

THE WORKSHOP

– SISTERS OF MERCY –

We get a believable and authentic set of characters in the opening pages of this story—Linda and her irreverent, gallows sense of humor was my personal favorite, and her illness feels like a solid reason for this group to gather together in Hawaii, at this moment. However, it does feel like the first act is lacking the kind of hooks that draw a reader into the story though, and given the beats laid out in the synopsis, it seems like this might be a sign of a larger issue: a lack of complexity to the concept and script as a whole.

For the most part, you stay on the surface, and we spend a fair amount of time on logistics—transport from the airport, who is staying in whose room, etc. Fundamentally, not a lot is happening in terms of actual plot/conflict, and beyond Linda’s diagnosis, we don’t learn anything of substance about these women, or get the kinds of smaller, interesting details that make us lean into the story. Even when we get a direct question from Laura about Barb on p19, “So what’s going on with her?” Linda responds, “Not my place to say,” which is potentially a missed opportunity to start layering in that interesting information. If something compelling or complicated is going on with Barb (or any of these characters), we need to know. The synopsis mentions the characters’ differing political beliefs, which will apparently give rise to emotional and story conflict, and that’s probably something that we should start getting a sense of—we don’t need on-the-nose lines about cancel culture or Black Lives Matter, of course, but small hints that this family is fractured and why feel necessary.

What you may think about doing is skipping right to the action. If the story is about the friction and fallout that results from this group getting together, then you could just as easily open with everyone already at the house and then drop lines and context clues that this is a family vacation/gathering after a long time apart. The tension should also probably already be bubbling under the surface. Right now, it seems like everyone is still trying to stay polite and bite their tongues. If there’s been long-simmering issues, then realistically, they’re probably coming in loaded for bear. The shots probably should be fired sooner.

But looking over the synopsis, what strikes me is how little is actually happening—the first paragraph sets up the reasons for the trip, and that’s good. But the second paragraph is a character breakdown for Laura, the third a backstory about Linda’s husband, the fourth more backstory for Linda, and it’s only the last sentence that hints at the forward-moving action in the story. What the characters are actually going *to do* on screen. A true inciting incident, of sorts, and path for the characters to follow—one that helps them have this emotional reckoning—is missing at the moment. What’s meant to fill the rest of the pages? What will fill out the rest of their arc, for that matter, and help them transform their relationships (or decide to give up on each other, whatever the case may be)?

