

TITLE:	[REDACTED]	TYPE:	SP 117
AUTHOR:	[REDACTED]	DRAFT:	Spec
SUB BY:	[REDACTED]	DATE SUB:	07/26/99
SUB TO:	[REDACTED]	DATE COV:	08/18/99
ANALYST:	Julie Saint-Anne	GENRE:	Murder Mystery
CIRCA:	1974, Present	LOCALE:	Arkansas
ELEMENTS:	Director	SUB AS:	Spec Script

LOG LINE

When Derek Rivers returns home for the funeral of his childhood friend, he discovers there's more to his past than he realized.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS

Derek Rivers's dearest childhood friend was an old man named Dump. Though they'd lost touch long ago, news of Dump's death brings Derek home for the funeral. He quickly realizes that not only was Dump's death not an accident, but that some terrible secret lies at the heart of his murder. Uncovering the truth is painful -- and dangerous -- for everyone. For some -- it's deadly.

COMMENTS SUMMARY

Multi-layered themes and characters, distinctive voices, carefully plotted, evocative atmosphere, tense, satisfying, cathartic -- it's difficult to believe the author is a "new writer."

SCRIPT EVALUATION: RECOMMEND
WRITER EVALUATION: RECOMMEND

SYNOPSIS:

FLASHBACK 1974. Derek Rivers, age eight, plays in 50-year-old Dump Sanders' junk yard. His son, Curtis, flashes his gold-toothed smile as he bounds out of the house on his way to visit his lover. Beautiful Lucille, bruised and bloody, speeds out of town. Curtis is shot through the head. Dump is beaten to within inches of his life. PRESENT DAY. Derek receives news that Dump died in a freak accident while fixing a flat tire. He discovers on arriving in town that he's not welcome. Dump's family resents him. Derek's mother is afraid of something. Derek asks what happened to Curtis. His mother tells him most folks think he drowned. Esther tells him it was Derek's fault that Dump was beaten.

A deer hunt with the mayor and the locals ends when Derek is shot at, and discovers the dead body of lawyer Harvey Taylor. Celia tells Derek that Dump's death was no accident. And Rodney is missing. Searching Dump's house, Derek is knocked over the head, and escapes just before someone sets the house ablaze. Answers get even harder to find as suspicions circle. He tells Celia he's not going to leave it alone, and she can help or he'll do it himself. In a makeshift basement at Dump's burned out home, Derek discovers a "trophy" in a bottle. He remembers Curtis chiseling at bricks in the old well, and climbs down. He finds a bag with cash and a photo of a woman, but before he can climb out, the sheriff dumps cement into the well. Derek climbs further down in an attempt to escape, and discovers a skeleton - unmistakably Curtis - before finding his way to the river. Celia discovers Rodney hiding in the cellar. Rodney finds the bottle with the "trophy" in it. It's a thumb. The sheriff's thumb. Rodney recognizes the photo - the mayor's wife. The woman Curtis was seeing. Celia is their daughter. Celia confronts the mayor, leaving him a note: Murderer.

Suddenly, Lucille (supposedly dead years before) shows up with Derek's mother, at Esther's house pleading for help. She had waited for Curtis, but he never joined her in LA. She had sent Celia to Esther because she couldn't take care of her, and kept in touch through Derek's mother all these years. The sheriff gathers a shooting party, and heads for Greyrock with the intention of killing them all and claiming a drug conspiracy. But Greyrock's young men are ready and waiting. A showdown. Lucille faces off against the mayor, the husband who shot her lover. Pulls the trigger. Derek decides to come home for good.

SCRIPT EVALUATION: RECOMMEND
WRITER EVALUATION: RECOMMEND

COMMENTS:

Comparing this piece to *Eve's Bayou* or *LA Confidential* might set up unfair expectations - but the comparison is not only fair, it's accurate. I would add comparisons to *Devil in a Blue Dress*, and *Rosewood*. The sense of hidden depths, buried secrets, and underlying tensions creates a rich atmosphere that draws us into the mystery, and colors the outcome with meaning and resonance.

The author's careful structure doles information to us in bits and hints, alerting us to unspoken antagonisms without hitting us over the head or sending up red flags. Lucille's death was dropped so unobtrusively, I didn't even suspect it was a lie. Every character is necessary. Every dialog contains subtext. Every action is essential to the eventual uncovering of the secret.

Personal outrage and deep friendship individuate and intensify universal themes. This is no diatribe. Themes are brought home on a personal basis. "A man only has one dream, anything else is what he settles for." "Absolute power ... makes you an asshole." "If you're going to ask questions, be sure you want to hear the answers."

Characterizations are well-rounded and compelling. The characters speak with natural, believable voices, behave with motivated actions, interact in dynamic ways, and move the plot forward.

The pace is fluid - slowing down and speeding up with expert control to a climax of quick cuts between opposing actions that had me biting my lip in anticipation.

My only reservation: the title is somewhat flat, and doesn't reflect the depth or meaning within the story. Change the locale from Greyrock to Red Rock (so it's *River to Red Rock*), or pull something else from the story for a more evocative title. All in all, not much of a quibble, is it?

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Characterization	X			
Dialogue	X			
Story Line	X			
Structure	X			

SCRIPT EVALUATION: RECOMMEND
WRITER EVALUATION: RECOMMEND