

Seven Ages of a Bathroom Cabinet

When do the seven ages of a bathroom cabinet begin? Not with the mewling, helpless infant who is merely the recipient of the contents, not the provider and replenisher. No, the bathroom cabinet's first age is surely when someone moves into their first independent home. Lucky you, there was a cabinet already in the home you moved into as an adult. But it was old and not quite empty when you moved in. Eeuw! Nasty bits of crepe bandage and an ancient bottle of indigestion medicine adhered to the shelf, which was pebble-dashed with liquids of an indeterminate origin. Well done, you held your nose, cleaned it out and now it's as good as new. As it's a shared bathroom, (an unpleasant experience, the distastefulness of which increases with each new sharer), you agree to have the left-hand side of the cabinet and enjoy filling it, feeling very grown up.

The First Age

What do you put into your side? Face cream, face masks, body lotion, zit cream, tampons, expensive shampoo and conditioner (kept in there because you don't entirely trust your flatmate not to use if it lives in the shower), lady shave, waxing strips (for when you're brave enough), then the inevitable in-grown hair cream, instant tan, morning after pill (in case). There's also Resolve for when you are absolutely not going to drink because you've got work in the morning. You don't keep your make-up or perfume in it, (that's in your bedroom on

the chest of drawers in front of a mirror with a good light source), but you do keep the gel pads that you put in your platforms when you go clubbing. Not that they help much, so you have plenty of Campeed to repair the damage. There are two packs of unopened dental floss. Your mother arrived with some 'essentials' she said. But you'd already bought floss, so now you have two staring accusingly when you open the door. (You know flossing's a good idea, but there's always something better to do.) Crammed in the corner of the cabinet is your extensive, but now redundant collection of nail polishes. When you had a salary raise at work, you could afford the luxury of gel nails. You hang on to the bottles, just in case. You may need to stop a ladder in your tights at some point.

The Second Age

How sweet, you've found your soulmate and you're buying your first house together. It's a new build and you have to buy a bathroom cabinet along with towel rails, soap dishes and other unnecessary paraphernalia. Your partner is worried about the expense, but you are excited, like having the doll's house your parents would never buy you. What goes into the cabinet? Stronger face cream, a tiny, though hellishly expensive, phial of serum which is going to prevent lines from forming on your beautiful face, (the Clarins woman told you that so it must be true), shaving cream (his), condoms, paracetamol, aftershave, make-up, smelly embrocation for his sports injuries, and less expensive shampoo and conditioner, because, as it doesn't seem to make much difference to the outcome of a hair wash, why would you

spend £20 on a bottle of shampoo when there are household things to buy, and anyway partner is using it, and he wouldn't notice if it was carbolic.

In the first self-conscious flush of co-habiting, your razor and waxing strips were hidden in your underwear drawer, but after a while they crept back into the cabinet where they feel more comfortable. You learn that his razor does a much better job than yours, so you steal his, until he realises he is changing blades more often and forbids you from touching it. You ignore him, of course. Now what you keep in your underwear drawer is folic acid and pregnancy tests. He thinks it's too soon. You disagree, privately.

The Third Age

You're pregnant - Congratulations! Do you need a bigger cabinet? It's a squeeze for all the indigestion tablets, (terrible heartburn), E 45, multiple stretch mark creams and oils, Primrose oil capsules, folic acid, vitamin D, vitamin C, alongside all the other stuff. Joyfully you evict your tampons and pads, little realising that mattress-like maternity pads soon follow. You think you might need a supplementary storage facility. He doesn't, and pointedly leaves his shaving cream and aftershave on top of the cabinet. Joining it is your wedding makeup on which you spent a fortune, (meeting the minimum spend of the make-up tutorial in the fancy department store so you could do your own on the big day). You didn't realise

then that it was to remain largely untouched for years, and now it smells peculiar as you learn that the little symbol of a pot with 18M on it means it goes off after 18 months.

Reluctantly, you conclude that you need to throw it out.

The Fourth Age

Baby is here and has taken over. Out go all the indulgent pre-baby luxuries. Shampoo and conditioner (from Poundland) are now kept in the shower to be kicked over every morning. You don't remember the last time you washed your hair, and it's falling out by the handful anyway. The bathroom cabinet is now full of gripe water, E 45 and nappy rash cream, and the ever-growing collection of plastic syringes from each new box of Calpol, a baby hairbrush, the snot-sucker that the midwife recommended, cradle cap shampoo, Q-Tips, and then there's the baby oil and talc your granny gave you that you'll never use. The cabinet's contents spill out all over the handbasin and there's no room for your daily make up. Little matter, you know you'll never have time or inclination to wear it ever again. The body moisturiser you used to apply religiously has been supplanted by baby lotion so at least you smell nice. Super strength eye cream makes its debut here to compensate for the lack of sleep.

The Fifth Age

The Calpol is joined by veruka kits, ear drops and Mr Men Plasters languishing at the back, having been superseded by a Superman brand. A rubber duck has found its way in there, for sanctuary, maybe. There's a BOGOF offer of children's toothpaste, which they insist on using until they go to uni because, for reasons you can't fathom, they prefer the taste. Inexplicably, several plastic-coloured rings from long departed electric toothbrush heads always roll out of the cupboard when you're looking for something, but they never get thrown away. What is the magic that allows them to survive the (very) occasional cull of the cupboard? He thinks they 'might come in handy' one day. The harsh chemical shower gel, in the nuclear reactor colours the kids prefer, makes you nostalgic for the organic baby bubble bath days. As they grow up the zit cream and hair gel makes an appearance, although why the boys keep them in the bathroom is a mystery to you, as they don't seem to recognise many of the other services the bathroom can provide. Romance will cure that, your friends tell you, but you don't want your sons coming under some other woman's influence, they're your beautiful boys. Your mother always told you 'a boy's a son 'til he gets a wife, but a daughter's a daughter for the rest of her life'. You hope that's not true - you would have liked a daughter. Contact lens cleaner makes its first appearance in the cabinet. You always hated wearing glasses.

The Sixth Age.

Hello to HRT patches, royal jelly capsules, ibuprofen, his hair dye, nose clippers, a wrist support (RSI since you went back to work). You have your hair cut and coloured

professionally. You work with lots of young people and grey hairs are just embarrassing. There's room for your make up again, although it's not as much now. The emphasis is on face and eye masks, cream, collagen and anything else that will hold back the years. His stuff stays in the cabinet long after he himself has gone. You miss him and keep his razors and shaving cream, nose clippers and hair dye for years after his death in a car you mocked him for buying. Mid-life crisis buy, the kids said. If only he'd taken up fishing instead.

The Seventh Age.

You can't reach the top shelf now, so every item is crammed onto the first and second shelves - like crepe bandages, Deep Heat, heart tablets and cholesterol tablets. Rennies and Gaviscon figure prominently as you're a slave to heartburn. You long ago stopped having your hair coloured, but the remains of a spectacularly unsuccessful DIY attempt at going auburn still lurks towards the back, behind an old packet of corn plasters from when you were a martyr to corns. In a bid to ingratiate herself, your daughter-in-law gave you some moccasins for Christmas. You were a bit sniffy at first, (you always assume she has a hidden agenda), but to be fair they have turned out to be very comfortable, so you have no need of corn plasters now and the visiting chiropodist says your feet are a marvel. Your favourite grandson joked about putting the plasters on eBay in the vintage section. He's so funny and clever. You always give him a little bit more and tell him not to tell the others. Well, what they don't know won't hurt them. You don't notice that half the middle shelf is taken up with packets of Paracetamol that are part of the repeat prescription you insist your son

collects for you every month but which you never take. (The family will share them out when they clear the house, tutting at the waste of NHS resources when they can be had cheaply at any supermarket).

Sometimes when you come into the bathroom, instantly forgetting what you've come for.

You look at the cabinet, searching for signs of its former lives, but sans make-up, sans baby oil and sans shaving cream, this strange eventful history will end here and await a new first age.

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