

Type of Material: Screenplay - 128 pages

Title:

Submitted by:

Author:

Analyst: Julie Saint-Anne

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Code #: 111601QP

Category: Aging & Friendship Ensemble
Dramatic Comedy

LOG LINE:

Three lifelong friends help each other through the final passage of life.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Characterization	X			
Dialogue	X			
Structure		X		
Storyline		X		
Setting		X		
	High	Medium	Low	
Budget			X	

SYNOPSIS

SUZY HULL (78) kicks out husband ARCHIE HULL (80). She was wife #5. He stuffs clothes, Viagra, and dog SIDNEY into his Jag and meets “the boys” at the Java Shop: former Senator HENRY WINTERS (78) and former Judge FRANK GREEN (77). He plays his “Obit Numbers” game, commenting on the dead, and winning points based on their ages. Henry makes Archie promise to give him a good reading when he dies.

Henry joins son, politician RILEY WINTERS (40) at the airfield to shoot a commercial aboard Henry’s Cessna. He doesn’t like the poll-serving, glossy campaign. Archie parties aboard the houseboat with prostitutes GINGER and SHASTA ‘til dawn. Son DAVID HULL (43) wakes them. Hollers on Archie for his wanton ways.

Frank is selling his sailboat to care for faltering wife ROSE. Henry and wife NORA, Frank, and Archie visit VIOLET and husband GEORGE in the hospital. Violet is wired to all kinds of machinery, but saucy as ever. Gives Archie a tongue-lashing and sends him running. George’s spirit is flagging. Henry makes a decision. Archie flirts with florist EMILY DREW (60).

ABBY cries on Archie’s shoulder. Husband David is having an affair. She wants him to come home. She wants Archie to talk to his son. He drops Henry at a doctor’s appointment. Henry has 6 – 12 months to live. Riley’s “team” asks Henry to fill in for his son at the Ranchers and Farmers rallies so Riley can do photo ops with schoolchildren and athletes.

July 4 parade. Barbeque at Frank’s. Front page article about Archie’s WWII Congressional Medal of Honor embarrasses the hell out of him. Henry tells Riley to talk to the farmers instead of posing with children. Neighbor RICK sets off illegal fireworks that backfire into the pool, the sky, the house.

Henry tells wife Nora he’s terminal. He warns her that one day, he’ll be late getting home. She shouldn’t worry. Borrows Viagra from Archie and makes love to her. He delivers letters to his friends, and flies the Cessna out over the ocean ‘til he runs out of gas. Archie’s obit: He went out with a splash instead of a bang.

Archie’s dog dies. They all attend his ocean burial, Archie’s Congressional Medal around the dog’s neck. Emily asks Archie what flowers he’d like at his funeral. Rose worsens. Daughter BARBARA begs Frank to put her mother in a home. He can’t afford to. He’s selling the house. Rose dies.

Archie sends a gift to Frank – Shasta. Frank isn’t ready for that, but there is something she can help him with. She climbs into the attic and brings him his cherished pipe case. Xmas, and David hasn’t been home. Archie pulls a favorite childhood book out of a storage box, takes it to David, and apologizes for being such a shitty dad. Now go home and be a man. Abby opens the door and hugs her husband. Frank wakes on Xmas morning to a make-shift Xmas tree with his house deed beneath it. Archie paid his mortgage.

Archie thought a lot about Emily’s question. They boat to his wealthy Aunt Tabitha’s private island. She left him her estate. They crest a hill, revealing a meadow of wild flowers with a formal dining table set in the middle. Why have flowers at your funeral when you can have your funeral in the flowers? All his friends toast him.

CRITIQUE

Characterization

- Lovingly drawn, full-bodied, individuated.
- Despite their richness, the arcs are too predictable, the problems clichéd.
- The only problem with these characters is that all they do is deal with their problems. They have no driving goal that unifies them, and that they can overcome.

Dialogue

- Beautiful, real, differentiated, funny, subtle, hard-hitting. Bravo.

Structure

- Unintentionally misleading opening. We spend so much time with Suzy and Archie in the opening that we think they are going to be the leads. But once the old woman finds out on page 3 that her husband gave her an STD, she throws him out and we never hear from her again. Too bad, because it was a good, unexpected, big problem with promising implications. We don't even get to hear her yell at him. Author instructs us that we see her yelling, but can't hear what she says. More disappointing because she promised to prove an interesting character, and could have contributed to the conflict in this tight-knit group.
- The "inherited wealth" exposition/backstory is a sore thumb and too convenient a device for the resolution.
- The quick pacing between scenes makes this primarily internal story feel languorous rather than slow. With the exception of the Suzy strand, Author jumps logically from one character to the next in a round robin of intersections.
- Love the season transitions: As Archie drives home from Henry's funeral, the background outside his car changes from Summer to Fall.
- Unfortunately, the structure follows from one death to another to another. It becomes depressingly monotonous.
- Satisfying conclusion.

Storyline

- Moved as I was by the lyric ironies and touching character arcs, I nonetheless waited for something to happen beyond each of the characters dying off – One. By one. By one. In, say, Ghost Story, they die off by supernatural means – not boring.
- Archie's Obits game is an important element, but how the game works is vague. Speed bump.
- The priest who reads porn. There isn't a payoff. We see him reading a couple times, once with a stack of 'em. He says he's keeping up with current sin. But it needs a third reincorporation that twists it with a surprise.
- What is up with Henry's flashback about bumping his head as a child? 1) It's the only fantasy in the script. 2) It's stupid, unnecessary exposition. 3) He isn't the POV character.
- The WWII backstory exposition is well-done – but it doesn't pay off in the external story.

Subplots

- Subplots deftly connected by relationships affecting each other.
- Good tension, good subplots. Each pays off on an internal level, but the external subplots are predictable.

Premise

- Not high concept, but moving.

Setting

- The setting is integral to the story only in that he lives on a houseboat, buries his dog at sea, and owns an island. The storyline doesn't use Washington. Not even the inclement weather.

Writing

- Forgive me, I just have to share this story with you. On page 57, the former Senator visits his son's campaign HQ. The bubble-headed receptionist says he can't see Riley because Riley is meeting with the Senator. Henry opens the campaign brochure with their father/son pix, and says, "Honey, I am the Senator." The passage reminded me of Walter's memorial. I checked people in with Melissa. As guests walked up to the table, we'd ask, "Name?" and check their name off the list. Lauren Bacall walks up, and Melissa says, "Name?" I turned to Melissa and whispered, "That's Lauren Bacall" trying not to embarrass her. Melissa turns to Ms. Bacall and says, "How do you spell that?" Oy veh.
- Author has a slugline problem. Changes scenes without them, or with non-slug slugs. For instance, "INT. AFTER VIOLET'S FUNERAL – AFTERNOON. Climbing out of a cab, Frank trudges..." 1) Interior where? 2) following this INT. slug, we're told Frank climbs out of a cab – EXT!
- Needs serious proofing.

EVALUATION

- Pass
- Worth a read
- X** Consider with a rewrite
- Consider
- Recommend

CHARACTERS

X-Believable
 X-Complete
 X-Interesting

Caricatures
 Thin
 Dull

DIALOGUE

X-Realistic
 X-Succinct
 X-Effective

Artificial
 Over-written
 Weak

WRITING?

Evocative, moving, funny, character-driven.

PLOT CONSTRUCTION?

Needs more driving external stories, more surprises (character and story), more variety in turning points, revamped opening, and less convenient solution for the conclusion. They need to do more than drink coffee and attend funerals! Good motivation and tension, but it could deal with less predictable, less overdone, more nuanced aspects of aging and dying.

WOULD IT WORK WITH A REWRITE?

Yes. I'm not convinced that a story that revolves around death and dying is commercially viable. But, push the story harder, and people it with a stellar cast of aging screen legends, and it could be Ghost Story, or The Grass Harp. (What's that line from Get Shorty? Gene Hackman says of the script he wants to produce, "This could be my Driving Miss Daisy.") Though Walter would have been ideal, these full-bodied characters would be a pleasure to cast.

IS IT VISUAL?

Remarkably visual, considering the lack of action. Author uses visual cues and subtext instead of dialog, so that there's plenty to look at, and it doesn't become talky.

BUDGET?

Low: character-driven

EXPLOITABLE ELEMENTS?

The gathering of a great cast for a moving ensemble endeavor.

SEX AND VIOLENCE?

Implied (geezer) sex. No violence.

TV?

Ideal MOW. Dump the hookers, and go Hallmark Hall of Fame. Family. Etc.

WHAT FILMS WOULD YOU COMPARE IT TO?

Grumpy Old Men meets Once Around.

HUMOR? IF SO, IS IT FUNNY?

One character carries the humor, and does it well.