

Story Consultant SAMPLE - by Suzanne E. Gillis

SCREENPLAY TITLE: **'THE NEW THIRTY'** (screenwriter not mentioned)

GENRE: Romantic Comedy

OVERALL IMPRESSION: The script starts off like a fluffy comedy about a married middle-aged PR man who gets assigned to a singer trying to break out of her Britney Spears image. There is some fun comedy in this, but unfortunately about halfway through the script, the marriage conflict this presents introduces a twist that forces the audience to take things too seriously to treat this premise strictly as a comedy. The result is a script that doesn't seem to be either firmly a comedy or a drama. The result is a confusing mixture of subject matter (extramarital affair of a happily married man) that has no real reason to cheat on his wife other than boredom, which presents a serious moral issue, which will only end up alienating your target audience, which at this point is hoping to see a comedy. This confusion will directly hurt the audience's reaction to the script.

SCREENPLAY TITLE: My sense is there is still a better title is out there and much funnier, once you get to what this comedy is really all about.

LOGLINE/PITCH: Presently this pitch does not tell me what the real 'hook' of this story is or what makes it different from other scripts films dealing with similar 'extra-marital' affairs. You need something more than this to make this story stand out from the crowd.

OVERALL STORY/PREMISE: Forty-seven-year-old Michael Bostic is a good guy in a good marriage. He doesn't even know he's having a mid-life crisis, until he meets her. We don't actually see that this woman is putting either his relationship with his wife or career in any real jeopardy. There are also issues that do not work out in terms of the tease and paybacks that are typical in such comedies. This script, premise and logline still needs more work right now. It lacks a moral yet comedic tone. The story about Michael's flirtation with infidelity works only if the audience knows what he has to lose if he 'acts' on this flirtation. Until this woman appears, we have no real sense that this marriage is in trouble or that he's facing any kind of midlife crisis. An potential 'affair' in itself does not possess enough punch to be a full blow mid-life crisis. From the moment Michael meets Cheyenne, he seems sexually attracted to her, but we don't see any signs of any personal or career problems in his life up till then. In a good comedy, conflict starts early and is followed upon in each new scene that ratchets up the tension until Michael is forced to 'finally act' in a way that brings his entire life crashing down upon him. So far, all of this remains vague and not believable enough.

ORIGINALITY: A PR man who is black and in the music business is a good start, but the rest of the story becomes too predictable and borders on offending your basic audience base the moral issue of his cheating on his wife and not seeming to care too much about losing her or his family. The moral issue of him committing adultery and getting away with it, is not well throughout. We need more at stake for him to lose for this premise to

work. He needs more at stake other than his career and wife, because in the end, his wife just forgives him and his life goes on as before. So where is all the conflict and fun in this story? And what message does that convey to your audience? Your demographic is a married family audience, since this is written as a comedy, so you have to be careful of what kind of 'message' you are sending them by the end of the film, otherwise, no studio will get behind this project. As an independent film, it would have to be much darker and not written as it is now, with elements and hints of trying to be a romantic comedy.

If Michael didn't actually have this affair, what would he stand to lose in this story? Nothing? So far, he just plays with the idea which in itself, doesn't keep us interested or amused for very long. In the end, he backs out before it gets too serious. So again, what did we get out of watching this story? It is not original enough right now, to carry its entire weight as a 'new' entertaining comedic story of a man in a mid-life crisis who thinks of giving up his wife and his family and ruining his career, over a woman who's half his age and who we can't even understand why she would be interested in him.

Meanwhile, Michael's wife, Evelyn, should be a main character in this story and she is not. When things start to fall apart in the second act, she suddenly disappears and goes on a vacation with a man she hardly knows, and this isn't even to get even, it's just her gay male friend. Again, you miss major ways of making the stakes higher, and the conflict believable and comedic enough to carry this story through. Eventually Michael goes chasing after his wife, but after you've already told us he doesn't seem to even care that much about her. What suddenly makes him change his mind and feel he can't live without her. All these elements of the story are missing, which is a problem right now. The main problem is where is or WAS the 'bond' that brought this couple together in the first place and held them together for the last twenty years? Why is this never shown or conveyed to us? If we don't feel the love -- then why do we even care if they end up together? This is a huge hole in this story now, and needs to be filled. You also need to stay within the lines of moral expectation in terms of your audience if you are to continue to market this as a family comedy. Otherwise, you need to change the genre.

STORY PLOT POINTS & TWISTS: Needs much more work. There is also a moment when Michael seems to have not heard of this famous Cheyenne nor does he realize her market value. This seems odd, given his PR status, and again doesn't make him appear smart. Cheyenne is portrayed to be as well known as Jessica Simpson and Britney Spears, so why wouldn't he have heard about her? You want to be careful that you don't make Michael too dumb for us to like him. This might be okay for a secondary character, but not the lead hero. Given the flirting and moral issues involved here, an audience isn't going to side with him simply because he's not too sharp. Also, since Cheyenne is 20 plus years younger than Michael, and clearly much smarter, what would be her motive for falling for him? He is not portrayed as attractive or smart enough to even temptant enough to completely launch her 'active' career. So what makes her go along with this 'flirtation' in the first place? Plus, making her so much younger, Michael ends up making Michael look like an even bigger cad for simply contemplating an affair with her based on her 'beauty' and age. Perhaps the way to solve this issue would be to recast her as a more experienced older Mariah Carey type, or perhaps someone who is suddenly losing

her real appeal to the newer sexier younger singer/starlets in town. Ultimately all these characters lack a 'convincing' inner conflict that shows what they are truly 'afraid' of or insecure about. This loses a lot of opportunity for fun and humor in this script, which it currently is lacking. See character development section for more information regarding these issues. If you make Michael less parental, then we can buy this attraction as potentially something less dangerous and more believable if he and Cheyenne seem to connect on some other level -- perhaps a similar insecurity or problem. Right now, their connection is simply based on 'sexual' attraction which is not clear why, since Michael is not sexually enticing enough to attract this woman, who can probably get any man she wants. Also, the moral issue of Michael and his marriage relationship is also not developed or clear enough for us to understand why we should care if he does in fact sleep with her. SO this is so far, a problem because you have many holes in various comedic plot points and twists which should be taking place, but are not developed yet enough to carry this script.

OVERALL STRUCTURE: Needs more work in terms of development of story, conflict and character. We need higher stakes, more clear objectives and conflicts, as well as more humor. Right now the story still treads on offending a family audience that would not find it amusing to see a middle age man sleeping with his younger sexy new client, and not having very much else going on, or at stake for his family, career, or marriage.

MAIN CHARACTERS: Michael Bostic is the real protagonist of the story, but he is introduced as a mundane guy just going through the motions at work and at home. There is a brief scene of him and his wife, but it doesn't convey enough about either of them to firmly establish the relationship they share or how their marriage is. Are they still in love? Is the relationship bitter or chilly? Or has it merely fallen into the mundane? The scene has enough hints of all of those possibilities, but doesn't clearly suggest a single one issue strongly enough to convey what type of marriage this is. We still don't see what he wants, and what's preventing him from getting this. Or is it that he is passive and thrown into a bad situation? If that's the case he cannot sleep with this other woman or we will not want to see him reconnected with his wife in the end. You'll lose your audience here, so watch out where you're heading with this. If this is going to be a comedy, he has to be the good guy and you can't let him have it both ways. He shouldn't be allowed to have his cake and eat it too. This doesn't make him attractive to a family audience. Unfortunately, Michael still needs further development and more insecurities that relate to his life besides work. So far, the tension between Michael and his wife Evelyn suggest various trust issues, but we are no example or source to know why or when or how this formed. There must have been something going on between them (some conflict) prior to Michael considering cheat on her. So far, there is no solid evidence that his even 'thought' of this is based on anything other than wanting to satisfy his sexual curiosity. We need to see that he is unhappy, and so is his wife and why, before we get into the story of Michael lusting after Cheyenne, his new client.

SECONDARY CHARACTERS: It is a fun idea to have Cheyenne's dad involved in the story. Will gets in the way by micromanaging his daughter's career, but I wasn't sure why his daughter who is now twenty six years old and who seems control in her life, would

allow him to have this much control over her personal life and career. It actually makes Cheyenne unsympathetic, unless she is allowing her father's control, simply because she doesn't have the heart to 'fire' him. Either way, having these two strictly business-types, Michael and Cheyenne's father butting heads over her and her career, is amusing and can be worked in even better, if we know what each of their specific agendas were involving her career and personal life. Also, the sexual tension between Cheyenne and Micheal doesn't seem to play out on the page or screen. We don't get what all the flirting is about, really or what the attraction is really all about. We don't yet buy why Cheyenne would want a man old enough to be her father who isn't fit, or even exciting, or smart of anything special in any way, so where is the attraction from her part? Why is she flirting with him? What is it going to get her? By page forty, we should be well involved in a deep plot with motives and plot points already taking place, as well as potential conflicts which should have already be starting to surface to keep the story flowing, the tension mounting and the audience fully engaged. But as the script is now, these character developmen and/plot points still aren't fully developed or present in the main characters, so the secondary characters are not working in 'full force' as potential friend or conflict which is what their purpose is in a comedy -- and we do not see how they are helping this story along in any REAL way.

DIALOGUE: Still needs work, since the main and secondary characters still are not fully developed. When they are developed, I feel there can be more jokes and arguments that can bring this story to life. Right now, we need more gags, conflict, sexual tension, and characters that work, as well as more meat to the main story.

CINEMATIC QUALITY: I like the suburbs and PR office for this story. Keeps it real and keep it grounded. You may also want to think about adding a big climatic scene, and a stage performance in a large hall to balance the visual scenes and overall action out.

CONCLUSION/SUGGESTIONS: If Michael's marriage is 'on the rocks' then Cheyenne should not be portrayed as the entire reason for the problem. She should merely part of the problem, and Micheal should also be equally at fault. Otherwise, you do not have a comedy here. SOMething must happen that 'breaks them up' before the affair comes alone. Right now, there is too much of a 'cliche' going on with no clear explanation for their marital problems. Also, it is unlikely that Michael wouldn't be contemplating his options if he does cheat on his wife of twenty years. He has not 'best friend' to confide in which is typical in these types of comedies. Also, his wife just takes off half way through the script and leave the entire story, instead of finding her own 'way' of geting her marriage back on tract or ending the marriage. She simply disappears and this doesn't add any drama or humor to the story and simply leaves Michael free to act on his affair, if he wishes to, and to actually get away with it, without his wife's knowledge. Where is the fun in that? Or the conflict? Throughout, Michael remains fully aware of what he is doing in terms of flirty with having an 'affair' and has no regard for his wife's feelings or consequences to his life and career if in fact he acts on this. Right now, this entire script needs to be taken to the next level. It's a good start, funny at times, has a good main character, but needs still further development in many areas, including futher development of the main/secondary characters, more added story conflict and more plot

twists. I feel more humor will arise once you focus on these missing ingredients in the next rewrite.