

## Foreword

I killed and buried an old friend today. It was a swift death after a few well-positioned blows. Blunt force trauma, I believe it's called. It was a sobering service, with only me in attendance, and it took everything in me to pay my last respects. I had been so obsessed for so long; it started to control my every move. The entire relationship was a toxic rollercoaster, which took me over a year to dissolve. I had ended the relationship so many times before, only to beg for my friend to take me back after a few days.

If I doubted myself, my friend was there to show me the truth, no matter how brutal. I found myself not doing things because I knew my friend would disapprove. My friend was seldom forgiving and could make me feel so bad about myself. I did everything I could to gain my friend's approval, but in the end, I had to let go and say goodbye. But this time, goodbye meant forever—no more bullshit. I killed my friend and there is no coming back...ever!

Murder? No, it wasn't murder. It was more like self-defense. I decided to put myself first and defend the little bit of pride I had left. I had hit rock bottom and my friend was right there, letting me slowly descend into a haze of low self-esteem and self-loathing.

Now, you're probably thinking, how could I do this? How could I take a life; especially a friend's? Well, I was driven to this moment by a series of life-changing events. My friend was there the entire time—most of the time mocking me, very seldom cheering me on. Always incessantly mocking! I could have sworn I heard laughter a few times too.

I thought about all the events that had built up to this moment. I leaned my head back and closed my eyes. I think the turning point was about a year ago. I had hit my rock bottom, but somehow, found a way to sink even lower.

# Chapter 1

It was a few years ago that I once again had to do something about my weight gain. I'm not even sure how it happened. I mean, I have always been a 'big girl'. My mom called it being *big-boned*. Society calls it fat.

It all started one fall. I was lying in bed thinking about waking up when a knock at the door jostled me to get out of bed. It was Boonie. Boonie had been my best friend since middle school. I nursed him through a bad marriage and practically everything else before and after that. He was gay and had married a woman he met in college—I know, a tragedy waiting to happen. He married her because she was pregnant.

I've known Boonie most of my life. I met him in the summer, just before we started fifth grade. His Auntie Gloria owned a new hair salon downtown, and I went one Saturday with my mom. I remember gathering my good barbie and coloring books and shoving everything into a bookbag. I wanted to take more barbies, but the rest had been chewed up by the family dog, Duke. My last surviving barbie, who I had affectionally named Foxy Brown (after the Pam Grier character in the movie) had also been chewed on, but not as badly as the others. Her face was a little deformed from a bite mark, and her blonde hair was choppy, matted, and uneven. My brother told me that I couldn't name my barbie Foxy Brown because she was white, but I didn't care. Anyone can be named Foxy Brown, I said back defiantly. And the name stuck. Soon everyone in the house called my barbie Foxy Brown.

I was playing with Foxy Brown in the salon waiting room, when I saw Boonie at the soda machine. Even then, he had style. He wore stonewashed jeans, a blue-collared shirt, a brown bomber jacket, and Adidas sneakers. He counted his money and put it in the machine. He caught me staring at him, and I quickly looked away. Once he had retrieved his soda, he walked over to me.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi," I responded.

"You wanna soda?" he asked, smiling at me.

“I don’t have any money.”

“I have money. I will buy it for you. I’m Boonie, my Auntie Gloria owns this salon. She does hair, and sometimes nails. She knows all about that stuff—fashion, makeup, shoes, clothes...” His voice trailed off.

“My mom is back there getting her hair done,” I said, pointing to the back of the salon.

“Come on,” He grabbed my hand and pulled me toward the soda machine, “What do you want?” he asked.

I looked at all the choices, “Red cream soda,” I responded.

He put the money into the machine and pushed the button for the soda. He handed it to me, “Come on, we can go sit in the back room, I have a TV and Atari.”

He motioned for me to follow. I ran back, grabbed my bookbag and followed him to the breakroom. We sat on the sofa, drinking our sodas. I fixed Foxy Brown so that she was sitting too. That is when he took an interest in her.

“What is wrong with your Malibu Barbie?” he said, laughing.

I looked at Foxy Brown. *She didn’t look that bad*, I thought to myself.

“My dog chewed her up,” I said.

“Oh. Well, what’s wrong with her hair?”

“Her name is Foxy Brown,” I said, sounding a little defensive.

He howled with laughter, “Foxy Brown? Like the movie?”

I didn’t answer. He noticed that I wasn’t laughing with him and smiled.

“I can fix her hair,” he said.

“What?”

“I can fix her hair,” he repeated. “I can cut it so that she looks a little better.” He reached for Foxy, and I grabbed her and pulled away, a suspicious expression on my face. I had let another boy, my brother, touch my barbies and they always ended up with a pulled-out arm or leg.

“What do you know about cutting hair?” I asked.

“A lot. Hand me those scissors on the table.”

I remember looking at the scissors and then looking at him. I think he could read my mind because he said, “I won’t hurt her, I promise. I will cut her hair and she will look really good. We can even dye it so she won’t be blonde.”

Something told me to trust him, so I handed him the scissors and Foxy Brown. He took off his jacket and went to work. I was surprised when he successfully cut her hair into a really cute bob. We bonded over Foxy Brown. He told me everything he knew about hair, makeup, and fashion, which was more than anyone I knew. It was that afternoon that we became best friends. I spent the summer with Boonie at his Auntie’s salon, and from then on, we told each other everything. I told him I was always getting teased for being heavy, and he told me that he had always felt different. He didn’t like sports, although his parents pushed him to do “boy” things, and he wanted to spend all his time at the salon.

By the time we reached high school, Boonie and I were inseparable. We were always together. I loved being around him because he had so much confidence and was always so sure of himself—the exact opposite of me. He didn’t care what people thought. The only opinion that mattered to Boonie was that of his mother’s, and he went to great extremes to keep his sexuality a secret from her.

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I remember when he told me he was getting married. I can remember it like it was yesterday, even though it was years ago. We had met for coffee and a catch-up date.

“So, guess who’s getting married?” he said, sipping his chai tea.

“Who?” I said, mixing the sixth sugar into my coffee.

“Me,” he responded casually.

I instantly stopped stirring my coffee.

“You can close your mouth,” he said while smiling.

“Boonie, what do you mean- getting married?!”

“Well, you know I’ve been experimenting right? I mean, I know I’m gay and all, but to please my mom, and supposedly Jesus, I started dating girls. So, enter Trina. I met her in my econ class. She’s really cool. We went out a few times. She has the most

fabulous wardrobe—the dresses, the shoes, the makeup. Oh! My! God! It was everything! I had to hold myself back from raiding her closet.”

He continued to gush over Trina’s closet until I finally had to stop him.

“What the fuck, Boonie? What are you talking about getting married? Does she know that you’re gay? What the fuck is happening? You haven’t even had sex before and now you’re telling me that you are getting married?” I paused long enough to catch my breath until a realization hit me, “Wait, have you had sex with her?” I asked, staring at him. “And before you respond, if the answer is yes, and I’m just finding out about it, I’m hurt. Secondly, I didn’t even know you were dating. Still hurt.”

He looked at me with those soft brown eyes and took my hand. His smile slowly turned to a kind of frown. Not a sad, *sad* frown, but a serious, *I fucked up* frown.

“She is pregnant,” he said.

I could barely compose myself.

“What the fuck!” I said, standing up. But when I saw the embarrassed look on Boonie’s face, I slowly sat back down.

“You need better training,” he grumbled, sipping his tea. “Look,” he started intently—“I know I fucked up. I didn’t even enjoy it, but I cannot tell my mother that I am gay. I would put her in an early grave. I know this is a big decision, but I think I will make an excellent dad. Don’t you think?”

“But Boonie,” I said—“Does she know you are gay?”

“Oh, girl, no. But I’m going to do the honorable thing and marry her,” he said, without an ounce of excitement in his tone.

“Boonie, why?” I asked, “Just tell her. I will be there for you if you want.”

“Too late girl, both our mamas know, and they’ve set the date. I didn’t think shotgun weddings were real, but here I am. I really wanted to pick you to be my best man, but I have to settle for my cousin, Patrick.”

I watched him sip his tea. I felt so sorry for him.

“You wanna split a fudge brownie?” I asked. He looked at me and nodded his head yes. We ate four between us that afternoon.

They did get married and had a little girl named Ivy. The marriage was doomed from the start—mostly because Boonie swore off vagina. After a year and some months, the marriage ended badly. It's bad enough your man leaves you for another woman, but when it's another man... Trina lost it. She went after Boonie with everything she had. In the end she got everything, and he got visitation rights. It wasn't until Ivy was in her teens that Trina finally let it go and Ivy and Boonie could develop a good relationship.

Boonie is a really good dad. How many girls' dads know about makeup, fashion and hair? To this day, Ivy and Boonie are inseparable.

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Boonie continued to pound on the door, and when that wasn't enough, he started on the doorbell.

"I'm coming!" I yelled.

"Girl get yo' ass up!" I could hear him shout back.

I slowly rolled out of bed—I mean *roll* in the literal sense. I wrapped my tattered robe around me, and slowly walked to the front door. I unlocked it, turned around, and started for the kitchen without pausing.

Boonie opened the door and stepped into the house. He was always so fashionable. He wore a pair of tight grey, pleated slacks with a collared pink shirt and grey tie. He was carrying his statement pink and grey man purse, which I have been trying to steal for months.

"Girl, what is going on here?" he said, looking around my cluttered house. "What you been doing or... not doing?" He picked up a dirty bowl, a cup, a half-eaten bag of chips and two soda cans from the coffee table.

I looked at him and said, "I don't want to go." Our eyes met for just a moment before he walked into the kitchen. "I'm not listening to this because we already had this conversation. You promised you would go. It's my weekend without Ivy, and honey, I need a drink. So girl, we are outta here!" he said.

I could hear him turn on the water at the kitchen sink. I stood in the living room trying to find a reason not to go. I did promise, but I was in no mood. I mustered up the courage and walked into the kitchen.

“Look, I know you want to go, and I know that I promised, but I don’t feel well. Boonie, I’m tired.” I tried to present my best ‘I’m really sick’ facial expression.

He didn’t even look at me, “You’re going. Now, what’s going on with your hair, girlfriend? Please go and take a shower. Have you been in bed all day?”

He stood with his back to me, washing dishes. I wanted to scream or cry—I couldn’t decide which.

“Look Boonie, I really don’t feel good,” I groaned.

“Nope, not happening. I’m going to finish up here while you go take a shower. Then, we will find you something fabulous to wear, and I will do your hair and makeup, okay?” He finally turned around and looked at me. His eyes were soft, and his smile was warm. How could I say no?

“Okay, okay. I’m going to shower. Thanks for cleaning up.”

“Girl, we need to re-evaluate your life,” he commented, turning around towards the sink. “I don’t know what is going on with you, but a night of fun can’t hurt.”

“It can’t help,” I whispered as I left the kitchen.

Boonie was excited about our 25<sup>th</sup> high school reunion, which I had no desire to attend. I didn’t really like the people back then, so why should 25 years make a difference? I definitely wasn’t popular in high school, and spent most of my time doing school work or hanging out with Boonie.

High school is not kind to fat girls—at least not to me, anyway. I was constantly being teased because of my weight. Boonie was naturally tall and thin, and in contrast, I was short and round. We got the nickname ‘10’ when we were together. The teasing never seemed to bother Boonie, but to me it felt like absolute torture.

Boonie knocked on the bedroom door, “Are you ready to get fabulous?” he asked.

“I guess,” I said as I opened the door. Immediately, a look of disgust contorted his face.

“Sweatpants?” he asked.

“I’m just wearing this until I—or rather you, decide what I should wear.” I sat on the edge of the bed and watched him walk over to my closet.

He put his hand to his chin, as if deep in thought and started rummaging through the clothes.

“Hmm,” he said, “Not this, or this, definitely not this...” His voice trailed off.

I lay back on the bed and closed my eyes. I secretly hoped he wouldn't find anything to his liking.

“Ah, I think I have found it. Yes, I have always loved this dress on you. This is it!” He emerged from the closet with a black cocktail dress that I had purchased for my son's college graduation a few years ago. It was cute, but I only wore it once. I was confident it wasn't going to fit.

“Okay, get dressed. Let's see it on you,” he said, excitedly.

I stared at the dress. “I don't think it will fit. I bought it a few years ago. I can just wear that flower dress I always wear to work. I know that fits.”

Boonie frowned. “Look, I know you don't want to go and you're only doing this for me. I really appreciate it, and wouldn't want to go with anyone else. I think you would look fantastic in this dress.”

“What size is it, Boonie?” I asked in a hushed voice.

He searched for a tag, and then replied, “The tag says... 24.”

“It definitely won't fit. I bought that dress a few years ago. I am now a size 28,” I could only admit that to Boonie because I knew he wouldn't judge me.

He put the dress back in the closet and sat next to me on the bed.

“Okay, so you've gained a few pounds, it's no big deal,” he said.

“A few pounds? Did you not hear me? I'm a fucking size 28, Boonie. I weigh almost 275 pounds! I'm tired all the time. I have no energy. I'm depressed. My life is a complete joke. My husband left me because of my weight gain. My kids drop subtle hints about working out, or joining a gym, or some new diet. Don't they think I see? I know exactly what I look like. I literally eat all day Boonie because I'm so fucking depressed and I can't do anything else. Eat and cry. That's what my life has become...” I buried my head in my hands and let the tears flow down my cheeks.

Boonie didn't say a word. He stroked my back and sat there with me. Finally, after several moments he said, “So, what are you going to do about it?”



“Huh?” I asked, wiping my tears.

“What are you going to do about it?” he repeated. “You have control of your life. If you don’t like something, change it,” he said. “Look, I know you have struggled with your weight, but you can turn this around, if you believe you can.”

I wiped my tears. “I’m so tired and miserable. I’m tired of being fat. I think I have hit rock bottom... and my heaviest weight ever.”

We sat in silence for a few more moments until Boonie spoke, “You know, since you’ve hit bottom, the only place to go is up! So, why don’t we make you over? A whole new you! New you, new life?!”

I looked at him with tears still running down my face. I tried to smile. Boonie was always there for me and he was here now. He really was a good friend.

“It sounds like work,” I said dryly.

“Oh, it's work honey, but it will be worth it. Trust, Boonie. I know,” he said, smiling. “Now, get your ass up and put on that flower thing you call a dress and let me work my magic with your hair and makeup.”

“Remember when kids would call us 10?” I asked.

“We are a 10 because we are fabulous. Fuck those hoes! Now get dressed. I’m going to find us some music and go grab my hair and makeup bag from the car. When I get back, I want you dressed,” he said, and left me to search for the dress I usually wear.

This was the worst part of my day—getting dressed. He made it sound so simple, but getting dressed was gut-wrenching every time. First was the underwear—*extra-extra-extra-extra-extra*-large panties, which by the way, are hard to find. Then, the bra. I can never find a bra that fits. My latest size is a 44DD. It seems to fit okay but leaves deep marks into my sides and shoulders. Not to mention, the side fat that hangs over.

I struggle, twist and turn and manage to get the bra on. I sit down on the edge of the bed, breathing heavily. Putting on a bra has become a sport. I can’t believe I’m out of breath. I thought about wearing a body shaper, but honestly, what’s the point? I probably couldn’t get in it anyway.

Now, for the dress. It really wasn’t as much of a dress as it was a muumuu. I found it at a thrift store, and it doesn’t look too bad with accessories. Besides, I had

given up being fashionable a long time ago. I really hate putting on clothes, period. I have reached the point in my life where I am uncomfortable in my own skin. I don't need anyone else to loathe me—I have heaps of that for everyone. I looked in the mirror and I didn't like what I saw.

I took a deep breath and flung the dress over my head. So far so good, until I get to the zip-up part. I don't know why I buy anything with zippers. After a bit of a struggle, I zip up the dress, but all I can think of is a circus tent and I'm the elephant in the flower dress, or maybe the fat lady—I can't decide.

I could have sworn I heard circus music...

