

Last Hand

Genre: Drama with family and thriller elements

Format: Feature, 99 pages

Nutshell: **21** but with the father/daughter of Moze/Addie from *Paper Moon*.

LOGLINE: A young female prodigy blackjack dealer enlists the help of her recently paroled gambling-addicted father to become the one thing the Vegas casinos fear – a winner.

OVERVIEW - My father is a gambler; he spends 2-3 days a week at the Indian casinos and made choices that hurt me. Like my protagonist, KIMI, I don't gamble, but gambling fascinates me, so I learned everything I could about blackjack, including how to count cards. **Last Hand** is a father/daughter story with the classic theme of survival as Kimi struggles to pay her rising rent, but, like the alcoholic bartender, she needs to prove she's not addicted to gambling by working at a job she loves and does well - dealing blackjack. Kimi harbors resentment toward her father and is quick to anger, often directed toward cheating gamblers. That temper is sometimes misdirected toward the two life-encrusted old codgers who manage her apartment complex and spend their days as her regular customers at the run-down casino where she works. Kimi desperately wants a better-paying job at a super casino, but her father's legacy keeps getting in her way. Set in the exciting world of Las Vegas, Kimi knows her recently paroled father can teach her what she needs to win a million dollars in an upcoming blackjack tournament. Kimi doesn't consider the contest gambling, but in the end, she takes the same risks as a gambler to get revenge for the villain, ARNIE, who wrongfully put her dad in prison. The tone is suspenseful, with warmth from the mending father/daughter relationship, but kept light with a sprinkling of humor from the two old friends of Flip, MORT, and SAMMY.

OTHER CHARACTERS

Pokey – Kimi's best friend, a smoking hot cocktail waitress, helps Kimi get an audition at her super casino.

Tommy – the gorgeous bartender and target of Kimi's affection.

Brad - an agent from the gaming commission who looks the other way while Arnie launders money for the thug, George, who threatens Flip's life.

Young Kimi and Ama – Six-year-old version of Kimi in the first few pages with her Cherokee mother, who is deceased in current times, but Kimi quotes her mother's proverbs.

Summary

An anxious little girl, KIMI, dressed in her birthday finest, waits in Circus Circus for her father, FLIP, a blackjack dealer. Just as her mother, AMA, starts to write him off as a "no show," Kimi spots a clown struggling to climb the stairs in his size twenty shoes and jumps into his arms. Pretending he's frustrated that his little girl saw through his disguise, Flip is proud of his daughter's keen ability to "smell" a poser. She's a prodigy at counting cards when playing blackjack. It's a heartbreaking moment later when the local police arrest her father for stealing while dealing blackjack to cover his gambling debts.

Fifteen years later, Kimi is a blackjack dealer at an off-strip grind joint. She hates cheaters and often loses her temper, but she's proud that she can work at something she is good at - and not be a gambling addict like her parents. She dreams of getting a job at one of the glamorous casinos on the strip, but those big shiny places only hire graduates of dealer school with years of experience - or someone with the right connections. She doesn't make much at her crummy job, then discovers her rent is doubling. It is a climactic moment when Kimi finds out from the apartment managers, SAMMY and MORT, that her dad is out of prison and has been subsidizing her rent. These old friends of FLIP from his gambling pre-prison days have been watching out for Kimi and her now-deceased mom ever since Flip went to prison. They want to tell Flip that Kimi now knows, but Kimi doesn't want anything to do with her father, who chose to gamble and fuel his addiction.

But there is a whiff of victory for Kimi when her best friend, POKEY, gets Kimi an audition. But it was a false victory when the casino manager, ARNIE, sets her up for failure by hiring a drunk to harass her. Angry, she confronts him and slowly recognizes him from her childhood – he’s her father’s former boss who had Flip arrested. Arnie accuses her of hanging out at his casino for the past few years - just like her father - to get revenge. A shocked Kimi forces Sammy and Mort to help her track down her father, demanding to know how long he’s been out of prison and following her. He admits that he’s kept his distance out of respect for her mother’s wishes for the past few years but helped with expenses. When her temper cools, she decides to give her father a second chance in exchange for his help getting her another audition at a super casino and preparing her for it.

The journey toward reconciliation begins, but another setback – being Flip’s daughter in a town where Arnie has so much influence means Flip’s friend backs out. Flip comes up with another option – Arnie’s casino is having a blackjack tournament, and the winner walks away with a million dollars. Kimi refuses - she doesn’t gamble, but if she saves up enough, she can get into dealer school, change her name and continue her dream. A total reversal happens when her boss hears about her applying for dealer jobs all over town, and with renewed pressure from Arnie, he fires her. There is no going back – she’s lost the one thing she counted on – being a dealer. Desperate for money for a fresh start, she agrees to enter the tournament and give Flip one more chance. He gives her the money for the entrance fee and coaches how to win.

With a montage, we see Kimi move from table to table - winning easily as she advances to the semifinals - the last five tables, and the winner from each play in the final round for the million. But danger lurks as Tommy tells her that Arnie has a video of her father gambling the past week and plans to have him arrested. Kimi realizes that is why she hasn’t seen her father during the tournament. He’s run off again. She shakes off her emotions of anger and hurt, knowing that she has to concentrate. She makes it through the semifinals, much to the dismay of Arnie, who had stacked the deck against her, but it is a short-lived victory as Arnie takes her to another of the five final tables and shows her that instead of her father fleeing - he is playing in disguise. Knowing that he has crushed Kimi, Arnie takes Flip to his office and makes a deal with him to play in the finals to ensure Kimi loses. The last few hands start with Kimi, Flip, and another player, SLIM. It looks like Slim has won until Kimi exposes him as an employee to the gaming commission official, BRAD, who has been working with Flip to expose Arnie’s money laundering scheme. Kimi asks why Flip never told her that he was innocent – and he replies that it would have put her in danger and he was guilty of being a gambling addict. Since Slim and Flip were ineligible players, Kimi was the last player with chips and won the million dollars. Brad gives her his card and assures her he’ll ensure she gets a dealer job anywhere she wants. With a twist, in the end, she uses the money as a downpayment on her old gambling joint. Kimi and Flip have a ways to go before becoming a close father and daughter again, but she decides her father’s legacy has nothing to do with her destiny.

About Sandi Jerome: I am a non-WGA graduate of the UCLA Advanced Screenwriting program with an animated Sci-Fi script being produced by BlackOrb Studios. I recently sold my software company, and I’m living my dream of being a full-time screenwriter. I write kick-ass female-driven scripts; two were finalists in Nicholls, and four were finalists at The Austin Film Festival and other contests. I am a Cherokee fellow in the 2023 NAMA Feature Film Lab <https://nama.media/native-american-feature-film-writers-lab-main/>. See Pitch Decks for my scripts on InkTip, my website, or email me.