

Chapter Three

Booty Fades; Bum is Forever!

I love my *Judge Judy* - the family court judge on TV (It's a shame women don't get knighted). I will, like an excited child, dash home from work of an evening to watch this (iron) lady berate some highly deserving muppet (dweeb, div, whatever) with cutting comments that are appropriate to those who come up against this television judge and think they can get one over on her with all manner of baloney. She'll rip them out '*a new one*' and, trust me, she takes no prisoners!

One of her most popular sayings is "*Beauty fades; dumb is forever*" and I believe that, frankly speaking, it simply means that if you're stupid now, you probably always will be, and even if you're beautiful now, well that's inevitably going to change!

The 'beauty fades' bit is all too true. When we're young no one tells us that we will be relegated, at some point in time, to the middle-aged stereotype scrapheap and will no longer wear our audacity and arrogance as well as we did our designers labels in our youth and that's because it's an all-change life where we go through stages.

Of course none of us actually imagines we're going to get old – that kind of thing only happens to *other* people.

I think when we're young we imagine old people were born like that and they embody everything we don't want to be – doddering, forgetful, ailing, wrinkly and unattractive, and in general a bloody nuisance. How many of us – come on now, you can admit it - have gritted our teeth and tutted audibly as we try to pass some 'little old dear' hogging up all the pavement when we're in a hurry to get past, simply because we have no patience and we blame them for being old and slow? Personally I've never done that by the way, but I know many who have. It's like thoroughfares are only the domain of the fast and the quick!

I used to work in an old-peoples' home. I'm so glad they've stopped calling them '*old people's homes*' because it smacks too much of a legal dumping ground for those who are past their sell-by date. I think the terms '*older person*' or senior citizen or even the retired sounds much nicer.

Of course I'm bound to be of that way of thinking now I've reached middle-age, and if there's one thing I've learnt about the middle-aged, it's that they never want to be seen as old and in fact never want to get old, maybe because they see their own old age on the horizon. That doesn't mean they want to die young, it just means that the level of denial goes clean into your middle-age because it's an episode in your life that you just don't find desirable with nothing positive to look forward to - and unfortunately - with good reason!

When I worked in this home for retired persons (that's me trying to be politically correct), many of the residents were either in their 80's or 90's; a lot of them in relatively good health, and I marveled at the old sepia photos on their walls, displaying the freshness of their long-departed much younger days. The fresh-faced soldier in uniform, barely nineteen years old, now sadly hardly comparable to the balding, bent-over, wrinkled version with raging gout and arthritis, some

60 or 70 years later. Similarly, the beauty of the ladies back in another era, say, half a century ago, of elegance, style and glamour, now faded and replaced by ill-fitting dentures, a face a Char Pei would envy, and a blue rinse.

With the prospect of the Zimmer frame and mobility scooter (with a walking stick thrown in), plus dropping below the poverty line into the eat-or-heat dilemma, there's not an awful lot of positive advertising for those of us getting on in years (another polite way of saying 'getting old'). There is absolutely nothing good whatsoever to be said about reaching pension-able age because in actual fact it could turn out that with all the stresses, strains, sacrifices, aches and pains of living, *AND* a low income (your pension), this could well be the worst time of your entire life...and my contention is that no one warns you that this is going to happen.

It's the day when you glance in the mirror and wonder who the hell is looking back at you in your reflection. It's the length of time it takes to get up an ordinary flight of stairs - wheezing and with aching joints - when once upon a time you ran up the self-same stairs in 30 seconds.

It's when your aches and pains become the topic of every conversation because you never had *that* twinge before, or *that* pins-and-needles feeling in your hands on waking, or the constant running to the loo in the middle of the night (well, maybe not *running* per se) and the fact that you monitor your own health hourly for changes in temperature, high blood pressure and cholesterol levels, keeping your corn plasters handy next to the blister pack of daily prescribed medication, and all the things that constitute the daily reminder that you're either *getting* old, or you've reached there already.

Memory-loss takes over slowly...that's a classic that one, going off to another room to get something and standing on the threshold, bemused, wondering what on earth I went there for. It's frightening to think this is where it starts - early onset Alzheimer's - a little bit of memory loss here, a little bit of memory loss there, then poof - the full-blown *Big A* and you've lost yourself for good! There's a joke doing the rounds on this very subject - would you rather have Parkinson's or Alzheimer's, and the answer is you'd much rather spill your wine rather than forget where you put it. Go on, you can laugh if you want, it's not *that* offensive!

Where was I? Oh yeah...

I have to say I think it must be pretty scary to reach your three-score-years-and-ten now that 'the elderly' are living longer because it's a case, really, of whether you *will* in fact wake up in the morning. Once you've had your quota and you're still here, surely it's a scary thing considering your funeral plot in case at some point soon your number is up, and if you do in fact wake up the next morning and the *next*, you must feel like punching the air and thinking, Yay! And that's all well and good if you're in good health. It's got to be a different kind of nightmare if you're not!

And because '*no-one knows the hour*', should I live another 20 years or so after my 70th birthday, at this stage of my life (in my early 50's) there appears indeed a whole lifetime ahead of me, it doesn't take away from the fact that by then, I'd have lost my sexuality and good looks because any 70 or 80 year old woman, plastic surgery and botox notwithstanding, is still going to look like a granny, compounding the fact that beauty does indeed fade.

You could look like sex kitten *Bridget Bardot* in your youth (for want of a better example) and if you know and remember her, she was a sweet, gorgeous little nymph of a girl, and I'm not saying a word against her in the present tense but, without the wonders of plastic surgery, the evidence is clear that that lady has very surely and, if I might say so, been very brutally ravished by the intervening years. I quite admire her stance (and courage) to not go under the knife like many of her contemporaries) but she still ended up, like many of us will, with deep grid lines on our jowly faces and our chests in our lap, as we slope reluctantly towards the twilight years before *shuffling*, quite literally off this mortal coil!

And what about the ageing parts of you that don't work like they did? This scuppers my dieting efforts to oblivion. You don't have the stamina or energy you once had, and it's true what they say about dieting and trying to lose weight – it definitely is harder after 40, never mind after 50 or 60.

I, at this moment in time, am on another healthy-eating programme (you can't call it a 'diet' because your brain fights tooth and nail if it even sniffs the 'D' word - it slows down your metabolism and won't let anything that isn't chocolate past your lips), and I am of course incorporating exercise in with the regime. Unless I'm prepared to work out like a footballer or a boxer, the weight will appear to come off at a rate of approximately half an ounce a week even though I'm going to bed with a rumbling tummy and exercising (with my bad knee) till I ache all over.

I even ride my bike to work most days and yet the scales tell blatant lies to my face when I step on them ever hopeful, as they show a puny weight-loss (even naked, no shoes) as if to say my sacrifices are futile. It's this type of thing that makes me want to raid the biscuit tin.

And you've got be careful what you ask for, I feel, at the end of the day because at this stage in your life, all things *not* being equal, the only way of getting really thin...is to get sick. Oh the pounds will drop off then, but I don't want to spend my last years gaunt, pale, wan, washed out and drawn with sagging skin long enough to drape over my Zimmer frame, or tripping me up thank you very much. Speaking of tripping, (not the *having-smoked-a-joint* variety) have you noticed that when you were young and tripped, you "...fell over...", but with age it takes on a whole new meaning and is described as your having ..."*had a fall*" ... Why? Can someone explain this inexplicable difference?

Life is so unfair and even if we *had* been warned when young, as is usual for the youth of today or even yesteryear, we wouldn't have listened anyway, because, like they say youth is wasted on the young, and there's no two ways about it, it's a very true statement. We would have laughed hard into anyone's face who tried to tell us any different about our youthful glorious lives where we dreamed of being millionaires by the time we were 30 (another myth) thinking we would hold onto our buff figures and beautiful features until we were at least 100, such are young peoples' delusions.

Now just to back-track a little, I've been truly blessed in the looks department. Not in the 'figure' department (alas and alack, I've been bemoaning my position for years in that regard) but all things being fair, I don't think I have grounds to complain (too much). My looks may fade in the long run but up to now I have to say I am one of the lucky ones. I looked about 12 when I was 19. I then looked about 16 when I was in fact 30. I searched in vain for wrinkles (yippee!) on my 40th

birthday and have to say with joy (and not a little smugness) that at the grand old age of 53, they've yet to make an appearance.

Having done the calculations correctly, I now look about 38/39 on a good day. On a bad day I look like a 45-year-old who's had a hard life, proving every cloud has a silver lining, and since we all know that 50 is now the new 40, I'm happy to go along with that as it appears our generation is aging rather more gracefully than our parents did at any rate, rather like fine wine.

With the cards I've been dealt I got a rather good pair of genes (a *pair* of genes?), no sorry I mean 'a set of genes', so I suppose I can't complain, although I do wonder what these fiddly little fine hairs are doing, sprouting irritatingly *just under* the chin...obviously where you can't reach, but let's not split hairs, shall we?

And, I maintain and always have (even given my position on the whole life-long diet thing and how hard it is to lose weight and keep it off (yada yada) that a little fat in the right place wouldn't go amiss. If your cheeks are hollow and gaunt and you're not ill, then you're *too thin*, it's as simple as that! If your backside is too small, or your breasts for that matter, why be dumb and spend thousands on implants when you can go the easier route and eat, yes, *eat* the sort of foods that pad out the frame and fill in all the gaps.

I've been doing it with 100% great success for years, so the proof of the pudding is in the eating, problem solved!

To summarise, I have a round jolly kind of face, to go with my somewhat round jolly kind of body, and I know I've regaled about it for years, but at this stage in my life it looks as though my excess (dare I say the 'F' word) *FAT* may just be working to my advantage. I thank Judge Judy for coining her popular and memorable phrase of Beauty Fades; Dumb is Forever! for the inspiration to write this chapter. Mind you, in my case it's more like "***Booty fades; Bum is forever!***"