

# THE WORLD ACCORDING TO

# KIM

She's been through it all, from personal tragedy to blinding success. Now Lil' Kim finds herself elevated to near-iconic status. This is her story.

WORDS BY PAULA T. RENFROE • PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARL POSEY

A queen-size bed covered in blood-red satin sheets slowly glides out to the center of the stage. Between the sheets, a shapely mass of feminine curves gyrates and moans to the sultry sounds of Prince. Fans, men and women, Black and white, scream out her name. She taunts and teases them with every tilt of her pelvis, careful not to reveal herself just yet. Hotter than the neon sign above the bed flashing her name, Lil' Kim rips off the sheet and struts her sexy ass across the stage. Flipping back the long blond tresses of her custom-made wig, the Queen B mesmerizes her audience for the next hour.

Three hundred sixty-six days ago, the front seats at a Lil' Kim show would have been packed with nothin' but brothas. Flash forward to the present and the reality is women dig Kim just as much as, if not more than, the men.



Funny thing though, when she first came out these same sistahs dismissed her as the over-sexed bitch who wouldn't know class if it started next period. Now females appreciate her on a whole 'nother level. See, while men salivate and lust after Kim, women are inspired and empowered by her, and it ain't just Shaneeka and Nay-Nay from Bed-Stuy and Compton. It's Amber and Brittany from the Hamptons and Silver Spring, as well as Imani and Adia from Atlanta and Cleveland.

But despite her new allegiance with the ladies, it's still the fellas committing the craziest stunts. Take the cat in the airport who calmly walked over to Kim, threw her over his shoulders and bolted out of the airport with her. "I wasn't even scared or mad, I was just in shock," the 22-year-old Brooklynite says laughing.

Yup. Lil' Kim drives 'em wild.



"I've got dreams  
that are much bigger.  
I'd rather buy the Sony  
building than have a  
whole wardrobe full  
of Chanel, Gucci, Fendi  
and Prada."

**Exactly one year and a day** from the first time Kim Jones popped into the wet dreams of adolescent boys and grown men alike (and let's keep it real, a couple of sistahs too), via her nasty-ass, platinum-plus debut album, *Hard Core*, this mini-sex goddess of the microphone contemplates passages from Richard Carlson's bestseller, *Don't Sweat The Small Stuff...And It's All Small Stuff*. Surprised? Me too, more so because I just started reading the same damn book a day prior to meeting Miss Kim. Nzingha, make-up artist for numerous Black stars, gave Lil' Kim the book soon after Biggie died to help her cope with the stress of losing and living.

"I haven't finished it yet because I've been so busy," Kim says, looking at me intensely. "But whenever I can, I read it one chapter at a time, and it really helps."

On this chilly afternoon in Boston, a white stretch limo whips us away from the plush Four Seasons Hotel and heads toward Worcester, Massachusetts where the rest of the Puff Daddy & The Family tour are rehearsing. Kim Jones stretches her short legs

across the leather seat in front of her. Clad in a sexy, yet tasteful midnight-blue patent leather pant suit, she's already unzipped the matching Gucci knee-length boots and tossed them to the side. They hurt her feet and she needs to be comfortable. It's gonna be a long ride.

You might think Lil' Kim, crowned hip-hop's hottie by this very publication, would be flipping through the glamorous pages of *Vogue* looking for Donna Karan's latest creation, not searching for ways to simplify her life, nevermind contemplating spiritual growth.

"I pray for everybody in this game because without God no one would be here," she says earnestly. "That's just my religious belief and I believe so much in Him. A year ago I wasn't as confident in myself as I am now and I used to spend a lot of money."

A visibly tired Kim is far from the Moschino ho we thought she was. In fact, she's a strong Black

do nothing. A lot of the things I have are from last year or the year before. I haven't been to the Chanel shop in a while, but Chanel has been coming around. Like for the MTV awards, they dressed me. Now they'll ask me, 'Kim, dahling do you need anything for such and such?' I have the money to shop there still, but I've got dreams that are much bigger. I'd rather buy the Sony building than have a whole wardrobe full of Chanel, Gucci, Fendi and Prada. Right now I'm reaching a maturity stage and my accountants, along with Hillary, are helping me through this."

**And let's not forget Sean 'Puffy' Combs.** Not long after Biggie left us, Puffy—along with Damion Butler, a long time friend of Biggie's—took on the role of Kim's manager, a role previously held by one Lance Rivera, better known as Big Un. He too was a close friend of Biggie, so close they started Undeas Recording, Kim's record label, together.

Unfortunately, the death of Christopher Wallace left more unresolved conflicts than we may ever know, including the future of Undeas. Faith Evans, Wallace's widow, inherited half of the label and the ton of legal paperwork that entails. And Un has been trying to negotiate a better deal for his label with parent group Atlantic, indefinitely tying up Undeas's money.

In the meantime, Un had to get paper. And he did. Not only did he receive \$64 million dollars from Epic to begin his new label, Entertainment, but he also has a new sexy female rapper, Charlie Baltimore, to help him launch it. All of this, he insists, is what Biggie wanted. All of this, however, has Kim ticked off.

"I love Un as a brother," says Kim. "I remember those days when he was there. He always did what he had to do to make sure my image was hot. It just didn't seem like he wanted me involved in my business. When he went and signed with another record label and I had nothing to do with it and didn't know what was going on, that's when I really felt left out. I felt like nothing. Then on top of that you sign new artists already. That goes to show you. I wish him the best, but we're fighting."

Un says he's willing to give Kim both more money and more control of her career. As for Charlie Baltimore, she was already in the works before Biggie's death and it's his [Un's] opportunity to show the industry that he's not a fluke in terms of selling female rappers.

"This is not about Kim and trying to spite her," he says, lighting a Newport in his brand new office. "I'm going to show people I know how to create. Charlie Baltimore is something totally different from Kim. I'm going to let people know I'm the real deal when it comes to marketing, promoting and making records. I need to show the music business, not Kim, that I do women. Women rappers are more difficult to break as artists. I make women happen. I can put out Lil' Kim and blow up and I can put out Charlie Baltimore and blow up. That separates me from a lot of people in this business."

Surprisingly enough, both Kim and Un admit Puffy wasn't always interested in Kim. But with

woman with issues. She's been hurt, used and abused, so she's understandably guarded. She's grounded, yet still vulnerable and impressionable. But she's not a clueless little girl on an endless shopping spree. "I heard on the radio that I spend all my money on Chanel, that I don't have a car and I'm broke. You know that's bullshit," she says, raising her voice slightly. "It's not like I spent my last. If I spend a couple of thousand dollars you betta believe there's more where that came from. But I ain't concerned about none of that shit no more."

Unreleased cuts by the Lox blare out the back speakers of the limo. Kim's road manager, Money L, Ceas and Trife from Junior M.A.F.I.A. all bob their heads simultaneously. Smithy, Kim's six-foot-five, 300 pound bodyguard, and her friendly assistant, Hillary, concentrate on the driver's chosen route. Kim glances out the window, then examines her manicured nails.

"My accountants are like my fairy godparents. I have to actually hide some of the things I buy," she says with a devious look. "They don't let me



beep

the  
debut  
album  
coming  
this  
spring



#### LIL' KIM, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 122

the completion of *Hard Core*, the highest debut by a female rap artist on the Billboard Top 200 chart, Puffy's tune changed. "He wanted to do for me what he did for Mary, but B.I.G. was like no, 'cause he would've been taking away his baby. I'm Biggie's first and only album," Kim proudly boasts. "People may have forgotten, but Biggie produced my album. So I'm glad I didn't let Puffy take over 'cause Biggie would have never had the chance to do what he always dreamed of doing."

"If Puffy's gonna take Kim to another level and continually be behind her and support her then they both have my blessing," Un says, blowing smoke out the right side of his mouth. "All this is fine if Kim's gonna sell 2 million albums the next time out. If it's not going to be beneficial, then everybody has my wrath to deal with. All these people that say they're better than Un for her, if they don't stand by their commitments then they got to deal with me."

Kim adds that although it is possible to work out her problems with Un, it may not be probable because she's feels like she's reaching for a hand that's no longer there.

"It's funny that she would say that," Un says, putting out the cigarette. "At the MTV awards, Lil' Kim. . .," he pauses. "First of all, Atlantic only wanted give up \$5,000 for the stage production and I fronted the rest out of my pocket. She gets to the fuckin' venue 10 minutes before she is to go on. She has to go up steps, get dressed and go on in two records. I'm waiting outside and as soon as she sees me she breaks down crying. She's getting dressed crying and carrying on. After awhile she was uncontrollable. Puffy tries to console her, but she ain't tryin' to hear that. I start screamin', getting things organized. I got make-up movin', I got them strappin' her shoes all while we're goin' down the steps, the last record is on and I'm holdin' her hands walkin' backwards, and all I said was make Biggie proud of you. We had 45 seconds before she went on and I let her go, but she started reachin' for me and I grabbed her hand. I'm always there. No matter what she says I'm always there. She sees Puffy there with her, but Puffy calls me."

"Bad Boy is my family. I love Puffy. It's not easy managing a female," Kim admits glancing at her long nails again. "Puffy put money in my bank account point blank, straight up. He started getting me more money for remixes. He helped me get my house. He's helping me be a better artist. He's helping me mature. He's helping me to see life in a different way."

**Everyone piles out of the car** except Kim and Money L. He's helping her get those too-tight boots back on. The five-footer finally emerges and a couple of little boys ask for her autograph. She obliges. We finally reach the entrance of the arena where we find the typical pre-concert steez: various technicians scattered about adjusting lights, moving props and testing the sound system. But there's no sign of the other artists except for the names on their dressing rooms.

"I don't really see the other people on tour," Kim says in a disappointed tone. "Me and Jay-Z have always been cool. Busta's cool, but I don't see him that much though, and I haven't even seen Usher yet. Because we [Bad Boy Family] go on last and there's so much preparation involved, I don't get to see the other acts. Oh, and I haven't seen the other girl yet."

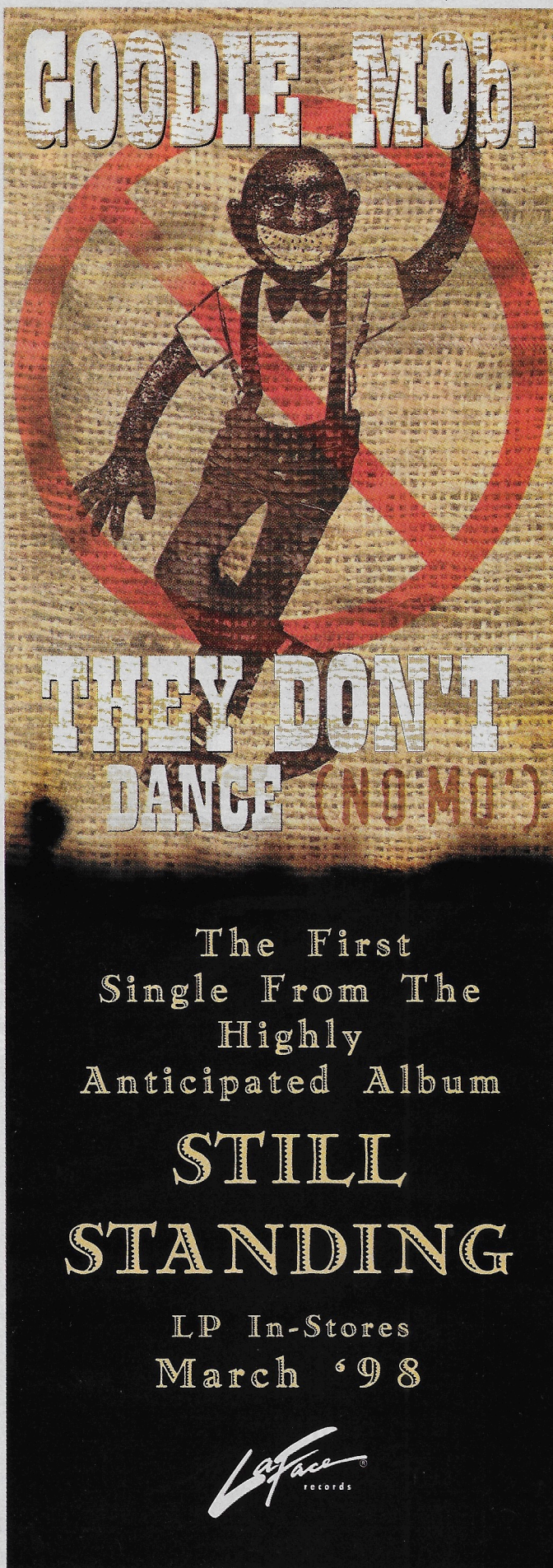
#### *The other girl?*

"I haven't seen *Foxy* yet," she responds flatly. "Everybody always puts us together. I wanted to separate us. We're not the same. I don't understand how people put us together. Honey is one of my favorite artists, but we're not the same. On my next album I want us to be completely separated [stretches her arms apart for emphasis]. This is something I want to set straight because I always used to get upset about it. We're not friends. I don't hate her. I don't have anything against her. As a matter of fact I always pray for her. I pray for everybody, but me and her had a few problems in the past and they were never resolved. Like, Foxy and I were supposed to do this Thelma and Louise song together and I thought it was a great idea for us to do it, but there was a lot of attitude going on between the both of us. I figured I'm older than her, let me take control, but the feedback I got was not nice. I called her and asked her if we could do it. She said, 'I already told your people I'm not doin' it.'"

"That shit was amazing to me," Kim says in disbelief. "I made the initiative and I got shot down. And then it was just like. . . I don't know. I just didn't

CONTINUED ON PAGE 126





#### LIL' KIM, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 124

understand it. And that shit hurt my feelings. Of course there was silence on both ends of the phone at that point. I mean she hugged me at the Soul Train Awards after I won and told me congratulations and I congratulated her too, but I still hear stuff. And I know I can't believe everything I hear. Regardless she's still my sister, but I'd rather just stay away."

Kim's dressing room smells like a gourmet delicatessen filled with fresh fruits, chewy chocolate chip cookies and decadent brownies. Outrageous pieces of clothing lay all over the cluttered dressing room, including a long candy apple-red sheer negligee with a matching thong. Kim looks at the outfit and starts joking about the Ab Roller Puffy bought for her that she's not using. Like a lot of women, she wants to look good, but isn't always up to putting in the work. Of course, no pain, no gain. She knows this, but she doesn't make excuses. Instead, she does like most ladies do, she sucks it in.

An hour later we make our way to the make-up room. Stylists bounce in and out, loaded down with stacks of clothes, colorful hairpieces and jeweled accessories. A strikingly pretty one flies in with the scoop that Foxy has changed her clothes for this show. Supposedly, girlfriend acquired the same red mink fur bra that Kim sports, along with a few other joints. Ticked off, Kim decides to check out the show for herself. The suspicions are confirmed. Not only are the clothes similar, but parts of the routine ring a bit too close to home. But Kim doesn't let it get to her. "I'm gonna be a professional," she says. Not long ago, Puffy told her that Biggie handed her the torch, but if she didn't nip her poor work ethics and emotional outbursts in the bud, she'd drop it. Determined not to lose grip of the proverbial torch, she doesn't let Foxy ruin her night.

Back in the dressing-room, Kim relaxes in a long green velour robe. Her nails, once again, are the focus of her attention. Painted in pearly white, Biggie's name adorns every other frosty nail in black script, and her own name graces the others.

"It's funny," she says chuckling. "I never did this when he was alive. Every day is a day of grief for me. Everyday I cry, literally everyday. Everybody doesn't know that I cry. I cry alone. Imagine somebody taking away your eyes, nose, mouth, feet then saying they'll give it back to you slowly. That shit is fucked up. I can't believe that he's not here. This fuckin' tour, I can't believe he's not on this tour." Her voice cracks. Her eyes water, but a tear doesn't fall.

"A lot of times I feel like God took him away from me for a reason, because I used to always say that I couldn't live without him. Biggie served his purpose. He was an angel. I believe he came here to do exactly what God wanted him to do. His time was up. I can't believe it though. He held so many people together. I can't believe I'm here talking to you without him coming in here and interrupting us."

**It's show time.** And all members of the Bad Boy Family, including dancers and choir singers, are required to partake in the nightly prayer. In their benediction they shout, "1,2,3, BAD BOY! 4,5,6, B.I.G.!" Both touched and empowered, the squad proceeds to stampede down the corridor with comic relief provided by the dimpled cutie, Mase. "Let the hoes fight, let the hoes fight," he chants, causing Kim to break into a full smile. We walk right past Foxy, neither woman acknowledging the other.

By the end of Kim's performance it's apparent that she's got enough talent in her five foot frame to transcend this thing called rap music. Other people seem to agree. Kim's even been asked to audition for Terry McMillian's "How Stella Got Her Groove Back." She's magnetic and knows it. But she's wise enough not to abuse it. She's every woman: the playful little girl, the loyal woman, the sex kitten and the around-the-way homegirl. No virgin/whore complex here. And it's no longer an issue whether or not Lil' Kim has skills. She's even written rhymes for a couple of brothas. Everyone from Heavy D to the original divas of rap, Salt-n-Pepa, has emulated her sassy style. Though imitation is supposedly some form of flattery, it's not enough for Kim.

"One thing I'm really striving for on my next album is to be recognized as a dope ass rapper. I want people to know that Kim got skills. People expecting me to go right are gonna be shocked when I go left."

Don't be surprised if the next time you see her name in neon lights it's on a marquis, not above some rolling bed.

5