

Short Analysis

Title	THELMA & LOUISE		
Writer	Callie Khouri		
Director	Ridley Scott		
Draft	June 1989 1 st draft with revisions		
Pages	138	Reader	dfk phl
Contact	Percy Main Productions a.o. Some buyers and distributors	Date	21.06.1990

On the way to a nice weekend, Louise, a waitress, shoots a man who wanted to rape her friend Thelma, whereupon complete male madness descends upon them. Thanks to their courage and friendship, they escape arrest.

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Does the script tell a complete STORY ?	X		
Do we BELIEVE in the story?		X	
Does the story have a MAIN CHARACTER we are rooting for?	X		
Are the Main Character's main GOALS interesting?		X	
Are the OBSTACLES and FORCES of ANTAGONISM strong and complex?	X		
Does the Main Character go through a meaningful CHANGE ?	X		
Is it possible to PENETRATE the mind of the Characters?		X	
Does the story develop an interesting THEME , a potent message?	X		
Is the story's UNIVERSE (where and when) appealing? Relevant? Original?		X	
Is the storytelling DYNAMIC ?		X	
Is the DIALOGUE well written?	X		
Potential for VISUALLY stunning scenes?	X		

Target AUDIENCE	All
REFERENCES	HAROLD AND MAUDE, ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, THE ROSE
GENRE	Tragedy Road-Movie (sub-genre)
REMARKS	The plot has some weaknesses, especially the premise of the main story (Thelma's story) isn't convincing and the intended goal of "fishing" is also dropped for no reason. On the other hand, the "underlying" story is so extremely strong that the audience will not consciously notice most of the plot contradictions. Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to develop a "final impact" that "helps" the audience. This would only be possible via the supporting character of the policeman, if at least he would reach the goal of the two women.

SYNOPSIS

THELMA (late 20s) and LOUISE (early 30s) want to escape their everyday lives and their husbands for a weekend at Louise's boss' mountain cabin. Thelma's husband DARRYL is a real macho-idiot, Louise's boyfriend JIMMY is a musician and usually on the road.

On the way to the mountain hut, they stop at a dance hall at Thelma's insistence. Thelma is very welcoming and very friendly. She dances with the sleazy macho HARLAN, who wants to rape her in the car park. Louise frees Thelma and shoots Harlan down. There are no witnesses to Harlan's rape intent. After discussions and distance in time and place from the crime scene, Thelma and Louise decide to flee to Mexico.

Louise calls Jimmy and asks him to transfer all her savings. Thelma wants to pick up a pretty hitchhiker, but Louise refuses. Darryl insults Thelma on the phone and isn't willing to listen to her. Thelma persuades Louise to give the pretty hitchhiker J.D. a ride. At the motel, where Louise is supposed to pick up her money, she meets Jimmy, who brings her the money in person. He proposes to her with a ring. She is surprised and happy and they make love. Thelma learns how to rob a shop from J.D., who claims to be a robber. She is very much attracted by him, and they have a wild night of love.

J.D. steals Louise's entire life savings, which Thelma should have taken care of, and disappears. Thelma attempts partial redemption and successfully robs a 7-11 shop using the J.D. method. Jimmy and J.D. are arrested and questioned by the police.

Thelma and Louise find out that their husbands' phones have been tapped by the police. Louise talks to the leading detective and tries to find out how things are and what the police know about Harlan's killing. The police try to trace the caller. Thelma discloses Louise's secret: she was raped in Texas and therefore never wants to go back to that state.

A patrolman stops Louise for speeding. Thelma overpowers him with her gun. They lock him in the boot of his car.

Both women are convinced that they have nothing worth returning for. They confront a tanker-truck driver who has already harassed them several times with unambiguous gestures while driving at full speed. Because he does not want to apologise for his behaviour, they shoot his tank-truck to explode.

The police have found out where they are. The pursuing police cars grow into an armada. The wild chase through the desert is abruptly stopped by the Grand Canyon. Thelma and Louise invoke their deep and strong friendship. Not wanting to go to jail or even to the electric chair for killing Harlan, they prefer to plunge into the Grand Canyon by car at full speed.

CHARACTERS

THELMA housewife, late twenties, a bit slutty, oppressed by husband, childless, a bit childish/teenagerish, inexperienced in travelling, open, outgoing, endearingly naive, adaptable, and willing, nice, pretty, direct, the "little sister" for Louise, rather extroverted, careless, inexperienced, sexually frustrated, sensual, young and sexy, a big girl.

LOUISE waitress, mid-thirties, prettily dressed, lives alone in a very clean flat, has a boyfriend, knows how to handle a gun, rather introverted, cautious, drags around a big and terrible secret, loves her boyfriend and is annoyed that he is away too often, experienced in life and marked, a woman.

HAL - detective superintendent, nice, accurate, correct, intelligent, psychological, human, smart, understanding, early forties, a man.

DARRYL - Thelma's husband, vain, macho, stupid, dull, carpet sales manager, retarded, cheating, blow-dried for business, home in a baggy look, watches football on TV, a spoilt snob boy with too much physical strength.

JIMMY - Louise's boyfriend, musician, kind, curious, helpful, vain, jealous, boyish, wants most what he doesn't have, romantic, a big boy.

J. D. - hitchhiker, out on parole, robber, cute, very pretty, nice body, funny, good lover, young, irresponsible, a little boy.

WAITRESS - experienced, Louise-like, no terrible secret, connoisseur of human nature, fond of Hal, helpful, correct.

HARLAN - Macho, womaniser, sleazy, good body, rapist, hard-drinking, thug.

TANK TRUCK DRIVER - dully brazen chauvinist, frustrated, overwhelmed, choleric.

Note: The two female leading roles are fully developed into three-dimensional characters. Their struggles are plausible and finally Thelma becomes a strong woman – with whom the audience can identify. She grows to an equal partner for her friend. Policeman Hal is the only character who could achieve the goal of the main characters as part of a melo ending, but this was not worked out in the script.

DIALOGUES

The dialogues are very efficient, coherent in content and written to fit the characters' bodies or psyches.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE | Acts & Sequences

Act 1 (scenes 1-47, introduction)

Sequence I (scenes 1-12)

In the first sequence of this act (introduction), Thelma and Louise pack and set off.

Sequence II (scenes 13-22)

At Thelma's request, they go to a trucker's pub where she is almost raped. Louise shoots the sleazy guy, the two women flee in panic.

Sequence III (scenes 24-47)

Louise organises the transfer of her savings and sets the destination of the escape, Mexico.

Act 2 (scenes 46-186, confrontation)

Sequence IV (scenes 46-76)

Policeman Hal learns from the husband that Thelma has a gun. He finds her fingerprints at the rape scene. Thelma prevails on Louise to take the handsome hitchhiker J.D. with her.

Sequence V (scenes 82-110)

Louise's money is stolen from the motel room by J.D. after he has given Thelma the first real orgasm in her life. The dejected Thelma takes charge because Louise is now resigned. She robs a small supermarket and empties the till.

Sequence VI (scenes 112-144)

J.D. is arrested, and the policeman Hal learns that the two women want to flee to Mexico.

Sequence VII (scenes 145-186)

Thelma finds out Louise's secret: she was once raped in Texas and therefore never wants to go back to that state and to the police for such an offence. Hal has also found out Louise's secret and wants to persuade her to give up. The fugitives are located.

Act 3 (scenes 188-215, resolution)

Sequence VIII (scenes 188-208)

The two women are tracked down and pursued by a police armada. They evade into the desert.

Sequence IX (Scenes 209-215)

Their escape is abruptly stopped by a large and deep ravine. Not wanting to go to the electric chair for this, Thelma convinces her friend to race into the Grand Canyon, which they do accentuated with the B.B. King song "Better Not Look Down". Hal can't stop his police or the two women.

COMMENT | CONCLUSIONS

In the end, the audience is left with the bitter cognition how hard it is for women and the few sensible men in the dull and insane American male world of Darryls, Harlans, J.D.s, truck drivers and most policemen. On the other hand, there remains a feeling of hope thanks to the strength and consistent attitude of the two women, as they value their self-determination more than dull and submissive conformity. As mentioned, unfortunately we do not learn what personal consequences Hal draws from this experience.

The structure classically comprises three fully developed acts with wonderful twists and turns that are most powerful when they concern the relationship of the two women. Each of the nine sequences are built around a central and significant event for the story. The scene numbering has not to be taken seriously, as here, as almost everywhere nowadays, numbers are imaginatively put in front of real scenes as well as simple shots. To remedy this problem, further training with Billy Wilder would help a lot.

This script is a very good piece of work. During further development under the influence of Ridley Scott, it will gain a lot of momentum and cinematographic quality. On the other hand, it is to be hoped that the author will defend her female characters to the last drop of blood. Personally, as a "Nevertheless Optimist," I would prefer a more melo-dramatic resolution (after the tragedy) with the "allied" Hal fulfilling an important goal of the main characters. (See also "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest").

This brief analysis was developed on the basis of our Story-Step-Outline, in which the entire script was summarized in 40 story-steps.

Provo (Utah) and Zürich (Switzerland), 21 June 1990 / phl, dfk

Story Step Outline

In brackets you find the scene numbers of Callie Khouri's script from June 1989 (first draft revised), the film will be directed by Ridley Scott.

- 1** (1-7) Louise clears the tables at the café, Thelma does the same at home. Thelma doesn't tell her husband Darryl anything about the upcoming women's weekend.
- 2** (8-12) Thelma packs a pistol, which she awkwardly hands to the surprised Louise in the car.
- 3** (13+15) In a truckers' pub, Thelma dances with the sleazy Harlan, Louise with Dan. The drunken Thelma is pushed out into the fresh air by Harlan.
- 4** (17-22) Harlan wants to rape Thelma. Louise frees Thelma with her pistol and shoots Harlan after his verbal attack towards the two women. They drive away in panic.
- 5** (24+28+32) Detective Hal learns from the waitress at the trucker's pub that she didn't see anything and is glad Harlan is dead. The car - where Harlan died - is examined for fingerprints.
- 6** (26-27+29+31+33+35) A handsome hitchhiker pockets a \$20 note that Thelma had lost during the ride. He gets out of a truck in front of a motel and sees Thelma. She is lying on a deck chair. He boards a car and drives away.
- 7** (34+36-44) Louise asks her boyfriend Jimmy to transfer all her savings to a Western Union branch in Oklahoma City.
- 8** (45+47) Louise wants to run away to Mexico. Thelma thinks Darryl is cheating on her.
- 9** (46+48+49) Hal reports the two women as possible witnesses to the Harlan murder. With the help of the waitress, sketches are made and faxed to the FBI.
- 10** (50-55) Louise stops in front of a shop and gets the address by phone from Jimmy where she can pick up the money.
- 11** (56-63) Darryl insults Thelma on the phone and wants her to come home immediately. She hangs up with a "go fuck yourself".
- 12** (64+65+67) Weeping Thelma is comforted by the handsome hitchhiker. He asks for a ride, which Louise refuses. Louise wants to drive to Mexico on side roads and under no circumstances through Texas, where something terrible had happened to her.
- 13** (66+68+69+71a+72+74+75+77-81) Hal identifies Louise and talks to her supervisor. From drunken Darryl he learns about Thelma's gun. Her fingerprints match those on the car, where Harlan was shot.
- 14** (70+71b+73) Thelma persuades Louise to give the pretty hitchhiker a lift.

- 15** (83+86+90+92+94) At the motel in Oklahoma, Louise meets Jimmy with her money, which she leaves in Thelma's room. Jimmy proposes to her, they make love and part as good friends.
- 16** (85+87+89+91+95) J.D. tells Thelma how he has done muggings. She is thrilled and they have hot sex.
- 17** (97+98) In the morning cheerful Thelma and happy Louise discover with horror that handsome J.D. has stolen all the money and run away.
- 18** (100+102-106) Thelma robs a shop using the J.D. method and runs back to the car with a bag of banknotes. Louise drives off swearing. The police and Darryl watch a videotape of Thelma's robbery.
- 19** (110) Thelma is ecstatic about what she has done and realizes that she is a bit crazy.
- 20** (112) A truck driver makes unmistakable sex signs while driving full speed.
- 21** (114) Thelma tells Louise about a rape scene from a Linda Blair women's prison film.
- 22** (116) Thelma wants to call Darryl. Louise makes points out once again that there are no traces of rape for the police to find.
- 23** (107+108+111+113+115+117-119+121) Jimmy is arrested, J.D. is led away in handcuffs. Jimmy identifies J.D. and realizes that he has stolen Louise's money. J.D. is grilled by Hal and in the end confesses everything.
- 24** (120+122-130) Thelma calls Darryl, who greets her very kindly, whereupon she hangs up in shock, because she knows immediately that the police are with him.
- 25** (131+132+134-144) Finally, it is clear that the police are looking for them. Louise does not want to go to prison. She learns that Hal knows from J.D. that they want to go to Mexico.
- 26** (145-148) They talk about their fears: Louise did not want to grow old alone, Thelma did not want to grow old with Darryl.
- 27** (149+150) They meet the trucker again and he macho advances them even more clearly.
- 28** (152-163) Louise calls Jimmy and confesses her eternal love to him.
- 29** (164+165) Thelma is shattered when she finally realizes what had happened to Louise in Texas. Louise almost goes crazy. Thelma laughs and cries about killing Harlan.
- 30** (166-170) A patrolman who stops them for speeding is disarmed and locked in the boot of his car.
- 31** (171) Louise and Thelma do not want to give up and to go back.
- 32** (175) Thelma is glad that Louise had saved her from Harlan, and she regrets that she had not shot him herself.

33 (176) The patrolman frees himself from the car boot.

34 (177-186) Hal knows what had happened to Louise in Texas. She is told to turn herself in or she will be put on the wanted list as a murderer. Thelma interrupts the phone call so the police can't trace her, too late.

35 (188+189) Louise is afraid of the death penalty. Thelma tries to distract her.

36 (190-195) They stop the truck in the desert, lure the horny driver to their car and demand apologies for his sexist behaviour. When he refuses, they shoot at his truck until it explodes.

37 (196+197+199) The patrolman reports to the headquarter. Hal is informed and gets on a helicopter.

38 (198+200-208) Thelma and Louise are pursued by patrol cars, leave the road and swerve into the desert.

39 (209) They run short of petrol. Thelma wants to take all the blame. Louise refuses.

40 (210-215) Pursued by a large police armada with many vehicles and a helicopter, they suddenly see the Grand Canyon in front of them and stop. The police want them to surrender. Thelma convinces Louise to race into the canyon, which they do accentuated with the B.B. King song "Better Not Look Down".