**Heroes**

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I met the infamous comedian. My parents were buying a snack in the crowded airport. My father squatted next to me, said the comedian’s name, placed a hand on my small shoulder, and directed my gaze with his other to the lounging man. At that moment, I was excited. In my memory, his image is dominated by the sweat suit he wore. Loose material hung from his reclined body, thick and soft in comparison to the shiny, vinyl seats. The sweats, the deep maroon of menstrual blood, surrounded by the subdued tones of the airport waiting area. The sickly pallor of the comedian’s face emphasized by the color and the dark circles under his eyes. His long limbs sprawled from his chair like lost tendrils in search of support. His hands, palms down, fingers splayed, on the seats next to him, his armpits just above the armrests, like a doll, haphazardly discarded by a bored child.

The comedian was frequently on children’s television shows. In those performances his voice expressed a playfulness that conflicted with the dark sadness betrayed in his eyes. My father and I approached. The comedian had no luggage, wasn’t at a gate, and sat alone.

I thought I wanted to write comedy when I grew up, though I couldn’t articulate it that way then. I delighted in following the loops and repetitions of themes through comedy routines and sitcoms on tv. When I told people, I wanted to be a comedian their responses crushed me like soft-skinned fruit. Adults laughed and said I had to be aggressive, learn to take what I wanted without asking. Kids told me, “Girls aren’t funny.”

I wanted the comedian to sign my diary. I gripped a pen tightly in both hands. I arrived next to the comedian’s loafered, sockless foot, took in his scaly ankle exposed by the cuff of his sweatpants, and could barely force a smile. Excitement wilted like the delicate flowers that decorated the cover of my pastel diary. The comedian stared indifferently at me. His sallow face like a vacant mask hung in a store aisle.

“Go on.” My father shoved my shoulder a bit too hard. The sweat suit seemed to signal a warning. Its brash color like a harbinger of future treachery. I tilted my diary toward him and opened my mouth, almost expecting him to shove me away with his foot.

“Can she have your autograph?” My father spoke over me.

“I don’t do that.” His stare, unchanging. “I’ll shake her hand.”

I pressed my diary against my chest like a shield. I knew when I told kids at school about this they would ask if I had proof.

The comedian awkwardly pushed himself upright and leaned over my tiny frame. His glassy, red-rimmed eyes like deep holes ready to suck me in. His hand moved toward me from an arm longer than my body. I knew I was supposed to feel thrilled. Instead, I felt trepidation.

“Go on.”

The comedian’s hand wobbled in the air like a raft at sea, ready to drown its charge. I raised my inexperienced hand to wrap my tiny thumb around the base of his and pressed my fingers into his cold, dry palm. His thumb clamped over my hand like a gate swung shut. The skin of the comedian’s hand was as rough and stiff as cardboard.

“Nice to meet you.” A generic reply.

I thanked him. My father and I returned to my mom waiting with our food. I learned of the comedian’s crimes long after I stopped turning humans into heroes.