

Done Deal

EXAMPLES

Treatment

Treatments can be anywhere from 8 to 10 pages up to 50 or more sometimes. It depends on how detailed the writer wants to be. Since treatments are generally just tools for a writer to flesh out and further development his or her idea & story, there is no right or wrong. This is a very basic example of what a treatment looks like. As you will notice, in this sample, dialogue is explained in prose form.

DARK PARK

by Sally Screenwriter

Late afternoon. Smoldering. A dry wind pushes a tumbling tumble weed towards the horizon. There is no way to escape the heat except through death which for some would be a welcome relief. In the distance a small cloud of dust emerges on the horizon. A taxi cab cruises down the road it shares with single tortoise. As the cab approaches, the DRIVER snaps from his daze just in time to dodge the small reptile. The sudden swerve of the cabin awakens its only other occupant, DEREK HOPKINS. He gasps as if coming out of a bad dream. Derek rubs his strong square jaw, then runs his hands through his shaggy hair. He's handsome without even trying. His piercing eyes look out over the desolate land. He's seen worse - but not much. Derek asks the driver how much longer, but the cabbie only smiles and nods his head.

A metal spike is driven into the dirt. A worker ties off a flap that has been loosened by the wind. The flap is connected to the ragged and worn Big Top -- the center attraction of "Annie's Amusement O'Rama." As the worker finishes his task, he walks around to the front of the tent and surveys the entire park. Before him lays equally worn smaller tents which cover various booths that sell food or provide an outlet for the locals to lose their money in a rigged game of chance. Behind the tents is a small village of trucks and trailers which the workers and performers refer to as their "hell away from home."

The taxi cruises down the main street of the small Texas town - population, 22,000. Derek soaks in the new surroundings. The cab takes a quick turn at the end of the street and drives a few hundred yards to the amusement park. It stops quickly at the entrance creating a large swirl of dust. Derek exits. Hands the driver a few dollars and pulls out his one and only piece of luggage -- a large Army duffel bag covered with various patches from car racing, to truck builders, to rock groups.

When community education courses advertise "Sell your ideas to TV," they mislead inexperienced writers who don't understand that the word *ideas* is being used loosely. The inexperienced writer doesn't sell an idea. Instead, he must write his idea *at least* into a treatment and try to get it into the hands of an active filmmaker. Second only to writing an entire screenplay or teleplay "on spec" (the industry term for "speculative work done without a contract"), your treatment may be the best tool for getting a foot in the door of moviemaking.

But the treatment is a strange animal, quite unlike any other kind of writing. If a screenplay focuses the story for a film, the treatment does the same thing for a screenplay. Yet there are as many kinds of treatments as there are writers. None of this confusion helps the new writer trying to break into the business, but for the outsider's purposes, what distinguishes one treatment from another is simply its effectiveness in making the sale, and/or laying out the story.

With the proliferation of cable programming, the expansion of video rentals, and the industry's acutely competitive need for films and programs to fill home and theatrical screens, the function of the treatment in today's motion picture and television industries has expanded. The usefulness of the treatment is behind the scenes, in developing a story, and/or in pitching it efficiently to filmmakers who might be sold on making the writer's story into a film.

A script is a selling tool; it's not a blueprint for a movie, in spite of what they tell you. Screenplays ought to be sold as prose. It's entirely about storytelling, explaining that story to the reader.

—Kurt Wimmer

Treatments can help the writer acquire an overview of his story, presenting the profile of the woods in contrast to the varied texture of the trees. By the same token, for a story editor or

development executive the treatment is a useful diagnostic tool for getting the story straight. By reading a short treatment, the editor obtains a perspective that may be lost when reading a faulty script.

Nothing can take the place of a live pitch, where the writer dramatizes his story for an attentive audience. But a written pitch is still needed to assist in the next stage of the filmmaking process, where the story is "repitched" to the next person higher up along the chain of production. When an oral pitch is impossible, a written pitch can do the job. (The treatment is a written pitch.) Everything we say in this book is intended to assist you, the writer, in understanding and creating the treatment to serve one or the other, or both, of these two crucial purposes.

For our purposes then, a treatment is a relatively brief, loosely narrative written pitch of a story intended for production as a film for theatrical exhibition or television broadcast. Written in user-friendly, dramatic, but straightforward and highly visual prose, in the present tense, the treatment highlights in broad strokes your story's hook, primary characters, acts and action line, setting, point of view, and most dramatic scenes and turning points.

The Key Elements of a Treatment

Let's take a closer look at the key elements that make a good treatment:

"relatively brief": A treatment's brevity or length is relative to the writer's purpose at hand. A top network executive, such as the Vice President of Motion Pictures for Television, may request a one-page treatment; his boss, the Senior Vice President of Motion Pictures for Television, may need only one paragraph. The writer may have started with a twenty-page treatment, which he used to clarify the story elements as he was thinking them through.

"loosely narrative": A treatment both *tells* and *shows* a story, moving from one to the other as the writer sees fit in his overall aim of helping his audience—whether an individual buyer from a network or studio, or the ultimate consumer in front of the tube or in the theater—visualize the story and become involved with its emotional content. It's "loose," because the rules for writing a treatment aren't hard and fast. The closest analogy we can think of is a vivid and intense letter to your best friend relating a series of amazing events that you've just experienced.

"pitch": This word describes the act of relaying a story for the purpose of selling it to the person listening to you. You spontaneously pitch the movie *Joe Somebody* to your best friend if you enjoyed it and are urging her to go see it. The director or producer at a friendly business lunch with the studio president pitches the story he's most excited about in answer to the question, "What are you working on these days?"

"user-friendly": The best treatments are easy on the eye. A treatment looks much like a short story because it's written in paragraph form, uses quotation marks for dialogue, and omits the technicalities of screenplay format. Use wide margins, a standard typeface, and short paragraphs rather than long ones. Leave a line of space between each paragraph, instead of indenting them.

"dramatic": A treatment is not an essay or a school composition filled with rhetorical and syntactical niceties. It's more closely comparable to an advertising campaign. The prose must be dramatic, or the treatment fails. Dramatic qualities include focus, intensity, dialogue, concrete characterization, and, most of all, *action*. Phrases like "the story starts with" or "in this act we see" serve no purpose in a well-written treatment. Instead, a treatment might open with:

The black limousine hurtles around the corner and slams to a stop at the front steps of the courthouse.

It's not "a" limousine or "a" corner, but "the" limousine and "the" corner because your intention is to make your reader believe that this story, with all its concrete details, is coming to life before his eyes as he reads.

"straightforward": The treatment's language is simple and unpretentious; its sentences forceful and declarative. The language draws no attention to itself, intent upon presenting only what will push the action forward.

"highly visual prose": Remember, your purpose in a treatment is to show us the pictures or scenes by which this story can be brought to life. Use your skill to evoke these pictures in as few words as possible.

"present tense": Writing in the present tense places your audience immediately in the action rather than distancing them. In the example given, note that the limousine "hurtles" and "slams to a stop."

"highlights": The treatment needn't include every single detail that the screenplay will spell out. It must include all the highlights, the *necessary* details (often called "obligatory scenes") without which the story makes no sense to the audience or reader. Highlighting must be positive. The treatment is not a critique and should contain no qualifiers or uncertainties.

"broad strokes": Please don't kill us with detail. The human mind can only absorb so much new information at a time. Stay focused on the most important elements of the story, remembering that your purpose is to tease your reader into asking for more detail—or for the screenplay.

"hook": What makes this story's approach to its subject matter different from other stories on the same subject? That difference or angle is what will hook your audience and, for that reason, your buyer.

"primary characters, acts and action line, setting, and point of view": By the time your prospective buyer has finished reading your treatment, he should clearly understand the main character or characters, the general shape of your story's

- **NO.** The negotiations go badly. You can't come to terms. The deal falls apart, usually because of the new writer's unrealistic expectations or his agent/manager's lack of experience.
 - **YES.** The deal is done. Even before you sign it, you may very well move to the next step.
7. Your executive (now you refer to him as "my executive at . . .") calls for a development meeting. At this meeting, you discuss modifications to the story. You agree to undertake the modifications. The executive asks you, first, to write a new treatment that reflects the changes so he can see them in the context of the whole story before you go through the painstaking work of revising the script itself. The treatment, in one form or another, continues to be used as a diagnostic tool until the final, or shooting, script is accepted.

Kinds of Treatments

In both television and major motion picture filmmaking, the three most common kinds of treatments are:

1. **Original dramatic treatments:** These are treatments of dramatic stories invented by writers. (Chapter 2 deals at length with these.)
2. **Treatments of true stories:** These show how the writer would turn fact into drama, organizing actual events and characters to create a compelling story line. Think about Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* and how he made a visually exciting movie based on the exploits of the thirteenth-century Scottish hero William Wallace. Or the heartwarming *Fly Away Home* with Anna Paquin and Jeff Daniels, which dramatized the true story of a man who taught endangered geese their migratory route. (Chapter 5 deals at length with these treatments.)

3. **Adaptation treatments:** These show how a writer would dramatize an existing story by another writer. A treatment for adapting *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott might convince a studio to develop a script for a remake. Producer Denise DiNovi did indeed produce a very successful screen version of *Little Women* starring Winona Ryder and Susan Sarandon. Emma Thompson won an Academy Award for her first attempt at screenwriting, an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. And Alicia Silverstone's catapult to stardom, *Clueless*, was an innovative, hip, '90s version of Austen's *Emma*. (We deal with adaptations in chapter 6.)

Confusing Terms

As we mentioned earlier, the term *treatment* is thrown around loosely in the film and TV world and has been used from time to time by development or creative executives, writers, and business affairs persons to mean variously a one-pager, a synopsis, an outline or "beat sheet," or a coverage. But there are some differences in these forms, as follows:

Treatment v. Synopsis

Synopsis is the term used by those in the entertainment industry to indicate a matter-of-fact summation of a story's plotline, a shorter version of a longer work, whether that work is a novel, a nonfiction book, a screenplay, or even a treatment. Think of the synopsis as a more or less complete and detailed recitation of all the scenes and events in a story, a condensed version of the plot. The purpose of the synopsis is to describe, not to sell. The treatment's purpose is to sell, and that's why it's written with an intensity and urgency the synopsis characteristically lacks.

action line, the impact of its setting on its development, and the attitude toward its subject matter. The treatment generally indicates, implicitly or overtly, the act breaks for a feature film (three acts) or movie for television (seven acts).

"most dramatic scenes": Skip the transitions and skim over the background scenes or "back story." Just give us the obligatory scenes required to imagine the overall shape of the story.

"turning points": Turning points or "twists" are moments in the story when the characters move into some kind of jeopardy under the impulse of previous events and their character makeup. A twist is an unexpected turning point that surprises the audience. Turning points include *cliffhangers*, used to propel the audience from one act to another.

"intended for production": Never forget that the intention of the treatment is to initiate the process of filmmaking. In filmmaking, as screenwriter William Goldman (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Marathon Man*) put it, "Nobody knows anything." This means that there are no true rights or wrongs in creating effective treatments. The best treatments are great because their writers are expert dramatists.

"theater or television": A treatment for each medium should follow rules prescribed by that medium. A film treatment, with its three acts, may perplex television executives worried about TV's traditional seven-act structure. A television treatment will trouble theatrical developers until it has been restructured for their audience.

A treatment generally varies in length from one to twenty-five or more pages, depending on the kind of treatment it is and its purpose. The treatment of the motion picture *One-Night Stand* with Wesley Snipes and Nastassia Kinski that garnered writer Joe Eszterhas (*Basic Instinct*) \$2.5 million from New Line Cinema (with another \$1.5 million to be paid on production) was four and a half pages long. AEI (with Zide Films) sold Steve Altens's *Meg* to Walt Disney Pictures for \$700,000 based on

TREATMENTS AS CLIFFHANGERS

Treatments should feel like pictures rushing together to form a story, in which you can see the characters and hear them speak. A treatment should never read like a synopsis, like dull beats of a plot moving forward, trudging toward a predictable outcome. When you're reading the pages, however simple, the thrill of the story must be captured. And how do you do that? You forget that you're writing a treatment and tell the story like a classic around-the-campfire cliffhanger—as if every event happened before your very eyes and you can't wait to share it.

The structure should reveal itself like the design of the master architect crossed with a clever composer. The beginning immediately captivates. Why? Because you know exactly where to start the story because you have thought about it very carefully. And you know exactly whose face has just appeared on the screen. The character's journey should feel random and spontaneous, as if rolling down a hill, not a step-by-step contrivance of events.

The energy of the beginning should carry us into the middle—and now you're in trouble. The subplot has to subtly kick in here, and its momentum carries us through to the end.

An architect's blueprint or a sheet of music is dull only to those who do not have the passion to appreciate its execution. These "treatments" of a breathtaking building or a moving symphony should be just as exciting as seeing the Parthenon or hearing the Ninth Symphony for the first time. And this is your job. When you tell your story, you'll be like the projectionist alone in the dark booth, until the lights come back on again and then everyone understands—finally—exactly what you wanted to say.

—Victoria Wisdom, agent and partner,
Becsey-Wisdom-Kaledjian

We start, in chapter 1, by examining exactly what a treatment is and how it's used in the industry to make a sale and/or to lay out a story. Here we also differentiate the treatment from its cousins the synopsis, the outline, the beat sheet, and the

Treatment v. Coverage

Coverage is the industry term used to describe the diagnostic document provided by the story department readers for executives making acquisition decisions in theatrical film and television. The typical coverage document consists of:

- identifying information (name of story, name of writer, name of person doing the coverage, type of story, etc.);
- a synopsis, as previously defined;
- a set of comments giving the reader's opinion of the cinematic worthiness of the piece covered;
- a rating chart, allowing the reader to rate the piece on characterization, dialogue, action, setting, and commercial appeal.

A script may be covered by:

- a talent agency for casting purposes;
- a talent agency, for *packaging* (the term for attaching talent—an actor, actress, or director);
- a director, actor, or actress's company to assess its suitability for involvement;
- a production company, to assess a film's viability;
- an agent or manager, to help determine whether the writer should be represented or the work produced.

The coverage's purpose is to report the strong and weak points of a story as objectively and comprehensively as possible. But a treatment, drawing its energy from its writer's personal enthusiasm, is *not* objective.

The Beat Sheet

A beat sheet is a writing tool used to identify the sequence of events, turning points, and action in your story. It's an abbreviated way (no longer than three pages, please) to break down

She wants the coins. He tosses them to her, and she promptly pulls the trigger.

- Alone, with five of her one-time best friends now dead, Julie turns the sailboat back to shore.
- In the distance a storm is coming, and the seas are choppy. Lightning illuminates the entire sky, revealing ominous thunderheads. The little sailboat rises and falls on the massive swells, standing little chance against nature's fury—and the curse of the coins.

THE END

Treatment v. Outline

The words *outline* or *reblocking* are used to describe a list of the scenes in a cinematic story, much like the beat sheet. Outlines of this kind are especially useful in the development process because they reveal the flow of the scenes, without elaboration, at a glance. An outline can be thought of as a skeletal treatment. Where a treatment may contain dialogue to dramatize a particular moment, the outline will not. Its purpose is strictly diagnostic, to allow the executive, the director, and the producers to chart the direction of a story and to make course corrections before the writer is fully committed to writing or rewriting.

The following example is a partial outline for our Disney film, *Meg*:

1. Seventy million years ago, T-Rex attacked and destroyed by *Megalodon*.
2. Professor Jonas Baxter finishes lecture on Meg. Terry Tenaka tries to get his attention.
3. Jonas attends media awards party. Learns his wife is cheating on him, walks out. Terry Tenaka is waiting for him.

In the next chapter we will discuss how to write an original treatment for motion pictures, while at the same time examining the basic elements of fiction and drama.

TREATMENT FOR A MOVIE FOR TELEVISION

UNWANTED ATTENTIONS[aired on NBC as *Shadow of Obsession*]

Treatment by Chi-Li Wong

Based on the Novel by K. K. Beck

Log Line: Stalked by an obsessed admirer for fifteen years, a beautiful college professor becomes the prime suspect in his "murder."

Act I

It is 1973 and **BENJAMIN KNAPP** feels the onslaught of another headache. He goes to the library and tries to concentrate on a history assignment. When he first sees her, he knows: there will never be another.

Benjamin follows her to her dorm and learns her name, **REBECCA KENDALL**. He pretends to befriend Wendy, also from the same dorm, and uses her to get closer to Rebecca. When he learns Rebecca will be attending an upcoming off-campus party, he harshly breaks off with Wendy, telling the stunned freshman that he is engaged to someone else. Through careful manipulations at the party, he arranges to give Rebecca a ride home.

Benjamin is driving. Rebecca notices that he has passed the turn for the campus. When she inquires, Benjamin refuses to take her home. There's a struggle, he strikes her, and with a knife hovering inches from her throat, orders her to partially disrobe—and forces her to tell him she loves him. Satisfied, Benjamin returns a shaken Rebecca to her dorm.

Rebecca brings Benjamin to trial on assault charges. Lacking evidence, the charges are dismissed, but not before the judge humiliates Rebecca, blaming her for Benjamin's advances.

Over the next fifteen years Benjamin remains in Rebecca's life. He follows her in his car on dark lonely roads. He watches her from her fire escape. Rebecca finds a heart scratched onto her car door on Valentine's Day. A series of letters, each one harsher than the previous, arrives in her mail, admonishing her for not responding and, finally, threatening her. Rebecca has the post office return them unopened. He starts calling her. Even though she has a series of unlisted numbers, Benjamin always manages to find her. She keeps moving. Suddenly Benjamin stops writing and calling. Is he gone?

CUT TO**Act II**

Rebecca, now a college professor, reveals to her fiancé, stockbroker **PHILIP PATTERSON**, the details of her haunted past. At the mention of Benjamin's name, Philip reacts suddenly and reveals a telegram he received, warning him not to marry her. Rebecca is stunned; she hasn't heard from Benjamin in two years.

Philip presses for an explanation from Rebecca. Her obvious discomfort in discussing the incident that forever changed her life only makes Philip press harder. Nervously, Rebecca recounts the ride home with Benjamin Knapp, fifteen years ago.

Philip is shocked by the story. However, when Rebecca shows him articles she has collected over the years of women who were stalked by obsessive men, he is horrified. "Rebecca, all these women are dead."

Fearing for her life, Rebecca enlists the help of her attorney, **ANGELA CASARETTI**, who was a prelaw student during Benjamin's assault trial. She is unable to get a restraining order on Benjamin because they can't locate him. She suggests Rebecca hire a private detective and recommends her friend **MICHAEL CARUSO**.

Caruso, who is immediately attracted to Rebecca's beauty and sophistication, successfully tracks down Benjamin's address and brings the news to an anxious Rebecca. Curious, he baits her with his comment, "I hope you'll go easy on the guy," and is met with an icy reply from Rebecca: "I wish I could kill him."

Spurred by his curiosity and rapidly growing interest in Rebecca, Caruso pulls Benjamin's address from his pocket. When he arrives at the apartment, he finds the door ajar. Much to his horror, the walls, floors, and bed are dripping with blood.

Act III

Caruso immediately contacts the police and informs them that he believes Benjamin Knapp has been murdered. Caruso accompanies the police to Rebecca's, having informed them of her chilling comment that she wanted Benjamin dead.

Not surprisingly, Rebecca is openly relieved when she hears the news that Benjamin is dead. Feeling free and easy for the first time in fifteen years, Rebecca allows the police to search both her apartment and car. Her

relief quickly turns to shock as they discover the car trunk is soaked with blood.

D.A. **CARL APPLIGATE** begins the investigation. Comments from Benjamin's mother indicate Rebecca was obsessed with her son for years. Although there is still no body, the evidence against Rebecca is so strong Angela suggests that Rebecca hire the sensational criminal lawyer **TREVOR KEEGAN**.

At a tense first meeting, Keegan confronts Rebecca with the cold truth: Given the evidence, it will be easier for him to defend her if she agrees to plead guilty than if he tries to convince a jury of her innocence. Angri-ly, Rebecca proclaims her innocence. D.A. Carl Applegate indicts her for murder. Even in death Benjamin Knapp still has a hold on her.

Act IV

At the trial, Benjamin's mother takes the stand, recalling the assault trial and the fact that the charges against her son were dropped. Rebecca cringes as she remembers all of the notes she received from Mrs. Knapp, urging Rebecca and Benjamin to "patch things up." Rebecca thinks that Mrs. Knapp is truly insane for believing she and Benjamin ever had a relationship.

Much to Rebecca's dismay, her attorney chooses not to cross-examine Mrs. Knapp. Later he reveals to Rebecca that doing so would have made him appear callous.

Ever present at the trial, Caruso is taking more than simply a professional interest in Rebecca, he feels responsible for her being brought up on charges, but most of all his gut tells him something is wrong.

Keegan calls Angela Casaretti to the stand. She is the attorney who has been working with Rebecca for the past fifteen years trying to stop Benjamin's constant harassment. Angela's testimony recalls the terror that Benjamin brought to Rebecca. As the evidence showing an obvious motive builds up against her, Rebecca wonders if this whole trial, the murder, and her arrest are not another form of Benjamin's harassment.

Just before Philip is to testify, D.A. Applegate asks that the court allow the introduction of new evidence. An expert testifies that Benjamin Knapp had his blood DNA-typed in order to prove his innocence in a paternity suit. His DNA type matches the blood found in both Benjamin's apartment and in Rebecca's car.

This information convinces Philip that Rebecca is guilty. He breaks off their engagement and refuses to testify. Rebecca collapses in Keegan's arms.

Act V

Keegan, well aware that Philip's reaction was inevitable, serves him with a subpoena that he filed at the start of the trial. Rebecca is crushed. She realizes that her relationship with Philip was a mistake fueled by Benjamin's harassments. Knowing this will only make Rebecca appear guilty, Keegan again insists that she change her plea to guilty. She refuses.

Keegan is ruthless when Philip takes the stand. Philip had access to both Rebecca's car and her apartment. Given the threat to his impending marriage that Benjamin provided in the telegram, he had every reason to want Benjamin dead. Now that Philip is in jeopardy, it is all too easy for him to accuse Rebecca.

After closing arguments in which Keegan hopes the jury will think that Philip may have been the murderer, Rebecca waits alone at home. Unable to rest, she prepares a hot bath to ease the tension. Standing before her mirrored closet doors in her slip, she is suddenly knocked to the ground by a man's arm. As she struggles, she feels the prick of a needle sliding into her flesh. She falls into a pit of blackness.

Rebecca awakens to the uneven rhythm of a moving vehicle. Bound and gagged, she can make out the driver, now hidden beneath a sandy beard and mustache; it is Benjamin! The vehicle stops. She feigns unconsciousness as the van door squeaks open. Another needle slips into her arm.

Something is bothering Caruso. Even though he heard Rebecca say she wanted Benjamin dead, the case is too neat. His years of experience tell him that murder cases are never this black and white. He starts to go over the case.

Benjamin allows Rebecca the use of a bathroom at a roadside stop. He gives her ten minutes. Desperately, Rebecca tries to find something to leave a note on. Her frantic search uncovers the morning paper. As she reads the headlines, she learns the horrible truth: the jury has convicted her of murder.

Act VI

Benjamin keeps Rebecca isolated in a windowless cabin deep within the woods, wondering what will happen next. Hoping to catch him off guard, she agrees to listen to music with him while he reveals how he had planned his own death in order to blame her. Rebecca scans the room for a weapon while Benjamin talks. A poker in the fireplace. But can she do it? Can she get close enough? She bends to kiss him on the cheek. Instead of kissing her in return, he slaps her across the face, accuses her of being a slut, and barricades her in her room.

The following morning, he greets her as if nothing happened. She seizes the opportunity and offers to cook him breakfast. As she displays the bacon and eggs before him, she splashes his face with scalding grease. He screams in pain as she smashes him over the head with the skillet. He falls to the floor, unconscious.

Frantically, she searches the house for the keys to the van. Her heart pounding, she finds the syringe. Fearing he could awaken at any moment, she injects him. Still unable to locate the car keys, she runs away from the cabin until she comes to a road. In the distance, she sees a column of smoke. With new hope, she runs toward it and comes across a small lake resort.

Caruso is waiting for Keegan when he hears the phone ring. He overhears Keegan telling Rebecca to stay calm and to talk to no one and wait for his arrival. As he arranges a float plane to take him to the resort, he has his secretary alert the press. This is going to be a big boost in Keegan's career. However, Caruso has a different plan. He disables Keegan's car and posing as the attorney's assistant boards the plane himself.

Rebecca is startled by Caruso's arrival. He warns that Keegan believes she is guilty and is planning to bring in a psychiatrist to declare that she's insane.

As she leads Caruso back toward the cabin, he explains how Benjamin could have used blood doping—a technique of storing one's own blood—to fake his own death. The only problem is that they need Benjamin to prove it.

Rebecca is terrified to enter the cabin, fearful that Benjamin is waiting for them. However, as they enter the kitchen, there is only the splattered breakfast, the skillet, and the syringe—Benjamin is gone.

Act VII

Rebecca begs Caruso to take her away. As they leave, Caruso notices Benjamin's feet sticking out from under the shed. He baits him, proclaiming that Rebecca is his prisoner and that he's taking her back to the inn.

When they return to the inn, Rebecca gives in to Caruso's charm and care. He admits that his investigation continued because he had fallen in love with her. Their first kiss is interrupted by a phone call. It's the sheriff's department. They want to speak to Caruso in the lobby.

As Caruso heads toward the lobby, he realizes he made a costly mistake. He's never heard Benjamin's voice. He races back toward the room, but as he turns a corner, a figure steps from the shadows and smashes him on the head. The keys to the room fall to the floor.

Rebecca rushes to the door when she hears the keys in the lock. She turns, thinking it's Caruso: standing before her is Benjamin. He drags her from the room.

Her horror intensifies as he brings her to the edge of a cliff, saying that the only way to be united forever is for them to fall together. With waves crashing below them, Rebecca pleads with him.

Suddenly, Caruso appears, holding a gun. Benjamin, with a sparkle in his eyes, tries to force Rebecca over the edge, but she manages to free herself as Caruso fires. Benjamin tumbles backward off the cliff. . . .

CUT TO:

Rebecca stands before the judge, who readily vacates judgment and dismisses the murder case against her. She bursts through the wall of reporters and into the arms of Michael Caruso, at long last ready to let someone love her.

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Lily

It's 2006. The political climate in China is very unstable. When ANNA, the young pregnant wife of an outspoken journalist is left widowed after a vicious assassination, friends whisk her out of the country to sympathetic expatriates in Queens, New York.

In Queens she's given a grim room in the local syndicate head quarters. Anna is lethargic, lost in pain. JON VAN, the charming head of the syndicate comes to see how she's doing, and expresses romantic interest in her. Anna's lack of enthusiasm angers him, but he writes it off to her recent experiences.

Lost in shock and grief, Anna, is placed with JUNE, another widow, who has adjusted to the new life. They share a run-down apartment in a maze of tenement buildings, serviced by a few small markets in a bad part of town. June runs the local daycare center for the working mothers in this closed Vietnamese community.

Anna, now seven months pregnant, is speechless and depressed until early labor forces a bone-chilling howl of pain from her parched lips. The baby is born, Lily, a perfect little girl, but Anna is too deeply distressed to bond.

It's June who holds the tiny girl, and cuddles her.

As the weeks pass, Anna slowly recovers. She starts to ask questions about the new world she's entered. Anna sees the mothers drop off and pick up their children, tension and fear in their faces. When Anna asks why there is so much stress, June explains that everyone owes the syndicate, the local arm of the people who helped Anna escape. Jon Van is the boss.

June reveals her hatred of the syndicate, telling Anna of their exploitation of their own kind. "That's why I make so little money, Anna, half of it goes back to them. That's why everyone's afraid, they use threats of deportation or death to keep us in line." Anna denies this, insisting that since the syndicate saved her life and the life of her daughter, June must be exaggerating.

June helps Anna improve her English, warning her to keep it a secret. Their nightly practice bonds them together like sisters. But as time passes, June becomes more and more depressed and decides to run away. Anna feels for June, but warns her that it's wrong to flee. Late one night, June tries to escape. She's caught and is beaten to death.

Horrified at the death of her only friend, Anna's emotional agony returns and she takes refuge in her relationship with Lily. When Lily wants to know about her father, Anna makes up a wild story. She tells Lily her daddy was a famous patriot, who died to save her and many others from the oppression in their country. When Lily asks if he's really dead, Anna hasn't the heart to confirm the truth. She pretends that there's a big secret. She tells Lily that Daddy really escaped and came to America, where he is searching for them

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everywhere.

This fantasy helps Anna to resolve her trauma over the death of her beloved husband and she begins to mend. Jon Van visits, and puts her to work. She takes over June's former duties and runs the local daycare center.

Jon Van lays down the rules: traditional food, dress and language. No English in the home, no western clothes, no contact with TV. Jon Van makes his usual pass, but Anna only looks at him with scorn.

Five years later.

Anna's daughter, Lily, is ready to go to school. On her first day, she's made fun of and returns home in tears. She begs her mother to teach her English and buy her regular American clothes. Lily's daily humiliation at school upsets Anna. She goes to Jon Van and asks that her daughter be allowed to wear American clothes and learn English.

Jon Van warns her to stop this revolt, reminding her of her illegal status. When she argues, he reminds her about what happened to June. He then offers to help Lily if Anna will respond to his advances.

Defeated and repelled, Anna returns home, realizing that June had told her the truth. The months pass, and Lily continues to attend school. Every day, she comes home crying. Lily becomes a faint shadow of her former cheerful self.

Anna can only attempt to comfort her. The only cure is a new story about Dad. Anna's helplessness turns to anger and depression, and she neglects her work and this causes her to lose her day care center.

Jon Van appears with his usual request, but Anna resists. She pleads with him to give her more time to respond to him, and to give her a job.

Meanwhile, after a rash of local thefts, the regular collector, another woman, is attacked and robbed.

Jon Van asks Anna to collect the deposits from the local stores and put them in the bank. She does this gratefully, and without question.

After a few months of doing this work, it's Lily's birthday. Anna steals the daily deposit and buys Lily American clothes and a gold necklace.

Meanwhile the thefts continue throughout the neighborhood.

When Jon Van confronts Anna about the missing money, she pretends the thief has attacked her.

Jon Van believes her, offers her safety in exchange for sexual favors. Again, Anna rebuffs him. She realizes that Jon Van was hoping this would happen, and it makes her even more determined not to give in to him.

DANIEL, the thief, burgles one more store, and is caught by the enforcers of the syndicate. They drag him to an alley and try to beat him to death. Ankle broken, severely wounded, he manages to escape into the maze of tenements.

Daniel breaks into Anna's apartment and hides. Anna is out collecting, and Lily is in school. He finds the necklace and pockets it.

Lily returns from school. She finds Daniel, and assumes he's her long lost father, just returned from a new adventure. Daniel's touched by her innocent acceptance and cannot hurt her. Anna returns. She's appalled to find Daniel in her house, alone with her daughter. She's about to turn him into the syndicate, when Lily joyously announces how happy she is to have found her father at last.

He's so badly beaten that he's not even a threat, and so, Anna doesn't have the heart to destroy Lily's joy. They have a little party, and Daniel and Anna pretend that the necklace is from her "father."

Anna is overwhelmed to see her little girl finally happy.

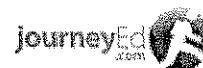
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They continue to enact this uncomfortable charade until Lily leaves for school the next day. Finally alone with him, Anna tells Daniel to get out. He refuses. She threatens to call the syndicate. He threatens to tell Lily he's not her father. Anna realizes that she will be accused of harboring a suspect. She asks Daniel what he wants. Daniel tells her that all he wants is a chance to recover and to get the hell away from there. Anna says she will let him stay if he will maintain the lie. Daniel agrees.

That night the charade continues. Daniel teaches Lily some cool English words and how to fight back. There is as much tenderness between them as though he were her real father. Anna is upset at the situation, but Lily goes to sleep, happy in the lie.

As the days pass, Lily and Daniel grow closer and closer. Lily changes and becomes more secure and out going.

After Lily leaves for school, Anna and Daniel talk. As the time passes, the conversation becomes more personal. Anna realizes they have a lot in common. She softens and takes care of him.

Daniel wants to know who beat him so badly. Anna tells him about the syndicate. Anna goes to the stores to collect the deposits. Friends warn her that the syndicate has found out that she bought the necklace.

She runs home and asks Daniel for help. He sees the poverty she lives in and demands to know where she got the money for Lily's gift. She tells him, commenting that they're both thieves.

Daniel realizes the danger Anna has placed Lily in, and tells her they must get Lily from school. They arrive in time to see Lily kidnapped on the way home by the syndicate. They pursue, but cannot follow inside the syndicate headquarters.

Daniel takes Anna to stay with his friends. He agrees to help her find Lily. They decide to turn the tables on the syndicate and break them up. The question is how? He and his friends are former soldiers, now fallen on hard times. They plan an elaborate scheme to break in and rescue Lily.

Anna must go in to the head quarters alone and face Jon Van. She pretends to be ready to give in to his advances in exchange for Lily, and they go to bed.

Daniel breaks in with his team. A firefight ensues.

Daniel rescues Lily, but is shot down. As he dies, he tells Anna he was happy his life added up to something after all.

Now Anna must save her own daughter, and kill Jon Van.

She meets the challenge, leaving the syndicate shattered behind her.

With new resolve and confidence, Anna takes over the syndicate, but brings prosperity and a new modern tradition into the community. She never tells Lily that Daniel, the thief, wasn't her father.

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About Marilyn Horowitz

How to Write a Screenplay in 10 Weeks is a revolutionary visual writing system, a revolutionary visual writing system, is an award-winning New York University professor, producer, a screenwriter, and a New York-based who works with bestselling novelists, produced and award-winning filmmakers. She is the author of [How to Write a Screenplay in 10 Weeks](#) and [Magic Questions of Screenwriting](#).



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