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Making It Up As I Go Along

Written by Marian Keyes

Published by Michael Joseph

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Making It Up As I Go Along

MARIAN KEYES

MICHAEL JOSEPH

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For Jonathan

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Introduction

Hello, and welcome to *Making It Up As I Go Along* (tales from an eejit who was off buying shoes the day Life's Rulebook was given out).

It's a collection of autobiographical articles that I have written over the last nine years. Some have already been published in magazines or newspapers, such as *Irish Tatler* and *Marie Claire*. I'd like to offer special thanks to the *Sunday Times Style* magazine, who've given me a regular column called 'Mind Your Head'. Other pieces have been cherry-picked from the monthly newsletters I used to write for my website, and some have – gasp! – never been seen before!

I have grouped the pieces into sections like 'Friends and Family', 'On My Travels', 'A Year in the Life' and that sort of thing. They're not always in chronological order; I've arranged them so that you can dip in and out and read them any way you like. You could even start reading from the back, if that's the kind of daredevil you are. Feel free to break the rules. Either way, I very much hope you enjoy the articles.

My publisher Louise Moore and my editors Maxine Hitchcock and Celine Kelly worked very hard with me, sifting through TONS of raw material to come up with this collection, and I'm very grateful to them.

I'd also like to thank Himself, who is always my first reader, the voice of reason, a stalwart support and the best colleague in the whole world.

And now, off we go!

Cast of Characters

I thought it would be a good idea to compile a cast list, because I mention many, many people in this book and you won't have a rasher's who half of them are. Many people I've described in terms of their relationship to someone else (for example, 'X: Y's husband'.) This is not to imply that X is not a viable person in their own right. I am only trying to keep things simple and easy to refer to. But of course, I am afeerd of offending people, because that is the way of life, is it not? Despite our best intentions, someone is always bound to be offended.

Anyway! Here's the list, which I hope will be helpful. I should mention that I come from a family of five children (shamefully small by Irish standards) and I'm the eldest and as a result I feel responsible for everyone's happiness and that's a scourge of a burden and I'd have much preferred to be the youngest, but what can you do?

Anne Marie Scanlon: very old friend. Also mother of Jack Scanlon.

Bruce: husband of Laura, who is a long-time, beloved friend. (So when you come to Laura, you can refer back to Bruce and then you'll know who she is. Do you see? This is how it works.)

Bubs: Tadhg and Susan's youngest dog. (They have two.)

Caitríona: my sister. (I've two.) She's four and a half years younger than me and is the funniest person alive. She lives in Brooklyn and is married to Seán, who is a tremenjuss musician and a tremenjuss cook.

Cast of Characters

Caron: my sister-in-law and a hugely talented writer (Caron Freeborn is her full name). Partner of Himself's brother Chris and mother of Jude and Gabe.

Cathy Kelly: my soul sister. A wonderful writer (yes, she's *that* Cathy Kelly), a warm, wise friend and a great source of comfort.

Chris: Himself's brother, partner of Caron and father of Jude and Gabe.

Claudia Winkleman: ah, lookit, you must know who she is.

Dad: my father. He used to be a 'Traditional Irish Father', by which I mean he was a right cranky-arse who would come home from work and say, 'Right! Which one of you am I to shout at first?' But in recent years, he has mellowed. Is it okay to say he has dementia? But mercifully he has a nice version where he is very loved up and often asks Mam to marry him.

Davina McCall: I refer you to **Claudia Winkleman**.

Dermot O'Leary: I refer you to **Davina McCall**.

Dylan: eldest son of Rita-Anne and Jimmy. Also known as Redzer the Elder. As I write, he's seven, but you might be reading it 'further down the line', so my apologies for any confusion.

Eileen: aka Eilers. Old friend.

Elizabeth: aka Beth, friend to the entire Keyes family – cleans our house and minds it when Himself and I are away, drives Mam and Dad to Mass every Sunday, and is always obliging and cheerful and a stalwart support.

Ema: daughter of Niall and Ljiljana. My beloved niece. Currently aged fifteen. I love her with all my heart. I have plans to pitch a TV show called *My Niece Is the Best*, which she would DEFINITELY win.

Fergal: great friend, and husband of Judy.

Gabe: youngest son of Chris and Caron.

Gwen: very good friend, partner of Ken and mother of Edward.

Cast of Characters

Hilly: very good friend, and part of our walking club.

Himself: the fabliss man I'm lucky enough to be married to. He is the best, kindest, funniest, most clever person ever.

Jack Scanlon: son of my pal Anne Marie Scanlon.

Jenny: Australian friend who lives in London and is the 'most good' person I've ever met.

Jimmy: husband of my sister Rita-Anne.

John: Himself's dad, aka my father-in-law.

Jonathan Lloyd: my literary agent. He's been my agent for more than twenty years, he's great fun, wholly supportive, and I owe my career to him and Louise Moore, my publisher.

Jude: eldest son of Chris and Caron.

Judy: very special friend. The woman I want to be when I grow up. She is married to an equally wonderful man called Fergal.

Katie: Tadhg and Susie's eldest dog. She's a boxer and named in honour of Katie Taylor (the boxer).

Laura: long-time, beloved friend. Married to Bruce.

Ljiljana: wife of my brother Niall. From Serbia. (Note: Ljiljana is pronounced 'Lilly-anna'.)

Louise Moore: my publisher. She is WILDLY fabliss, has published me for twenty years, and I owe my career to her. See also **Jonathan Lloyd**.

Luka: son of Niall and Ljiljana. Currently aged fourteen. Very handsome, although he goes mad when I say it, so maybe I shouldn't . . .

Mam: aka Mammy Keyes. Mother of all the Keyesez. A living legend.

Mark: good friend, and part of the walking club.

Milenko: Ljiljana's dad, who very sadly died three years ago.

Niall: my brother. (I've two.) He's two and a half years younger than me, is married to Ljiljana, and is the father of Ema and

Cast of Characters

Luka. Currently living in Dublin, but they used to live in Prague and are still known as the Praguers.

Oscar: youngest son of Rita-Anne and Jimmy. Also known as Redzer the Younger. As I write, he is five.

Posh Kate: aka Kate Beaufoy. Wife of Posh Malcolm. Beloved friend of mine and Himself's.

Posh Malcolm: aka Malcolm Douglas. Husband of Posh Kate. Beloved friend of mine and Himself's.

Praguers: see **Niall**.

Rita-Anne: my youngest sister. (I've two.) She's eight and a half years younger than me, and she and Tadhg are twins. She's married to Jimmy and is Mother of the Redzers (Dylan and Oscar).

Seán: husband of my sister Caitríona.

Shirley: Himself's mammy, aka my mother-in-law, and I couldn't have wished for a better one. I love her dearly.

Siobhán: aka Shivers. Old friend.

Susan: wife of my brother Tadhg. Also referred to as 'Susie'.

Suzanne: my sister from another mister. Her mam and my mam worked together in Limerick 4,000 years ago. She was in Caitríona's class at school, and she and I were flatmates for years and years in London. Bonded for life.

Tadhg: my youngest brother. (I've two.) He's eight and a half years younger than me, and he and Rita-Anne are twins. He's married to Susan and they have a little boy, baby Teddy, and two dogs – Katie and Bubs. (Note: Tadhg is pronounced 'Thigh-ge'.)

Tania: sister of Seán, who is married to Caitríona.

Teddy: son of Tadhg and Susan. As I write, the 'newest' Keyes.

Tom Dunne: lead singer in Something Happens, radio presenter, and owner of a beautiful voice and a charming personality. We share a bin night.

Making It Up As I Go Along

Vilma: naturopath from Lithuania and a beautiful human being.

Zaga: mother of Ljiljana, she lives in Belgrade and if feeding people was an Olympic sport, she would take home the gold.

Zoë Ball: I refer you to **Dermot O'Leary**.

Lexicon

Just in case you don't speak Hiberno-English fluently – and there's no shame in that, no shame at all! – I thought I'd do a little dictionary for you.

agin: a derivative of 'against', it means 'counter to'. For example, to 'take agin' a person means one has developed an antipathy towards a certain person and wishes them ill. One of my favourite words. Taking agin people can count as a hobby, to be listed on job applications along with keeping fit and cooking, except it doesn't have to be a lie.

banjaxed: broken. For example, 'That fecking IKEA chest of drawers is banjaxed' means 'That item of furniture I purchased from a well-known Scandinavian retailer no longer functions.'

banjoed: same as **banjaxed**. Unless one is talking about furniture, in which case it means 'upcycled'.

bayshte: beast. As in 'I made a bayshte of meself, ayting them four Easter eggs.' Can also refer to animals ('bayshtes of the field').

be the Janey: an expression of astonishment.

bet-down: burdened by life. Having endured a lot of disappointment and looking every inch of it.

bolloxed: Can mean broken or inebriated. Context is key. 'My hairdryer is bolloxed' means one's hairdryer is *hors de combat*. But 'Cripes, you were bolloxed last night' means a person was extremely inebriated on the previous evening.

bould: comes from the word ‘bold’, but does not mean ‘daring’ or ‘courageous’. Rather it means very badly behaved. ‘Bould as bras’ is as bad as it gets.

by the hokey: an expression of astonishment, very similar to **be the Janey**s.

cliothar: I’m guessing, but I think it’s related to ‘clatter’. It means a short, sharp blow. Often used in reference to a child who has just drawn all over your lovely Designers Guild wallpaper: ‘What that little fecker needs is a good hard cliothar.’ A word that Mammy Keyes seems particularly fond of.

clob: face, as in, ‘I stuffed me clob.’ Confusingly it can also mean ‘mouth’.

craythur: a derivative of ‘creature’. A term of compassion, as in, ‘Ah shur, the poor oul’ craythur, he was never right after he drove the combine harvester over the postman.’

divil: a derivative of ‘devil’, but does not refer to Satan/Lucifer/the man below. It’s usually a term of compassion and often accompanied by a sigh. ‘Ah, the poor oul’ divil . . .’

eejit: a foolish person. For example, ‘The fecking eejit’s after leaving his jacket on the bus. Again!’

enjoying the day: inebriated.

feck: the most misunderstood, falsely maligned word ever. It is NOT a swear word. Anyone, even the Pope, could say ‘feck’ and no one would look askance. It is nothing like the other ‘F’ word. Feel free to use it liberally.

gawk: enjoys two usages. One is ‘to look at or view’. The other is ‘to vomit’. Context is key. ‘The gawks’, or worse still ‘a desperate dose of the gawks’, is when one cannot stop vomiting – often the morning after one has been **enjoying the day**. This is also when ‘the dry gawks’ may occur.

gobshite: a powerfully disparaging term of abuse. Mildly sweary.

gom: I refer you to **eejit**.

grand: a fascinating word, which does not mean ‘swanky’, ‘excellent’ or ‘awe-inspiring’. Mostly it means ‘just okay’ or ‘barely adequate’; however, an entire (very funny) book has been written on the word by Tara Flynn. I urge you to read it.

in top form: usually means ‘inebriated’. But – confusingly – it can sometimes mean simply ‘in top form’.

jar: drink, alcohol, Babycham, aquavit, grappa and whatever you’re having yourself.

JohnEamonChippyBill: the wonderful pundit-men on the panel for Ireland’s football games.

lad: can mean ‘a teenage boy’, but when I use it I tend to be referring to a penis. For example, ‘Well, if he thinks he can arrive around here, with his lad in his hand, he can think again!’

lads: a greeting, which can apply to both sexes, even those who are not lads or who don’t *have* lads. Always accompanied by an exclamation mark, for example, ‘Lads! How’s it going?’

lock-hard: specifically ‘lock-hard men’ – famous creatures in Dublin who appear from nowhere while you’re trying to parallel-park on the street. They will stand and shout instructions, always urging you to ‘lock hard’ on the steering wheel. They will invariably make the job of parking your car far more fraught than it would otherwise have been and will expect a couple of yoyos for this.

looderamaun: I refer you to **eejit**.

lungeon: the meal you ‘take’ in the middle of the day, if you are posh. See **sangwidge** if you are not posh.

now: means anything *but* the present time. For example, ‘I’ll do that now in a minute’ means ‘I’ll do it as soon as I feel like getting round to it. Now feck off and leave me be.’

oul: a derivative of the word ‘old’, but does not mean ‘aged’. It’s a

Lexicon

fascinating word that enjoys many usages. It can be disparaging, for example: ‘He never rang me, the thick *oul*’ *eejit*.’ But it can also be compassionate: ‘Ah *shur*, the poor *oul*’ *divil*, and the guttering after falling down on his head.’ However, sometimes ‘*oul*’ adds nothing to a sentence, except to perfect the rhythm, which matters a lot in conversational Hiberno-English. If this is the case, there is no need to ascribe meaning to it.

oxter: armpit.

praties: potatoes, spuds, the staple diet of the Irish.

press: a cupboard.

quare: unusual, distinctive, astonishing, special.

ride: a very attractive person, often used by women to describe men, but these days women say it to each other, in this manner: ‘Look at you, you great big *ride*, you.’ This is a compliment of the highest order. ‘*Ride*’ can also mean ‘an act of sexual congress’.

ridey: an adjective derived from **ride**, it means ‘very sexually attractive’.

sangwidge: a casual lungeon, consisting of two slices of bread bracketing cheese or ham or similar.

scuttered: inebriated.

shite: like ‘shit’ but marginally less bad.

skaw-ways: crooked.

spannered: inebriated.

stotious: inebriated.

sure: pronounced ‘*shur*’, it has no meaning. It’s most definitely *not* a term of agreement (as in ‘*Sure!*’). It’s simply an extra word added to the start of a sentence, in the way ‘so’ is used in the modern global lingo. Except it’s not annoying.

tay: comes from the word ‘tea’, and it can mean a hot drink in a mug or one’s evening meal.

Lexicon

togs: a bathing suit, a swimming costume, trunks, those sorts of things.

thrun: comes from the word ‘thrown’ but hints at unhappiness – to be ‘thrun in the bed’ implies a bout of depression.

tool: a foolish man.

yoke: a catch-all word that seems to defy translation. Basically it can mean *anything*. Some people have said that ‘whatjama-callit’ or ‘thingummyjig’ is the same as ‘yoke’, and certainly ‘Where’s the yoke?’ can mean (and frequently does) ‘Where’s the remote control?’ Or ‘I broke the little yoke on the yoke’ can mean ‘I’ve broken the small attachment on my spiralizer.’ But ‘yoke’ means much more and can also be used to disparage a person. For example, if a man with whom you shared sexual relations does not seek to repeat the experience, you could call him, in very bitter tones, ‘a hairy-arsed oul’ yoke’. Or if an acquaintance has recently lost weight and is making much of it, you could say, ‘Look at her there, the skraggy-arsed oul’ yoke, swanking around in her size 6 jeans, thinking she’s it.’

yoyos: the currency of Ireland. Sometimes known as euros.

(BAD) HEALTH AND BEAUTY

Over the years I've written various beauty columns, and many of you who folley me on Twitter will know about my great love for chemists. And you will also know that I 'enjoy' bad health. That's what this bit is all about.

Where It All Began

My love of cosmetics goes back decades and I blame Mammy Keyes – well, like all mummies, the poor woman has (entirely unfairly) got the blame for many of her daughter's woes over the years, so why shouldn't she get the blame for my deep and abiding love of cosmetics? One of my earliest memories is of her sitting at her dressing table, patting some funny liquid in the palm of her hand until it eventually emulsified into a white cream, which she then spread over her face. 'Take care of your skin,' she often told me, 'and some day it will take care of you.'

The strange thing was, this was Ireland in the 1960s and 70s, when the Catholic Church controlled everything and the message it gave was that women were meant to be baby factories who entirely neglected themselves in order to boil massive pots of praties and say round-the-clock novenas while kneeling on frozen peas. A weekend away with the girls consisted of forty-eight hours in Lough Derg, eating burnt toast and singing 'Hail, Holy Queen' and walking on pointy stones in their bare feet.

Vanity was a total no-go area and my mammy was – and is – a devout holy type. But still, she couldn't resist the lure of the beauty counter. Like, she didn't go mad or anything, she wasn't an eyelashed glamour-puss who showered me with perfumed kisses and called me 'Darlink', but she had the basic products, and one day when I was about twelve I smothered my face in her foundation and I was stunned – I looked . . . well, FABULOUS!

Making It Up As I Go Along

My whey-white Celtic skin was bright orange – I think it was actually the law at the time that all foundation sold in Ireland be that colour – and the chic way to apply it was to cut it off at the jawline so that the face looked like an orange lollipop, balanced on a white neck.

Mesmerized by my own orange loveliness, I gazed at myself in the mirror, seeing that the white bits of my eyes looked extra-white and the green bits looked extra-green and my shameful freckles had been banished entirely. The transformative effects of make-up were never so obvious, and because I'd always felt like an ugly little yoke I vowed that this magic gear would be part of my life for evermore.

Funds, of course, were initially a problem. But mercifully my new love of cosmetics coincided very neatly with the traditional early-teenage shoplifting years and I was down in Woolworths in Dún Laoghaire most Saturdays, relieving them of the odd kohl pencil or lipstick. (I've since repented and am very sorry for that carry-on. If I could go back and change things I would, but that's life, isn't it? We all do things we subsequently regret and the guilt is our punishment.)

But enough of the philosophizing and on with the make-up! I got my first job when I was seventeen, and from the day I got my first pay cheque to one morning about three months ago I quite literally NEVER left the house without wearing foundation. I really mean it. No matter how tired I felt, no matter how poor I was, foundation was my bridge to the outside world. I genuinely felt I wouldn't be able to look someone in the eye without it. My desert-island product would have been foundation, because if I hadn't any, I wouldn't have been able to jump around on the beach, waving my T-shirt and shouting at a rare passing ship to please rescue me. Instead I'd have to hide behind a coconut tree, to protect the pirates from getting a

Where It All Began

shocking gawk at my freckly clob. (What happened about three months ago was I had IPL on my face which did some quare business where my freckles all disappeared and my skin became – and forgive me for sounding like a boasty boaster – very fresh and even. Apparently the trauma of the IPL (which stands for Intense Pulsed Light) stimulated bow-coo de collagen. I was told that this would happen, but in my heart I think that anyone who makes a promise like this is a liar and no one was more surprised than me that it actually really did work. I mean, it won't last, I'll have to go back and get it done again at some stage, and it's a) spendy and b) painful beyond description. But still!

In my twenties I moved to London and shared a flat with two other girls and lipstick became our non-negotiable product. Chanel lipstick, no less. We lurched from pay cheque to pay cheque, borrowing and bartering, barely able to keep ourselves in Jacob's Creek, and yet we prioritized Chanel lipstick. Red, of course. Because it was empowering, so we were told. We'd get promotions if we wore red lipstick. We'd run the world if we wore red lipstick. We'd get on the property ladder and learn to drive and get married if we wore red lipstick. Anyway . . .

Despite the red Chanel lipstick, my life hit the skids in spectacular fashion when it transpired that I'd become a little too fond of the Jacob's Creek and I ended up in rehab. (Even there, I wore foundation every single day.) After six weeks I emerged and at high speed my life changed course and I started writing a book and got a publishing deal and met a lovely man and got married – so maybe, in a roundabout way, the red lipstick *did* work!

Then I got a gig doing a make-up column, and to this very day I still say it's the nicest thing that's ever happened to me. I swear to God, you have no idea! Free make-up began arriving at the house in the PEOs (Padded Envelopes of Loveliness). My first

Making It Up As I Go Along

batch was from Lancôme, and this was around the time when women were trampling over each other in beauty halls to get their paws on Juicy Tubes, and I got three – THREE! – of the new colours in the envelope. It was so thrilling that a family conference was called, and all my brothers and sisters and Mam and Dad came to admire the free make-up, and we sat around the kitchen table staring at it, and no one could really believe it, and Dad, who used to be an accountant, totted up how much it would have cost if I'd paid for it, and we MARVELLED at the figure, and my mammy became quite anxious because she was sure there had to be a catch, but all in all, it was *bloody fabulous*!

Overnight, the arrival of the postman flipped from being something to dread – bills and strange requests and that sort of thing – to something to anticipate. If he rang the bell, it was a really good day – it meant that he had a Padded Envelope of Loveliness that was too big to be shoved through the letter box. No matter how early he arrived, it was with a joyous heart that I skipped down the stairs to open the door to him. Soon he began to realize that I was causing him more work than the rest of the road put together, and all I could do was apologize and give him a decent tip at Christmas time.

I hit a rough patch when I worried that loving make-up was incompatible with being a feminist, but I've eventually made my peace with it.

However, as we know, all good things come to an end and eventually the magazine I was writing for folded and the Padded Envelopes of Loveliness stopped arriving. (Ten years on, thinking about it still gives me a stabbing pain of loss in my sternum.) However, I stayed passionately interested in all aspects of beauty, getting particularly animated by anything officially 'New and Exciting'.

Where It All Began

Now the thing is that I wasn't (and I'm still not) a beautician or a trained make-up artist, I'm simply an enthusiastic amateur – a very, *very* enthusiastic amateur. But I do have my moments of insight. Like, you've heard of the 'Lipstick Index'? It's the theory that during a recession, sales of lipsticks increase as women shift their spending habits from expensive fripperies like shoes and handbags to more affordable things like lipsticks. Well, it's been overtaken by the Nail Varnish Index, and what kills me is that I predicted it! I knew it was happening because I could see it in my own behaviour – I was haunting Rimmel counters and buying two or three nail varnishes in super-bright colours, bagging the whole lot for under a tenner. But the only person I shared my theory with was Himself, and I'm *raging* that I didn't do a David McWilliams and write a scholarly paper on the topic for the *Sunday Business Post*, and be hailed as the new Irish economic sage, but shur, there we are.

First published in *Irish Tatler*, November 2014.

Eyelash Extensions

Eyelashes. Such lovely things. The more the merrier, thanks. Over the years, when I'd had my make-up done, I'd seen the dramatic effect of false eyelashes, but I never got the hang of doing them myself.

Then I heard about eyelash extensions: false eyelashes that are glued, one by one, to a person's own lashes and last until the lashes fall out naturally. No more mascara. Just constant, round-the-clock, dark-lashed loveliness. It sounded like something from a fantasy.

So I went and lay on a bed and – this was a few years back – to my great dismay, the extensions were so heavy they pulled my eyelids down and, in the following days, I was told, more than once, that I looked like Salman Rushdie.

Also, I felt very 'blinky'. Every time I blinked (and I discovered that I blink an awful lot) it was as if it was happening in slow motion. Worse still, the lashes were rigid and sort of crunchy, so at night I was kept awake by them scritch-scratching against my pillow and if I slept on them funny I awoke to find them bent into strange geometric contortions.

Next thing – within days – they started to fall out, taking my own eyelashes with them, and very soon my eyelids were bald. It was a bad experience and I thought, 'Ah well, we live and learn.'

But about nine months later, I decided to give it another go. I went to a different saloon where they used lovely lightweight

Eyelash Extensions

lashes – so I didn't feel heavy-lidded or blinky and no one looked like Salman Rushdie. Except Salman Rushdie.

And I cannot tell you how *fabulous* I felt. The effect was dramatic: the long dark lashes changed the shape of my face and made my eyes 'burst'. (In a good way.)

The long and the short of it is, you look GREAT with eyelash extensions. You wake up looking fantastic. You go to bed looking fantastic. You can go swimming and look fantastic. It doesn't look like you're wearing false lashes – especially if you go for the more expensive silk extensions – it just seems like you've got gorgeous long, natural eyelashes, with more va-va-voom than even the fonciest mascara could ever give you.

However, with great power comes great responsibility, and it's no joke having semi-permanent eyelashes in your care: they are highly strung, nervy beasts. Basically you have to avoid touching them at all because they're easy to upset, and when they're upset they leave you, and that is more unpleasant than I know how to describe.

So it's tricky putting on eye make-up. And it's even trickier taking it off. To do my eyeliner I had to use a very, very long make-up brush and use tiny, exquisitely delicate stokes.

You know that game where you have to move an object on a loop along an electrified wire, without touching the wire? (Would it be called Operation?) That's what it's like. My concentration was *intense*.

Taking the make-up off was even more nerve-racking. I used a cotton bud soaked in oil-free remover, and if I ever accidentally touched the lashes, I had to shout, 'Sorry, sorry! I'm really sorry!'

To be frank, living with eyelash extensions was like being in a dysfunctional relationship.

After a few rounds of acrylic lashes, I upgraded to silk ones –

Making It Up As I Go Along

more expensive, but even more lightweight and dark and clustery. I fell even deeper in love.

‘They’ say that extensions are supposed to last about six weeks, but that, of course, is a lie. Even with the gentlest care, at around the three-week mark they would start to fall out, usually taking my own real lash with them. And every lost lash felt like a mini-death.

I’d start filling in the gaps with mascara, which needed to be removed every night, which interfered with the extensions, making them fall out faster and faster – and long before the six-week mark I’d arrive back at the saloon, looking for a refill.

The few days before the appointment were always the worst. I’d feel utterly naked and lived in dread of being taunted, ‘Baldy lids, baldy lids!’

In I’d go, looking all meek and blinky and baldy-eyed – and two hours later I’d swagger out, batting my fabulous lashes left, right and centre, interfering with the flight paths of planes, sending wheelie bins racing along the road and crashing into each other, and generally feeling like the most powerful woman on earth.

I was utterly addicted to the extensions and couldn’t contemplate going back to a life without them. But the thing is, you’re only supposed to get them for about six months and then you have to stop because you’re depriving your natural lashes of sunlight and oxygen and all that other blah.

But when the six-month time limit arrived, there was NO WAY ON EARTH I was stopping. So – like the true addict I am – I began to lie and cheat. I started going to different beauticians, the way I used to go to different off-licences when I was drinking, so no one would know the full extent of my habit.

When the beauticians would ask me how long I’d been getting

Eyelash Extensions

the extensions, I'd say, with elaborate vagueness, 'Let's seeeee, hmmm, maybe about . . . God, I don't know, four months?' When the reality was, I'd been getting them for *a year and a half*.

However, when I hit the two-year mark, it all came crashing down. I'd gone to a beautician who was basically my enabler – she knew that I was lying and she still went along with it. However, on this particular day she was away, and in her place was what you might call a locum – and this new one was on to me immediately!

She removed my mascara and the last few extensions that were still clinging on, and made me take a good hard look at my own lashes – and I was horrified. They were pale brown stumps. 'You've got to stop,' she said. Basically she refused to serve me!

Then she cast me out on to the street with a tube of some RapidLash yoke and instructions to apply it twice daily, and told me that I was now in Eyelash Rehab.

It was a low, low moment: I'd hit rock bottom and the game was up. No more eyelash extensions for me for a very long time.

I consoled myself by thinking bitter thoughts about her and nursing elaborate plans to start again as soon as possible; but after some time passed and I got used to having normal-style eyelashes again, I began to feel as if a burden had been lifted from me. It had been hard, *hard* work maintaining the lifestyle of an eyelash addict – and I'd been freed from it. I hadn't wanted to be free, but now that I was, I kind of liked it.

So, as things stand, I have no immediate plans to resume the habit.

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