





# Made-up stories

*Five writers tell us about the personal beauty rituals that have become part of who they are*

illustrations *helena pérez garcía*

## **Twiggy mascara** words *megan hall*

One of my close friends wore heavy make-up and, when I was 13, came to stay over. I took a real interest in her make-up box. I quickly became obsessed. My mum was never someone I'd look to for make-up advice - she's a natural beauty - but she put a dab on my eyes, just mascara to start with. The eyeliner came later.

My eyes are particularly big and I found that the looks I'd see in magazines were hard to recreate. When I first started out, I definitely used too much. It wasn't until someone compared me to Twiggy that I found a look that I could do. Growing up, I worked on a cosmetics floor and would clump my bottom eyelashes together, baffling the make-up artists around me with how I did it.

I adore putting it on. I suffer with anxiety and when I put my make-up on, I get a feeling of true calm. Nothing makes me feel more content than putting on my

make-up, wrapped up in my nightgown with a cuppa and some music. On a weekday, I've got it down to 10 minutes, sometimes less. If I am allowed unlimited time then it takes, perhaps, 30 minutes. It upsets me when friends or parents make throwaway comments about the amount of time it takes, or even that I'm putting it on.

Most of the time, my make-up is my shield and it helps me through the world but sometimes I'm made to feel it's my vice. To this day, every boyfriend I've had has pushed the fact that I should go without make-up more often. They fail to realise how it has become my identity. Even girlfriends seem to be shocked when I take it off, and comment on how 'nice' I look.

I doubt that I'll ever lose the winged liquid eyeliner and black mascara. When I picture myself in the future, with my children and their children, I'm still wearing my staple winged eyeliner and clumpy mascara, with my boyfriend somewhere in the background rolling his eyes! →



## *"I've been called out for my 'cascading' locks and told to tie it back"*

### ***I always wear my hair down*** **words tina daheley**

I wear my hair down all the time. I am sure psychologists would say something about not wanting to reveal too much of myself. But I just don't really like tying it up.

You see, I have a complicated and changing relationship with my hair. I grew up in an Indian Sikh family, which meant I wasn't allowed to cut it. Of course, as a rebellious teenager, all I wanted to do was exactly that. I did cut it when I turned 18, but that's the only time I've ever had my hair short. Since then, it's always long – my signature look.

I work in TV, and there's this perception about how a news presenter should look, especially as a woman – you know, that short newsy bob. When I first started out in the industry, I was encouraged to cut my hair – by a man, incidentally. And I did feel I should dress conservatively, as I wanted to be taken seriously. For a while, I subscribed to the way others – especially men – thought I should look.

But it isn't just men who are part of the problem; a female MP once commented that I was “brave” to wear a pair of patterned tights with my structured black dress. If you've ever noticed, women who work on the radio often have deeper voices; I think these women are hired because they sound more like men. And in the newsroom, women commonly have shorter hair, again to prescribe to this notion of looking more like a man to get far ahead in a male-dominated industry. There's this misconception that if you have long hair that you're trying to look “glam” or “sexy”. That simply isn't the case; why can't

I make the most of my healthy, shiny hair by wearing it down?

There have been trolls on social media who have called me out for my “cascading” locks and told me I should tie it back to look more professional. But I take that supposedly negative comment and own it – I don't want to conform to stereotypes. Why should I cut it? Why should I prescribe to any outdated beauty rules supposing that, just because I am a certain age or do a certain job, I should have to look a certain way? Everybody is individual. And as I have gotten older, I trust myself. I know myself. Although occasionally, doubt does creep in. When I covered the election, I did have a few inches cut off my hair.

It's funny how things come full circle too. When I was younger, there were things that I used to do behind closed doors – I would almost try to dial down my Indian-ness. I'd always use a simple home-made face mask made from turmeric. We would use turmeric for everything: as an antiseptic, a tonic, in cooking. Now it is huge in beauty. Coconut oil too; my gran used to plait my hair and slather the stuff all over it. I hated it at the time and thought it was disgusting. Now I am reclaiming it all over again.

It's funny, there's these cultural superstitions that I grew up with too. Looking back, perhaps they were a way to control women. I wasn't allowed to comb my hair or wear it loose at night. And if you have a brother, then two nights of the week, you were not allowed to wash your hair. I accidentally did it once and was terrified of the bad luck that might befall me.

Now, I'd say my long hair is my own grown-up rebellion.





### **Cleanse, tone, moisturise** words *frances ambler*

*Jackie, Company, then Cosmopolitan.* I was years below the intended readership but that's an advantage of having a sister who is five years older. Such magazines are a godsend when you're too timid to ask, or too cautious to try for yourself. I wanted to be one of the girls on their pages, with a boyfriend and a Saturday job; to wear giant hoops that jangled as I laughed, and to smear my eyelids in gaudy oranges and blues. This wasn't possible on my mum's watch for at least a couple of years so I devoted myself to the invisible art of skincare; more specifically the routine of cleanse, tone and moisturise.

My chosen brand was Simple – that was appropriate! Smoothing on the cleanser, swiping the toner and patting in the moisturiser felt like a simple triad for success, like I was laying the foundation (no pun intended) for the life to come. While I experimented with the rest of my make-up over the subsequent years, the cleanse, tone and moisture remained constant. I did it on mornings when my stomach was twisting with excitement about the day ahead; other mornings with eyes still half-closed with sleep; after days

with my brain crammed full of work or nights out that left mascara smeared down my face.

I'm now way past the boyfriend and Saturday-job stage of my life, with a life that my pre-teen imagination could never have given form to. I'm grateful to my precocious reading habits that my skin is in good shape, not quite giving away that I've arrived at a once unthinkable age. And it's still cleanse, tone and moisture, a ritual that bookends my day.

But if these magazines have had such a lingering effect on my beauty routine, I wonder what else they've given me. Which of their commands have I been acting out daily without even realising? Are my aspirations theirs or mine? Has my idea of how I should look been formed through the ritual of turning their pages?

I used to believe they revealed a formula for lifelong success. Now I see how they can trip you up with standards that are always shifting. Even the cleanse, tone, moisturise routine is now dated, in the same way as my nan's devotion to cold cream. I should be using serum, perhaps, or SPF, definitely. What such magazines never told me: even with the best intentioned advice, there are always things that you'll need to figure out for yourself. →





## Morning moisturiser

words *tahmina begum*

Watching your mother make up her face in the mirror is often a first interaction with make-up – femininity, even. Just like other '90s kids, I watched my mum pat her red lipstick on and pin back her puffy hair, but the strongest memory I have is watching her applying her favourite face cream. It set the mood in the room.

My mother has always used Olay; the same black-topped, white plastic bottle with an almost pink cream inside and a Matisse-inspired drawing of a woman on the outside. At six years old, it was everything I wanted to be. It's something I still expect to see on her vanity table, even if I were to go into her room today.

The clean, thick, floral and warm smell is one that has also become synonymous with the smell of my brothers. To this day, they smother themselves with Olay after washing in the morning. It is our original fragrance, just like it is still our mother's.

After I cleanse my face, my go-to is that face cream; the way it squirts out of the bottle like a circle in the palm of my hands, ready to be dotted around my face. Its slightly milky texture is then smothered all over as I close my eyes, always, waiting for it to sink into my skin. It's a reminder of my *Ama's* butter-soft, honey-coloured skin. The smooth surfaces across her face that welcome no fine lines, call for no dark spots, is something I always look to imitate. I always want my skin to blossom like hers.

It's the kind of product where you can tell if someone else is wearing it when you're sitting next to them on the train. Or when you're at a party discussing growing up and it's part of someone else's childhood. They too remember it as a symbol for a fresh new day, where there have been no mistakes, worries or disappointments made.

It doesn't matter how I put my make-up on or if I update the entirety of my make-up bag, Olay will always be there, as well as the stories that come with it too.



*"I hated my lips when I was younger.  
Too pointy, too small, too neat"*

***My shade of red***  
**words amy abrahams**

On the landscape of my face sit two mountain peaks: the twin pink summits of my top lip. They rise sharply, creating a defiant Cupid's bow; they make a mouth more suited to a bygone era.

I hated my lips when I was younger. Too pointy, too small, too neat. An austere companion to my rounded cheeks, un-angled nose and unruly curls tumbling around my face. Early make-up experiments avoided the mouth because I struggled to respect its geometry and like a child I could not keep in the lines. Glosses and lipsticks slid out and over, lipliners only made those peaks more severe. Lipstick was not for me, I decided, lipstick was not my thing.

But when I was 21, that all changed. It was the early 2000s and a friend had introduced me to London's alternative gay scene, where we danced at club nights named Nag Nag Nag and The Cock at now-long-gone Soho hotspot The Ghetto. Dress-up was encouraged and make-up was another portal to express ourselves.

So it was that one afternoon, before a big night out, we walked through the hallowed doors of Mac's Soho store and I found my lipstick soulmate. Her name was Ruby Woo. She was the perfect shade

– a blue-hued red that balanced my rosy cheeks and popped against my pale complexion. Best of all, Ruby Woo was matte. It did not slide. The colour stayed put. It did not creep outside the lines.

Putting it on for the first time was transformative – and its power has not waned since. A slick of bright red jolts you back to iconic old Hollywood, yet it's undisputedly modern too – this is a shade that refuses to let you hide away. My lipstick is warpaint and luxury and comfort and magic in one – it is a benevolent bullet of red-hot confidence I can carry wherever I go. I have worn Ruby Woo most weeks since that inaugural outing in Soho. She's come with me to job interviews and meetings, to birthdays and dinner parties. I wore Ruby Woo to my wedding, even though someone told me brides "should wear pink". And when a best friend died, I wore it for his funeral – I knew he would have wanted me that way.

Yes, I flirt with different shades: a berry tint here, a fuchsia gloss there. But Ruby Woo will always be The One. As age changes the map of my face, these peaked lips of mine morph slowly into something softer, but I shall never turn my back on lipstick.

A smear of rouge taught me to highlight what is unique, it helped me subvert the "flaws". Lipstick might seem frivolous to some, but to me, it really can set you free. ♦

