

# Daily Mail



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**FEMAIL**  
magazine

**DIET PILLS  
THAT COULD  
KILL YOU**

**I'm glad I'm  
no longer  
beautiful**



**IS FROZEN  
YOGURT  
A CON?**

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I say it is worse than that. If people assume you to be a certain type of person, based on your looks, you can end up believing the assumptions yourself — and start to live up to the caricature. I look back on my 20s and shudder at how much I did that. I became a doll-faced airhead — and it was addictive.

When did I first realise that others considered me pretty? My family had never made a big deal about looks.

My mum was nice-looking, intelligent and ambitious, but shy. It was her children's achievements she valued, not good looks — which, in her wisdom, she knew to be fleeting and superficial.

**beautiful  
any more**



by *Eve Ahmed*

**W**HAT would my 22-year-old self think if she could see me in the mirror today? I make an effort, but there is no escaping the grey hair, the age spots, and the wrinkles.

It would once have pained me to admit this, but I am no longer eye-catching.

Men's gazes don't rest upon me any more. To most, I elicit indifference. I'm a mum, a wife and, most of all, I am old.

So would I swap places with the younger me? You might think I'd jump at the chance. When I was in my 20s, I lost count of the times I was told: 'You could have any man you wanted.'

I was even told — I don't know whether to laugh or cry at it now — that I was too pretty for my own good.

Beauty can be a curse. It's only now, coming up to 50, that I realise it, and that I appreciate how free a woman can feel when her beauty fades.

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Why I'm so  
glad I'm not  
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**A**S A result, we got a modest lot. If you were attractive, it would be conceded to draw attention to it. It was thought children would get big-headed if given compliments — so they weren't told they were beautiful, talented or special.

It was in the mid-Eighties when I was working as a PA in a London advertising agency that I realised the effect my looks had.

My boss's colleague tried to get me to join his new firm. There would be a fantastic salary, travel, creative work and the lavish social life that was synonymous with advertising in the 1980s.

I was sorely tempted. I hadn't done a degree to end up stuck in front of a typewriter.

I didn't take the job, however. I'd always wanted to work at the BBC and an opportunity arose there.

It wasn't as glamorous a position, but I knew that many of the BBC's top women had started out in the typing pool. I'd work hard, be spotted, and soon I'd be a TV newsreader. Well, that was the plan.

When I turned down the executive advertising job, though, the man who had been so charming said something shocking. 'It wouldn't have worked anyhow,' he told me. 'We all fancy you. It's the only reason we offered you the job. You'd be too much of a distraction.'

I was speechless. Then he came out with the 'you're too pretty for your own good' line.

It got worse. At my leaving party, I expected to be thanked. Instead, my boss presented me with a cartoon he'd drawn of me. I was big-breasted, big-eyed, with big,



fluffed-up hair. He'd written a ribald limerick about my boobs. He'd drawn my colleagues — middle-aged men — gawping at me with tongues hanging out.

I was dumbfounded. How naive I'd been. I thought I was a valued colleague, yet they'd seen me as a joke. My best friend suggested they'd meant it as a compliment, but I wasn't convinced. Something changed in me after that. Without intending to, I started to live up to this caricature.

It's taken until now for me to have some insight into why.

**B**EAUTY is useless without self-confidence. You may be gorgeous but, if you don't believe in yourself, you'll get nowhere.

I never thought I was much to look at. When I became aware of this newfound attention, I started to need and dislike it in equal measure. And I began acting up to it.

So the problem followed me. At the BBC, I'd hear women whispering as I entered the newsroom and would sense men's eyes rake over my body.

I felt neither triumphant nor flattered, just trapped by their

expectations. But did I try to challenge them? No. Rather than cannily forging alliances and pushing for promotion, I hid inside ultra-feminine clothes.

Every morning, I fretted over my make-up. I spent ages trying on jewellery and stiletto shoes — all for what was turning out to be a dead-end job in a typing pool.

My self-imposed standards were exhausting. My reward? Lavish compliments from baggy-eyed journalists, yet none of them asked me out. Either they thought I was out of their league, or that I had nothing between my ears.

I suspect the latter. I had become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I am a writer now. I think I could have been then, too, had I just dragged myself away from the mirror for long enough to get on with it.

Novelist Zadie Smith recently confessed that she only 'knuckled down' to writing because she was large and thus 'invisible'.

She was quoted as saying: 'That's the problem with pretty girls; they don't get anything done.'

I was that girl. Every time I put pen to paper, my colleagues would drag me out to discos and bars. To my surprise, I'd become Miss



**Ages of beauty: Eve when she was 22 and inset, today aged 49**

Popular: the good-time, fun-loving party animal who nobody — including me, by now — took seriously. Life was one long session of flirting, drinking, smoking and nightclubs.

It was a vicious circle. I'd begun to depend on the compliments and would doubt myself when they weren't forthcoming. I suspect many pretty women with fragile egos go through the same thing.

When I eventually plucked up the courage to ask for a screen test, the editor suggested I get a haircut. Newsreaders had to look business-like and my flowing locks did not suggest authority. In a panic, I refused — my long hair

was part of my identity. In retrospect, it's no wonder the powers-that-be didn't consider me a serious contender. And I have only myself to blame for my career stuttering to a halt.

The irony is that I finally have the self-confidence to be a good presenter — but I'm too old for youth-obsessed TV.

It was only after I married and had my daughters that I stopped caring so much. Children don't allow a lot of time for fretting over make-up. I concentrated on parenting and before I knew it, I was middle-aged.

Many women find this difficult. I can't say I embraced it at first. It is hard to lose your looks if you depend on them.

**O**NCE drivers would honk their car horns and builders would wolf-whistle, but now it would be nice just to be acknowledged.

But I gradually realised that being old sets you free. Your face and figure become only a part of who you are, not the sum total.

During the last couple of years, I have thrown myself into writing, studying for a Masters degree and shutting myself away in my study.

To write, you need to lead an almost monastic life, and I do. The days of having my head turned by flattery are now long behind me.

Your options narrow as you age, and now I am being forced to utilise the talents I neglected.

Nevertheless, I am not envious of my 22-year-old self. Instead, I feel sorry for her, trapped in a beautiful gilded cage. At this halfway point in my life, I am grateful that the door of that cage is finally open. I have a feeling that the best is yet to come.

## Website of the week

**NATURAL** skincare is big in the beauty world, but there are few products for difficult teen skin. British retailer blushkiss.com sells paraben-free, green products from the U.S. and New Zealand for problem skin. They're a brilliant gift for your teen — though you may find yourself equally enamoured.

## TALKING SHOP *The city shirt on the catwalk*

**IF YOU** think TM Lewin is only for buying husbands and boyfriends sensible shirts for work, think again. The brand has a rich heritage — it was founded in 1898 — but its autumn womenswear collection is aiming to bring fashion back into the office. To prove it, TM Lewin's fitted blouse featured on Phillip Treacy's London Fashion Week catwalk earlier this week. The navy version sold out

immediately, while the berry shirt, with its dainty clover pattern and rounded collar, encapsulates the print trend — and it's only £32.50. TM Lewin products are still designed in-house in London and are available online and nationwide. Team with print trousers for a high-fashion look or wear with classic plain jeans.

[www.tml Lewin.co.uk](http://www.tml Lewin.co.uk)

**NICOLE MOWBRAY**

