

A THIRD FACE

My Tale of Writing, Fighting, and Filmmaking

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WITH Christa Lang Fuller AND

Jerome Henry Rudes

APPLAUSE
THEATRE & CINEMA BOOKS

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by Samuel Fuller

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Cut to thirty years later. I was meeting one of my lawyers for lunch at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. I arrived early, walked up to the bar, and ordered a Bloody Mary. Somebody tapped me on my shoulder. I turned around. An elegant woman stood there smiling at me.

"I remember you," she said. "Do you remember me?"

I looked at her lovely face and couldn't place it. I shook my head.

"Corner of Ninety-seventh Street and Broadway," she said.

I suddenly remembered. Dotty, the girl who got out.

"I told my husband that you had ethics," she said.

Her dapper elderly husband walked over with their daughter, already a young woman. The husband was a well-known lawyer for the mob. The daughter looked exactly like her mother had when I'd met her in the early thirties. We gibble-gabbed, and I was careful not to say the wrong thing. We said good-bye, and she gave me that beautiful, mysterious smile before I turned and walked away.

Those recollections jarred me into writing *The Naked Kiss*, a yarn about a prostitute who decides to start anew in a small town where nobody knows her. She thinks she can escape the double-dealing and deceit of the big city. However, she'll have to struggle against just as much ill will and hypocrisy in the sticks. My story would delve into the small-mindedness that thoughtlessly points its finger at sinners, fostering intolerance and hate.

I wanted to grab the audience like a screaming headline, and quickly establish the character of my lead, Kelly, in the first scene. Critics have called this sequence my "signature" scene. That's bullshit, because every scene in every movie I ever made bears my imprint. Here is the opening from *The Naked Kiss* from the final version of the script, which we shot almost exactly as written:

INT FARLUNDE'S APARTMENT-NIGHT

i. A WOMAN

is attacking a drunk with her handbag. The woman is KELLY, exquisitely filling a fitted sheath dress with spaghetti straps, revealing an eye-shattering figure. Her chic hat is on a lovely

coiffure; her features are extraordinarily flawless. PULL BACK with FARLUNDE, the drunk, as she advances, smashing him with blows. Even as she hammers the helpless drunk, she is an artist's unblemished masterpiece of consummate grace, regally groomed. Trying to ward off her blows, trying to remain on his feet, Farlunde reels and staggers into his bar, sending glasses, bottles crashing to the floor. On wall a picture gallery of women watches Kelly and drunk in noisy battle. Props crash. Chairs are overturned. He loses his balance, crawls across room. She batters him with handbag.



In my opening for Naked Kiss, Kelly (Constance Towers) beats the crap out of her pimp. My cameraman, Stanley Cortez, started the prologue from a low angle, with lots of grays and shadows. Then he got the struggle between Kelly and her pimp by sticking the camera in Connie's face.

FARLUNDE

Please Kelly! I'm drunk!

Her handbag smashes his mouth. Lips bleeding. Cheeks cut. He protects his head, leaps to his feet, loses his balance, swings, knocks her hat off, grabs at her gown, pulls it off. She is in a bra and half-slip, black satin with lace. He grabs at her hair, pulls. Her wig comes off. She is bald. His hand finds her mouth, pulls. She bites. He shrieks, retreats in pain, reels drunkenly against writing desk, sends lamp and desk props crashing to floor. Lamp bulb on floor continues to burn. Farlunde falls, his head striking a table leg. He is out. Only sound: her hard breathing. She stares. Dead? She checks him. Relief. Alive! She grabs a bottle of siphon water, sits on his stomach, squirts water in his face. He chokes, coughs, comes to. His eyes bulge. Panic. She finds his wallet, takes out his fat bankroll. He grabs for his money. She slaps his face. He whimpers. He is too drunk to fight her off. She swiftly counts bankroll.

KELLY

Eight hundred dollars.

(peeling off each bill deliberately)

Ten. Twenty.

(slaps his face)

You parasite! Thirty. Forty. I'm taking only what I earned. Fifty. Sixty. Seventy. Seventyfive.

(slaps his face)

I'm not rolling you, you drunken leech. I'm only taking the seventy-five dollars that's coming to me!

She flings rest of money in his face, stuffs the \$75 into her handbag, gets into her dress, swiftly repairs her shoulder strap, gathers up her wig and hat, goes to wall mirror, stares at her weird reflection.

2. CLOSEUP KELLY

staring into camera lens (which now has become the mirror) as anguish sweeps her smeared features. She is a shorn image. Carefully she fits the wig on her head as THE NAKED KISS crashes over her face with MAIN MUSIC THEME. As she repairs her face, CAST AND CREDIT TITLES appear over it. The finishing touch is her hat. She steps back to appraise herself. Once again she is the extraordinarily beautiful woman. She starts out, remembers something, goes to the picture gallery, rips off her photo, tears it up, throws pieces at the drunk, proudly exits. MOVE IN to Farlunde on the floor, drunkenly counting his money, whimpering. HOLD on CLOSE SHOT of desk calendar on the floor. It Is: "JULY 4, ig6i."

FADE OUT

I was lucky enough to have Stanley Cortez again as my cameraman on Naked Kiss. For the opening, Stanley attached a camera to an assistant's back. There were no Steadicams back then, and believe me, those cameras were heavy. Another guy had to kneel behind the cameraman and hold him by the waist so he wouldn't fall over backward. I told Constance Towers, who played Kelly, to smash the camera's lens with her bag as if she were hitting the pimp's face. In the editing room, we cut back and forth between her and the pimp getting the hell beaten out of him, then added a jazzy soundtrack.

That sequence was the last thing we shot, because I wanted Constance to shave her head. She did it without a qualm. In France after the Liberation, I remembered how they'd shaved the hair off women who'd been sleeping with German soldiers. Kelly's pimp pulls this horrible trick on her as punishment for her revolt against his authority. Right after the fight, Kelly puts on her wig and arranges her makeup. The audience knows right away that there's an unbridgable breach between Kelly's harsh life and middle-class respectability. A final close-up in the opening is of a calendar on the floor of the pimp's place. It's Independence Day for America and Kelly. She walks.

When I was a crime reporter, I covered suicides. A helluva lot of them left behind suicide notes for their loved ones. Typically they wrote things like "God forgive me"

or "I can't go on." I'd never forgotten one note written with an eyebrow pencil on a paper bag by a prostitute: "Today is my independence day. I am going to celebrate it now."

Film directors all over the world have told me how much they have been influenced by the opening sequence in *Naked Kiss*. I'm always pleased to hear that. At the time, however, I was only thinking about portraying my character honestly. Extending the language of film sometimes starts with just trying to show one true thing.

Naked Kiss skips forward two years. Kelly resurfaces in a typical American town called Granrville. They have a little movie house there that's playing-what else?-*Shock Corridor*. As soon as Kelly steps off the bus, Griff, the local cop, is on to her. He picks her up and takes her back to his apartment, where he pays twenty dollars for a taste of Kelly's "Angel Foam Champagne," her traveling prostitution gimmick. They spend the night together.

Like Kelly, Griff's a complex character the audience can't easily figure out. There's no phony romance between him and Kelly, just a professional liaison. Kelly wants to have a cop on her side. Griff's a loner, ambivalent about his small-town police work, yet pleased to be the big fish in a little pond. He's paid to keep the peace and maintain the town's facade of civility. That means blinking at the prostitutes across the river at the local brothel run by his pal Candy. Griff would love to be a big-city cop, but he can't hack it. When the sophisticated Kelly shows up, she sets him on his ear, exposing Granrville's phoniness and Griff's hypocrisy. See, he wants Kelly out of his territory, but not so far away that he can't partake in her charms from time to time.

Kelly wakes up the next morning in Griff's bed and looks at herself in the mirror. As if for the first time, she peers at her face and hardly recognizes the person she's become. Then and there, she decides to stop turning tricks. Kelly rents a room in Miss Josephine's house and finds a job as a nurse's aide at the local hospital for crippled children. She turns out to be a big success with the kids, earning respect and appreciation from her colleagues. I put in a musical number with all the children in the hospital singing sweetly to Kelly:



I didntgive a damn if people thought it was corny for a rejbmrned prostitute to end up in a children's hospital. I wanted to show a "tainted" woman succeeding in the pure world of children. Kelly's warmth and sincerity attract the attention of the town's popular philanthropist, Grant, a man with a terrible secret.

Mommy, dear, tell me please, Is the world really round? Tell me where Is the bluebird Of happiness found ...

Kelly befriends Buff, a beautiful young nurse, lending her one of her elegant gowns for a night on the town. Buff comes back with twenty-five dollars she's "earned." Kelly suspiciously asks about the cash. Buff confesses that Candy gave it to her as an advance against future earnings at her brothel across the river. Kelly explodes, first slapping Buff silly, then sitting down beside the girl and telling her about her own hard lessons in the flesh trade. I wrote the following monologue for Kelly so she could talk about her life and the lives of all prostitutes.

KELLY

... You'll be every man's wife-in-law and no man's wife....
Why, your world will become so warped, you'll hate all men
and you'll hate yourself because you'll become a social
problem, a medical problem, a mental problem and a
despicable failure as a woman.

Kelly goes out to Candy's brothel and smashes the madam in the face with her purse, forcing the twenty-five dollars into her mouth and warning her to keep away from Buff. Kelly has balls and a sense of justice. It's her beauty and romanticism that get the immediate attention of Grant, the town's handsome and well-respected philanthropist. In Grant's mansion, he connects with Kelly as Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" is playing in the background. In a romantic reverie, they watch home movies taken from a gondola drifting through the canals of Venice and recite Lord Byron's poetry.' Kelly is lifted into another world, a world of imagination and wonder. Seducing her with his idyllic nonsense, Grant is totally insincere, a pretentious bastard covering up his perverse character with a veneer of charm and generosity.

Grant kisses Kelly. She pulls away and looks at him strangely. There's something uncomfortable about Grant's kiss, though Kelly can't say what it is yet. Later she comes to understand that it's a "naked kiss," the kiss of a sexual pervert. Kelly is upfront and confesses to Grant that she was a hooker. Regardless, he pledges his love and asks her to marry him. The very day she comes to his house to show him her new wedding dress, Kelly finds out the truth about Grant. He's a pedophile. She catches him in the act of molesting a little girl named Bunny. The child runs away. He explains to Kelly his take on their upcoming marriage.

GRANT

Now you know why I could never marry a normal woman....
That's why I love you ... you understand my sickness. You've
been conditioned to people like me.... You live in my world
... and it will be an exciting world.

(dropping to his knees)

My darling, our marriage will be a paradise because we're
both abnormal.

Shocked and disgusted that he would use her to cover up his perversion, Kelly crushes Grant's skull with a telephone receiver. Her anger against the child molester is

overwhelming, as if she's striking out against all the men who've abused her. Grant's dead, and she's thrown in jail for murder, her past splashed across the headlines. Everyone in the town turns against her. They'd like to burn her at the stake like a witch. After all, she's killed their patron saint, the richest man in town. The only thing lower than a prostitute to those churchgoing, law-abiding citizens is a pedophile. Bunny, Grant's child victim, is finally identified and coaxed into telling about her "games" with Grant. All charges against Kelly are dropped.

The entire town shows up the day Kelly is released from jail. They stand in silence. She is suddenly a hero for attacking the child molester. Kelly looks at the crowd coldly, then walks off wordlessly to catch a bus out of Grantville, pausing only to glance at an infant in a baby carriage. She doesn't give a damn about anyone or anything. Her dreams are broken. Their reactionary little town can never be home for her.

The End.

The Naked Kiss did great box office when it was released. Thirty years later, it continues to play at art cinemas and on cable television channels all over the world. Of course, I'd never see a nickel of those promised residuals. Inexplicably, I'd become a "Lindy" in the world of filmmaking, an independent making movies whenever and wherever I could find a producer. If the producer was dishonest, I was screwed. There was little defense against the crooks except to keep writing original yarns and hope my next producer would honor his side of the deal.

I was almost fifty-two years old when I finished The Naked Kiss, proud of what I'd already accomplished, bursting with energy and original stories, full of anxiety about the new period in my life that was dawning, that of an independent moviemaker. It was going to be a wild ride. I fastened my seat belt and held on tight, ready and willing for whatever the rollercoaster of life would bring me.