

Story Consultant SAMPLE - by Suzanne E. Gillis

SCREENPLAY TITLE: **THE BELMONTs** (screenwriter not mentioned)

GENRE: Broad/Family Comedy

OVERALL IMPRESSION: This was by far the best-structured first act I've read in a long time. Great characters and dialogue and excellent set up. This has the makings of a great comedy script in terms of original and promising premise. I was very pleased with the pacing and consistency of the character's and story throughout. My only problem happened when the second act started and the secondary character's didn't remain as clever and resourceful as they were during the first act. I'd love to see them better treated in the next draft.

SCRIPT TITLE: Excellent. Tells us immediately that this is comedy about a wealthy family.

LOGLINE/PITCH: *"When a rich, snob learns that in order to receive her share of her deceased father's vast fortune, she must first spend her summer vacation with a brother and his family that she never knew existed. All hell breaks loose when the two families come together. She will stop at nothing short of murder to rid herself of her new found sibling."*

Too long and too wordy. I would try something shorter like: *"A wealthy white family suddenly learns that they must accept a unknown black family into their family in order to inherit their father's family fortune."*

OVERALL PREMISE: Good to excellent. I would, however, tone down the 'black' angle to avoid jeopardizing the humor and offending your target audience. These jokes need to be made less offensive and more personal if they are to work. They should only be used once by an individual Belmont family member. These prejudices should be more directed at the poorness of the black family than their race overall. It is my suggestion that the script work better if a particular Belmont family member (perhaps the oldest member who was raised in different times or the meanest member who's going to change the most by falling in love with the black family) and not by the entire family. The embarrassment should be centered more around the fact that these people aren't refined enough to fit into the family, and not simply because they are black. Work on this and you will get more laughs and be less offensive to your target audience. Also take a look at the new and original screenplay that deals with family mixing of white/black race issues in 'GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER' for handling this sensitive subject matter while not offending your core audience.

ORIGINALITY: Good. Just keep building on the secondary characters and adding more humor in appropriate manner that is not offensive to black audiences and add more stakes to the second and third act.

PLOT POINTS/TWISTS: As I mentioned, the only reservations I have about this script still center on the 'black' issue, which still borders on offending your target audience. This black issue shouldn't be the central focus of the humor/conflict. Focus more on personal stuff between the family members, particularly the secondary characters. Let the humor tell us something more personal about this family and their particular hang-ups and why this keeps getting on other the family members nerves, particularly Karen's, the central character. Neat freaks, garden parties, stuck up unannounced friends, social embarrassment, toilet habits, inappropriate clothing, and other issues should be the source of humor here. This will get more laughs and keep the audience clued into what is at stake here for accepting this black family into the Belmont's social arena. Focus also more on the greed of the family what will happen to the family fortune as a result of letting this illegitimate family getting their hands on it and spending it unwisely. Also, some of the plot points in the second act should have been introduced much earlier on. I will point them out in a separate e-mail. This is something to pay attention to in the next draft. Also read the Screenwriting Handbook for specific page numbers where these plot points should be introduced (page 45/65/85). They don't have to be exact, but the closer they are these pages the more you know you're hitting your professional mark as a screenwriter. In humor everything is timing and you always have to be one step in front of the audience and reader.

OVERALL STRUCTURE: Good to Average. As I mentioned, we still needs more twists in the second act and involvement of secondary characters in the central plot. Third act will play out much funnier once this humor is added and you hit the LAUGH marks. It will also make the secondary characters even more loveable. Secondary characters are sometimes the most remembered characters in successful comedies. So don't shortchange them by keeping them out of the real fun here.

MAIN CHARACTERS: Excellent. Keep Karen on the breaking point till the final act, and you've got a very memorable character that any actresses would love to play. Keep us on the edge of our seats waiting to see what she's going to do next at all times. Let us see her pulling her hair out and falling completely apart, and maybe even hiring a therapist or yoga specialist. See 'DOWN AND OUT IN BEVERLY HILLS' when the family hires a dog therapist -- very funny twist.

SECONDARY CHARACTERS: June and Junior need to be just as smart and resourceful as Karen. Up their cleverness quite a bit here. Also, the bonding of the kids happens too fast and doesn't focus on the real conflict between Karen and Junior. We need to see these kids either defending their mother and family, or willing to do anything to get out of this stuffy family. Make a choice and make it pay off with the kids. Also the Black Mama figure gets lost too quickly. She's responsible for this whole problem and needs to be held accountable for her actions. Don't let father Ford off so easy either. He's the central problem too. They lied, broke the social rules and now the rest of the family must sort it out and pay for it. Make someone in the family try and force them to deal with the consequences for falling into lust. It could even be the Bulter or neighbor who's the biggest snob of all but doesn't have anything really at stake here. Get these

characters flushed out more in the second act and this will make for a much more laughs throughout. They need to be into the game of the humor here/premise and you'll find you have a much more polished script.

DIALOGUE: Good to Excellent. Get more laughs out of the secondary characters, fix some of the other issues mentioned above and you've got a real winner.

CINEMATIC QUALITY: Strong. I love the feel of the wealthy home in the suburb where the Belmont's live in. However, we need to see more of the contrast to Junior's household before they move in with them, to fully understand their difference and to truly appreciate the humor of all this. This should be added in in a quick scene.

CONCLUSION/SUGGESTIONS: I think the writer is clearly talent enough to do a great job in fixing the second and third acts the next draft. As it is now, the script is too short even for a comedy and needs about 5-10 ten pages added to make it's structure sound and funny enough. Don't shortchange your audience here. This is easily fixed and is some of the necessary secondary characters involvement here. As of now, these characters are still not fully flushed out yet or fully participating enough yet in terms of the humor and plot point/twists and complications they should present. Also, why didn't Karen tell her husband about Junior sooner? If he such a good husband she wouldn't have confiding in him. That would make both of them more convincing as an actual couple. It would also strengthen their bond and need to get rid of Junior and his family, if the are so connected and in tune with each other, both money wise and socially.

This premise could be even funnier if the focus is more on the Momma and the dead Dad and some hidden agendas they had. This would up the stakes for Karen and the Belmont's if they found out there Dad had some real secrets he was keeping from them, mostly about the way the live and their real values. This would also help the problem with providing more believable motives for the secondary characters to become more involved in keeping Junior and his family from becoming part of the Belmont family. When the Belmont's work as a team they are bonded but as individuals things start to fall apart when they get to know this black family start falling in love with them on a more personal one-to-one basis.

Remember, anything you bring up in the first act needs to be built on in the second act, and resolved by the third act. Each family members needs a specific character arc (with inner and outer problems) which is completely fleshed out. Once we fully understand all of these character (their speciic agendas and weaknesses) it is much easier to bring out the humor of the script, while also finding way to resolving the conflict by the end of the story. Keep working at this and you'll have a winning script. You have excellent timing when it comes to writing comedies. Don't shortchange you characters or yourself in your next draft. You just need to add a little more 'meat' to the second act, more depth to the characters and more conflict to the family plot to actually and pull it all ALL off. Great job so far, and keep writing. You have a natural talent for comedy writing.