
Industry Coverage Report

TITLE: Valentine's Day	FORMAT: Screenplay (99 pages)
WRITER: XXXXXX	GENRE: Teen Horror
LOCATION: London, UK	PERIOD: Contemporary
BUDGET: £3m	AUDIENCE: 18-24
READER: The Script Connection	DATE: October 2006

Log Line:

When a ghostly boy tells a group of romantically entangled teens they will all die on Valentine's Day they laugh it off as a prank. But as the prophecy begins to come true those left alive unravel a mystery that reveals what has cursed them, why, and what (if anything) can be done to stop it.

Brief Summary:

On Valentine's Eve, RACHEL receives a necklace from her friends to help her get over last Valentine's Day when she found out her boyfriend was cheating on her. Later that evening a ghostly young boy appears, telling the group they will all die on Valentine's Day. They laugh it off as a joke, but we see they are being stalked by an invisible (to them) burning figure – the ghost of a woman with a severed neck.

The ghost makes its first kill on Valentine's evening, engulfing JONNY in flames as he is given a Valentine's gift from CLAIRE. The others panic about the prophecy, but the burning ghost is seen only once more. Just before midnight it appears before Rachel – who is filled with relief when the figure vanishes as the clock strikes twelve.

The following year each of them receives mysterious 'Be My Valentine' cards. Rachel also has a vision – a vicious murder, a woman wielding a knife and clutching the very same necklace her friends gave her last year. She reasons the ghost must want the necklace and has placed a death curse on anyone that has owned it – and as her friends paid for it jointly and gave it to her, that means all of them.

Tracing the history of the necklace, Rachel discovers the burning ghost is ISABELLA, who along with her son (the boy) was murdered on Valentines Day shortly after husband NATHAN gave her the necklace. He was blamed for the crime but always claimed his jealous mistress was to blame. Rachel is shocked to discover that this mistress is now her stepmother JANET – currently in a jealous rage with her father.

Rachel and her remaining friends (who Isabella is torching one by one) work out that those cursed by the necklace trigger Isabella's attacks by receiving Valentine's gifts.

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They hope that saving Rachel's father by using the necklace to curse Janet (who Isabella gratefully kills) might break the curse.

But Isabella's ghost still isn't satisfied. She targets Rachel and LUKE, whose gift to each other of love enrages her jealousy. They figure they must return the necklace to Isabella's grave to escape her wrath, and do so moments before Isabella makes them her final victims.

Comments:

With a potentially great concept that combines elements of **Final Destination** and **The Ring, Valentine's Day** is made all the more appealing by its use of such a meaningful date (particularly for its target audience) and the powerful emotions associated with it.

For all the script's strengths and flair however – cinematic writing, striking imagery, strong scene construction, good use of dialogue – things are a little muddled at story design stage and weaknesses in plot, structure and character begin to show, betraying the fact that this is an early draft.

There are two problems in particular that prove to be the root cause of weaknesses elsewhere. The first is an uncertainty about the antagonism faced by Rachel & co. Horror movies are defined by what the protagonist(s) find themselves up against and in this case it is Isabella and later, Janet.

In the Isabella – Nathan – Janet backstory all we know about Isabella is that she has been wronged twice. She is an innocent victim and while her ghost has every right to be angry about it, her current motivation – to jealously curse anyone that finds love – doesn't ring true. Janet was the jealous one, not Isabella. If her ghost is motivated to do anything it is to take revenge on Janet, not take the lives of innocent teenagers.

Adding Janet into the mix as a secondary antagonist highlights this confusion as Rachel wonders whether Isabella wants to kill them all or merely take her revenge on the woman that killed her. If all she wanted was revenge the links between Isabella, Janet, the necklace and Rachel become too coincidental and her slaying of innocent teenagers seems pointless.

The Janet twist is problematic beyond this. It has the feel of the familiar moment when the main (least expected) antagonist steps forward. But Janet isn't the main antagonist – she isn't going around cursing and torching kids – Isabella is. Her emergence also makes Rachel lose focus of the story problem (how to break the curse) while she rescues her father. This undermines the story we have been following by putting it on hold.

This has structural implications too. Although the danger her father is in represents a crisis for Rachel it isn't the main story crisis because what is at stake has changed. Therefore the second act doesn't actually end until they discover killing Janet doesn't break the curse, which reduces the third act to only four pages.

Essentially, for the concept to work Isabella's motivation must match her actions. She needs bitter jealousy in her before she dies. In short, finding a way to merge her

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character with Janet's would make her a more likely antagonist and eliminate the difficulties that introducing Janet as another antagonist causes.

This also presents the opportunity to establish a stronger theme by linking Rachel's inner problem to Isabella's all consuming one i.e. if Rachel was dumped for another on Valentine's Day she might develop a jealous streak that comes out when she sees her friends pairing off. Isabella's ghost would personify this jealousy. Only by facing up to and defeating her can she break the jealous 'curse' she is under.

The second issue is the writer's decision to hold back information about how the group has become cursed in the first place. Similar concepts like **Final Destination** and **The Ring** rely on this information to set their stories up.

The job of the first act in a genre like this is to establish the problem facing the protagonist(s), motivate them to act by making the consequences clear should they fail to do so and provide them with some idea of how to solve the problem.

In this case, the problem facing the protagonist(s) is that they are cursed to die on Valentine's Day. But for sixty or so pages they fail to respond to this problem because they don't have enough evidence of it to believe it is true. Therefore they don't believe it is a problem.

Even when Rachel accepts the group is under a curse and realises that it might come back to haunt them in years to come, she isn't able to do anything because she's stuck. And she's stuck for the same reason the group refused to believe they were cursed in the first place – *they have no idea how they became cursed*. Until they do, neither they nor the story can move forward.

As a consequence, the first act is slow. But this also has implications for the second act because as soon as the connection with the necklace is made a sudden change of pace unbalances the script as Rachel and Luke begin frantically unravelling the mystery that led to the curse.

It also means a lot of information has to come out very quickly. Consequently, their investigation is almost obstacle free and they uncover the truth easily in sequences that lack dramatic punch. Again, this is a knock-on effect of an opening act that is thin on action and exposition.

Valentine's Day has its qualities and the general idea is great but the script is held back by problems that need to be ironed out at story design stage.

Evaluation Grid:

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Concept			✓	
Structure		✓		
Character		✓		
Stakes		✓		
Visuals			✓	
Dialogue			✓	
Marketability				✓