***The Last Babushka Doll*** *– Director’s Treatment*

**CONCEPT:**

*The Last Babushka Doll* is a story which needs to be told. The debate has been raging for some time now - and will continue to rage - over what constitutes humane treatment of loved ones when quality of life is so poor that they themselves request an end to their suffering, or indeed, those nearest and dearest, request finality on the patient’s behalf.

With this complex and fraught issue in mind, *The Last Babushka Doll* has created a scenariowherein medical professionals confront a wife’s heart-felt pleas to stop medical assistance administered to her husband, thus allowing him to die.

The screenwriter has cleverly set the stage for a compelling philosophical discussion on the morality of keeping the terminally ill alive, and the ethics of allowing such patients to die with dignity.

I believe my job as director is to ensure that by the end of this 15 minute drama, viewers will leave the cinema acknowledging the integrity inherent in the narrative, and find the story’s resolution both optimistic and uplifting.

**ACTING STYLE:**

My aim is to elicit naturalistic, low-key (but not *low energy*) performances from actors. Subtle gestures and body language will convey the underlying gravity of the themes this story is tackling.

The character of *Penelope* will have a “quiet” demeanor but beneath that fragile exterior, and behind those placid eyes, resides a woman of strength and purpose.

In the more comedic moments, the actor playing young, awkward *Paul* will not play it for laughs. Rather, his jokiness will barely disguise a sagacity which comes to the fore at a poignant moment in the story.

*Daniel’s* performance will emphasize the dilemma he finds himself in – torn between what he knows in his heart to be right but is compelled by rules and regulations inculcated in his brain by years of training, that as a medical practioner his duty is to keep his patient alive at all costs. Daniel will feel a huge burden on his shoulders, and the actor playing him will deliver a performance which presents to the world a façade of stoic authority, but behind which exits a vulnerable, sensitive human being.

**SHOOTING STYLE:**

Given that we’ll need to average 3 - 4 mins of screen time per day, I’ll aim to shoot as economically as possible but without compromising high production values.

There are scenes – interior and exterior - which I feel require the camera to be moved slowly. For most of the shoot, I’ll seek to utilize a simple form of steadicam (without bulky harness). Minimal use of tripod set-ups should save time and allow for more coverage during the four days.

Notwithstanding this production’s tiny budget, I’d aim for as filmic a look as possible. Shooting 4K RAW, 1: 2.4 aspect ratio, will go a long way to achieving the qualities I believe the script deserves.

I’ll endeavor to capture Nature in all its glory in and around Katoomba with its stunning landscape (a character in its own right). I’ll aim to accentuate the message implicit in the narrative that we come from the earth and it’s the earth we return to. Ultimately, I wish to construct a nexus between Ully’s spirit soaring free after his death, and a feeling of soaring optimism to be experienced by the audience.

I intend to shoot characters much more in close-up in the doll shop than at the ambulance station. I’d like to convey a strong sense of intimacy within the confines of Penelope and Ully’s world and that when “strangers” enter that world in the form of Paul and Daniel, they are by necessity drawn into it in order to better understand this habitat. Here, facial expressions – be they human or painted – will bear the markings of the vicissitudes of life.

**LIGHTING:**

Weather permitting, I’ll use available light wherever possible or practicable, and give interiors a bluish tinge to accentuate a similar hue prevalent in the mountains and valleys. I want to suggest that nature needs to enter our *artificial* environment and that the way of all things *natural* must ultimately prevail.

I’m a great admirer of the way colour and light is used by master artists such as Caravaggio and Vermeer; I’ll endeavor to deploy the technique of chiaroscuro for the doll shop interiors in a similar fashion to the way cinematographer, Eduardo Serra, shot the interiors of “The Girl With the Pearl Earring”.

**PRODUCTION DESIGN:**

**Colour Palette:**

I see muted grey and beige and for the ambo station to contrast with earthy russets, reds and indigo for Penelope and Ully’s bedroom. Rich grey-green eucalypts bathed in a bluish light will occur naturally in the landscape.

**Wardrobe:**

I imagine Penelope wearing colourful “Babushka” clothes to hint at coalescence with the art she creates.

Paul’s uniform could be a mite too large for him. It will accentuate his gawkiness as well as suggest that he’s growing into his job whilst needing to fill out his clothes.

Ully’s fine cotton pajamas will be white or off-white to suggest a shroud of sorts.

**Make-up:**

Subtle use of make-up is important to be in keeping with the natural quality I wish to give the entire film.

Ully’s pallid, weary, worn face suggests he’s at the end of his tether and ready to exit this world.

**EDITING STYLE:**

There’ll be subtle shifts in pacing. I see shots being held longer in the early stages of the story when the paramedics’ world is introduced.

Once we’re at the doll-shop, the pacing will pick up suggesting urgency. Once Ully has passed, we’ll go for a slower pace and allow the viewer to absorb a much more relaxed ambience.

**MUSIC:**

The score will have an ethereal quality to heighten the story’s spiritual element. Quiet, contemplative music will at times be punctuated with profound melancholy laced with grief.

**SOUND DESIGN:**

Interior or exterior “silence” will be imbued with natural sounds such as that of wind through eucalyptus leaves, and loud or faint haunting echoes of vociferous birds (of spring) flying over deep valleys.

Ully’s labored breathing, spasms of pain and dryness in his throat will work to not only convey a sense of a man in considerable discomfort, but also a realization from the viewer that Nature wishes to claim him.

I’ll suggest the sound designer be as inventive as possible and experiment with sounds to create something textured and rich. I’ll ask for sound FX to complement the score - melding sounds of nature with sounds of distant voices, tones and cadences existing at the fringes of human being’s mundane proceedings within the town of Katoomba.

Angelo Salamanca October, 2016