

MINI SCRIPT IN DEPTH STUDIO STORY NOTES

Grade: 2 PASS

Log Line:

A nun rediscovers her belief in God when her home is invaded by junkies while she is watching over a young boy.

Overall / Premise:

XXXXXXXXXXXX is a drama not only about a young nun who has lost her faith, but also a mentally challenged teenager taken advantage of by his druggie friends, who manages to do good despite his simplicity. It is compelling, fast-paced, wrought with tension, and boasts characters with their own unique voices.

The groundwork is laid here for a good story, but the script needs a few more passes to truly reach its potential. Though well thought out, there is too much to be tackled in such a short script. There is a lot in it to work from however, and dedicated rewrites could really launch it to the next level.

Synopsis:

Determined to hit the “big time” and support his drug habit, a twenty-something junkie, RODEN, collects his friend DISNEY to help him with a night-time heist. Disney, a slow-witted star gazer, is more interested in his telescope however, and has to be convinced he’s embarking on a Robin Hood-like mission before he agrees to come. He finally acquiesces, but only if he can bring his telescope of course.

Driving them to the pot-house where they will score big is LOU, a dangerous, no-nonsense criminal who will take out anyone who gets in his way. Despite his bad temper, he is assured by Roden that the tip on this address (167 S. Killen St.) is solid and they are about to be “coming up fat!”

In the meantime, two nuns across town at 197 S. Killen St. greet SOLOMON at their door, a young boy they are taking care of for the evening. When they take him in, the number 9 on their door ominously swings down off its nail and becomes a 6.

The Sisters are URSULA, the older and wiser of the two, and BARBARA, the disenchanted one who has lost her faith after a traumatic experience. Later that night, Barbara is jolted out of sleep at the sound of glass breaking downstairs. She hides Solomon then wakes up Ursula. The little boy, thinking they are playing a game hiding from bad guys, retrieves his cowboy outfit and toy pistols from his room. The women are discovered before they can call the police, and Lou slaps Roden around for bringing them to the wrong address. He quickly realizes there's a kid running loose, and sets Roden out to search for him.

In the meantime, Disney wanders the house and playfully pretends to die when Solomon appears briefly and "shoots" him. Roden, agitated with Lou's outburst, eventually discovers Disney setting up his telescope and in a tirade, breaks it. When the boys leave the room, Solomon jumps out of his hiding place and finds Roden's gun – dropped unnoticed during his rage.

Roden and Disney return to Lou saying they can't find the kid. Lou sends Roden out with Ursula to make withdrawals with her ATM card. When he himself leaves momentarily to raid the fridge, Disney tells Barbara about his telescope. He says he's been looking for heaven and asks if she can introduce him to God. In a moment of internal conflict, she says "yes".

Lou returns and, having taken a liking to Barbara, sends Disney out to find the kid so he can "get to know" her better. Solomon then pops out with his toy gun, followed by Disney who defends the two. Disney struggles with Lou and is shot. He dies in Barbara's arms, with a smile on his face and a message to her from God. As Lou re-focus his attack on Barbara, Solomon draws his other gun, the real one (Roden's) and still thinking it all a game, shoots Lou dead.

Plot /Story Development / Structure:

As it is now, the script is trying to tell a feature in just 33 pages. The story, characters, and plot need to be focused and condensed so that each one can be fleshed out and achieve a more well-rounded arc. At the moment there is not enough time to give each character and storyline the attention they deserve, so each is now resolved in a less-than-satisfying manner. Specifics follow, including other notes on plot points and such.

- 1) Too many things are not clear in the beginning. For example, how old are *all* the characters? Whether Disney is 10 or 16 makes a huge difference in how we perceive his actions – even if he is mentally slow.
- 2) How is Disney connected to Roden – family friend, school chum? Their relationship matters because we must understand why they do what they do in order to buy into the

plot. Roden seems to care for Disney at least on some level and has certainly earned his trust. If this is the first time Roden is taking him out to do something like this, it would make the stakes much higher. And even more importantly, why does Roden choose Disney for this job in the first place? Is he an expert at numbers? A good lookout because he can be easily ordered? An excellent lock picker? He seems an unlikely accomplice, so there must be some good reason for wanting him along. As it is now, they don't really use him for anything at all.

3) The beginning setup takes way too long. In a feature script, an inciting incident needs to happen somewhere between page 7 and 10. Here, the incident that sets everything off – the number 9 turning into a 6 which brings them to the wrong house – doesn't even happen until page 9. Then they don't even break in until page 14. The script is halfway over before the action really begins! Things to consider: consolidate Lou and Roden into one character, and consolidate Barbara and Ursula into one. More specific notes on that in the character section below, but with less characters to introduce, develop, and integrate into the plot, the setup and rest of the script overall will be much more focused.

4) There are a lot of interesting details that never go anywhere. For instance, a lot of time is spent on Disney's revulsion to bad words, but it doesn't affect the climax or plot in anyway. In order for the story to be tight, everything should be integrated and nothing should be random. In another example, having the number on the address swing down all on its own comes across as a convenient plot device. It would be more interesting if something one of the character's does leads them to the wrong house. For instance, they could entrust it to Disney, but he gets it wrong because he's slow. This not only makes things more complex, but makes the characters accountable for what ensues and not merely victims of chance. Another detail that never goes anywhere is Solomon's medicine. Now it is purely a plot device. There is never any indication that he needs any or what is wrong with him, and it doesn't affect the rest of the plot in any way. Any such setup needs to become relevant in a deep way by the climax.

5) There are several things that are odd about the nuns babysitting Solomon. First off, he clearly has a Hebrew, not a Christian name, so that absolutely needs to be addressed. It may be that you simply like the name, but the audience will surely assume something is meant by it. Second, why aren't the nuns living in a convent? Is this a special facility? Third, why are they taking jobs as sitters? Was the mother a former nun or someone they helped get their life together? This is an example of how not knowing the characters can prevent us from buying into the plot. Again, condense and focus. If Ursula and Barbara are combined into one character, then there is only one nun to connect to the boy and his mother.

6) It is almost impossible to successfully include subplots into a script this short without the main story line suffering. For instance, as an adjunct to the previous note, babysitting the boy is at the moment a fairly random (and unexplained) event. However, if he or it were somehow connected to Barbara's loss of faith (the main arc of her personal journey) then it would be integrated. Solomon could be her son from her "former" life, or was somehow involved or the product of whatever it was that caused her to lose faith in the

first place. Maybe he witnessed or saved her from something. Or perhaps he is the only thing she finds redeeming in this down turn and when his life is threatened, she is finally able to snap out of it and find her way back to God. Without something to connect them on a deeper level, the stakes are not as high as they could be.

7) To continue with the above, the backstory of the murdered girl is so far removed from what is happening (unless of course, it is connected to Solomon), that it detracts from the main through line and takes up valuable time needed to keep things moving forward. This scene is extremely long given the length of the script, and comes off as expositional because the conflict in it is not that heightened. For instance, this scene (in much shorter form) would take on a completely different context with much higher stakes if it happened in hushed tones while the women were hiding in the closet from the men, fearing for their lives. If Ursula truly thought they were going to die, she would want Barbara to fully accept God before she does and her need to push her would be a desperate one. This way it would function as action pushing towards the climax instead of merely setup.

8) If the boys think no one is home, why do they spend two hours watching the house before they break in? Taking time to smoke the joint serves no purpose – it's already been established that they're druggies. And it could easily be integrated into the scene when they first join Lou in the car without taking up more time.

9) The tension in the climax is diminished because there are so many characters scattered about throughout the house, too many story lines to integrate, and too much plot to wrap up! This is one way it tries to be a feature script rather than a short. It is going to be difficult to draw the audience in when there is so much they are supposed to keep track of and become engaged in over such a short time. This also ties in with the note below about whether or not this is an ensemble piece. This “scattered” effect is fine – as long as every single character has a well-rounded arc and the story is “tight” despite the scattered or chaotic feel.

10) Another setup to further develop is Roden being sick at the last job. It's mentioned and then never reappears until it is needed for him to unknowingly drop the gun. It needs to follow all the way through and build to the gun drop. This will not only add tension, but would say something important about his character – especially if he is sick because he doesn't feel right about what they are doing or some other telling reason. Anything in the script that functions only as a convenient plot device takes away from piece and needs to either be integrated or cut.

11) Structurally, the only two storylines that resolve each other are Disney's and Barbara's – they help each other find God. However, the structure of the script feels more like an ensemble piece. Every character is given fairly equitable screen time and it is told from multiple points of view. If Disney and Barbara are the only antagonists so to speak, then the other parts needs to be pared down and these two need to be ramped up. Otherwise, both Lou and Roden (again, depending on if they are merged into one) need arc's themselves that get resolved. In this way, the coming together of all could produce

a vortex where they each achieve what they need: Disney and Barbara both find God; perhaps Roden rethinks his drug habit; and maybe Lou sees the good in one of the others and realizes he wasn't always such a horrible person (even if he does die in the end).

Characters / Dialogue:

This is a character-driven script (rather than being plot-oriented) and because it is also a short, the people we meet in it need to really pop out of the page, captivate us instantly (with little or no lead time), and make such an impression we remember them despite spending so little time with them. That being said, having so many characters reduces the amount of time that can be spent on each and produces a "general wash" instead of a focused palette.

DISNEY:

He is certainly the most interesting character and the fact that he has been using the telescope to search for God is a nice touch. This will come more to the forefront when the beginning setup doesn't feel so scattered.

RODEN / LOU:

Right now Roden has a sense of humanity but makes too many stupid decisions, and Lou has absolutely no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Since Lou is the ultimate protagonist both for Disney and Barbara, combining the characters and giving him some of Roden's positive traits would focus the overall story and climax more. The tension between Roden and Lou as separate characters does not drive the plot significantly and detracts from the main storyline – both Disney and Barbara finding God. What *is* important is Lou as a catalyst for the two main characters completing their arcs. So if they are not merged into one, get rid of anything extraneous in the script and focus on the absolute essentials of their internal arcs.

Also, consider that by not showing absolutely any goodness in Lou, it makes it really easy for the audience by not giving them anything to think about or struggle with. Perhaps Barbara could see some good in him and try to reform him, beyond the mere need to save herself. This would make his death in the end tragic, instead of a he-deserved-it moment, which doesn't hit as hard.

BARBARA / URSULA:

Why is it important that Ursula is from Jamaica? It's such a distinction but doesn't really separate her from Barbara in any way. Again, these two may function better as one character. There are other ways to get the backstory out without a conversation between the two. Otherwise, truncate their scenes so we can get to the main action quicker. The moment where Ursula and Roden share a cigarette however is a nice one and adds a much needed lighter moment.

When Barbara's backstory that led to her loss of faith is more integrated into the present action in the script, her character will pop out of the page more. Right now her connection to Solomon is no more than any other caring human being to a child, her fear

of Lou no more than any other woman in the same circumstance. All her stakes need to be much higher in order for her to get her faith back – even with Disney’s death.

MOTHER:

She is not useful in any meaningful way. She also takes up valuable time in the setup (which is way too long), short as her part is. Either integrate her into the backstory, make the drop-off of the medicine much more crucial, or cut her.

DIALOGUE:

The dialogue reads fine for the most part. Disney and Roden are particularly fun to read because they are so differentiated. Adding some “flair” to the nuns’ dialogue (whether there ends up being one or two) will add some color and a bit of humor too.

Marketability / Box Office Viability:

Once the story is more focused, the plot and characters condensed, and the emotional beats at their highest stakes, this film could do well on the film festival circuit as a treatise on faith or God. As film festivals tend to favor shorts that are either political in nature or comedies, what will really sell *Ticket to Heaven* is dynamic, memorable characters.

Right now the religious nature of the script is not controversial in any way. If it were, that would serve as a selling point as well. It is also not a “message” piece, so the drama and tension need to be heightened to make it stand out. If done well, it could serve as a nice piece for a director and/or writer trying to showcase his or her talents for feature films.