

## **Reader's Report**

Script: *Ancient Lights*                      Writer/s: Sandra Rojas-González  
Genre: fantasy drama                      Format: Theatrical Feature  
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Reader: Mariana Pérez Villoro                      Date of Read: 14<sup>th</sup> May 2012

### **Logline:**

An insecure teenager bullied by a mean girl suffers a coma that leads her to a fantastic world where she will have to confront an evil undine in order to save the habitants of that world and become confident of herself.

### **Synopsis:**

Alexa is an insecure sixteen year old student. She loves fantasy books and videogames. She lives with her parents, Sasha and Derek. She has two good friends, Caro and Mark, and a girlfriend, Rain. Alexa suffers because Rain is soon going to move but also because she is not ready to tell her parents and friends that she is dating her. Her biggest problem is Michelle, a popular and mean girl from school that torments her, her friends and Rain every time she and her minions have a chance. Alexa's depression, low self-esteem and lack of courage make her cut herself to feel she still alive. Nobody is aware of that but Rain, who discovers her doing it after a confrontation with Michelle. Alexa's parents, girlfriend and friends are encouraging and supportive with her but she's unable to let them help her. Michelle attacks her and her friends in different occasions but when she assaults Caro, who just had a conversation with Alexa about how friends protect each other, Alexa cannot help but timidly defend her against Michelle, who pushes her making her fall from the stairs and suffer a coma.

While her body remains in the hospital, her mind enters Ancient Lights, a fantasy world where she meets Anara, a spirit of the air and Anwar, a shape shifter. She also encounters Ike and Dieter, two human-demon hybrids that work for The Lorelei, an evil undine that has cast a curse in the town where these mythical beings live. Since no human has been there before there's an expectation about what can Alexa do to help them cure the curse but Alexa is the only one who can decide it. Alexa decides to help them try to find the

cure in exchange of being helped to find a way back home. Meanwhile at the hospital, Alexa's nurse, Patrick, her parents, friends and girlfriend want her to wake up but nothing seems to improve, they also realize she was cutting herself. Alexa, in the fantasy world, keeps hurting herself. She finds in the street three young habitants Connor, Liam and Mia that are suffering because of the curse. Mia dies. Dieter and Ike are about to take Alexa to the Lorelei but Anara and Anwar avoid it. She helps them research for a cure but she hasn't stop the cutting and has an argument with Anara. The Lorelei learns that there's a human in Ancient Lights and asks Dieter and Ike to bring her to her. Alexa learns that Anara is cursed and that the curse intoxicates the mind, making the ones that have it loose their faith in themselves and commit suicide. The Lorelei realizes by looking at Mia's smile in her dead face that something has change in A.L. and wants to personally take care of "the human". Anara takes Alexa to the forest where she entered Ancient Lights and they try to find a clue, Anara explains why she keeps fighting in A.L. They find a catch-dreamer that belongs to Alexa, there are two words written on it but Alexa can't remind what they mean. At the hospital, Alexa's condition improves a little bit. In the fantasy world, in the forest, while Alexa is trying to find a way back home, the Lorelei finds her and insults her. When the Lorelei leaves, because of the last thing she says, Alexa realizes Anara might be in danger and she runs back to the town to help her. She confronts Dieter, Ike, and the Lorelei who was attacking Anwar and Anara. The Lorelei casts a spell on Alexa and leaves. Anara tells Alexa she shouldn't have let her get that involved. Anara and Anwar confront The Lorelei in order to save Alexa. The Lorelei beats them up and Alexa arrives to help them confronting the undine. At the hospital, Alexa's condition improves very much. Alexa and The Lorelei fight but The Lorelei is too strong and uses her speech to weaken Alexa even more. At the hospital, Alexa's health seems to aggravate. Alexa remembers the word on the dream catcher and finally realizes that she has to use her inner strength and defeats The Lorelei but doesn't kill her. Anara destroys the Lorelei's necklace that maintains her alive; The Lorelei dies and the curse disappears. Anara reveals she's Alexa, a mature version of her. Alexa leaves Ancient Ligths and wakes up at the hospital. She can now tell everybody Rain is her girlfriend and confronts Michelle. She's now confident and happy.

## **Comments:**

This script is overall a good script. The fantastic atmosphere makes it enjoyable and the characters interesting. The theme is compelling and the message it delivers is clear and profound. This is a piece that could help lots of people to regain confidence but not because of that is less entertaining. The development of the theme "find your inner strength to save yourself" is one of the biggest achievements of the script.

The plot in general is attractive. The main story is clear and effective and there are enough reversals and complications for the protagonist. The antagonism is also very clear.

It can improve if you try that every scene leads to the next one; try to make as many scenes as you can a consequence to the previous one. There are some scenes in the script that could be suppressed, condensed or mixed. Some of them are repetitive. Reviewing which ones are not necessary, and eliminating them to see how the story works should help. For example, I found repetitive Michelle bullying Alexa and her friends in three different scenes and Alexa cutting her in five different scenes. There are other moments that aren't fundamental.

Some scenes are a bit too long. I have that feeling with the bathroom scene p.11-13, the street scene p.14-17 and the phone conversation between Alexa and Rain p.17-20.

I think you can add more suspense to the scene in the changing room p.20. If Caro is about to discover Alexa is cutting that would be very stressful for Alexa and would make us care about her even more. It's difficult to believe that they have swim classes and no one has realized that Alexa cuts herself.

Right now, the inciting incident (the moment where the adventure starts) is on page 27-28; it is her accident and her entry to Ancient Lights. It should be preferably around page 21. If you make the scenes that I mentioned previously shorter and you eliminate what's not fundamental you can easily achieve this. It would make the beginning of the story move faster and maintain the audience interested.

I like the suspense you created in the hospital scene p.27. Because there are no dialogues we don't know exactly what's happening but we know it's bad; it makes us care about Alexa and their loving ones.

The scene that follows p.28, where Alexa appears in the forest is one of my favorites; I like the suspense of not knowing who the silhouette is and the fact that she follows it. Getting lost in a forest is a psychological symbol that means the urgency of finding who you really are, is been used for centuries, I don't know if you did it on purpose but it works perfectly.

There are other tense moments that make the plot intense, like the first time Alexa sees Ike and Dieter, and interesting moments like when she realizes Anara has pointy ears, that Ike and Dieter have pointy fangs and sharp nails and when she realizes that Anara knows already her name.

There is something important that is not very consistent yet. It's not clear if Ancient Lights exists only inside Alexa's mind or if it really exists and she entered through her coma. It makes this more unclear the facts that Anwar says the Dragons have another reality and that Patrick seems to be Anwar at the end. I think you should choose one of these options and hold to it, eliminating the elements that are incongruent with the choice. Personally, I like better that everything happens inside Alexa's mind.

It's not clear either yet what's the role of Anara in the city; she mentions she created the city p.40 but later it's mentioned that she's the healer p.48 (by the way, a bit too late for giving this info.). Nothing indicates that she is the queen, the princess or the most important person in A.L.; she should be that if she created the city. This makes difficult to believe that she created it. Why she and Anwar know everything that happens there is also not explained and difficult to buy. The role of Anwar in the city is also unclear.

There are some small moments in the story that are not clear like Alexa rolling her eyes on page 10. This makes me think that she's not happy of seeing her friends and I think it's not the case; you can clarify this. Something similar happens with the part of the action description in p.41 when Patrick "nodding and smiling leaves the room", maybe if he just reassuringly smiles to Sasha that would be clearer.

When Anara heals Alexa (page 45) there could be some concrete sign that indicates she is curing her, like Anara closing her eyes, saying magical words, or something like that to give more importance to this moment and make it more plausible.

It's not clear why the color of Alexa's blood is unusual p.44-45. Is it darker? And why is this happening? I couldn't find the payoff for this question.

When on page 46 Anara says she eats even if she is a spirit it is hard to believe. We need an explanation more than a joke because spirits normally do not eat. It is also weird that Anwar enters the house without knocking. Does he have a key, this isn't set up.

There's no payoff for the search of the medicine container p.46. We also don't know what this medicine is, or what happens if it's not found. This makes the motivation for this scene weak.

Wouldn't Alexa recognize Rain's voice every time she calls her? (Girl's voice (O.S)) This must be clarified or fixed somehow; it seems odd.

It is unexpected that Liam asks Alexa to save Mia so insistently; it would be more realistic if he asked her to find Anara or something according to what she can do, not something impossible. It is confusing that Liam explains that Anara is the healer and then do not recognize her on page 50. It's not clear either how Alexa saves Liam p.49-50, nor if Ike and Dieter take Mia with them to take her to The Lorelei.

I think it would be more surprising if Alexa sees for the first time Anara's scars in p.55, not before. It could be emotionally stronger if on page 57 after knowing there is a human in A.L. the Lorelei keeps combing her hair but not singing anymore like at the beginning of the scene.

I really like the moment when The Lorelei realizes something's changing in A.L. because of Mia's smile p.59 and the beat with the runs p.60. It's exciting. The moment on page 64, when Alexa sees the lights in the tree shining together as one is wonderful. It would maybe be clearer if she, or Anara, say "They all shine like one." because I don't know if this is going to be visually clear and it's very important for the story.

Another thing that is really important and it's not yet completely clear is how the curse in A.L. works. Is everybody cursed or just some of them? Why Anwar isn't cursed? It seems random. Also, knowing since when Anara got cursed and how much time she has left would raise the stakes and make the plot more stressful in a positive way.

It's not clear either when Alexa gets cursed, I think the scene in the forest p.68-73 is a good chance to add a moment when The Lorelei clearly curses her; it would also fix the fact that this encounter isn't strong enough, at the moment it's not understandable why The Lorelei just leaves without trapping her or killing her, she just mistreats her with her mean speech.

It's not clear why leaving A.L. would have been the solution for Anara when she got cursed, she says she could have left p.63 but there's no explanation about why this was a possible option in that situation.

Patrick being too sure that Alexa is going to wake up lowers the emotional stakes (because he's the nurse and has medical skills) p.67, it's enough having Rain, Mark and Caro sure about it; if the danger is high the audience remains interested.

In p.75 when Alexa steps between The Lorelei and Anwar receiving the punch and Anwar uses that distraction to go and check Anara but never comes back to help Alexa fighting The Lorelei it seems like if he didn't care about Alexa.

I really like the moment when The Lorelei whispers in Alexa's ear the creepy babies' song p.76.

The moment in p.87 when Alexa hears Connor and can't find him seems unnecessary, I think you could suppress it and nothing would happen, it's a bit confusing because there's never a payoff for that.

There's no reason for Alexa to know where The Lorelei lives, this should be set up before, because when she gets there in p.84 it's difficult not asking how does she know where The Lorelei lives and makes it incredible.

On page 85 Anara screams "Alexa no!" but right after it is written that "Anara lies unconscious", this is contradictory. I like that moment in p.87 when Alexa's weakness is also related to the cuts she did to herself but the way it's described is not visually clear yet, especially in the one

that is on her leg; if it's mentioned the blood is darker and that it's visible through her pants it would clarify it. You say at the bottom of the page that the blood from her arm is "darker than anything", I'm not sure what you mean by "anything" but I think is the same idea.

I like the moment in p.91 when The Lorelei sings the song Alexa used to sing when she cut herself; it's one of my favorites. I also find very interesting that Alexa hears the voices of the ones she loves saying negative things about her, like if all her fears were materialized. Maybe instead of just hearing them like voices out of screen, The Lorelei could say those dialogues talking with the other characters' voices (this is maybe what you tried to express, in this case keep The Lorelei saying those dialogues, just put in parenthetical Michelle's voice, for example). The Lorelei could even create an illusion making Alexa see them instead of her, like if she could take their shapes, it wouldn't be necessary a special effect. I think it could work because it's almost what happens when Rain appears to be there.

I like that Alexa's solution p.93-94 is realizing she has to use her inner strength, this is really good, deep and helpful for the audience. The words "Neart Laistigh" are never translated by any character and I think this could be useful to make relevant the dream-catcher. I like a lot the symbolism of it.

The moment in p.69 when Anwar regains consciousness jut after The Lorelei is defeated seems too convenient, maybe the girls should take him home unconscious, or do something to make him wake up.

It's not clear how the curse is cured when The Lorelei dies, maybe Anara could mention how she feels right after the Lorelei dies, the light in A.L. could also change. There isn't anything that proves in a more tangible way that the curse is gone.

I like a lot that Anara is Alexa but I don't' understand how she was hiding her physicality similar to Alexa's; maybe she could be the shape shifter and Anwar the spirit of the air instead. I think it could also help a bit if Alexa and Anara were an anagram, like for example Alicia-Cialia. Another option is that if Anara is Alexa and A.L. is inside Alexa's mind every character in A.L. is a part of Alexa, Anara would be the wisest part of her, she could explain this to Alexa

instead of revealing she's the same person; this could solve the necessity of having the anagram and Anara could be physically different to Alexa.

The moment when Alexa leaves A.L. in p.99 can be more emotive, Anara just pushes her towards the lights, she can't say good bye and she might never see them again, especially Anwar.

Personally, I dislike that Patrick is Anwar at the end, I would like that A.L. and all its habitants stay at A.L. where they belong. Like I said before, I like to think that is a place in Alexa's subconscious, it makes it much more credible, poetic and profound.

The end where Alexa confronts Michelle for the first time is very satisfying. Alexa's happiness with Rain at the end moved me and made me smile.

Most of the characters are well developed. The emotional expressions of the characters are well described; it makes the story more realistic and appealing.

I like that you choose a feminine protagonist, there are not enough in the movies. The relationship between Alexa and Rain really comes across. Alexa's character is very realistic, I can easily imagine her and I almost feel like I know her. Her arc is awesome, she's very good hero; she starts in a difficult situation and ends up overcoming it in a progressive and believable way. It gives a great example to the audience. This is one of the things that make me really like the script. I also like the contrast between the song she sings and the cutting. It makes the moment more ritualistic, striking and memorable. I think is also very good the description about the methodical way she has for cleaning her bruises and the razor.

I love Rain's character, her name and her personality; she's such a good ally. She gives the hope and strength Alexa needs. I like the moment on page 12 when Rain asks Alexa to let her help her.

Michelle is a good character because she's clearly the antagonistic force but sometimes her dialogues are a bit cliché, for example the "Well, well..." in p.10, other are good like the one on page 105 "I wish I could have taken more..."

If you add some distinctive and original attribute to her the character would improve a lot, right now she's the typical bully.

Caro and Mark are a bit diluted, I don't picture them well enough; I think you can work a bit more in these two. Mark's dialogue in p.16 "Is there something she knows but not us?!" is too girly, if you did in on purpose just play with this trait a bit more, right now it just feels out of place. Caro's dialogue in p.43 "She wanted to tell you." It's something she doesn't know for real; it seems weird having her saying that.

Sasha is more developed than Derek. You could work a bit more on him. Sasha's dialogue in p.43 "... she looked so happy" is peculiar because in the scenes at the beginning Sasha appears to be a bit worried about Alexa.

Ike and Dieter seem to be the same person; they could have different personalities if you want to make them more realistic. They could also be twins.

The Lorelei is a good one. I like her physical appearance, her elegance and the way she emotionally attacks. I like that she sings and says creepy things. I also enjoyed that she finds disgusting the human smell; you could use this a bit more, the same for the runs. You could also describe a bit more when she appears the first time p.55 her expression, her eyes, something that shows she's an evil being. I like her dialogue "It's been a while since I had fun with humans." but to make it stronger she should be the only one saying it. Dieter says the same thing in p.51. It's a bit contradictory that she calls Ike and Dieter "her faithful warriors" p.59 and then calls them "useless" in p.60, this dynamic seems fake to me. Like for Michelle, the "well, well..." she says p.76 is a bit cliché. I don't understand her piece of dialogue "Hopefully much?" p.83. I like a lot her dialogue on page 88 "You. Are. ALONE."

Anara's description in p.29 is good. I also like her protective personality and that she's a mythical being. It's good to have a character in A.L. that believes in Alexa's capacities, her role is similar to Rain's role in the real world. I also like her sense of humor like in the dialogue "It's been a while since someone called us "Mythical" in our faces." p.38. I think she should have more personality traits

in common with Alexa to make us really believe that they are the same person once Anara reveals it.

It's not clear why Anwar can make potions to cure Alexa p.62 and p.78. If Anara is the healer why is Anwar the one who does this activity? You could clarify this. Anwar's dialogue "that's why we need to hurry." p.80 is to explicative it appears like he's saying it for the audience; just take away "that's why" and it will be more natural.

There could be more subtext in the dialogues, add more moments where is possible to read between the lines. Some of the dialogues are a bit too "on the nose". For example, I think you can replace the dialogue exchange between Sasha and Alexa "You don't sound so excited as usual."/"I'm just tired, it's been a long day." by a description about their attitudes. I think this moment could be a silent attitudes conversation, it would create more tension. Sometimes it's said much more with our eyes or expressions or the intent to hide our feelings than by directly asking or denying things. I think this moment is emotionally important because it shows Alexa's disconnection from her mother and her mother's fear or doubt. You do it well with many of Alexa's dialogues in the first act, when she tries to hide what she really feels.

Some dialogues are repetitive or unnecessary, like for example when Alexa asks "There's a curse?" on page 38, the small dialogue between Anwar and Anara on page 49 and Ike and Dieter firsts dialogues in p.75. Try to avoid all these questions or comments that don't give new information. The more you can synthesize without making things incomprehensible the better. I recommend you to review the whole script paying attention only to this to really cut what's not necessary; this kind of things can be tiring for the audience.

The insult "stupid" is used too much and is not a very strong one. I think you can find more insults for the antagonists to say.

On page 55, when the Lorelei sings, what does she sings? Is it a just melody or some lyrics? If there are lyrics you should write them as a dialogue.

I don't understand the dialogue "Sent me your kisses in the wings...my eyes." I interpret that is a way to tell herself

that she must love herself before dyeing but I'm not sure if this is what you're trying to express, it's not clear enough.

Alexa's first dialogues in voice over are interesting. I like this way of introducing the character. However I'm sure they could be more related to Alexa's journey. The part "Starts with a prince and ends in a heartache" makes me think that we are going to watch a romantic comedy about an heterosexual couple, and it's not the case. Even if it's funny it doesn't work to introduce neither the theme nor the tone.

If the dialogue "Everybody loved my work. They even cheered." p.04 is sarcasm add it in the parenthetical.

Fairytales have always been appealing to those who like to dive inside the human mind and psychology. They also were in the past one of the first ways of keeping people amused. I think you choose a great genre and making a drama of it was really good; the original versions of the fairy tales are dramas that always end with a happy ending, like your story. I also think the people that could beneficiate with the theme exposed in the story love this genre.

Regarding to formatting there is a problem that I found frequently in the script. Sometimes the action descriptions are more a narration than a description, like for example: "ashamed of being discovered...situation." p.12 and "His pride weights more" p.16. This is something you can't say in a script, you have to show everything with visual action-descriptions. The same happens on page 20 with: "She hates gym class, especially because it involves...judged." this works in a novel but in a script is impossible to show if you do not put it in concrete clear actions or dialogues. The same in: "She re-analyses the situation...something." p.26, "hoping she won't get lost." p.33, "She has no idea...soon." p.33., "but she remembers...these two" p.34, "Sasha can't help...baby." p.41, "She tries to...attention to it." p.47, "Ike and Dieter...confronted." p.52, "confirming what she suspected" p.58, "Alexa thinks about...of hope." p.61, "Alexa's been unconscious for 2 weeks now" p.68, "Alexa had been...first time." p.68, "Alexa tries to...past it." p.69, "Alexa realizes the words of the Lorelei." p.73, "She can't just...well known." p.83, "trying to...running out." p.85, "but Alexa has become...The Lorelei." p.86, "She realizes...AL and Alexa." p.86, "to prevent...neck." p.99, "a headache starting to show." p.100, "Doctor...paperwork." p.101 and "Michelle...frustrated." p.105

There are some other formatting details that could improve. "A girl lies in a hospital bed" could be replaced by "ALEXA (16) lies in a hospital bed". This way we would immediately know who Alexa is and avoid any possible confusion about who "the girl" is. The same for "another girl" p.8, better if you replace it by "RAIN (17)".

If you name a character, use the name every time he/she appears; it helps the readers. For example, on page 49 you use "the girl" and "the boy" (and "the little boy" p.53 and "the girl" p.59) to talk about Mia and Liam when we already know who they are, this makes it less clear.

When two or more characters are interacting and some of them are the same genre (male or female) use the names because if you use "she" or "he" it can happen that we don't know to whom you are referring. For example, on page 76 you can use "The Lorelei" instead of "she" because there are moments when it's not clear if you're talking about her or about Alexa.

On page 65 is a small mistake "I HAD TAKE" appears as a character name in a dialogue, I guess is ALEXA's dialogue.

There's no action-description at the beginning of the Forest scene in p.68.

When the dialogue shows what is needed like in "Good...I'm-" p.77 you don't have to add things like "She can't finish saying the words" p.77 in the action-description. There is a couple more like this one in the script.

Replace "the opposite direction of the forest" p.83 by "towards the town" or "towards the path that leads to the town" because she's already in the forest.

If you want the audience to know all the characters' names remember to make another character mention them, at least three times.

If the description of the physical appearance of a character is not essential to the story try to avoid it, the same for the camera movements.

Avoid the expression "we see" p.86. It's not used anymore, much better if you can cut it or replace it by something else.

You can ameliorate some other writing details. The part of the action description "as if trying to cover the bruises that stand out in her light skin" p.01 is not necessary; it creates a distraction, because it makes us think who or why her fringes are purposely covering her bruises.

My conclusion is that this is an awesome story and a nice script with lot of potential. I think that if you work on it, it will become really good and accomplish what it pretends: entertain and thrill but also help insecure young people that suffers bullying. I deeply wish you could dedicate a bit more of your time, patience and creativity to make it shine.