



Encourage your split personality by trying different looks. You'll find anything can happen

The wild side

We all have latent personalities – some innocent, some less so – just waiting to be brought to life at the stroke of a mascara wand or lipstick.

Ariel Leve decided to get to know her other selves

I have a big mouth. Literally and figuratively. Most of the time I wear colourless lip balm – the make-up equivalent of trainers. Sometimes, if I'm feeling festive, I'll apply a shiny lipgloss – clear, of course, because I don't want attract too much attention. What's happened to me? When did I become someone who desires invisibility?

I wasn't always this way. As a teenager, Halloween was an opportunity to let my inner sex kitten out. I would wear red lipstick, fishnets, spiked heels. I'm not sure why dressing up as a hooker was so liberating but once I was in costume, the inhibitions vanished. As I got older, the costume became less obvious, but the dichotomy still existed.

In the late Nineties, dark, wine-coloured matte lipsticks were a staple of my make-up routine. MAC made a color called Dubonnet and I wore it so much that my mouth seemed to disappear without it on. It became, briefly, a "signature" look, something I'd never had. And once it was on, I could function. But somewhere along the way, I gave it up. Not just the lipstick but the more audacious aspects of my personality.

We live in an era of the instant makeover. Changing our hair colour is as easy as changing our sheets. For me, applying a coat of lipstick is a drastic move. It significantly alters my appearance, but does it alter my personality as well? Does changing how we look change how we behave?

A few weeks ago, I visited the lipstick graveyard – a dusty basket under my sink. Scientists have yet to explain the phenomenon of why women purchase a lipstick, wear it a few times and then, knowing it will never be used again, hang on to it just in case. In the event of an emergency or natural disaster, I'll have no water or food, but plenty of lipstick to sustain me for months.

I decided to have a night out in red lipstick. I chose a crimson shade called Hot Hot Hot and wondered if I could handle the pressure. As soon as I applied it, I was transformed. My self-esteem soared. Standing there in my robe and red lips, I felt like Angelina Jolie. Only without the fame, height, wealth or figure. >

BEAUTY

Wearing red lipstick suggests many things. It is a statement, not unlike cleavage. Not only does it say “I want to be seen” – when wearing red lipstick, you have to own it. There is no way to pretend you don’t know it’s on.

I soon discovered this at the hotel bar where I was to meet my friend for cocktails. As I entered the room, I could feel the stares. Not just the men. You’d think I had walked in naked. The overt wave of attention was so unfamiliar that my first inclination was to go to great lengths to thwart it – a fake yawn that allowed me to cover my mouth for an extended period of time. But perhaps this was not the best approach as, really, how long can a yawn last? Five seconds into it I realised it didn’t look as if I was yawning, it looked as if I was a strange woman covering her mouth with her hand.

I relaxed, revealed my mouth, and began to hold myself accordingly. There is an expectation of glamour and allure that goes with red lipstick and I knew then I had a choice: go with it or go home. So I went with it. Why not? I had just run the gauntlet of

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leering glances to reach my friend. If I could make it through that, I could make it through cocktails.

Jezebel had emerged. I had broken through the barrier of self-consciousness and was coy, flirtatious – living up to my lips. There was also freedom to be a seductress without having to seduce. All I did was react. The number of looks I got from men was extraordinary – I’d gone from zero to 60 in the getting-noticed department and being on the receiving end of that desire buoyed my self-esteem. I fed off the reaction and let myself enjoy it. For a few hours I was a siren and it was fun. I was Hot Hot Hot.

The temptation to take it to the next level was impossible to resist. If wearing red lipstick brought out my saucier side, what would it be like to alter my appearance one step further?

I have always been a brunette but secretly wondered what it would feel like to be a redhead. To me, redheads have always seemed powerful, fiery, carrying off a sexuality that is alluring without being tacky.

At the Trendco wig store I tried on a number of “reds” until I found one that suited me. An auburn shag, it had a name: Jenny. The following evening Jenny and I went out. Or rather, I went out with Jenny on my head. With a bounce in my step and a glance at my fringe, I departed looking like a completely different person. Happy.

I went to a party for a friend’s birthday, thinking it was a chance to mix with people I knew and people I didn’t. How would my friends react? Two seconds after I arrived, my friend Joanna gasped. “I love it,” she said. Then she told me I looked taller.

Being a redhead was off to a good start. Of course, I worried: did it look like a wig? Friends swore it didn’t – and I believed them after a woman I’d never met before asked if I was from Ireland.

Whereas wearing red lipstick had brought out my inner siren, being a redhead brought out a more devilish, bewitching side. I found myself extroverted in a way that usually makes me uncomfortable. For instance, I could tell a joke with confidence and flair instead of prefacing it with my usual “I don’t know if this is funny but...”

I also found my gestures were more exaggerated and instead of feeling like a court jester I felt like a charm magnet.

The potential to be the life and soul of the party was something I’d never experienced. My body language had changed, as well. Normally when I’m talking to someone I stand with my arms crossed; tight and controlled. But I noticed I had let my hands rest on my hips, standing like someone who felt secure. I began to contemplate dyeing my hair red permanently.

Men were forward in a way I was adapting to quite easily. When I’d worn the red lipstick the reaction had been equally attentive, but now there was an added element of curiosity. It seemed as though they were not only intrigued, but shameless about it, too. What man doesn’t dream of having a redhead with a bed-head?

I was in a bar. A handsome man in a grey suit had come over and introduced himself. We began having a playful, albeit slightly mischievous conversation, when suddenly he leaned in and asked, “Do the curtains match the drapes?” Charming.

At that point, I became concerned with what I was projecting. Had being a redhead

made me a harlot? A siren was sexy; a harlot, scary. Maybe I wouldn’t be dyeing my hair red after all.

The questions about my behaviour lingered. What other personalities were lurking inside me? The siren, the harlot... I needed to examine this further.

Unless I had a tan – or rather the perfect tan – I knew I would never fulfil my potential to feel truly at peace. Recently I had gone to Italy and with my pale white skin, I floated like a bar of Dove soap in the Mediterranean. Alongside all the bronzed and sleek Italians I came to the conclusion that deep tan equals deep happiness.

Anyone who knows me knows I was about as likely to get a spray tan as I am to get a Maserati. But seconds after having a layer of St Tropez sprayed over my body I felt as though I belonged in a miniskirt – two degrees of separation from belonging in a Maserati.

The change in behaviour was instant. I left the tanning salon and my first instinct was to shop. Luckily, across the street there was an Agnès B and the only thing that stopped me from financial ruin was the realisation that I couldn’t try anything on or the tan would wipe off.

A few hours later, I was ready to spend. Walking into the stores with a tan I had a sense of entitlement I wasn’t used to. Maybe because I felt confident that I could wear skirts without worrying about people shielding their eyes from the white glare of my legs. The saleswoman also seemed far more attentive. What red lipstick does for attracting men, a spray tan does for attracting sales help.

Suddenly, I was filled with a desire to chat. She asked where I’d been on holiday and I quickly invented a story which led me to realise that not only did having a tan bring out the friendly shopper in me, it also brought out the liar.

But what would happen if I wore Jenny with my tan? Was there a retail-driven lying harlot in me? I had to know.

It was a fiasco. We all have multiple personalities but they need to be staggered, brought out one at a time. Tan I could handle, redhead I could handle, but a tan redhead caused an identity crisis. Wearing Jenny, I left my flat to meet a friend for dinner but five minutes later I had to turn back. I got upstairs and took off the wig, took off the skirt... I wanted to unzip my skin, content with the notion there are sides of me I don’t want to know. ■

