


Hot this month Aussie drag queens, mooncakes, Talk Like a Pirate Day

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SEPTEMBER 2018



THE SURREAL THING

Call It a Comeback

MICHELIN STARS
ALIGN FOR
BUDAPEST'S
FOOD SCENE

West Side Story

EXPLORING
PHILLY'S MOST
COLORFUL
NEIGHBORHOOD

The Good Place star Kristen Bell
*juggles the afterlife, public life and
the messy realities of motherhood*

**"Being here is
like entering
this amazing
time warp"**

HOT RODDER KEVIN
CARLSON ON THE
RACE OF GENTLEMEN

The Good Place *star*

Kristen Bell is mastering

THE ART OF LIVING

by making time for her

family, fighting for what

she believes in and slurping

medicinal oregano oil

Words **DERRIK J. LANG**
Photography **MAARTEN DE BOER**



It's one of the

hottest days of the year in Southern California, and Kristen Bell is feeling it. Inside an abandoned office complex in sweltering Simi Valley, the actress is filming a scene for her quirky NBC comedy, *The Good Place*, one that requires her to repeatedly run past rows of cubicles clad in a pink sweater. The jumper is adorable, but it's not the ideal choice for someone whose afternoon consists of physical activity in a clammy office with no air conditioning.

To make matters worse, the 38-year-old actress is fighting a nasty cold, though you wouldn't know it looking at her. Between takes, Bell is all smiles with her co-stars, showing off her latest social media obsession on her phone: a guy nicknamed Brother Nature, whose shtick is to go around filming himself feeding woodland creatures. "I can't get enough of him," she says to William Jackson Harper, the actor who plays her *Good Place* soul mate, Chidi. "I love this guy."

A little later, Bell roots around in her purse for some relief, producing a bottle of oregano oil. "You can feel it burning everything in your throat," she says of the unpleasant-looking brown-and-yellow brew. She squirts the herbal oil on her tongue, then chases it with a mixture of ginger, turmeric, cayenne and lemon juice. "I'm a beast" she whispers before jumping back into the chase scene.

Bell is perhaps most famous for voicing plucky Princess Anna in the Disney megahit *Frozen*. (She's currently working on the sequel.) Her breakthrough role, though, came in 2004 as a modern-day Nancy Drew on the cult series *Veronica Mars*. The show was canceled three years later, but it's fondly remembered by its fans—and Bell herself. While contemplating what to do after a recent burglary at her home, she recalls thinking: "What am I supposed to say when I walk into the police station? 'Hello, I'm Veronica Mars. I'd like to report a crime.'"

It's the morning after *The Good Place* shoot, and Bell is nursing a green smoothie at a café near her home in Los Angeles, where she lives with her husband, the actor Dax Shepard, and their daughters, Lincoln and Delta. Dressed in a pair of blue jeans, a tangerine floral cut-out blouse and a pair of faux suede ballerina flats, she looks cooler and more comfortable than yesterday, despite the fact that she had a minor emergency during the morning school run. "One of the kids," she explains with a long-suffering smile, "was barfing in the classroom." >





Between sniffles and coughs, Bell acknowledges she has too much on her plate, but she's fine with that. "I'm lucky to have my attention pulled in a bunch of different areas," she says. "I always try to walk in other people's shoes. Yeah, I could've told *Frozen* to wait two more weeks for me, but they're on a deadline, and I try to be respectful of that. With the drive and hunger I have for life and work, I'm not willing to take it easy on myself."

Bell's main focus right now is the surrealist sitcom that had her running around that abandoned office space. In the show, which is entering its third season, she plays Eleanor Shellstrop, a woman accidentally sent to a heaven-like afterlife where it's impossible to curse and there's an endless supply of frozen yogurt. Eleanor is dishonest, shallow, abrasive and self-obsessed, but she is also a joy to watch, due in large part to the wry amusement Bell brings to the role. This ability to hit the right comic note has established the *House of Lies* and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* star as one of America's top comedic talents.

The Good Place's new season (premiering Sept. 27) opens with Eleanor and her pals—save for Ted Danson's immortal architect Michael and his Siri-like sidekick, Janet—back on Earth. "Michael and Janet are holding the joystick in the afterlife," Bell says, "and discovering how much they can meddle with our lives on Earth." That's all she will say about the forthcoming installment—and don't even think about asking why Eleanor was being chased around an office in a pink sweater.

When Bell was a teenager, she wouldn't have been pegged as a trailblazer. While attending Shrine Catholic High School in suburban Michigan, she asked her parents, who divorced when she was a toddler, to buy her a copy of the album *Betty* by the alt-metal band Helmet. She had no interest in the music; she wanted to hang the cover in her locker, thinking she'd come off as a bad girl and therefore be more popular. "I used to be paralyzingly codependent, to where I was a chameleon with any situation," she says. "I would agree with people and give them what they wanted—to a point."

This chameleon-like quality, however, would eventually come in handy. After high school, Bell studied acting at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, but dropped out after being cast in the Broadway musical adaptation of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Later, she moved to Los Angeles to pursue film and television work. In her first major role, she played the president's abducted daughter in filmmaker >



Bell's black suit throughout: Suit: **Armani**; Top: **Armani**; Black and red ties: **The Tie Bar**; Shoes: **Giuseppe Zanotti**; Earring: **Jennifer Zeuner**; Cocktail ring: **H.Stern**; Overcoat: **Michael Kors**; Anklet: **Jacquie Aiche**; Bowler hat: **Janessa Leone**



KRISTEN'S COMMANDMENTS

The Good Place
star's tips
for promoting
positivity

Think Happy Thoughts

"I learned that you imprint negative thoughts on your brain much quicker than you do positive ones.

Lately, if I have one negative thought, I will purposely say 10 positive things out loud. I just started making my kids do it. My 5-year-old was having an emotional day, and I told her she had to think of 40 positive things."

Treat Others Kindly

"We go down to the Glamis sand dunes in a motor home about four times a year. We usually bring friends and are out there with a very diverse group of people whom we may not align with politically. It's a polite reminder everyone is doing the best with what they have. You are allowed to disagree, but you have to treat them with respect."

Try Your Hardest

"The beautiful thing about playing Eleanor, who starts out as the most selfish person on Earth, is that she's trying to do better. It's very liberating. You can be set in your ways, but you can still grow and lead by example. To me, that is the most beautiful story you could tell. That's what everyone on Earth needs."

“I used to be paralyzingly codependent,



to the point where I was a chameleon.”





Suit: **Smythe**; Earrings:
Adornmonde;
Rings: **Adornmonde**

Previous spread: Dress:
Zimmermann (The Outnet);
Earrings: **Adornmonde**



David Mamet's *Spartan*, and guest starred on such critically acclaimed shows as *The Shield* and *Deadwood*.

Today, Bell doesn't have to try so hard to fit in. With her down-to-earth manner and quick wit, the two-time People's Choice Award winner has become a go-to guest host for the likes of Jimmy Kimmel and Ellen DeGeneres, and was the first-ever person selected to emcee a Screen Actors Guild Awards ceremony. She has also managed to avoid the social media melees that beleaguer many public figures. When asked how it feels to have achieved this level of popularity, Bell winces a little. "Well, it feels good," she says. "I'm not being honest if I don't say it feels great to be liked."

Mostly, though, Bell is just happy to be solidly employed, unmotivated by seeing her name appear at the top of the credits. She played the straight woman to Melissa McCarthy's wild bully in *The Boss* and an overworked mother in the *Bad Moms* films, in addition to her array of voiceover work for film, TV and video games. "It's an amazing gift to feel like I am a part of the entertainment industry," she says. "It's the easiest, most well-paid job on the planet."

This is not to say that Bell doesn't have outside interests. She is vigorously active in several causes—immigrant rights, mental health and animal rights among them—a trait she traces back to her unusually sensitive childhood. (She has been a vegetarian since age 11.) "I was the kid crying in the corner while other kids were killing bugs," she recalls. "One time, when I was 16, I stepped on a slug, cried for 20 minutes, then buried it in a matchbox and gave it a funeral service. My parents, of course, were like, 'Oh, she's going to have a lot of trouble in her life.' I've turned it into something that I really enjoy."

In 2014, Bell and Shepard launched their most personal campaign. Inspired by an anti-paparazzi bill backed by Halle Berry and Jennifer Garner, the couple sought to stop media outlets from publishing photos of celebrities' children. The rationale was that entertainment figures choose to live in the public eye; their offspring do not. "I thought nobody was going to listen to us," she says, "but you have to try." The pair met with photo agencies across Hollywood and petitioned celebrity friends to deny interviews to outlets that used images of children without their parents' consent. In response to the campaign, a majority of entertainment outlets vowed to cease using such photos.

"To us, it felt huge," Bell says. "It really only affects about 50 kids on the planet. However, this is what my husband says: Doctors work to cure cancer, and they also work to cure foot >

**A PLACE
IN THE SUN**
Kristen recalls
her favorite *Good
Place* chapters

“Category 55 Emergency Doomsday Crisis”

Season 1, Episode 5
Eleanor and Chidi host a couple who are experts in analyzing body language cues. “Being around someone you are utterly transparent in front of? That really got to me.”

“Michael’s Gambit”

Season 1, Episode 13
The episode featured one of Bell’s favorite lines of dialogue. “Eleanor looks at Chidi and says, ‘I was dropped into a cave, and you were my flashlight.’ I think that’s just a beautiful thing to say to someone.”

“Somewhere Else”

Season 2, Episode 13
An omnipotent judge played by Maya Rudolph decides the group’s fate. “I kept laughing so hard at the way she just casually asks, ‘Would anyone eat chips and guac if I put it out?’ She makes me so happy.”



fungus. This may be a foot fungus problem, but it is still a problem.”

By Hollywood standards, Bell and Shepard—the irreverent star of *Parenthood* and *Idiocracy*—have an unusually stable relationship. The pair have been together for 11 years, a longevity that Bell puts down to a willingness to confront issues head-on. “I think the reason people break up is because they don’t talk about taboo subjects,” she says. “The dialogue we have is incredibly open and honest, so nothing is really off the table. It can be a scary place to visit, but once you’re fully there, everything is comfortable.” She smiles and adds, “Whether we like it or not, we’re sticking together.”

Bell may have demonstrated a flair for comedy, but her roles aren’t all fun and games. In the Netflix dramedy *Like Father*, which began streaming last month, she plays a workaholic left at the altar, who winds up taking her honeymoon cruise with her estranged father (played by Kelsey Grammer), with all the awkwardness and soul-searching this implies. For Bell, though, the measure of an actor isn’t always found in moments of heightened emotion—an opinion echoed by her *Good Place* co-star Ted Danson.

“She’s so fast, nimble and bright,” Danson says of her work on the show. “That always comes through in her performances. She can do these double, triple, quadruple deliveries where the writers have written her a declarative statement that’s interrupted by a thought she muses on that comes back around—and she’s able to pull it off effortlessly, while I’m still trying to remember my lines.”

There is one serious ambition Bell harbors: directing a project of her own. She’s actively looking for the right opportunity—and the time, of course—to venture behind the camera. “I don’t usually start something unless I’m 120 percent confident that I can do it,” she says, taking a sip of her smoothie, “but I’ve been having this feeling lately that I’m seeing things in a different way, which is what you need as a director.” ➤

Stylist: Lindsey Dupuis
Makeup: Simone Siegl
Hair: Aviva Perea

Shot on location at
Kimpton La Peer Hotel
in West Hollywood, CA.



Catch up on
the past two
seasons of *The
Good Place*
on American
Airlines’
in-flight
entertainment

THE GOOD STUFF

Kristen's current inspirations

Books

Love Warrior and *Braving the Wilderness*
"When I'm having trouble, I look at the words of Glenn Doyle and Brené Brown to articulate my thoughts. Those two are my north stars."

Television

HBO's *Last Week Tonight*
"I go to church every Sunday: the church of John Oliver. It's our place of worship. I find that I need John Oliver in my life."

Destination

Beaches
Turks & Caicos
"It's like *Sandals* but for kids. You can drop your kids off at camp all day and sit on the beach. They have *Sesame Street* shows every night."

Music

Avett Brothers' *True Sadness*
"When I want to relax, I turn on Avett Brothers, and when I want to pump myself up, I listen to Motown."

Podcast

Armchair Expert
"I really do love my husband's podcast. Is it lame to say you really do love your husband's podcast?"



During her two decades in show business, Bell has quietly soaked up knowledge, treating sets like schools and colleagues like professors. "My director and producer friends," she says, "see me over their shoulder all the time, asking questions about the framing of a shot and why we are cutting from one thing to another." It doesn't hurt that she lives with a director: Shepard has helmed a number of TV and film projects, including his 2017 buddy cop comedy, *CHiPs*. "It's not an easy job," she says. "It is managing 120 kids, not two." You do not get the sense that she is intimidated by the prospect.

Despite her ambition, Bell is clearly not the type to sit around worrying where her first Oscar will come from, or how seriously she is taken by the critics. "To be blunt," she says, "the artistry of the job is like third or fourth on my list." For her, work-life balance—and avoiding jerks—is paramount. "You know how many times I'm on this planet? One time. That's how many times. I don't want to be around people who are not kind, and I don't want to do a six-month-long movie in China. I have a three- and a five-year-old. They are way more important to me than just adding another notch to my belt." **AW**