

DAVE CHAPPELLE ALSO LOOKED AT MY ASS & he also said Daaaaaaaaaamn
we were in the frozen food section at Ralph's in North Hollywood & I half-
smiled I was wearing my favorite old Levis with the hole at the left side belt
loop & had just moved back to L.A. with my two-year-old

CHRIS ROCK DID THE SAME THING same jeans at the movie theater across from the Beverly Center & he thought he wouldn't be recognized with that newsboy cap on but I saw him he looked twice

OHMYGOD BUT WHEN WE SAW DEVANTE ON THE ESCALATOR with his arms bandaged to cover fresh tattoos everybody freaked out screaming except me & of course I thought his green eyes were amazing & of course I knew all the words to all the Jodeci songs but I'm on the quiet side & not really one to be jostling in a crowd there were six of us that day ditching science because the teacher was a perv on top of being boring I stayed at the lower level with our backpacks while everyone else got autographs but no hugs due to the tatt situation I had on a sundress white with blue flowers & some brown clogs it was picnic day for our crew & we all dressed alike that day it was clogs & flowered dresses & all the cheerleaders hated us because the football players started to sit with us at lunch

ONE DAY TIFF WAS SAD BECAUSE IT WAS THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF HER MOTHER'S DEATH & SHE JUST REALLY WANTED TO GO SEE MICHAEL JACKSON she said she knew where the family lived in Encino because her sister used to babysit Tito's kids so we left school after the first bell & got on the bus with just enough fare we thought & rode three different buses & walked a bunch of suburban blocks it was like 90 degrees & I had on jeans & socks & sneakers & a crop top HOTASFUCK carrying my backpack when we finally got there no one was home & we looked at the pool on the other side of the lattice gate with deeper longing than our previous desire to see MJ although I don't think I need to explain how much we stayed loving Michael Jackson or how the day he died was the day before my sister's wedding in St. Lucia & Tiffany arrived at the hotel weeping but I might have to explain how much I had already walked for him when I was a kid I braved a full mile to the house of a neighbor I hated just to listen to *Thriller* because they were the only ones in the neighborhood with a record player my mother broke mine just because my father had bought it & tore my favorite posters in half the one where he had on the yellow sweater & the one with the Jackson 5 all smiling & sequins & pre too much surgery but somehow I protected the record so I would ignore the alcoholics playing spades at the kitchen table & swat the hands of the boy trying to lift my skirt & I would sit on the neighbor's smoke-blue fabric couch listening to MJ flattening my lap with Black magazines & anyway no answer at the Jackson compound so we walked all the way back to the bus stop there was a Burger King next to it with AC so we took a chance & used part of our return fare to get Whopper Jrs & \$0.15 cups of ice water we were so hungry & thirsty by then & there was a payphone in the parking lot so after we ate & drank we called my dad for a ride we called a bunch of times hanging up before the answering machine came on so we could use the

same quarter but he never answered we were stuck & freaking out a little bit we ended up asking random strangers for change the first few people gave us nickels & quarters & dimes but one guy gave us a \$5 bill because he said he had daughters & it wasn't safe for us to ask strangers for money he also offered us a ride but we said no thank you because he could've been a perv & this was years before some kids accused MJ of making them drink Jesus juice & even then to believe white people over MJ seemed like betrayal like here they go trying to take everything from us again our geniuses our heroes our talents our loves & if it's true it hurts it hurts it hurts & anyway the bus came & we got back to school in time for 6th period

MY DAD SAID HE TOOK US TO SEE BOTH NELSON MANDELA & MUHAMMAD ALI at different times in our childhood but I don't remember either maybe we sat way in the back or something he had to be telling the truth because he taught us to read using black history flash cards & one of my favorite outfits then consisted of pink corduroy stirrup pants with a matching checked shirt & low-slung purple belt with a silver buckle plus black karate shoes & Oh God there are pictures

SPEAKING OF THOSE PICTURES in one of them with that outfit on I posed with my sister & a giant-sized Megatron at Universal Studios I never felt happier in my nine years of life than at that moment but only because they didn't have Optimus Prime & yes robots count as famous men especially Optimus Prime & oh the indelible grief when he died in that cartoon movie my sister & I sat in the middle of the theater & cried way past the credits & the ushers had to kick us out

PRINCE CALLED ME UP ONSTAGE AT THE PONTIAC SILVERDOME & my scary ass didn't go up there my sisters waited in line for hours so we could get good tickets & we lucked up on the 8th row & used the light bill money to pay for it I mean who needs lights when you got Prince & the day before the concert I bought a supertight electric blue column dress from Charlotte Russe at the Livonia Mall it had a back-of-the-knee-high slit I was 21 & we all screamed when *The Beautiful Ones* started up & I began to cry even though he didn't play any of the old hits straight but because everything was spectacular I didn't sit in my seat the whole time & was losing my voice & then a burly guy with a headset motioned that I should go with him & come on stage & WHAT I froze I mean WHAT I knew that dress did not make me look shy but I thought if I went up there I would faint & I'm not the best dancer I thought I'd probably cry like an idiot & then pass out & wake up & pass out again so I said no & shook my head no my heart beating fast & sweating my dress into a darker blue

WATCHING KOOL MOE DEE ON *UNSUNG* MAKES ME THINK ABOUT CELIBACY I mean he never married or had children & although one friend says he has women on rotation another calls him the monk MC but I just think he's an introvert & maybe scarred by his father stabbing his mother a hell of a thing to witness at 12 & it makes me wonder if being alone isn't easier but a braver choice to be at peace with your own expectations rather than those of others & it made me wonder if another year free of men might turn into five or ten or the rest of my life like my mother who feels perfectly content spending her time not cooking any man's food or washing his underwear & made me wonder if I could do more or less with my life if I had a man in it or if my son is missing out on more than he should & it made me wonder if I am enough but only for a minute because I realized I like my body unassailed by tenderness or roughness & free of obligation I like my peace & I tried to make my teenager watch the video for "Wild, Wild West" on YouTube he gave it 30 seconds pressed pause & backed out of the room I probably should have played "How Ya Like Me Now"

WHEN I WAS IN MY EARLY 30S I SAW ELTON JOHN IN A NIGHTCLUB IN ATLANTA CALLED TONGUE & GROOVE my sister thought he was an imposter but his haircut seemed right & no one could miss those rhinestone or maybe diamond-framed eyeglasses & lime green paisley suit purple satin shirt & matching necktie except maybe the drunk twentysomethings dancing slash stumbling you could smell the alcohol in the humid air & feel the spills fuse to your shoe soles & I was unlucky I had just gotten dumped & some fool splashed half a Long Island Iced Tea on my white sheath dress & I was ready to go & dancing was supposed to make me feel better but instead marked the end of seeing nightclubs as fun despite the wake of Elton John whizzing by so close I could see the fabulous gap in his teeth

I FOLLOW THE ROCK ON INSTAGRAM & one of these days I'm going to meet him & get a muscle hug & find some way to yell FOCUS! like he does when he's working out & really I don't care if that sounds lame I just hope I'm not having a bad hair day & have on something photo-ready like my pink wrap dress & suede wedges that make me look 5'10" & I hope it'll be at a good time for him so I don't feel guilty about what my son calls fan-girling & clearly someone who watches *Scorpion King* twice a year on silent & sees every new release on opening weekend is committed but really I've been a fan since my roommate in the Navy had a WWE poster of him above her bed & got me watching wrestling again way back in the late '90s & his trash talk & independent eyebrow inspired me to boss up & get through dealing with the monumental bullshit women in general & women in the military have to slog through between unwanted advances & wardrobe policing & femininity policing & language policing & lack of intellectual trust like the time I said yessamassa I'se a-sorry massa please don't beat me massa with a real non-yessamassa tone & face when my two supervisors tried to bully me into apologizing for something I didn't do but I stood my own ground in my uniform & combat boots & Toni Braxton haircut my neck & shoulders on swoll from lifting anyway how many times will the average person get to meet The Rock I only need to meet him once I promise

SO WHEN A FAMOUS POET DECIDES HE WANTS TO CALL ME I don't really want to talk very long & I don't believe his flattering emails I mean I heard he was enamored but I also knew the long list of ex-girlfriends & I also had to iron my son's clothes for school & help him with his homework so I said I am not interested in being an ingénue & we laughed & he would call & say May I speak to the ingénue & I was busy I work long hours & go to the doctor a lot & barely have time to write & hardly ever draw anymore & I couldn't take him seriously not really I mean I can't really help what I look like but I can help what *it* looks like so it took months after he sat in the front row at the Center for Book Arts & nodded at my poems for him to tell me that he could see the small of my back because he was sitting behind me & he remembered I had on an eggshell blouse with a high collar & pearl buttons & it took months before I went to the Harlem Arts Salon for his book release party & after it was over he walked my son & I to the elevator & squeezed my hair no one had ever really squeezed my hair so the next day I replied to his email I said I would be in the City I had on suede knee boots & a trench because it was fall & we ended up walking somewhere in Manhattan after Thai food holding hands & a random guy telling him You Doing it Big! & a few months later he would push me into a hotel closet at a writing conference & grab my breasts so hard it hurt & saying I liked it until I screamed as loud as I could in his face when he wouldn't stop & why couldn't all this only be about name-dropping & brand names & puddintang ask me again I'll tell you the same

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