

A Lapse in Judgement

Two strangers meet and have an entire relationship over dinner riddled with misconception, deception, conversation and consumption (“consumption” like eating food, not the disease . . . that wouldn’t be funny)

Kelly came into the restaurant a bit frantic, silently cursing herself for saying yes to a blind date in such a crazy week. The food magazine shoot was tomorrow, and she really wasn't prepared for that. The leash company decided, after the actual photo session, that now they want to switch the backgrounds that all the leashes were already shot on. Chris needs to come through and flip 87 backgrounds by lunch tomorrow. Plus her mom and her physical therapy that it seemed only Kelly could schedule. So she came early to her blind date looking forward to having a drink and a few minutes to catch up with texts and emails. She will chill for a bit and when Matt or Mark or whatever his name is gets done with his lawyer stuff, maybe she could have a nice meal and meet someone interesting. Or it will all crash and burn. She really just wanted to go home and change into sweatpants and watch TV tonight. Maybe some ice cream.

As she is seated at a table, Kelly starts scrolling quickly through her phone and starts a voice to text to Chris, her designer.

“The dog leash guys want a different color background, please tell me you –“

“Hi, I'm Mike-“ Crap, he's early. Kelly barely glances up as she pops a finger up as if to say “one moment” while she went back to her text. She was thinking that might have been a bit rude, but she has to get this text out now.

“-please tell me you saved the layers on it. They're asking for a burnt sienna color, whatever that is. I've emailed some ideas they sent me. We need them all done, all of them, by 11am tomorrow. So up late or up early, whatever you need to do, but text me back and let me know you're on it.”

She put her phone face down on the table, breathed out loudly and stood up right away. A man seemingly younger than herself stood in front of her. Good looking, athletic. Tussled hair. Pleasantly handsome and not what she was expecting.

“I'm so sorry, that was probably pretty rude.”

“No, it's fine,” Mike said, “It happens more than you would think.”

“I'm Kelly. Nice to meet you. I'm having a crazy day and can't quite get my head on straight.”

“Sure, I get it. You want a drink?”

“I'd love one. Like a real drink, right? I need alcohol tonight. And Jenny said you were handsome, she's not wrong.”

“Thank you?” He said hesitantly.

“Did I just say that? I'm sorry. Yeah, this is a bit weird for me, I don't do this a lot so if I'm a little awkward . . . just roll with it, humor me, you know? Is it weird if I say I thought you

would be older. But it's fine, I don't know what I'm saying. I'm kind of nervous. Do we hug? I don't do this a lot. Do you do this a lot?"

"We can absolutely hug."

They hug and then step back awkwardly.

"I'm Mike. And yes, I do actually kind of do this a lot, is that a problem?"

"No, no. I mean, everyone is their own whatever. No. Well, what's a lot?"

"Like five nights a week. Sometimes more. I even try to pick up a few lunches once in a while. "

"Wow, that's nice. You're like an expert. " Kelly sat down and seemed uncomfortable and not sure quite how to take all that. "I mean, just dinners. Is that what you mean?"

"And some lunches."

"Right. Like you're not, you know, every night of the week with someone different, right? Like for me, tonight, we are just dinner. So we're on the same page. It's not going to be like getting super drunk and sex or anything. Was that too much to say? Too soon?" Kelly is clearly speaking faster than her brain can edit.

"No, it's all good information." Mike politely says.

"Why don't you have a seat?"

"I can't. You know. Work."

"Wait, what? You have to go back to work?"

"No, no. I can't sit down when I'm working."

Kelly cocked her head and looked at him as the mental puzzle pieces came together.

"You . . . " she started.

Nodding slow, Mike finished it for her: ". . . are the server. At this table. In this restaurant. Yeah, you gonna need a moment?"

"Oh God, yes. I am so sorry." She blushed red and sank into her seat with her hand in her face.

"It was a good hug. And I almost never get sex from my customers, so you were right on the money with that one."

"Oh my God. Is . . . is 'mortification' a word?"

"Let's say it is and move on to beverages. Pretty sure you really need a drink now, right?"

"Oh, hell yeah I do. Vodka gimlet. With a little hemlock, maybe?"

“I’ll be back.”

“I’ll be here, trying to shrink away.”

Mike came back to the table with her gimlet to find a man in a very expensive suit, ten years Kelly’s senior splitting his attention between Kelly and his phone. His phone was winning at the moment.

“Hello, there, I’m Mike, I’ll be your server tonight. Can I get you anything to drink, sir?”

“Sure, what’s she having?”

“A gimlet.”

“What the hell’s a gimlet?”

“Gin and lime juice, but there’s also a Lord of the Rings joke in there if you’d like to hear it?”

“No, I don’t need to hear any jokes about kids killing each other on an island. And I’m not drinking that. Give me a martini.”

“Okay, very good. If you need anything you can ask for me, I’m Mike, . . . or you can ask any of the servers on the floor. We all dress the same, so we are easy to spot.” He says with a slight tilt of his head as he looks at Kelly.

With her date’s head still in his phone, Kelly clenched her teeth and widened her eyes at Mike and they both had a quiet laugh.

Somewhere between the martini, ordering dinner and the appetizer arriving, Mike overheard Kelly’s date talk about his favorite judge, golfing with the mayor and deposing a client in Miami. He finally downshifted from conversation to consumption. The calamari hit the table and he was slurping it down after drowning it in the marinara sauce. Then he would mop his lips with his napkin, nodding to Kelly and checking his phone routinely. When it rang he fumbled for it with red and greasy fingers and excused himself from the table. Mike came over right away.

“How’s it going over here with Mike the Shyster?”

“It’s okay. And it’s Paul. “

“Paul? Wait, we don’t have the same name? I introduced myself-”

“-I know I know, I didn’t remember his name. I’m the worst.”

“And, you know, RINGS!” Mike was purposely vague to see if she got it.

“Not FLIES! Right?” And she did.

“So is he cool?”

“He is. He will tell you himself. Even if you don’t ask him.” She said with her eyebrows raised.

“So not cool. Sorry. Hey, here’s my mom and dad.” Mike shows Kelly a picture on his cell phone.

“Okay.”

“You have a picture of your parents?”

Looking at him oddly, Kelly reached for her cell, scrolled a bit and showed him a picture, “This is my mom.” Mike just nods and walks away.

About halfway through their dinner, a hostess comes up and asks them if they are driving a Black BMW since it will be towed. Paul gets up in a huff and Mike comes over just as quick.

“Hey, I don’t want you to be upset, but I think I should tell you; I’ve started seeing other customers.”

“What? That hurts. Well, fate, different worlds. Can I ask, who is she?”

“See that girl sitting under the bridge painting? In the leggings?”

“Yes.”

“The hot girl. With the long blond hair.”

“I see her.”

“And that low cut shirt, I’m not even sure she has a bra on.”

“I said see her!”

“Well, it’s the grandmother sitting at the table behind her. She’s my new . . . um . . . “

“Squeeze?”

“ . . . guest. Guest. Who says squeeze anymore? Are we in Grease?”

“I love Grease.”

“You know I meant the movie not the country.”

“I know you meant the movie. Love that movie.”

“Of course you do. I gotta go. We can talk later,”

“When are we going to talk later?”

“When I get him to get up from the table. Again.”

Paul comes lumbering back over and flops down.

“Wrong car,” he says and goes back to eating his dinner.

Her eyes go from Paul to Mike.

“I am glad you two enjoyed everything. For dessert, well, wait,“

Another server comes over and puts her hand up to stop Mike’s dessert speech. “Hey Mike, sorry to bother you, I’m going home. Can you finish my tables?”

“Sure, you okay?”

“Yeah, just my back is killing me,” she says stretching and wincing, “After that guy ran into my car, I’m a mess.”

“Then why did you even come to work?” Mike asks in his best teleprompter voice.

“I’ve got bills. I can’t afford not to.” Her overplayed words are right out of a bad community theater.

“Ok, yeah, I got them. Go home, it’s cool.”

Mike turns back to the table.

“Yeah, Darlene got rear ended by some auto parts truck the other day. She’s been a mess.”

Paul is practically salivating as he looks beyond Mike and finds Darlene in the restaurant. Kelly has a “no way” look on her face as she sees this whole thing unfold.

“Could you excuse me a moment? Let me see if I can help her out some,” Paul says as he gets up and follows Darlene to the host stand.

“You are diabolical.” Kelly tells Mike.

“When he asked if you could excuse him, did you answer him? I didn’t hear you answer him.”

“I did not. And hey, where have you been?”

“Miss me?”

“A little, yes. Your wittiness was conspicuously absent from the table for a while. Devin came over and cleared our plates.”

“Devin? That bastard. I was on a break.”

“Well, he was kind of funny.”

“I hate that guy. I never should have taken a break. The truth is I think I was scared. Emotionally. Plus, Paul-not-Mike the mouthpiece was still in your life.”

“Hey, you were still seeing Grandma-behind-hot-girl. And don’t think I didn’t see you slowing down every time you walked by hot-girl.

“Well, I didn’t want to upset you, but I feel I need to tell you. I cleared her plates when you were in the bathroom.”

“What? That sounds right. Such a dog. You probably clear many plates. Five nights a week. And some lunches.”

“Nameless, faceless many. You let Devin clear yours. Practically right in front of me.”

They pause a moment,

“Wow our first fight.” Mike says with a smile.

“I think we did that well.” Kelly smiles back at him.

“So, Paul-not-Mike the ambulance chaser, are you gonna tell him about us? I mean we connected, found that spark, met each other’s parents, then I needed a break cause I was scared of a real relationship, kinda cheated on each other, had our first fight, but here we are still going strong. I think we have a shot.”

Kelly just shrugs her shoulders, laughing, “You are something else.”

“And did you give *him* the no sex talk?” Mike asks.

“No, no, just you.”

“Well, I don’t want to brag, but I have had many, many women give me the no sex talk.”

“Well, I will inform you, that just may have been a lapse in judgement on my part.”