

Gesturing @<3

Miles Davis, Kind of Blue: "So What"
24255 Pacific Coast Highway, Malibu 90263

As rare as they may seem, Stephen and I are both Los Angeles natives. He's from Inglewood and I always claim 'Mid-City,' the no man's land between the La Brea and Crenshaw exits on the 10. Despite being born, raised and schooled beside what the world knows as the sunny surf and sand of Southern California, we never went to the beach together and neither one of us works 'in the industry.' The televised versions of L.A.—'Venice Beach,' 'the Hills' and 'Rodeo Drive'—never represented *our* L.A. In hindsight, the televised versions of most anything hardly represent reality.

We 'met' when I wrote him on Yahoo! Instant Messenger in 2005. December was turning into January and I found myself at school, alone in a dorm room at Pepperdine. As usual, my grade point average was fine; the writing I was doing was receiving modest applause; and I was *en route* to graduate that April. But my heart was empty; my soul was cold; and the only sound I heard in the Towers' halls was the echo of my own voice.

Dwele, Some Kinda...: "Old Lovas"
1839 S. Main St., Los Angeles, 90015

Nearly a year later, Stephen and I met in person. He'd been in New York and his online profile hadn't been updated the previous 'winter.' After months of talking on the phone and voicing our thinly veiled intentions through computer screens and across the distance of thousands of miles, he came to me. It was here, within the walls of my Downtown, art deco studio apartment, a hop, skip and a jump away from the grime of Skid Row, the bargains of The Fashion District and the luxury of the Westin Bonaventure, that we fashioned our love.

I learned to take Microgestin. (Thanks, Ke'lona.)

He bought me a bicycle for my trips to and from USC.

He took me to the garden roof of the Otani where I first tried salmon eggs.

We broke my new Ikea bedframe with our shenanigans. *LOL!*

We went to Hollywood and Vine and visited the Mann and the ArcLight.

He didn't hate me after I left the Les Nubians concert on Sunset simply because my feet were tired. (Thanks, Stephen. And I'm sorry, really.)

He came to see my play, "Failure to Mate," both nights. (Rife with irony, I know.)

And the regular arrivals and departures of the train drowned the sounds of our lovemaking. Aged 23 and 25, we tried to figure out how to love each other. It was our first time around and we struggled some. There were lapses, fights, lies, ebbs, flows, ups, downs and other handsome, willing men. But we always came back to each other, despite the fact that I'd leave for Madrid, Cambridge, San José, Managua, and Guadalajara every now and again. He said he loved me but I could rarely feel it being so indoctrinated by both the big and small screens.

I really thought love looked like John Cusack balancing a boombox precariously over his head beneath his beloved's bedroom window. I thought love was Richard Gere snapping a jewelry box of diamonds closed on Julia Roberts' finger tips. I thought love was making vulnerable, embarrassing, public proclamations of devotion like the hidden ring in the girlfriend's dessert, the airplane banner proposals trailing across the sky and the flash mobs carried out in rehearsed unison at the airports. Love was vulnerable, expensive, contrived, risky, rare, against the odds and anything else you'd see on *90210*, in an after-school special or at a matinee. Drama, danger and occasionally the company of Woody Allen. Unfortunately no one ever filmed and romanticized the consistent knock at your doorstep, the regular ding-dong of the bell or the ping alerts on your phone from text messages quoting the inside jokes only the two of you knew and shared. Were they, too, "I love you"?

Buika, Niña de Fuego: “No habrá nadie en el mundo”
Bravo Murillo 200bis 4A, 28002, Madrid, Spain

Then my trips became more frequent and they took me farther away. My wanderlust took me abroad for longer than either of us expected and my eye for the other handsome, willing men engaged. They were foreign, tall, short, dark, pale, employed, not, many and few... and Stephen felt betrayed. Alone he prepared biometric programming systems in a Tarzana office and impressed his clients. He bought a car, maybe glasses; probably visited the dentist and grew up. I danced hip-hop in Huertas’ La Comedia; I drank *mosto* in Café Gijón on the Paseo de Recoletos; and I took photos at La Catedral de Justo in Mejorada del Campo. Daniel followed his love on *Ugly Betty* when she left New York for London. Was there hope? Or did that just happen on tv?

Drake, Nothing Was the Same: “Hold On, We’re Going Home”
Korean Bell of Friendship, 3601 S. Gaffey Street, San Pedro 90731

Four years later, August 2013, I saw him again, overlooking the ocean, on his wedding day. I spotted him in a traditional, dark tux and I could see that he was nervous, which meant he cared. He married a sweet, pretty woman who’s shorter than me and more patient, who’s less demanding than me, has stronger familial ties and less wanderlust. (And I’m sure she’d never walk out on any concert at all.) I wore a beige and orange floral print dress and gifted them a deluxe Scrabble board game. When I met his bride, she hugged me and thanked me for attending. I wonder who exactly the guests thought I was.

Days later, Stephen and I took a moment at one of our old spots, the China Den on West Boulevard and Pico, to apologize mutually for our failings to each other. He acknowledged that his near four years’ of boyfriend training with me happened ‘on the job’—he was intern, human resources, accounting, manager and co-owner all at once. That’s a lot of pressure. I gave him the compromising photos I had of him. And then his wife, Kori, came to pick him up. She’d been rehearsing with her church choir and now it was time for them to go away together. I was then left with my music, my memories and my musings. I don’t watch so much tv anymore and that will likely benefit me and anyone posting his profile within a 50-mile radius.