

SHORE SCRIPTS

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Title: [REDACTED]
Writers: [REDACTED]
Length: 103 Pages
Genre: Psychological Thriller

Location: Utah USA
Circa: Contemporary
Budget: Low/Medium
Coverage Date: [REDACTED]

Format: Feature

Logline:

When a woman suffering from post-natal depression becomes convinced that her husband's ex-wife is trying to take her baby away from her, those around her put it down to schizophrenia. Bringing back memories of her mother's illness; she has to fight in every way she can to keep both her liberty and her son.

Industry Scorecard:

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	PROFICIENT	NEEDS ATTENTION
PREMISE	X			
STORY	X			
CHARACTERS		X		
STRUCTURE	X			
DIALOGUE		X		
MARKETABILITY	X			

SYNOPSIS:

Mixed race beauty Mira can't sleep. She's had that dream again, the one where her husband Andy's ice-cool, blonde ex-wife, Elaine, is in the nursery and snatches their baby boy. It's probably just the hormones. But here Mira is, gulping water in the moonlight, with a baby kicking inside her.

In prospect, after Andy gets through teaching his grad-students about post-impressionism, a trip to the in-laws. Hmm. On the porch of their Colonial-style house, Mira realizes she forgot the gift. She retrieves it. When she gets back, Andy has gone in. She pauses by a family portrait. Elaine stands next to Andy, indelible. Mira gives Sue her gift, a frostiness between them. Sue suggests Mothering Sunday must be difficult for Mira, but Mira is creating new memories.

Ruth, Andy's grandma joins Sue and Kenneth (his dad) and Lauren (his sister) and her girls for dinner. She is perturbed by Mira, whom she doesn't recognize. When reminded she is Andy's wife, Ruth snaps, "That's not his wife." Elaine again. Unspoken, but unforgotten.

That night, Mira has another dream about the accident she was in as a child with her mother, also a blonde. The sounds of the lake accident dream merge with those of Elijah crying... It's Andy's first day back at work after paternity leave. Her father calls, but things aren't good with him either. She's too black for Andy's family, too white for her own.

Mira goes to campus, can't find Andy, and has to breastfeed Elijah on a bench out in the open, under the stares of smirking students. Elaine happens by. She's supposed to be in New York. That night, Mira challenges Andy, but he deflects with an invitation from an exhibition organizer to submit a painting. Inspired, Mira gets carried away painting in the garage and doesn't notice the baby monitor is off line. When she does, she rushes to the house, but it's locked. She takes a key from under a pot, leaving the door wide open and the key in it. Elijah is just fine.

Her best friend Jaqc arrives. She's doing fertility treatment. They'll be a 'new mother community' just like in the olden days. Mira breaks down. Motherhood is not what she thought it would be. She doesn't feel complete, and she's worried because she is now the same age her mother was when she went off the rails. What if it's hereditary? Jaqc gifts her a black figurine of mother and child and encourages her to sue Dr. Thackery for mis-treatment and discrimination.

Another day of painting. Again, the back door is locked when Mira tries to get in, only this time the key is missing. She finds the front door is wide open. She rushes up to Elijah. He is safe. Phew! While she ferries her art supplies to the attic. Mira wriggles out of the faculty dinner pleading ill health. Andy tries to get Mira to change her mind, but no. The family has again brought up the subject of the baptism. Andy is minded to relent. Mira says it's hypocritical as he was still married when they hooked up. *Separated*, he reminds her.

Mira thinks there's an intruder. She checks on Elijah. He's safe. She hears a noise outside. The garbage bin is on its side. She goes outside – sees an eye staring through the fence. She rights the bin and stares through the crack in the fence. No one. She turns and bumps into — Andy. He notices the blood. At the hospital, the midwife reminds her: no lifting, and no sex. Talking to the midwife about the baby blues, Mira reveals a history of mental illness in the family: her mom was schizophrenic. Mira decides to pursue a discrimination claim against Dr. Thackery.

Out shopping, Mira is convinced she spots Elaine, but can't seem to catch up with her. Back to painting her picture... Mira comes down and finds the door wide open, the photo album she'd thrown away on the doorstep. She's startled by Lauren in pink washing up gloves, doing the household chores Mira is increasingly unable to do. They look at the photo album together. Lauren encourages her to get therapy, to talk about the accident, and gives her a special tea.

Mira faints in the bath and relives the accident again. Jaqc offers to babysit, as Andy has organized a special dinner to celebrate their anniversary, surrounded by art at the campus museum. That night she dreams she is in the hospital and the whole of Andy's family is conspiring to take away her baby to give to Elaine. When she awakes, Andy is not beside her. He's in the nursery, on the phone. Mira challenges him. His grandma has been rushed to hospital. Oh.

Mira is bathing Elijah in the kitchen sink when there's a noise outside. A woman is rummaging through the bins! Distracted, Mira steps away from Elijah to grab her phone, when she gets back the woman is gone. There's a gurgling sound. Elijah! The water is up to his mouth. She goes to see the therapist, unhappy at how having a baby has changed things.

Ruth dies. Mira spies Elaine at the funeral. Alone at home, she hears a noise. She sees a blonde woman walking away from the house. Mira runs out onto the street, asks if people have seen her. She looks wild. Andy comes home to find Elijah alone, the door wide open. Mira tells him Elaine has been coming to the house, but he doesn't believe her. That night she dreams her mother is there, but when she looks again, it is Elaine. Next day she calls her dad to ask for the poem her mom used to read to her. She doesn't think mom committed suicide. Roger thinks she should move on... Mira sees her therapist again but is humiliated when Elaine is there.

Lauren visits and reveals Elaine was pregnant when she and Andy split. Mira is horrified. She didn't know. On campus, Mira spots Andy talking to someone under a tree. Elaine. Fuming, she marches towards them, but the stroller rolls downhill and she has to run to rescue Elijah. She takes him home. She is astonished to find Andy there. He confronts her about suing Thackery, but she counter-attacks with Elaine's pregnancy. They row.

Andy tries to take Elijah. His family is going to the Uintas for the weekend; she can have me-time. Mira's not having it. They struggle and Mira's stitches re-open. Andy leaves, calls Roger. Her dad arrives. Does she remember her mom rummaging through trash, or leaving doors wide open? Schizophrenia is genetic, triggered by trauma. She throws him out but has the poem.

That night she dreams of the accident again and remembers. Her mother swerved to avoid a deer. Mira is at peace, until she hears a key turn in the lock. Andy sneaks into the nursery. The crib is empty. He turns to see — Mira wielding a knife. While Mira takes a bath, Andy packs Elijah's things. He's about to take Elijah when he notices blue droplets forming on the ceiling.

Up in the attic, a paint pot is overturned. He sees Mira's portrait. It shocks him. Meanwhile Mira relives the accident in full, including her mother's death. Andy is on the phone to Elaine, plotting to get Mira sectioned. He hears a noise. The front door is open. He goes to the bathroom and forcing his way in, finds the bath overflowing, but no Mira.

The water won't drain. As he unclogs the plughole, Mira arrives silently behind him, holding the figurine Jaqc gave her. She hits him with it, and he falls in to the bath. Elaine has got tired of waiting. She comes to the house. When there's no answer, she opens the door, with the missing spare key. She searches for Andy... and screams!

Mira is on the road her mother took that fateful night. She takes Elijah into the lake with her and baptizes him, reciting lines from the William Blake poem she loved so well as a child.

FEEDBACK:

Premise

██████████ focuses on a woman's fight to overcome a serious illness and prejudice to protect herself and her son. As such the premise is strong, ripe with conflict and a timely tale of a woman being gas lit so that all around her believe she has inherited her mother's mental illness and is schizophrenic, at a time when she is vulnerable after a traumatic birth and post-partum blues. Furthermore, the writer makes it ambiguous enough, that we can see it from both sides: what Mira, the protagonist is experiencing, and what it looks like to those around her.

Suggestion is a powerful tool, and once the possibility that Mira has schizophrenia is raised, it is difficult not to interpret everything she does through that prism. We find out at the end that Elaine, the ex-wife Mira has replaced, did in fact steal the missing key. The possibility is open that, knowing details of Mira's case — which she could, as she is a member of the same practice that Mira's therapist belongs to, and so she might be able to hack in and access her notes, she is gaslighting Mira to drive her mad and win Andy, the object of both their affections, back. Certainly, as a trained psychotherapist, she would know exactly how to go about gaslighting Mira, and that appears to be what she is doing. But are the family in on it?

Seen from Mira's perspective, it looks that way. Elaine was supposed to be going to NY but stayed behind. Andy lied to Mira about them being separated when they hooked up. Not only were they not separated, but Elaine was pregnant. Andy's family has still not gotten over the divorce. There's still a huge family portrait with Elaine in their home. Plus, Elaine, the preferred granddaughter-in-law, gets invited to Ruth's funeral. Mira seems to see her everywhere. She bears an uncanny resemblance to her mother, and sometimes takes her place in her dreams.

How much of what Mira comes to believe is imagined? Is Lauren poisoning her with that special tea, as revenge for Mira suing her husband for discrimination? Is the dream of surprising them all at the hospital, plotting to take her baby away to give it to Elaine pure paranoia? Why does Andy meet with her so often, and look so happy when he does? Ultimately, Elaine does convince Andy to do the very thing that Mira fears: commit her to an institution. He must know that the worst possible thing he could do from Mira's perspective is collude with his ex-wife to get her sent away and separate her from Elijah?

This then, is one of the joys of ██████████: the ambiguity. The possibility to weave theories, because we only really see one side of the story. It is possible, indeed likely, that Mira is suffering post-natal depression, however, it's a question of degree and diagnosis. Is it that, or is it the onset of schizophrenia, which we are told can be triggered by a traumatic event?

The writer also takes the opportunity to bring out some important themes, like the discrimination against black women in natal care. A black mother is 3-4 times more likely to die in childbirth than a white mother. This is a shocking discrepancy. The US Centre for American Progress has concluded that disparities in maternal and infant mortality are rooted in racism.

While this is known, and reports about it sometimes flare up on social media, it is good to cover this in a film, which is more enduring and can bring about real change. What's more, the writer does it in such a subtle way, that nobody can object that it is being rammed down their throat. It is genuinely integral to the story and when Mira decides to sue her sister-in-law's husband for discrimination, that explains some of the dynamics between her and her husband's family.

The writer also touches on racism itself, but subtly points out that both sides are guilty. Mira complains to her father, "I'm too black for Andy's family and too white for yours" (P.26). Grandma Ruth's reaction to Mira on P.6 — "that isn't his wife" — might be based on racism (although it might equally be because she genuinely loved Elaine). Then there's the whole episode with Dr. Thackery, when Mira tells the medical staff she is in pain, but everyone ignores her. Jaqc meanwhile is overtly racist against white people. "I always suspected she was a crazy white bitch," she says (P.58). Again, it's all very subtle (although that last line might not look like it out of context).

I only found one little plot hole. Andy goes off to work to teach his grad students about post-impersonism, saying when he gets home, they can ride to his parents together (P.3). But the trip to his parents is on Mothering Sunday (P.5). Does he teach on Sundays? It seems highly unusual, but it is just a tiny flaw and doesn't spoil the read.

One further psychological aspect that the writer might want to bring out a little more is survivor's guilt. We see fragments of the accident. It builds and builds until finally we have the complete picture, and one of the details we see quite late in the film is hands holding under water, breaking apart and separating as Mira floats up and Joy sinks.

There is not a whole lot to change: the script requires a polish rather than a page-one re-write. The report contains 5 areas of focus for that polish: a plot hole, character introductions, Lauren's character, dialogue and bringing out some of the psychological themes a little more strongly, e.g. survivor's guilt.

Marketability

The first thing a producer will look at is the title, and [REDACTED] is well chosen. [REDACTED] tells us this will be about an infant or infants and the use of the word [REDACTED] is ambiguous — it could mean a lullaby a mother sings to a child, or a woman's yearning for a child. In this film, we have both — Mira and Elaine, and we also have different generations — Mira and Joy.

There are a lot of movies about pregnancy, but typically they are either documentaries (*The Business of Being Born* 2008, *Babies* 2010, *First Comes Love* 2013, *The Beginning of Life* 2016, etc.) or comedies (*Juno* 2007, *Knocked Up* 2007, *Baby Mama* 2008, *Away We Go* 2009, *The Switch* 2010, *Storks* 2016, etc.). The horror genre has picked up on post-partum depression (*The Mother* 2008), but most of the more successful dramas or thrillers about it seem to come out of Europe (*Le Lait de la Tendresse Humaine* [The Milk of Human Kindness] 2001, *Lost Song* 2008, *Dreamlife* 2017). All of which suggests that there is a gap in the market.

Another theme to look at for comparisons is gaslighting, and here there is a wealth of possibility from *Gaslight* all the way back in 1944 to *The Invisible Man* in 2020, passing by *Rosemary's Baby* 1968, *What Lies Beneath* 2000, *The Girl on the Train* 2016 and *Mother* 2017. What [REDACTED] offers that is fresh and different is the combination of post-partum depression and gaslighting. It is like an updated, multi-cultural version of the Hitchcock classic, *Rebecca* (1940).

The budget has been assessed as low to mid, depending on how much of the car crash is shot. Most of the film is shot in and around Mira and Andy Chapman's house, with additional scenes on campus, in a hospital, at a therapist's and in Andy's parent's house.

The cast size, while not particularly contained, is still reasonably modest. There is one scene with children and several with a baby, which would push the cost of the cast to the mid-range though. Aside from that, there are no animals, pyrotechnics or firearms, and probably only limited CGI for the crash. This is a point very much in the script's favor.

Additionally, the script is formatted to industry standard, with the exception of the occasional word in bold and the use of the word 'establishing' to describe a shot (which is not needed and almost never used these days). However, there is a lot of white space, and everything else is properly formatted, so producers need not worry that the relationship between 1 page and 1 minute of screen-time would not hold.

Current Predicted Industry Outcome:

RECOMMEND	CONSIDER	PASS
X		

Character

Mira is a character who is easy to love. She's about to give life when we meet her. She seems happy, radiant, complete. Then it all goes horribly wrong when her waters break while she is visiting her in-laws and she is forced into having a C-section when she planned a completely different type of birth. Because it is so common-place, people forget that a C-section is major surgery and can incapacitate a new mother for weeks afterwards. Mira's situation is so much worse, having been denied the care and pain relief she needed while the operation was in progress. That kind of vulnerability and injustice is endearing. It means that as she descends into mental illness, we are still prepared to give her the benefit of the doubt and root for her.

Andy is revealed not to be the charming, young-for-his age, cuddly college professor we initially see. Why does he only take two weeks off for paternity leave when he is entitled to four and his wife is obviously struggling? Knowing his wife's insecurity about Elaine, why doesn't he take greater steps to avoid her? They are, after all, divorced. Instead of judging Mira for not staying on top of the housework while she's depressed and learning to look after an infant, why doesn't he hire a cleaner for a month? Asking Lauren for help cleaning the home is a further

humiliation for Mira — plus it's weird, as Mira is suing Lauren's husband (although Andy doesn't seem to know that at the time).

Elaine is an enigma. We find out just enough about her to realize she is capable of gaslighting Mira. That's good. The writer should keep it that way. They might want to be clearer about how close of a resemblance Elaine bears to Mira's mother though. We are going to see that on the screen anyway, so no need to be coy about it on the page.

Then there's Lauren, who manages to be kind to Mira with only the occasional pointed reference to her suing her husband. Lauren is the one character who feels inauthentic. She is too much of a saint, although she does stir things up by revealing family secrets here and there. Maybe she could be more passive-aggressive than she is?

Jaqc is a good ally, on the surface. It's almost as if she encourages Mira to get in touch with her inner goddess. We get the feeling that she has looked up to Mira for years. Now here is Mira in front of her in bits. It must be a shock to see her that way. Perhaps that could be brought out a little more, and we could visibly see her shift to assuming the role of "the strong one." Yet Mira doesn't turn to her when Elaine and Andy are closing in and making their move to commit her to an institution. Why is that? Is it because she is too far away?

The writer might want to give a little more consideration to how they introduce characters. For example, Mira is introduced as a 'troubled black woman.' That feels a little dismissive. What are her good qualities? What was it that attracted Andy to her? He says he knew from the moment he saw her that she was special. What was special about her? Was it merely a physical attraction? Character descriptions are important to give actors a sense of the essence of a character. What lies at Mira's core?

Elaine and Joy don't come off much better. Elaine is "an intense white woman with blonde hair" (P.1) while Joy is a "disheveled white woman in her thirties" (P.12). Lauren, meanwhile, is a "wealthy, brunette do-gooder" (P.6). Andy gets a fuller description. He's a "white man in his 40s whose guy-next-door looks exude safety and stability."

Dialogue/Sound

The writer demonstrates a firm grasp of writing dialogue for screenplays, with lots of one-line responses back and forth, and few monologues or long speeches. The use of William Blake's poem is very soothing at a time when the action is quite psychologically fraught, building to a climax. The one line that jars is when Mira says her mother isn't real to her. She gives her an awful lot of real estate in her mind, so that doesn't ring true. Of course, Mira could be lying, but she has not been established as someone who is evasive or downright dishonest.

To elevate the dialogue, the writer might consider techniques to make the characters less similar to one another. Show differences between different generations. Mira comes from a family where her father was a pastor and her mother was well-versed in poetry. How might that be reflected in the way she speaks? For all the characters, consider any special words they

might use, for example, jargon borrowed from their jobs, the syntax they use, their cadence, their propensity to curse, regionalisms they might use, etc.

As this is a psychological movie, the use of sound can be an important tool in telling the story. The writer appears to have carefully considered and crafted the soundscape. Several points of action are driven forward by the protagonist hearing a sound — mostly real sounds, although there are the sounds of the screeching tires and the crash in the dream too.

Structure/Pace

█ follows a classic 3-Act structure:

Set-up: Mira (30s) and Andy (40s) are expecting their first child, having been married for almost a year. They know it's a boy. They couldn't be happier or more in love as they prepare to welcome him to their home. Mira is a goddess of fecundity.

New situation/Opportunity: Mira's water breaks when they go to stay with Andy's family to celebrate Mothering Sunday. Having planned a more natural birth, Mira is forced into having a C-section because the baby is at risk, but the health staff ignore her pleas for something against the pain. She can *feel* the cut. But the baby is born, fit and healthy.

Turning point: Mira goes to campus and sees Elaine, Andy's ex-wife. She was supposed to have gone to New York. From this point on, Mira, always insecure on the subject of Elaine, becomes suspicious that there is more to Andy's relationship with his ex than he is letting on.

Change of Plan: Mira takes up painting again. Her plan is to produce a painting for an exhibition. She becomes absorbed in her painting, to the point that she forgets about the baby for hours. It also leads her vulnerable to a stalker, which is what Elaine may be.

Progress to Point of No Return (midpoint): Mira decides to sue Lauren's husband, Dr. Thackery, for discrimination during the delivery of Elijah.

Complications and Higher Stakes: Andy challenges Mira about suing Dr. Thackery, but she strikes back with what Lauren has told her — that he lied to her about being separated from Elaine when they met. Furthermore, Elaine was pregnant at the time, but lost the child soon after due to stress.

Major Setback: Andy sneaks into the house to take Elijah away with him to a family retreat in the Uintas mountains, but Mira foils him. They struggle, and the Mira's stitches open up again, leaving her bleeding. Andy retreats.

Final Push: Andy and Elaine are plotting to get Mira committed — although Andy may be doing so innocently, thinking it is the best way to help Mira, while Elaine appears to be deliberately trying to get Mira out of the way. Meanwhile, Mira is in the bath dreaming. For the first time, she dreams about the accident in its entirety and learns that her mother did not commit

suicide: she swerved to hit a deer. This is the information Mira needs to heal.

Climax: Mira hits Andy over the head with the figurine Jacq gifted her. From Elaine's scream when she's exploring the house, we assume he is dead.

Aftermath – transformed existence: Mira stands in the lake — possibly the same one her mother crashed into, when she escaped, but her mother drowned — and baptizes her son. She has become a goddess again, only this time one who takes life.

The pace feels like a general unfolding rather than a race to an exciting conclusion, but that is appropriate to the subject matter.

Visuals

The recurring visual of the dream / memory of the accident Mira was involved in as a child, when her mother left the institution she was committed to and took her, is pivotal to the film. It regularly haunts Mira in her dreams and each time we see it, another detail is added.

Eventually, Mira remembers her mother swerved to avoid hitting a deer — something that has been neatly prefigured by the deer on the baby-grow and the one on the baby mobile that Andy gifted to her.

At the point of realization, though, her relationships have broken down, so that information is shared with the reader/audience alone, creating satisfaction that the mystery is solved, but sadness that nobody will ever know. Everyone will go on believing that Joy attempted to commit suicide with Mira in the car, and that Mira has been messed up because of it.

Another important visual is the figurine that Jacq gives to Mira. Jacq has told Mira of her travels in Africa and the way the new mothers rally round and support each other, creating a community. She wants to build such a connection to Mira. She wants their children to grow up thinking of each other as kin. The figurine symbolizes the goddess, the giver of life, but it also feels like a representation of Mira herself. Fitting, then, that she should use it as a murder weapon.

Mira is a painter and Andy an art history professor, so there are naturally images of famous paintings throughout the film. Mira reads a Van Gogh book and dwells on a sketch of a pregnant woman with the word sorrow written in the corner. Andy organizes a special anniversary dinner at the campus museum and tells her one day her paintings will hang among them. Then there is the painting that Mira is working on, which is revealed at the end to be a haunting self-portrait.

All in all, the use of visuals in this script is excellent.

Believability

Avoiding melodrama and writing with ambiguity and subtlety gives the film authenticity, as does the inclusion of discrimination against women of color in maternal health care as a subplot. Can we believe Elaine is stalking Mira and gaslighting her? Yes, we can. She wants Andy back. In her mind, she probably blames Mira for “stealing” him and resents her for having a baby, when she ended up losing the child she was carrying when Andy left her. She has the skills to gaslight Mira, and probably the cunning to manipulate Andy. She’s in the background, which is why it is easy to overlook or even dismiss Mira’s fears. But when Elaine shows up when Andy is trying to take Elijah and commit Mira with the key that has gone missing, that is proof that she has been involved somehow in prompting Mira’s delusions — if delusions they be.

Do we think Mira is crazy? Maybe a little, temporarily, due to the hormone imbalance that often happens after pregnancy. One in five mothers experience post-partum depression. Mira definitely has the baby blues, but from there to a diagnosis of schizophrenia, we need to hear it from someone we can trust. We can’t trust Mira’s therapist because of the connection to Elaine and Lauren. We can’t trust Mira’s dad, because he never understood his wife and doesn’t know the truth of Joy’s accident. We certainly can’t trust Andy because he lied to Mira that he was separated from his wife when they first got together, and who knows what else he has lied about?

That there are so many possibilities, so much to unpack and many theories that could be put forward is a sign of a credible story. One that throws up as many questions as answers and makes you keep thinking, talking, or even writing about it once it’s over.

Conclusion

██████████ is a compelling, clever, and competent screenplay that conveys a fascinating insight into post-partum depression, and contrasts it to another form of mental illness, schizophrenia. I came away alarmed at how easy it might be to confuse one illness with the other and misdiagnose it, as well as by the fragility of family happiness.

There is not a whole lot to change: the script requires a polish rather than a page-one re-write. Among the things the writer could consider doing are:

- Figuring out the plot hole of Andy teaching on Mothering Sunday
- Bringing out some of the psychological themes a little more strongly, e.g. survivor’s guilt
- Improving character descriptions
- Developing Lauren’s character more
- Elevating the dialogue by making the way the characters speak more distinctive from one another.

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