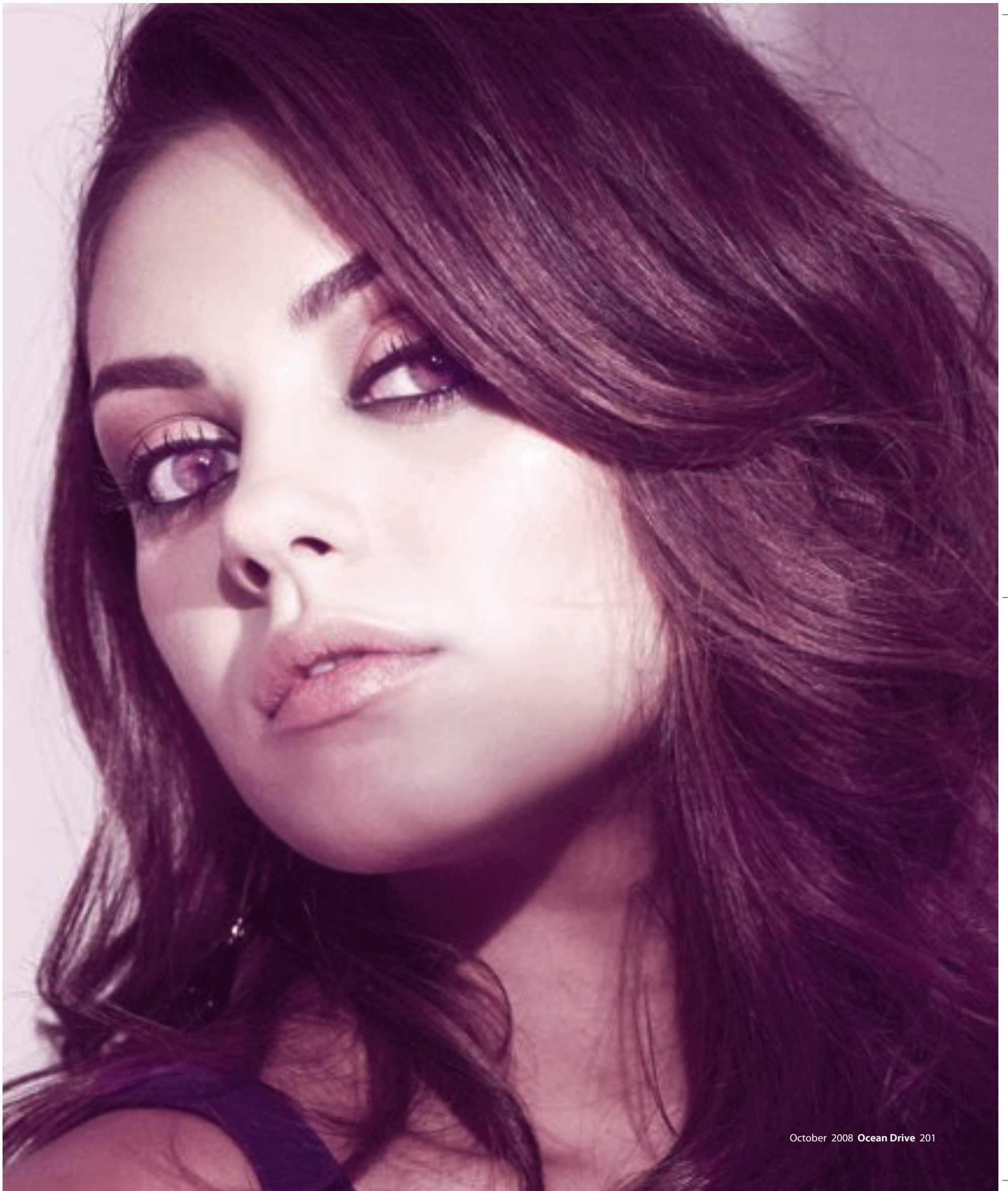


# Mila Feels the *Payne*

*She's got a hit sitcom behind her and A-list films on the horizon (including **Max Payne**, which opens this month), but **Mila Kunis** doesn't seek celebrity, believe in plastic surgery or even care what you think. Maybe that's why she's one of Hollywood's fastest-rising stars*

BY E.C. GLADSTONE  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY KURT ISWARIENKO



## MILA KUNIS

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ila Kunis is moving. She's had enough of West Hollywood—the traffic, the attitudes, the celebrities who have ruined her nail salon and her gym, and most of all, the paparazzi, who sit outside her house waiting for...what? A trip to the dry cleaners? Walking the dog? Her boyfriend taking out the trash?

"Makes me so angry," she says with a barely throaty rasp. "So many people care about your personal life

over your talent. I don't live to be famous. I don't live to be recognized. I never want to be on the cover of *Us Weekly*. I truly am telling you: I despise this aspect.

"There used to be mystery, mystique" about the lives of film-land folks, she rants. Now, "There's a war going on, and we're still [asking], 'What did Britney Spears have for breakfast?'"

Anyway, this is kind of a big deal. Mila moving, I mean. Because the tough little cookie (who you know from *That '70s Show*, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, and now *Max Payne*, which opens Oct. 17th) is practically a West Hollywood native, having lived here 17 of her 25 years, ever since emigrating with her family from the Ukraine.

Wearing a vintage Bowie shirt and tourniquet-tight jeans, Kunis is meeting me at Cake and Art, a WeHo staple of sorts, which—aside from having some of the best cupcakes in this cupcake-obsessed town—specializes in XXX-rated party pastry. Though she suffered a bout with food poisoning the night before ("Sorry if I'm a little quiet," she says), Mila cannot resist getting a personal lesson in cake frosting from Kody, the manager, who also happens to be one of the country's preeminent Britney Spears impersonators. This is the world that f-bomb-loving Mila is totally comfortable in. "Absofuckinlutely!" she says.

But we're not quite done with the rant. "According to 'those' magazines, I've been married, I've been divorced and I've been pregnant," she says with a bitter laugh. But it's none of the above, in fact. It is true, however, that along with her dogs Shorty and Audrey, her other housemate is long-time boyfriend Macaulay Culkin.

"We don't talk about it," to the press, Kunis insists. "We've been together going on seven years—because we don't talk about it." Nor will you often see them walking red carpets together. "It's already more high profile than I want it to be," Mila moans, insisting they have a "good, healthy relationship," and telling me warmly that they met "in New York on a beautiful, beautiful Spring day" before closing the subject.

Well, almost. Kunis admits Culkin shares her unhealthy obsession with videogames, particularly *World of Warcraft*, which they had to swear off earlier this year because their circle of friends realized it was actually taking over their lives. "There's no such thing as 'just five minutes,'" she says with a laugh. "It got to a point where I was so excited to get home, not to see my family, but to play WOW." Nevertheless, she's looking forward to *Spore* (and may be addicted already by the time you read this) and still enjoys Mario Party.

Ironically, she isn't much a fan of the *Max Payne* game but enjoyed learning to shoot real weapons in order to play an assassin in the movie and wrestle Mark Wahlberg. That isn't to say she trains vigorously for every role. Between bites of chocolate-on-chocolate cupcake, Kunis chuckles about guzzling mai tais and something called a "monkey's lunch" on the beach while *Forgetting Sarah*

**"SO MANY PEOPLE CARE ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL LIFE OVER YOUR TALENT. I DON'T LIVE TO BE FAMOUS. I DON'T LIVE TO BE RECOGNIZED."**

*Marshall* co-star Kristen Bell worked her body out to perfection during the Oahu filming. "The first two weeks, for sure, whenever she did yoga I was right there. And then I was like, 'Eh, I get it.'"

What concerned her more was rising to the challenge of improv comedy in the Judd Apatow film, much like she had to in her next film, Mike Judge's *Extract*, with Jason Bateman and Ben Affleck. "I play a kleptomaniac psychopath, a pathological liar. And...hilarity ensues."

Despite her candid demeanor ("I'm pretty much an open book"), Kunis can be a little evasive, even argumentative. When it's pointed out that she doesn't smile a lot in photos—obviously touching a nerve—she argues to the contrary, complains about people who fake a smile all the time, makes a point of grinning widely in the pic we take together, then finally admits she has a cracked, discolored front tooth. Her other imperfection, a disease in her right eye that occasionally discolors the iris, is kept under control by steroids.

"I have nothing fake about me," she insists. "Not one single thing. I will never. I don't have a boob job, I don't have extensions, I don't have fake lashes. Do I wish I had bigger tits and an ass? Absolutely! If it makes you feel better about yourself on the inside I see nothing wrong with it. But I am 100 percent happy with what God gave me." Still, Kunis has declared a moratorium on *Maxim*-type photo spreads—not in protest of her slipping down the "Hot 100"

## ALL WORK, SOME PLAY

What was the best part of working on *Max Payne* for Mila Kunis? "I got to put on leather pants every day and go in and kick some ass," she says. "I loved that I wasn't the damsel in distress, that 'poor-me' girl who needs some guy to save her. There's one scene in which [Mark Wahlberg's character] gets wounded, and I run in with my MK5 and shoot the bad guy."

Indeed, Kunis delights in the idea that her *Payne* character rocks a badass look, an assassin named Mona Sax who carries out her assignments in a leather Balenciaga coat and Christian Louboutin shoes—"when you're an assassin you can afford the good stuff, right?" she says. It also doesn't hurt that the role couldn't be more different than her last outing, in the Judd Apatow-directed comedy *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*. "I wanted to work with Judd for a long time; I

met him for *Knocked Up*, and that time it just didn't work out," Kunis remembers. "This time he called me in for the table read, and I really wanted it. Six months later, I got the phone call. It was two months in Hawaii; you couldn't ask for a more amazing experience."

Kunis is currently shooting *Extract*, a comedy written and directed by Mike Judge that also stars Jason Bateman, Ben Affleck



With Mark Wahlberg in *Max Payne*.

and Kristen Wiig of *Saturday Night Live*. "Mike is so great, and I was a true, true fan of *Office Space*, so I basically told him, 'Anything you want me to do, I'm there,'" Kunis says. "So far it's been an incredible experience and really collaborative. There are no egos involved."

Ultimately Kunis is keenly aware that each script choice has to be ever more carefully considered. "When you're young you're not really picky, but when it becomes a career choice, you have to make decisions that you're going to be proud of," she says. "I'm much pickier than maybe I should be in my position, but I only want to work with people I admire and from whom I can learn something." Thanks in part to *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, and not unlike her role in *Max Payne*, Kunis is enjoying the chance to, quite simply, kick some ass. "[*Sarah Marshall*] let people see me outside the light of *That '70s Show*," she says. "I still have to go in and audition, but at least I'm meeting with people who have an open mind. And all you can ask for is that opportunity."

—Laurie Brookins



Dress by **Bill Blass** available at Neiman Marcus.

# MILA KUNIS



Dress by **Prada** available at Prada, Bal Harbour. Shoes by **Versace** available at Versace, Bal Harbour. Ring by **Kara Ross** available at Bloomingdale's, Aventura Mall.

204 Ocean Drive October 2008



## MILA KUNIS



Draped dress with floral accents by **Marchesa** available at Neiman Marcus, Bal Harbour.

Opposite page: Dress by **Etro** available at Etro, Coral Gables. Necklace by **Marni** available at Saks Fifth Avenue, Bal Harbour. Ring by **Kara Ross** available at Bloomingdale's, Aventura Mall.

**Photographer represented by** Opus.

**Styled by** Tara Swennen/The Wall Group.

**Digital tech is** Jeff Gunthart/Raw Capture.

**Photo assistant is** Billy Harnist.

**Produced by** Mike Shahin/Opus.

**Hair by** Mara Roszak/Magnet LA.

**Makeup by** Rachel Goodwin/Magnet LA.



lists ("Seriously, where do you think I went wrong in my career?" she cracks) but just because, "It's time to move on. My dad's like, 'Okay, we get it, put some clothes on.'"

Kunis says people already look at her differently at 25. But they may just be doing the math in their heads, trying to figure out how she could have eight seasons of *That '70s Show* under her belt. As has been oft reported, Kunis fibbed about her age when auditioning—claiming to be 18 and managing to score the role of 14-year-old Jackie when she was actually only 14 herself. "It was eight years of my life that sculpted me," Kunis says, admitting the end was bittersweet.

"There was so many things I went through on that show as a girl," she says, although she insists she never watched an episode after the first season and hasn't since. "Are you fuckin' crazy? No. I don't need to see myself going through puberty." On the other hand her parents, who live across the street, practically TiVo it daily and have a shrine erected, Kunis jokes.

She is obviously close to them and to her older brother, Mike, an entrepreneur with a biochemistry background. In fact, one of Mila's happiest times was traveling to Korea with him, where apparently no one had seen *That '70s Show*. "I took the subway, I went to the mall, I went shopping, I was running around by myself and I was safe. It was so incredibly freeing." She also loves Disneyland, enjoys "getting pampered" at spas as often as possible, and waxes lyrical about a recent trip to Key West. "It's really fuckin' cute, the water was beautiful, and they had really great crab, great fish. I loved it."

She's also excited about Halloween, which will find her and Culkin not going out—but in a good way: "We do murder-mystery dinners every year. It's really fun. We get a group of 14 to 20 people, give people their characters beforehand, everyone dresses in costumes. Last year I was Morticia Addams. I still have the dress."

Not long ago she would've been happy doing just about anything but acting. At 19, she says, "I wanted nothing to do with this industry—hated every aspect of it. I was going to go to college. I wanted to be a teacher." Actually, Kunis did attend classes at Loyola Marymount for a time, but then, "I realized I enjoyed doing what I do, minus all the other bullshit that came along with it."

"When you're young you want to please people," she explains. "You want to please people you don't know, so that the stranger on the street says 'good job!' because that's what matters. And at a certain point you've got to realize that's not what matters. What matters is you being happy with what you did."

Today, she's perfectly comfortable saying, "I'm not 'industry.' I'm not gonna make an album. I'm not going to come out with a fuckin' clothing line. It's not who I am, and people are fully aware of it."

On the other hand, the immigrant is fully aware that she's living "the American dream, right?" At least, that is, when asked about the irony of someone who learned English as a second language—supposedly from watching *The Price Is Right*—now being a well-compensated voice actor as Meg on *Family Guy*.

Where will she go from here? Says Mila, as she hops back in her black Lexus, "I don't fuckin' know. I'll let you know when I get there."

One thing is for sure: It will definitely be in a different zip code. 📍