel guilty for having the audacity to request or need a bag. It’s got to the point where I fear the Bag Police may sneak up on me one day.

“Excuse me, is that bag really necessary, madam?”

“Oh well, yes, officer... I... I...”

You get my drift.

I don’t know why the retailers don’t just provide robust paper bags. Easy to recycle and kinder to the planet. Then we might all be allowed a bag without the suggestion that we have committed some heinous crime. It’s not as if people go around asking for extra bags over and above their needs for a bit of a laugh. No doubt there will soon be a law to stop such profligate bag requests. Guilty of the crime of inappropriately procuring a bag under false pretences. I rest my case.

So why did I have bag rage on that particular day? Simple. I had just returned from visiting my sister Debbie in New Zealand, where in every shop, without fail, I was met with a cheery greeting and no miserable old bag asked me if I wanted a bag. Great!

I admit I am no handbag lady – never been one for bags, although to be fair, I do own two decent ones but sadly lacking in designer kudos. It never ceases to amaze me what women are prepared to pay for a bag or indeed how anyone could need so many. It must be a full-time job for some, keeping up with the latest trends – big ones, small ones... Posh should know! Posh (aka Mrs David Beckham) surely is to bags what Imelda Marcos was to shoes. Still we all have our vices and I confess I have a distinct weakness for boots. However, I suspect I will never suffer bag envy. Give me my bumbag any day, even if I can’t fit a week’s shopping in it.

Anyway, after my disgruntled bag debacle, I made my weary jet-lagged way home, wondering how on earth I could possibly have needed to visit a chemist again this decade, having purchased every lotion, potion, and drug known to man prior to my departure for New Zealand.

CHAPTER 2

MY FRIEND THRUSH

Over the years I have travelled a lot and, having reached the SAGA milestone of fifty, with age comes wisdom. I now go armed with vast supplies of ‘just in case’ medication; my theory being, if you have the remedy to hand the symptoms will never appear. A strange psychology perhaps, but it does work.

Take for example *Thrush* – and *no*, I don’t mean the feathered variety. I refer to that elusive itch – the itch you can’t scratch. The bane of women’s lives. For you ladies lucky enough to have ‘escaped’ the pleasure of this irritating gynaecological problem, that has the habit of presenting at the most inconvenient of times, lucky you! I say inconvenient but come to think of it, when is it convenient to have a bout of *Thrush*? Try never and you’ll be getting close.

In my experience, it has the nasty habit of sneaking up on you when you are on holiday abroad. Let’s face it, who wants to try explaining to a foreign chemist in sign language what your problem is? Pointing at your pubic area and scratching in mid air can be very embarrassing and not one of your finest moments.

During one holiday to Gran Canaria, I felt positively smug at having eluded the *Thrush* curse for the duration. Of course how was I to know that I would be blessed with a dreadful case of piles instead? Yes, back to pointing at nether regions again at some bemused chemist. No laughing matter.

And neither is the issue of cost. Do you realise how expensive it is to keep treating recurring *Thrush*? I could have paid off the third world debt if I hadn’t ploughed a fortune into those magic remedies or at least paid for a flight to New Zealand. There have been times when I have felt compelled to give my bank account details to the drug companies with *carte blanche* to help themselves to my money. Dare I say you have little choice but to accept they have you by the short and curlies and pay!

You may detect that I have become a little cynical and jaded over the years and have decided that a temporary cure for my predicament will not suffice. Prevention, not cure has become the new mantra of life.

You are probably aware of the triggers – tight jeans for example – pity because I prefer tight jeans. Wear cotton pants. I do. Don’t bathe indulgently in bubble bath or use excessive soap. I don’t. But I am not easily thwarted.

My GP, whom I have wearily sat opposite explaining my woes has nodded unsympathetically and muttered that some women are just unlucky (indeed) and prone to the *Thrush* virus. Not a very helpful attitude and lacking in the prevention approach.

I once thought that a certain play gel was exacerbating the problem, so armed with this ‘medical discovery’ I shared my new found suspicions with another GP. Interest hardly registered on the Richter scale and I was definitely not nominated for an acknowledgement in the *Lancet* medical journal. Back to square one.

However, on one occasion, having tried all the usual over-the-counter remedies with limited success, my GP raised my hopes by prescribing a different cream. I left the surgery with glee at the prospect of a ‘eureka, I’m cured’ moment. OMG! BIG mistake on my behalf.

If I said that after applying said cream my 'bits' felt like they had been dipped in acid, I would not be exaggerating. Bring back the *Thrush*! All is forgiven! Needless to say that particular medication was quickly consigned to the bin.

On a more positive note, *Thrush* does instigate a sense of camaraderie amongst we ladies. If you ever hear someone bemoan the *Thrush* curse, there is always a cacophony of muttered sympathy from fellow sufferers. For those lucky enough not to be privy to the experience (my teenage daughter Jocelyn has eluded it – how, I ask you?) I shall declare myself peeved and not a little jealous.

Strangely, of late my pre-disposition to *Thrush* has improved dramatically for no rhyme or reason, change in life style or habit. If indeed my 'friend' has packed its bags and left me for pastures new, bring it on.

