

SCREENPLAY GURUS

SCRIPT NOTES

TITLE: X
LOCALE: City of the Angels
WRITER(S): X
PERIOD: Present
FORM: Half-Hour Teleplay
GENRE: Comedy / Drama
BUDGET: Low
PAGES: 32
DRAFT DATE: 4/7/22
COVERAGE DATE: 5/25/22
PREPARED BY: TA

COMMENTS

OVERALL

X tells the tale of an unhappy woman dumped for an older woman by a feckless fiancé who then crashes into a costume shop where clown makeup is permanently bound to her face.

The Pilot deftly balances comedy and drama. The depths of the woman's stale life are juxtaposed by laugh out loud funny. In a way, the makeup is a final link for an inherent clown who does not take life very seriously, and cares more about herself than her fiancé. Now, inner life is on display for all to see, including her. All within the boundaries of a laughfest.

In character, dialogue and story, there are fascinating themes, sharp observations and juicy subtext coursing in the story's veins. This is a bittersweet contemporary woman's story. The protagonist role is cheese for established actress (Kristen Schall, Kate McKinnon, Chelsea Peretti spring to mind) or talented up n' comer mouse.

However, the text is a little lackadaisical and sometimes clunky. The quality does not match the rest of the Pilot. The script is too long and uses a cheat to cut a page or so. There are some typos and formatting miscues.

Let's jump in the Picanto and drive the 405 to script improvements.

STORY

Excellent work, writer. This is a fun, fun, fun Pilot where the masks of comedy and tragedy are perfectly overlain. A self-described LA 7 (funny), Violet struggles with her own psyche. She is a complex, angry character not entirely likable but there is no requirement for likeability in protagonists.

We root for her because she got a few raw deals. Her fiancé invites the woman he prefers to their dinner where he breaks the engagement. Then, it is as if God greased the road and sent the Kia flying. It is a violent wake up for the unapologetic Violet. Status quo no mo.

Her name suggests "shrinking violet" which Violet is certainly not. She is an oblivious clown who will do anything to be noticed but eschews consequences:

VIOLET (CONT'D)

See that lawn mower? I can totally fill the gas tank with puke.

LACEY

Your stomach acid corroded the engine. Ken had to get a new mower.

(off Violet's dismissal)

Look, Vi, you know I love you. But sometimes you can be a little... out of control... and selfish.

Peter also notes this:

PETER (CONT'D)

Your heart only has room for one person, and that person is you...

She has an expensive management degree yet is still a desk clerk. It is assumed she graduated 10 or so years ago and has not even made assistant manager. She is fired and does not believe it. Violet skates on self-delusion.

Violet is 'Man Not Needed To Complete Her'. There is wonder how Peter and Violet got together and to the brink of a marriage - of convenience. Her mother hounding her to complete with a fiancé is old skoll. Add Mom's financial need, no mention of

love, a selfish bride and a recipe for disaster is complete. Violet does not seem all that upset about losing Peter. Then again, she is dealing with a lot.

On Violet's mother:

SUSAN

Fine! Don't accept my help. But don't tell me that I never tried.

VIOLET

You never tried.

With a mother like faded beauty queen Susan, you cannot blame Violet – too much. Not only are their perspectives from different eras, they seem like they are from different planets. There is good work here as with all the characters' relationships.

The child aspect is also complex. Violet has a hysterectomy yet whispers in a baby's ear she is a better mother than the mother, and applies for adoption. There is a bit of detail before Violet picks up the baby that says many things – the sanitizer. On the surface, it is funny, but it is the tip of an iceberg into Violet's psyche. Great work.

The script markup grossly cuts Violet's visit to Peter to retrieve her makeup. It is fun the makeup slides off her face; no escape from the affliction. However, this three-page scene is a bit too long and sidetracks the story. A suggestion to trim to Violet sneaking in to find Peter having an energetic 'not so much as touched lips' session in bed with Brenda. Violet sneaks in, gets the makeup, bolts in a 1 – 1.5 page scene.

On Peter, what motivates him to give Susan money? He is also concerned about Violet. This connotes he may be rethinking the break up. Or feels guilty. Their split is effective and should be permanent though they could remain friendly. A rethink on floating money to Susan. Maybe a predatory loan or something far cleverer the inventive writer concocts.

A suggestion to trim scenes to their essence and streamline the story. More in Structure. However, a few short scenes of Violet dealing with everyday life would add breadth to the story. For example, she is pulled over by a cop, gets gas or buys groceries. These are all ripe opportunities. In a sense, Violet is handicapped or can be seen as a persecuted race; both tracks could lead to funny social commentary.

On the Joker references, the dramatic irony heads off viewers thinking the same thing. The inference is Violet starts a bit unbalanced like the seriously unbalanced Arthur Fleck who ultimately descends into insanity.

VIOLET (CONT'D)

I was too focused on myself, and I took him for granted.

This is the far end of Violet's arc. It should come from Elaria. Violet is not yet ready to own that shit in a self-confessed leap. The conversation with Elaria just needs a few tweaks for her to say something to the effect, "With Felix, I don't focus just on me, and never take him for granted." This gives Violet pause, and she responds with a line inferring she kinda knows what Elaria is saying.

This is akin to her conversation with Lacey:

LACEY

You need to start acting like an adult, Violet!

Consider how this would play if Violet admitted it. Change is a slow process. Here, it is too quick for Violet. Where do we go in the rest of the series if she gets it together? Gags about appearance will peter out without strong emotional struggle.

It is understood she needs to be in the proper headspace to adopt a baby. This cannot be a baby to cure her ills. It may be the reason the writer gives Violet the epiphany. That she is now wired tight enough to take on the responsibility. Having a baby is the ultimate exercise in selflessness. We need another clever element to get the baby in her arms – where we predict the series is headed.

The Pilot ends with Violet accepting herself by not going out with the hat. Her admission to Elaria could be cut. The symbol of self-acceptance is strong enough.

Once we get the baby to Violet, she makes plenty of mistakes and slowly learns how to give unconditional love. We foresee conflict with granny Susan's interference and awful advice for Violet.

We would certainly tune into the next episode to see how Violet navigates the assessment with Ore. Comedy gold. And dramatic fodder.

These notes only scratch the surface of the Pilot's complexity. This is a wonderful work with only a few rough edges to sand. Great work.

STRUCTURE

The writer properly structures a Premise Pilot. In a reverse of what a Premise Pilot should be, many writers would put the accident at the end for a big reveal. The rest of the Pilot shows Violet's life up to the accident. That does not work.

X has a strong Hook, Set Up and delivers the promise of the premise. We hit the deck running on page two. There is enough to illustrate her life in the restaurant scene and in the hospital before the reveal on page 5.

Some trims and cuts are needed. These include: Peter's house; the face off with Alfred (keep the shot of him overhearing 'cunt') and her finger gun exit; Susan starting on page 17; next scene with Lacey and the neighbor's party; Elaria before and after Susan's call. The call connotes Peter will also be at dinner. Susan may be engineering reconciliation.

As noted, the Episode Out should be trimmed to end on a Visual Button of the hat.

The Pilot is essentially 34 pages long. A good target is around 28 properly formatted pages.

Great work. The stakes and complications rise, and laughs abound.

CHARACTERS

The characters are solid. Effective work. Susan is a mom from hell.

The one weak spot is Harold. He is a trope – the feeble old man with dementia. It is an easy shot that needs some originality. The suggestion is to consider what a husband would become after 30 or 40 years with a woman like Susan. He could be a base counterpoint to her acid personality, and Violet is always in the middle. A volatile yin/yang? Or something more inventive the writer cooks up.

PLOT LOGIC

The clown premise is out there. Beyond believability. However, the writer treats it as matter of fact. It works. Therefore, Dr. Ando starts to unwrap Violet's bandages as she stirs. could be considered too soon after she is hospitalized but this too works.

CRAFT

This is an area in need of some work. The Courier Prime font is 11 point. The standard is Courier 12 point. The 11 point cuts about a page or so from the script. The cheat will be recognized. The strong recommendation is to use 12 point.

Overall, the text needs punching up and more detail. Some text is a little awkward.

Susan sees Lacey, and her look of judgment fades away. **She goes over** and hugs Lacey.

Lacey **goes to** the bed, and Susan follows.

'Goes To' does not really work. There are dozens of words for walk:
<https://www.wordhippo.com/what-is/another-word-for/walks.html>

Susan's judgmental look fades when she spots Lacey. Both find solace [or another need] in a warm hug.

Lacey tiptoes to Violet's side. Susan creeps behind her.

Dr. Ando uncoils the last of the bandages.

Susan and Lacey rubberneck for a glimpse.

Susan YELPS and recoils as if she's seen the devil. Color drains from Lacey's face. She seizes the bed rail to steady herself.

These sentences are phrased awkwardly. Consider modifier placement. 'Turns to' is not necessary unless motivated by the scene:

Violet turns to her mother incredulously.

Incredulous, Violet swings to her mother.

Violet fires an incredulous look at her mother.

Violet to Susan: WTF!

Violet's face: WTF!

Violet turns to Felix, looking at him imploringly.

Violet implores Felix with her eyes.

Violet makes sad puppy dog eyes at Felix.

The Pilot has too many underlines. The recommendation is to cut all of them. It is noted the writer stops underlines for descenders. There are not many who go to this trouble. Kudos, but drop the underlines. They are a distraction.

Avoid temporal qualifiers like 'begins', 'starts' and 'suddenly':

begins to laugh - laughs
starts to unwrap - unwraps

looks like a clown?.. looks like a clown...?

These need to be formatted with more pop. As written, they are a bit toss away.

She pulls her car keys out of her pocket, and looks at them for a beat, suddenly hearing the ECHOEY CRASH of the car wreck.

VIOLET (CONT'D)
SHIT!

She finds car keys in her pocket, considers them for too long.

QUICK AUDIO FLASH

The ECHOEY CRASH of the car wreck.

BACK TO SCENE

VIOLET (CONT'D)
SHIT!

DERMATOLOGIST
I don't know why it's there, or how it came to be a part of your skin, but I would take solace in the fact that--medically speaking--you're completely healthy.
(checks file)
Ah, yes, aside from a hysterectomy in 2018. Is that correct?

Violet blinks as the doctor's words echo from far away.

DERMATOLOGIST
I don't know why it's there, or how it came to be a part of your skin, but I would take solace in the fact that -- medically speaking -- you're completely healthy.

The Doctor's words ECHO as if he's a million miles away.

He scans her file.

DERMATOLOGIST

Ah, yes, aside from a hysterectomy in 2018. Is that correct?

Violet just blinks.

DERMATOLOGIST

Ms. Newman? Is that correct?

Some parentheticals like this example are too long and should be Actions instead. The guideline is three words max and simple (sad) (overjoyed) (to Lacey).

(off the Dermatologist's offended look)

The script does not always use Direct Address commas.

I'm just being honest dear.

I'm just being honest, dear.

When are we going to eat grandma?

When are we going to eat, grandma?

The 2015 KIA PICANTO is a very odd and funny choice. It does not seem to have been sold directly by KIA in the US.

PETER (O.C.) (O.C) is rarely used any longer. Change all to (O.S.).

Drop the pre and post accident makeup references. The script is clear enough to let is know when and where we are.

Markup flags issues and errors.

The recommendation is a deep pass on the text to pump it up to add interest and some detail, fix typos and formatting issues and delete underlines. 12 Point!

DIALOGUE

Terrific work on the dialogue. Funny, dramatic, subtextual.

And I don't know many men who want to fuck Ronald McDonald with tits.

Markup flags a few trims.

TITLE

Works. Keep it.

MARKETABILITY and CONCLUSION

The potential for a sale or option is very good. This is a low budget Pilot with roles attractive to actors. It fires on all cylinders. There is much woven into the script, and it is funny as hell. Good scripts have meaning. This is a good script.

The Pilot is not quite ready for industry eyes or use as a Spec. The text needs cleaning and amping up to be as smartly written as the rest. The story only needs a few minor tweaks.

The writer is very clever and talented. They are encouraged to continue development and get the Pilot out into the world.

Thanks for the opportunity to make a pass on the Pilot.

SCREENPLAY GURUS' 11 POINT SCORING MATRIX

Scores: 0 – 10 points for each element, 110 total possible points

Pass: 0 – 75
 Weak Consider: ¹ 76 – 80
 Consider: 81 – 90
 Strong Consider: 91 – 100
 Recommend: 101 – 110

Statistical Scores of submitted screenplays

Pass: 80%
 Weak Consider: ¹ 10%
 Consider: 5%
 Strong Consider: 3%
 Recommend: 2%

PRESENTATION	6
THEME	10
STORYTELLING	9
ORIGINALITY	9
STRUCTURE	9
PLOT	8
CHARACTERIZATION	9
DIALOGUE	9
STYLE	5
CONCEPT	8
MARKETABILITY/COMMERCIAL APPEAL	9
TOTAL POINTS	91

SCRIPT: STRONG CONSIDER

WRITER: RECOMMEND

Presentation:

Is the script properly formatted, free of typos and misspellings? Does the writing use standard English conventions? Is the cover page attached with the author's name and contact information only? Is there white space? Are there lengthy blocks of dialogue and action?

Theme:

Is the theme stated and does the screenplay reinforce it throughout. Is the theme relevant or unique?

Storytelling:

How effectively has the author crafted the timeline of events? Is the story interesting or compelling? Is it relevant? Does the script serve the genre in which it's written? Does the story have a through line and respect it without unnecessary departures?

Originality:

Does the story twist well-worn conventions, or create a new one, without straining credibility? Where does the story fit into the four degrees: Totally Familiar; Familiar, Yet Different; Different, Yet Familiar; Totally Different (Familiar, Yet Different and Different, Yet Familiar are preferred).

Structure:

Does the script have and an Inciting Incident, proper Act Breaks, Rising Action, Complications and Obstacles, a well- identified Protagonist and Antagonist?

Plot:

How well has the author informed the audience why the story's events belong in the script, and what the story is meant to communicate?

Characterization:

Do the characters have dimension beyond cliché and trope? Are they real or relatable? Do they have flaws? Do the characters elicit empathy or sympathy?

Style:

Is the writing clear, economical, free of bloat and unnecessary description. Does the writer "Show, don't tell?" Are the descriptions visual and intriguing? Does the writer use Active Voice and Present Tense?

Concept:

Is it sound, interesting or compelling? Do Plot, Storytelling and Structure reinforce the concept?

Marketability/Commercial Appeal:

Where does the script fit in the marketplace? How likely is it to be made? How does it compare to similar films? How will audiences react?

1. AKA Consider With Revisions.

Thanks for submitting your screenplay to Screenplay Gurus! We hope the analysis gives you the info you need to make the script as good as it can be.

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