

# HoneySuckle

MAGAZINE

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Dorri Olds

# KIRSTEN DUNST: A TRIBUTE

**H**ollywood has convinced so many women to fix their “imperfections.” Not Kirsten Dunst. When the actress showed up on the set of her first *Spider-Man* movie, she was told to get her crooked teeth straightened. Dunst refused. “I was like, ‘No, my teeth are cool!’” Now, at age 35, Dunst has once again delivered a firm “No” to a filmmaker’s request. She was asked to drop some pounds for her role as Miss Edwina in the new Southern gothic thriller, *The Beguiled* but Dunst said (I’m paraphrasing here), “Nope, not gonna happen.”

Oh, the irony—it was her close friend and long-time collaborator, director Sofia Coppola, who asked Dunst to slim down. Yet it was also Coppola who advised a sixteen-year-old Dunst never to change her teeth during their first work project, 1999’s *The Virgin Suicides*. That was the film that some would argue really put Dunst on the Hollywood movies map. In 2006, Coppola also directed Dunst in *Marie Antoinette*.

*Kirsten Dunst on the set  
of THE BEGUILLED.  
Photo: Ben Rothstein /  
Focus Features*





*Kirsten Dunst  
and Sophia Coppola on  
the set of THE BEGUILLED.  
Photo: Ben Rothstein /  
Focus Features*

*The Beguiled* is Dunst and Coppola's third time making a film together. It is a remake of the 1971 movie starring Clint Eastwood, and both films are based on a novel by Thomas Cullinan. The scenes are lusty and tense, and loaded with director Coppola's love of atmosphere and high drama. It's a thriller that takes place in Virginia during the Civil War.

In the opener, young Miss Amy (Oona Laurence), is out picking mushrooms when she spots a Yankee soldier, Corporal John McBurney (Colin Farrell). He is suffering with a badly wounded leg. She feels sorry for him and helps him back to a plantation that used to be a boarding school for girls. During wartime, it has become a shelter for six women. Dunst's character, Miss Edwina, is a school teacher. Miss Martha, the headmistress, is played by Nicole Kidman, who teeter-totters between seemingly very good and kind, and capable of dastardly deeds. Elle Fanning plays one of the students.

With six women living under duress, McBurney's arrival creates quite a stir. He's not a particularly good guy in that he manipulates the women and pits them against each other by using his seductive wiles. While the women tend to his wounds, a houseful of sexual electricity sizzles. I must say, it is so refreshing to see a female director's decision to keep all of the women clothed, but turn the man into a bare sex object. There is a humor amidst the intensity.





*Kirsten Dunst and  
Viggo Mortensen.*  
© Dorri Olds

Recently, Dunst appeared as a guest on *The Tonight Show* with Jimmy Fallon. After congratulating her on both Emmy and Golden Globe nominations for her role in the FX series, *Fargo*, Fallon urged Dunst to dish on her engagement to *Fargo* co-star Jesse Plemons. A blushing Dunst said that she really wanted to keep things private—especially because her fiancé and their families were watching. She confirmed the engagement and added that she was glad that she and Plemons had become really good friends first.

Fallon, continuing to press for more juicy deets, pointed out how amazing it was that by agreeing to work on that television show, Dunst met the guy she is going to marry. The actress threw her arms up in the air in mock exasperation and said, “Yes, that *is* amazing. I’ll name my kid Fargo Season 2.”

Her great sense of humor and quick smile are endearing and I feel lucky to have witnessed them up close when I interviewed Dunst myself on a few occasions related to her earlier movies. In 2014, I chatted with Dunst, alongside her sexy co-star Viggo Mortensen.

That film, *The Two Faces of January*, opens with Colette (Dunst) and her husband, Chester MacFarland (Mortensen) looking very well-off, gorgeous and *Great Gatsby*-ish. We see them enjoying a carefree vacation in Greece, looking happy and in love. While sightseeing at the Acropolis, they meet Rydal (Oscar Isaac), a young American working as a tour guide. Rydal is dazzling gullible tourists right out of their dough, when suddenly he spots Colette and Chester. The opportunist first noticed Colette for her beauty, but then immediately sizes her up as another potential patsy. What Rydal doesn’t realize is that the slick and dangerous Chester had already been spying on the conman.

When I interviewed *The Two Faces of January* director and screenwriter, Hossein Amini, I asked him how he had chosen Dunst to play Colette. “I’d seen her in so many movies,” he said. “What I was really struck by is how smart she is. She has this extraordinary intuitive sense of a scene. She knows what’s going to work and what’s not. I wouldn’t be surprised if she ended up being a fantastic director. There’s an intelligence and sensitivity and almost telepathic understanding of the people she’s working with.”

Oh, how right Amini was! Dunst will be making her feature film directing debut in 2018 with *The Bell Jar*, an adaptation of the only novel by poet Sylvia Plath. Dakota Fanning will play the lead role of Esther Greenwood, the semi-autobiographical Plath character who descends into mental illness. Dunst and Nellie Kim co-wrote the screenplay. She has cast her fiancé Plemons to star opposite Fanning.

**D**unst told me one of her reasons for doing that film was that she'd met Viggo before. Dunst shot him her signature dimpled smile and said, "We were also both in *On the Road*, but we didn't have any work together." She mentioned that Mortensen also knew her then-boyfriend, *On the Road* co-star, Garrett Hedlund. She added that she'd also already known Isaac. "I immediately felt like I trust, and feel comfortable, with these people, which is very rare to happen."

When I asked about challenges during the making of that film, Dunst said, "Sometimes for me, I felt like it was all about the boys. Sometimes Colette is objectified, since she's the only female. But I wanted to be a part of this film because I loved the script so much, and Viggo was already attached." She explained, "I wanted to make Colette as much of a character as I could. But it's also about the guys, so that was probably the hardest thing for me—I wanted to make her as full as possible, when she could have easily just been a throw-away character."

She added, "What's interesting is that when I watch movies that are only about boys, and there aren't any interesting female characters, I don't really end up liking it that much."

An earlier time I met with Dunst was in 2012, a year after she had finished *Melancholia* and really wanted to do a comedy. "I hadn't done one in a while," she said. "People don't see you in that light unless you're a comedic actress," she said. "I didn't want be pigeonholed in any type of mood, because I got a lot of scripts after *Melancholia* that were heady, weird, depressing. I'm like, I'm not gonna repeat this again. It's boring for me and for everyone else, too."

That's how she decided on the edgy *Bachelorette*, which was released the following year. "I got this script, Lizzy [Caplan] was attached to and met Leslye [Headland, the director] and then I was like, this is hilarious and I would love to go completely opposite and be in this project."

Due to the title of the movie, she mentioned the reality television show, *The Bachelorette*. "I like those TV shows," said Dunst. "They're just so ridiculous; everyone vying for a rose." She laughed, flashing that awesome smile. "It's so dramatic," she said. "It's just amazing trash television that you can watch with your mom and grandma on a Monday night!"

Dunst enjoyed her character in *Bachelorette*. "We look like a mess in the end of the movie," she said. Isla Fisher chimed in, "We're bad people doing bad things and, frankly, it's not glossed over." Dunst agreed and said, "I think that's refreshing."

*Bachelorette* won Official Selection at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival and also starred Isla Fisher and Rebel Wilson. When I interviewed director Headland, she bounced right into a midtown Manhattan hotel room, talking fast with her blonde hair flying. She has a deep ballsy laugh yet also projects an endearing, almost childlike, vulnerability. Headland said, "Meeting Kirsten was nerve-wracking. I remember driving to meet her and I'd smoked like 37 cigarettes and had like 18 shots of espresso. I just really wanted her to do this movie and I didn't know what I should do to get her to say yes. Directors that I look up to—like Kubrick and Altman—have reputations of being manipulators but I'm so not like that. I'm such an open book. I thought I was going to really have to talk her into doing it."

Much to Headland's delight, Dunst happily signed on. "It was a gift from God that Kirsten, who I was a huge fan of, liked the character," said the director.

Dunst is doing all right for herself, eh? This A-lister began her career as a three-year-old child fashion model for TV commercials. She signed on with Ford and Elite modeling agencies. At age six she was in her first feature film, *New York Stories*, where she appeared in Woody Allen's section titled, *Oedipus Wrecks*. A year after that, she co-starred with Tom Hanks in 1990s *Bonfire of the Vanities*. Her biggest movie breakthrough came in 1994, when Dunst was 11 and played Claudia in *Interview with the Vampire* with Brad Pitt.



*Kirsten Dunst in WOODSHOCK.*  
Photo: A24

On September 15, you'll be able to catch Dunst in A24's arty and haunting thriller, *Woodshock*. She plays Theresa, an isolated, grief-stricken woman who becomes paranoid after taking a powerful, reality-twisting drug. The film is the directing debut for Los Angeles fashion designers and screenwriting sisters, Kate and Laura Mulleavy. Until its release, you can check out the movie's psychedelic, trippy trailer.

"It's kind of your job as an actress to define what kind of things you want to do, and the types of people you want to surround yourself with," Dunst told me. "It's really your taste and what you want because everything is out there. It's just how you go about your own process and what's true to who you are and what you want to put out in the world."

For all of her strength, smarts, and success, we celebrate Kirsten Dunst as the woman with the **HERS** spirit for this issue of *Honeysuckle Magazine*.