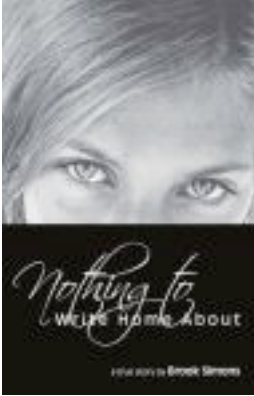




Nothing to
Write Home About

a true story by **Brook Simons**



It is 1977 when Connecticut girl Brook Simons arrives in Los Angeles to become a screenwriter. Homesick and naïve, but ambitious, she falls into the narcotic clutches of the Sunset Strip standup comedy world. Soon obsessed and in love with a talented, self-destructive comedian, she can't get off the train wreck that ensues. Laced with sex, drugs and violence, this fast-paced, good-girl-goes-bad, true-story romp poses serious questions about addiction, abuse, and the power of passion.

Nothing to Write Home About

by Brook Dougherty

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NOTHING
TO WRITE HOME ABOUT

a true story

Brook Simons

BROOK SIMONS

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First Edition

This is a memoir, but some of the names have been changed.

Dedication

To my daughter, Alicia, the light of my life,
and to my husband and hero, Jay.

BROOK SIMONS

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CHAPTER ONE
– HOUR OF THE PIMP –
1977 – Age 26

I missed the farm most at cocktail hour. That time of day always gave me the creeps anyway. I missed the chatter of interesting people on the porch, and making my mom a gin and tonic. I missed the smell of my dad's cigar.

When the Los Angeles day faded, that familiar creepy feeling that came with cocktail hour woke up inside of me. It was like I was a guest at an evil hotel, and dusk was my wake-up call. I was twenty-six years old, and it reminded me that I hadn't made any friends yet and didn't have anything to do. It made me feel anxious, and was my prompt to get around people as fast as possible. It was a feeling that led to no good.

I sat behind the Smith Corona electric typewriter I had set up on a wooden desk facing the window. From there, I could admire the roses. Every few minutes, a tanned, buffed guy walked by in a speedo or tennis shorts and distracted me from my screenplay. Some people called the West Hollywood neighborhood I lived in the Swish Alps because all the guys were gay. I called it a bummer, because none of them stared at me when I stared at them. They didn't care how my body looked in a bikini.

Once when I was thirteen I followed my dad and his chauffeur, Ellsworth, out to the driveway. I posed with my blonde hair draped over half my face and practiced starring at them with a sultry look as they loaded into the limo. Dad had started calling me a floozy, and I was almost proud of the name Floozy. It was like he had assigned me my own personal bad-girl name. For my oldest sister, Joan, he had chosen Jezebel.

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It was his idea to bleach my hair blonde when I was twelve and brooding. Four girls had been blown up at a church in Birmingham. JFK had been assassinated. My best friend had just died. Everyone was brooding. He thought the social torture chamber of junior high would be easier if I looked more like Marilyn Monroe and less like Heathcliff. But being a blonde was harder than it looked, and I wasn't that great at it. My attempts to gate crash the in-crowd were bungled even with my shiny new hair.

"Bye Dad," I said in my sexy voice.

He winked at me. "Be a good girl." Ellsworth paid no attention to me at all. Then I sauntered back up the path to my stunning mother who didn't know the first thing about being unpopular. She had been the most beautiful girl in Montreal. "Don't look at men that way," she said. "They'll think you mean something by it." I did mean something by it. I wanted them to look at me.

It had not been a good day for the screenplay, and the tanned, buffed guys seemed more unavailable than usual. I was slammed so hard by a wall of homesickness I could feel myself getting ready to stuff it down with food. But my green bathroom scale, which I had named the Monster, had been giving me bad news every day for three weeks. Being fat was not going to fly in Los Angeles. So, instead of eating, I decided to go to my local watering hole, hang out with other writers, and quit whining about being lonely.

In the shower, I banged my head against the wall and said out loud, "You've got talent," to remind myself that I had driven all the way across the country six months earlier to write about how my brothers fought for civil rights and protested the Viet Nam war. I wanted to write about the dead boys I had known. Nothing else mattered. Still it was hard to shake my misery. While the conditioner washed out of my hair, I let myself remember the farm just for a minute.

Coming up Kellogg Hill Road, there was a bright yellow sign that said "Cattle Crossing Children." Faraway Farm had seventy-

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five acres in Weston, Connecticut. The jumbled white house had twenty-eight rooms and eight bathrooms. A thin dirt driveway unfolded next to the vast lawn that had an ancient knotted pear tree at its center. It ended at the gas pump in front of the pool and tennis court.

There was a little farmhouse across the road where our farmer lived. His daughter Janet and I were left to roam, almost feral, through the barns, in the Connecticut woods, barefoot and curious. Still curious, I dried my hair, which was still blonde, and aimed my car at Budd Friedman's Improvisation on Melrose.

Mounted on a stool in my knee-high red boots, I ordered a Scotch and reminded myself of my mother and how she would say, "I'll have a Dewar's on the rocks, please, with a twist." She was a hard act to follow.

The Improv was a small, homey place whose decor was brown and wood. I studied the three guys at the other end of the bar. Los Angeles was still foreign to me; I wasn't sure what the rules were.

I snapped open my red, leather notebook and thumbed to a new page. My thick pen whizzed across the yellow lined paper as I tried to describe the big brown barn we kept the calves in. It was old and saggy, the color of a moth. With fat bullet points I listed forty dairy cows, eighteen cats, two yellow Labradors, chickens, two goats, two horses, a farmer, the chauffeur, the nurse, cook, housekeeper, a black Cadillac limousine, a red McCormick tractor, one donkey named Chico and countless bunnies. Then I listed the children from two marriages. Five from my dad and his first wife. I was his sixth child, and my mom's first. My brother, Windy, was the seventh. All the good roles were taken.

A lanky guy in ratty sneakers sauntered over to me. "You an actress?"

"Me? No, I'm a writer." *Hence the pen.*

"Hey, all right. Not many chicks write."

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“Yeah, terrific. I’m thinking, okay.” I gave him a little wave with my fingertips.

“So, where’re you from?”

“Connecticut.”

“Connecticut? Is that a state?”

“Yes, it’s a state. Do they not have schools in California?”

“Don’t think too much, you know.” He skulked away.

Sipping the Scotch through two red straws, I leafed through my old boyfriends in my mind. I wondered why it was so damn hard to get someone to love me and why I always screwed it up. It was like I needed to fill up on handsome every once in awhile, but then it would make me sick. I stared at the bottles of whiskey and Scotch and thought about the kind of guy I would want to end up with. I definitely didn’t want it to be someone like my dad.

He was an aggressive, possessive, explosive, short-fused Madison Avenue tax lawyer. His clients were rich men and their corporations. He pretended to be an Episcopalian, but he was a Jew and my mom was his WASP debutante. It was clear from the get-go that they belonged to each other, and not to us kids. She was his treasure. He was her star. Dad loved that he married a direct descendant of Edward Winslow, who was the first governor of Plymouth Colony.

I lit a cigarette, annoyed with him even from three thousand miles away. He kept calling and checking on me, trying to talk some sense into me. The smoke filled my lungs on the inhale and tamped down my craving for bar pretzels and his approval.

Wouldn’t it be great, I thought, if there was an ointment I could rub on myself to relieve the need to have a man so I could concentrate on my career. I took a breath, smelling the old wood of the place and the sour water the glasses were washed in, and looked deep into my drink. When I raised my head and shook my hair, I saw a tall man glide by in the mirror behind the bar. He walked right

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behind me. Close enough that if I had turned around, I could have touched him. He was a stunner.

He claimed a seat at the end of the bar, at an angle from me, so I could see him. Perfectly. He had black hair and blue eyes, full lips under a black mustache, and an aquiline nose hung between high, tan cheekbones. He wore a tusk-like piece of ivory secured with leather around his neck. He had long, strong fingers and wide hands. I stared at his reflection. If he had been for sale, I would have bought him. My desire raced around my brain and rutted deep track marks, and I let them razor a vein so I could feel myself wanting him even more, just to want something.

A burn started inside, and I felt myself get sucked in by the challenge of getting him to notice me.

I swirled the straws through the Scotch, making it last, and watched the bartender pull a beer, staring as his hand wrapped around the white ceramic handle.

I ran my finger around my rocks glass the way Faye Dunaway did in *The Thomas Crown Affair* when she was trying to tell Steve McQueen he was hot. I licked my fingers to see if I could get the glass to squeak and stared at him.

I had no idea if this would work, but I'd read in some Indian book that a way to attract a lover was to focus all your energy on the reproductive region. Zap it. I concentrated my spirit into a make-believe arrow and aimed it at his crotch, then thought about him there. He looked at me. I held his glance.

The scrawny guy in sneakers materialized again. "You kind of remind me of Barbara Streisand." Damn my nose.

I ignored him and went to the ladies' room to apply a thick layer of lip-gloss and calm down. The Scotch had done its thing to reduce my shyness, so I was confident as I walked across the wooden floor to my stool. The man was talking with two women. Finally, I caught his eye in the mirror again and stared at him some more. We went

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back and forth like that until he turned his gorgeous head straight at me and said, “I’d really like to fuck you.”

The scrawny writer was shocked. I was shocked. Before I said anything, I clamped down on the nervousness that was racing around inside of me despite the alcohol, and thought about what I was going to say back. *Just pretend to be cool*, I said to myself. *Just pretend to be cool*. I knew that a guy at a bar was not supposed to tell you he wanted to have sex with you. It was crass, offensive and rude, but it read to me like a dare. I guessed he was trying to offend me, because he thought offending me would be funny. He wasn’t going to win that point.

What mattered was that I had gotten him to look at me. Now I had to keep his attention. That was where my cool fake personality came in. A smart and funny remark would be good: something to show I was daring and not a shy prude. Something to make up for what I lacked in prettiness. I needed to show the man how deeply interesting I was. So I returned his half-smiling gaze with an equally steady, knowing look of my own and said, “Thank you.”

The guy in sneakers was crestfallen and scuttled away. The tall man got up and came to sit beside me. He’d studied Shakespeare at the Globe in San Diego. His name was Biff Manard. He was an actor, he said, a member of the Screen Actors’ Guild, but it was when he said he was a writer that I was done for. He was a little arrogant and sure of himself, but right from the beginning, I knew he was faking it, just like me. I could see it in his eyes. There was tenderness there. I guessed he was like one of the thoroughbreds we had during the brief episode when my dad decided having racehorses was a good idea. This man was kind of skittish.

He wrote comedy, and had actual TV writing credits. He was a member of the Writers’ Guild, and that impressed the hell out of me, and William Morris represented him. The snarky, Machiavellian thought crossed my mind that I should proceed with him, not only because he was gorgeous, but also because he could help my career,

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such as it was. This was the kind of strategic thinking I'd learned from my dad. He wouldn't call it prostitution. He'd call it time leveraging. Here was a beautiful man and an established writer. Two birds. One stone. Dad would be proud. The bar was emptying out, so Biff walked me to my car, where we kept on talking.

There on the sidewalk, he took a vial out of his pocket. He lifted a little spoon to my nose, and I sniffed the white powder like I knew what I was doing. I held back my hair, but really I was holding my head steady because it was shaking. He did some himself and returned the vial to his pants pocket. He was a good foot taller than I was, and when he bent to kiss me, I stood on my toes, stretching to my maximum height. At that moment, I fell completely, madly in love with him, or it might have been the idea of him.

"Thank you."

"For what," Biff asked.

"For the coke. For the kiss."

"I loved it when you said thank you at the bar. You only had one chance there, and you had the right answer. I thought that kid was going to shit."

"There was a right answer? You have like an early decision plan for women or something?"

"Just wanted to find out what you'd say."

"I'm glad I passed," I said. He kissed me again. *Oh my God.*

"I want to go to your house and do some more lines."

I guessed lines were what you did with coke when you weren't inhaling the stuff off a spoon. "Actually, it's an apartment."

"Whatever the fuck it is, I want to go there."

I didn't want to go there. First of all, it was a mess. Second of all, I hadn't shaved my legs, but mostly, I wanted to be different to him. "Does it have to be tonight? I don't want to leave from a bar and go home. I think it would be better if you came over, like tomorrow, earlier. And I want it to be different, you know?"

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“Yeah,” he said, shaking his head like he was sick of hearing that, “Twats all want to be different, so none of them are going to be different and go home with me the first night. They all know that I get laid all the time, and they’re all determined not to be just one more piece of ass.”

“That not it. I just don’t do that first night thing.” That was a flat-out lie. I’d gone home more than a few times from a bar with New York guys I didn’t care about, but it never ended well. One of my new California rules was never to do it again. I had other rules too. Never sell your body, never take acid and never sell drugs. These followed my dad’s two rules when I was a teenager. One was that I wasn’t allowed to ride on a motorcycle; the other was that I wasn’t allowed to ride in Volkswagens, because a Nazi might have touched it. Not that the rules kept me off the back of my boyfriend’s Triumph 650.

“We’ll see,” he said. “Maybe I’ll come over tomorrow.”

The next day Biff did come over. It was just at cocktail hour. He looked out my window at the fading light and said, “Hour of the pimp.” I pictured the prostitutes up on Sunset doing their makeup, pulling on their fishnets and getting ready for their nightly stroll. He sat at my writing table with me, which was just next to the bed. He told me he’d been a centerfold in *Playgirl* magazine then handed me the May issue. “Bad Boy Biff Manard” was written in bold, block letters on the cover. I opened the magazine, pulled out the centerfold and opened it. It was the size of a small poster. He autographed it for me as I scanned the photos in the spread. Then my eyes caught a sidebar about his perfect ex-wife. Her name was Michelle, and she was a dancer, a professional dancer on TV. “The love of my life,” Biff said.

I smoothed my white turtleneck over my jeans. I had chosen the outfit in hopes he would think I always dressed like this to write. I’d hardly slept the night before because the coke had kept me awake.

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But I hadn't eaten either, and was down two pounds. Once he knew me, I thought, I would become the love of his life.

He told me there was a girl on set whose sole job was to arrange the penises, getting them a little puffy, but not too hard. What a weird job, I thought, but I barely listened to him as I stared at the photos of him. I was way out of my league, but as a sixth kid, I was used to being out of my league. Still, I thought, as I studied his chest on the glossy paper, why not? I imagined putting my head there, on his chest. I stared at the photograph again and then looked up at him and back at the page, and thought he was a beauty who was covering something hidden inside, something fragile, something that had once been broken perhaps.

He passed me his vial of cocaine and I took a snort, first in one nostril and then in the other. My hand shook as Biff watched, hawklike. "Why are you shaking?"

Before I could answer, my door opened and my next-door neighbor Jill, the only other girl in the building, came in carrying her phone, trailing the long cord. "I'm sorry; I didn't know you had company. I just wanted to borrow your shampoo."

"You expecting several dozen phone calls while you're borrowing shampoo?" Biff knew perfectly well she was there to check him out.

She hated him; I could tell. "You always this slick?"

"You always this friendly?"

She stormed out the door without the shampoo.

"Why're you sitting so far away? Come here." He pulled me over to his lap. I put my arms around his neck. It was heaven. In a weird way, my passion for him was like loving an animal. I wanted to touch him and be in him and bury my face in his neck like he was my 4-H cow. If he had a flank, I would want to stroke it. If he had a tail I would want to braid it. I wanted to possess him... which was a mistake.

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As we kissed, he picked me up and expertly transferred our whole operation to the bed. In an instant, we were naked and I was impaled on top of him. Out of nowhere, he said, "Lick my nose."

That stopped me, "Why?" Then I saw the faint white rim of cocaine around one of his nostrils.

"No," I said.

With one move, he locked his thumbs into my hipbones and flipped me up in the air. I landed on my back on the bed. *Damn*. I was too surprised to do more than stare at him as he stood up, jammed himself into his pants, put on his sweater and headed for the door. "What'd you do that for?"

"Because you said no," he retorted. "And that was the wrong answer."

He walked out of the door without looking back and slammed it shut.

After a few stunned moments, I wrapped my pink bathrobe around me and banged on Jill's door. "What kind of guy asks a girl to lick cocaine from his nose?" I flopped down on her bed.

"Bar scum."

Two weeks later, Jill moved back home, and the film I was working on went into turnaround. I loved that job. I got to sit in a room with two writers and type like a banshee while they waved their arms and wrote out loud. It had been on the Paramount lot, and when the project was ripped away from my bosses, I was as depressed as they were. Holed up in bed with chips and dip, I remembered the exact moment I decided to move to L.A. and the film business. It was on the corner of 57th and Lexington in the rain right after *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Now it seemed it wasn't going to that easy.

I half-heartedly played tennis with the gay guys, but all I really wanted to do was write or binge eat. I didn't see Biff Manard again for another month, and it hurt every single second.

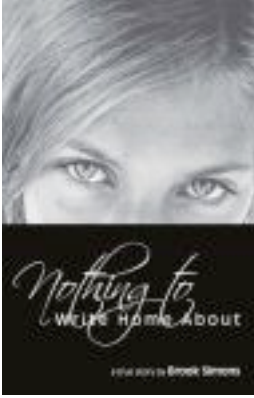
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He didn't call, and God didn't see fit to throw me any other kind of bone either. There were temp jobs, like the screaming agent I worked for meticulously checking off his phone calls with red if they were completed or green if they weren't. Meanwhile, the screenplay was all clogged up because I couldn't get to the bottom of how the sixties had gutted my family, couldn't turn it into a story anybody would want to read.

Night would come, especially weekend nights, and my old monster would be faced with the dark and the empty apartment. The monster had only two speeds, lonely and lonelier. When my dial edged past both of those and headed into stupid, I'd get in my blue Volvo and head for the Improv, or I'd call my mom.

She would say, "Make friends, darling," as if I were going to run right out and become a Kappa Kappa Gamma. But I wasn't her. I was a hermit with ambition and a nose that was a little too big. At the Improv, I forgot how lonely I was, and would sip a Scotch and talk up a storm with the other regulars. It was just enough alcohol and human contact to survive without doing anything dumb, which is what blondes, I'd been told, often did. Then I ran into Biff Manard again.

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