

NO GOOD DEED

Screen Gems

Terrance Mulloy – November 2010

Colin's motive

Colin's motive should simply be revenge.

He gets out of prison, is hit with final proof that Alexis has left him and moved on, and after confronting her, a fight breaks out where he brutally murders her in cold blood. When removing evidence, he discovers an item that links Jeffrey to the affair (preferably a business card in her purse with the address of Jeffrey's residence), and then hatches a plan to take revenge on Jeffrey's family. After the murder of Alexis, Colin realizes he has crossed a threshold where there is no turning back. His only option now is to finish what he started and destroy the man responsible for this. So he's not going to Terry's house to frame her; he's going there to take away what is most precious to Jeffrey – his family. But when Colin arrives, he learns that Jeffrey is away for the night.

A contained thriller inside Terry's home

Keeping it contained would mean we don't have to have that scene where Colin kidnaps Terry and her kids and drives to Alexis' house in order to show her the body and frame her – we can keep the script in one location: Terry's house (although we will have scenes all throughout). The idea is to make this a 'contained chase movie' which becomes a deadly game of cat and mouse throughout the house, with Terry trying to evade Colin at all times. I would also want to play on the storm a little more – and heighten the suspense in the 2nd act by having the power in Terry's home blackout from the storm.

The twist

There can be a terrifying scene where Terry struggles with Colin and manages to knock him out – with Alexis' cell phone falling out from his jacket and skittering across the kitchen floor. Terry snatches it and makes for the basement with her kids, frantically barricading herself inside. Colin eventually comes to and methodically begins searching for them throughout the house, armed with a large hunting knife.

When Colin finally locates them and starts smashing through Terry's makeshift barricade, Alexis' cell phone suddenly rings - Terry answers it only to find out that it's Jeffrey on the other line. Once the realization of Colin's motive becomes apparent, she tells Jeffrey to call the police. When she hangs up, Jeffrey calls 911 but can't get through because the storm

has clogged all the lines – so he takes off from his father’s place, heading back home.

We can have the police show up to the house in a later scene, with Terry forced to answer the door and play everything down as a hoax or simple misunderstanding. Standing behind her, a mere few feet from the front door, is Colin with a knife to Ryan’s throat and a hand over her mouth.

One issue I did have with the initial ‘cell phone’ twist was that in a raging storm like this, there’s a good chance cell reception would be pretty crappy - especially in a rural area. One way we could go, is instead of a phone call from Jeffrey, we get a text message: *“Tried calling u earlier - no reception. Missing u so much baby! XXX Jeff.”*

Additional ideas/fixes

1. Colin is a great character – charming and cunning – but not menacing enough. The way we show the audience how dangerous he is, is via the murder scene with Alexis. That scene has to be more thrilling where Alexis will fight for her life till the very end, and in some instances nearly escape Colin. It will be a white knuckler sequence, which will also serve as a dramatic highlight – also displaying Colin’s willingness to kill whenever he deems necessary. He is our main villain, so the audience must fear him. As it reads now, he’s a jealous lover with a bad temper who did some time for manslaughter. I want to keep all the great characteristics he already possesses, but expand on his darker side – and show that he is a murderer – plain and simple.
2. I’d also like to show that Colin has had some type of military training in the past – perhaps he is an ex-marine/war vet - one that obviously has serious psychological issues. Again, we need to establish that this guy is deadly and has killed many times before. We could show more of Colin during the set-up and before the murder of Alexis, and meet him for the first time while exercising in his cell on the day of his release. Colin’s jail cell can be dotted with photos of Alexis in happier times. I’d like to also show him being discharged from prison, and lengthen the ‘stakeout’ scene where he trails Alexis to her lunch rendezvous with Jeffrey.
3. Colin crashing his car with deer landing in his lap. I think we should lose that all together. Instead of crashing his car, Colin could simply park/hide his car somewhere near the house during the storm, and tell Terry he has crashed it and he needs to use her phone for a tow truck. So the blood/cuts and scratches on Colin’s face and body are not from a car crash, but from his struggle with Alexis. This can also allow Meg to find his car in perfect condition in the 3rd act, confirming her suspicions. However, if you want to keep the ‘deer crash’ scene intact, perhaps he can just clip the deer – causing him to violently swerve and flip the car.

4. By page 65, it still reads like the ACT ONE set-up. I would consider moving some major plot points forward (such as the major twist) say to the mid-point of the script. This will set the story off into a tense, contained third act, which makes it more about survival and escape, as opposed to framing/playing some sort of 'whodunit' game. I do like the 'playing the game' aspect, and I can still touch on that, but I feel it should not be Colin's ultimate goal or motivation. Colin's ultimate goal is revenge. Terry's is trying to find out why Colin is attacking them, while battling to survive and ultimately escape with her children.
5. When Colin attempts to clean up his crime scene, he not only takes Alexis' cell phone with him, but perhaps her body as well - crammed into the trunk of his car. I would love to see Alexis' corpse show up somewhere in the third act – perhaps Meg discovers it in the trunk of his car, along with Jeffrey's blood-stained business card.
6. Once Colin's motive becomes apparent to Terry, her only way of surviving this is to kill Colin or escape. The lioness within her now knows, it's either kill or be killed.
7. Establish Jeffrey as more loving and close to his children in the 1st act (which makes his affair even more despicable). Overall, I'd like to see him have more of a role in the script. Not just disappearing in the 1st act, only to show up again at the end. Perhaps at the very climax, Jeffrey and Colin can share some screen time.
8. Thematically, the 'Lioness' angle is great and should remain in the script. Terry is a former shadow of herself, a bored wife stuck in a loveless marriage. In order to survive this ordeal, she has to find an inner (and outer) strength she always knew she had, but thought she may have lost.

Minor fixes

9. Overall pacing. Get to the meat a little quicker. Some scenes can end earlier.
10. Lose some redundant dialogue that does not serve the story or move the plot forward. Some dialogue also reads too 'straight', and as a result, lacks subtext.
11. On page 95 the car alarm stops wailing, yet on page 96 it is still wailing.
12. Background lightning strikes and thunder booms, doors slamming, branches breaking windows, etc. I think these are great tools to heighten suspense, but as it reads now, some of them felt unnecessary.

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FORENSIC RESULTS – APPLICABLE TO COLIN’S FRAMING/INITIAL CRIME SCENE

THE TWIST 2.0

I’ve reread the script a few times and spent the last few days chewing over this - and I really don’t think there’s any way you can make the first and second acts not feel like they’ve been written to serve the major twist – at least not without dismantling the entire set-up (which I believe is not what you’re looking at doing). Seeing as we don’t want to fix what ain’t broke, one potential way to make the “twist” work a little better and heighten the tension, is by intercutting the scene where Meg finds Colin’s crashed car (and puts the story together), and when Terry gets the phone call from her husband on Alexis’ cell.

Tease out the twist by cutting back between both scenes.

As it reads now, Terry gets the phone call from her husband, then a few scenes later, Meg discovers Colin’s car – which I feel dilutes the overall impact. So by cutting back and forth between these two crucial scenes in real time, it will give our audience the big reveal from two separate sources – at the same time – which will also enhance the overall twist. It may not make it feel less like a set-up, but it would make the set-up more impactful and intense for our audience.

MEG’S DISCOVERY

When Meg discovers Colin’s wrecked car, I don’t think it’s very clear as to how she manages to locate Alexis’ home – so perhaps by showing Colin’s home address on his registration papers would make this clearer. I also think the ‘love note’ should be separate to Jeffrey’s address – instead of being scrawled on the back of a Jiffy Lube receipt. As I proposed in the previous document, maybe adding a business card that Colin took from Alexis’ purse (after murdering her) could also work.

FRAMING TERRY / THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

Based on our previous conversation, your main concern was making the framing seem more ‘real’ and less CSI-ish, so I managed to track down a copy of ‘The Encyclopedia of Forensic Sciences’. As much as I like the twist, and the framing reversal in NGD, I do agree with your concerns. The problem with a lot of these TV shows is that although considered somewhat procedural, and for the sake of their one hour time-slots, they always manage to wrap up rather neatly at the end – where the lead characters are able to locate that one magical piece of incriminating evidence that links the entire scene back to the bad guys. You only need to watch a reality show like The First 48, to see that most of the time investigators rarely luck out on an ‘open and shut’ case where all the evidence just neatly falls into place. To some degree, NGD has the exact same problem – although we do have some time to broaden the strokes a little – and expand on Colin’s plan to frame Terry.

For example -

On page 90 when Colin presents Alexis’ battered corpse to Terry and asks her, “what do you see?” I suggest that instead of Terry almost immediately stating it was death by “*a single blow*”, we give

Terry a little more time to examine the scene, thus showing us how she utilizes her old courtroom skills. For instance – Terry notes (apart from the massive trauma to the side of Alexis’ head) contusions on her flesh that indicate violent force from a blunt object. There are also defensive wounds and bruises on her hands and arms, indicating she was attempting to defend her head and neck from the blows. We also learn that Terry has some familiarity with ‘fluid dynamics’, which is the analysis of blood splattering and blood rings. Based on the blood splats arced across the bedroom wall, Terry informs Colin that blood released from a wound by violent impact – in this case, a blunt object – tends to fly in smaller drops. That’s because the force of the object is much stronger than gravity and easily overcomes the surface tension, flinging tiny drops away at high speeds. This stuff all comes effortlessly to Terry, and is delivered to our audience in layman’s terms.

On page 91 when Terry examines underneath Alexis’ fingernails she spots the opposite of what is written there now – instead, she sees a wealth of DNA and skin cell evidence to suggest that a good bulk of Colin’s flesh wounds are not from his car accident, but from a violent struggle with Alexis. Terry tells us that when two people come into violent physical contact, there is always evidence of that contact left behind – whether that’s hair or fiber debris. The problem is preserving this evidence – but seeing as this crime scene is still relatively fresh and rather sloppy, investigators have a lot to work with.

Not only that, Colin would have left dirty boot prints and possibly fiber samples from his cloths during the struggle. Terry is certain that based on what she has examined; the struggle took place throughout the living room and the master bedroom, meaning that unless Colin somehow manages to rip up all the carpet in the house, he’s had plenty of opportunities to leave incriminating evidence that would link him to the murder of Alexis. *“The way we catch you is by finding the evidence you can’t see with the naked eye. The evidence you don’t even know is evidence.”*

Of course, Colin does not buy all of this – and when Terry inadvertently kills her best friend, Meg – Colin decides to link Terry to both Alexis’ murder and Meg’s. Terry’s prints are on the kitchen knife which she plunged into Meg’s chest, and Colin knows that if he can link Terry to Alexis’ murder it could buy him enough time to confuse investigators and allow him to disappear. Instead of having Colin scrape Alexis’ nails down Terry’s cheek, another, perhaps more plausible way, would be to have Colin dip her fingers into a pool of blood, or a wound, then smear her prints on the wall – possibly Meg’s wounds as well because her blood would still be fresh.

“You discovered Alexis was fucking your husband and decided to drive over her and kill her. Your best friend Meg followed you in order to stop you from doing anything stupid, and when she arrived and got in your way, you killed her too. When police ask me what I’m doing here, I can prove I live here – and came home to catch you in the act.”

But it’s a futile plan. Terry reminds Colin that investigators are not that stupid and quick to judge. And when Terry informs Colin that she knows about Jeffrey’s affair – and his motive – she can prove her innocence via the one single piece of evidence that confirms her story – **the phone call from her husband to Alexis’ cell. They have Jeffrey’s voice on record – calling Alexis’ cell phone.**

Terry warns Colin that no matter what Colin decides to do, he’s screwed either way. The only option is to give himself up. With Colin now knowing there’s no turning back, this leads us into our final climax where Colin and Terry face off in a gut-wrenching battle to the end.