

Entertainment Weekly

*Britney Spears
at the MTV Video
Music Awards*

Oh, The Horror!

Is Britney's
Comeback
Already Over?
Or Does
She Have
A Prayer?

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**Viggo
Mortensen**
Oscar Buzz
From Toronto
Sean Young:
I Could Have
Been Julia
Roberts

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"I've been forced to deal with my character assassination. I never hurt anybody in this business, ever."

—Sean Young

By Karen Valby

photograph by Sheryl Nields

“I’m not
Julia Roberts.
And I could
have been.”

—Sean Young

There isn't a red carpet for miles, but Sean Young still likes to make a movie-star entrance. It's a warm weekday morning, and the 47-year-old actress swans out of a Santa Monica gym draped in a slightly smudged creamy cashmere cape with foxtails dangling off the ends. Her thin brown hair is teased high on top of her head, and her lips are nicely collagen-free. She's as long and leggy as she was 20 years ago, when she joyfully pretzeled herself around Kevin Costner in the backseat of a limousine in her best movie, *No Way Out*. Young sits down at the outdoor table of a nearby café, clasps her fingers behind her head, and tries to play it cool.



Big Screen...

A few of Sean Young's most notable films



Stripes
1981



Blade Runner
1982



Dune
1984



No Way Out
1987

"I don't really like doing interviews. I'm so easy to make sound bad, but what are you going to do that hasn't been done to me already?" she asks, sounding less aggressive than wearily resigned to her unshakable reputation for being seriously unhinged. "Who's going to f--- me over any more than they already have?" She launches into a rehash of a recent tussle with a tenant who lived in a back building on Young's property, who she claims left in a huff, informing city hall on the way out that Young was renting two units illegally. "That [money] always made it a lot easier to be an actress in a tough town," she says with a sigh. "A bad break along a long string of bad breaks."

After a burst of movies like *Stripes*, *Blade Runner*, and the surprise box office hit *No Way Out*, Young seemed like she was on an unstoppable run. Sure, she could rattle cages sometimes, like on the set of 1987's *Wall Street*, where she irritated director Oliver Stone so badly that he wrapped her scene early and had her dropped off at the bus station. But her coltish good looks and snappy, sexy appeal suggested a kinetic star just coming into her own. Then in 1988 she starred in *The Boost*, or as Young refers to it, "The Bust," a lame relationship drama starring James Woods. Their off-camera chemistry quickly turned toxic: Woods sued her for harassment, and Young's reputation as a nutty broad not worth the trouble ignited. She'd soon get fired from the Tess Trueheart role in 1990's *Dick Tracy*, officially for not seeming maternal enough in dailies, though she later accused Warren Beatty of kicking her to the curb for turning down his advances. (Beatty has maintained it was purely a creative decision.) On the set of *Batman*, she broke her arm falling off a horse during rehearsals and was replaced by Kim Basinger. When Warner Bros. was putting together the 1992 sequel, she stormed the studio lot wearing a homemade Catwoman suit in a disastrously ill-conceived bid to be considered for the role in *Batman Returns*. She became, and remains, a crazy-bitch punchline to the powers that be.

Today, Young waves her fork at Los Angeles. "The city of angels? It's the city of devils. The city of smiling cobras. This [town] eats venom for breakfast. Me, I just eat a nice breakfast," she says, smiling down approvingly at her little pad of scrambled eggs and broccoli sprigs. "I've been forced to deal with my character assassination. I never hurt anybody in this business, ever. But," as she'll repeat dramatically over and over during the next two hours, "the sin is not with me."

For years she's been mainly relegated to the hammy beast of cable-TV and B movies, playing everything from a Native American woman opposite Richard Grieco in 1995's *Bolt* ("we called it *Blot*") to a sexually confused scientist with Soleil

Moon Frye in 1999's *Motel Blue* ("terrible movie, absolutely awful"). "When you're crying for the cable audience," she says of her recent dramatic history, "it is just so lame.... I don't want to do any more movies where I look at it and go, 'Oh, God, gross.'"

In 2006, Young decided to crash the *Vanity Fair* Oscar party to try to network with the A list. She dolled herself up and scooted in on the shiny heels of Jennifer Aniston, only to be escorted out the back door by a humorless bouncer on the orders of four assistants on headsets. "It was degrading," says Young, trying to laugh off the incident. "But when you have nothing to lose, it's really not that big of a deal."

And yet the woman, who seems both like her own worst enemy and a victim of miserable luck, just will not quit. A single mother of two boys under the age of 13 (she divorced their father, actor Robert Lujan, in 2002), Young says that without a college education or any employable skills, she knows of no other way to make a living. (Though she is, she'll say, a whiz of a tap dancer, which made it all the more cruel when she was passed up for last season's cast of has-beens on *Dancing With the Stars*.) Watch enough TV and you'll eventually catch a glimpse of her. Since last year, she's popped up in fine guest turns on episodes of *CSI*, *ER*, *One Tree Hill*, and in a cute supporting role alongside Tom Selleck in the CBS movie-of-the-week *Jesse Stone: Sea Change*. But even as she plugs away, she still clings to one sad, desperately held belief.

"I'm not Julia Roberts," she says, certain of her thwarted destiny. "And I could have been."

A

middle-aged woman in a large sun hat approaches the table. "Sean? I'm sorry about interrupting but, Sean, I think you're a great actor. I'm a big fan. And just listening to you talk, I can tell you're very intelligent." "Well,

thank you very much," says Young, preening for a moment before warmly sending the woman on her way with a waggle of her fingers. "No, I didn't pay her to do that," she says, chortling. "But that's not unusual for me, you know. I have a lot of supporters."

One of them is Carl Reiner, who directed her in the 1993 spoof film *Fatal Instinct*. "I'll take 100 Sean Youngs," he says. "I was apprehensive when I first met her and I put it right to her: 'You're perfect for the role, but are you going to drive me crazy?' And then I found out it was all a fairy tale.... She's a very gifted comedienne and actress." When asked how she might win more supporters like Reiner, Young says, "I just need to get on *The List*. I don't have an opportunity to even go in and meet people at the top level. So I look at movies now and go, 'Well, too



With Woods in 1988's *The Boost*

“For years every time I would go to an audition, I’d hear,

‘So what about this James Woods stuff?’”

bad they didn’t get me. I would have been perfect for that.’ That’s my joke now. ‘Ha! She has my part.’ Like the Diane Lane part in *Hollywoodland*? I said, ‘I don’t know why this bitch has my part!’ No, I love Diane Lane, I love Diane Lane. But it’s always another actress besides me. I mean, everybody always gets my part.”

When Young first arrived on the scene, a gregarious teenager who had alienated many in her suburban-Cleveland high school with her need for attention, she was quickly snatched up as the hot young thing. Steven Spielberg called her back for two auditions for the Karen Allen role in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* before she was deemed too green. At 20 she made her film debut, in the 1980 Merchant Ivory movie *Jane Austen in Manhattan*. Ten years later, after working with everyone from David Lynch to Ridley Scott, she was done.

She places the blame for her derailed career largely in the lap of James Woods, who she says lashed out at her when she shrugged off their on-set flirtation in 1987. (Woods denies doing anything to harm her career.) She had a boyfriend at the time, he had a girlfriend, and she says their sexual tension just wasn’t worth the trouble. “I was like, ‘Jimmy, look, these are normal feelings, if we feel this way in six months, we’ll revisit the concept,’” she says. “It was a crush being turned down, that’s all.... So sue me! And he did.” Woods and his then fiancée filed a \$2 million suit for harassment in 1988, alleging that, for instance, Young left a disfigured doll on his doorstep and trampled the couple’s expensive flower bed. “It is so retardedly stupid that anyone could have believed it,” says Young. The case was settled out of court in 1989.

Some bitterness dies hard. In a 1992 EW cover story on Young, Woods sounded a note of contrition

when he said that “I love and admire Sean,” and elsewhere he has been quoted as saying “Maybe she’ll say it’s time to bury the hatchet. I can only be a gentleman and say I hope for the best.” But when approached again for this piece, he struck back at the actress in four angry and raw e-mails sent to EW over the course of 12 hours, cc’d to his lawyer and publicist. He wrote, among other things, that the actress perpetrated a “jihad of terror” against him and his now ex-wife, that this all “was certainly not about spurned advances, as they were most assuredly not spurned,” and that “I am sure it is fashionable to bash the guy (yawn) and pity the poor woman.” (He also stressed that a highly publicized urban legend, wherein Young superglued his penis to his leg, was entirely false and if the magazine suggested otherwise he’d take EW to court. The actress also denies the incident.) His lawyer quickly followed up Woods’ eruption with an e-mail saying the messages had been accidentally sent, and insisted EW only quote his client using the following statement: “These incidents took place over 20 years ago, and I have moved on and would suggest Ms. Young do the same.”

Without laboring the issue, Young does suggest that the fact that she was a woman—a strong, mouthy, opinionated one—also contributed to her



A 1992 EW cover, after Young had exiled herself to Arizona

...And Small

A few of the actress' most recent TV spots



CSI
2006



Jesse Stone: Sea Change
2007



One Tree Hill
2007

exile. She points fingers at the suits at Warner Bros. who shook their heads in eye-rolling dismay when she showed up in her Catwoman suit. "The fact that I made them see me, that aggressiveness on my part was just not allowed for women to do. If a guy had done that—if Jim Carrey had done that, if Sean Penn had done that—it would have been 'Ha-ha, what balls!' But for me it totally backfired." She floats the possibility that someone like *Dick Tracy* casting director Jackie Burch trashed her around town. "She might have called on her other casting people never to bring me in," says Young, "because it's a very tight business." (Responds the floored Burch: "There is absolutely no basis for this, but I wish her well.")

Young does take some responsibility for her Hollywood downfall. Tired of feeling demonized, the actress fled the scene for Sedona, Ariz., and spent much of the '90s living in peace in an adobe-style house off a desert road. "I retreated, and that was a mistake," she allows. "I should have stood my ground and fought. If you're not there to stand up for yourself, the rumor turns into a monster. I may have perceived it as self-preservation, but it had the effect of career derailment." Or, Young says, she might at times have been too giving, too alluring, too unwilling to tiptoe around powerful men with fat egos. She should have taken *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* instead of *The Boost*, and she curses the accident that forced her to bow out of *Batman*. She wishes she hadn't been offered Sharon Stone's role in *Casino* when she was pregnant with her first son. Tell Young that she would have been interesting in the juicy part that won Stone a Golden Globe and she sighs. "I have a lot of would-have-beens," she says, starting to look annoyed. "We should, uh—I get tired of talking about myself after a while. Franklin Roosevelt had the New Deal and I had the raw deal." But

she has just finished reading Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays With Morrie* and she feels righteous, convinced that like the serene old man in the best-seller, she'll die one day with a clear conscience.

A young woman walks awkwardly up to the table and starts gushing. "Can I tell you how much of an inspiration you are from when I was a little girl? *No Way Out?* That's why I'm an actor." Young smiles beatifically, seconding "good movie, good movie." The fan asks if she can take a picture with the actress and Young agrees. "Let's go back in the shade where it's flattering," she tells her new friend who, Young swears, was not paid to take part in this little scene.

Not so long ago, Young decided to take an audition class given by *That '70s Show* casting director G. Charles Wright. So on a cold January night, she watched all the students around her get up over and over again, vul-

nerable to a room of their peers. She credits the class for turning her negative attitude around. "For years every time I would go to an audition, I'd hear, 'So what about this James Woods stuff?'" she says. "So I didn't audition well.... When you have your reputation wrecked, then you go in to prove yourself, it's really not the same game. I'd be frustrated or needy or just not believing that anybody on the other side of the table was rooting for me. Then I took the class and thought, 'Okay, I got it, maybe people really want you to do well.'"

Young looks at her watch and realizes that she's late for her 1 o'clock computer class, but she wants to leave on a note of go-get-'em optimism. "I'm a comeback waiting to happen," she says firmly. "No one deserves it more than I do. So what I would wish for me is good luck. Just a lot of good luck." Her big dream is to remake the 1937 madcap comedy *Topper* with George Clooney sliding into Cary Grant's shoes and her tackling the Constance Bennett role. "I think our chemistry would match very well and I'd give him a run for his money. I have at least or more of what he has, just not the same opportunities. So if he would *just return my call*," she says, glaring at her unresponsive cell phone on the table, "and give me a shot, that could be really great.... I really see myself in that new niche: a glamorous comedienne like Carole Lombard or even Lucille Ball. Humor and beauty. Those two things, they're natural to me."

After a firm handshake, she leans down to purr that she's gone ahead and taken care of the check and then saunters off, smooth as silk. From out of nowhere, a small bird flies toward her head, its little wing flapping for a beat in her sprayed nest of hair. Young yelps, and waves off her attacker with a nervous laugh. She just can't get a break. ■

“I’m a come-back waiting to happen,” says Young. “No one deserves it more than I do.”