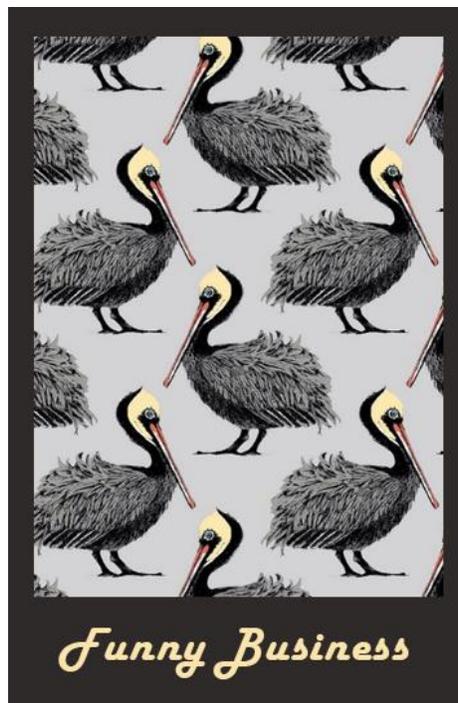


Funny Business

Synopsis / Pitch

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IN BRIEF**TITLE:** "Funny Business"**GENRE:** Light Comedy**LOGLINE:** On her wedding day, a bride leaves her billionaire fiancé standing at the altar, and winds up in Key West in a studio with two quarrelling artists. Inevitably, both men fall in love with her--and she with them--and they have to do battle with one another and with her fiancé and his billions for her affections.**RATING:** PG-13 (projected). For language and adult situations.**EST. LENGTH:** 90 minutes**EST. SHOOTING SCHEDULE:** 21 days (Principal Photography)**EST. BUDGET:** 100k - 1m**WRITER/DIRECTOR:** Jeff Thelen**PRODUCTION COMPANY:** Quixotic Arts www.QuixoticArts.com

QUICK OVERVIEW

"Funny Business" is a light comedy in the classic manner. It is inspired by "Design for Living" (1933), directed by Ernst Lubitsch, and hews close to the same basic plot line: a young, vivacious woman enters the lives of two artists, old friends sharing an artists' studio. Both men fall for the woman--and the woman falls for both of the men--whereupon trouble and comedy ensue. Into this mix is tossed the wealthy sensible fiancé, vying for the woman's affections with his money and solidity.

Who will the woman wind up with? Will she renounce her "Bohemian" independence for the security of a wealthy husband?

That is the basic formula, and it works because it is simple and light--and familiar.

"Design for Living" was based on the play by Noel Coward, although the film differs widely from the play. "Funny Business" duplicates this basic plot, more or less, moving it from Paris to Key West, and updating it to the modern era. The characters are significantly different as well, particularly the two artists, old friends who partly resemble Felix and Oscar from The Odd Couple.

MADELEINE MOSTACCIOLI (30) is a beautiful woman who has always nursed a desire to be a photographer, but who has never had to exert herself because, according to her, she has been pampered all her life--first by her father, then her boyfriends, and now her billionaire fiancé, Everett.

The film opens the day of her wedding at the Judge's chambers when Maddy cannot find a parking spot...

MADDY

I didn't mean to, I intended to go through with it, I did. He's a very fine man. A saint really. But, you see, I couldn't find a parking spot at the courthouse, so I drove around looking for a space--and the more I drove, the more I thought, and the more I thought, the more I drove--until, before I knew it, I ran out of asphalt, and here I was, a runaway bride.

She ends up in Key West ("the end of the road"), and finds a room to rent with Brutus and Ziggy, two very different artists who live together in a crummy studio.

Maddy gives herself until her 30th birthday to prove herself as an artist--a mere six months to become a self-sustaining photographer--before she runs out of money and has to crawl back to Everett and a life of solid, numbing comfort.

Maddy goes straight to work, and she is happy in her new independent life as a photographer of palm trees and pelicans, and as a muse and inspiration to Ziggy and Brutus.

But first, the three agree to some ground rules not to engage in any "funny business..."

MADDY

Which leads me finally to the big no-no. Let's get this out of the way right up front, here and now. For this to work, for us to live together in peace and harmony, for us to thrive as productive comrades in art, our arrangement must be *strictly business*.

BRUTUS

Absolutely.

ZIGGY

But what if--

MADDY

No ifs, ands, or buts. You are both darlings, even Brutus. I adore you both, even Brutus, and we've only just met. So it is imperative we agree to the rules of engagement. There must be a line in the sand, which we must not cross.

BRUTUS

The Rubicon.

MADDY

To be exact, none of this, and none of that--and never, ever *any of that*. Am I clear? Do I make myself plain? You dig?

BRUTUS

I dig.

Needless to say, both men fall for Maddy, and she falls for them, each in his own way.

Tensions mount, the air crackles with suspicion, fists fly.

So that when her birthday does arrive, the studio is a war zone, Brutus and Ziggy's friendship is in ruins, and Maddy sneaks off in the middle of the night, back to Everett, a failure as an artist and as an independent woman...

BRUTUS (40) is a classic sculptor in marble. He is not the stereotypical sensitive artist. He is a huge man, a bull, a boxer, a bruiser, a loud-mouthed bully--but with the soft-buttery soul of a saint. All callouses and leathery exterior, Brutus resembles Hemingway--except he cannot tolerate cruelty to animals (He lives and sleeps with six stray dogs.)

BRUTUS

I'm not a fan of fur.

MADDY

Oh, are you one of those?

BRUTUS

I don't know what one of those is. I just can't abide cruelty to animals. It's a thing.

MADDY

You have a lot of things.

BRUTUS

I don't care if people suffer-- some people, most people. But dumb brutes are different.

ZIGGY

Cause they're dumb.

BRUTUS

Right.

A moment.

BRUTUS

Mink. Ermine. Sable. Rabbit. Seal. Beaver.

ZIGGY

Rats?

BRUTUS

Rats? Who gives a damn about rats? Rats were made to suffer. They can all go to hell!

MADDY

Do you wear leather?

BRUTUS

I like leather. I like the smell, you know? Every now and then, I like to put on my cowboy boots and my leather coat and go downtown and eat a great big steak.

MADDY

Me too.

ZIGGY

I like silk. It's so soft and shiny.

BRUTUS

Silk's alright. I mean, c'mon, they're worms. I'm not Gandhi, for God's sake. I'll stomp on a cockroach as fast as the next girl.

MADDY

You surprise me, Brutus. You're a lot more complicated than you appear.

BRUTUS

"I am vast. I contain multitudes."

Despite the fact he has been married four times, Brutus blushes like a virgin around women. Maddy is no exception. He seems to barely tolerate her presence, and is very resistant to her joining them at the studio...

BRUTUS

Alice Needlemeier.

Ziggy flinches as if stung.

ZIGGY

Alice Needlemeier?

BRUTUS

Alice Needlemeier.

ZIGGY

What about Alice Needlemeier?

BRUTUS

Have you forgotten so soon?

ZIGGY

Remind me.

BRUTUS

It was exactly one year ago today that Alice Needlemeier invaded our quiet, peaceful, productive lives and after a mere two weeks--ten days that shook the world!--she left it a war zone!

ZIGGY

You exaggerate, as always.

BRUTUS

Do I? Do I, Zig? Let me remind you.

ZIGGY

Don't.

BRUTUS

For almost a year afterwards you produced nothing. Not a thing. Not a sketch, not a single pelican. And I lost four commissions because I didn't have the strength to get out of bed.

ZIGGY

You were drunk.

BRUTUS

I was drunk. And so were you. And it took months to sober up, to rebuild, to re-establish trust and comity, to put our household back in some semblance of order, to get us back on our feet and become productive citizens again.

ZIGGY

Trust and comedy?

BRUTUS

Comity! The wounds inflicted by Alice Needlemeier may never fully heal.

ZIGGY (35) is a painter, specializing in cheap watercolors of pelicans which he sells to tourists. He has no real ambition to be "a great artist." He is happy.

He is Jack Lemmon to Brutus's Walter Matthau. Ziggy is the sensitive soul--very eager, upbeat, flighty, agile, forever cheerful, a puppy wagging his tail frantically.

The two men, despite their years together, resemble the Odd Couple: the loud gruff Brutus and the neurotic Ziggy, unhappily content in their life together...

31.0 EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Carrying bags of groceries and flowers, Brutus and Ziggy walk up the sidewalk toward home, six dogs on a leash. Brutus carries a potted palm tree with a ribbon.

The dogs sniff for a good place to go.

ZIGGY

I really should have been gay.

BRUTUS

I shoulda been a dog.

ZIGGY

I was dealt all the right cards. I'm sensitive, bookish, artistic, considerate, smart. I am the complete opposite of you.

BRUTUS

I am so tired of going to the bathroom. Every day it's the same old boring Vaudeville routine.

ZIGGY

All my life, everyone tried to convince me I must be gay. The kids in school, my priest, my shrink, my mother, her friends. They all said, "Ziggy, you're so gay!"

BRUTUS

For a dog, going to the bathroom is the highlight of their day. They sniff around and around, looking for just the right spot. It's serious business.

ZIGGY

The unfortunate fact is that I love women. Inside and out. I'm sorry, but I can't help it. So sue me!

BRUTUS

A dog has no ambition in life except finding a solid piece of earth to water.

ZIGGY

Whatever happens, Brutus, promise me this.

BRUTUS

A good patch of grass is all that's really important in life.

ZIGGY

Brutus.

BRUTUS

Woof.

ZIGGY

Brutus, promise me we won't let this Maddy business ruin our friendship.

BRUTUS

Do we have a friendship to ruin?

ZIGGY

I always thought so.

BRUTUS

Okay then.

A moment as Ziggy registers this.

ZIGGY

Never mind! I don't want to be
your friend.

BRUTUS

Okay.

A moment.

ZIGGY

Eight years! Eight years is
enough!

BRUTUS

Will you pipe down? We're not
at home, you know...

Ziggy falls instantly in love with Maddy and he doesn't try
to hide it--his heart is an open book--but he does
reluctantly agree to abide by "the rules."

But rules, as everyone knows, are made to be broken...

FILM NOTES

"Funny Business" reflects my love for the great comedies of 1930s and 1940s, the golden age of Hollywood. It is patterned on "Living by Design"--a frothy comedy--with a few extra elements from screwball and some of the inanity found in Preston Sturges' films.

It is in many ways not a modern movie. Sexuality is suggested rather than openly shoved in the audience's face. Toilet jokes are excised. Cursing is limited to a few venal exclamations.

We may even shoot it in black and white with an academic frame to acknowledge its classic roots.

"Funny Business" is a simple film, by the formula, and doesn't aspire to do anything more than to delight and entertain.

It was written for low-budget, with three main characters in a single location (the artist studio) for nearly 75 percent of the film. Although a few exteriors will have to be photographed in Key West (or a stand-in), the majority of the film can be shot in Atlanta, our home base.

Its humor rests on (hopefully) witty dialog and repartee. It resembles a stage-play in that way, and in a few long static scenes. But I think there is more than enough dynamic, visual elements to make it cinematic as opposed to a "filmed play."

Needless to say, its ultimate success will depend on appealing actors with a fine sense of comedy...