

DEPARTURE FROM REALITY

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Pitch: *In the Heat of the Night* **meets** *Me, Myself & Irene*

Logline: A man with multiple personality disorder (MPD) is kidnapped by his alternate personality – a woman, fighting for her existence. Two cops – one black woman, one white man – struggle to resolve their differences as they try to solve the crime.

Treatment:

A slightly-built reclusive young man in his late 20s/early 30s, **Stephen Tyler** (think Johnny Depp, Leonardo DiCaprio, Eric Close), lives alone in the family house on the outskirts of the small town of Reality, in Eureka County, Nevada. His parents died

under suspicious circumstances when he was younger and he has no siblings.

Stephen is very bright if somewhat withdrawn, and is rumored to exist on income from the accumulated wealth of his family, obtained from now-defunct mining operations in the area. Either way, he doesn't appear to have a job, but he does appear to be something of an inventor and we see him working on and test flying a couple of his inventions (for an idea of what the machines might realistically resemble, see www.solotrek.com and www.moller.com).

Stephen has a reputation as something of an eccentric as far as the local townspeople of Reality are concerned. They don't dislike him, but they don't quite trust him either. They see him every other week when he comes in for supplies from the local store and – rarely – a meal at the local diner, but he doesn't talk much and doesn't encourage social interaction. He did once turn up at a local miners dance but swiftly withdrew when local girls began to take an interest in him.

When he is persuaded to talk, he's fired with enthusiasm but no-one seems to understand his ideas, so he tends to go quiet again very quickly.

One day he doesn't turn up for his usual supplies and an anonymous telephone call to a distant relative in Carson City reveals that he's been kidnapped. The distant relative tells Carson City police who in turn contact local law enforcement in Reality. Sheriff **Garrett Harlow** (think Kevin Costner, Harrison Ford, Mel Gibson, Gene Hackman, Paul Newman), teasingly nicknamed "Jean" by his deputies and few friends, checks out Stephen's house and finds the flying vehicles among a number of other inventions in progress, and some ambiguous clues to the kidnapper's identity (vaguely threatening letters impaled on a spike and a word scrawled in lipstick on a mirror in the bathroom: "FREEDOM!").

We see Stephen held captive and tortured by his kidnapper who appears to be a woman attempting to disguise her voice (trying to sound deep, like a man).

Stephen's eyes are almost completely covered by a blindfold so all he hears is her voice. We see the action through Stephen's eyes – his blindfold allows him (and us) to see a little of the floor in front of him but not much else. His kidnapper seems to keep behind him at all times so she is never seen directly.

There is another phone call to the distant relative in Carson City in which Stephen is allowed to talk briefly. The kidnapper mails a photo of a blindfolded Stephen holding a current newspaper to the relative to confirm Stephen's situation. In the mail package is another, macabre, piece of evidence supplied by the kidnapper: a foreskin – as an incentive for the demanded \$5 million ransom to be paid. We don't know if the skin is Stephen's or not, but forensic tests by a lab in Carson City show that its DNA is similar to that of the Carson City relative, so there is circumstantial support for its origin.

Garrett is puzzled. Is the kidnapper known to the victim? A woman from his secretive past? Someone

wanting to obtain enough money to leave Reality, which is a hot, dead dump in the middle of nowhere?

Garrett is stumped. His department is ill-equipped to undertake a manhunt but he doesn't want to call in help from outside. He discusses his dilemma with his closest friend, **JayCee Simmons** (think Kevin Costner, Harrison Ford, Mel Gibson, Gene Hackman, Paul Newman), the owner of both the local store and the local diner in Reality. JayCee is possibly the one person in Reality who has had the most contact with Stephen. He liked the quiet, polite young man who bought goods from his store and occasionally came in for a meal in his diner. He persuades Garrett that he has no real choice but to talk to the police in Carson City and ask for their help.

Garrett reluctantly calls Carson City police and is assigned an experienced detective, **Sam Leigh** (think Alfre Woodard, Whoopi Goldberg, Oprah Winfrey), to help him. When Sam arrives in Reality, Garrett is surprised (and not happy) to discover that Sam is a black woman. Garrett's deep-seated misogyny and racism are given

short shrift by Sam, who does not suffer fools gladly, least of all within her chosen profession.

Sam sets about the process of following up the few leads available and decides that the simplest solution would be to pretend to pay the ransom and catch the kidnapper after she has picked it up.

At the moment that the ransom is about to be paid, Stephen manages to escape and reaches Reality.

Stephen is given medical treatment and he seems to have survived his ordeal rather well. The kidnapper however is still at large, although Stephen seems reluctant to assist in her pursuit. Forensic specialists analyze material under Stephen's fingernails from his struggle with his kidnapper and find something odd: the kidnapper's DNA appears extremely close to that of the victim.

The forensic lab also reveals that thanks to developments since the conclusion of the first stage of the Human Genome Project it is now possible to look at

someone's DNA and predict what they will look like. They run the DNA obtained from the material under Stephen's fingernails through a computer simulation, which takes twenty four hours.

In the meantime Sam and Garrett continue to pursue the kidnapper. She always seems to be one step ahead and adding further tension is a threatening cellphone call to Stephen promising that he will never be able to escape, which the authorities are unable to trace.

Garrett finds himself slowly losing his prejudices as Sam impresses him with her abilities both as a cop and as a woman. But he still has to handle things his way and against Sam's advice he stakes out Stephen's home, and finally he corners the kidnapper. There is a struggle in which shots are exchanged, Garrett is seriously wounded and the kidnapper – also seriously wounded – escapes.

As she sits by Garrett's bedside in the intensive care unit, waiting for him to regain consciousness and hopefully reveal more about the identity of the

kidnapper, Sam finds herself inexplicably feeling affection for the middle-aged sheriff. Despite their differences there is a central core to the man that she finds attractive.

Garrett recovers just as the forensic lab completes the simulation and Stephen appears in ER with a fatal gunshot wound, apparently inflicted by the kidnapper.

Garrett drags himself out of ICU with Sam's help and the pair head for ER. As doctors battle in vain to try and save Stephen's life, Sam and Garrett come face to face with the truth: in front of their eyes Stephen transforms subtly into his female alter ego, **Stephanie**. There is a physical as well as a mental change. The image produced by the lab matches Stephanie exactly. The lab even has an explanation: Stephen's DNA mutates minutely from time to time, producing a physical transformation to match the mental change. The kidnapper with whom Garrett had struggled and shot is in fact Stephen. Things begin to fall into place.

Stephanie gives a deathbed confession: she was jealous of Stephen and wanted to get away and make a life for herself. Stephen was aware that his alter ego had murdered his parents in a fit of rage but couldn't bring himself to confess – as far as he was concerned, he hadn't done anything wrong. His solution was to fight to suppress Stephanie.

Keeping himself isolated and avoiding relationships helped, but this only served to frustrate Stephanie and she decided to become the dominant personality.

However, with no legal identity of her own, and no access to the family wealth, she felt that her only recourse was to try to obtain a ransom by "kidnapping" Stephen.

While her imminent death is also Stephen's death, in Stephanie's eyes she has still obtained her freedom and having confessed, she passes away peacefully.

Sam and Garrett are uncertain how to fill out the paperwork. One thing *is* certain though: the experience has changed both of them – for the better, for ever.