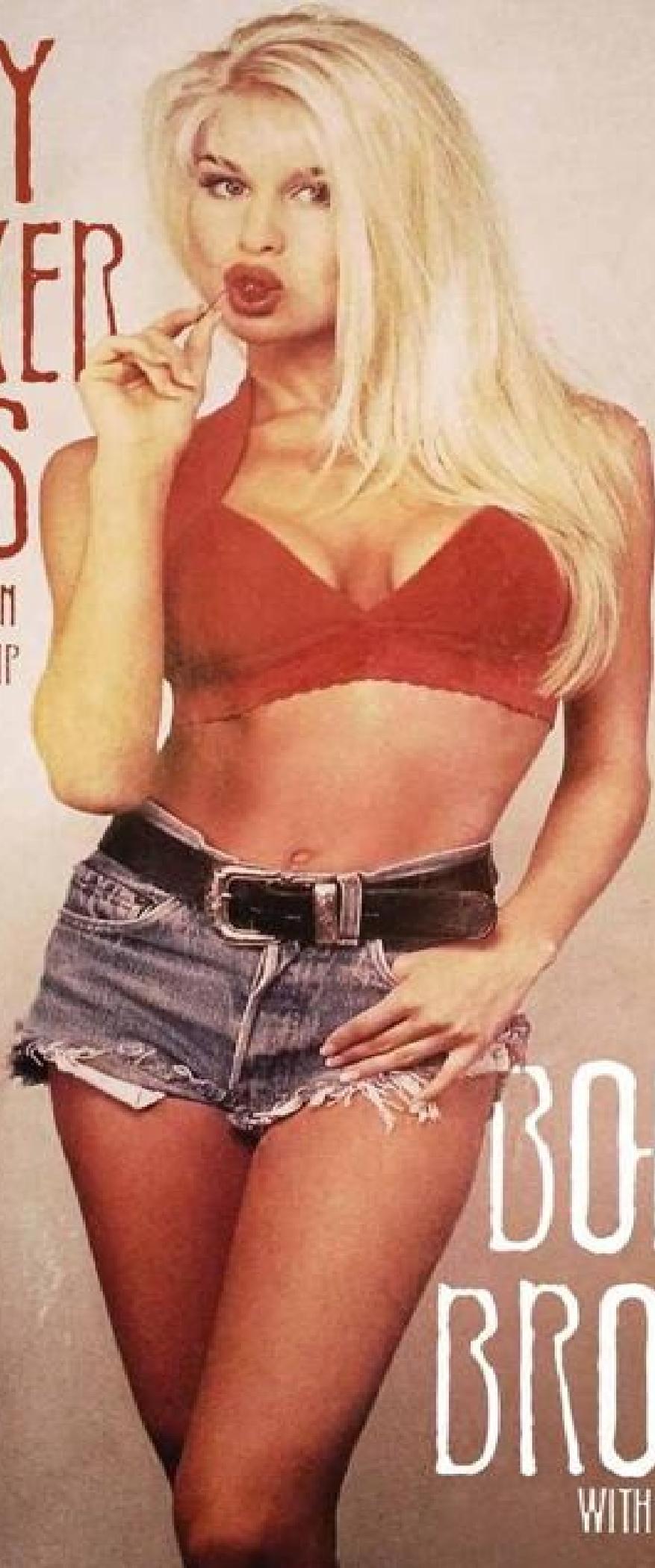


DIRTY ROCKER BOYS

LOVE AND LUST ON
THE SUNSET STRIP



BOBBIE BROWN

WITH CAROLINE RYDER

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DIRTY
ROCKER
BOYS

*Love and Lust
on the Sunset Strip*

BOBBIE BROWN
WITH CAROLINE RYDER

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI GALLERY BOOKS 



My father, Bobby Gene Brown, as a rough and tumble youth.



High school yearbook photo of my mother, Judy Ann Faul, age sixteen.



Me, around age three.



Me, around age nine, holding my baby brother, Adam, almost one. He is still the apple of my eye, and the sweetest man I know.

*I would like to dedicate this book to my family;
Mom, Dad, Taylar, Adam, Mr. Bill, Mr. Earl,
Jani, and the Ex-Wives of Rock family.*

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Acknowledgmen

Photograp

About Bobbie Brown and Caroline Ryc

EX-WIFE OF ROCK

Wait, *what* happened? Last week, Tommy Lee was my fiancé. This week, he's married. To Pamela Anderson.

It was February 1995, and in the aftermath of Tommy's shotgun wedding on the beach in Cancun four days after our breakup, my coping strategy was twofold.

1. Get high.

I had a line on some of the dopest trucker speed in Malibu. It was a killer buzz, lasting for days—back in 1995, the meth was clean as a bean. I had been secretly using throughout my relationship with Tommy, as a way to maintain the rail-thin Barbie-doll figure that Tommy liked, and as a way to escape the growing sense that my life was fucked-up, on all levels. Very few people knew about my little problem, even though my pupils were dilated in broad daylight and I shouted at invisible dogs. I drove to the corner store for soda, came back eight hours later with gardening tools. My glitter gun became my best friend as I embarked on endlessly elaborate middle-of-the-night crafting projects, just to give my racing mind something to focus on. I was spun, a member of a long-established club known as the “Hollywood Speed Freak Society”—a long line of celebrity tweakers who, like me, were afflicted by a cursed disposition for that unsavory mistress, methamphetamine.

2. Get even.

A few years prior, a voodoo doctor in my native Louisiana had warned me about messing with revenge. Dark energy, he said, “will come back and bite you.” But after seven years of having my head shredded by Sunset Strip cock rockers, I wanted to teach those assholes a lesson. *I'm going to flip the script, treat the guys the way they treat us*, I thought. I had reached my tipping point. I was ripe for revenge.

I looked in the mirror. Twenty-six years old. My peroxide mane was messy; my roots were showing. I was Courtney Love meets Malibu Barbie, with the gaunt yet chic figure of a runway model—around ninety-five pounds on a fat day. *Thank you, crystal*. The world knew me as Bobbie Brown, fiancée of Tommy Lee, ex-wife of Jani Lane, cutie-patootie from the “Cherry Pie” video on MTV. They'd yet to experience Bobbie Brown, wrathful, world-weary drug addict with no pride left to lose. I put on lipstick, a Wonderbra, and some assless chaps. I was ready to hit the clubs.

After a year playing Malibu Rapunzel, holed up in Tommy Lee's beachfront fortress, I couldn't wait to fall back into Hollywood's welcoming arms. I had always been a club kid. I loved the darkness, the anonymity, the feeling of being underground. The velvet ropes that melted as soon as I arrived. Tommy may have tossed me aside, but in clubland, I was still queen.

In 1995, Thursday nights at Grand Ville were where it was at. The club was a hub of the '90s neoburlesque scene, full of corseted girls with shoe-polish-black hair, a whirl of rhinestones, glitter, and feathers. Grand Ville was the toughest door in town, but the promoter, Rick Calamaro, a dear friend of mine (may he rest in peace), always greeted me with a smile.

“Welcome back, Bobbie.”

I stepped inside, through the looking glass, and into a different reality. A pleasure dome, decadent and carnivalesque. Everywhere I turned, I saw the ghosts of my past loves. There were the Tommy Lee

—wild, tattooed romantics, who turn mean when the roses wilt. The Jani Lanes—sweet, tortured artists weighed down by their demons. The Matthew Nelsons—blond angels destined to fly away. The exes in my life are no different to the exes in any girl’s life—except mine all happened to be rock stars.

Who better to confide in about my problems than a wide-eyed actor named Leonardo DiCaprio who had about as much life experience as a Care Bear? “Thing is,” I told him as we chatted at the club, “if you’re not grown-up enough to deal with their ‘musician issues,’ then rock star lovers can send a girl down some very dark and dangerous rabbit holes. You know what I mean?”

Leo did not know what I meant. We were in the VIP lounge at Grand Ville, and he was looking at me like I was insane. I *was* insane, kind of. The stress of being married to one rock star (Jani Lane) and engaged to another (Tommy Lee), and then jilted thanks to my professional rival (Pamela Anderson) had taken a toll. I was tired, jaded, defeated. The speed was playing tricks on my sanity, and my behavior had grown notoriously unpredictable. But how could Leo possibly understand? He was young, fresh and upbeat. He looked like he should be drinking milk, not martinis.

For years Leo had been dancing up to me at the clubs, saying how he wanted to make me his girlfriend. I smiled and patted him on the head. *How cute*. I was seven years his senior and felt like his grandma. I’d never been someone’s G.I.L.F. before. “Do you think it’s too *Harold and Maude* if I do it with Leo?” I asked Sharise Neil, ex-wife of Mötley Crüe’s Vince Neil, and my sister in pleasure seeking. Sharise raised an eyebrow and shrugged. At least baby-faced Leo had a grown-up career, I thought. *The Basketball Diaries*, his breakthrough movie, had come out that year, and he was about to star in Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*. If I hooked up with Leo, who was younger, cuter, and about to be more famous than Tommy Lee, it would hit Tommy right in the ballsack.

This time, when Leo came dancing up to me, I played along. “Call me, I dare you.” My inner G.I.L.F. was ready to party.

UNICORNS AND UNIBROWS

I opened my front door, and there he was, wide face, cornflower-blue eyes, big smile. Leo’s hair was pulled back in barrettes and he was wearing a headband. He looked pretty, like a ballerina. I invited him in. “Can I put on some music?” he asked, waving a CD in the air.

“Sure.”

Don’t go chasing waterfalls.

Please stick to the rivers and the lakes that you’re used to.

Leo sat on the floor, eyes closed, singing along. I recognized the song, by that R & B girl band TLC. It was all over the radio. I stood there for a while, watching Leo sing along, wondering what to do next and what conversation there was to make. There was none. Pokémon? New Kids on the Block? College? “Let’s go to the bedroom.” I said. Leo nodded.

My bed was big and tall, and you had to climb up a small ladder to get to it. “You want to get up there with me, Leo?”

“Okay!”

We started kissing. I pulled his T-shirt over his head, leaving the barrettes in his hair. I unbuttoned his jeans and tugged down on his boxers. What I saw made me gasp. It made no sense. The kid paled like Tommy Lee to shame. “Wow, Leo, I wasn’t expecting that.” Next to his slim body, his assets were startlingly huge. “Wait, let me turn the light on,” I said. “I’ve got to see this properly.” Yup, even under

closer inspection, Leonardo DiCaprio's crotch was on steroids. I couldn't take my eyes off it. *Ha, wait till Tommy "I've got the biggest dick in Hollywood" hears about this*, I thought.

"So, Bobbie, do you have any diseases?"

Oh.

The question dropped like ice water on my head. I hadn't really thought about it. I'd come of age on the Sunset Strip, which was basically a glorified STD factory. No one in the rock scene wore condoms. *No one.* Had I been tested? Of course not. Nothing *seemed* too diseased down there, but I hadn't thought to ask a doctor to check me out. On the Strip, when it came to bodily juices, sharing was caring.

"Also, Bobbie, what about gonorrhea? Have you been tested for that? And when you suck my dick, can you do it with a condom on?" *Gah, he's so PC*, I thought.

Truth be told, I could hardly blame Leo for feeling the safe-sex vibe with me. Tommy Lee was one of the biggest man-whore stripper chasers on the Strip. But I had never sucked anyone's wiener with a condom on it before. *Oh well, first time for everything.*

Leo rolled a rubber on, lay back, and closed his eyes. My cue to get started. I kissed his belly and drew him close to me. I began to lick and kiss his gargantuan penis. I tried to put it in my mouth but could barely breathe. My jaw locked; my eyeballs bulged. So I went back to licking it. Unfortunately, the latex tasted like the inside of a balloon, bitter, reminiscent of trips to the dentist. I rode my tongue up and down, trying to ignore the acrid taste, but after a few minutes, I had to stop. The flavor, along with his spectacular girthiness, was making me gag.

"Leo, I'm sorry but this condom tastes terrible. I don't think I can do it." Leo pulled me down next to him and kissed me sweetly. "You're right, that does taste kinda funny." I pulled him on top of me. His eyes stayed open, gazing into mine. His brow furrowed a little as he eased himself into me. I inhaled sharply—he was . . . *titanic*.

"Wow, Leo, that's nice, really nice." Waves of satisfaction rippled through my body. I pulled Leo deeper into me, as deep as he could go. Revenge was sweeter than I could have imagined. If only Tommy Lee could see me now.

"Wait. Wait a second. Don't move, Bobbie," whispered Leo.

"What's wrong?"

"We need to slow down."

"Um, okay."

We were about one minute into the lovemaking. I waited a few beats. I pulled him close again and he squeaked.

"No, no, not yet."

I looked at Leo's perfect face as he grimaced, hoping to make it past the two-minute mark. He was a unicorn. Rare, innocent, and horny. Me, on the other hand, I'd been engaged, married, and had given birth. I needed a man, not a man-child.

Ah what's the point?

"I'm going to get a drink," I said, pushing him off me, climbing down out of the bed, throwing on my T-shirt. I was mad at him, mad at the whole world. The speed was making me antsy, bitchy, and annoyed with the handsome young golden boy for making me feel like a pedophile. Heading down the stairs, I yelled over my shoulder. "Maybe you should take your socks off next time." Leo seemed confused. "Okay . . . can you make me a drink too?"

"How about a glass of milk?"

I went downstairs and hung out by myself, watching TV. I just wanted him gone. "Bobbie? Are you

coming back?" I heard him call from my bedroom.

"Nah."

Leo, at his tender age, had yet to learn how to recognize damaged goods. How was he to know he was just one in a series of revenge fucks? A little confused by my behavior, Leo got up, got dressed, and left.

A few months later, I did an interview on the radio in which I mentioned Leo's extraordinary penis. Leo, apparently, didn't see the funny side. He sent his best friend Kevin Connolly, who you might have seen on *Entourage* and in the movie *He's Just Not That Into You*, over to talk to me. Kevin was a mutual friend of ours who I talked to on the phone occasionally, and who had also asked me out a few times. Today, though, he was visiting on "official business."

"Yeah, so Leo heard about that interview you did," said Kevin. "He's really pissed off that you would talk about something personal on-air."

"I'm sorry," I said, stifling my laughter. I couldn't imagine Tommy ever getting mad about the world knowing what a huge penis he has. But then, Leo wasn't a cock-rock musician. For all his playfulness he was a serious kid. I never heard from him again. Which was fine by me.

Next!

A few weeks later, the actor Stephen Dorff sidled up to me on the dance floor at Grand Ville, with an entourage of about six dudes. *Wow, he really thinks he's the shit.* I towered over him in my heels and had to bend down to hear what he was saying.

"So, you wanna go back to my house and fuck?" said Stephen, in my ear. No hello, no "how are you?" Just straight to business.

"Excuse me?"

He leaned in a little closer, and I could feel his spit on my cheek.

"Do you want to go back to my place?"

You picked the wrong ice queen, motherfucker, I thought. I hit him with the most withering up-and-down stare I could muster and proceeded to tear him a new one.

"Well, first of all, you're short. Second of all, you're fat. And third of all, you have a fuckin' unibrow." I made a unibrow above my nose with two fingers, to illustrate. "Oh, and you're spitting on me. Can you back the fuck up? Yeah, get out of here, chubby."

Damn. After all these years of being fun, goofy Bobbie Brown, unleashing my inner asshole felt good. *Damn* the consequences—these guys had it coming. Thanks to the heart-numbing properties of the speed I was on, I had no mercy. Stephen turned to his entourage, stunned. "Come on, guys, let's go." Sharise, who had seen the whole encounter, was about to die of laughter. "What a dork!" she giggled. Fresh off her divorce from Vince, she was as disillusioned with men as I was. "Let's show those assholes," I said.

Next stop, Kevin Costner's house. I looked around the party—five guys and about a hundred girls—wondering how they got there. I wandered through the house and peered into a bedroom. Kevin was sitting on the bed, encircled by a few females. *Oh, please,* I thought.

"Come on in," he said, smiling.

I sat down on the bed. The girl sitting next to me put her legs around her neck. One leg, and then the other.

"This one's a sure thing," I said, rolling my eyes. Kevin seemed amused. "You're funny," he said. He asked me for my number, and as I jotted down my digits on a napkin, I giggled privately. *Mwa-ha-ha-ha.* If only Kevin knew what he was about to get himself into. He called me the next night. "Hey Bobbie, are you in front of your TV? Check out channel five." I put it on. *Dances with Wolves.* "We

hi . . . there you are.” My eyes rolled deep into the back of my head.

“~~You girls should come to a party in Malibu this weekend. There will be music and dancing. You love it.~~” I wasn’t sure I could be bothered. Kevin’s over-earnest egotism was turning me off, but Sharise wanted to go. *Ah, fuck it.* Ready for a good time, we made the hour’s drive to Malibu from her house in the Valley, singing Sheryl Crow songs all the way.

Malibu’s twenty-seven-mile stretch of sun-drenched coastline is home to Mel Gibson, Steven Spielberg, Courteney Cox, and dotted with glassy million-dollar homes that stare out at the surf. Behind the elegant façades lies the same hedonistic, morally bankrupt scene you’ll find in Hollywood—guys in Ferraris, strung-out Bel Air wives, rockers in cowboy boots, dust clouds of cocaine in the wake. *Idiots*, I thought, taking a quick key bump of speed in the car. I *hated* coke. Coke was for losers.

Sharise and I walked into the party and headed straight for the dance floor. The DJ was spinning some rad hip-hop, and thanks to the speed, I had plenty of energy. I tuned into the rhythm, oblivious to the curious gazes of the other partygoers as Sharise and I busted out our raddest ’90s dance moves—pop-locking, voguing, and doing the Running Man like it was going out of style (which it was). Then I felt something behind me; it was Kevin, dancing up to me, awkward mating ritual in full effect. Imagine someone being led by his penis in a pelvic thrust, off the beat, headed in your direction. Instinctively, I shoved him with both arms across the dance floor.

“Whoa,” said Kevin, stumbling. Undeterred, he came back at me with that pelvis.

“Why don’t you go dance somewhere else?” I sniped.

Sharise told me to stop being a bitch. I’ll admit, I was kind of an asshole back in those days. I was not impressed by anybody or anything, no matter how many Oscars or Grammys they might have. Which always seemed to make them come on stronger. Sharise begged me to please just be nice to Kevin—she was always a tad more compassionate and polite than I—so when he invited us over to his house to watch a movie the following night, I gave it one more shot.

DANCES WITH DISASTERS

Kevin opened the door, wearing a country-western-type outfit: blue jeans and a plaid shirt. He had a beautiful Spanish-style home in the Hollywood Hills that he had bought from Richard Dreyfuss.

“Hello, girls.”

Within moments of arriving I managed to smash my glass of vodka tonic on the tile floor. I was notoriously clumsy, always tripping, crashing, breaking things, possessed by inexplicable involuntary spasms. I was embarrassed, so I grabbed Sharise’s glass and threw it on the floor too.

“It’s a Greek restaurant! O-pa!”

“No, it’s not a Greek restaurant, Bobbie,” said Kevin, dryly. *Ugh, what a bore*, I thought.

“Whatever.”

I was more off-kilter than usual, having been up all night partying with the guys from Cozy Chamber. Pierced nü-metal goth kids in black eyeliner, they were my kind of people, with my kind of taste in vices. Normally, I found it easy to hop between the rock scene and glitzy Hollywood shit, but the night I showed up at Kevin’s tastefully appointed home, my brain was clearly still in heavy metal parking lot mode.

Turning a blind eye to the shards of Waterford crystal on the floor tile, Kevin suggested we retire to the film-viewing room, where he had a movie cued up for us to watch. I stepped into the viewing room, looking back over my shoulder to say something to Sharise, failing to notice the rather large stool in front of me. I went flying, landing face-first on the ground. Man, why was this always happening

me?

~~“Face-plant!” I yelled, chewing on a mouthful of freshly shampooed carpet.~~

For Kevin, the horror of my dangerous one-woman freak show was starting to sink in. He looked nervous. “What the fuck is wrong with you?” hissed Sharise.

We sat down on the wraparound banquette in his screening room and Kevin put on the movie *EDtv*. I tried to relax and act like a normal human being, but something about the way Woody Harrelson delivered his lines was really pissing me off. He kept stuttering and blinking his eyes. “Fuck,” I exclaimed at the top of my voice, in full Tourette’s mode, not realizing I was thinking out loud.

“What?”

“The fuck? He did it again. This is ridiculous.”

“What’s the matter?” said Kevin, pausing the film.

“I-I-I don’t know, K-K-Kevin.” I imitated Woody, stuttering and blinking my eyes. Kevin looked at me blankly.

“Woody Harrelson keeps stuttering every time he delivers. It’s pissing me off.”

“Can’t you maybe ignore it?”

“No.”

“Please just shut up, Bobbie,” said Sharise. Kevin put the movie back on. In the very next scene Woody Harrelson stuttered and blinked. Again.

“Oh. You’re right,” said Kevin, sounding irritated. “I can’t watch the movie now. Perhaps we should just turn it off.” Sharise, ever the peacemaker, convinced him it would be okay to carry on watching, so long as we tried not to focus too much on Woody’s tics. I couldn’t be bothered and drifted into a deep, twitchy sleep, for the first time in days. The speed was starting to wear off.

“Wake up, Bobbie! The movie’s over,” said Sharise. I was hanging off the couch sideways, a little drool dangling from my lips.

“Let’s all go upstairs for a nightcap, shall we?” said Kevin, in one last desperate bid to rescue the evening. “There’s a magnificent view of the city from my bedroom.” Kudos to Kevin for not kicking me out. Seriously. Hats off. I guess he must have really wanted to get laid. He led the way up to his bedroom, which, as promised, had an enormous deck overlooking the whole of Hollywood. I stepped out on to it, inhaling the heady scent of eucalyptus and orange blossom, mesmerized by the snaking glow of the freeways in the distance. The balcony railing was only crotch-high, and as I leaned over, I half stumbled and gasped, holding on tight to make sure I didn’t flip over and tumble down the hillside below.

“Whoa, kind of dangerous over here!” I yelled at Kevin and Sharise, who were ignoring me. Since Tommy had left me, I’d been on a string of dates, most of them calamitous, or hilarious. Something inside me had become resistant to all that was sane and decent in this world. I was a chaos magnet, a bad-luck charm, a catastrophe in kitten heels. Sharise, too, had suffered her fair share of rock-wild damage, but, unlike me, she could keep it together in public.

“Maybe you should go inside—you’re making me nervous,” called over Kevin.

“Okay, but I want a cigarette,” I said, strolling into the bedroom. I lit up my Marlboro and looked around. The room was huge, shaped like an octagon, with a giant fireplace illuminating one of the walls.

“No smoking inside,” I heard Kevin call from the balcony.

“Bob, he said no smoking,” Sharise hollered.

“All right, all right,” I said, taking one last pull on my cigarette. *Where do I put the fucker out?* I thought, eyes searching for an ashtray.

I flipped the cigarette toward the crackling fire—*fliiiiick*—and walked back toward the balcony, trying to join in the conversation. Moments later, Kevin's expression shifted. He pointed behind me, shaking his head, panic in his eyes.

"My bedroom's on fire."

I turned around, and indeed, flames were crawling up the wall from the mantel above the fireplace where my cigarette had landed.

"Holy shit!" I ran into the bedroom, took off my jacket, and slapped it against the wall, trying to put out the flames. Sparks exploded like it was the Fourth of July.

"Dude, stop fanning the flames! You're making it worse!" Sharise hissed.

"I am so sorry, Kevin!" I said, determined to put out the blaze. I took off my scarf and slapped it at the wall. Even after the fire went out, I carried on slapping and thrashing, grunting like a tennis player as I gave the wall a good beating. Kevin's face was stricken.

"Will you fucking calm down," yelled Sharise. I turned to my friend, annoyed at her constant chiding, and tried to whip-slap her in the face with the tail end of my burnt-up scarf. Except I missed and ended up slapping Kevin in the eyeball instead. On the snapback, it ricocheted into my face.

"Jesus! Ouch!"

"Fuck! Sorry, Kevin!"

I was squinting. Kevin's face was sooty, and he was cupping one eye. His fancy mantelpiece was charred and ashy. Sharise's jaw, as it so often was when we hung out, was on the ground.

"Bobbie, where on God's Earth did you come from?" said Kevin, shaking his head.

BYE-BYE, MISS AMERICAN PI

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 196

According to family lore, it was stickier than molasses the day my dad told my mom she was the finest piece of ass in the South, prompting my mom to fling the contents of her ice cream soda in his face. “Maybe this’ll cool you down!” she yelled, and my dad cracked a smile, squinting through the root beer blur. *My kinda girl*, he thought, licking his lips. It was the first time Bobby Gene Brown and Judy Ann Faul had met, and frankly, with the heat, a little ice cream soda in the face was not entirely unrefreshing. Bobby eyed Judy up and down—she was seventeen and a half, with cat-eye makeup and jet-black hair, just like Priscilla Presley. He wiped down his leather jacket with a napkin and watched my mother storm out of the diner, picturing her in a leopard-print bikini.

“She’s gonna be my wife,” he said to the cashier, who shook his head.

Three months later, they were married.

Bobby was nine years older than Judy, a wrong-side-of-the-tracks kind of guy, a diamond in the rough with dark hair, full lips, and blue eyes. He grew up in Spartanburg, South Carolina, a quaint Southern backwater founded by French fur trappers and pioneers, and dotted with church steeples and apple orchards. Straight out of school he enlisted in the military but never served. He decided to become a car salesman, and let’s just say, whatever the clichés are about a man who sells used cars, they’re pretty much true, especially when it came to my daddy. He had the gift of gab and was smooth enough to talk a good Catholic girl like my mom into giving a guy like him the time of day.

My mom, Judy, grew up in a Catholic family in a small swampy town named Church Point, Louisiana, so-called Cajun Music Capital of the World. She was one of six, raised by a single mother, third from the youngest. She was born sick, with spinal meningitis, so my grandma Isabelle used to make her wear a braid necklace that had been dipped in holy water, to make her get well. I don’t know if it was Jesus or just good fortune that did it, but my mother did grow into a healthy, beautiful teenager.

My grandpa had walked out on my grandma when all their children were kids, so my grandma raised the six of them on her own. With such a big family, the children had to go out to work early—when she was thirteen, my mom lied about her age to get a job at a store called Shoe Town. With so little money in the family, she had to grow up quick.

* * *

When Bobby Brown started showing up at the house with big bags of groceries, Judy and Isabelle liked that. Money was tight, and groceries were always welcome. They were then living in Baton Rouge, capital of Louisiana, the quiet cousin of New Orleans. It’s nice and simple there, and so are the people.

“Miss Judy, Miss Isabelle . . . I saw some wonderfully fresh meats at the store today. I couldn’t help thinking you might want some for your sandwiches.”

“Bless your heart,” said my grandma, eyeing the grocery bags, handing my mother a cigarette, and mouthing, *I like him*.

When Bobby choked Judy in a jealous rage during one of their first dates, Judy assumed his actions were a sign of his passion for her. After three months of dating, they married. A year later, on October

7, 1969, I was born, following a grueling twenty-six-hour labor. “You were a bitch coming into the world, and you still are,” my mom likes to joke. “Let’s call her Bobbie Jean,” said my mom proudly, cradling me in her arms in the delivery room. She was eighteen. My dad liked that—Bobby Gene Brown’s firstborn child would be named Bobbie Jean Brown, after him.

We lived in a house on Pioneer Drive, in the Park Forest subdivision of Baton Rouge. It was a quaint little neighborhood, with a community pool where all the kids would ride their bikes and go swimming in the summertime. I enrolled at the elementary school down the street, Park Forest Elementary, and played hopscotch with all the neighbors’ kids. From the outside, life looked pretty sweet.

My mom always wanted me to be pretty. She imagined me as a princess or a Southern debutante and was always fixing my hair, pulling it into a tight ponytail or putting it in rollers before bed. (Years later she would do the same to my baby daughter, who, unlike me, loved it.) I hated having to sleep with a million sponge rollers attached to my scalp, but so long as I had nice hair for school, my mom was happy, so that was that. When I was in fifth grade, my mom started taking me to White Gloves and Party Manners classes, kind of a finishing school for kids where you learn about good hygiene, table manners, phone etiquette, and so on. Underneath the Southern curls and the lace dresses, I was a goofy tomboy, but I learned at a young age where to place a napkin on the table, in what order the forks, spoons, and knives went, how to correctly get in and out of a car, even how to walk a catwalk—“the essentials of being a true and proper lady,” my mother said. “We may be broke, but we don’t need to act like it,” she said. The older I got, the more I rebelled against all that. I would do everything in my power *not* to look perfect—to scuff my shoes and dirty my cheeks. I broke the rules because the reality behind our white picket fence didn’t match the façade.

Now, I *loved* my daddy, Bobby Brown. But truth be told, he was an angry motherfucker. My mom always tried to shield me from it, but it was obvious that Bobby had some ugly rage that festered deep inside. I must have been five years old the first time I decided to step in. Bobby was getting Judy real bad, kicking her on the floor. So I grabbed a bottle of ketchup, lay down, and squirted the red stuff all over my belly, so as to create a diversion.

“Look over here, Daddy, I’m hurt. You must get help.”

Bobby cocked his head to one side. “You better get out of here, Bobbie,” he growled. “Yes, get out,” my mom screamed. I wasn’t sure who was more mad at me, my dad or my mom. She really hated me seeing her like that.

Judy tried to leave Bobby numerous times. She would pack a few suitcases and we would go stay at a hotel, but my dad would show up looking all lonesome and sorry for himself and convince us to come home. He just had this way with words, the ability to make you fall in love with him all over again, no matter what he had just done. Things would get good for a while, and our little house on Pioneer Drive would be filled with music. My daddy played the guitar, mandolin, and harmonica; once upon a time, he even had dreams of being a country singer. A lot of blues and country singers came from his hometown of Spartanburg—Pink Anderson (inspiration for the Pink in Pink Floyd), Davy Ball, and Walter Hyatt, for instance. When I was little, I would sit up with him late and listen to him strum on his guitar. Those were my favorite times with him. Sometimes my dad would perform in a little bar close to where we lived. When he wasn’t performing at the bar, he’d be drinking it dry.

Bobby didn’t drink much at home, but he loved to go out and party, and when he came stumbling onto the front porch, that’s when the fun and games began. I could hear them in their bedroom, my mom yelling at him to stop. After a while Mom would have me sleep in bed with her, hoping perhaps that I could act as a safety barrier. But it didn’t work. Bobby Brown couldn’t help himself—a trait that ran in his family.

“Bobbie, honey, wake up.”

~~It was the night of my seventh birthday and I had fallen asleep hours ago, high on cake and soft pop.~~ I opened my eyes and blinked, trying to make sense of what was happening. My mom was leaning over me, stroking my hair.

“Grandpa John just went to heaven; now we gotta take him to the funeral home. You have to get up, sweetie.”

Grandpa John was my dad’s dad. I was his favorite, the only kid he really liked out of all his children and his children’s children. In fact, I may have been the only human being he liked, period. Grandpa John grumbled, growled, and complained, and had beaten up his poor wife, my grandma Ida, like it was his daily duty. A sweet, mild-mannered woman, she had died before I was born, after suffering a brain hemorrhage. My dad was a teenager at the time of her death.

“The heat was on high in the house when I came home,” my dad told me, when I was in my twenties. “That’s when I knew something was wrong.” On a hot Southern day he found my grandma lying on the couch with the heating turned on high. He thought she was sleeping, but she was dead.

My dad remained loyal to my grandpa, though, and when Grandpa John got sick in 1975, he moved in with us. I was six years old and tried my hardest to be a good nurse for him. I would steal pink geraniums and pansies from the neighbor’s garden, tie them in a posy, and lay them on his bedside table. “That’s my Pickle,” said my grandpa, patting my head, ignoring the neighbor in his yard hollering about his missing flowers. Grandpa John loved to call me Pickle.

We drove eleven hours to Grandpa’s funeral in Spartanburg. That was the first time I had ever seen my dad cry. I cried too. Grandpa John was the only grandpa I ever knew, and I loved him. The last piece of advice Grandpa gave my mom before he died was, “Give him a son.” He figured that if my mom bore Bobby a boy, that might help lift his mood. And so when I was eight, my mom gave birth to my brother, John Adam Brown, the sweetest little baby on Earth. As for my dad? Well he stayed grumpy, except maybe a little worse. Now I had a baby to worry about, as well as my mom. Usually when things got bad, I would lift baby John out of his crib (we soon started calling him by his middle name, Adam) and we’d hide in the closet. I’d hold him close to me and sing songs until things got quiet again.

Things worsened when my dad quit being a car salesman and started his home-insulation business. Being around chemicals and fiberglass all day long made him tired and irritable. On top of that, he had trouble figuring out how to make money, hard as he tried. Add a hangover every morning, and you’ve got one mean, pissed-off son of a bitch. Life with the Browns was never a rose garden.

ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD JOYRIDER

The one thing that always cheered me up, apart from playing with my baby brother, was my girlfriend. I learned early on that when family lets you down, your best friends can pull you back up. My BF, Missy Brown lived down the street. My other best friend was Shannon Parker, who lived next to Missy. Then my two other besties, Jenny Mizel and Kelly Winters, lived within walking distance. We were inseparable, like the Pink Ladies from the movie *Grease*, and we loved nothing more than putting on makeup, gossiping about boys, and making up dances to our favorite pop songs. Jenny and Kelly, especially, were into the dancing. As soon as I could walk, I would groove. I stuffed socks into my mom’s bras and boogied with the vacuum cleaner while watching *Soul Train*.

“Look, honey, she really loves that black music,” said my dad. To this day, hip-hop is my jam.

I was shy in middle school, but once I started dancing at our school talent shows, that changed.

When my mom found out, the stage mom that had resided inside her for so long was finally unleashed.

~~“Okay, let’s do it one more time,” my mom would say, as Jenny and I practiced our ’80s dance moves. We had picked the song “Funkytown” for the sixth-grade talent show.~~

“A little more like this, Bobbie! And *smile!*”

Winning the talent shows boosted my confidence even more, and I started singing solo in front of the school. I never had an out-of-the-womb amazing voice like Christina Aguilera, but I knew how to entertain a crowd. I’ll never forget my mom’s proud face after I sang “Over the Rainbow” in front of the whole school. That moment, I think, is when she realized she had an entertainer on her hands.

Along with my newfound confidence came a growing disregard for the rules. I became convinced that I knew better than most adults—and who could blame me, considering how my parents carried on with each other. Nothing was off-limits, as far as I was concerned, including stealing my mom’s car and kidnapping my baby brother. I blame my friend Penny’s older sister, who was eighteen. She was like a mentor to Penny and me. She taught us how to French kiss on our hands, how to make a boy think you were ignoring him, how to write a love letter, which lip gloss to wear, the importance of blending eye shadow, how much hair mousse to use, why dry shampoo mattered—the important stuff.

I was eleven years old, and so was Penny. Driving an automobile seemed doable. Penny’s sister gave us a pretty thorough lesson in her mom’s Thunderbird, and by the end of the day we were confident drivers, our little butts propped up on cushions so we could see over the steering wheel, feet bare reaching the pedals. Driving around the block, then pulling up against the curb and parking was a thrill. I’d never felt so grown-up in my life.

One day I thought it would be fun to take my toddler brother out for a spin. I found my mom’s car keys, carried him to the car, and sat him in the passenger seat. We drove about fifteen blocks through the subdivision and then back. It was a glorious morning, and my three-year-old brother seemed perfectly at ease with his eleven-year-old chauffeur. Pulling up to the curb outside my parents’ house was met by an unwelcome sight—my mom in her bedroom slippers, smudged makeup around her eyes.

“Bobbie are you *driving?*”

I put on the parking brake, just like Penny had showed me, unfastened my seat belt, and got out of the car.

“Yes, I’m an excellent driver.”

My mom stormed over to the passenger door, opened it, and lifted Adam gently out of the car, holding him close. “There are going to be some changes around here, mark my words,” she said, madder than I’d ever seen her. I got my ass whipped pretty hard that night.

When I was in my mid-teens, and in the ninth grade, my mom finally left Bobby for good. One night she woke me and my brother and we tiptoed out of the house, into a new life. She had been planning it in secret for a long time. Our new home was farther away from my friends, and smaller, a three-bedroom townhome. But I didn’t care—I was tired of the nights of driving around the block looking for my dad. I was tired of lying as flat as I could on the floorboard of the car, trying to make myself disappear. I was tired of my mom having to find him, sometimes with another woman, always drunk.

Bobby had started picking on my little brother, which really riled me. I started purposely provoking my dad, hitting him hard on the back of the head with a comb while he was watching TV, calling him names. I would stand, silent, watching him pick a belt out of the closet, or a switch out of the tree. “I’m going to spank you till you cry,” he would tell me. But I never let myself shed a tear. They would well in my eyes, but I never let them fall. When my mom told me she was filing for divorce, I felt relieved. And

this time when Bobby tried to win her back, it didn't work.

THE MARVELOUS MR. EARL

Mr. Earl LeSage was everything my father wasn't—soft-spoken, softhearted, and practically a teetotaler. He never raised his voice, and he agreed with absolutely everything my mother said. He had a successful flooring and carpeting business, and had met my mom when he did our floors. She was still married to my dad at the time, and Mr. Earl was married too, but it was clear from day one that he would do anything to help her. Sometimes that meant trying to find my dad a job, just so that he could pay our bills. Mr. Earl was always putting in a good word for Bobby, not because he liked him, but because he hated to see my mom suffer. When Judy finally left Bobby, Mr. Earl was also freshly divorced, and waiting with open arms.

Mr. Earl had grown up poor, but had worked very hard to make his business a success. He was kind and caring, and my mom, after years of fighting and struggling with Bobby, finally started to understand what a truly loving relationship could feel like. She fell madly in love, and even quit wearing high heels, so she wouldn't tower over him (he was shorter than her). They made a handsome couple. Mr. Earl always knew how to dress—he wore snakeskin cowboy boots and belts that matched with slacks and a nice ironed shirt, and he had a quite collection of cowboy hats. He was a gentle man who loved nature, and his favorite thing in the world, perhaps, apart from my mom, was his garden. Corn, beans, potatoes, turnips—you name it, he grew it. He always grew the plumpest, reddest tomatoes in town, the size of small pumpkins and ten times as sweet.

After my mom married Mr. Earl, she, my brother, and I moved in with him into this big old house on four acres of land just outside Baton Rouge. It was pretty there, although the summers were almost intolerably hot. And there was no escaping the lovebugs. Lovebugs (they're also known as "honeymoon flies," and "kissing bugs,") look like flies that are connected by the tail in pairs, stuck to each other for days after they mate. They would drift in huge, slow clouds in the late summer and if your car ran in one of the swarms, you'd have to clean them off right away; otherwise the acid in their blood could strip your paintwork.

"Love hurts," I would sing, as I hosed down my mom's car for the tenth time that week, spraying off the insect carcasses. At night I would sit on the porch with my brother, plug in one of those ultraviolet bug zappers, and listen to the sharp buzz the lamp made as it fried the lovebugs pair by pair. I daydreamed about what summers might be like in other places, places that weren't hot and sticky and full of dead bugs. Places like Los Angeles, with its swaying palm trees, beaches, and rock music.

I had heard that Tommy Lee lived in L.A. This is pertinent because when I was fifteen, Tommy Lee was my absolute number one crush, and my entire bedroom was covered in Mötley Crüe posters. I loved to watch their videos on MTV, and I thought they were *way* cool for wearing makeup. *When I do it for the first time, it's gonna be with Tommy Lee*, I'd think, staring at Tommy on the wall, his lips pouting, blowing obscene kisses my way. Mr. Earl did not understand my Mötley Crüe fascination one bit. One time, when he drove me, my mom, and my brother to Disney World in Orlando—an eight-hour drive—I insisted on blasting Mötley's *Shout at the Devil* the whole entire way. "But this is the *future*," I yelled, every time Mr. Earl tried to turn the music down.

HIGH SCHOOL BOY BLUES

I had made a new friend over the summer, Deanna. We were going to start high school together and

hoped she and I could become best friends. Unbeknownst to me, Deanna had a huge crush on a boy called Mark DuVall. ~~Mark was a year older than us and very handsome. He had invited me to go to the movies a few times, and I was hoping that once we started high school, he might ask me to be his girlfriend.~~ I had mentioned this to Deanna. She smiled, but I guess she wasn't happy about it.

"Hey, you wanna try my mom's tanning bed? It'll make you look like you've been playing beach volleyball all summer," she said. I had never used a tanning bed before. Twenty-five minutes later, I emerged from the coffin-like bed. My skin felt crispy, brittle.

"You look amazing!" said Deanna, smirking.

A few days later I enrolled at Starkey Academy, a private high school in East Baton Rouge County with burns all over my face. I was covered in hundreds of tiny painful blisters, swollen and oozing and red as Mr. Earl's tomatoes. Even talking hurt.

"What setting did Deanna have the tanning bed on?" asked my mom, shaking her head as she dabbed chamomile lotion onto my face that morning. "Doesn't she know you have Irish blood?"

"I look cremated," I sobbed.

My mom's rule was that unless you were puking or bleeding, you weren't missing school. Having an incinerated face didn't count, so I had to walk the halls looking like a burn victim for days, until the blisters went away. Then my skin started peeling, and I just looked like a leper. I was too embarrassed to even talk to Mark DuVall, who assumed I didn't like him anymore, and started dating Deanna. With that, the penny dropped. Some girls, I realized, will stop at nothing to get what they want. My very first lesson in love.

“Just stay there—*don’t move.*”

I had Dirk Arnold pinned to the backseat of his car. Leather seats squeaked in tandem with the frog croaking outside as I French-kissed him. Fifteen minutes later, I was done. His entire neck was covered in hickeys. “I want everyone to know that you’re mine,” I said proudly. Dirk examined himself in the mirror. “Gosh, I wonder what my mom’s gonna think,” he mumbled.

Something had happened to my personality since my mom divorced my dad, a slow but noticeable blossoming. From being the moody girl who would scuff her shoes on purpose and downplay her looks, I started walking with my head held high, just like the models in the fashion magazines I was starting to collect. These days I listened to my mom, especially when she told me I was pretty. When she showed me how to apply lipstick and how to fix my hair, I listened, rather than pushing her away. My mom, delighted at this newfound closeness with her daughter, loved nothing more than taking me shopping. Finally, bonded by retail, we were on the same page. And I looked good. Really good.

Maybe that’s why Dirk, my first boyfriend, didn’t mind that I was somewhat of a goofball. We would sit in his car for hours listening to Def Leppard, making out until our lips were shredded and my chest was raw from his stubble. I had started teasing my hair just like the hair metal girls I saw on MTV, wearing tight acid-wash jeans with tears in the butt and off-the-shoulder white T-shirts. I posed for photos with friends, pouting and pretending I was a music video star like Tawny Kitaen.

Dirk’s sister was Lacey Arnold. She was the same age as me, and a welcome third wheel in our relationship. We always had the best times together. At night we would sneak out of our folks’ house, driving their mom’s car into town, ducking every time we saw a cop. We’d go to underground clubs in Baton Rouge and dance until it was two in the morning, everyone around us high on ecstasy. We didn’t even know what ecstasy was at that point—we just loved to dance. Late at night we would sneak back home and crawl into bed, getting up bleary-eyed for school in the morning.

“Hey, Boobless! This seat taken?”

Boys, especially the ones who knew they didn’t have a chance, had been calling me Boobless Bobbie for years, thanks to my boyish figure and pancake-flat chest. One morning on the school bus, after a long night of dancing and yet another mean Boobless Bobbie jibe, I blew my top.

“Whatever, cheese dick, I’m going to be a model one day, so I’m *supposed* to have no tits.”

I was *obsessed* with models. I spent all my pocket money on fashion magazines, not to read the articles but to look at the girls. I would study their poses and marvel at the symmetry of their faces. They were all tall and skinny like me, with full lips and powerful cheekbones and almond eyes. Maybe looking goofy wasn’t such a bad thing after all. My favorite models were Christy Turlington, Stephanie Seymour, and Paulina Porizkova. I liked Paulina the most. She was Czech-American, with piercing blue eyes and fine features, and eventually married Ric Ocasek from the rock band the Cars. I thought he was the most exotic beauty I had ever seen before. I kept photo albums filled with pages I had torn from magazines featuring Paulina and my favorite models in their high-fashion ad campaigns. My boyfriends never understood it. “I think she looks like a snake,” said Dirk, as I pointed out Paulina’s latest spread in *Vogue*. “You’re prettier,” he added, and I didn’t get it. I thought blondes were so American pie-ish and boring. I wondered if maybe one day I could dye my hair and look just as sexy and imported as my idol. They just didn’t make girls like her in Baton Rouge.

Blond and apple pie as I was, I still wondered if maybe, just maybe, I had a shot at being a model too. ~~I didn't want to be a secretary or a nurse or a teacher, and with my grades, it didn't look like~~ a glittering academic career lay ahead of me. My mom had never gone to college, and there wasn't much pressure for me to succeed scholastically. "Being pretty is what you're best at," my mom said when I asked her if she thought I had a shot at being in the magazines. "If you want to make a living at it, why not? We all have to work with what we've got, Bobbie."

My family never raved about my exceptional good looks, but the consensus was Bobbie Brown looks were probably her greatest—possibly her only real—asset. And if she didn't want to use her prettiness, well . . . Subway was hiring. They would have loved me just as much either way, and it was comforting, knowing there was no huge pressure on me to succeed. But I didn't see myself making foot-long subs in Baton Rouge for the rest of my life. No way.

My new best friend was Mona, a petite girl with big breasts and four sisters all as pretty as she was. She became an ally in my quest to become pretty enough to be a model. But what were we going to do about that chest of mine? I was still flat as a pancake.

"If you drink Dr Pepper, your tits will grow," she told me.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Positive."

I drank so much Dr Pepper that summer my tongue turned brown. Sad to say, my chest refused to blossom. All that sugar, combined with the disappointment, made me testy, to say the least. I tried not to care about having boobs anymore, and now that I knew I wanted to become a model, I sure as hell didn't care about school anymore either.

I became a total brat in the classroom, talking back if I didn't agree with something. What my teachers didn't know was that for me, getting sent to the principal's office was no biggie—the school principal was Mona's father, and he always let me off with a warning and some candy. I was starting to learn that in life, it really is about who you know.

"SPREAD 'EM FOR T-BOY"

T-Boy was probably the cutest boy in all Baton Rouge. He was five foot nine, muscular, and very athletic. He was on the football team and wore a letterman jacket. With his brown hair, brown eyes, and juicy lips, he looked like Taylor Lautner run through a 1980s spin cycle. Meow. One night I was sleeping over at a friend's house when T-Boy and a couple of other popular guys came over. There I was, in the kitchen, raiding the fridge in my pajamas, when T-Boy taps me on the shoulder and whispers in my ear.

"I like you, Bobbie. May I call you sometime?"

I had broken up with Dirk, and this kid was an Adonis. So I gave him my number and soon after, we were official. About six months in, I figured it was time we got down to business.

"We should probably have sex, right?" I said to T-Boy one night at my friend Melissa's house. He looked surprised.

"Okay, if you're sure you're ready?"

My first time was more of a first attempt, because neither of us knew what the hell we were doing. I assumed T-Boy was experienced and would show me the ropes, but actually, he was just as clueless as I was. I didn't even know that you were supposed to open your legs. T-Boy rubbed up and down between my closed thighs for an hour before we called it off due to chafing. After two months of fruitless thigh humping, T-Boy made a suggestion.

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