

STARK RAVING NAKED

SYNOPSIS



QUIXOTIC

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VITAL SIGNS

TITLE: STARK RAVING NAKED

GENRE: Screwball Sex-Romp / Romantic-Comedy

LOGLINE: A middle-aged Casanova visits a psychiatrist and falls in love with her patient--a damaged young woman suffering from debilitating sexual phobias. A screwball romance in the vein of "Annie Hall" and earlier, funnier Woody Allen films.

RATING: R (projected) for adult subject matter and brief nudity.

SHOOTING SCHEDULE: 21-30 days (estimated)

DRY-AS-DUST THUMBNAIL SYNOPSIS

Harry Burke (35-40) is just another horny middle-aged teenager. He pops Viagra from a Pez dispenser. A self-absorbed fashion photographer with raw animal magnetism, he works daily with lovely models who inevitably wind up in his bed.

But Harry is getting on in years and when he wakes up one morning squeezed between two models, he is horrified to find he has wet the bed.

On the advice of his friend, **Max** (35-40), Harry visits a sex therapist, **Dr. Giselle von Trapp** (30-35). He uses the session as an opportunity for picking up Giselle, a woman "with a Ph.D. in fucking." Giselle is no babe in the woods, however. She recognizes that Harry "has turned his bed into a toilet"--and that his subconscious is telling him he must change his life.

As he is leaving, Harry first spies **Marlowe** (25-30), a damaged young woman, crumpled up in the waiting room like a "discarded love letter."

Max is Harry's best friend since high school. "A big fat oink," according to his wife. Max is unhappily married to **Judith** (40-45), a vintage model who has turned to vinegar. They live in separate rooms in a large manor where she openly parades her infidelities before him.

Max is a sweet gentle lapdog, who lives on his wife's money and has never had the courage to shake her control. He has no talents or skills except for cooking and eating. He would like to open a restaurant, but he has no money and his wife would never finance a

project that might give him the opportunity to slip the leash.

Max has attended sessions with Giselle for years. His main complaint is his ever-failing marriage--but both Max and Giselle are aware of an unspoken understanding that his sessions are a pretense for their attraction to one another.

Judith is Max's wife. A fading model, she is a nasty piece of work who openly taunts her husband. A cock-tease extraordinaire, she has long had her way with men--except for Harry, oddly enough, who rejected her advances 15 years earlier at a birthday party for Judith's younger sister's--Marlowe. Hell hath no fury.

Harry doesn't recall Marlowe from that time; he doesn't recognize her as the anxious wreckage he now sees every Tuesday in Giselle's waiting room, where he returns after another bout of bedwetting.

Marlowe doesn't recognize Harry either. She is seeing Giselle at Max's suggestion while she spends the summer with Judith and Max.

As we learn in one of her sessions, Marlowe is a bundle of anxieties. In particular, she is afflicted with sexual phobias, which have destroyed her life.

Dinner at Eight

One night, Max invites Harry out to dinner for advice on buying the restaurant. Harry is surprised to find Marlowe at the table with Max and Judith.

The two spark.

Just then Harry gets a message for an emergency rendezvous. Unable to resist his habitual impulses, Harry departs the table mid-bite, leaving Marlowe confused and broken.

Harry goes dutifully to his booty call, but his enthusiasm is dampened by guilt. He rushes back to the restaurant in time to apologize and get a kiss.

When she learns of this budding romance, Giselle kicks Harry out of her office. She refuses to treat Harry as long as he "uses that poor girl as yet another plaything." Giselle also lets it slip that Marlowe is very frail, having spent the last few years in an institution. Harry departs with a slam of the door.

Back at his photo-studio, Harry attempts to seduce Marlowe for the first time. Harry pops his Pez and Marlowe downs her tranquilizers

--but it's a debacle all the same. Marlowe panics before she is unclothed and rushes to vomit in the bathroom. Harry learns then not only is she a virgin, but she is a married virgin. She asks him to be patient with her.

Looney Tunes

In a session with Giselle, Marlowe recounts the story of her loopy marriage.

We see how she was institutionalized a few years earlier for having eaten poisonous mushrooms; how she fell in love with an older doctor, **Vincent St. Vincent** (50), who himself suffered from agoraphobia; how they were married by a lunatic priest and lived together in a cottage in the shadow of the asylum. But because of their illnesses, they lived like brother and sister instead of man and wife.

Vincent's agoraphobia became so acute he could no longer leave the little cottage, while Marlowe grew stronger every day. Needing a vacation from this hot-house, Marlowe packed her things and went to stay with Judith for the summer, where she met Harry.

She has a decision to make: return home to her fake marriage? or stay with Harry and hope he has the patience to wait for her miracle cure? And if there that never happens? Is romantic love possible without the physical--especially with a man like Harry?

Happy Birthday

During his next session with Giselle, Max relays the disastrous events at Harry's recent birthday party. Max had made a fabulous meal which the two couples ate on the patio. Judith was especially nasty that night, flirting shamelessly with Harry and making Marlowe uncomfortable.

During the meal, they learn that Marlowe had not bought the mushrooms at the market, but had found them out in the woods. Panicking that her crazy sister wants to kill everyone, Judith drives herself to the emergency room; but Harry and Max trust Marlowe's judgement and finish their meals without dying.

The next morning, Max makes breakfast for Judith and Marlowe and Harry on the patio. They are surprised when a young stud, Judith's hospital intern, joins them. Max is humiliated; Marlowe is furious at her sister.

Hearing this story, Giselle realizes that her sessions with Max

have become an impediment to his happiness--and to hers. She tells him that she can no longer treat him because she has crossed the line. Max is both devastated and overjoyed.

The End is Nigh

A week later, Giselle phones up Max's house to talk to Marlowe, who has missed her session. Judith, in a furious mood, tells her that Marlowe left to go back to her "old man" and that Max moved out to live in his new restaurant. Giselle is blown away.

Here's what happened:

Max and Harry and Marlowe are fixing up Max's new restaurant when Judith screeches up and throws her suitcases through the plate glass window--because she learned that Marlowe drained her trust fund to help Max buy the restaurant (and leave Judith).

That night at his studio, Harry proposes to Marlowe and she accepts, despite the fact she is already married. She puts on a negligee and pops some pills, hoping they will bring an end to their non-sex life. When she emerges from the bathroom, she finds Judith in Harry's bedroom. Judith is falling down drunk and wearing nothing but a fur coat. Judith tells her that Harry always keeps a key out back, "for midnight backdoor rendezvous." Harry enters and, despite Judith's pleas that she loves him, throws her physically out.

Marlowe is shaken by doubts about Harry and their future. She is convinced that the best thing is for her to go back to her husband.

MARLOWE

Who are we trying to kid, Harry?
You've got your young girls and I've
got my old man. You've got your
pills, and I've got mine.

Harry explodes with anger at her cowardice and she leaves in tears.

Love is a Padded Cell

Harry shuts down his studio and avoids all human contact. He grinds up his lenses in garbage disposal. He starts wetting the bed again. The portrait of a man in love.

Giselle is surprised one day when Harry, looking like death warmed-over, interrupts a session. They commiserate as friends. Giselle urges Harry to call Marlowe, but he refuses. He's sick to death of

her and the damage she wrought in his life. He just wants to get back to normal. He asks Giselle to dinner, and she agrees if he will call her.

At the grand opening of Max's restaurant, Harry finds Judith at the bar. Judith is incensed that Max won't even acknowledge her.

Just then Harry's "date" arrives. Giselle and Harry enjoy dinner together. Giselle flirts with Max while Judith stews in her own juices.

Harry leaves and drives home, during which we hear his call to Marlowe. Harry relays how he has come to understand that love may be madness but it's all we've got, and that if they never consummate their love, it wouldn't matter to him. Because all that matters is that they live and breathe in the same padded cell together.

During the phone call, we see Marlowe in her crazy cottage, packing and leaving Vincent--who sleeps with a gun in his mouth. She drives back to town.

Marlowe arrives at his place and they embrace. Despite his assurances that it doesn't matter, Marlowe summons up the courage to get stark raving naked before Harry. The last images are of only her face, going from fear to pleasure to happiness at last.

Because, you see, it's really all about her.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

In "Stark Raving Naked" I wanted to write a film, as always, that I would like to see, inspired by some of the great movies I saw as a youth. Those include the small but gem-like romantic comedies of Woody Allen ("Manhattan" and "Annie Hall" particularly)--films made by adults about adults for adults, with wit and intelligence and humor that rises above potty jokes.

There are far too few such movies today. Sadly, I can't think of any recently (least of all, Woody Allen's latest). The reasons for their decline are many and various, but certainly it cannot be because audiences have tired of laughing and falling in love.

SRN does not fall into the category of "nuptial" romantic comedies as it has evolved in the past decade--movies like "Ghost of Girlfriends Past" (about a playboy photographer, strange to say) or "27 Dresses" or a hundred other similar films I haven't seen.

Neither is it, despite its title, a juvenile cavalcade of dick and fart jokes that seems to be the current vogue.

It is nearest in spirit to "Annie Hall" with elements of "Alfie" thrown in. A more recent example might be "Silver Linings Playbook" or "500 Days of Summer"--although "Stark Raving Naked" has more surreal humor. Edward Burns' small movies, such as "Newlyweds," may come closest in spirit to these films.

"Stark Raving Naked" could be the title of a 70's porn film, but this film is in truth the opposite of a sex romp; it's a frustrated no-sex-romp which concludes with the end of bachelorhood and the affirmation of married love, as romantic comedies traditionally must.

Although there are some bawdy jokes in SRN and although the hero is a very busy playboy, the film does not try to disguise the fact that Harry is a sick man. He has literally made his bed a toilet. He's just not aware of his sickness until the petals fall from his eyes when he meets Marlowe and realizes he has missed one-half of what makes life worth living. Like Alfie, he's a narcissistic womanizer; the trick for the actor is to portray these negative aspects without alienating the audience.

In fact all five of the major characters are in some way sick--love sick, of course. Even Giselle, the skilled professional; despite having written "The Idiot's Guide to Love, Romance, and Sex," she has been divorced three times; she is alone and lonely, and now finds herself falling in love with her patient, Max, a cardinal sin for a psychiatrist.

Marlowe is, of course, the most seriously ill. She suffers from a devastating phobia which has destroyed her young life. I don't actually know if such a specific phobia exists, but it's not unlikely. I do know phobias.

Although an ensemble comedy about the love-lives of five people, Harry and Marlowe's story is at the center. They are opposites in the respect that they both completely lack what the other has. Giselle makes a point of saying that there are two halves of love: the physical and the spiritual. Harry and Marlowe embody those two halves. Whereas Harry is all raging (and aging) hormones, entirely unaware of the spiritual side, Marlowe is all romantic love, unable to engage in the physical. It's only when they come together in the end, fusing with their opposite, that the two halves are made whole again.