



SCREENPLAY READERS

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Karmic Debt Paid In Full

Submitted Writer: A. Stampalia

103 pages

Genre: Psychological Thriller

Time Period: Present

Estimated Budget: Medium

Location(s): home, bar, hospital, bus

Reader: TZ

LOGLINE

A young woman has a vision of the newly elected President being assassinated at her inauguration, but no one believes her, and she's on her own to prove that she's right.

SYNOPSIS

HELENE "BILLI" KNUTSON (20s) lives with her mother who suffers from a terminal illness. She also cares for her cat Psyche. Billi has a history of visions. She's had visions since she was young. When she has a vision of the newly elected President being assassinated at her inauguration, Billi becomes concerned that there may really be an assassin that wants to kill the President.

John Kennedy crashes his balloon on Billi's roof. Billi is fascinated by the idea of John flying a balloon and he invites her on a flight. Later, when Billi touches John, she gets a bad feeling and sees deception. It scares her.

Still haunted by her vision of the assassination, Billi feels obligated to report this to the Secret Service. However, when she reports her vision to Agent Fine, the agent doesn't believe her and dismisses her as a kook or being a suspect who wants to kill the president.

The agents pass her photograph around to the other agents, including John Kennedy and his partner. John is an agent. He recognizes Billi. When the agents won't listen to her, Billi tries to warn the President-elect that someone wants to kill her. Billi is arrested by Agent Leary and sent to a psychiatric hospital.

Billi, however, convinces the doctor that she really does have the gift of vision and astral projection. Her visions place her right at the scene of the assassination, but she can't identify the assassin. When Billi has a vision of the doctor's past, the doctor finally believes her. She's released.

As the agents continue to investigate, the assassin sees Billi on the news. The assassin, eventually, learns where she lives. The assassin abducts Billi and places her in the trunk of his car. She can hear the assassin talking to another co-conspirator.

Billi escapes and tells the agent about her abduction but they don't believe her, and she's arrested but then released. Billi realizes that her gift to see visions has disappeared.

Billi's mother's condition declines and she wants to quietly die. Billi makes her mother some soup, but when she returns, she notices that her mother has taken all her pills. Her mother peacefully passes away. Bill gives her mother the Viking funeral that she always promised her and burns the house.

Billi takes off. It's up to her to stop the assassination. Agent Leary and the others search for Billi. When her car doesn't start, she steals a balloon to get away and then hitches a ride from a trucker who eventually sees her photo on the news.

Billi escapes from the cops. She eventually finds shelter in what looks like an abandoned camper shell where she meets Cross-Eyed Mary, a former DOD analyst. Mary believes Billi and helps Billi plan her escape and stop the assassin. Billi leaves her cat, Psyche, with Mary.

Billi finally reaches the inauguration and spots the assassin but she's also startled when John tries to stop her. He's working with the assassin. When Billi touches John they share a vision together. In the past, John assassinated President McKinley and Billi was there. Billi realizes that she has to pay her karmic debt. Billi tries to stop John and the assassin. Shots are fired and Billi is hit. The agents take down the assassin and then John turns the gun on himself. Agent Leary reaches Billi, who gives the agent a message from the agent's father. Leary realizes that her gift is real.

Sometime later, Billi is now considered a hero. Psyche, the cat, escapes from the camper shell and makes her way back to Billi where she belongs. They are happily reunited.

SCRIPT NOTES

The concept for Karmic Debt Past Due offers a very intriguing concept. The idea of a young, troubled woman with visions seeing the assassination of the President-Elect has the ability to make for an exciting thriller. Moreover, she can't convince anyone that her visions are true, making her a target by the agents and the assassin. The idea that she decides that she must stop the assassination herself, is another good choice. The story is driven by the themes of karma and destiny. Billi believes that it's her destiny and fate to pay her karmic debt from the past.

As stated, the concept is solid, and the opening is captivating. The opening teaser of the assassination pulls us immediately into the plotline. The twist that it's a vision makes for a strong reveal.

Yet, overall, there's room to strengthen the script. There are some story choices and/or how they are executed to be re-examined. One considers this a thriller similar to films like Nick of Time and The Pelican Brief in which a woman has information and tries to convince others while being tracked by a killer. What makes these films exciting is the strong pace and compelling suspense. They also highlight the ticking clock tension, especially the thriller Nick of Time.

Thus, in this script, it has the ability to showcase the ticking clock tension with the approaching inauguration, but it's not highlighted as well as it could be. The scenes

don't create a heart-pounding type of tension or suspense that keeps the audience on edge. For example, the scene on page 26 could be more intense when the agents grab Billi at the convention center. First, the description that the President-Elect "registers pity" should be more visual. Then, the agents tackle Billi and drag her away. It occurs all rather quickly and doesn't build the suspense it needs.

Essentially, there can be more suspense when Billi initially approaches the President-Elect. Next, when she finally reaches her and yells out that her life is in danger and someone is going to assassinate her, maybe the people around them panic and misunderstand her, thinking there's an assassin right there. Try to make the tackling of Billi feel more intense. Maybe she's screaming that they must listen to her as they drag her away.

Even the climax can be more intense at the inauguration. To be honest, the flashback (aka the shared vision) of Billi's previous life and the assassination of McKinley interrupt the tension in the climax.

Furthermore, the tone doesn't always feel like a gritty thriller such as the quip about kinky sex. Yes, there can be sharp wit, but this just felt out of place. She's running from her kidnapper and it should be terrifying with the feeling that she might get caught again.

There are some logical concerns. The idea of John's balloon crashing down on Billi's roof feels a bit contrived. Perhaps it's supposed to be Karma, fate, and/or destiny that brings Billi and John's life crashing together, but it feels forced.

The idea of the assassin being so open about hating the President i.e. "fuck that traitorous bitch" is debatable. Given that he plans to kill her, one doubts he would be so open about it in public. Moreover, the assassin just happens to pick the bar that Billi goes to and knows Skipper. The Skipper just happens to mention to the assassin that he knows Billi, a psychic, who saw the assassination. It all feels too much like a coincidence. The audience can take a few leaps, but where there are too many, then the plot loses credibility.

So, again, right now, the audience is being asked to accept that John, who happens to work for the Secret Service, and who happens to be a co-conspirator in the assassination plan, also just happens to crash into Billi's home and then, in addition, as

outlined, the audience has to accept that the assassin easily goes into the bar meets Skipper who tells him about Billi.

There are other scenes that don't feel like they are essential, especially for a thriller. For instance, the idea of Dr. Hernandez and Westfield being involved doesn't fit with this type of film. One understands the idea of fate and destiny, but it doesn't forward the plot in any meaningful way. Also, one doubts that both of them would have gotten together to help Billi.

The Secret Service agents and the investigation doesn't always feel realistic. They easily dismiss her as a kook. On page 26, Billi has been questioned for hours, yet Agent Chary says, "Why do you want to kill the President-Elect?" One doubts that after hours of questioning this would be the question and it also sounds on the nose. It's noted that his question is asked several times during the script. It's asked again on pages 36 and 54 by the press.

It would have been nice if Agent Leary were more sympathetic to Billi and not sure whether to believe her or not. This would make the ending when she touches Leary and sees Leary's past more of an emotional payoff. Right now, Leary weeping and realizing that Billi does have a gift isn't as powerful as it could be because they haven't developed any type of relationship. This is another reason that the movie *The Pelican Brief* worked because of the relationship that was developed between the role of Julia Roberts and Denzel Washington. He ended up being the only person that she could trust.

As for the shared vision at the end, as discussed, it feels like it disturbs the tension in the climax. It's disorienting to the audience. Perhaps earlier, Billi has visions that lead up to the McKinley assassinations - just brief memory flashes but she doesn't know what they mean and then in the climax, she just has a brief vision of John being the person who assassinated McKinley. This would create suspense. In other words, Billi has these brief flashes but doesn't know what they are and then, finally, she realizes that she wasn't able to stop that assassination and she must stop the killer now. It's her karmic debt.

One, also, needs a better understanding of their motivation to want to assassinate the President-elect. It feels vague. They just don't think she's good for democracy. It's a weak motivation.

Continue to work on developing the characters, especially the dialogue. The dialogue and voice hold back the characters and the script. Billi has a strong goal and the stakes for her are high. Billi is in her 20's but she acts and sounds more like a teenager. She has true love and feelings for her cat and her mother. This is when she's the most likable. She believes in destiny and that people are born with a plan. However, overall, she can be a rather cold and emotionally detached character and sometimes this makes her feel challenging to emotionally relate with it.

For example, when they discover that Skipper has been murdered, her reaction is rather cold, "It was the Skipper's Karma." Even when she realizes she has lost her gift her emotions feel muted. Try to make her sound and act more mature. Sometimes it's just her voice that alienates us from her. One doesn't feel emotionally moved when she says things like, "Universe, I am sorry for using my gift to personal advantage..." She says that her visions scare her, but we don't always see or feel her emotions. In contrast, there's a scene with Tweakie where we begin to see Billi's inner wound, "Do you know how alone I was?" However, in general, sometimes there's a disconnect between what he says and how she acts.

Regardless, one does root for Billi (and there are moments we truly care about her) and, hence, it feels satisfying that she's reunited with her cat, aptly named Psyche. There's a true bond.

John could use further development. It's hard to believe he's a Secret Service agent, yet, at the same time, sound so unhinged i.e. he suddenly says, "Fuck you, witch!" which seems to come out of nowhere and gives away to the audience that he's not a good guy. As discussed, his motivation for the assassination could be stronger.

Continue to develop the agents. Unfortunately, they all tend to blend together and share the same voice which makes it more difficult to tell them apart. Also, none of them believe Billi. As suggested, maybe Agent Leary is more skeptical and willing to listen to Billi but isn't sure whether to believe her or not. This would give the agent more depth and dimension. The dialogue from the agents also could be sharper. It's hard to believe that they don't take her abduction seriously but instead arrest her.

One doesn't understand why Tweakie becomes upset with Billi i.e. "You hurt people..." It didn't feel fully genuine. Yes, the feds are asking questions and she's always protected Billi, but it felt like an overreaction by Tweakie.

There are some formatting errors and a typo Julie vs. Tweaking (page 41). Remember the audience can only see what's on the screen and they can only hear the spoken dialogue. The audience can't see, "Billi is truly one of a kind. A genuine doll you can't help but love to pieces." Also, unfortunately, one doesn't feel this way about her. On page 3, the audience can't see, "Billie knew that was coming..." One can't see, "Tweakie mentally fits The Skipper for a strait-jacket." On page 8, one can't see, "A truly gifted psychic, Billi understands how she touches people," or "Each reading takes a tiny piece of Billie." Try to convey this emotionally through her expressions, behavior, or her dialogue.

In summary, the idea of a young woman seeing the assassination of the President is a compelling concept for a psychological thriller, especially the idea that no one believes her. It's a terrific setup for drama, tension, suspense, and action. Continue to develop the plot and the characters and consider some of the suggestions. She has a vision. No one believes her. She tries to warn the President-Elect, she fails.

Maybe she examines her vision to pick up on clues and this propels her to try and track the assassin down by using those clues. This would make her feel more proactive. It would be more suspenseful than her being thrown into a psychiatric hospital. Maybe she suspects one particular person is the assassin, but this turns out to be wrong. When it all fails and she can't convince anyone, she decides to attend the inauguration herself. Maybe she convinces Leary that it's going to happen, and the agent finally believes her.

SCRIPT READER'S SCORESHEET

The concept is strong and/or script has a buzzworthy hook	80
Script's first 10 pages are compelling	77
Script's theme is well-executed/interweaved well	85
Story/plot/story logic is clear and easy to follow	75
Every story element feels essential	72
Setting/world is easy to understand/follow	80
The script is not bogged down by exposition	77
Scenes and moments cause/impact later scenes and moments	75
Stakes are clear/conflict is strong and/or compelling	85
Tension builds/escalates throughout	77
Characters are interesting/entertaining/fun to watch	79
Characters' choices and actions drive the story forward	79
Characters' motivations/wants/obstacles are clearly defined	76
It's easy to tell who's who – Characters are different from one another	79
Antagonistic forces are difficult for the protagonist/s to overcome	75
Dialogue is strong/colorful/entertaining/impactful	75
Action/description text is visual/concise/vivid	78
Climax/resolution is entertaining/satisfying	74
The script feels as if it's as strong/funny/dramatic/entertaining as it can be	75
The script's target audience/demographic is clear	100
The content/subject matter is likely to be strategically appealing to buyers	85
The script's format/spelling/presentation isn't distracting	98
Average Score	79.8
Recommendation	PASS