

Screenplay Critique:

"Angels Should Never Cry" by Tiberiu Ganea

Overview:

This is a heartfelt story about a family faced with tragedy that becomes too much to overcome. Mary falls in love with Sam, and soon they marry and have a beautiful child, Angel. With Mary's job as a doctor and Sam's as a pilot, their life and future seem assured. But when Angel starts to become ill, things start to fall apart. Angel's school won't let her attend, her friends won't play with her, and when she is diagnosed with HIV, even Mary and Sam become ostracized. The marriage starts to fray as Mary is consumed with worry about her daughter and can't be a wife to Sam, who needs someone too. He moves out and Mary soon discovers him with another woman. At her wit's end, she looks into a facility where sick children are cared for, one that was founded by philanthropist friends. But it is too understaffed and underfunded to provide proper care. Her unhappiness is clear to Angel and Mary ultimately sees that her time with her child, no matter the issues, is what matters. She packs the two of them up to go on a trip but tragedy strikes again as they are involved in a car accident. And while Mary survives, Angel does not.

Technique:

The first issue to discuss is the formatting of the screenplay. Quite simply the layout and technical aspects. Proper screenplay format is a 'slugline' at the beginning of each scene that gives us the location and other specifics. Examples would be:

INT. MARY'S HOUSE – KITCHEN – DAY

EXT. PLAYGROUND - MORNING

This is then followed by a short description block to set the scene. And then dialogue, which has the CHARACTER NAME heading (there is no : after it) and then DIALOGUE. You can find the way this should look online many places but here is one: <http://creativegenius101.blogspot.com/2013/01/page-numbering-screenplay.html> Your script doesn't follow this formatting and it is important that it does as not doing so will make your work appear unprofessional. This is a technical issue but one that is nonetheless very important. You can also buy a software program like Final Draft that will give you a template and automatically format for you. But either way, your script must look professional and that means conforming to the industry norm.

Remember that description should be short and to the point. A screenplay is a blueprint for a film, it is not a novel. Long blocks of description will be skimmed if read at all. You also cannot tell us things in the description that we wouldn't know onscreen. An example of this would be your introduction of the philanthropist Arthur Goodman. You spend a full page describing him and none of it comes across in the

actual narrative or conversation, so there is no way that someone watching would get any of this information. The first rule of screenwriting is to **SHOW not TELL**. You must show a character through actions and through dialogue, not by telling us via description or by having another character just tell us either. (Let's also note that despite this time spent, the character really doesn't come into play much in the story; make sure you don't spend time on characters that don't matter.) If we wanted to show this character's attitude about his wealth, for example, look at how differently these choices could portray him...

MARY

Arthur, I hear you opened a new jewelry store?
How many does that make?

ARTHUR

(shrugs)

More than I can count.

This makes me feel is arrogant. But if he instead says:

ARTHUR

We're doing pretty well, I can't complain, that's for sure!

Now he seems modest. And if his wife chimes in:

JULIA

Ask him about the new hospital he just endowed!

Now I know he is a philanthropist. This info must come across on screen, not just in description.

Other technical problems with the script include language. I understand this is a difficult issue since English is not your native tongue and I applaud you for doing a very good job, given that. BUT if you wish to move forward with the project and submit to U.S. agents and producers, you should consider having someone revise to correct the language issues which include, unfortunately, dialogue that does not ring true, awkward construction and errors in syntax and spelling. No matter how good the material, a potential buyer cannot look past these as so much of what comprises a good script is the dialogue.

Narrative:

You have created a good story, so congratulations on that. It is both human and relatable, no matter who you are or where you live. Who couldn't be affected by the story of a family torn apart by the illness of a child. Remember that screenplays follow a three act structure and you need a bit of work to strengthen your act breaks. The first act, which is generally 20 to 30 pages, sets up the situation and ends with the 'premise' revealed. So for you, the first act would be the love story between Mary and

Sam, their marriage, birth of Angel, their happy life underway and then – the signs that Angel is ill. That would be your first act end. The second act, which is generally 50-60 pages, is the bulk of your story unfolding and ends with what we call ‘the best friend dying’ which generally means the worst thing happening that then propels the main character to act to make things right. For you, your second act is the story of Angel’s illness and the repercussions... the family falling apart, Sam leaving, Mary finding out he is unfaithful. Your second act end is not very clear or strong but it’s close to it when you have Mary visiting the facility. But rather than just doing so, consider her actually leaving Angel here, convincing herself that it is best for both of them. Perhaps Julia convinces her to do so, meaning well, after maybe Mary has a breakdown from the stress. Or perhaps it’s Sam who does so. In either case, if Mary is at her lowest point and it precipitates Angel being put into the subpar facility, that is a stronger ending to your second act. Now for the third act, which is the resolution, and generally 15 to 20 pages, Mary must come to her senses, realize that however much time she and Angel have left together is precious and must be treasured. So this third act would have her go and ‘rescue’ Angel and them set off on their third act journey together. Let them go somewhere wonderful, somewhere Angel has always wanted to go – be it the beach or some other tangible place – and let them have some happiness before tragedy strikes. And while I am not against tragedy striking, and a sad ending for this story, you might consider that this tragedy takes mother and daughter both, together, and that this is a more fitting ending. I believe it will strengthen the impact of your story.

Conclusion:

I believe you have the makings of a strong piece here but you must address both the technical and language issues before trying to present it to buyers. I would also suggest some of the narrative revisions I’ve outlined as well. Remember that you only get one chance to make a first impression so be sure the script is everything you can make it before submissions. They say that the real form of writing is rewriting so keep at it! Best of luck!