

My \$46,000 Plastic Surgery Quote

Two cosmetic surgeons explain what it takes to be camera-ready, Kardashian-style.

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I'm not Instagram pretty. I don't have thick brows arched over perpetually startled doe eyes. My eyelashes are stumpy, and the one time I tried to boost them with a growth serum, I ended up with a patch of coarse blond hair *under my eyes* that was very painful to pluck. Even though, sure, I'd love to look like I've been drawn by some guy at Pixar, my pores, wrinkles, scars, and spots betray me. On average, my selfies spark approximately 76 likes. And if I had to say what celebrity I most resemble, it would be Gwyneth Paltrow's second cousin. You know, the one who's Cheesecake Factory pretty.

And that's just fine with me.

OK, yes, I've spent countless hours of my life feeling exactly how all the marketers, product developers, and influencers want me to feel: like if only I purchased the right haircut/eye shadow/chin implant, I could rocket straight from the Cheesecake Factory into Nobu. *Of course* I feel that way – this is America! Two seconds of scrolling and I'm confronted with Blake Lively's perfect nose job, Cardi B's gravity-defying ass, Bella Hadid's cat-eyed brow lift. I dare you not to marvel at the wonders of the modern beauty industry after spending an evening with the Real Housewives of New York. Hello, Luann, Dorinda, Sonja, Ramona, who are you working with, 'cause, girls, *you look amazing*.

But I'm not a Real Housewife, an Instagram influencer, or even a minor celebrity. I'm a 40-year-old single mother who can probably get by just as I am. Still, I spend large chunks of my 79-cents-on-the-dollar lady money at Sephora and the dermatologist in a never-ending struggle to look 35. I spend approximately \$1,000 a year on skin care products (if you haven't started a seven-step Korean skin care routine, drop what you're doing and start now!) and a cool \$1,200 on Botox for my forehead. Isn't that amazing? I could've gone on a weeklong all-inclusive at a Mexican resort for \$2,200. Still, once you see how a quick pop of botulinum toxin can hoist up a drooping middle-aged eyelid, you can't help but wonder what else can be done.

I tell myself it's the perfectly reasonable pursuit of my own personal X factor and not the delusion that I could morph into a beautiful person on Instagram that has me walking into the offices of two prominent Chicago-area plastic surgeons for a full assessment of my face. Armed with a before-and-after screenshot of Kendall Jenner, I settle into Iliana Sweis's (see "[The Beauty Gurus](#)") exam chair and try to keep my face calm as she gazes at me and works through a long checklist, making notations about my facial structure and signs of aging. "Well," she says when she's finished, "you're beautiful." I love her. Obviously there are some interventions that she *could* offer, though.

We move to a three-way mirror and agree I show most signs of aging around my mouth. I'm not surprised: My ancestors are farmers from southern Illinois; I'm prepared to eventually lay down my skin care routine and be overcome by my *American Gothic* destiny. Until then, Sweis suggests Juvéderm Voluma XC (\$1,250 per syringe) to lift my cheeks, more Juvéderm (\$725) to fill in the sunken corners of my mouth and restore my upper lip's youthful buoyancy, and a hint of Botox (\$150) to relax that lip enough to prevent the deepening of fine lines. Though I'm concerned about paralyzing my lip (my smile is arguably my best feature), I'm enticed by this vision of my face. But before I plop down my spring break savings on injectables, I've got another consultation to get to.

Michael Byun – famous for a face-lift procedure he developed (see "[The Beauty Gurus](#)") – also clocks my aging mouth. "No more straws, no frowning," he tells me. I laugh. No frowning? He must not have children. He pokes and prods at my jaw and suggests some Botox in my chin to prevent it from turning up, a possibility I had never even considered but is now my worst nightmare. Immediately I visualize this figurine of a witch with a turned-up chin that my grandmother put out every Halloween. I must look concerned because Byun remarks that I'm very beautiful. He says I'm not ready for his specialty, which sutures the muscles of the midface back to their original positions and starts at approximately \$30,000 – but I should come back when I am.

Because the siren song of Instagram beauty is strong, I push Byun to tell me what I would need to get the whole look. He sighs. Well, I could start with a full eye lift (\$15,000) to get my brows up and out, rhinoplasty (\$15,000) to bring up the tip of my nose and scoop the bridge, hollowing my cheeks by removing the fat and transferring it to my chin (\$15,000), and then obviously I would need lip fillers (\$1,200) – for a grand total of \$46,200. Holy shit, no wonder you need to be Kris Jenner to look this good.

I go home honestly pretty impressed by the fortitude of women: by their willingness to break their noses, allow scalpels right up next to their eyes, and inject paralyzing agents into their faces. Today's beauty standard is definitely not for the faint of heart. Or the light of pocketbook.