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Title:

Submitted by:

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LOG LINE:

Meek assistant college librarian NATHAN ROSS has to transport curmudgeonly poet HARRY CALLAHAN to speak at commencement. Harry drags Nate to his hometown and gives him a tour of his tortured, passionate life. Nate returns a changed man, and becomes a book publisher.

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

SYNOPSIS

Assistant college librarian NATHAN ROSS has to arrange a guest speaker for commencement, and academic politics puts a lot of pressure on his success. Asks beautiful Lit teacher JULIE if she's ever heard of Nichols Prize-winning, Maine-born poet HARRY CALLAHAN. She loves his poetry, but warns Nathan that he hates Maine. Harry seems to hate everything. He negotiates Nate's offer of an honorary doctorate in humane letters to an honorarium of \$3000. That's what it would take to get him to come back to the most backward state in the country. School won't go higher than \$1000. Harry agrees if they'll include travel, meals, and lodging. And a driver.

Nathan meets Harry's train in Limerock. Harry insists on visiting his old haunts. He's hoping for a jolt from the past. They have plenty of time to get to Garfield. He's appalled at the yuppie trend that has overtaken this old seaport. Starbucks and art galleries have replaced the old warehouses and gritty bars. A bourgeois paradise of little shops. "The whole damn town is cute!" Each landmark launches Harry into a tale from his mischievous past, and harangues against the present. Knocks on his brother's door, but a stranger lives there now.

Soon as they check into the hotel, Harry thumbs the phone book. JOHN CALLAHAN isn't listed. Nathan is starving, but Harry drags him all over the small town looking for people who might know where John is. Harry never went to college. Won a poetry award in high school, then worked his ass off and wrote and wrote. Amazing that wife LOUISE stayed with him all those years. The local bookshop doesn't carry his books. Advises Nathan to forget "making a living" and get out there and live. Volunteer for community theater. He's driving Nathan crazy.

Harry's father's barber shop has been replaced by an art gallery. His whole family thought he was crazy to become a poet. Wondered if he was gay. They visit Nelson's Appliances. Dickie Nelson was Harry's best friend and cohort. And now Dickie is behind the counter -- and thrilled to see his old buddy. Tells Harry that John is at the Seaview. Had a bad stroke a year ago. Can't speak. On their way out, Harry bumps into old schoolteacher MISS HACKBERRY. She read his poems. "You were always a gloomy boy."

Nate waits in the car while Harry visits his brother. Harry's mother died at Seaview. He visited her and never came back. Not even for his father's funeral. John never forgave him. He wrote him a poem, and now John won't even hear it. If Harry ever ends up like that, he hopes someone will kill him.

They stop at a bar. Drunk friend CLIFFY CHISHOLM takes them to his boarding house, and gives Harry a sheaf of poems another bum (MYRON GREEN) wrote. Left them to Cliff when he died. It's dark now, but Cliff insists they row out in the bay. The oar slips. Harry falls overboard trying to retrieve it. Nathan falls in trying to retrieve Harry. They're all soaked to the bone. Back at the hotel, they throw their clothes in a dryer, and return to their room.

All Nate wants to do is sleep off his headache, but Harry insists on walking Cliff home. Despite the late hour, Harry still isn't ready to turn in. Insists on visiting HELEN SIMMS. Cliffy told him she still lives in her childhood home. He wakes the neighbors throwing stones at her window, but she won't respond. He recites a poem he wrote for her before the cops arrest them and take them back to their hotel. Nathan worries about scandal at the school. Harry laments the life of the poet. A fire alarm wakes them. The dryers went up. Their clothes are gone. Harry sleeps with a gun under his pillow.

In the morning, Harry insists on fish breakfast at Mussel Point. Takes the car keys. As they tour the countryside, Harry tells Nate he should start a small press publishing company. Promises to give him his next book of poems to publish. He'll even give a reading. Boom! They hit something and fly off the road. They walk through the woods, ripping their clothes and bruising their legs and arms. Harry tells Nate how he got ALICE CHESTNUT pregnant in these woods. He's ashamed that he ran away, and left her pregnant and alone. He's never met him, but he deserves his son's hatred. Nate is eaten alive by biting flies. His eye swells up.

The fish sandwiches are heaven on bagels. Harry wants to share it with one of Cliffy's ex-wives BETTY BLACK. They trudge way out of the way to her shack. 300 pounds and 2 teeth, and thrilled to see her old friend. She spit-cleans a couple glasses for them. They have to be on campus by 6. They don't leave until 4:35. But Harry insists on another stop: the cemetery. It may be the key to what he's searching for. EMILY WOODS, his high school sweetheart. She was going off to college. They went to the windswept rock out on the bay to say goodbye. A huge wave swept her away. He couldn't save her. That's when he decided to be the poet she thought he could be. He's never been able to write about her. Helen blamed him for Emily's death. Harry reads the poems Cliff gave him. They're extraordinary, first rate. Harry promises he'll get them published. They arrive on campus just in time to go straight to the reading, dirty and smelly.

The gathering of students and faculty is so tame compared to the group in Limerock. Nate begins to question his life. Harry sees old nemesis BERGERON and becomes paranoid when a student questions his poetic structure. The only person he likes is Julie. He pouts while he signs books, and refuses the faculty dinner. They're all relieved.

Back in the dorm room, Harry regrets making a fool of himself. He'll never be capable of writing that Great Poem. He's a failure. Nathan loses it, tells Harry to stop calling him Nate, to stop talking altogether. Later that night, Nathan hears a gunshot. Rushes to Harry's room. His gun went off accidentally.

Next morning, Nathan drives him back to the Seaview. Harry says goodbye to brother John, and asks his forgiveness. Always too late with everything and everyone. Commencement. Harry does the "Everyone Can Make A Difference" speech. Announces the formation of the Emily Woods scholarship, and donates his honorarium. They head back to Limerock. He didn't find what he was looking for, the key to the poem only he could write. They promise to keep in touch.

Nathan visits Helen Simms. She never blamed Harry for Emily's death. She didn't like him because of what he did to Alice, who almost killed herself. She had to move away. Nathan lands the job of directing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* with the Garfield Players. Julie marries BARTON LEEDS. Opening night, Nathan gets the news that Harry shot himself. His cancer returned. Named Nathan his literary executor. Left the majority of his estate to the Emily Woods Scholarship. He left a package of 40 new, unpublished poems and the poems of Myron Green to Nathan. Nathan scatters Harry's ashes over the gorge where he'd lost Emily and starts the Limerock Press.

CRITIQUE

Characterization

- Good, character-revealing introduction to Harry: “What?” he said. “Romaine lettuce?” “No, no,” I said, “humane letters. A doctor of humane letters.” “Oh, yeah, humane...Jesus, it ought to be inhumane the way I treat letters, words, sentences - brutal. What’s your name again?”
- Great pov through narrator Nathan. Most of the funny moments are in his interior dialog! Harry shows him a picture of fat, toothless Betty when she was a svelt young woman. “Julie would never change like that. For one thing, she goes to the dentist...”
- Basically 2 characters and a bunch of cameos. No integration.

Dialogue

- Some of the most entertaining dialog is in Nate’s unspoken asides.
- Some of the most cloying platitudes: “There’s a world of difference between ‘he died’ and ‘he finished his dying.’ ‘Died’ is static. ‘Dying’ is a process, part of the endless continuation.” As though Author is looking for a spot on Oprah.

Structure

- The driving internal problem is Harry’s search for what he needs to write his Great Poem. He hopes to find it by rummaging through his long past in Limerock. Ho-hum. It’s not even motivating enough to get them to Garfield. The only external problem is getting to the college on time. No stakes. No pressure. Just a weak timelock.

Storyline

- You’ve got two funny characters, and lots of funny bits without a driving storyline.
- It’s all about poets and poetry, but we don’t hear any, even at his poetry reading. No poetry until the “Afterward.” And then, it’s just a couple of poems that prove the old bum was a better poet than Harry.

Subplots

- Nathan’s hidden, one-way love affair with Julie is a throwaway.
- Harry’s history is anecdotal at best.

Premise

- Two opposite characters could create a lot more tension than they do here.

Writing & Adaptability

- Love the opening line: “Beautiful Julie and I were alone...” (JSA: Maybe I’m biased?)
- Some juicy quotables: “A whore in gaudy garb, the foe of poetry, that’s television.” “Thoreau was right about men’s lives.” “If somebody praises my work, I don’t believe them, I think they’re just being nice. If they slam it, it hurts, no matter who they are. Insane!” “My being was saturated with words, they sang in me like music sang in other kids.” “Now here’s a strange thing: if you can’t see, you’re blind, if you can’t hear, you’re deaf, but if you can’t smell? No word for it! ... Let’s call it snoo, kind of like sniff and snuff...Odd how our language has all these *holes*.” “I had breakfast. Three Frosts, two Larkins, four Dylan Thomases. I’m stuffed.”
- Nice “touches” throughout.

EVALUATION

- X Pass
 Worth a read
 Consider with a rewrite

Consider
Recommend

CHARACTERS

X-Believable
 X-Complete
 X-Interesting

Caricatures
 X-Thin
 Dull

DIALOGUE

X-Realistic
 X-Succinct
 X-Effective

Artificial
 X-Over-written
 Weak

WRITING?

A pleasant, touching read, but, ultimately, it isn't cinematic, and the characters aren't unique, engaging, or surprising enough to make up for the static storyline and platitudes.

PLOT CONSTRUCTION?

The story follows the standard road trip structure, but since nothing really happens, it's more like a Sunday drive in the country.

WOULD IT WORK WITH A REWRITE?

Adaptation could turn out an interesting "slice of life" character study, but there aren't enough surprises in the characters to be worth it. More adaptable to the stage than the screen.

IS IT VISUAL?

Lovely countryside, vivid seaport and characters - but little action. Talky.

BUDGET?

Low: character-driven.

EXPLOITABLE ELEMENTS?

Unusual setting, sleeper potential. Nice moments for character actors.

SEX AND VIOLENCE?

Neither.

TV?

Yes. Bravo, IFC.

WHAT FILMS WOULD YOU COMPARE IT TO?

I'm Not Rappaport, For the Boys, My Dinner with Andre, My Favorite Year, Planes, Trains & Automobiles

HUMOR? IF SO, IS IT FUNNY?

Yes, satisfying irony.