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REAL LIFE HORROR

"I'm addicted to ripping my hair out"



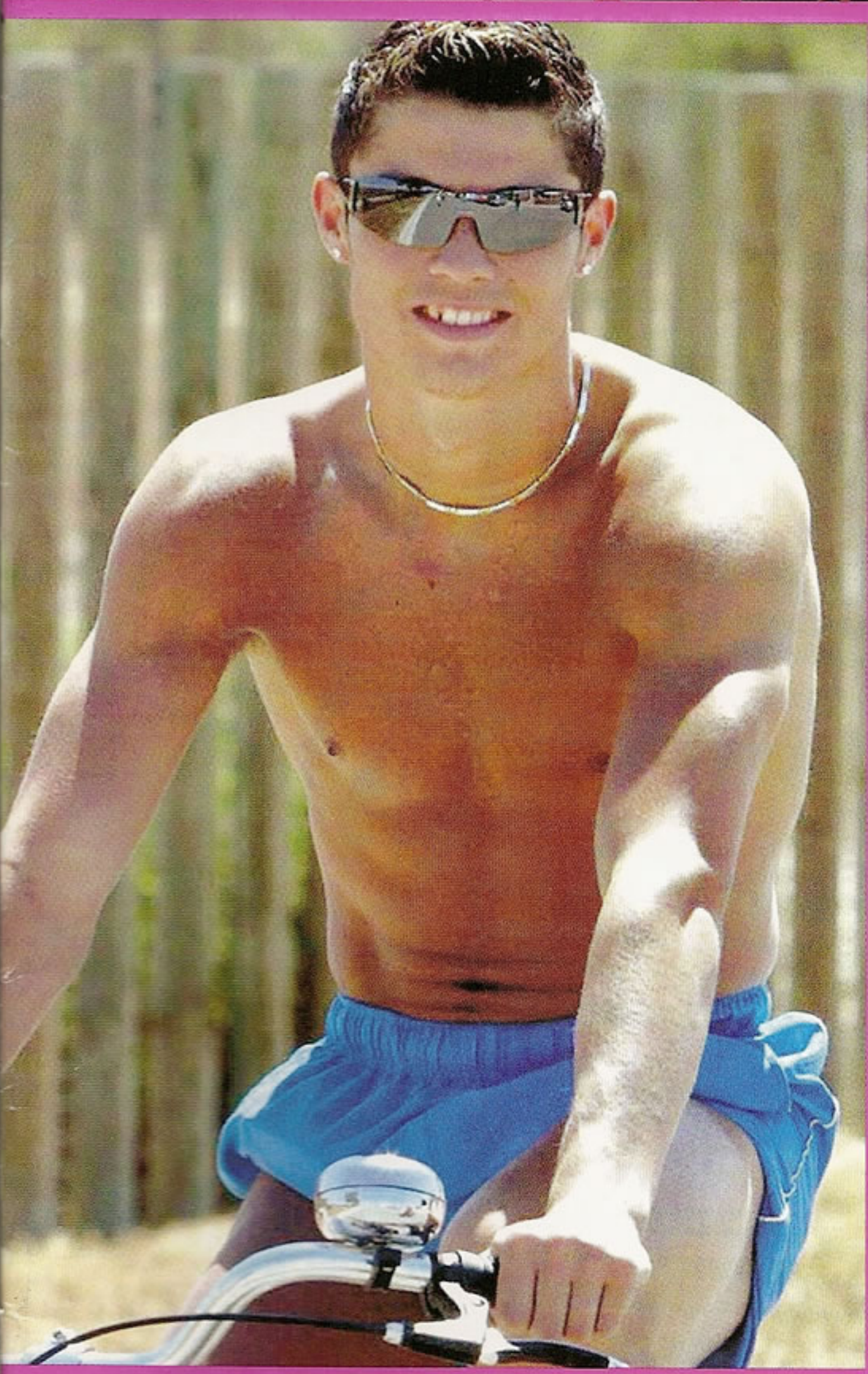
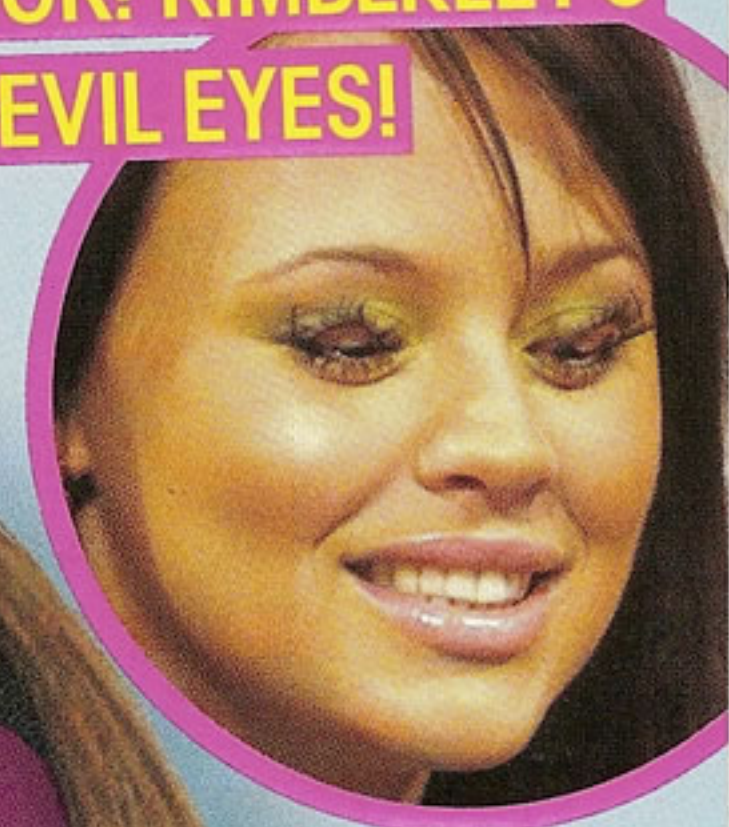
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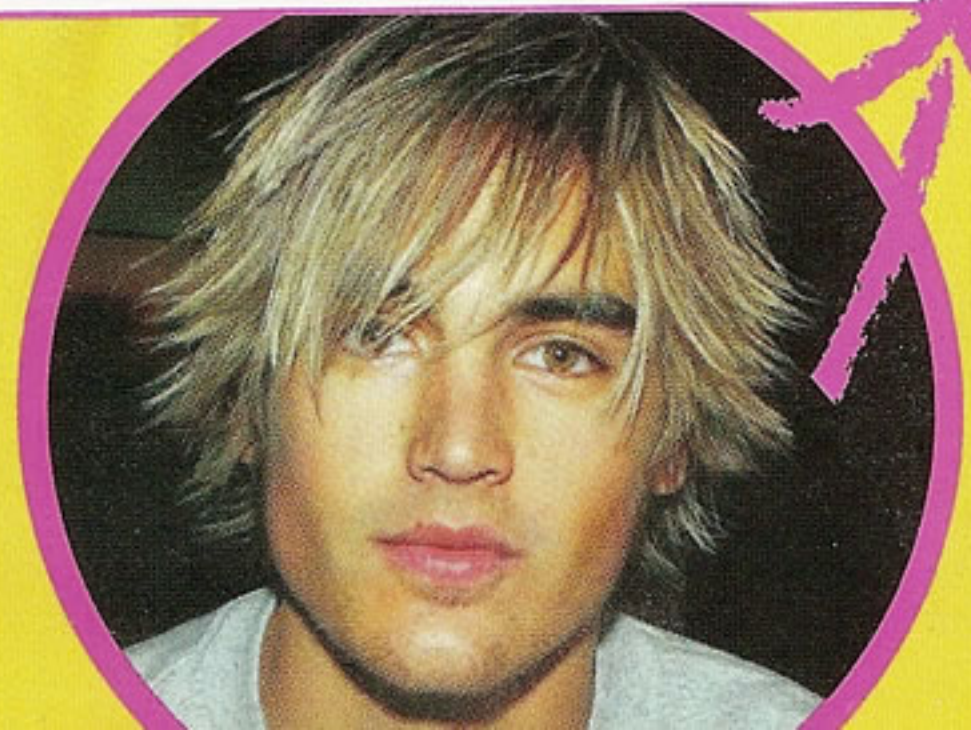
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“I was addicted to ripping out my hair”

Heather Perrott, 18, pulled out her hair for four years. Now she's finally got her confidence back



Heather tied back her hair to hide her bald patches

My dark brown, shoulder-length hair didn't worry me until I was 12. My dad had just remarried and I'd recently started secondary school. Very quickly, I found I couldn't cope with the huge workload. I dreaded going to school every day and I felt really stressed out.”

“Every morning, I'd say to myself, 'Don't pull your hair out today' but as soon as I had some time on my hands, I'd end up pulling out loads again.”

“My obsession was affecting my life”

“I didn't dare tell anybody what I was doing. Normally, I told my best mates, Becky and Danielle, everything, but I didn't want them to think I was weird.”

“But my obsession was starting to affect my life. Bald patches were beginning to appear all over my

head, and I started to avoid going to sleepovers at my mates' houses 'cos I needed time each morning to make sure I covered them up.”

“I was so paranoid that people would start to notice all my bald spots that I finally decided to say something to my friends.”

“I've got something wrong with me and my hair is falling out,” I lied. They were so sympathetic that I felt guilty about lying – but I couldn't tell them the truth.

“After two years of suffering in silence, I finally told Mum what was happening. I was scared my habit had got out of control and I knew I needed help. I confessed to her one evening, when I was about 14. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I told her that I kept pulling my hair out and didn't know why.”

“She was stunned. I'd managed to keep the bald patches hidden so well that Mum had had no idea.”



Before

“I lost all of my self-confidence”

“Telling Mum made me feel much better. She took me to a doctor, but he said it was a phase and I'd grow out of it. I was so disappointed. I felt like I was the only person in the world who pulled my hair out.”

“Mum helped as much as she could by telling me off every time she saw me pulling at my hair. But knowing I was just stuck with this weird problem made me feel even

worse and, gradually, I lost all of my self-confidence.”

“I started wearing a baseball cap over my tied-up hair because the bald patches had got bigger. I even wore the cap indoors – including when I was at the cinema – and I was constantly terrified that lads in the street would snatch it off and make fun of me.”

“But one evening, just before I turned 16, I had a breakthrough while using our home computer. Mum typed the words 'hair pulling' into a search engine and it came up with the condition trichotillomania.



After

“We'd never heard of it, but a website said it was related to stress and anxiety, and although the cause of it isn't known, around 2% of the population has it.”

“My bald patches made me unhappy”

“I felt huge relief when I realised that I wasn't alone. We read about a place which might be able to help me – the Mark Glenn Hair Enhancement Studio, a salon which specialised in giving people

like me hair extensions.”

“I'm sure if I had a full head of hair again, I wouldn't pull it out any more,” I told Mum. “I have to do something – my bald patches are making me so unhappy.”

“Mum rang the salon straight away and made an appointment. The people at the studio were really friendly and I was thrilled that after four years someone could finally help me.”

“At £900, the treatment was expensive, but if it would restore

my confidence, it'd be worth every penny. I paid for half of it from my savings and Mum paid the rest.”

“Attaching the extensions took ten hours, but once it was complete, I was amazed. Staring back at me in the mirror was a girl with long, full, glossy hair. ‘I can't believe it's really me!’ I thought.”

“The extensions took away my stress”

“It sounds unbelievable, but it was the extensions that ultimately took away my stress, gave me back my self-esteem and stopped me from pulling out my hair. My hair looked so perfect that I didn't want to ruin it any more. I didn't even twist it around my fingers at night.”

“For the next eight months, I returned to the studio every six weeks as my real hair – woven into the extensions – grew longer.”

“During one of my visits, I even had my hair styled for the first time with layers and feathering, which made my appearance feel even more ‘normal’ again.”

“A month after I'd first had the extensions, I started seeing Lewis, who's 19. When I told him that I suffered from trichotillomania, he was very supportive. He told me he thought my hair looked lovely, whatever state it was in.”

“Gradually, my real hair grew

back alongside the extensions, and I eventually had all of them removed. Looking back, I can see now that my hair-pulling was my way of handling the emotional stress I'd gone through when I was younger.”

“Once I realised I wasn't the only person with my condition, I knew, with the help of my mum, that I could finally overcome it.”



Heather's boyfriend Lewis supported her



Trichotillomania: the facts

Trichotillomania is an impulse control disorder where the sufferer can't stop themselves from pulling out their hair, eyebrows or eyelashes. They can't explain why they do it, although it often starts as a habit and then increases when the sufferer is under stress. Experts say it's quite common and it's most common in girls during puberty. It can usually be treated with counselling rather than drugs.

“My head became numb to the pain”

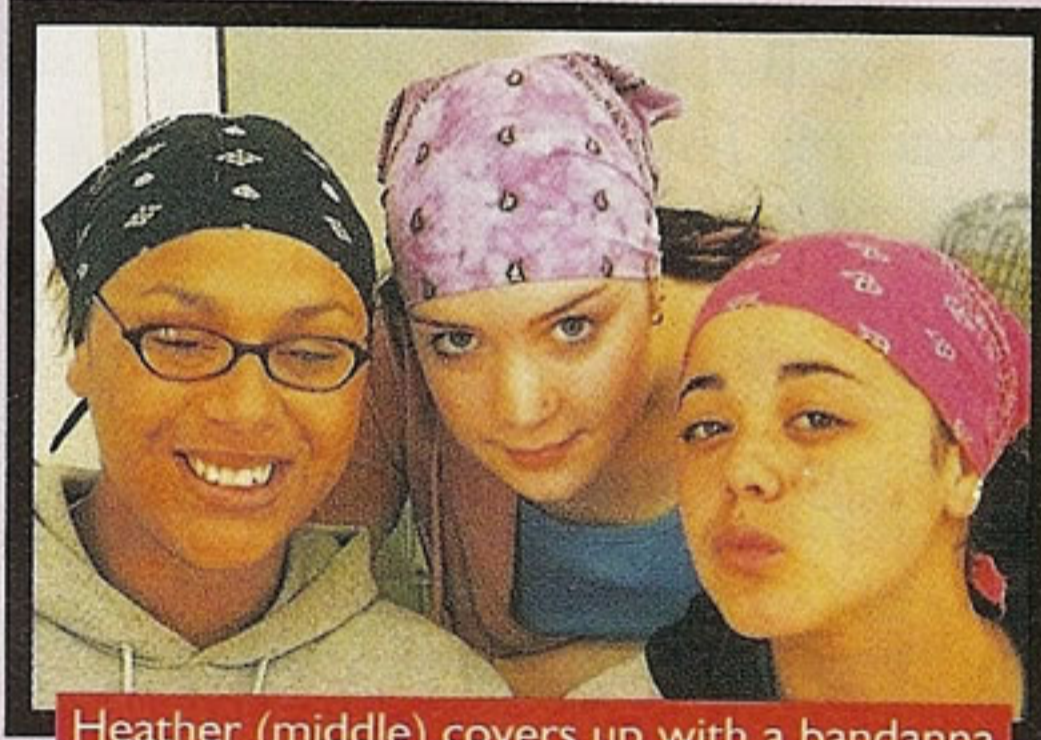
“One day, I was sitting at home watching telly when I did something really strange. I started pulling strands of hair out of my head. It hurt a little and I know it sounds odd, but doing it made me feel a bit better about myself.”

“After that, I began to pull strands of hair out every day. I knew what I was doing when I tugged at my hair. At first I thought I was doing it because I was bored, but I soon realised I couldn't stop doing it.”

“I was pulling more and more out each day, until I was literally ripping clumps of hair from my head – it was like an addiction.”

“My head started to become numb to the pain and before long I didn't really notice I was doing it at all. I even did it while I slept at night. I'd wake up in the morning and find tufts of hair on my pillow. It was awful.”

“It became a vicious circle. The more hair I found on my pillow, the more upset I got and the more I did it. It started to freak me out because I couldn't control it.”



Heather (middle) covers up with a bandanna

AS TOLD TO: ADRIAN MONTEI HEATHER HAD HER TREATMENT AT THE MARK GLENN HAIR ENHANCEMENT STUDIO IN LONDON. FOR MORE INFO GO TO WWW.MARKGLENN.COM OR CALL 020 7495 6969