

Mortified by the female chin's darkest little secret

The fuzzy-chinned Carole on 'Big Brother' reminds Andrea Smith of a hairy little problem of her own

MOST of us would love to think that we looked like someone famous, but as it happens, the celebrity I resemble most is Ronnie Drew!

You might be wondering what on earth I'm on about, but the thing the lovely Ronnie and I have in common is... a glorious beard. Or at least I would have, if I hadn't spent half of my life waxing, plucking, bleaching and shaving it all away.

Facial hair on women is a huge problem, and we dark-haired women are obviously particularly susceptible. And as nothing comes for free in this life, I guess it's the price we pay for saving on the old eyelash-tinting lark.

Women are meant to have beautiful, smooth skin all over, and it's for this reason that we pay people to torture us to pieces by ripping the hair out from our legs, underarms and nether regions, while electrocuting our faces or zapping them with lasers. Even the less harsh methods of shaving and bleaching involve harsh chemicals and razor nicks.

When Julia Roberts waved to the crowd at the premiere of *Notting Hill* in 1999, the hairy armpits she revealed to the world generated more headlines than anything else the pretty woman has done in her career — and the photos still get trailed out regularly in celebrity shock-horror articles.

When you consider it's absolutely *de rigueur* to have a Brazilian or a Hollywood these days, having a hairy mug is a huge problem, and pretty much a taboo subject. You only had to see the reaction to Carole, the hirsute 53-year-old who entered the all-female *Big Brother* on Wednesday night. When her introductory video was broadcast, the camera repeatedly zoomed in on her lip and chin, in case we had missed the fact that Carole had a bad case of Ronnie-itis. In a house dominated by pretty, young girls, I was kind of raging that it had to be the butch-looking militant political protester that was the resident bearded lady. It couldn't have been one of the beautiful ones! Although there was that infamous incident with Shilpa Shetty and the facial bleach in *CBB*, where the argument raged as to whether it was her skin or her hair she was trying to lighten — and my money is on the hair!

When Carole entered the house the other day, she



RIGHT KIND OF HAIR LOSS: Andrea Smith has confidence in the treatment provided by Jeanette Dunne at the Renew Clinic. Photo: Tony Gavin

looked like she had removed the worst of the hair, or maybe it was just better concealed with make-up. We can expect many derogatory hairy comments and lurid headlines, if Carole causes even a fraction of the controversy she promised in her video. And no doubt Dermot and the *Little Brother* crew will be watching closely and running some sort of Beard-Watch surveillance, much as they did with Tom and his ginger chest hair in *BB3*. After all, in *Big Brother*, nothing is considered too intimate or personal to be screened.

Apart from being dark-haired, facial hair can blight the lives of women for reasons that include hormone imbalance and obesity, and as a side-effect of some medications. And it is truly mortifying. No matter how much you pluck or wax, keeping on top of regrowth is a daily task, and there is nothing as horrendous as the fear that someone will come in contact with your stubble, or that you'll give them beard rash! I'm the queen of air-kissing for that very reason. My own personal horror story involved minding my friend's little girl, then aged four, who announced in the middle of doing my hair and applying glitter make-up to my face, that my face was "prickly, just like Daddy's". Aaaagggghhh!

Being of a somewhat melodramatic bent, I regularly imagine my funeral, and I have this romantically tragic picture of myself looking all serene and angelic in my coffin, while everyone who has ever fallen out with me cries over the coffin and begs for forgiveness. And then my gorgeous little reverie gets rudely interrupted as I remember that hair still grows after death, and realise my three-day growth would probably elicit more gasps of horror than of anguish!

With this in mind, one of the things I vowed to do this year

was to literally get to the root of the problem, and I finally plucked up the courage to start laser treatment. I've had two sessions so far and, I have to say, the difference has been amazing. I've been attending the Renew Aesthetic Clinic, on Convent Lane, just off Baggot Street (see www.renewclinic.ie), and the reason I grew confident enough to trust them is because I get my Botox done there too. According to the lovely Jeanette and Sinead, the two fully qualified nurses who own and run the clinic, laser treatment is the most effective method of permanent hair reduction.

I approached my first session of Lumina Medical Intense Pulsed Light, to give it its official title, with apprehension. The sensation is most frequently described as being like an elastic band snapped against your skin, and I have to say that this is pretty accurate. You lie down on the treatment bed, wearing protective eye goggles, and every few seconds, the laser is zapped on a small piece of your skin. It stings for that second, but the pain goes instantly, and the whole thing is really bearable. It's not particularly pleasant, but it's over in a few minutes, and by the time you're finished, your face is completely grand — I didn't even have any residual soreness afterwards.

The good news for dark women is that laser treatment is particularly effective for us, as it works best on pale skin and dark coarse hair.

You need to have a few sessions because hair grows at different stages, but the difference after two sessions has been tremendous for me, and I'm absolutely thrilled with the results. So if the old writing lark falls through, I won't be able to run away and join the circus, and much as I love him and all, I'm looking forward to the day when I look more like Drew Barrymore than Ronnie Drew!