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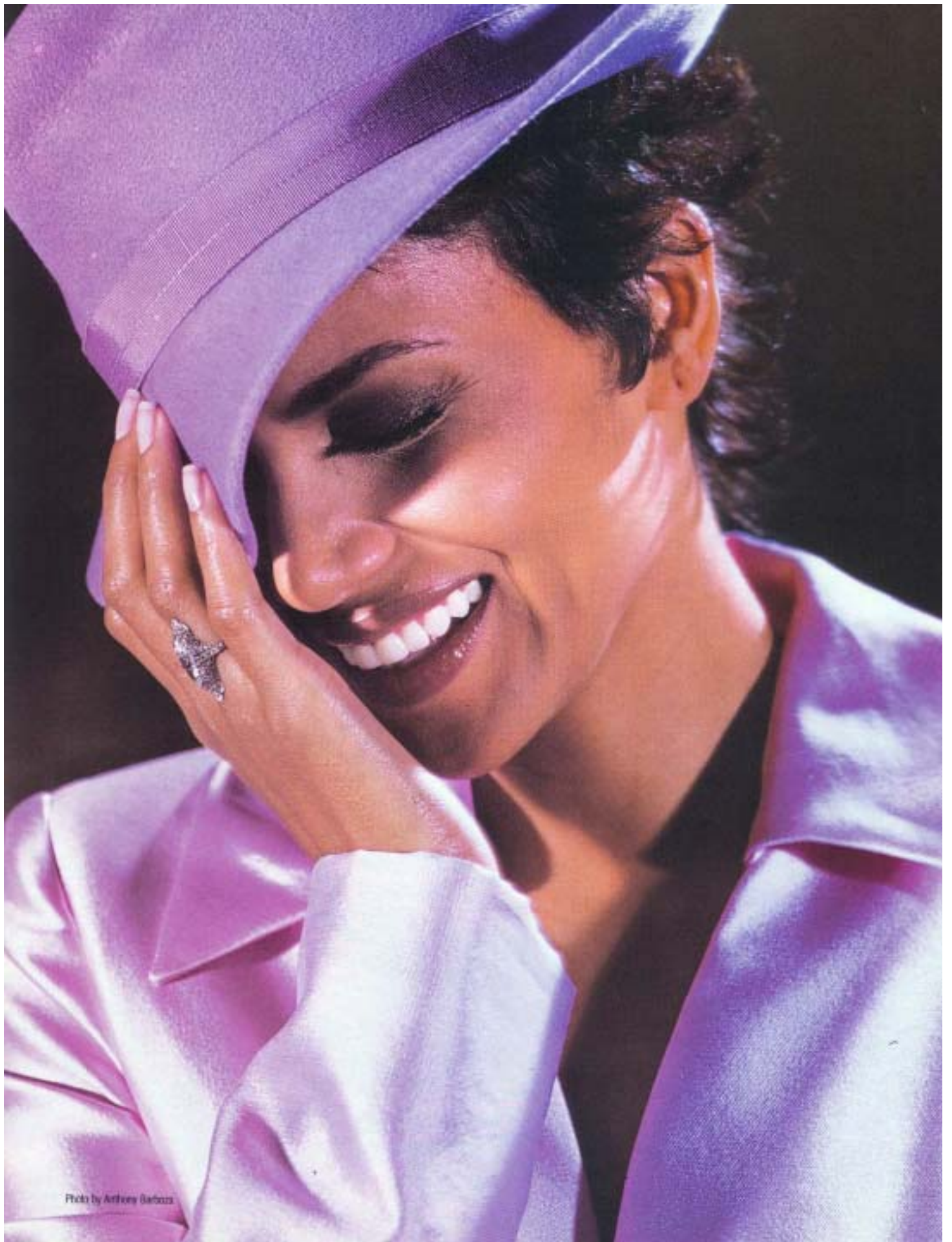


Photo by Anthony Barboza

HALLE BERRY:

HOLLYWOOD'S REIGNING QUEEN

BY LISA DEGNEN



Halle as Storm in "X-Men"

When Halle Berry held her Best Actress Oscar at the 74th Academy Awards last March for her role in *Monster's Ball*, she knew she was in the midst of a history making moment. "What it means to other women of color is just as important as what it means to me," she said. "It means we are finding that new day that Dorothy Dandridge never got to see."

Still, she does admit it was surreal at the same time. "I think I had an out-of-body experience," Halle says. "This is an independent movie that I thought would not get noticed in that way. I just hoped that it would get other directors to see me differently. What I hoped when I got the role was to get people talking, to draw people to the theater to get the message."

But what she got was so much more. Now Halle can write her own ticket in Hollywood and actually see movies come to life because her name is attached to the project. That's a role few actresses—let alone an African American actress—ever get to play.

Halle has decided to follow-up her Oscar by starring in the new Bond movie *Die Another Day* with Pierce Brosnan (out Nov 21) and reviving her role as Storm in the *X-Men* sequel due out next year.

Says Pierce: "It's a much simpler story this time. You can actually follow the plot!"

And, despite all the rumors to the contrary, Halle will not share a lesbian kiss with Madonna [Sorry guys, Madonna will make a cameo though]. Halle will be wearing an Ursula Andress-like retro bikini in a role described as, "A sort of a female Bond." Halle won't say much about the role except that her character "Jinx" is "supersecure in her sexuality and extremely intelligent."

That sounds a lot like the superstar herself, who chose to do the rough and raw sexual scenes with Billy Bob Thornton in *Monster's Ball*, even though she knew it could backfire with critics, because she believed the movie had an important story to tell. But she wasn't always so fearless. There was a time she says, when this former prom queen and honor student thought it was more important to fulfill the role others had decided for her.

"In the past, all I'd have to hear was 'nude scene' and I'd say, 'Don't send me that,'" she says. "I'm sure I passed up wonderful scripts that I never read because I knew they required nudity. I worked hard in my life to be what people wanted. I was obsessed with wanting approval. So many black people would

approach me and say, 'My daughter aspires to be like you. Stay positive.' So I'd try to stay that way. I thought that if I did nudity, I'd let them down and send the wrong message to those girls. But then I realized it's not my job to raise those girls."

The turning point seemed to come after marrying singer Eric Benet and feeling secure in a relationship for the first time, after so many disappointments, including her hugely publicized divorce from baseball star David Justice. "The social milieu of this country is that nudity is wrong or bad," she says. "Finally, with *Swordfish* [where she was topless for the first time] my husband said, 'Why are you afraid of this? Are you embarrassed about your body?' I said no. So he said, 'What's the problem?' When I told him people expected something different from me, he said I should do what I wanted to do. 'He also told me to look around our house. Every piece of art is of the naked form. 'And you bought it all,' he said. And I realized I was allowing what people thought of me to stop me."

There were other moments along the line that convinced her to start living for herself. Success and self-confidence came with her portrayal of Dorothy Dandridge on HBO, which won her an Emmy and a Golden Globe award.

But there was also the humiliation of being the butt of endless jokes after the February 2000 car accident that helped her to finally decide that she had to start living for herself (she was fined \$13,500 and sentenced to 200 hours of community service and settled out of court a civil suit filed by the other driver, after she pleaded no contest to a hit-and-run charge after she allegedly ran a red light in her Chevy Blazer and struck another car).

"People thought the worst you could think about me then—and my life carried on anyway. That was the start of me being released from that need to be liked. People still make jokes about it, but I'm not the first person to have a problem like this—and I won't be the last. I had to learn who I was and not look to other people to validate me. I know who I am—and that's what's important."

It was that attitude that finally led to the role of Leticia Musgrove in *Monster's Ball*, but she had actually been preparing all her life. "I drew on a lot of painful things from my personal life," she says. "Some are really private, but one thing that connected me to Leticia was that I was raised by a single mom who struggled to raise two children by herself."

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Halle was a young child of 4 when she understood that all was not well in the marriage of her mom Judy and dad Jerome. A violent alcoholic, he beat his wife and left Judy to raise Halle and sister Heidi alone. "I have not always lived the 'American Dream.' My life's been filled with great highs and great lows, and has certainly not been without strife, struggle and pain," she says. "My father was an alcoholic and very abusive. I want to believe my father was good. My mom wouldn't have married him otherwise, and she is the queen of my universe." Halle still doesn't speak to her father, even though he is reportedly very ill. (She also has a strained relationship with her sister. "We fought a lot. We don't now, but part of me feels that we never recovered from the adolescent years. I moved away from home at such a young age that the relationship never quite repaired itself.")

And despite racism in school, Halle, the overachiever, still managed to become class president and editor of her school newspaper. As Miss Ohio, she was runner-up in the 1986 Miss USA pageant and was the first African-American to represent her coun-



Halle and Eric Benet
photo by Diane Cahill

try at the Miss World contest. That, combined with modeling, helped her land her first role in the TV drama *Knot's Landing*.

It wasn't until her portrayal of a crack addict in Spike Lee's 1991 film *Jungle Fever*, that producers began to sit up and take notice of Halle. Her career has been on a steady upswing ever since. But Halle has always said she has faced two obstacles in her career...racism and her beautiful looks.

Even though most women would trade faces with her in a heartbeat, she has said that it often has led people to believe that she can't take on tough roles.

"I'm so up to here with that," she says. "It's like saying that only good things happen to pretty people. I've certainly had my fair share of the pits, and my looks haven't affected that one bit. I'm fighting all these silent battles. Being black, too, I find I'm sort of in a gray area. For Leticia [in *Monster's Ball*], I heard things like,

'Well, maybe she isn't quite black enough.' Sometimes I feel like a big freak."

That wasn't the first time Halle's manager Vincent Cirrincione has heard the argument either. "The stuff people would say to us you wouldn't believe," he says. "When Halle was up for 'Strictly Business' in 1991, they didn't want her at first. They said she wasn't black enough, that she should get a tan! They hired someone else, and in the end they dropped her and came back and hired Halle. I've had to fight and yell, and I've made a lot of enemies."

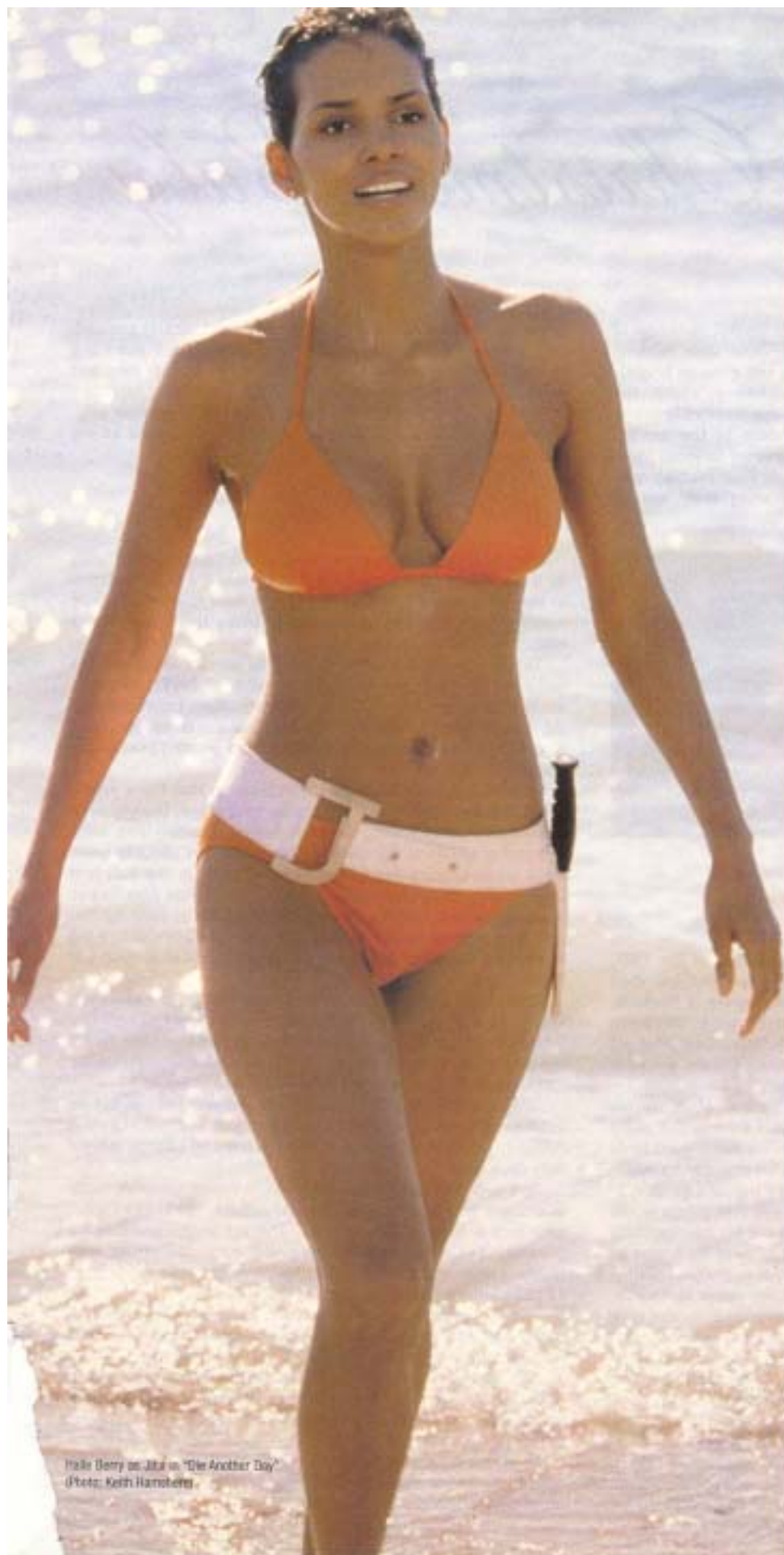
For her part, Halle has always heard that growing up as a bi-racial woman. But she decided early on what she was. "I see people on talk shows who are mixed, and they seem very confused. Sure I got called 'zebra' and 'Oreo cookie' in school—every little kid gets teased... But I think it's healthy to decide if you're one or the other—no one wants to be in the middle. That's why I decided early that I was black."

Halle says her mother, Judith prepared her to cope. "My mother is very tough," Ms. Berry says. "She taught me when I was little that I'm her daughter, I'm half white, but when you leave this house people will assume you're black and you'll be discriminated against. So accept being black, embrace it. She said if I fight it, I will have a battle with them and a battle inside myself."

Now, this proud, black actress knows she can do whatever she wants in her life—and career. "It's great that I can go from a movie like *Monster's Ball*, which is so reality-based, and then go do a movie like *James Bond* which is so fantasy-based," she says. "I wouldn't want to do *Monster's Ball* every time out. Nor would I want a *Bond* movie every time, either. So that's the joy, from one extreme to the next. Hopefully, after *Bond* and *X Men 2*, I will be able to find another character as well-written and well-rounded as Leticia...It would also be great to play a bad girl," she continues. "I've never done that on film before. We can't be bad in life: You get in trouble and go to jail. So it would be a thrill to do things in a surreal world, with lots of fighting and bad-ass stuff. I don't do that in life."

Still despite being on an unbelievable high in her career, Halle is making the most of the moment, knowing it won't last forever.

"I'm aware of a real double standard about how attractive women and men actors are seen to be as they age," she says. "When I'm in my 40s and 50s, I really see myself in a different lifestyle than making movies. I want to have a family. I'm hoping to get out of the movie business before gravity takes a hold of my face." ■



Halle Berry as Jita in "Die Another Day"
(Photo: Keith Hamshere)

Few of us were born with Halle's spectacular gene pool. However, just because she was blessed with a perfect face and body, doesn't mean she's leaving the future to chance. This gorgeous actress has a favorite beauty routine to keep her always looking gorgeous.

Halle keeps her flawless figure by working out three to four times a week with her personal trainer Robert White, who takes her through a series of aerobics and weight lifting moves. Getting in peak possible condition is also a mental process for Halle. In the dog eat dog world of Hollywood, Halle keeps her head clear by focusing on her own personal goals and not the gossip around town. One of her favorite mottos is: "When someone is trying to bring you down, they must be below you."

When people meet Halle, they can't help but notice what exquisite skin the 36-year-old actress has. Halle loves a celebrity favorite to keep her body glowing. Brown Sugar Body Polish by Fresh is a delicate scrub that contains an oil that moisturizes and exfoliates at the same time. Plus, says Halle, "It smells good enough to eat!"

Whenever she gets some free time to herself to relax, Halle will put a favorite CD on (India.Arie's "Acoustic Soul" or of course, Eric Burdon's "Better and Better") and slip into a warm bath with a product called Curd's Daughter Body Aches and Bath Salts. To shave her perfect legs she uses Satin Care Wild Berry Shave Gel by Gillette.

Once she's feeling perfectly de-stressed, Halle applies any one of her favorite body lotions. Among those that she loves: An orange body oil called EASIC at Estou, Lemon and Sage Body Butter by Bliss or Sugar Bath body lotion by Fresh. To get that great sheen to her skin, Halle loves another product that Hollywood celebrities adore, Nars Body Glow and to give that final body touch, she loves Kitten Goes to Paris body powder by Benefit which adds soft little sparkles to the skin.

To keep her face looking great, Halle uses a fairly simple cleansing and moisturizing routine. Every couple of weeks, she gets a glycolic acid facial from her dermatologist and uses Dermal peeling cream to exfoliate, but after daily cleansing, she says that she uses a vitamin C cream, Emergin C by Pharma cosmetics her face. And to keep her teeth looking beautifully white and bright, Halle wears Whitestrips by Crest.