

SCRIPT COVERAGE REPORT

Title: The Caravan
Form: Screenplay
Length: 85 pages
Writer: ██████████
Genre: Social Realist Drama
Submitted By: BBC Films

Producer: N/A
Director: N/A
Cast: N/A
Locale: Skegness, Lincolnshire
Circa: Present Day
Budget: Low
Verdict: Pass
Reader: Carwyn Jones
Date Covered: 30/10/20

Logline: On a tough Skegness estate, two downtrodden care workers foster pipe dreams of escaping domestic chaos for a better life by the sea. They are assigned to care for an ailing old woman with a mysterious past, who becomes the unlikely catalyst for the friends to escape their bleak situation.

Evaluation: Although the distinctive setting taps into the increasing demands for rural content, at present the tumultuous plot and underdeveloped supporting characters obscure the story's emotional core. Pass at this time.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
IDEA			X	
PLOT			X	
CHARACTERIZATION				X
DIALOGUE			X	
PACE				X
SETTING		X		

SYNOPSIS

Present day Skegness. On Blackley, a tough sink estate where restless HOODIES roam and the unfortunate lose their lives in dark doorways, friends KAREN (35) and TRACEY (36) are just about keeping their heads above water: Karen has recently lost her mother and having been caring for her, scrapes by on a few hours at the local convenience store; Tracey works for a care agency under fake credentials and goes home each night to her abusive husband BRIAN.

The story opens with Karen visiting the scruffy seaside caravan that she has inherited, and which was her childhood home. Her mother's death has opened a longing to return and escape the brittle estate, but she has little hope of raising the cash to cover the annual pitch rental. She resolves to increase her shifts, but instead is laid off, and subsequently threatened by bailiffs when she can't make her rent.

Terrified of ending up homeless, like her cousin MANDY (35), she allows Tracey to forge her a care worker certificate. Although she worries about getting caught, all goes smoothly and she soon joins Tracey on her rounds. Two of their regular clients are the cantankerous BERNIE (late 60s), a retired artisan jeweller and kind-hearted DORIS (late 80s), a former croupier with a mysterious past. Bernie lives on the estate, but Doris' home is a short bus trip and a world away on White-Moor, a new development with pretty bungalows and well-kept lawns. She bonds with Karen and Tracey, drawing them into her world, but her unpleasant goddaughter GINA (late 30s), warns them off, making it clear that they are not to get too friendly.

Sadly, after a fall, Doris' condition deteriorates, leaving her frail and vulnerable. Gina takes advantage of this, stealing cash and claiming that Doris owes her. Doris tries repeatedly to confide an important secret to Karen and Tracey, but never manages to finish.

As Doris' health dwindles, the lives of the other characters spiral: Karen's electricity is cut off and she is mugged by the hoodies on the estate; Brian's violent behaviour escalates and Tracey turns up for work with two black eyes and a fractured rib. Alarmed, Doris lets her stay at her bungalow, but when she doesn't return home, Brian breaks into Karen's flat in a drug-induced rage, smashing the place up, including her money jar labelled *Caravan*.

The following day, Gina is incensed to find that Tracey has stayed over and sacks the pair of them. They return to the estate to discover that Karen's flat has been repossessed and her mother's caravan destroyed; they are forced to spend the night on the streets, where they also learn from the hoodies that Karen's cousin Mandy has been murdered. Meanwhile, Gina neglects, humiliates and eventually abandons Doris, reluctantly calling the agency to bring Karen and Tracey back. Waking up on the estate to an urgent call, the women rush to Doris' house where they find her struggling to breathe. As she lays dying, she asks them to pass her jewellery box, and insists on giving them her collection of rings. Later, they visit Bernie who recognises the rings as part of a famous diamond heist. He agrees to keep schtum so long as he gets his cut.

Six months later: Karen and Tracey are seen making their way home to two luxury wooden chalets on the caravan park. As Karen enters her home, a framed picture of a young Doris smiles down at her.

COMMENTS

The recent popularity of shows like mockumentary *This Country* (2017-20), and coming-of-age comedy *The Young Offenders* (2018-20), demonstrate a strong market demographic for drama depicting lives lived on the margins in rural locations. BBC Films have also set precedents for serious social realist stories, including *Fish Tank* (2009) and *I, Daniel Blake* (2016); whilst this genre isn't as commercially successful as others in the UK market, there is clearly an audience and a need to raise awareness of the subject matter explored in these texts, especially in the wake of continuing political austerity. *The Caravan* fits well into this niche with its themes of people struggling on the fringes of society and the ambiguous morality one needs to get by.

The story world is brought bleakly into focus with sharply descriptive sentences. Whilst these conjure the grimly authentic circumstances in which the characters find themselves, the level of detail given to describing the settings seems prioritized at the expense of the plot.

Karen's yearning to escape the estate and live in her mother's caravan is an endearing hook that the audience can invest in. However, as the tension rises amidst escalating obstacles, Karen's goal becomes lost in the chaos; this is exemplified when the jar containing her caravan fund is smashed halfway through the script. As Karen and Tracey's lives spin out of control, this loss of focus may offer narrative verisimilitude, but could be disconcerting for audiences and may not hold viewers' attention.

Similarly, whilst the subplots beneath the main narrative offer some depth to the story world, they don't appear to have enough emotional impact on Karen and Tracey or influence their final choices. Although Brian's actions push the story forward, there is no real scrutiny or pay-off given to this narrative branch, which is disappointing; equally, the almost incidental reveal of Mandy's murder at the plot's culmination point, bizarrely seems to have little impact on Karen.

The array of characters inhabiting *The Caravan's* landscape attests to a richness of lives fully-lived in spite of adversity: use of lesser known actors would help capture the spirit of this under-represented demographic, while easing the probable low budget of production. However, this depth is never fully realised within the characters themselves: the anonymous 'hoodies' exist only to reinforce the dangers on the estate, without representing the circumstances of the individual members or inferring reasons for the gang's existence. Likewise, Bernie and Doris' analogous stories shrewdly observe that wealth offers no respite from the privations of old age, but the dramatic needs of their characters are never fully explored; ultimately, it feels that they serve mostly to provide a convenient resolution. The final twist feels like a hollow 'way-out' for Karen and Tracey and it is unclear what the audience is meant to take away from it, although there may be an inference about the importance of caring for those more vulnerable than oneself.

The writer demonstrates promise to refine the story's embedded social messages. The tense dialogue exchanges between Karen and Tracey present clashing moral viewpoints over forging a certificate, highlighting their limited choices of legitimate employment. However, although the setting taps into the increasing demands for rural content, at present the tumultuous plot and underdeveloped supporting characters obscure the story's emotional core. Pass at this time.