# The XXX COMPETITION

# Judge’s Feedback

# **Title:** *The Disappearance*

**Form:** One-Hour TV Pilot

**Genre:** Drama, Mystery

**Setting:** Boston, Massachusetts

**Budget:** Low

**Page Count:** 61

**Reader’s Initials:** C. B.

**Date:** 12/12/2022

1. Logline:

A young, charming sports journalist’s perfect life with his fiance is thrown into chaos when he discovers that his future in-law’s close family friends are actually his own absent father and kidnapped younger siblings.

2. In what ways is the writer successful at achieving his/her goals?

It is evident that the author is a skilled screenwriter in many capacities. The setup, execution, and reveal were all written very well. From the moment that Will rides into the scene on his bike, the reader is taken on an emotional roller coaster. Each scene flows nicely from the last, bringing Will closer to finding out the truth, fluctuating in intensity to keep the audience interested with calculated precision—the calm moments quickly become upsetting, and the upsetting moments are quelled by sweeter moments shared between Will and his family.

The relationship between each character is also very well-written and intriguing. Will and Kate have a good mix of playful banter and nagging that clearly shows how close they are. Will and his connection to his siblings that he grew up with is also easily understood—they care for each other and even keep tabs on each other to some extent, even though they live far apart and act coldly in person. Their relationships also keep the audience hooked out of pure curiosity: what happened between Jamie and Casey? Why does Will say that he needed to hide the fact that he had family in Boston? Why does Casey live the way she does? Why did Will’s father disappear, and does Ryan remember his old life? All of these questions and more provide a lot of content for the pilot to follow up with in future episodes. TV agents will appreciate this.

Most noticeably, the author did an outstanding job using imagery to tell the story. The police at the front door, the worn-out Red Sox hat, Michael’s pictures on the wall, and the home video; each of these visuals tell the audience precisely what they need to know without spelling it out for them through dialogue. A few props attached to specific character motives prove to be an advantageous storytelling technique (e.g., when Will throws away his hat, demonstrating that he is willing to give up on chasing down his lost siblings).

3. In what ways does the screenplay fall short?

Although the natural-sounding dialogue is essential, it is equally imperative that the dialogue stays short and sweet; it should only be long enough to demonstrate a character's motive and move the plot forward. For example, on page 27, when Will explains the situation to Casey, the audience is already aware of what is happening, so meditating too much may make them restless. Another example is on page 32; Morgan talks a lot about IPA types, which is only partially necessary to the plot.

The characters’ relationships are well-fleshed out, but Casey, Jamie, and Kate would benefit from more screen time. They each present interesting individual perspectives on the ongoing conflict, yet their motivations outside of Will’s quest to find his long-lost family aren’t clear. Kate’s life is thrown into almost as much chaos as Will’s and his siblings’—the love of her life and her close family friends aren't who they say they are. Before that, Will becomes increasingly emotionally unavailable. By introducing more scenes, perhaps from the perspective of Casey, Jamie, and Kate, or by twisting existing scenes to reveal their personal lives and goals, their characters would bring the script even more emotional impact, and cause the audience to empathize further with the family drama.

There are also a few plot inconsistencies that may bring the audience out of their immersion. For example, on page 50, Jamie offers Will cash, which seems to be for Casey’s rent, as in the next scene, Will gives Casey an envelope with both money and the necklace from the scene that ends on page 50; this is inconsistent because Jamie wasn’t there when Will offered to pay for Casey’s rent. She wouldn’t know about it. Additionally, it is implied that Jamie sent the police after their dad once Will revealed he had found Michael and Izzy, yet Will never mentioned where he found them. Michael/Bill's location may need some more context before Jamie can send the police after him. Another inconsistency is how recognizable Will is—while it is crucial to how his character interacts with the setting, it is also true that journalists aren’t usually recognizable by face alone, even the more noteworthy ones. It might make more sense if Will were an anchor or sports reporter for TV news.

4. On the contest scorecard, you gave this script a total score of: 84/100  
Please explain your criteria for your score.

PREMISE/CONCEPT Score: 8/10

Although the core premise of the main character discovering their long-lost family is moderately conventional, the author’s storytelling ability gives it an interesting, unique twist that would entice many viewers. Unfortunately, by the end of the pilot, the central plot is already close to being wrapped up; because of this, while the premise is great, the author may find that the story is best-told through a medium other than television series, where the plot need not be as drawn-out.

PRESENTATION Score: 8/10

There were a few format, grammar and spelling issues, although they were not particularly egregious. Some examples will be provided here in order to help the author know what to look out for, although there may be more. On page 29, the ‘your’ in “All your missing is…” should be you’re. On that same page, Casey says “Had me over to dinner to celebrate,” where the proper preposition should be ‘for’ dinner. On page 52, Kate says “I need to get my ass into gear and get the shower;” the phrasing is odd, and suggests that the author missed adding the word “into.”

STRUCTURE Score: 9/10

The structure is a well-developed 4 acts. The setup is very powerful; it draws the audience into Will’s world, and shows them quite possibly the most defining moment of his life, the reason behind his actions throughout the entire pilot. The rising action that follows is similarly well-done; its contents have the audience on the edge of their seat, wondering how they are going to resolve it. The crisis could use some more emotional intensity, but overall, it elicits the response that it needs from the audience. The ending is a very powerful cliffhanger that does its job well, making the audience curious about what will happen next, compelling them to watch the next episode

PLOT Score: 9/10

The plot does have some holes (mentioned in ways the teleplay falls short). Outside of those, however, the plot is otherwise entertaining. It follows its premise well, draws in empathy for Will, and keeps the audience asking for more. Due to the contained nature of the premise, though, the plot is too short to be a pilot for an entire TV season; the author may consider adding more depth to other characters and more complexity to the long-lost family’s mystery if they intend for the pilot to last longer than a season, although this is just a minor suggestion, as the author may already have a lot more to unravel that does not bear its fruit in the pilot.

PACING Score: 7/10

The pacing is powerful in some places, and falls behind in others. For example, Act I and its setup entice the reader to keep moving, and Act II asks a lot of questions that the reader desperately wants to know; however, from Act III onwards, it seems like Will, and therefore the audience, already know most if not all of what will happen moving forward—yes, Morgan and Ryan are his siblings. Yes, Michael/Bill is his dad. Despite this, the author makes Will double and then triple-verify whether it really is them. At this point, an audience may already have checked out, because they already know the answers to his questions; they just want to know what he’s going to do about it, and in the end, Will decides to pretend that they aren’t until he has a panic attack. The author may consider cutting some of this questioning short or adding higher stakes so that Will has a more challenging time determining whether or not Ryan and Morgan are his family. If the author gave Will more reasons to avoid figuring out the truth or more obstacles, the pacing could feel more direct and less as though it is meandering. Perhaps some of the characters could already be aware of the mystery, and actively attempt to keep Will away from the truth. Another way the author could put more pressure on Will would be by having Kate push further to figure out what he’s hiding—asking more questions, and getting angrier when he misleads her or hides his true intentions.

CHARACTERS Score: 7/10

The audience feels deeply for Will’s character. He is put in a tough situation that moves the readers and causes them to root for his victory—whatever that may be. Outside of figuring out whether or not Michael, Morgan, and Ryan are really his family and not wholly ruining his relationship with his fiance, though, Will does not seem to have any significant goals. On top of that, once he does find out the truth, he becomes a passive character. The audience may begin to lose interest once Will has no more goals for which they can root.

Secondary characters struggle with similar issues—Jamie and Casey seem to have no interests outside of their relationships with Will and the mystery. Kate is utterly oblivious to her fiance’s search for answers like many significant others are to their counterparts in a drama; still, unlike other partners in various dramas, she is too easily quelled by simple lies and promises, making her, in turn, more two-dimensional than the author intended.

DIALOGUE Score: 9/10

Dialogue is solid overall. Most conversations were clear, concise, and emotionally charged, although the author should look out for instances in which characters may talk for too long. This could be remedied by having other characters help flesh out what the author wanted to convey (the author does a good job of this for the most part), by ensuring that filler conversations don’t take up too much space on a page (e.g. when Morgan describes all the IPA beverages that the restaurant has in stock), and by eliminating redundancies (e.g. Will explaining his thought process to Casey when he visits her apartment).

THEME Score: 10/10

Will’s quest for closure strikes at the audience's heartstrings and may cause them to call and tell their out-of-state family that they love them. Family matters, and nobody makes it more apparent than the Johnson siblings, who have kept tabs on each other and miss each other, despite their estranged relationship and harsh circumstances.

STYLE/TONE Score: 10/10

The show manages to flow in and out of emotional intensity at a professional level. Betrayal to love, love to loss; the author manages to build and release tension in a way that comes naturally to people and relationships, especially regarding family. Throughout most of the pilot, this interweaving between melancholy and happiness stays constant. The author does a fantastic job of ensuring that when one emotion is felt, the other can be seen on the horizon.

COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL Score: 7/10

The pilot presents an easy-to-understand, low-budget, yet well-written series of events that could easily find a place among the many drama series that permeate modern streaming networks like HBO Max and Hulu. Will as a character is overall solid and may be enticing for A-list actors looking to work in dramas or mysteries. To attract even more attention from actors, the author may consider previous suggestions to further flesh out secondary characters.

On the other hand, agents looking for TV series that span many seasons may be discouraged by the lack of long-form content that the pilot offers—after all, the pilot almost completes the mystery’s whole arc.

Additionally, the characters and setting are presented in a white-centric manner, with traditionally white names such as Richard, William, Casey, Michael, and Kate. BIPOC audiences may feel underrepresented and opt to watch other shows that do include BIPOC instead. The majority of TV audiences now comprises people of color, and many of the most popular dramas feature people of color as their main characters, or at least including them within their cast. This oversight could significantly lower the series’ potential reach. To remedy this, the author may consider tweaking a few characters slightly.

5. If you received this screenplay at your agency or production company, would you give it a:

RECOMMEND **CONSIDER** PASS

6. How could this writer improve his/her chances of success with this script? What else would you like to tell this writer?

The writer’s storytelling prowess shines through *The Disappearance*. The banter is witty, the scenes are cathartic, and the tone is enthralling. Although there were a few inconsistencies and issues, these could easily be remedied with minor dialogue changes, a few scenes and scene rewrites, and a copy edit. The author’s keen eye for detail and visual storytelling are very valuable aspects of the script, which is already especially captivating and entertaining; once they are applied to the supporting characters, and to increasing the overall plot’s content, the author’s chances of success with this script will increase tenfold.