

Caroline Bramwell

# Loo Rolls to Lycra

The Ironman Dreams  
of an IBD Sufferer



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# Chapter One

'HOW MUCH longer are you going to be? Someone's going to spot us!'

As my husband acted as lookout on the roadside, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, I was crouched as low as I could behind the decorative flower bed on one of the busiest main roads in Barnstaple at prime time on a Saturday evening. There wasn't anything I could do; this, for me, was a normal occurrence. As I squatted uncomfortably amongst the bushes with my back up against a small, cold brick wall, I was in so much pain and my body was turning itself inside out. Thankfully the darkness helped to obscure the sight of me hunkering down like a common tramp in the undergrowth. This flower bed had been the nearest location that I could find to dive into when my ulcerative colitis attack came on; next to the pay meter of a car park, I was hoping against all odds that, at 11pm, no one was going to be needing a car park ticket!

When my husband, Craig, had called out those words in hushed tones – 'How much longer are you going to be?' – I'd had to bite my tongue. 'I didn't exactly think

about timing myself,' was the retort in my head. From the aching in my legs I knew I'd been here a long time – maybe up to 30 minutes? Or maybe it had been longer? I can imagine for him, loitering on the roadside, he'd probably looked a bit suspect as well as being bored out of his mind. Who would want to stand on the street as a lookout after a night out?

I was in a whole different world of pain, one that I'd come to live with over the last five years. I would much rather be the embarrassed lookout, trying to distract the passers-by with a cheery 'Good evening', than being the anxious and distraught person that I now was, hiding in the bushes.

The evening had started out so well. It was a rare thing to get an evening out together, partly due to my illness and partly because we didn't often manage to get a babysitter. So we'd planned to go to the cinema. Nothing strenuous – just a lovely 'grown-ups' evening to see the latest blockbuster. I'd planned my day carefully so that I hadn't eaten anything that might upset my stomach; I'd kept the day as stress-free as possible and it was all paying off. I'd managed a whole evening without incident – watching the whole film without having to dash off at regular intervals to the toilet. For once, I'd been feeling like a normal human being again as we watched the final film credits roll. The biggest incident of the evening was me kicking over a huge carton of sticky sweet popcorn that even the cinema attendant came and swept up with a huff.

As we left the cinema for the short walk to the car park, my stomach started to cramp up. 'Oh no, not now!' I thought; I turned to Craig, who could see by the worried look on my face that I was having a problem. I had to

find somewhere to go, right this second! These attacks are instant, and I mean *really* instant! We had already walked past the only pub near the car park, and I'd never make it back there in time anyway. Approaching the car park, my only option was the bushes. They weren't exactly big bushes to hide behind, but it was that or nothing!

So, how does a grown woman in her early 40s stoop so low as to be crouching in the bushes?

The last four years have been a living hell ... to be honest, it really all started when I was pregnant with my daughter, Natasha.

\* \* \* \* \*

It's October 2004 and I am three months pregnant with my second child; I'm a nervous mum-to-be. Since my son, Robert, was born just over a year ago, I've sadly had two miscarriages, so this time I've been extremely cautious and tried to make sure my life has been calm and stress-free. In the bathroom for the usual 'morning ablutions', I am therefore immediately panicked at the sight of blood in the toilet bowl. 'Please, no, not again.'

A mother's instinct kicks in and I immediately get myself an appointment with my GP. However, it's not right – it's not like before. The bleeding isn't coming from the pregnancy. That's a relief, but it leaves some unanswered questions about what this really is. The doctor wants to monitor things – if she's got any ideas, she's definitely not prepared to share them with me at the moment.

As the weeks pass and the baby inside me continues to grow, the bleeding and upset stomach doesn't let up. Clearly there is something else going on, as I am spending longer in the toilet. At first it's suggested that it could be irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), but from the way in

which I explain to her that I get a slight urgency for going to the toilet, the doctor suspects that it could be ulcerative colitis. I've never heard of ulcerative colitis, and I've no idea what causes it or how it's cured. Until we know for sure, the doctor cannot make a confirmed diagnosis. The only way we are going to know for sure is with an internal inspection – a colonoscopy – but this could put the baby at risk of miscarriage, so we have to leave it until all risk to the baby has passed.

At seven months pregnant, the decision is made to carry out the internal investigation. At the hospital, I am asked to drink a glutinous concoction that both looks and tastes like thick, gritty mud. It smells disgusting, and in order to swallow it, I have to hold my nose. This is so gross. This foul-smelling swamp sludge is supposedly going to 'clear me out'. I'm left in a small private room with an en-suite toilet, and I sit and wait. It doesn't take long to work. Oh my word, I dash to the toilet and my body drains itself at full pelt! After two further dashes to the toilet, my body feels racked and empty.

Nervously, dressed in an unglamorous blue hospital gown, loosely tied down the back to provide some modesty, I feel very exposed both physically and mentally. A gently spoken nurse comes in to see if I'm OK and tells me it's time to go through to the next room, where the consultant will carry out the procedure. I lie down on the table and the consultant explains to me what is going to happen. The camera is going to be passed up my back passage and around the bend that is the sigmoid. He's going to be looking for signs of inflammation, which, if I want, I can see on the television screen beside the table.

I roll over with my bum exposed, counterbalanced by my baby bump, which is nestled in the drapes of the

blue gown. With three people in the room, this feels like a performance in embarrassment. But it's got to be done. As the consultant talks to me throughout, the procedure isn't too bad until it meets the sigmoid. As this point, the camera has to go around a bend, which becomes exceedingly uncomfortable. I wince at the sudden pain and discomfort, and I'm asked to move my body a little to ease it going through. It's as far as it's going to need to go, and on the end of the instrument is a small 'grabber' that takes a biopsy. We can all see on the screen that the lining of my bowel is red and inflamed. It's confirmed that I have ulcerative colitis (UC).

Ulcerative colitis is an autoimmune disorder, sometimes thought to be hereditary, but that's not always the case. It's definitely not something that runs in my family. In essence, your body's natural defence mechanism will fight off viruses, but with Crohn's disease or colitis the body's defence system thinks you are the virus, so it attacks your intestine. By attacking the lining of the intestine, this becomes ulcerated and bleeds, which was the first indicator for me. But it's not just that the intestine is ulcerated – simply eating can keep it aggravated. It was explained to me that it's like having an open wound on your skin and constantly rubbing food and dirt over it; it's not likely to heal when it's constantly being rubbed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Natasha is born by caesarean, as she ended up refusing to turn around, so her head was high and her feet were pushing downwards. If it wasn't bad enough having to need the loo with my UC, I've also had her kicking my bladder, making me need to pee all the time as well through the later stages of pregnancy. The hospital did



try turning her with acupuncture, but she was stubborn and wouldn't shift.

As Craig watches on, the nurse lifts our beautiful baby girl up for me to see and I hold her close. I may have had to put up with tummy upsets whilst pregnant, but this little bundle is so worth all the aggravation.

Discharged within the week, I'm home with Craig and my toddler, Robert, and now we have our final member of the family all tucked up with us. Recovering from the caesarean will take a few weeks, but it feels great to be home in my own bed with Natasha in the crib beside it. I've been breastfeeding her from the moment she was born, but as we move into the second week at home she is in need of more bottle feeding. I expect to be losing some of the weight that I've carried whilst I was pregnant, but after the initial drop it continues to fall. Whilst I feel like I am getting back into shape, this is just far too rapid.

As I get thinner by the day, I am struggling to produce enough milk to feed Natasha; my body is failing me as a mother. This disease is now starting to take over my body. Whilst I was carrying the baby, I felt like I was battling to protect her – but, since she was safely delivered, this disease has had free rein to really have an impact on me. The ulceration in my colon is making blood loss a regular occurrence, and with this comes fatigue.

When the lining of the intestine is so inflamed and bleeding, the knock-on effect is twofold. There is the effect of fatigue simply due to the amount of blood loss, but also the body is unable to absorb enough nutrients from the food I'm eating, because this is absorbed through the lining of the intestine. So it's a double whammy of a downward spiral. Within two weeks of giving birth to Natasha, I have lost two stone in weight; and with the

exhaustion of the disease, I need to rest more and more. With Robert not yet two years old and now with baby Natasha, Craig takes charge of doing all the night feeds for Natasha with the bottles I've prepared.

My doctor refers me to a specialist consultant at North Devon District Hospital – the same man who carried out the sigmoidoscopy on me just a few short months ago. His very matter-of-fact approach is harsh, but I guess he's being a realist. This is a disease, not just a condition that can be cured with a course of tablets. The only way to stop my body from attacking itself is to suppress the autoimmune system: to turn off that defence mechanism that has gone awry and normally protects our bodies. This entails some lengthy discussions about steroids.

'Steroids? Aren't they bad for you? Don't they have side effects?'

'Yes, there are side effects,' the consultant admits, 'but we will give you some tablets to counteract those.'

To begin with, he prescribes for me some prednisolone, a topical steroid foam. The plan is to use this on a regular basis at the point of the problem, to try to calm down the inflammation. I am to try it for a few weeks and see how it improves things. I pick up the bulky plain paper bag from the dispensary in the hospital, now feeling armed with my own defence mechanism against this disease. To say that using this for the first time was a unique experience is an understatement. The bag contained a canister of foam and a large quantity of plastic straws. It doesn't take much imagination to realise how this is going to get to the point of delivery! I've squatted over a few unpleasant toilets on foreign holidays in my time, but trying to 'squat and squirt' would put the skills of a contortionist to the test.

After a few weeks, the foam isn't having much effect, except perhaps I'm walking slightly differently! So it's a repeat visit to the consultant for an update. Clearly this disease has got a better grip on my gut than I have, so we have to look at upping the steroids in my body to battle this. We need to find a balance between keeping the disease under control and not overloading my body with unnecessary steroids, as there is only a certain limit we can go to based on my weight. So the decision is made to give me a relatively low level of steroids in tablet form, as well as the foam, for the time being. The steroids, however, can cause osteoarthritis and have other nasty effects on your internal organs, so I am prescribed a concoction of medication for each to treat the effects of the other. This includes taking ferrous sulphate (iron tablets) and calcium tablets.

As things start to settle down, with less and less bleeding, I'm at last starting to feel normal again and feel like we've got this under control. After all, when you're ill with anything, it takes time to recover and start getting back to your old self. I am, however, a little concerned at having to be on the steroids, and I know the idea is to get things under control now, then wean down the steroids so my body can cope on its own again.

\* \* \* \* \*

It's taken me several months to feel like I'm at the point of reducing the steroid dosage, and I'll admit I'm a little bit nervous – and excited at the same time – to be dropping this. There's a bit of me that wants to get rid of the steroids altogether, but I know that's not going to be possible at the moment. By going 'cold turkey', my body, which has become dependent on the tablets to keep my immune

system suppressed, won't be able to cope so suddenly, and I know the flare-up from the ulcerative colitis will be so much worse. So this is a gentle reduction of steroids, giving my body time to 'rebalance' itself.

With the flare-ups more manageable, being a mum again is a wonderful feeling, and I plan a trip into Barnstaple for some clothes shopping with Natasha. She's not yet a year old, so having her baby buggy makes it so much easier for me to carry more purchases, and means I don't have to carry her. Ulcerative colitis is a very unpredictable disease. Whilst the condition eats away at your insides, as it progresses it is causing me to have some 'urgent' toilet visits. I don't mean like someone who just feels that they really desperately need the toilet; most people can hang on until they find a loo. But with ulcerative colitis you lose even that control. The only way to describe it is like having food poisoning but without the sickness.

Browsing amongst the rails of gorgeous baby clothes in Mothercare, my stomach suddenly starts to cramp up. Panic-stricken, I look around to see if they've got any customer toilets in the store. Unfortunately, not being a large store, they don't! Terrified of what is about to happen right here in the middle of the store, I ask the girl on the checkout if they have a toilet I could use urgently.

'I'm very sorry, we don't have customer toilets. The nearest public toilets are down the other end of the shopping centre,' she says, pointing out of the store.

'I won't make it that far!' I cry. 'I've got a medical condition called ulcerative colitis, which means when I need to go, I need to go immediately. If I don't get to a toilet straight away, I'm going to be in an awful mess. It's pretty much uncontrollable.'

Seeing my distress, the manager standing beside the young sales assistant spots that there's a problem and immediately steps in to help.

'We do have our staff toilet out the back, which you can use. However, you won't be able to get the buggy in there with you, it's just a tiny toilet. But don't worry, we will look after your daughter here behind the counter while you use the toilet.'

I cannot thank her enough, although the thought of leaving my baby daughter behind the counter in the shop, whilst I am out the back, terrifies me. I'm led to the back of the shop and out through their warehouse to a tiny toilet cubicle – really it's just the size of a cupboard. I dash in, lock the door and burst into floods of tears. 'I hate this disease – why me?' I sob.

After about 20 minutes of pain and suffering, I make my way back to the shop floor. Natasha is happily dozing in her buggy, oblivious to the disappearance of her distraught mother. The manager and shop assistant are wonderfully kind and ask if I'm OK. Now that the urgency has passed, I am able to explain to them more about the disease and the impact it has on my body. I cannot say thank you enough to them for their consideration and help. Their understanding means a great deal to me. I count myself lucky that I was in Mothercare when this attack happened; if I'd been in a hardware store or a large supermarket, would they have been so considerate to a mum in distress? Would they have done the same thing? I'd like to think so.

After this terrible episode, I vow never to go shopping with my children alone; Craig is going to have to come with me in case it happens again. And happen again, it does! In fact, it increasingly becomes a problem. For

months, the urgent attacks come on. At first they are just intermittent and it's difficult to pinpoint what causes them. Often it's just picking something up and putting a strain on my stomach, or it could be having a stressful day. Irritable bowel syndrome is brought on by anxiety and lifestyle stresses, but this inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is different.

Sadly, people do get the two conditions confused. So often it is thought by friends and family that IBD is the same as IBS and that I should just 'take it a bit easy'. I can't take life easy with an 18-month-old and a 3-year-old. When the children are crawling around on the floor in the lounge, I get down to join in, but simply the movement of rolling around on the floor causes the cramping pain, which signals having to make an emergency dash to the toilet. As I come to identify what might trigger an attack, the more I hold back. I can no longer get down on the floor and play with the children, I can no longer pick them up and swing them around, I can no longer take them to the park to play, where there are no toilets nearby. This horrible disease is stopping me from doing all the things a mum and dad do with their kids in these early formative years. It becomes heartbreaking to watch Craig play with Robert and Natasha in a way that I want to, to throw myself into being an active, fun-loving mum, as I was when Robert was born.

Shopping trips into town become a regular family event now, and with the increasing number of attacks I am getting, my steroid dosage is having to be increased just to keep the condition under control. This doesn't mean it stops the bouts of urgency – it just tries to limit them. My life is now being controlled by toilets. I can't go anywhere where there isn't a toilet, and I even consider applying

for a Blue Badge. This would entitle me to park up on double yellow lines, or in disabled car-parking bays, which would be close to a loo in case of emergency. But I don't consider myself to be 'disabled' in the way anyone would traditionally consider 'disabled' to mean. So I choose not to apply for the Badge. I do, however, become a member of Crohn's & Colitis UK, who, with their welcome pack, send me a Radar key and a 'Can't Wait Card', which I can show someone if I am in a mad rush for the toilet, without having to explain it all. The Radar key looks like a giant key to some magical Pandora's box – maybe, in a way, it is. It will allow me access to disabled toilets.

However, having such a 'magical' key that gives me access to the inner sanctum of a large disabled toilet facility, especially when I have two small children in tow, brought its own issues. You see, when someone sees me coming out of the disabled toilet with two small children, I'll get stared at and even have remarks made to me along the lines of, 'This is for disabled people, it's not for families.' Whilst I want to snap back at the individual, I have to take a deep breath and explain calmly that I have a medical condition. Of course, being a condition about bowels and pooing, most people feel very uncomfortable and embarrassed at having asked. Maybe next time they won't be so quick to judge.

So, on trips to the big shopping centre in town, to save myself the embarrassment of people questioning my right to use the disabled toilets, and holding up others, I generally endeavour to use the regular ladies' toilets. I might be in there for ages. The urgency comes on so fast, and my body starts to empty so fast, just like when I took that swamp sludge for the sigmoidoscopy. But this time, it won't stop. My body cramps up, trying to excrete everything it

contains and more; it's an involuntary spasming that leaves my stomach aching, as though a tight band has been put around my body and tightened and tightened until I hurt. Poor Craig and the children are left outside waiting for half an hour or more for me to reappear – a washed-out, frail version of the me that went in.

On one occasion, I take Natasha into the ladies' toilets to change her nappy. Laid out on the fold-down changing board, with the little straps that hold the wriggly little person in one place, I've just taken off her nappy when the cramping starts. Now I've got a big dilemma: Natasha's halfway through a nappy change in the middle of the toilets and I'm about to poo myself! I ask one of the ladies queuing for the toilets to quickly go and call my husband, who is waiting outside. Startled, she does as I ask, and Craig, with Robert in tow, has to come through into the ladies' toilets to pick up where I am about to have to leave off. Apologising profusely to the women queuing for the toilets, Craig takes over the nappy change, whilst I dash for the first available cubicle, queue-jumping in the process whilst Craig explains what the problem is.

From that point on, Craig becomes the nappy-changer on every outing. His role becomes that of mum and dad rolled into one. Neither of us can trust my body to behave in any situation, so, rather than having the same problem happening again, it seems simpler for Craig to deal with Natasha, as more often than not I'll need the toilet and be gone for quite some time.

\* \* \* \* \*

As I'm on increasingly higher dosages of steroids, the doctor and hospital consultant are having to monitor how my body is coping with all these drugs. The steroids have



a bad effect on my internal organs, so I have to take extra drugs to counteract that effect. Plus I have to be careful in the sun, as the steroids thin the skin. But in order to know how much of each drug I should have so that it isn't having a detrimental effect on my internal organs, I have to get blood samples taken every two weeks. Each visit, I have to switch from my left arm to my right to preserve the integrity of my veins, and if the needle doesn't go in easily, I end up with terrible bruising in my arm, making me look like some kind of drug addict.

Taking my bloods is routine for me, and as Natasha and Robert are growing up and come with me to my doctor appointments, they are fascinated by the whole process. I don't want my children to grow up worrying about needles, so they get 'hands on' and get to hold the phial after it's been filled, amazed at how it feels warm in their little hands.

Living with a disease like this, your whole life revolves around medication, blood tests, toilets and hospital appointments. My stomach becomes bloated quite frequently, and I find that this can make my urgent dash to the toilet more volatile. Looking online for information, I can only find forums full of other people who have the condition and it's all 'woe is me'. The stories of their illness and how bad they feel, and how they cannot do anything, are really depressing, and the thought that this is how life is going to be for me is a bleak prospect.

Thinking that there must be some natural remedies for this condition, I've read up that wheat and dairy can aggravate the gut, so cutting these out could help. I've also come across Aloe Vera, which you can take in a drink form. It tastes pretty foul to me, but as aloe is a natural healer, the concept is that this lines the inside of your

intestine. I'm not sure exactly how effective this can be, and as my condition worsens it is definitely not having any effect. I think my system is beyond the point of being gently healed by a plant drink.

Changing my diet, however, does seem to have a calming effect on my system. By cutting out bread, I'm getting less bloating. The bloating has become an increasingly big part of this condition. It's been terribly depressing seeing myself ballooning up, not just from my gut feeling swollen and uncomfortable, but also with the side effects of the increasing dosage of steroids. Over time I have begun to look like I've been pumped up like a helium balloon; I've now got what is called 'moon face' – my face has puffed up and it's no longer me looking back from the mirror in the morning. My clothes no longer fit me, and I am having to wear my dark, loose pregnancy outfits again. To be honest, I actually look pregnant again. I avoid looking in a mirror as much as possible now, as it just makes me cry to see myself looking so huge. My eyes look like slits in my big, inflated face. This is the drugs taking full impact on my body. I have no choice but to take the tablets, hence my desperate endeavours to find natural remedies to help manage this condition so I can come off the medication.

Cutting out bread is easy – just stop eating sandwiches – but it's actually going gluten-free that seems to calm my system the most. So this means finding alternatives to eat. I've bought myself a bread maker and spelt flour, and I've started to make my own spelt bread. Being an ancient form of wheat, I have found it doesn't create the gluten issues of more common wheat. I've also found a little local bakery that makes fresh rye bread, which has also been a great alternative to the bread I used to eat, as

this hasn't caused me any bloating. But going gluten-free isn't just about bread: I have to cut out all forms of gluten, and I've now become obsessed with checking the details on the packets of everything we buy. No pastry, no gravy ... it's shocking how much of our everyday food contains gluten. Endeavouring to go gluten-free and dairy-free at the same time is doubly tough, and my choice of foods is dwindling to a very slim range. I'm sure I'm not getting the best nutrient intake.

Craig has pretty much taken over the running of the house and kids, including cooking dinners every evening. However, he's having to create different meals for me every night, and it's just more for him to have to cope with.

I've taken to juicing wheatgrass. I've bought a juicer, which you clamp on to the side of your kitchen unit and then grind the grass through it to get the juice. It's a laborious task for such a small amount of juice from all the effort. The house is now also looking like a garden centre, as I've taken to ordering trays of growing wheatgrass on a regular basis. The only place where I can keep it is in the conservatory which adjoins our kitchen. I can easily access it for my juicing. Craig thinks it's all getting a little extreme, but I'm trying everything.

Talking to my consultant at the hospital, I explain to him what I'm doing with my diet. He tells me that food has nothing to do with it. But I know my own body, and I know that with cutting out the gluten, in particular, I'm feeling less bloated and uncomfortable and therefore not dashing to the toilet quite so much.

Craig's being mum and dad these days, because I'm simply unable to cope. The steroids are really messing with my head; it's like there's loads of 'noise' going on all

the time inside my head and I cannot think straight. Craig and I run our own PR, marketing and graphic design business, which I'm the 'front man' for; if I don't go out and look for new work, then there's nothing new coming in to keep us busy or pay the wages. But I'm struggling at the office with fatigue and what I call my 'noisy head'. Up until now we have employed two staff – one is an account executive and the other is my office manager, who looks after the accounts too – but it's worrying that I cannot bring in new work and I am increasingly having to have a quiet time to take a power nap in the afternoon in the office, whilst the others 'man the fort'.

Craig and I decide that I should just focus on the business and not worry about the house and kids, after an incident at Tesco one Saturday morning. I take Robert and Natasha with me for our regular weekly shop at the supermarket. Parked up in the 'mother and toddler' bay, I load the two of them into the double seats in the front of the shopping trolley and head into the store, armed with my long list of groceries and household stuff. The store is busy; I've picked a bad time to come – mid-morning on a Saturday. I head up and down the first two aisles of fruit and vegetables, looking at my list to make sure I haven't forgotten anything. Trying to get around the top of the aisle into the next one, there's always a bottleneck of trollies and people. Why do people find it necessary to leave their trolley unattended in places where people are coming round, whilst they wander off to pick an item off the opposite aisle? This really irritates me. The next aisle is equally busy with families; feeling my frustration starting to bubble up, my head is starting to spin and I cannot seem to concentrate. Now there are two men chatting in the middle of the aisle, totally oblivious to the

fact that their trollies have completely blocked the aisle and no one can get through.

With a sharp 'Excuse me', I glare at the men as I barge my way through them, bumping one of the trollies out of the way as I go. I'm not someone who would ever get angry at something so minor, but I am absolutely seething. Inside my head I am screaming; my children keep grabbing items from the trolley behind them, thinking it's a great game, but I cannot think; my heart's racing; I've got to get out of here!

Pushing the trolley to the front of the store to where I see a shop assistant, I grab both the children out of their seats and sob to the lady, 'I can't do this, it's just too much. I'll have to come back when it's not busy.' Leaving this startled young lady with a half-loaded trolley, I dash out to the car, strap the children into their car seats and ring home, crying my eyes out. I cannot even cope with going food shopping now, and all this upset has set my stomach off into cramping again. Thankfully I don't live far away, and Craig comes out to help me bring the children in whilst I dash to the toilet. Another disastrous attempt to be a normal mum has ended with me back in the toilet again.

So now, I don't take the children out into town on my own, I cannot play with them on the floor and I cannot even go supermarket shopping. Hence the decision that Craig should take control of all this for me, so I can at least attempt to focus on work.

Craig, however, is having to contend with another side effect of my steroids. Usually a placid, friendly person, I have always been prone to sleepwalking. But now even this has been pushed to extremes with this harsh medication. In the middle of the night, without warning,

I am sitting up in bed, and punching Craig in the head and swearing. Who is this monster? I only find out the following morning, when I see Craig has a yellow eye from where I've punched him in the face. I have absolutely no recollection whatsoever of doing this, and that's upsetting. If I could do this to my husband, what else might I do in my sleep?

It isn't too long before we find out. Late one evening whilst Craig is up watching a movie, he hears me coming down the stairs. He calls out, and I clearly don't respond, so he's a little concerned. Following me into the back office, he rapidly snatches the telephone out of my hand and hangs up on the call. It's 1am and I am calling a client's mobile number! Without a word, I turn and go back to bed.

Whilst my night-time antics can be concerning, the one I cannot believe is my sleep-eating habit. At 3am, Craig shakes me awake. There's a brown mess all over the duvet. Worried that I might have had some kind of problem in the night with my ulcerative colitis, we tear the bed linen from the bed. Hang on, that's not poo: amongst the folds of the duvet cover is a small brown square with a diamond shape on it. Recognising this pattern, we dash down to the dining room. There on the table is all the evidence we need. Strewn across the table, as if attacked by a wild animal, is shredded gold paper and cardboard. What's missing is the Easter egg!

I have absolutely no recollection of eating that Easter egg; there's no taste of it in my mouth, but there's not a shred of chocolate left – just that blob of melted chocolate that made its way back to bed.