



Simply Irresistible

Taraji P. Henson and Tyrese Gibson are good-looking when they're apart, electric when they're together. Easy to see why they top our list of the finest folks in the world.

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Let's get the gossip out of the way.

They've never had sex. That is not to say they haven't thought about it or pondered it or simulated it. But actual, for-real sex? Nope. These two are practically virgins to each other.

Yet in the 10 years since the release of the pop-culture classic film *Baby Boy*, waves of fans refuse to let the movie sex die. They take the steamy love scenes as a sign that Jody and Yvette, aka Tyrese and Taraji P. Henson, are together in real life. The duo's actions don't help quell the rumors, either, what with the way they frolic, touch and pat at each other everywhere from last year's *Soul Train Awards* to today's EBONY'S 50 Finest photo shoot in a rented house in the Hollywood hills. Time and maturity have only intensified their chemistry-fueled friendship.

She's wearing a robe and getting a manicure, a pedicure and her makeup done. He swoops into the room wearing beads around his neck, a half-open shirt and loosely clinging jeans. He sits on the couch, legs splayed, and plugs his iPod into the radio sitting on the floor by the couch. She doesn't put him out for barging in. He doesn't wrinkle his nose—as most men do—at the acrid scent of polish. Instead, he starts singing and stealing glances at Henson getting even more gorgeous. She's checking him out, too. Has he been here before? Has she?

Later, away from the camera, they play in a bedroom together. He gives her a book. She gives him a smile. They mock muff each other. They hug, chitchat and take pictures of themselves in a floor-length mirror. They act sexy, stopping short of getting pornographic. Being together in *that* way, they both say, would be kind of icky. Like getting busy with your brother or your sister. Theirs is a platonic kind of love; a friendship created when Henson—going way off script—ran and jumped on Gibson's back during casting for *Baby Boy*. She quite literally tackled him,

and later, they captured Black America's nonstop gaze. Our favorite kind of love was born.

"People think that Tyrese and I have been together, but we haven't," says Henson, who's 40 going on 35. "The chemistry is great because we never crossed that line."

Adds Gibson, 32: "Certain friendships shouldn't cross over into relationships."

That's their truth, and they're sticking to it.

Gossip aside, they owe each other in part for their careers. If director John Singleton hadn't selected R&B singer Gibson to play baby-making, almost-hoodlum Jody, and if Singleton hadn't selected a practically unknown Henson to play Yvette, their theatrical explosion might never have occurred. And if *that* hadn't happened, two of Hollywood's most talented—and most attractive—players might be absent from this summer's film scene.

Thankfully, it did happen. Henson is now taking a long-awaited comedic turn in *Larry Crowne*, starring Tom Hanks in the title role as a middle-aged man who reinvents himself by going to a college class taught by Julia Roberts. Henson and Cedric the Entertainer play his neighbors. She's also starring this fall in *Person of Interest (P.O.I.)*, a series created by TV-ratings god J.J. Abrams, the mastermind behind *Lost*. Gibson stars with Shia LaBeouf and Josh Duhamel in *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, the third installment of the blockbusting series. After that, he'll release another album,

continue tweeting words of wisdom to his 1.6-million followers and bask in the glow of the übersuccessful *Fast Five* (released earlier this year) and his New York Times best-selling memoir, *How to Get Out of Your Own Way*.

They've both reached the next level, as Gibson calls it. And now

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PREVIOUS SPREAD, ON TARAJI: CAMI BY BLACK HALO; SKIRT BY RACHEL ROY; EARRINGS BY MICHAEL M.; BANGLE BY SOCHEEC. ON TYRESE: SHIRT BY THEORY COURTESY OF NEIMAN MARCUS; RING BY DAVID YURMAN; WATCH BY ELYSEE.

BODYSUIT BY DOLCE & GABBANA; SKIRT BY RACHEL ROY; RING BY MICHAEL M.; BANGLE BY SOCHEEC; EARRINGS BY MICHAEL M.





SUIT AND TIE
BY BROOKS
BROTHERS;
SHIRT BY
PERRY ELLIS.

is when alignments with the right people are even more important than they were when they met 10 years ago. As Will Smith famously told Gibson, your close circle of friends must be the right people; upstanding people and supportive people who can help you get to where you are trying to go.

Henson, clearly, is one of those peeps.

"I love her," says Gibson just before walking into a book signing at popular L.A. mall The Grove, where hundreds of screaming fans await. "She represents the integrity and the strength of a woman, and that is part of why I love her so much."

Henson is poised, petite and well-dressed, and her makeup is immaculate. She's the mom of 17-year-old star athlete and private-school kid Marcel. She won't "live out loud" for the paparazzi. She posed tastefully naked for PETA and won't wear fur, but she will don leather without apology. And though she's a Virgo, born on September 11, somewhere inside her lies a Scorpio; a fierce, womanly Athena who seems quite capable of hitting a man upside his head, jumping on his back and cussing him out for sleeping with another woman.

Not that anyone would ever cheat on Henson. Doubtful. Dangerous, too.

She's matter-of-fact and driven. And silly. Who knew? She cracks jokes on herself. She'll get excited about something and start fluttering her hands, tossing her hair (yes, it's hers) and slapping the table. She'll jump in front of a mirror and belt out show tunes while jacking her patootie into the air. Her sistagirl has an off-and-on switch, as evidenced by her Academy Award-nominated turn in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. She seems restrained. Then again, she *did* just drop the word titties into the conversation.

It was the best noun for describing the day's events. Says Henson, "[The photographer] said, in a very nice way, to put my titties on the glass."

Henson obliged. She's familiar and happy with her boobies and her body. She can turn on the sexy, but more than likely, in a movie, she's asked to turn it off. Usually, she's somebody's mom. Good work, but not very lusty. It was a shame and a waste, she jokes, to play a wrinkly old mama juxtaposed against Brad Pitt's fineness in *Benjamin Button*. Some films [*The Karate Kid*, *Talk to Me*] let her show off her shape. But her sexiest role by far was *Baby Boy*, in which she first played a mama—albeit a young, lithe one.

"Go back and look at the characters I have played," says Henson. "Yvette was cute, but she was a little girl; [then I was] a pregnant ho; a lesbian, gun-toting woman; Brad Pitt's mama with saggy boobs, fat butt, wrinkled skin and all. You know what I mean. It's not like I have a career [in which] I've used [sexy]. It's kind of been a blessing and a curse."

But Henson's not complaining. She could've been typecast as a bimbo in B-horror movies. Instead, she's an A-lister. Catch her next in the pivotal role of men's golf coach Catana Starks in *From the Rough*, a drama inspired by the true story of the first Black woman



to lead a men's golf team. Later this year, she'll head to TV by taking the lead female role in *P.O.L.*, Abrams' new CBS project, opposite James Caviezel, best known for playing Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ*. ("Oh, you know the Jesus jokes were flying. We were doing the table read, and I said, 'Look! The Last Supper!'") Her silly side hopes to lead in a

romantic comedy; her business side is shopping a kid's movie and perfecting her directing chops.

Here's where "driven" kicks in:

"Where's my *Bridget Jones's Diary*?" she says. "I just want to play a regular girl. Like John [Singleton], didn't nobody want to buy a film about a Black pimp and a White ho or some pimp and his three hoes living in the house. Who wants to deal with that? But he did it."

Here's the sexy mama: "I've experienced things. I've had a child. I gave life. I'm confident in who I am. I make no excuses about my butt, my breasts, my stomach; whatever it is, I love it, I'm comfortable. And that comes with growing up."

Then, the sistagirl: "Taraji, you are a grown-ass woman and you carry it well."

That confidence makes Henson the rare woman who will give another gal an honest compliment. If your Coach is slammung, she'll tell you. If your nails look lovely, she'll tell you that, too, but bookend it with advice: "Girl, try the Minx on your toes. It lasts longer."

She's also a realist. One of her most recent films, *Hurricane Season*, starring Forest Whitaker, Lil Wayne and Isaiah Washington, was good but went straight to DVD. If you think too hard about why, it'll make you sad. Mostly, though, Henson says, it's because some industry folks don't believe a movie with Black stars will do well overseas.

"But I disagree," she says. "You just have to be innovative. They love our music. They love watching Black videos, and what are those? Our stories."

Henson frequently acknowledges that an Oscar nod doesn't necessarily beget cash flow or better roles. She makes plenty of money; however, she has yet to bank

\$1 million up front for a movie role, versus later from residuals. It's a sore spot in the conversation, but another challenge she will overcome.

"How is it that I went from [being] an Academy Award-nominated actress [to being] number three on the call sheet?" she asks emphatically. "I should be number one! It's always a fight, and I'm still trying to prove myself. That's why I don't chase awards. I just keep pushing because I will be rewarded."

Tyrese Gibson is seeing a shrink. He's got issues. Have you read his book? It's all there: growing up in Watts, having some really messed-up friends and very nearly permanently screwing himself out of a great life. Gibson was saved by himself and a few guardian angels—those people who swooped in and pulled up the boy who got his start singing the most memorable of Coca-Cola's jingles. But by then, he'd seen

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far too much and became the 'hood jester so he wouldn't get the beat down.

The toll on his psyche produced a best-seller with hard-earned life lessons for readers.

"I'm actively in therapy for the things that I haven't gotten closure [on]," says Gibson. "I'm still a work in progress. I'm living the life of my dreams, but there's still some stuff going on in me that nobody in my life could help me to get closure [on]. So I'm getting help."

A real man won't carry pain, Gibson says. A real man faces and deals with it. "I wish somebody *would* say something to me. 'Hey, man, you seeing a shrink?' Absolutely, Jack."

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Gibson is talking therapy while hurtling down a California freeway in a big black SUV. He's not driving. He's in the second row. He's all over the place—chatting about his 3-year-old daughter, Shayla, how he would definitely get married again and how he's digging on his current girlfriend with an unprompted, "I ain't cheated on her." He's on his way to LAX after leaving the book signing (where Singleton showed up to say hello) and dinner at The Grove (tortilla chicken soup).

He pulls on some jeans and interrupts himself. He's just seen a ghost. Himself!

That chocolately face, those chiseled cheeks and perfect teeth are gracing a billboard hawking *Fast Five*, which made some \$86.2 million in its opening weekend. He waves at himself. "Whatchu doing on the freeway, man? You cold out there?"

He stops waving and pulls out his cell phone. He leans over to the

ON TARAJI: DRESS BY RACHEL ROY; BELT BY BDG COURTESY OF URBAN OUTFITTERS; BANGLE BY SOCHEEO; EARRINGS BY MICHAEL M. ON TYRESE: SHIRT BY THEORY COURTESY OF NEIMAN MAROUS; BELT BY FACONNABLE; TROUSERS BY PERRY ELLIS; RING BY DAVID YURMAN, CHRONOGRAPH BY ELYSEE.





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opposite window and snaps a picture of the full moon. He appreciates beauty. He also believes a person can only reach the next level by openly facing fears, assembling the proper circle of influence and getting rid of dysfunction. He details the path in his book, which offers a raw and intimate view of the actor. Six years ago, he says, his key influencers weren’t right.

“I had horrible taste in friends,” he says. “People are dream killers. You’ve got to be careful who you give emotional access to.”

His mom cried when she read his book. The memoir made her realize how parts of his childhood experiences impacted him, he says. “I have no regrets,” he adds. “I had to anchor my book in truth—harsh, uncomfortable truth—for people to really appreciate the way I appreciate how far God has taken my career.”

He counts Deepak Chopra, Will Smith and Rev. Run among those in his new circle, and he’s almost obsessive about the power of influence, an idea gifted him by Smith. “It was instant,” says Gibson. “It was so clear and so raw and so bold and so right in my face. I’m the victim of my own choices.”

Fast-forward to now. “At this point, I’ve gotten rid of all people and all things that don’t belong. Everybody deserves peace. Taking all the advice and moving on the advice has changed my life. God is such a powerful God, but I do the work. Prayer without works is dead.”

Gibson isn’t always so intense. Wait. Maybe he is. It’s no accident that his two blockbuster movies, a book and an album are dropping within months of each other. He plays to win.

“I’m being obedient,” he says, referring to the quiet voice that holds him accountable for himself. “There’s so much more to do. It’s real easy to get lax and lazy when you’re making more money than all of your friends. ... Some people are content, and I respect that. But me? In my mind, I’m always a job away from broke. I’m not making money while sleeping.”

It’s always tough to get at the nugget of a person’s soul in a few hours, over a few lunches, or even in a few days. But with a decade of shared experiences between them, it’s easy to see the elements of a real, abiding friendship, cultivated in love and respect.

“There have been some moments when I’ve seen Taraji’s performances in movies, and I couldn’t believe I knew her,” Gibson says. “Like, some straight star-struck shit; like, what the f--- was that? Taraji is very, very special.”

Henson describes Gibson as “a fine chocolate specimen” who

ON TARAJI: TOP BY JEAN-PAUL GAULTIER FOR LA PERLA COURTESY OF NEIMAN MARCUS; MINISKIRT BY VICTORIA’S SECRET; EARRINGS BY MICHAEL M; BANGLE BY SOCHEEC; RING BY SOCHEEC; VINTAGE ROBE. ON TYRESE: T-SHIRT BY JOHN VARVATOS COURTESY AT NEIMAN MARCUS; BELT BY FACONNABLE; TROUSERS BY PERRY ELLIS; RING BY DAVID YURMAN; CHRONOGRAPH BY ELYSEE; ROSARY BY DENIS MAHGEREFTEH.

has always been there for her. When her son’s father was murdered, she called Gibson first. They share a lot of firsts.

“What Tyrese and I had was so special because we were both virgins,” she says, remembering their *Baby Boy* lovemaking scenes. “I had never done nudity, he had never done nudity; we kind of held each other’s hands and got through it.”

Now she’s a pro at such things and is more interested in playing in a romantic comedy with Gibson than giving the public a part two.

“I don’t think a part two is what we need,” she says. “Leave that alone. What we need is just us on the screen again as love interests. I think whatever me and Tyrese do together will be fine.”