

COVERAGE, INK. COVERAGE

TITLE:
LOCALE: Seattle
AUTHOR:
PERIOD: Contemporary
FORM: Screenplay
GENRE: Romantic Comedy
BUDGET: Medium
DRAFT DATE: n/a
COVERAGE DATE:
PREPARED BY:

LOGLINE:

Love slowly blossoms when a high school student meets the pop star he idolizes.

SYNOPSIS:

Brad Kelly is a shy and sensitive high school junior—save for best friend Trevor, he's pretty much an outsider. His interest in gardening does nothing to help his status with the popular crowd at school. He's also consumed with fantasies about Star McCarthy, a world-famous pop singer. She's on tour and will soon perform in Seattle—Brad feels certain it is his destiny to meet her, and he is convinced that if he can get in the front row, their eyes will meet and she'll share his amorous feelings.

Unfortunately, it's one fiasco after another as Brad tries to purchase tickets. He is forced to view the concert from the nosebleed section, and can barely see her onstage even with the help of binoculars. But he gets another chance when Star's manager Anna coerces the singer to sign autographs at the mall the next day. Brad optimistically gets in line, only to have Star leave before he can approach her. Star prepares to hop in her limo when she discovers that her beloved dog Sammie has escaped. She and her entourage desperately search for the pet; when she emerges from a room right in front of Brad, the teen faints straightaway. Star pursues Sammy outside; the dog runs across the street, and Brad heroically risks his life to save the canine. A truck nearly hits Brad, but Sammie is safe. Star hops in the limo with her mascot, never realizing Brad's courageous role. But back at the hotel she realizes she lost a diamond earring, given to her by Landon, the hunky singer she dates. But Brad found the diamond and manages to track Star down to return it to her. She is impressed (yet initially skeptical) that he selflessly wants to return the earring, wanting only the privilege of meeting her.

Star is about to hit the road again, but realizes she can't deal with the stress of watching over the dog. Her father, who now lives in Seattle, is unable to watch Sammie due to a business trip. Star is unwilling to board the pet with strangers in a kennel, so she calls the one person she feels she can trust. Brad happily takes the responsibility, and even refuses payment for his efforts. He meets Star on the tarmac of the local airport, picks up the dog, and says farewell to the jet-setting pop star. Despite this miraculous turn of events, he realizes he can't confide in anyone but Trevor, due to the seeming absurdity of the story.

Things begin falling apart for Star—she's sick of the hollow life of an entertainer, and Landon cheats with another woman. Brad consoles her about Landon, and ultimately offers sage counsels rationalizing her wealth and fame, which is in marked contrast to the abject poverty many face. Lyndsey, Star's best friend, urges her to consider dating Brad, because he is smart, sensitive, and honest. Star dismisses the idea.

Star finally returns from tour and visits Brad to pick up Sammie. He shows her around the simple suburban house, and then takes her out back to dazzle her with his amazing gardening work. They draw closer and eventually kiss a single time. Brad is of course thrilled! Soon after Star leaves, Brad calls to ask if she'll perform at his high school's spring dance, and she accepts.

But not everyone is so happy at this growing bond—Anna thinks the relationship bad for PR, and considers the concert a career killer. And Landon keeps attempting to win Star's love back; he ultimately succeeds, but the power-couple is prevented by their hectic careers from spending time together. Still, things seem to be going well for Star—and terribly for Brad. She tells the teen that there's no hope for a love affair, and she reneges on her plans to play the dance. Brad of course is thoroughly discredited at school.

But the tables are soon turned when Star again catches her man cheating. It's finally over this time! Despite his regrets, Brad attends the dance, but all he experiences is humiliation from his classmates...that is, except from Trevor and Chloe, a nerdy girl he was previously not interested in. Brad and Chloe share a tender dance just as Star and her band arrive. They rock the house on one tune, and Star invites Brad up onstage. They make plans to spend the summer together, then ride off on a Harley.

COMMENTS:

This is a somewhat modest story (meaning sweet and simple, rather than a high stakes thriller or over-the-top comedy), and the writing craft is at times superb. The first twenty pages or so are close to flawless—the “quest” for the protagonist is clearly established early; dialogue is snappy and witty; humor is wry and sophisticated; we learn many nuanced details about the protagonist via thoroughly subtle indicators as opposed to gross exposition; and scenes often cut with precision to subsequent scenes, so the pace is close to perfect.

The downside is that pace slows severely even before we’re out of Act I, and the protagonist lacks a clear quest in Act II. Many of the scenes in the middle of the screenplay are far too long, and do not drive the story in the sense of intensifying or resolving conflicts. The protagonist has a very shallow transformational arc—he does not grow or change much as the result of his experiences, and this lowers stakes considerably.

Most of the problems in this screenplay concern PLOT and CHARACTERIZATION. We’ll look at these together, since they are so interdependent in this case.

CHARACTERIZATION/PLOT: Brad is a likeable protagonist. He’s sensitive, thoughtful, honest, but far from perfect—we commiserate with his shyness and with his feeling like an outsider. He’s so good-natured, we laugh with him rather than at him as he fantasizes about the pop star he has no hope of meeting. We root for him, but we sadly realize he probably has no hope to achieve his dream. Most enjoyable is the dynamic between Brad and Trevor; their jibes and banter in the first 20 pages or so are splendid. Moreover, we learn quite a lot about the inner workings of Brad via very subtle indicators; rather than getting information via exposition, we see what he is like through his actions, dialogue, gestures, etc.

The big issue concerning the protagonist is that his quest—to meet Star and impress her enough so that she falls in love—is quickly resolved or at least diminished considerably. He meets her and makes a fairly good impression early on, so this is no longer a quest or source of conflict. True, he now has to get her to love him, but he takes absolutely no active steps to achieve this in Act II. As a result, we never get the sense that he is on a mission, and we are denied the satisfaction of watching him struggle to win her over. He basically lets events happen to him in Act II, and is content to sit back and hope for the best with her.

The author suggests a few valid sources for conflict in Act II—Brad seems to want to impress his classmates, but can’t claim to know Star because they will dismiss his claim as bogus. This is quite a crucible! Brad also wants to prove himself via helping to organize the school dance, but this too is denied because no one takes this outsider seriously. But these strains are severely

underdeveloped: Just as Brad does not take active steps to win Star, he does not actively try to impress his classmates, and he makes only one feckless attempt to pitch in with the dance plans. Moreover, it is never clear why he cares so much about the popular kids. The author should (and could easily) explore his insecurities and needs for validation from the in-crowd. Act I should firmly depict Brad as desperate for respect from the jocks and cheerleaders, etc., only to be a perpetual outsider. This will explain his attempts to pitch in on planning the dance—and his desire to take a hottie to the event—as ways to boost his credibility with the elite of the school. This could very well become the focus of Act II, rather than Brad's generally low-stakes interactions with Star. Because he meets Star early on, and because Act II lacks much of an active quest, Star could possibly serve as an archetype who symbolizes Brad's longings to hang out with the elites.

This device will not only give added dramatic weight to the climax (in which Brad loses the popularity and admiration he so desperately craved), but it will also permit a much steeper transformational arc. As it stands, Brad does not change very much in this story. He starts off a decent and thoughtful guy (albeit very uncool), and he pretty much stays that way as the story progresses. The author should consider making him dreadfully uncool, only to grow in confidence and cockiness as his friendship with Star grows; perhaps various kids could come to believe his story about Star by the middle of Act II, and Brad could wind up on the fast track to inclusion in the popular set. As he hits this peak, he should kick his friends to the curb. In this sense, the big fight with Trevor should happen much earlier, and it should last much longer—Brad should have to struggle to win back his best pal, whereas it's not currently a very rocky road to reconciliation. When Star reneges on her pledge to sing at the dance, all of the popular kids (led by that nasty jock) should rabidly turn on Brad, believing they were duped vis-à-vis Star. Brad will now have no one—no Star, no Trevor, and certainly no popular friends.

We can go one step further with this. The author presents a very sympathetic character in Chloe. She's a nerd, probably cute behind her shy façade, and clearly hopeful for romance with Brad. He doesn't seem to notice her in that way, but is basically nice to her. Why not have them tentatively entering a romance (Brad can even ask her to the dance early on) until he meets Star? As his popularity magnifies, he can begin to ignore Chloe, thus crushing this poor girl the way he himself is always crushed by the elites. In the climax, when Brad realizes how hollow popularity is, he can fight to win back her trust. As it stands, he gives her a sympathy dance in the climax, but it has absolutely no lasting meaning... *Gee, thanks. One measly dance, then Star shows up, and she's a nobody again!!!* This is a very unpleasant final image of our hero. It makes his quest ultimately shallow, and shows he learned nothing from his journey. The author should strongly consider having Brad abandon his quest for Star in the climax because he finds true love in his own high school.

The first scene is wonderful—we are in the midst of Brad’s fantasy world, and have no reason to doubt it is reality, until things literally come crashing down on him. But this juxtaposition between fantasy and reality should be explored much more throughout the story. As he gets to know Star, Brad should believe he no longer has need for his childish fantasies, as he’s getting to know the real Star and is hopeful that in the end he’ll win her romantic devotion. But as he gets swept up in the excitement of hanging with a celebrity and thus becoming a big man on campus, he actually enters an even more elaborate delusion. Only when his world implodes will he return to reality—to Trevor, Chloe, and his family.

Characters in screenplays should usually have a single “superpower” and a single “kryptonite.” That is to say, while it’s great to have nuanced, complex characters with many levels, they should have one clearly identifiable trademark, and one clearly identifiable flaw that will stand in opposition to their primary quest. The most apparent trademark for Brad is his love of gardening. But this needs to be expanded. We catch a few glimpses of him working outdoors at school, but we do not delve into the work he does at home to create the stunning garden he shows to Star at the end of Act II. Moreover, he displays other, inconsistent trademarks. There is a brief reference to his skill as a skateboarder (we never actually see this), and he gives advice to Star about the Apollo missions—he tells her he’s interested in space exploration, and we see him working on a model. Everything but the gardening motif should be removed so that we have a consistent profile of our protagonist. Gardening can serve as a wonderful symbol of Brad’s fantasy world—he concocts a perfectly beautiful garden just as he concocts images of the perfect life in his head. His fatal flaw can be his need for popularity, his need to be justified via the approval of the cool kids.

Star likewise needs a more consistent profile. Very soon after meeting her we learn that she is increasingly turned off by the selfish people who clamor around her. But in the middle of the second act, she seems to be far more turned off by the shallowness and materialism of her very career. It makes the most sense to have Star simply crave trust and honesty. She can’t trust the executives around her, she can’t trust her fans (who all want something from the fantasy life she vicariously provides), and she can’t even trust her boyfriend. Finally, she meets the one man she can trust, and she begins to fall for him. The irony can be that as her love for Brad grows, his trustworthiness vis-à-vis his true friends, will decline.

Currently, Star has a very shallow arc. She’s already doubting her lifestyle when we meet her—she expresses several times that she’s considering getting out of her glamorous but meaningless career. And despite being a bit standoffish toward her fans, she quickly proves herself a basically sweet and simple teen. There are two possible solutions here, and the correct one will depend on how the author decides to re-imagine Brad. If the author decides to give Brad a sweeping arc, in which he goes from being a shy guy with values, to being a

snob and jerk, back to being true-blue, Star could have no arc—she might seem to be idyllic when viewed from afar by the star-struck teen, but the audience will realize she's just a vain celebrity. On the other hand, if the author wants to keep the focus on the romance with Star, in which Brad and Star ride off as lovers in the end, she should have a drastically steeper arc, changing from shallow to substantive due to Brad's influence. This change will of course reinforce how good a guy Brad is, but the problem with the latter approach is that it puts the weight on how the leading lady changes in response to the protagonist, rather than on how the protagonist himself grows. For this reason, it would probably be more satisfying to give Brad a sweeping arc and progressively reveal Star as not quite as idyllic as she seemed.

Trevor is lots of fun, and the author has wisely given him a pay off in the end. It can't be stressed enough that the most rewarding aspect of this screenplay are the relentless barbs hurled at Brad by his friend. If the screenplay could maintain this playfulness in every scene, we'd have a real winner of a story.

There are probably too many minor characters. Molly and Sean are mainly nonexistent, so we should probably have no more than one sibling. Several jocks are presented, including an unnamed LETTERMAN we never see again—one or two menacing jocks will suffice. Jackson is not crucial to this story—Anna could cover all the functions of Jackson as he escorts Star to her hotel room, etc.

STRUCTURE: In terms of hitting the major pivotal marks of a three act screenplay, the author is generally close to being right on the money. We start off great! There is a strong visual hook on page 1, when Brad fantasizes about Star, and there is a decisive inciting incident on page 8, when Brad goes on his ill-fated mission to score tickets.

The plot point setting up the new act seems to be Brad's discovery of the ring. This is a powerful way to pivot the story into new territory, but it happens too late. When Brad returns home and tells Trevor what happened, we have the feeling of entering a new act. But this only begins on page 40. As noted throughout the markup, the mall scene is unmemorable and should be cut drastically. Some suggestions on how to achieve this are given in the markup, but there are many possible solutions. The vignettes showing the autograph line lack the wonderful humor of the earlier pages, and are not really important in that they do not concern the protagonist. The build up with the limo driver losing his spot is not necessary for creating true conflicts, sneaking across the mall in disguise is not vital to the story, etc. In fact, the scene could begin with Star pulling up to the mall just as Brad arrives; Sammie could bolt into traffic, Brad could give chase, and this could lead to his finding the earring. The mall scene currently stands at around 20 pages, whereas a more direct set up could occur in just a page or two.

Act III happens at about the "right place" (page 90), when Anna sets up the reunion between Star and Landon. Subsequent pace is good, although the

protagonist would have a much more riveting transformation if he pursued an active quest and encountered more challenges in Act II. In other words, the sense of closure for Brad could be far more complete in the climax; due to the lack of real crises and conflicts in Act II, the events of the final act simply do not pack the punch they could...issues are being resolved that were not clearly established as problematic in earlier pages.

STYLE: Overall, style is pretty good. There are a few instances of needless camera direction (rarely warranted in a spec script); of exposition and telling rather than showing us subjective states; and of scene transitions that are not as razor-sharp as they might be. Most of these are indicated in the markup.

The author has a pesky habit of not giving scene headings as characters move within a general location. These can be subheadings rather than complete sluglines, but we clearly need to distinguish when we move from, say, a LIVING ROOM to a KITCHEN. Most of these are marked on the hard copy as well.

As a very general style note, there are quite a few scenes (particularly in Act II), that are forgettable, and could be ramped up in terms of humor, conflict, and pace. Most of these scenes are marked in text as well, but again, the 20-page mall scene is the most glaring example.

MISCELLANEOUS: It's never clear why the author indicates Olivia and the principal are friends; this is a narrative dead end which we do not subsequently explore.

It would be nice to get some examples of Star's lyrics so that we could learn what Brad finds so inspirational.

The title doesn't pack much weight, as it seems to be perfectly literal. It would be nice if there were some sense of double meaning or irony, but it really is about a teen's obsession with a pop star.

CONCLUSION: If the author can live up to the standards established in the early part of the story, he'll have a very appealing rom-com on his hands. The most vital issue to address is the quest of the protagonist (and thus the definition of the primary plot), and this must dovetail with Brad's transformational arc.

Good luck!



	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Very Good</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>So-So</u>	<u>Not Good</u>
Artistically			X		
Commercial				X	
Premise			X		
Story				X	
Main Characters				X	
Minor Characters				X	
Dialogue		X			
Visual Elements			X		
Title				X	

SCRIPT: PASS
WRITER: PASS