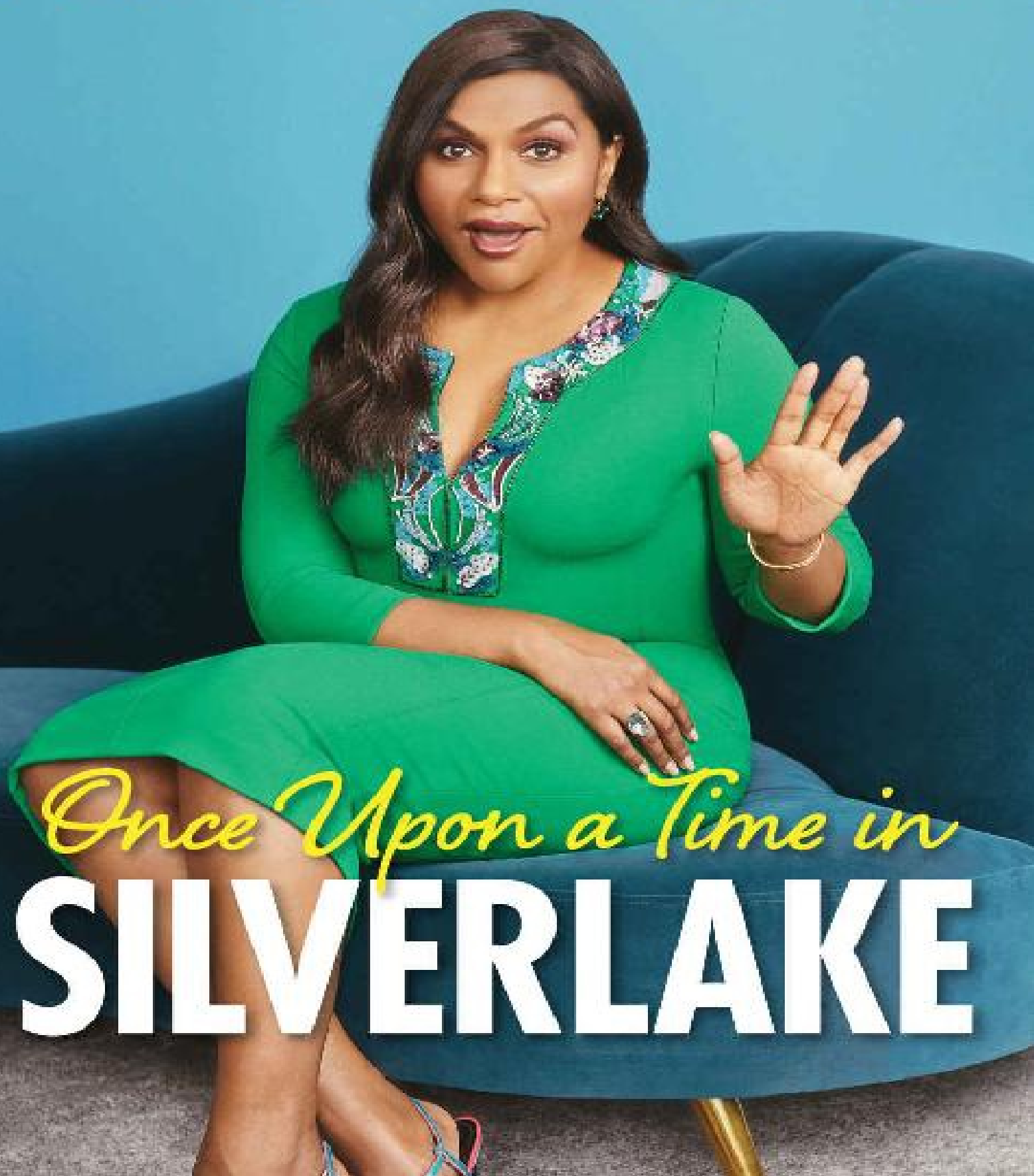


AMAZON ORIGINAL STORIES

MINDY KALING



Once Upon a Time in
SILVERLAKE

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SILVERLAKE

**NOTHING LIKE
I IMAGINED**

(Except for Sometimes)

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Generally when I tell stories about my life, they tie back to some lesson I learned or an observation I have about the larger truth of the world. But sometimes things happen to me and I don't think there is a lesson; it was just something really crazy. This is one of those stories.

In November 2017, I was driving with B.J. from Hancock Park to Silver Lake. It was a really warm November, which I know sounds like the name of a maudlin indie rock song. But it really was. It was all anyone would talk about. If you were getting gas or checking out at Target, a stranger making small talk could say, "Can you believe this heat?" and you would respond, "I know! I can't believe it! This late in the year?" while shaking your head in disbelief, and you would both leave thinking you had a great conversation.

So in this time of heat so alarming it rendered even trite conversations interesting, B.J. picked me up in his fancy car (this isn't a dig at him for having nice things—it becomes relevant later), and we headed to dinner across town. I was eight and a half months pregnant, and I was having a hard time. Los Angeles had turned into Dubai. Not in the fun, high-end shopping malls and massive outdoor waterpark way, but in the dangerously hot weather way. Having survived the prolonged LA summer, I was counting the days until the fall came to cool things off, only to find October and November spiking into the low eighties. I was sweating for two, and it wasn't pretty. Would there never be another winter? Was summer just how we lived now? Honestly, if someone had explained climate change to me in the context of how it would affect the comfort of my pregnancy, I would have been Greta Thunberg.

In addition to all this sweating, I'd spent eight months avoiding all my major food groups: sushi, cold cuts, soft cheese, and alcohol. To paint you a picture, before I was pregnant my lifestyle consisted largely of coming home from work, eating sushi I picked up from Whole Foods, and drinking a glass of rosé before passing out facedown on my bed. Simple pleasures. Now I was a back-sleeping, water-drinking, grilled-chicken-eating, miserable mess of a pregnant

woman. Smartly, B.J. knew I needed a night out and recommended Night + Market Song, a famous Thai street food restaurant in Silver Lake. I looked at the menu online, and I could eat *everything*. Not a soft, unpasteurized cheese in sight. I was in.

One of my favorite perks of being friends with B.J. is that he fully accepts a pretty annoying part of my personality: I don't have the patience to listen to podcasts, but I want someone *else* to listen to them and distill the best parts for me. And I don't just want it regurgitated; I want someone to dazzle me with a highly edited version of the podcast performed at the same level as, if not even better than, the original. I will give you six minutes to tell me the riveting gothic tale of a wrongfully imprisoned alleged murderer with a beginning, middle, and end. B.J. loves doing this for some reason. He is a great story(re)teller.

This time, he was telling me about the ten-part podcast series he had just listened to called *You Must Remember This* about Charles Manson's Hollywood. (I later listened to the entire podcast series because of the eerie events that follow. It's excellent and I highly recommend it.) As B.J. drove us through Koreatown, over the 101, and through the fading sunset of the East Hollywood hills, he painted a picture of Hollywood in 1969, and of Charles Manson. He told me stuff about Manson that I'd never heard, like how he had played the guitar pretty well and was preoccupied with becoming a pop star. B.J. explained that Charles Manson had befriended Dennis Wilson, one of the Beach Boys, and had taken over Wilson's house with some of his Manson "family" girls for a summer of drugs, orgies, and record-listening parties. By the time we parked on Sunset Boulevard, I was completely transfixed. When we got out of the car, B.J. was explaining how Charles Manson and Dennis Wilson had even recorded some of Manson's original music.

As he was putting money in the parking meter, we were interrupted.

"Hey, I know you!" someone shouted. We turned and looked. It was a man, a drifter. A drifter is different from a homeless person because a drifter is on a journey. The journey might be dangerous or might not make any sense, but there is a purpose. This man was white, in his early thirties, with shaggy blond hair, and he was very dirty. He was wearing tattered cargo shorts and a shirt the kind of gray that I wasn't sure was actually gray or had once been white but was so dirty, it now appeared gray. He walked toward us and stopped one foot away. It was so close my pregnant belly almost grazed him. He pointed his dirty finger at us. He whispered to us with meaning, "I know you!"

In Boston, where I grew up, drifters looked like regular people. But in LA, they have a different deal. More often than not, they came out here to make it in the music industry or show business, and then things went sideways. They were probably once the promising actors and singers of their hometowns, which is to say, now that things didn't work out, they're kind of disgusting-glamorous. They're like mottled, leathery versions of handsome movie stars you might know. This drifter, for example, was like an extremely worse-for-wear Seann William Scott, you know, Stifler in *American Pie*. Primed with stories of Charles Manson, I was not in the best place to receive a dirty white stranger in an un-gentrified part of LA. The hairs on my neck stood up.

"From *The Office*! Great job! Keep it up!" he said. We smiled and walked away. I was a little embarrassed that I had been so judgmental. This poor guy loved the misadventures of good old Michael Scott, and here I was thinking he was going to Helter Skelter us.

We shook it off and walked a few blocks to Night + Market Song. When we arrived, the lights were out and the door was locked. We checked their website, but there wasn't any announcement about it being closed. (This isn't the spooky part of the story. This is just a

normal, annoying part.)

Grumbling, we headed back to the car, talking about how unprofessional it was for a business to not abide by its own posted hours and, more importantly, where we should go instead. With each sweaty step, I became hungrier and hungrier. We walked a few blocks, and we saw what we thought was B.J.'s car, but we kept walking, because we saw the back of a man's head in the driver's seat. We naturally assumed it was another car that just looked similar. But after walking for another few minutes, we stopped. We definitely had not parked this far away. With my pregnancy waddle in mind, I would have insisted we park closer. Where was the car? That's when it dawned on both of us: the car with the strange man in it was B.J.'s car.

Here's where the type of car B.J. drives becomes relevant. It's one of those fancy cars that locks automatically a minute after you have walked away from it. Somehow, in the minute after we parked, someone had quickly slid into the driver's seat. As we approached, we saw who it was: dirty Seann William Scott, *The Office* fan. He didn't even notice us coming closer because he was doing something very strange. He was busy looking at B.J.'s laptop, *which he had taken out of a messenger bag and opened on his lap.*

We sprinted over to the car. B.J. whipped open the passenger seat door and instantly got in. "HEY, MAN. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?" he said very loudly and clearly, with just the right amount of "I'm not going to physically hurt you, but I'm thinking about it" in it. While B.J. did that, I hustled over to the driver's side, which faced the street; stood on busy Sunset Boulevard; and pressed myself against the door so the guy couldn't jump out and run away. For whatever reason, I wasn't scared at all. I was furious! How dare he? This dude was from a Harmony Korine movie. I was from a Nancy Meyers movie. This was my one night out, my respite from sweltering LA pregnant hell!

B.J. and I responded to the conflict so quickly and calmly it was odd, like we did this all the time. Like we knew exactly what to do if a strange criminal took over your personal space and we had a system. B.J. was confronting the man, but not in a way I had ever seen him. He did not yell. Instead, he loudly addressed him in a manner that was way scarier. He was Christian Bale's Batman all of a sudden. His voice dropped two registers and he growled: "TELL ME WHAT YOU TOOK."

The drifter, weirdly, did not seem thrown. "Oh hey, man!" he said amiably, quickly closing the laptop. He then put his hand on the handle of the driver's door to make a quick escape, but there I was, blocking his exit. He looked up at me, and I scowled at him over my enormous belly. Then we made deep eye contact. That's when I became terrified. I had looked into the drifter's beautiful, scary blue eyes and saw he was calculating how easy it would be to kill me. I guess that's what happens when you make eye contact with a criminal and he sees that you're the only impediment to his escape. What the hell was I doing? Too much TV watching had made me think I was Olivia Benson or some shit. I was very pregnant! With a baby! I kept pressing my body weight against the door but silently wanted B.J. to hurry up and resolve this.

B.J. grabbed his laptop and rummaged through his bag to see if anything was missing. The drifter turned to B.J. and said, earnestly, "It's so weird, man. It was like someone was telling me to get in the car. So I just followed that voice and went inside." Oh, so this really was like some Manson shit—what B.J. had just been telling me about! Creepy criminal Hollywood people didn't bother just Beach Boys.

An awkward (to say the least) few minutes went by while B.J. searched the car. Once he saw that nothing was missing, he nodded to me through the window. I stepped away from the driver's side door, making sure not to get hit by any oncoming traffic. The drifter popped out. I

joined B.J. back on the sidewalk. The drifter's energy was not that of an embarrassed criminal who had been caught mid-act. It was of a friendly, befuddled man on a plane who was accidentally sitting in your seat. Like, "Oops, I just happened to break into your car and go through your things. Could've happened to anyone!"

Then he said the eeriest thing of the night. He looked at us very seriously and said, "You should be more careful about your car. Anyone could just break in." As though this entire interaction was an elaborate plan he'd devised to teach us a valuable lesson about car security. "Be safe out there." Then he stepped onto Sunset, which was darkening into night. He looked back and gave us a little wave as he crossed the street.

We stood on the curb as he walked away. What should we do? Call the police and tell them a crime had *almost* happened? That a dirty drifter man who looked like Seann William Scott was entering cars and acting erratically like Charles Manson around Sunset Junction? It felt flimsy. So we did what made the most sense to two hungry writer-performers who had displayed uncharacteristic bravery on a Saturday night: we got in the car and went to Alimento. Another Silver Lake restaurant, but one with a valet.

Later, when I told this story, I was surprised at the parts people found most intriguing. My friend Ike, for example, thought the craziest part was that I ran into the street and pushed the door closed to trap the man inside. He didn't get how a pregnant woman would put herself in harm's way like that. To me, I think a pregnant woman is *more* likely to do stuff like that, because we feel protected by the extra human wrapped around our midsection. Nothing could possibly happen to me, I'm *pregnant* for God's sake! Ike then reminded me of Sharon Tate, to which I responded, "Oh, yeah. Shit."

I thought the craziest part was that the drifter didn't just open the car door, grab the messenger bag, and go. Had he done that, he could be on B.J.'s computer right now ordering an air fryer on Amazon Prime. But instead he settled into the driver's seat, opened the laptop, and sat there with his thoughts. As Generation Z says: "*Y tho?*" Did he really think he would crack the security code in the time it would take for us to have dinner? If so, then what was he going to do? Read some of B.J.'s writing and leave him scathing criticism to read when we returned from dinner?

I'm not sure that I'll ever know why drifter Seann William Scott did what he did. I like to think it's all related to Charles Manson somehow. Like in the unrelenting Los Angeles heat, another man was driven to insanity on Sunset Boulevard—just as I was when I ordered two entrées and dessert at dinner. It was too much, but at the time, I felt invincible.

About The Author



Photo 2020 by Mike Rosenthal

Mindy Kaling is an actor, writer, producer, director, and the author of two *New York Times* bestselling memoirs. She is the creator and executive producer of the Netflix original series *Never Have I Ever*, which is based partly on her teen years. She also created and starred in *The Mindy Project* and the Amazon Original film *Late Night*. Previously, she was a writer, producer, director, and costar of the Emmy Award–winning sitcom *The Office*.