

Ryan Reynolds Is Exactly Like You

**(Except that
he's been
married to
two stunning
women, and
he's rich
and famous.)**

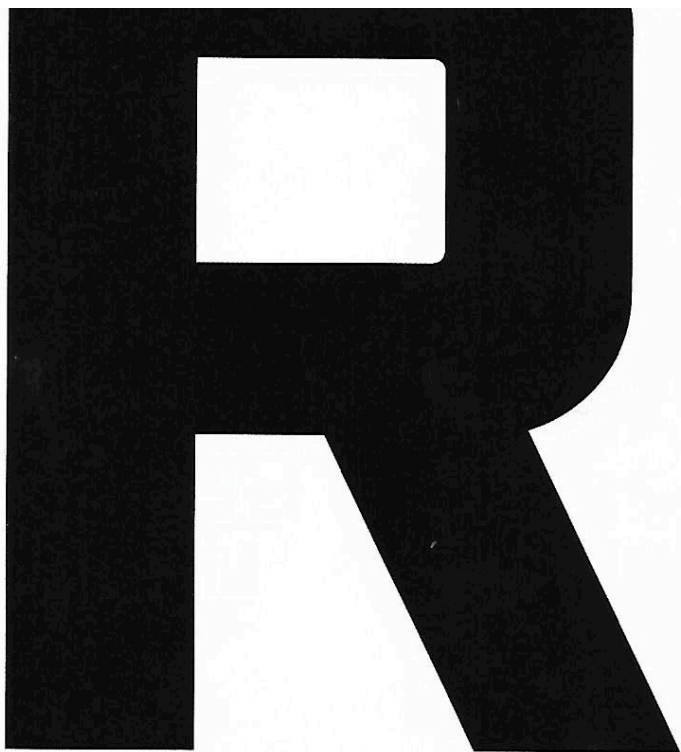


▼
By Eric Spitznagel

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**Photographs by
Ture Lillegården**

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RYAN REYNOLDS'S FACE LOOKS LIKE A BADLY BRUISED SCROTAL SAC.

Those are his words, not ours. Actually, if you want to get literal about it, his exact words are “an ancient, deep-fried, badly bruised scrotal sac.” And from our vantage point, that’s an accurate description. As for the rest of his body, it’s not faring much better. His hands are covered in blistering skin and brown spots. His neck is sprouting carbuncles. His feet are reminiscent of a diabetic Gollum’s. Or, as Reynolds sums up his general appearance, “I look like somebody who’s had sex with pure radiation.”

It’s strangely satisfying to see the actor in this state. It levels the playing field, at least a little.

This is a guy who gets a lot of attention for being easy on the eyes. Women love him. Some of the women who love him are famous. Like Blake Lively, the blonde stunner he first met on the set of 2011’s *Green Lantern*, a superhero flick that flickered out prematurely. He married her about two years later, so by now he’s seen her naked, like, a bunch of times.

So it’s nice to see *People*’s 2010 Sexiest Man Alive like this, lounging in his trailer in a sweat suit and Crocs, like an old, hairless man waiting for a bowel movement, his best days long behind him.

Except none of it is real. Reynolds’s face has been deranged by prosthetic makeup. He’s in Vancouver, his hometown, for a few reshoots of *Deadpool*, his latest attempt at headlining a superhero movie.

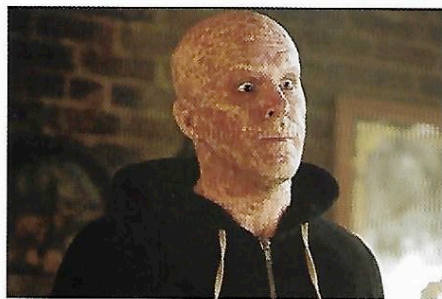
Even if you can accept this repellent Reynolds at face value, it’s hard to feel superior. Something about him is just so damned... relatable.

“Relatable” is not a word usually associated with big movie stars who have hot wives and gigantic bank accounts. But that’s not the case with Reynolds. He exudes normality. If there’s any ego there, it’s well concealed. You try to remind yourself not

to believe any of it. He’s an actor, and all actors are emotional manipulators. But within minutes of meeting him, your cynicism is gone and it’s like you’re having beers with an old college pal.

Which is to say it gets very immature very fast.

At one point he mentions that his *Deadpool* makeup takes an hour and a half to remove, followed by a soak in a hot bathtub back at his hotel while the remnants of the prosthetics slowly dissolve and slough sickly off his body.



Sexiest Man Alive?

Reynolds was *People* magazine’s “It” guy back in 2010. But he let himself go for his *Deadpool* role. (No word on how Blake Lively liked it.)

MH Well, obviously that’s where this interview should be happening.

REYNOLDS Absolutely. We’re doing that, right? You’re coming back with me?

Sure. And maybe we pop open a bottle of char-donnay?

We’ll smoke a couple of stogies, listen to some Nana Mouskouri, light a few candles.

We’ll need a lot of candles.

Hundreds of candles. Like that Police video for “Wrapped Around Your Finger.” And what are your thoughts on some gentle, cordial foot rubbing?

For you or...?

I’m the one getting the massage. I want you to use some olive oil, really dig your fingers in. You know anything about reflexology? Where you hit certain pressure points and it’s like a map to your brain?

What kind of reaction are you looking for exactly?

I want you to find that spot on my foot where you press it in a certain way, and you’re like “Aaaand you’re peeing.”

We’re not familiar with that spot.

Wouldn’t that be an amazing superpower? Knowing where to press on someone’s neck to make them immediately urinate.

That’s a great premise for a superhero movie.

Totally. Just a guy who walks up to bad guys, touches them on their pressure points, and says, “Aaaand you’re peeing.”

You’ve got the superhero catchphrase already.

“Aaaand you’re peeing.” Just you wait—every kid in America is going to be saying that line next summer.

Reynolds has a reputation for being guarded about his personal life. But he’s not bashful today. He tells stories about his wife, Blake Lively, the former *Gossip Girl* star who sets off a TMZ frenzy whenever she appears in a bikini, and how she’s “basically a human GPS. I remember being in Nashville with her, and she’s telling me, ‘Just take your third right and go down that little alleyway, and then left at the end of the block, and there’s a gas station.’ And I was just, ‘How do you know that? You’ve been here one day. What sort of dark magic flows through you?’”

On the topic of his daughter, James, who turned 1 year old in December, he’s even less reticent.

“During those first six months, it’s amazing that you find a way to keep going,” he says. “Just the lack of sleep, and the hallucinations. Fuck peyote. You want to trip balls? Have a kid and see what it’s like to be awake for a month straight. You’ll have moments where you’re like, ‘Did I really ride a unicorn to work? I’m pretty sure I didn’t, but I don’t know. Was Willie Nelson cradling my testicles this morning? It probably wasn’t him, but let me check his tour schedule just to be sure.’”

He’s hallucinating all this, yes, but he’s grappling with genuine anxiety, the kind you don’t



Ryan's Secrets to Success

NEVER COMPLAIN

"Even if I've been in a gym for two hours before a 17-hour day on a movie set, I never bitch about it. Get your sleep when you get your sleep."

BE PUNCTUAL

"What you're telling people when you're late is that their time doesn't mean a thing to you. And it sends a real bad message right away."

TRY LISTENING

"If someone is saying something that you're opposed to on a molecular level, forget about your argument and just go into their head for a second."

RESPECT EVERYONE

"When I'm making a movie, I make sure that every member of the crew feels included. I'll change a line in the script just to make Doug the gaffer laugh."

**The Real
(and Twisted)
Tweets of
Ryan Reynolds**

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

"I'd walk through fire for my daughter. Well, not fire, because it's dangerous. But a super humid room. But not too humid, because my hair."

BE BLUNT

"If I were to become a life coach, the first thing I would do is let all my clients know they've just hired a life coach, so it's already too late."

START EARLY

"Love writing nursery rhymes for my daughter. Her favorites are 'Sunshine Cuddle Time!' and 'Everyone You Know Will Eventually Die.'"

GO ALL IN

"Call me old-fashioned, but sending a dick pic is truly disgusting and lazy. Real love means sending a nice bouquet of penises."

TELL THE TRUTH

"Nothing better than spending an entire morning staring into my beautiful baby daughter's eyes and whispering, 'I can't do this.'"

really understand until there's a tiny human being depending on you for survival. That kind of responsibility can do weird things to a guy's head.

"I still check on her in the middle of the night and put my fingers under her nose just to make sure she's still breathing," he says. "Is that insane? I feel like it might be a little bit insane."

We assure him it's not insane, and he smiles. "Thank you for saying that," he says. "It's been a freaky year. I need all the encouragement I can get."

He's not just talking about his daughter. He recently lost his father, James, who passed away after a 20-year battle with Parkinson's. (And yes, his daughter is named after her grandfather.) That's part of the reason he's back in Vancouver.

"I got to say goodbye to him," Reynolds says. "I got here while he was still conscious, and had some pretty valuable time with him." He and his mother and brothers—he's the youngest of four boys—buried the family patriarch less than 24 hours before he sat down with us.

"We had a deeply complicated relationship," he says of his dad, "and it leaves behind some questions that are still being answered. Not just about him but, you know... how I'm trying to get better at being a dad and a husband and a man."

Forget the hot wife, the movie career, and the famous abs. Reynolds is facing down the challenges that every man, sooner or later, has to contend with. Parents die, children are born, and one day you wake up a middle-aged grownup who has to pretend he knows what he's doing.

Reynolds, who'll turn 40 in October, is reluctant to reflect on the lessons of four decades. "There's nothing worse than a celebrity talking about life in a unilateral way, like his experience is the same for everyone," he says. "I would rather punch myself in the dick for 45 minutes than be that guy."

But we got it out of him anyway.

Success Doesn't Require Crazy Risks

Reynolds played football in high school, and he played it hard. He ended up with a few concussions—"a dangerous amount of concussions," he says. And never got medical treatment for them.

"When you're growing up in a family without a lot of money and four boys, it can't always be, 'Let's go see a specialist, see if you're okay,'" says Reynolds. "If you got hurt, you were tough about it. It became a mantra for us: 'Just walk it off.'"

There was also a part of him that wanted to please his father, a cop and former boxer, who

liked the idea of his youngest son being a competitor so fierce that something as trivial as multiple concussions wouldn't keep him off the battlefield.

"I learned discipline from my father," Reynolds says. "Not in terms of corporal punishment, but being determined in whatever you do."

His dad wasn't as thrilled when the youngest Reynolds gave up sports for acting. "He didn't really understand it," Reynolds says. But just because he wasn't taking as many blows to the head doesn't mean he wasn't willing to put himself through physical hell to get what he wanted.

When he landed a small role in *Blade: Trinity*, a 2004 vampire thriller, Reynolds was a comic actor best known for the hard-partying college comedy *National Lampoon's Van Wilder*, which didn't actually find an audience until it landed on video. But with *Blade* he decided to transform himself by sculpting the body of a movie star.

That involved three-hour workouts and six to eight meals a day. "I remember thinking, 'This would be such a perfect time to die,'" he says. "At the time, it seemed like a protracted hell that would never end." That was a decade ago. Now, at 39, he sees fitness as a part of his life, not as punishment.

"I get depressed if I don't move," he says. "So for me, that's enough. I don't necessarily need to have 400 pounds on my back in the squat rack and then take a picture of myself and send it out to my Twitter followers: 'Part of the 400-pound club today! I like to hike and go biking, that kind of thing. Get outside, move my body, get some fresh air pumping through my lungs. That's my idea of a workout now.'"

He's also trying new things, like warming up. "I never did stuff like that back in my 20s," he admits. "But I'm that guy now. I'm the guy doing calisthenics. I'm doing jumping jacks and deep knee bends. I work out like a British person."

He's used that same take-it-easy approach with movie stunts. "I've done things to my body, mechanically, that I'll never do again," he says. "I've done stunts that I shouldn't have done 10, 11, 12 times. I've broken a ton of bones on sets."

He broke his neck while filming the 2012 thriller *Safe House* and vows he'll never put himself in that position again. "You realize you can do this without hurting yourself to prove your worth," he says. "That was a nice revelation. There's a qualified professional who looks just like me called a stuntman, and he can give it a crack as well."

Humor Is Funnier with a Purpose

Reynolds has a great story about the day his daughter was born. And it involved him doing something very, very inappropriate.

"It's evidently not very easy giving birth," he says. "I have a tremendous respect for that process, and I hope to repeat it many times in my life. I just wanted to..." He pauses, looking for the right words. "Take some of the pressure off."

He's right about childbirth being stressful—definitely for the mother but also for the dad. You're not sure how you can help, other than holding your wife's hand and offering encouragement. But Reynolds came up with a plan: He was going to make his wife laugh. In the delivery room, surrounded by

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“I learned discipline from my father. Not in terms of corporal punishment, but being determined in whatever you do.”

doctors and nurses, with Lively huffing and puffing, Reynolds did something that nobody was expecting.

"I jammed Marvin Gaye's 'Let's Get It On,'" he says. "It was a really bad time to do it. She hasn't let me forget about that one. But it's an impossible song to ruin, as I've found out, cause she still loves it. But now, when it comes on, she can only think of crowning."

Reynolds has always been a funny guy, but in recent years, he's learned how to be funny with a purpose. It's part of the reason he's held out so long for the chance to make *Deadpool*.

For non-fanboys, the Deadpool character is a maniacal mercenary with accelerated healing powers and a twisted sense of humor. Being immortal has made him a little nuts. He's like Spider-Man but with the emotional maturity of the Joker.

Reynolds played Deadpool before, in a brief scene in 2009's *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, but there were no plans to give the character a movie of his own. It didn't help that Reynolds starred in *Green Lantern*, another movie about a hero in a skintight costume that bombed and bombed hard.

But Reynolds refused to give up on the project. "I've likened it to a terrible relationship," he says. "It's something I needed to do. Because I really identified with this character."

And not because he has a soft spot for vigilantes or for wearing clothes that leave little to the imagination. "I understand the idea of filtering pain through a prism of comedy," Reynolds says. "I think this character does that quite well. He obviously takes it too far. He wakes up in the morning exclusively to annoy everyone around him. But for your average civilian like me, I think there's something really relatable about that idea, that there's something to be learned by taking life a little less seriously."

He takes a moment to consider this.

"Laughing can serve you in those dark moments," he says, "and even help you crawl your way back out."

Reynolds is a master at using humor as catharsis. He's quick to joke about anything that makes him uncomfortable, even his infant daughter's inevitable sexual maturity. "We've had the talk already," he says. "Which frankly went right over her tiny head. The great thing about having the sex talk now is that she can't say I didn't do it. Because I recorded it."

He also addressed the grim medical realities of aging. "I finally had my prostate checked. And I was really thankful that I taught my asshole to whistle before the doctor stuck his finger in there. The look on his face was priceless."

Humor is a tempting refuge when you've just buried a parent and the weight of loss can seem too much to bear. You'll say things to well-wishers that perhaps aren't entirely accurate.

REYNOLDS My father was swallowed alive by his own anus. It was a terrible way to go.

MH Like a snake swallowing its own tail?

Yes, absolutely. It was really horrific to see anyone stretch that far.

And then just disappear.

That was the worst part. He just evaporated, and became thousands of bats.

We laugh way too hard, like you laugh when somebody you love is taken away and you weren't ready to lose him yet. That laughter is, of course, therapeutic, in ways you couldn't imagine until you actually need therapy.

"In my dad's dying moments, we were making him laugh," Reynolds says. "We were all in there together, me and my brothers, just joking with him. And of course we end up busting each other's chops. I recommended that the doctor raise Dad's dose of Dilaudid in order to make my other brother more tolerable."

Reynolds smiles, like it's a warm, fuzzy memory. And maybe it is.

"It wasn't a bad way to go," Reynolds says. "If I could have the same death as my father, I would do it right now."

“In my dad’s last moments, we were making him laugh. We were all in there together, me and my brothers, joking with him.”

You Don't Need All the Answers

We get to talking, as men of a certain age sometimes do, about what unbelievable, self-involved assholes we were in our 20s.

"At 23 I was in an existential crisis," says Reynolds. This was around the time he was costarring in the horribly titled ABC sitcom *Two Guys, a Girl and a Pizza Place*, his first taste of semi-success. (He was getting paid, but not exactly recognized on the streets.)

"When you're that age, everything is so huge and heavy and important," he says. "Except of course it's not. But you feel the weight of life anyway. You're just this big ball of pompous, arrogant insecurity."

Something happens when you put a few decades on your life's time sheet. One, everything gets more complicated. Exhaustingly so. And two, you're not as stressed-out by the details anymore. It seems like a contradiction, but Reynolds insists it's true.

When he had no money, no sustainable career, no family obligations, and no one approaching a woman like Blake Lively by his side, he says he was "gripped in a state of pure anxiety 24-7." But when life took a turn for the serious, when he began juggling responsibilities that would have crushed him at 23, his shoulders finally loosened.

"When my daughter was born, my first thought was, 'Oh yeah, I can do this,'" says Reynolds. "It's not that I felt ready or that I knew exactly what I was doing. The exact opposite. I had a cactus when I was in my 20s, and I killed it. A cactus! If I couldn't handle that responsibility, how can I handle what my life has become now?"

Reynolds wants to be the sort of parent who makes it up as he goes along. He wants to do the same with his marriage and career. What's in his future? He'll find out when it gets here.

"There are so few surprises left in life," he says. "We've gotten so addicted to knowing. It's the Google generation. We want the answer to everything right now. Every little piece of knowledge has to be instantly accessible. You can't even have a passing thought like, 'Wait, who sang 'St. Elmo's Fire' again?' You just have to..." He rips his cellphone from his pocket and violently taps on the screen. "John Parr! I knew it! Gotcha!"

There's a comfort, Reynolds says, in not knowing, in accepting that you don't have all the answers, and not letting the anxiety of that suck you in like an all-consuming anus.

"The best directors I've worked with, they all have the same thing in common," says Reynolds. "They're the first to say, 'I don't know.' If you ask them, 'How are we actually pulling off this movie?' they'll just shrug and go, 'I have absolutely no idea.' I think that's a sign of strong character. I want to raise my

daughter like that as well. I'm going to admit when I'm clueless, and I'm going to ask people for help when I don't know the answer to something."

REYNOLDS Speaking of parenting, are we going to watch *Field of Dreams* tonight?

MH Um... I guess we could. Like right now?

No, I mean when I'm taking my makeup-dissolving bath and you're giving me a foot massage.

Oh yeah, sure, we could do that. Why *Field of Dreams*?

It's the best movie I've ever seen about being a father. I am a blubbery, weeping, shivering mess by the end of that movie.

Because of the plot, or all the chardonnay we'll be drinking?

Let's make it white wine spritzers. It feels more professional. We'll throw in a few pills. Who knows what'll happen, right?

Wait, what kind of pills are we talking about here?

I don't know. Mystery pills. Let's find out together.

Um...

Weren't we just talking about this? Stop being so obsessed with knowing everything, man! This isn't really what we signed up for.

Oh, so that's the part you have a problem with? The foot massage, the bath by candlelight, watching *Field of Dreams*—that's all fine by you. But I incorporate a few randy pills and suddenly you're out the door?

For the record, we never got around to giving Reynolds that bath time foot massage. Which is probably for the best. Eventually a production intern came to whisk him away; we'd been holed up in his trailer for too long, and the *Deadpool* director wanted to shoot a few scenes before morning.

"Sorry," Reynolds says, pointing to his testicle face. "Duty calls."

We'd almost forgotten about the makeup and that he was here to make a movie, not just to talk with us all night about death and parenting and the freedom that comes with admitting that life can scare you shitless.

We don't want this to be one of those sycophantic magazine profiles that insist a celebrity is just like you. But sorry, Ryan Reynolds is just like you. Not in the ways you wish—the ridiculous abs, and the wife everyone wants to see naked, and the adoration of millions of strangers. He's like you in the ways that matter.

As Reynolds walks us to the door, he reaches out and touches our shoulder, and it feels like he's about to say something profound. He rubs a finger lightly across our arm. "Aaaand you're peeing." ■

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