

Months later we find Evan giving a reading of his recently published short story anthology, to a small but enthusiastic crowd at his book launch. At the after party, Evan is thrust into the spotlight of attention from fellow writers and reporters alike. Evan is taken aback and clearly uncomfortable with the attention, compounded when he is slapped and verbally abused by his favorite author for inadvertently suggesting his career was over in front of a reporter. Evan is stunned and disheartened, especially when the author rants to him that critics/reporters have no idea about the world of literary (and Evan's) talent.

His anthology released, Evan receives his advance on the novel and sits down in a new apartment in downtown Manhattan to begin writing. Before getting past the opening title he is interrupted to attend a photo shoot for the cover of his yet to be conceived novel. Evan however is clearly less than comfortable at the sexy angle the photographer is aiming for—his lack of self-esteem made all too clear. It does however aid in establishing his self-recognition that perhaps he is now a true author, and with three months before a first draft is due, he eagerly sits down to write.

It rapidly becomes obvious to Evan that he has no idea what to write about and within a month still has nothing to show for himself. He begins withdrawing into his studio, drinking heavily and ignoring an upcoming award night in which he's been nominated. Still he makes no progress on his novel. The due date draws near and Evan desperately asks Peggy for an extension which she grants, before inviting him to a party for an emerging author named SISYPHUS, whose talent seems to lie in having no knowledge whatsoever of grammar or literature.

Evan attends but is barred from the VIP area. Knowing that his book is in trouble and losing faith in the merit of his literary genius, he hits the bar where he meets the beautiful, shrewd and yet charming ALEXA VEER DE VEER, who introduces herself as a movie producer. As it turns out Alexa attended the party solely to meet Evan who she believes is a literary master. Evan is genuinely flattered by the seemingly intelligent and genuine compliments of his work and he is clearly taken with both her beauty and eloquence. She is about to leave the party, detesting the stupidity of the people around her, when she stops and asks if Evan would like to go to a real party. Without hesitation he accepts.

Thus begins Evan's arrival into the world of success on the arm of Alexa. At the first of several parties they attend she introduces Evan to a world where your friends become the rich and famous, before sitting him down to pitch her idea of having Evan adapt his short stories into a screenplay. While Evan mulls it over during the following days, Alexa takes him shopping at all the designer stores in New York, and it becomes clear when Evan hands his credit card over to her that he has become completely comfortable with Alexa. The celebrity parties continue, Evan ecstatic at being included as the cool, successful writer.

Intuitively they fall for one another and make passionate love, which has the immediate affect of curing Evan's writers block—clearly he has also found his muse. Evan then gets carried away in his happiness and insists they fly to Hollywood to begin work on selling the prospective screenplay. Alexa is hesitant and reveals that she's had a tendency to sleep around in the past which culminated in her cheating on her husband, who subsequently killed himself. Evan takes this in before then declaring his love for her. They arrange to meet at the airport, only for Evan to discover Alexa has skipped out on him and left for Monte Carlo.

Evan tries to track her down at the film producer's company she said she worked at, however the boss, MORRIS KADEN, has never heard of him. He has however heard of Alexa. Kaden

takes a disturbed Evan into his office, sits him down and explains the con. We relive the compliments she gave him, the name dropping, socializing with celebrities, now seeing it for the illusion it was. Kaden's secretary calls Evan's credit card company and discovers he's been taken for \$35,000. A flashback reveals that Alexa copied his card when he gave it to her while shopping for clothes.

Against Kaden's advice Evan sets off to find her, firstly stopping at Peggy's office who admits she had unwittingly provided personal information about him. He returns to Kaden, who explains that nothing has ever happened as a result of her scam, because none of her victims have wanted to admit to their blindness—as it turns out Kaden himself is also a former victim of Alexa. Through his investigation, Evan discovers MICHAEL (Alexa's husband) alive and well, who explains that much to his sorrow he'd helped create the chic, sophisticated personae that is Alexa (formerly BRENDA). It was Brenda's obsession with the Alexa character they'd created, that had resulted in the dissolution of their marriage.

Evan returns to his apartment to find a mass of messages from his publisher demanding an update on the progress of his novel. He returns to Peggy's office where his now furious publisher all but threatens his life to deliver a manuscript. Thinking it over, Evan suddenly gets an idea about how to trap Alexa with Peggy's help. The plan set in motion we jump to Alexa sitting in a luxurious spa reading a story about how Evan's new book has been sold to a film company for a seven figure deal.

She immediately flies to California and his hotel to try and win her way back into his life. Once she arrives however she is considerably startled to see many of her former victims sitting in the foyer. Slipping by, she proceeds to Evan's room, where he informs Alexa that he intends to ruin her by writing a book that exposes her scam. Desperate to regain her feet, she deftly uses her charm to win Evan back by declaring her love for him and asking him to marry her.

Evan is momentarily taken in and they kiss passionately, before Alexa slips up when she declares that she thought she'd never have such feelings for a man again following the death of her husband—the husband who isn't dead. Evan freezes and Alexa knows she's caught. Humiliated she leaves but not before passing through the foyer where her former conquests stare at her with looks that range from pity to resentment.

Returning to New York Evan starts writing his story about Alexa, which becomes a best seller much to the mixed reaction of Evan who isn't thrilled his work wasn't the literary masterpiece he had always aimed for. A year later in Italy, the successful author runs into Alexa now continuing her scam in Europe. After an exchange that's part sadness at a lost opportunity, part anger, they walk away vowing never to interfere in one another's life every again.

COMMENTS:

This script is a skillfully written intellectual drama about a young writer desperate to establish himself as a novelist, but is conned by a beautiful woman who promises him fame, in a kind of ADAPTATION meets MATCHSTICK MEN. This script clearly fits into the coming-of-age stories of twenty-something adults, such as GARDEN STATE, which although successful are typically better suited to small independent's than a major studio. The premise follows a well known novel; the story executed with sufficient skill to warrant the writer being considered in the future, despite this script's low concept nature. And while the relationship between the two leads

remains somewhat vague (particularly at the conclusion); their dynamic is generally well maintained for such a character-driven narrative.

The combination of the coming-of-age & con-artist genres makes for an interesting story. Similar films from both genres have tended to perform steadily as low budget productions (<\$10m). As such this script probably fails to offer any incentive to any production entity looking to come in with a higher budget as it will ultimately fail to attract sufficient major box office attention to justify the outlay. This script is clearly targeted at a niche, more intellectual market, than at the mainstream US audience.

The idea of having a smart but naive young writer, who is conned by a seductive woman who preys on the about-to-be-famous, is a novel premise that is well crafted in this script. A disillusioned EVAN, who has always dreamed about writing the great literary novel of his time, meets a captivating woman, ALEXA, who tells him everything he wants to hear about his artistic genius, promises him the world and then promptly robs him blind. This occurs within the first half of the story, leaving the remainder for Evan to track down his muse, confidant, lover and betrayer. Ultimately her life and the people she has conned become the subject of his novel, in a fitting, if somewhat predictable conclusion.

The principal relationship that develops between Evan and Alexa goes to the heart of this story. Although Evan's quest to become a writer is significant, it is only when he meets and becomes enraptured by Alexa that the story, his story, really takes off. The con she pulls on Evan triggers the bulk of the narrative which is formed around his pursuit of her; however whether this is more about revenge or love remains unclear. Regardless of this, there is clearly a mutual attraction between them that is plausible and effectively infused into the narrative and of course left hanging for the audience at the end.

The small failings of this script such as the unclear and undeveloped relationship between Alexa and Evan, is probably an easily rectifiable one in a following pass. There is no escaping the reality however that the wordiness of the dialogue and premise of this script are low-budget in nature, therefore better suited to a small independent production. Although there is some potential for big name interest given the established novel this script is based on, increasing its potential for box office success, this script ultimately is a drama that although intelligent, witty and somewhat mimetic, will not be likely to justify a wide release and/or attract a large mainstream audience.