

I'm Not The First Guy Who Fell In Love With A Woman That He Met At A Restaurant

by Chris Okum



I swear on Christ's ever-loving heart that the story I'm about to tell you is true. Actually, it's not a story, not in the conventional sense, with a beginning, middle, and end, but more like an anecdote, and not a particularly profound one at that. The reason I'm telling you this is because it's my only connection to the world of show business, to movies, to celebrity, to that precious resource we call fame. My sister, you see, when she was 19-years-old, dated Val Kilmer. For three months. She met him at a restaurant, I think it was a Japanese restaurant, at the Beverly Center here in Los Angeles. Like I said, she was 19, out with a friend, and Val Kilmer was eating dinner at the same restaurant. He got up from his table, came over to my sister, said something to her (she doesn't remember what he said because she was more than a little star-struck), and then he asked for her phone number, which she gave him, without hesitation. The next day he called her and they went out on a date. And then they went on another. And another. Now, mind you, my sister didn't tell anyone that she was going out with Val Kilmer when she first started going out with him. She went on three dates and had never bothered to tell either my dad or me. And then, one day, I'm sitting in my bedroom, on my bed, reading *The Guinness Book of World Records*, and on the wall above my bed is a poster for the movie *Real Genius*. There is a knock at my door. I tell whoever who's knocking to come in, the door opens, and I don't look up from my book, because I figure it's my dad or my sister, or whoever. And then there's a strange voice, and the voice is saying, "Man, I hated that movie." I look up from my book and I'm looking at Val Kilmer. Val Kilmer is standing in my doorway looking at a poster with himself on it, and he's saying, "I heard that guy is a real piece of work." Val Kilmer is standing at the foot of my bed, looking at the poster, his hands on his hips, and he's wearing nothing but a pair of jeans. No shirt, no shoes. Just a pair of jeans. And I'm looking at him. And I have no idea what is going on. Val Kilmer is standing in my room and he's talking to me about himself and I have no idea what to do or say. Then another person walks into the room, and it's not my sister, it's Jon Gries, Kilmer's co-star in *Real Genius*, the guy who

played Laszlo. Jon Gries stands next to Kilmer, looks at the *Real Genius* poster, looks at Kilmer and says, "Hey, I was in that movie." Kilmer looks at Gries and says, "You know what, now that I think about it, I was too." That's when my sister finally came into my room. "Val, this is my brother Chris," she said. "Chris, this is Val. And Jon." Kilmer shook my hand, as did Gries, and then they both walked out of my room, both taking one last look at the poster over my bed, which I'm going to assume they thought I had put there because I knew they were coming over, or because my sister was dating Kilmer, but which I did not. It should go without saying that the poster was on my wall because I loved the movie, and specifically, I thought Kilmer was funny. Because he was. This is what people have forgotten about Kilmer now that he's gone. The man was funny with a capital Y, probably the best comic actor of his generation, maybe to a greater extent than Nic Cage (too abstract) or Robert Downey, Jr. (too high) or Matthew Broderick (too cutesy). Anyway, Val Kilmer was at my house. I got up from my bed and looked at my sister, who gave me a look that said, "Don't ask," which I didn't. I followed Kilmer and Gries as they walked into our kitchen and proceeded to put away the groceries they had bought with my sister. My sister had gone to the market with Val Kilmer and bought groceries and then on the way home they had picked up Jon Gries because Kilmer had told Gries that they were going to make lasagna with his new girlfriend. Which is what they did. Val Kilmer and my sister made lasagna while Jon Gries and I sat at the kitchen tables and watched. And then all four of us sat down and ate dinner together. Kilmer never put on a shirt, or shoes, but he did do the dishes. And then, when he was done, he gave my sister a kiss and told her he would call her later. And he did. And they went out again and again and again, until finally, Kilmer told my sister he had to go to New Mexico to shoot a movie called *Willow*. He asked my sister to come with him. My sister said no. And so Val Kilmer went to New Mexico alone, where he met his future wife and mother of his children. He called my sister once to tell her that he didn't think they would be able to see each other again, and my sister said she

understood. So that was that. Val Kilmer never came over to my house again, and my sister stopped talking about him. But I didn't. I wanted to know what happened. So I asked her, and she said she didn't want to talk about it. I think I asked her every week for almost two years what had happened between her and Val Kilmer, why they broke up, and why she didn't go with him to New Mexico, an adventure I'm sure my dad would have signed off on, seeing as how at the time my dad, who was 46, was dating a 19-year-old himself, a freshman at USC, who, when she slept over, would wake up the morning and come into the kitchen and ask if I could make her a glass of chocolate milk, the kind you make with brown powder, which I always did, in silence, making sure not to stare at my dad's girlfriend, who was only 4 years older than me and wearing nothing but a tank top and underwear. As a kid I was surrounded by strange people wearing almost no clothes. But that's not the point of what I'm telling you. Actually, there is no point. My sister dated a movie star, and then she didn't, and she didn't really want to talk about it, not until a few years ago, when the subject of Val Kilmer came up because of something or other, probably the documentary he made about his life. I asked my sister again why she didn't want to go with him to New Mexico, why they stopped seeing each other, why he never came back to our house and made lasagna. "He was too much for me." she said, "He poured hot candle wax on my nipples. I wasn't ready for that back then. But I am now."

