

Portal

Short film script · Portal Full Script R7 Numbered.pdf · 2026-10-05

Your editor's letter

Script: Consider · **Writer: Consider**

Consider: a clear one-idea short with a real ending and a strong structural payoff, held back because the two beats that should drive it, his first sight of his living daughter and his decision to kill his double, are not yet on the page.

You gave no genre, so I have read this as a speculative grief drama with a thriller engine: one parallel-world device, everything else naturalistic, played straight. At 12 pages it is the right length and the right shape. It holds one idea, starts late and lands. Within two pages we have a dead child, a birthday ritual and a man who "stares at the ignition button", and a voice through the vent interrupts him. The best structural idea is that the suicide rig becomes the murder weapon on p. 9, and the climax on p. 11 undoes that decision when he drops the knife. That is a real ending. It is driven by his daughter's fear, not by outside rescue, and a programmer will remember it.

Your instincts are visual, and they are good. The empty hamper on p. 3 against the overflowing one on p. 4 tells us shrine versus life in two lines. The sympathy cards, the swaying hanger and the blood stain that gives David-A away all do the same work through objects. Angie-B is the surprise. She starts as a voice and a back, then carries the second half: she probes the wall, crosses over, learns from Sarah's card that she is dead here, and sees through the impostor. It is also cheap to make: one house, two principal actors and a portal you can build from a closet of hanging clothes.

The main problem is that the film cuts around the two moments it exists for. He never sees his daughter's face. In Kitchen-B the line is "Her back is to David-A." When they finally meet in Kitchen-A, his first words are "It's nothing." His decision to murder his double is one line, "Then an idea dawns on him." It comes straight after a sincere 911 call, with nothing onscreen to tip him. As a result, his grip on her arm on the stairs has no visible cause, and the ending reverses a choice we never watched him make. That matters more than usual, because the grieving father who crosses worlds for his child is a premise genre programmers have seen. What would make this one stand out is exactly what the draft underwrites. As it stands it reads as competent but familiar.

Behind that sit three further problems. In a script built on doubles, the action lines name the dead girl as the living one through the climax: "Angie-A slowly approaches him." On screen, the A/B

slugline suffixes are invisible, so the cross-cut on pp. 7 to 9 has no visual code. David-B meets his own face and reacts as if to a burglar. The coda is a clean image, but it tidies rather than follows: the portal closes for no reason, and the attempted murder leaves no mark on David-A.

Consider, then. The idea and the ending are there, and every problem I have named can be fixed inside the current length. You have about a page and a half to spend from the graveyard, the connective Kitchen-A beat on p. 2 and Angie-B's stair slip. Spend it on the reunion and the decision. On this evidence you have a director's eye and the structural sense to make a short pay off. What is missing is the discipline on the page and the nerve to hold on the emotional beats rather than hurry past them.

What matters most

1. Stage the reunion

p. 4 · p. 10

| *Her back is to David-A.*

The premise promises a father looking at the living face of the daughter he buried that morning, and the script never shows it. In Kitchen-B he sees her back, then the chase starts. In Kitchen-A, his first words are an order to leave. Without that beat, everything he does afterwards lacks a visible motive.

Direction: Write one held, probably wordless moment where he sees her face and the plot stops for it, either in Kitchen-B before David-B spots him or in Kitchen-A when she lowers the knife. It is the scene the short is selling.

2. Make the decision to kill visible

p. 6 · p. 7

| *Then an idea dawns on him.*

The film's moral hinge comes straight after a genuine attempt to get help, and it is asserted in a single line. The looping hold message reads as a convenience, and the clothes swap may play as confusion rather than intent. The climax reverses this decision, so it needs to land as a choice.

Direction: Give him an onscreen trigger in Angie-A's room (the portrait, the cards, her voice) while the phone is in his hand, and have him end the call himself. The audience should realise what he is about to do one step before he acts.

3. Fix the A/B labels and give each world a visual code

p. 9 · p. 10 · p. 11

| *Angie-A slowly approaches him.*

The dead girl's name is used for the living one at least four times during the climax, which makes the decisive scene hard to follow just when it must be clearest. On screen, the kitchens and hallways of the two worlds are identical, and after the sweater swap nothing tells the audience which world or which David they are watching.

Direction: Do a dedicated pass on every suffix, or switch to distinct character names in the action lines.

Give each world one lighting and palette signature, state it once on first entry, and make every cross-cut land on it.

4. Let the coda follow from his choice

p. 11

| *The wall is solid. The portal is gone.*

The portal closes for no stated reason. His change is shown only through new clothes, and the attempted murder and the raised knife leave no trace on him. The result is resolution without consequence.

Direction: Tie the portal's closing to the moment he lets her go, for example as they cross back or as he releases her arm. Add one small action in the coda that shows he carries what he nearly did.

5. Let David-B see himself

p. 5 · p. 11

| *Stay Here.*

A man finds his own face in his kitchen and responds with a shout, a knife and an order to his daughter, as if this were a break-in. That flattens the uncanniest moment the premise offers. At the end he leaves without a look at the man who tried to kill him.

Direction: Give both men a beat of shock before the chase, and give the two Davids one exchanged look on the stairs at the end.

What's working

Starts late and pays off its own opening

p. 2 · p. 9 · p. 11

| *He drops the knife onto the stairs and lets go of her arm.*

Grave, hose and ignition arrive inside two pages. The suicide rig then returns as the means of killing the double, and the dropped knife reverses that choice. The beginning and end echo each other, and that is what makes a short memorable.

Storytelling through objects

p. 3 · p. 4 · p. 10

| *The hamper overflows with dirty clothes.*

The script's best information arrives through images rather than lines: the two hampers, the sympathy cards, the swaying hanger, and the blood stain that exposes the impostor. These shots are cheap to get and are the calling-card skill a short is meant to show.

Angie-B carries the second half

p. 8 · p. 9 · p. 10

| *Wish you were not dead.*

Handing her the point of view keeps the film from being only a man's grief story. She investigates, crosses over and learns she is dead here from Sarah's card, with no exposition. She is also the one who reads the blood. A strong young actor would want this part.

Built for a short-film budget

p. 3 · p. 8

One house redressed for two worlds, one actor in a dual role, a teenager and a cemetery. The portal is a closet of hanging clothes that can be faked in camera. Nothing in the concept needs CG.

The revision plan

1. Write the reunion beat: one held look at Angie-B's face, in Kitchen-B or Kitchen-A.
2. Rebuild the p. 6 to 7 hinge so the decision to kill has an onscreen trigger and he ends the 911 call himself.
3. Pay for both beats by compressing the graveyard to the cupcake, candle and kiss, showing the hose rig in place rather than step by step, folding the p. 2 Kitchen-A beat into the move upstairs, and cutting the stair slip.
4. Give David-B a moment of recognition at first sight and an exchanged look at the end. Decide whether Angie-B is fooled or suspicious when she hands over the knife, and play that choice.
5. Tie the portal's closing to his letting go, and add one consequence-bearing detail to the coda.
6. Do a full A/B label pass, define each world's visual signature, then proof and reformat in screenwriting software and settle the title.
7. Have someone cold-read the climax and tell you who is who on pp. 9 to 11 before it goes to any producer or festival.

Ratings

Concept

Good

One clear idea a short can hold, though the parallel-world grieving father is familiar territory.

Structure

Good

Starts late, turns twice and lands, but both turns are underwritten.

Character

Fair

Angie-B is vivid; David-A's two key changes happen offscreen, and David-B is only a function.

Dialogue

Good

Spare and mostly right; the overheard phone call is excellent, while David-A's few lines are purely functional.

Ending

Good

The dropped knife is earned and memorable; the coda tidies rather than follows.

Producibility

Good

One house, two principals and a practical portal; the dual role, the minor, the stunts and the running car need planning.

The rig-turned-weapon hook is strong, but until the reunion and the decision land it reads as competent and familiar.

Logline & synopsis

After leaving a birthday cupcake on his eleven-year-old daughter's grave, a father about to gas himself in his garage hears her voice, now a teenager's, coming through her closet wall. He crosses into a world where she lived, and must choose between stealing his double's life and letting her go.

The Portal (submitted as "Portal") is a 12-page, near-wordless genre short set almost entirely in one family house, shown in two versions, with a cemetery opening. It follows a suicidal father who finds a way into a world where his daughter survived, meets the man who still has her, and turns the means of his own death against his double. The second half shifts much of its point of view to the living daughter, who crosses back the other way. Most of the story is told through objects and action: a cupcake, sympathy cards, a swapped sweater, a blood stain, a frying pan. There is very little dialogue.

Synopsis

At dawn, David-A leaves flowers and a candle-lit cupcake on the grave of his daughter Angie (2008-2019). At home he runs a hose from his car's tailpipe into the back window and sits at the ignition. Before he starts the engine, he hears a teenage girl's voice through the garage vent. He follows it upstairs to Angie's bedroom, kept exactly as it was and crowded with sympathy cards, and his fingers pass through the back wall of her closet.

He emerges in a messy teenager's version of the room. Downstairs, unseen, he watches 16-year-old Angie-B, who walks with a cane, persuade his exact double, David-B, to let her skip dinner and go out with friends. David-B spots him, grabs a chef's knife and chases him back through the closet. David-A tackles him, and David-B strikes his head on the dresser and lies motionless. A 911 call gets only a recorded message. David-A swaps his hoodie for David-B's sweater and drags the body down to the garage.

Angie-B, armed with a frying pan, follows through the closet. In her old room she reads the cards, including one from her friend Sarah, and learns she is dead in this world. She trades the pan for the knife. In the garage, David-A seats David-B in the car and starts the engine. In the kitchen Angie-B confronts David-A, sees the sweater, relaxes and hands him the knife, then notices blood on his collar.

David-B staggers in from the garage. As David-A drags her up the stairs, Angie-B sees that David-B's head wound matches the stain on David-A's collar. She calls out "Dad!" and resists. David-A draws back the knife, sees her fear and drops it. David-B and Angie-B go back upstairs together.

Later, in new clothes, David-A clears out the closet. The wall is solid and the cards are gone. He boxes the frying pan with the dresses and turns off the light.

Category and audience. The author gave no genre. I read it as a speculative grief drama with a thriller engine: a parallel-world double story played straight, with no comedy and a sombre, suspenseful tone.

It is for adult audiences. It contains a staged suicide, an attempted murder and a knife raised against a teenager, so it is not family programming. It sits in the grounded, low-effects end of genre: one world-bending device, everything else naturalistic.

Length. 12 pages, so roughly 12 minutes on screen. That is the upper edge of the 5-to-12-minute festival sweet spot and comfortably under 15. Its 20 scene headings average about 0.6 pages each, so much of the film is made of short, cross-cut scenes.

Comparable titles. *Coherence* (2013, dir. James Ward Byrkit): A low-budget feature in which characters meet alternate versions of themselves in a near-identical house, and one tries to take a double's place. It shows the same contained, single-location approach to parallel selves. · *Fringe* (TV series, 2008-2013): Not a film, but its central backstory is the closest familiar reference: a grieving father crosses into a parallel world and takes his alternate self's living child. Programmers who know genre will think of it. · *Another Earth* (2011, dir. Mike Cahill): An indie that uses a duplicate world as a lens on grief and guilt rather than as spectacle. That register is close to what this script is reaching for.

Story & structure

This is built around one idea: a father who has lost his daughter is offered her back, and the price is his own double's life. Nothing in the script is a subplot. The portal, the double, the knife, the clothes swap and the coda all serve that one question, and the answer, that he lets her go, is a real ending rather than a fade-out. Structurally this is the right shape for a short, and at 12 pages it sits inside the length programmers book most easily.

It starts late and escalates fast. Grave, garage, hose and ignition button arrive inside two pages, and the voice through the vent interrupts the act at the last second. The midpoint turn (p. 6-7, his decision to kill David-B and take his place) and the climax (p. 10-11, he raises the knife at her and drops it) are the right two turns, and the second reverses the first. Turning the suicide rig into the murder weapon is the script's best structural idea, because it makes the first two pages pay off at the climax.

The skeleton is sound, but the two load-bearing beats are missing their weight. The film never stages the moment the premise promises, a father seeing his dead daughter's face, so the desperation that drives the second half has no visible cause. The turn into murder happens in one line of action, straight after a genuine attempt to save David-B, with nothing onscreen to hinge it. Fix those two beats and the ending, which is already well placed, will feel earned rather than merely correct.

The coda is quiet and clean, but it tidies up rather than follows from what came before. The portal closes for no stated reason, and the attempted murder leaves no trace. There is also about a page and a half of connective and descriptive material that could go, which would leave room to build the missing beats without lengthening the film.

One idea, started late, escalated fast

p. 1 · p. 2

■ *He stares at the ignition button.*

Within two minutes of screen time we have a dead child, a birthday ritual and a man about to kill

himself. Then a sound gives him a reason not to. The inciting incident lands exactly where a short needs it, and every later beat grows from that one premise. Nothing here feels like a compressed feature.

The reunion the premise promises never happens

p. 4 · p. 9 · p. 10

| *Her back is to David-A.*

The engine of the story is a father seeing his dead daughter alive, and the script cuts around that moment every time. In Kitchen-B he sees her back, then David-B spots him and the chase starts. In Kitchen-A, when she lowers the knife, his first words are 'It's nothing.' and an order to leave. Without one held beat of him taking her in, the decision on p. 7 and the grip on the stairs on p. 10 have no visible emotional cause. The audience has to infer the stakes instead of feeling them.

Direction: Build one deliberate beat where he sees her face and the plot stops for it, either in world B before he is spotted or in Kitchen-A when she lowers the knife. It is the scene the whole short is selling. Pay for it from the cuts listed below.

The midpoint turn happens in one line

p. 6 · p. 7

| *Then an idea dawns on him.*

This is the film's moral hinge: a man decides to murder himself and steal his own life. As written it follows directly from a sincere 911 call, kept from connecting by a repeated hold message ('We are experiencing a high volume'), with no trigger between rescuer and killer. The busy line also reads as a convenience to keep help away. Structurally, the turn is asserted rather than caused, which weakens the climax that depends on it.

Direction: Give the decision an onscreen trigger in the room he is standing in: the portrait, the cards, the closet, her voice from the other side. Consider having him start the 911 call and end it himself, so that the call becomes the hinge of his choice rather than a stalled device.

The climax reverses the turn, and the rig pays off

p. 9 · p. 11

| *He drops the knife onto the stairs and lets go of her arm.*

The ending is structurally right. On p. 9 the hose meant for his suicide becomes the means of killing his double, and on p. 11 he gives up the life he tried to steal. The choice lands because it undoes the p. 7 decision, and it is driven by her fear, not by outside rescue. This is the beat a programmer will remember. Protect it through revision.

The coda tidies rather than follows

p. 10 · p. 11

| *The wall is solid. The portal is gone.*

The final room is a strong closing image, but nothing causes it. The portal closes for no stated reason and is not linked to his choice. His change into new clothes is presented as done rather than arrived at.

The attempted murder and the near-stabbing leave no mark on him, and the car still running in Garage-A after David-B staggers out is never addressed. The audience gets resolution without consequence, which makes the ending feel neat rather than paid for.

Direction: Tie the portal's closing, or the start of his change, directly to the act of letting her go: have it close as they cross, or as he lets go of her arm. Let one detail in the coda acknowledge what he nearly did.

About a page and a half can go

p. 1 · p. 2 · p. 7

| *She takes each step carefully.*

Several stretches spend minutes the film needs for the missing beats. The graveyard runs close to a full page to establish one idea. Kitchen-A on p. 2 is connective and does little the garage and the bedroom can't. Angie-B's stair slip on p. 7 slows the cross-cut and pays off only loosely when she sits on the stairs on p. 10. These are the places attention drifts.

Direction: Compress the graveyard to the cupcake, the candle and the kiss. Fold the Kitchen-A beat into the garage-to-bedroom move. Cut the stair slip unless it sets up something specific later. Spend the recovered time on the reunion beat and the p. 7 hinge.

The shared birthday is the hidden spine, and it stays hidden

p. 1 · p. 2 · p. 4

| *really set on taking me*

The cupcake at the grave and David-B's insistence on dinner imply both fathers are marking the same day, which is the thread that ties the two worlds together. It is never made legible. Angie-B brushing off her father is set up and then dropped, so her cry of 'Dad!' on p. 10 lacks the sting it could carry.

Direction: Add one clear signal that it is the same day in both worlds, and let the dinner she was dodging pay off, even silently, as she chooses her father on the stairs.

Character

You establish David-A fast and almost entirely through behaviour. The cupcake, the candle and the kiss on the headstone tell us a child is dead and that her father has not survived it. The hose and duct tape on p. 1 to p. 2 tell us the rest. By the time he "stares at the ignition button" we know what he has lost and what he intends to do, in under two pages and without a line of dialogue. That economy is the script's best character work, and it sets a standard the rest of the draft doesn't keep.

What David-A wants changes twice: first to die, then to have his daughter back at any price, and finally to let her go. On paper that is a complete arc for a short. In practice the two hinges are missing. The first is the moment he sees his daughter alive. The second is the moment he decides to kill himself to take her. Both happen offscreen or in a single line of action, so he reads as a man carrying out a sequence of plot steps rather than a man being changed by them. The ending's act of grace, dropping the knife, works because it is played as a visible moment. The two turns that set it up need the same

treatment.

Angie-B is the surprise. She starts as a voice and a back, and becomes the most active and most readable character in the second half: she investigates, crosses over, learns she is dead here, arms herself, and is the one who sees through the impostor. Protect that. Her logic blurs at exactly one point, the relief on p. 9, and the recurring "Angie-A" mislabels on pp. 9 to 11 blur her further on the page just when she matters most.

David-B is the weak link. He exists to be displaced, and the script never lets him register that the intruder has his face. The cast is otherwise lean and right for a short: one actor doubling, one teen, a dead child present only as objects, and an offscreen friend, Sarah, who earns her place by bridging the two worlds.

The father never sees his daughter's face

p. 4 · p. 9

Her back is to David-A.

The premise promises a man looking at the living version of the child he buried that morning, and the script withholds it. In Hallway-B he sees "the back of" Angie-B. In Kitchen-B he watches David-B. When they finally meet in Kitchen-A, his first words are "It's nothing." and an order to leave. Without one held beat of recognition, his desperation on the stairs has no visible root. The audience has to take it on trust that he wants her badly enough to kill for her.

Direction: Give David-A one unhurried moment with Angie-B's face before the plot moves again: in Kitchen-B, as she turns on her stool, or in Kitchen-A, when she lowers the knife. Keep it wordless if you like. The actor's face should carry what the graveyard set up.

The decision to murder is one line of action

p. 6 · p. 7

Then an idea dawns on him.

This is the moral turn of the film: a man who was about to kill himself decides to kill himself in another body and take his life. It happens straight after he has genuinely tried to call 911, and the script covers it in one line. We don't see what tips him or understand the plan as it forms, so the clothes swap may play as confusion rather than intent. It also costs the ending: his choice to let her go on p. 11 is a reversal of a decision we never watched him make.

Direction: Make the hinge visible. Let something in Angie-A's room (the portrait, the cards, her voice still in his ears) catch his eye while the phone is in his hand, and let him end the call himself. The audience should be one step ahead of him, realising what he is about to do.

David-B meets himself and sees a burglar

p. 5 · p. 11

Stay Here.

A man finds his own face in the shadows of his kitchen and reacts with "Hey!", a knife and an order to his daughter, as if this were a break-in. That flattens the uncanniest moment the premise offers and strains belief. It also leaves David-B a function rather than a person. He never registers the other man

as himself, and at the end he takes the knife and his daughter without a single look at the man who tried to kill him. Calling him "an identical twin" on p. 4 points the reader the wrong way too.

Direction: Give both men a beat of shock at the first sighting before the chase. Then give the two Davids one exchanged look on the stairs at the end. Whatever passes between them (pity, fear, recognition) is the closest this film gets to David-A facing himself.

Angie-B carries the second half

p. 8 · p. 9 · p. 10

┃ *Angie-B extends her cane in front of her, like a sword*

Handing the point of view to Angie-B is the right call. She is careful, physically vulnerable and brave all at once: cane and frying pan raised, probing the wall, then stepping through. She learns she is dead in this world from Sarah's card ("Wish you were not dead."), with no exposition. She is also the one who reads the blood on the sweater. A teen actor would want this part, and it stops the film being only a man's grief story.

Her relief on p. 9 needs a reason

p. 9

┃ *Relief washes over her and she hands David-A the knife.*

Moments earlier she has learned she is dead here and found a knife on the floor, yet one look at the sweater disarms her completely. It gets the knife into his hand, but it plays as convenience. It also wastes the scene's most interesting question: does she half-know this is not her father?

Direction: Decide what she believes and play it. If she is fooled, show the sweater doing the work: she reaches for it, or he uses her name the way her dad would. If she suspects, let her hand over the knife warily and watch him, so the blood stain confirms a doubt rather than springing from nowhere.

The change in the coda is a costume, not a character beat

p. 11

┃ *wearing new clothes*

The coda tells us David-A has moved on, using clothes "somewhere between" the two Davids, the missing cards and the boxed dresses. The image is clean, but the change is asserted through wardrobe. He also never reckons with the fact that he nearly killed a man and nearly struck his daughter. That act is the darkest thing he does, and it is the one thing he is never seen to carry.

Direction: Give the coda one action that shows his inner state rather than the room's: a pause at the frying pan that costs him something, or a moment in which his eye falls on the hose, or the dresser edge. Keep it small. The film's quietness is right; it just needs to acknowledge what he did.

Angie-B's brush-off of her father is set up and dropped

p. 2 · p. 4 · p. 10

┃ *Can we do lunch instead of dinner?*

Her bargaining over dinner is a lovely, ordinary teenage beat. Played against a man who would give

anything for that dinner, it has a sting. But her side of it never develops. Her cry of "Dad!" on p. 10 gestures at what she has learned about a father's love, and the script doesn't follow through.

Direction: One small return would complete her: a glance between her and David-B as they climb the stairs, or a line or gesture about tonight. It would let her end the film changed too, without adding a scene.

A lean cast where everyone earns a place

p. 3 · p. 9

| *I miss you so much.*

This is the right size of cast for a short. Angie-A exists only as a headstone, a room and a portrait, so her absence is felt without a second child actor. Sarah never appears, yet she ties the worlds together: she is the friend on the phone in world B and the child who wrote the card in world A. No one is surplus.

Craft & tone

The script's craft strength is visual. Its best storytelling happens without a word spoken: the empty hamper against the overflowing one, the sympathy cards, the swaying hanger, the blood stain that gives David-A away. Dialogue is spare and mostly right for a short. Angie-B's half of a phone call carries the inciting incident and a whole teenage attitude in a few lines. When this script trusts an object or a sound, it works.

The page is less disciplined than the instincts behind it. Action lines narrate every micro-step, chain actions with 'then', describe furniture for the camera, and slip into inferences no lens can show. That costs the reader time on the pages that should be fastest, especially the opening.

The serious presentation problem is the A/B naming. The whole film depends on the audience and reader knowing which father and which daughter they are watching. Through the climax the script calls the living girl by the dead girl's name at least four times. It also never says how the camera tells world A from world B, because the slugline suffixes are invisible on screen.

Tone is mostly controlled: a quiet grief opening, a cold turn to suicide, then a thriller in a domestic space. A few beats, like the looping 911 hold message, the escalating slaps and the raised frying pan, could tip into unintended comedy unless you decide that dark absurdity is part of the register and play it on purpose.

A/B name errors blur the climax

p. 9 · p. 10 · p. 11

| *Angie-A returns her attention to David-A.*

Angie-A is dead. Yet the action lines name her as the girl on screen in 'Angie-A ambles down the stairs.', 'Angie-A slowly approaches him.', the line above, and 'Angie-A wimpers'. In a script whose whole premise is doubles, this is not a typo a reader skims past. It makes the decisive scene hard to follow at exactly the moment it must be clearest. A producer reading for whether this can be shot will

stop trusting the page here.

Direction: Do a dedicated pass on every A/B suffix before anyone else reads it. Consider whether the suffix system is the best tool at all. Distinct names in action lines ('DAVID' and 'DAVID-B', or 'DAVID' and 'THE OTHER DAVID') are harder to get wrong and easier to read.

Wordless storytelling is the script's best craft

p. 3 · p. 4 · p. 5 · p. 10

┃ *The hamper overflows with dirty clothes.*

Set against 'The hamper is empty.' on p. 3, one prop tells us a shrine against a lived-in life. The same instinct shows in the sympathy cards, in the hanger that 'sways lazily back and forth' to draw David-B across, and in the reveal 'The blood stain on his sweater matches the wound on David-B.' These are cheap to shoot, and they hand the audience information through images rather than lines. That is the calling-card skill a short is meant to show.

The camera can't see the slugline suffixes

p. 7 · p. 8 · p. 9

┃ *almost neon*

The cross-cut on pp. 7-9 jumps between Hallway-A, Hallway-B, Kitchen-A and Kitchen-B. On screen these are the same rooms. Apart from the bedrooms, the action lines never tell us how the audience distinguishes the two worlds. The 'almost neon' bouquet on p. 1 hints at a visual idea and then drops it. After the clothing swap, the viewer also loses the sweater as a tell for the Davids.

Direction: Decide on one consistent visual signature per world (light quality, palette, a recurring piece of dressing) and state it once, briefly, on first entry to each. Then make sure every cross-cut lands on that signature in its first shot.

Action lines narrate every step

p. 1 · p. 4

┃ *David-A then places a supporting hand on the gravestone*

The graveyard spends close to a page on lid, sprinkle, candle, lighter, flame, breath, kiss and sit, linked by 'then' and 'finally'. In Kitchen-B the island, the stovetop and the stools are described for the set designer rather than the story. The images are good, but the step-by-step delivery slows the opening. The opening is where a programmer decides whether to keep reading.

Direction: Write the beats that carry meaning (the cupcake, the candle, the kiss) and let the rest go. Describe space only where it matters to action, such as the stools Angie-B sits on with her back to the stairs. In a later pass, strip chained 'then' constructions throughout.

Inferences no camera can show

p. 8 · p. 10 · p. 11

┃ *It must have been a significant injury.*

Several action lines tell the reader conclusions instead of images. Besides the line above, there is 'It is

her bedroom from four years ago.' on p. 8, which also miscounts the gap between 11 and 16. On p. 11, David-A is described as shocked by 'what it looks like he is about to do'. These lines do the actor's and audience's work for them, and they flag the writer's uncertainty that the image is enough. Mostly, it is.

Direction: Replace each with something filmable: the size of the stain, her hand coming away red, what she touches in the room that tells her where she is, what his eyes land on before he drops the knife.

Dialogue economy is right, and the phone call is a gem

p. 2 · p. 4 · p. 5

I'm trying to get out of it, okay?

Angie-B's one-sided call, heard through a vent, reads like a real 16-year-old ('Duh!', 'I'm coming! Just give me a minute, okay?'). It sets up her taking a living father for granted while a dead girl's father listens. Elsewhere the script mostly lets silence work, which suits a short. The weak spot is David-A. His few lines are functional ('Hey.', 'Shit.', 'It's nothing.'), and nothing he says to his daughter carries weight. That is the one place where a single line could matter more than any image.

Tone has a few tipping points

p. 6 · p. 7 · p. 8

We are experiencing a high volume

The register runs from quiet grief to cold suicide to domestic thriller, and mostly holds. Three beats risk an unwanted laugh: the hold message played twice, David-A slapping his unconscious double 'with increasing intensity', and Angie-B advancing with her cane held 'like a sword' and a frying pan raised overhead. None is wrong in itself, but together they edge toward black comedy without the script choosing to go there.

Direction: Decide whether a thread of dark absurdity belongs in the film. If it does, commit to it lightly and consistently. If not, cut the repeated recording and play the pan and cane as fear rather than comic bravado.

Format and line-level housekeeping

p. 1 · p. 2 · p. 3 · p. 4

carefully peels off the lid

Patterns to fix later, not now. Typos and homophones recur: 'peals', 'the shuts the vehicle off', 'Angie'A's', 'Its blood', 'hangars'. Off-screen lines are inconsistently tagged; 'Duh!' and 'I know.' lack (O.S.). The p. 3 slugline is missing its period after INT. David-B is described twice in three lines, first as 'an identical twin', which suggests the wrong relationship. If the numbering on every paragraph and dialogue line is in your actual file, remove it; spec scripts don't number elements. Similes are uneven: 'Like fingers holding onto night' earns its place, while 'Like a deer caught in headlights' is stock.

Direction: Leave these until the structural revision is done, then do one clean proofing and formatting pass in screenwriting software before the script goes to anyone.

Production

This is a cheap film to make. It needs one two-storey house, used for both worlds, and one cemetery. There are two speaking performers on screen: one adult playing both Davids and one teenager. There are no night exteriors, no period elements, no crowds, no animals and no digital effects that can't be done practically or in a few frames of compositing. Angie-A exists only as a photograph and a headstone, and Sarah only as a card. The 911 operator is a recording. A realistic schedule is half a day at dawn in the cemetery and two to three days in the house. At 12 pages the running time should land somewhere around 10 to 13 minutes, depending on how long you hold the graveyard and the cross-cut. That is inside the festival sweet spot.

The money and the risk sit in four places. The first is the dual role: every shot where both Davids share the frame costs time, a body double or split-screen. The second is a minor on set holding a knife and being threatened with one, in a film about suicide. The third is the stunts: the tackle, the head strike on the dresser, and a man dragged through the house and into a car. The fourth is the car in a closed garage. None of these are unusual for a short, but each needs a plan before you lock the script, and several get much easier with small changes on the page.

The location is specific, and finding it will shape the shoot. The house needs an internal door from the kitchen to an attached garage, a staircase visible from the kitchen, a bedroom with a closet you can build into, and a kitchen island with a built-in range. Because world A and world B are the same rooms, the cross-cut on pp. 7-9 makes you redress kitchen, hallway and bedroom back and forth. Schedule by dressing, not by script order. Let light and grade carry as much of the A/B difference as possible, because that is far cheaper than set dressing.

One house, two actors, a practical portal

p. 3 · p. 8

they pass right through

The whole premise runs inside one location redressed for two worlds, which is the right way to do parallel realities on a short budget. The portal is a closet full of hanging clothes, so the crossing can be faked practically. A false back wall of stretched, painted fabric with a slit lets David-A's hand and Angie-B's cane ('The tip of her cane is buried in the wall of her closet') disappear in camera. The clothes hide the cut when a body goes through. This is the script's biggest production asset; don't write anything into the portal that would need CG.

Dual role: keep shared frames to a handful

p. 4 · p. 6 · p. 7 · p. 10 · p. 11

supporting each other, past David-A

Both Davids share the frame in Kitchen-B (p. 4-5), the tackle and clothes swap (p. 6-7), the garage (p. 9), and the stair climax and exit (p. 10-11). Most of these can be covered with a body double over the shoulder or face-down, and an unconscious David-B helps. The expensive moments are the ones where both faces must read at once, above all David-B and Angie-B walking past David-A on the stairs. Bodies crossing each other rule out a simple locked-off split-screen and push you toward motion

control or careful compositing.

Direction: Decide now which one or two shots need both faces, and block everything else for singles and a double. Restage the final exit so the double is always the figure nearer camera, or let David-A be heard and not seen as they pass. Cast a body double with matching build and hair early, and shoot all of one David per setup before switching.

A minor, a knife and a near-stabbing

p. 9 · p. 10 · p. 11

| *pointing it menacingly at David-A*

Angie-B is 16. She carries a chef's knife, points it at an adult, is dragged by the arm up a staircase, and is the target of a wind-up to strike, all in a script whose first act is a suicide set-up. Casting a real minor brings limited hours, a chaperone and stricter consent around the violent and suicidal content. A knife near a teenager in a physical struggle also needs a proper safety plan.

Direction: Cast an adult who reads as 16. That also frees your hours for the long climax. Use a dull or retractable prop knife for everything except inserts. Have a fight or stunt coordinator block the stair struggle and the arm grab, since the actor playing David must pull Angie-B up the stairs convincingly without hurting her.

Stunts: tackle, head strike, body drag

p. 6 · p. 7 · p. 8 · p. 9

| *with a sickening thud*

David-A tackles David-B, who falls and hits his head on the dresser edge. David-A then drags him by the feet from the bedroom toward the stairs, through Kitchen-A into the garage, and heaves him into the driver's seat. That means a fall, a furniture impact and a dead-weight drag that apparently goes down a flight of stairs, all performed by or against your lead. Angie-B's stair slip on p. 7 adds another fall, with a cane, for very little return.

Direction: Bring in a stunt coordinator for the tackle and fall, and pad or rebuild the dresser corner. Don't show the drag down the stairs: cut from the top of the stairs to the kitchen floor. Use a weighted dummy or the body double for the heave into the car. Cutting the stair slip saves a setup and removes a risk to your youngest performer.

Never run the car in a closed garage

p. 1 · p. 2 · p. 9

| *Exhaust fumes enter the vehicle through the hose.*

The garage scenes need a car with push-button start ('He stares at the ignition button.') and a rear window that winds down, inside an attached garage with an automatic door. Running an engine with the door shut and an actor in the car is genuinely dangerous, and the p. 9 beat is written as exactly that, with David-B unconscious inside. David-B later bursts back in 'coughing, dizzy and confused', so the fumes have to read on screen.

Direction: Shoot all in-car performance with the engine off, the tailpipe end of the hose disconnected,

and the garage door open out of frame. Sell the fumes with sound, a faint haze in the cabin from a safe theatrical source used under supervision, and one exterior insert of the exhaust shot separately with the door open. Borrow a car that fits the brief rather than writing around it.

World A and world B need a cheap visual code

p. 3 · p. 4 · p. 7 · p. 8

In the center of the kitchen is an island with a stovetop range built into it.

Pages 7-9 cut between Hallway-A, Hallway-B, Kitchen-A and Kitchen-B. In practice that is one hallway and one kitchen shot twice. The bedrooms are differentiated by dressing (shrine versus mess), but the kitchen and hallway are not, and after the clothes swap the audience has nothing to tell the worlds apart. Fixing this with set dressing means a full redress of the kitchen and hallway for every cross-cut, and those changeovers eat your day.

Direction: Give each world a lighting and grade signature you can set on day one. For example, world A curtained, cool and dim, and world B sunlit and warm, which the script already starts on p. 4. Add one or two cheap dressing tells per room: something on the island, a coat on the hall banister. Shoot all of world A's coverage in each room, then all of world B's.

Wardrobe and blood continuity

p. 7 · p. 9 · p. 10 · p. 11

Angie-B sees a wet stain on the collar of David-A's sweater.

The plot's key reveal depends on costume and blood states. The sweater appears clean on David-B, then blood-soaked on David-A, while David-B's 'hair is matted with dry blood' and he wears the hoodie. The coda adds a third David look. Shooting out of order with one actor and a double makes this easy to get wrong, and a continuity slip here would break the reveal.

Direction: Budget at least three identical sweaters (clean, fresh-stained, dried) and two hoodies. Keep a separate makeup continuity sheet for each David's head wound. Scheduling the post-tackle material in one block will save repeated wound application.

Cemetery: fake headstone, dawn window

p. 1

long shadows cross the graveyard as the sun rises

The opening asks for sunrise, a knee-high headstone reading 'Angie Adams, 2008-2019', a candle that stays lit in a breeze, and a cupcake placed on top of the stone. You cannot put props on a real grave, so this needs a fabricated headstone, a cemetery that permits filming, and a short light window. The portrait on Angie-A's dresser, 'an 8x11 portrait of a happy 11-year-old', also needs a child who convincingly reads as your teen actor at 11.

Direction: Build a lightweight foam headstone and place it in an unused part of a small rural or private cemetery. If sunrise is impractical, shoot low evening sun; the audience won't know the difference. Have a backup lighter and a wind-shielded candle. For the portrait, ask the cast actor's family for a real childhood photo, which costs nothing and sells the likeness.

Festival & next steps

Inferred genre: speculative grief drama with a thriller engine. That puts it in the genre and fantastic shorts blocks: Fantasia, Fantastic Fest, Sitges and the many regional genre festivals modelled on them, plus the genre or late-night programmes that general festivals run alongside their drama strands. It is not a comedy or a crowd-pleaser, and the suicide and attempted murder of a double rule out family and youth programming. At 12 pages it already sits inside the length band programmers schedule most easily. Tightened to around 10 minutes, it becomes easier to slot into a block.

The hook is strong enough to survive a programmer's one-line pitch to a committee: a father about to kill himself finds a world where his daughter lived, and tries to use his own suicide to steal his double's life. The trouble is that the parallel-world grieving father is a familiar premise, and the elements that would make this one stand out are the ones the draft currently underwrites: his first sight of her alive, and his decision to kill. Until those land, a programmer will file it under 'competent, seen it'. What separates a selected genre short from a declined one is usually a single unforgettable beat, and this script has the material for one but has not yet written it.

As a calling card it is promising for a director and less so, as it stands, for the writer. A director can show world-building through set dressing, a dual performance and a practical portal on a short-film budget. A writer submitting this draft would be judged on the A/B name errors in the climax before anyone reached the ending. Treat it first as a self-contained short. It could prove a visual grammar and a tone for something longer, but its power comes from one choice and one letting-go, and that does not stretch.

Next steps, in order. Revise the two hinges, the reunion and the decision. Then fix every A/B label so a cold reader can follow the climax. Then do a table read with someone who has not seen the script, and ask them to tell you who is who in Kitchen-A on p. 9 to p. 11. Before shooting, test the portal effect and one shared-frame shot of the two Davids, because those are the shots that will make the film look either assured or cheap. Retitle before you submit anywhere.

The festival hook is the rig turned weapon

p. 1 · p. 9

Exhaust fumes enter the vehicle through the hose.

The idea a programmer will repeat to a committee is that the man's own suicide set-up becomes the means of killing his double, with the clothes swap staging it as his death. It is dark, logical and specific to this script, and it gives a genre programme a moral spine rather than just a twist. Paired with the dropped knife on p. 11, it gives the short a beginning and end that echo each other, which is what makes a short memorable after a full block.

Familiar premise, distinctive beats underwritten

p. 4 · p. 7

Then an idea dawns on him.

A grieving father crossing to a parallel world to take his alternate child is close to Walter Bishop's

backstory in *Fringe*, and doubles meeting across realities will recall *Coherence* for genre programmers. That is not disqualifying, but it means the short is judged on what it does that those do not. Its distinct material is his face when he first sees his living daughter, the moment he decides to murder himself, and her recognition of the impostor. Only the last is fully on the page. The reunion is played to Angie-B's back, and the decision is compressed into this one line.

Direction: In revision, write toward the two moments a programmer cannot have seen before: give him one held look at her face, and make the trigger for his decision visible. Those two beats are your selling points, so they need room on the page.

Draft presentation would cost you a producer's read

p. 9 · p. 10 · p. 11

┃ *Angie-A slowly approaches him.*

In a script built on A and B doubles, writing Angie-A, who is dead, for Angie-B through the climax makes the decisive scene confusing to read. The same goes for the stray typos and missing (O.S.) tags. Producers and festival readers who take scripts for development or labs read fast. They will stall exactly where the film needs to be clearest, and they may decide the writer is not in control of the concept.

Direction: Before this goes to any producer, lab or script competition, do a dedicated pass checking every A/B suffix against who is actually in the scene. Then have someone cold-read the climax and tell you who is who.

Strong director's calling card on a small budget

p. 3 · p. 4

┃ *The hamper overflows with dirty clothes.*

Set against 'The hamper is empty.' on p. 3, this shows the script building its two worlds from one house through set dressing. A director who can sell the switch between shrine and lived-in room, a practical portal through hanging clothes, and one actor playing two fathers is showing exactly the control that producers and financiers look for in a first or second short. One location, a cemetery and two principal actors keep the calling card affordable.

Better as a standalone than as a pitch for a feature

p. 11

┃ *The wall is solid. The portal is gone.*

The short ends where its idea ends: he lets her go and the door closes. Expanding it would mean answering what the short rightly leaves alone: the portal's rules, the consequences of attempted murder, David-B's side and what Angie-B carries home. Done that way it becomes a different, more conventional story. Pitching it as proof of concept for a feature would invite exactly the comparisons to *Fringe* that hurt it.

Direction: Make it as a complete short. If you want it to work as a sample for longer work, make that case through craft: the A/B visual grammar and the tone. A feature version would need its own engine, not this ending stretched.

Detailed suicide method will draw programmer scrutiny

p. 1 · p. 2

The garage sequence walks step by step through attaching and sealing the hose. Some festivals, platforms and broadcasters apply safe-messaging guidance to on-screen suicide, and a near-procedural depiction can count against an otherwise strong film in selection, or trigger content warnings that narrow where it plays. The rig does need to be clear, because it pays off on p. 9 as the murder weapon. The step-by-step detail is not needed for that.

Direction: Keep the rig legible but not instructional. Show the hose in place and the man at the ignition rather than every stage of fixing it. That also tightens the opening, which helps the running time.

Retitle before submitting

Title page

 *The Portal*

A programmer scrolling hundreds of entries on a submission platform sees the title first. 'The Portal' names the device, sounds like countless other genre shorts and says nothing about the father, the birthday or the choice. The submission also calls it 'Portal', so the title is not yet settled.

Direction: Choose a title that points at what is distinct here, such as the daughter, the anniversary or the letting go, and use it consistently across the script and every submission.

The numbers

Measured from the text by Storynotes, not estimated.

Words: 2,889

Pages: 12

Scenes (scene headings): 20 (about 0.6 pages each)