

SAMPLE COVERAGE #2, for portfolio demonstration

Title: Rocky Mountain High

Writer: M. Boulder (as credited)

Source: six-page short posted publicly on SimplyScripts, 2024; read here exactly like any client's draft

Genre: Drama / Music / Light fantasy

Pages: 6

Logline: On Thanksgiving, a grieving fifty-five-year-old hikes into the Colorado mountains with a pocketful of joints and meets John Denver on the peak, where the dead singer he worshipped as a boy talks him into the gratitude he came up here to escape.

RATINGS

Story: 8 Character: 8 Dialogue: 8 Marketability: 7 (as produced; estate rights pending, see notes)

Recommendation: RECOMMEND

SYNOPSIS

Frederick, 55, climbs a snowy Colorado peak on Thanksgiving morning and pulls a small plastic bag of joints from his coat. A voice behind him says "Far out, man." It is John Denver, 53, "in the flesh," which is the script's joke: he is not. Frederick explains himself: tough years, mother gone, father failing. Denver was the soundtrack of his childhood, the singer his mother taught him to love, the man who sang him to sleep. He came up here to smoke, because he is not feeling particularly thankful and it is legal now, but what he really wants is underneath. "Did you do it on purpose? The airplane?" Denver deflects with grace. Frederick remembers the St. Louis concert his father somehow afforded third-row tickets for, and gratitude arrives on its own, mid-memory. Denver conjures a guitar with a snap of his fingers, plays "Rocky Mountain High" while Frederick cries, tells him he remembers the boy in the wire-rimmed glasses singing every word, and fades into nothing. Frederick pockets the joints. "Maybe next year." He walks down the trail, singing.

COMMENTS

The first trust-earning move is the George Burns line (p.1). The premise is one misstep from treacle: a grieving man meets the ghost of John Denver. The script knows it, and gets the joke in before the audience can: "It was either you, or George Burns." When John names it ("You know only like three people are going to get it, right?") and Frederick answers "This one's for me," the sentimentality is owned, not performed. That exchange is the whole tone of the piece in miniature, and it is the reason the sincere pages after it land.

The turn from grief to gratitude is built on a fact, not a speech. Frederick's "how in the hell did my dad get third row tickets? We could barely afford a box of mac and cheese" (p.3) is the best beat in the script: a man in his fifties suddenly seeing his father's sacrifice from the other side of the table. The theme arrives as a question he asks himself mid-sentence. That is what "show, don't tell" actually looks like on a craft level, and it earns the "So, you are feeling thankful" / "I guess I am" exchange that follows.

The script uses what the audience already carries. Denver died in 1997 at 53 in a plane crash, and for years the public half-whispered about whether it was deliberate. "I lasted fifty-three" (p.5) and

Frederick's question, "Did you do it on purpose? The airplane?" (p.3), go straight to that wound. John's answer, "It would be a personal moment, if I did," is the best single line in the piece: it grants the real man a privacy death took from him, without confirming or denying. The audience's pre-installed grief for Denver does half the screenplay's work for free. The script knows this and does not cheat it.

Discipline with the bag. The joints are planted on p.1, eyed by John on p.2, the subject of the draft's only real joke at John's expense ("I just assumed--since I'm here," p.5), and never lit. "Maybe next year" (p.6) is the right button: the escape is deferred because the conversation already did the job. A lesser draft has him light up with the ghost. This one understands that the high was never the point, and that the film is better if the audience watches him walk down singing instead.

The "Far out, man" repetition is language, not tic. John says it four times as punctuation; Frederick finally calls it ("You say that a lot." "World's a crazy place."), and the catchphrase becomes character in one exchange. The George Burns thread runs the same way: setup on p.1, payoff when the guitar appears by finger-snap ("Didn't George Burns do something similar") on p.4, and the coda ("You've really gotta stop with the 'Oh, God!' references") that turns the joke into the two men's private language. Deliberate repetition between two people is how this script builds intimacy, and it works.

Honest notes. First, the one fuzzy gear: "Can I go back?" / "You know you can't" (p.4). Because Frederick walks down the mountain alive (p.6), the first-time reader is briefly unsure what is being refused: a return in time? a death? The beat is doing two jobs (you cannot undo the loss; you cannot stay on this peak) and it is coherent on a second read, but the ambiguity costs a moment of the audience's trust at exactly the point where the song needs to carry them. One clarifying half-line, or a visual beat (Frederick's hand on the bag, John's look down the trail) would seal it.

Second, the structural one, and a reader's job is to say it on p.1: this script cannot be produced as written without the cooperation of the John Denver estate. The likeness, the name, the persona, the catchphrases, the actual lyrics (the song on p.4, Frederick's sung verse on p.6) are all owned, and the music is a separate license from the name and likeness. The irony is that the script's best asset, the audience's pre-installed grief for the real man, is exactly what makes it unproducible without permission. The alternatives all cost the piece its payload: fictionalize the singer and the ending loses its temperature. The one genuinely good path is the one the script's own warmth points to: this is a love letter, and love letters sometimes get answered. The estate conversation is the real "is this shootable" question, and it is worth having before a single location scout.

Third, an audience note. Viewers under roughly thirty-five know "Country Roads" but may not know Denver's face, his plane, or why fifty-three matters. The script mostly does the work ("The airplane?" plus "I lasted fifty-three" is enough for anyone paying attention to feel the shape), but the piece quietly assumes a grief that is generational. If the target is a young festival audience, the ending runs a few degrees cooler. Not a fix, a fact to know going in.

Fourth, small: John is a function as much as a person. He mirrors, deflects, comforts; all the interiority sits on Frederick's side. That is correct for a visitation, but John names his own demons on p.2 and the draft never lets him have any onstage. One beat of what the ghost envies in the living man would make him a presence instead of a projection. Optional. As is, the one-sidedness is defensible, because Frederick's need is the story.

Reader's bottom line: RECOMMEND. A six-page short with a real engine, real restraint, and dialogue that earns its own sentimentality. Between it and a festival screen sit two things: a clarifying beat, and a legal conversation. In that order, if the writer is lucky; in the other order, if they are smart.