

Off With My Head

by Hannah Louise Shearer

Whenever you have a negative thought, you say 'cancel-cancel' and the thought disappears. Actually, it reminds me of my mother spitting 'pooh, pooh, pooh' when she wants to keep God from hearing.

A very prominent, very successful screenwriter told me recently he never reads the trades or anything that has to do with the business of the business. It makes him nervous. He doesn't want his creativity affected by the 'reality' of the industry. Him, three big hits later, nervous about what 'they' are saying out there.

Maybe I should have shared with him the positive thinking techniques I learned from the 'Silva Mind Control Course' years ago. Whenever you have a negative thought, you say 'cancel-cancel' and the thought disappears. Actually, it reminds me of my mother spitting 'pooh, pooh, pooh' when she wants to keep God from hearing.

So I'm sitting in my home office, armed with techniques to keep the state of the industry, and my own emotions, from affecting me. I just 'cancel-cancel' the negativity away. It helps that I just came back from my karate class where I broke boards for the first time—I'm feeling confident.

I sit down with my spec script. I'm deep into rewriting the second line of the first page.

"EXT. MT. MASSIVE - EARLY MORNING: Laurie's strong hands strain for the next opening, the next handhold. She grasps a crevice."

Then Nacio the mailman delivers the trades and a film magazine.

Front page of *Variety*: producer Arnold Kopelson just had *Dead Reckoning* rewritten to star Steven Seagal.

In the original draft, the protagonist was a woman. Geena Davis was very interested in the part.

Kopelson says "...practicalities came into play on this project...but I want to make one thing clear...We're not saying Geena Davis can't open a movie...It's just the revised role and script for this budget means that Seagal is right for the project. The revised version is the superior script." Oh.

I guess studio wisdom says audiences won't watch women protagonists in big-ticket movies. Especially in an action picture. I argue with Kopelson in my head. Let's talk turkey here, Arnie (no, not *Hudson Hawk*—that's a big budget male action picture already). Kopelson does not argue back. I love winning.

I decide I need to skim the film magazine to get back into the mood to write. It quotes Glenn Close:

"I think women will always be problematic in film because it's a male-oriented and largely male-run business. They don't know what to do with us in life, so why would they know what to do with us in film?" Oh my God, she's right.

I throw both articles across the room. Arnie lands on a rhyming dictionary; Glenn, face down in the peach potpourri. It's definitely time to write. A voice in my head shouts that a protagonist named 'Laurie' won't play in the men's room. Just write!

"EXT. MT. MASSIVE - EARLY MORNING: Mike's strong hands strain for the next opening, the next handhold. His fingers grab a crevice."

The phone rings, interrupting my process. It's a writer friend, upset after a conversation with his female agent. She tells him Brandon Tartikoff's mission to 'youthify' Paramount has now caught on all over town, even though Brandon's become an over-40 producer. She says my friend has to lose weight. He has to dye his hair. He has to shave his beard, it makes him look older. I mention to my friend maybe he should get rid of his agent instead of his beard.

I start to write again. Dye your hair. Shave your beard. Youthify Paramount.

"EXT. MT. MASSIVE - LATE EVENING: Mike's young, strong hands grab Tiffany's butt as he climbs below her."

The phone rings again. It's *my* agent. Forget this coming of age stuff. The only thing they're buying is thrillers. *Basic Instinct* type thrillers. Give it some thought.

"EXT. MT. MASSIVE - VALLEY - NIGHT: The Slasher silently climbs down behind the cabin. Through the window he watches the scared, cold teenagers huddle nude near the fire..."

Jeanne from City National Bank calls. Just a little reminder my balloon payment is due next week.

"EXT. MT. MASSIVE - DAWN: Mike slides, no, no, *jumps* off the side of the cliff."

I climb into bed and pull the covers over my head.

The next day Nacio the mailman brings me a large green envelope stamped 'residual.'

"EXT. MT. MASSIVE - EARLY MORNING: Laurie's strong hands strain for the next opening, the next handhold."

Back to my own basic instinct.

Nacio rings the bell a few minutes later. Sorry, he forgot my trades. Sixteen picture deals, not one of them mine. Along with an envelope reminding me it's time to renew.

Cancel-cancel.

Hannah Louise Shearer has written and produced television series, MOVs and miniseries.

"Muse-ings" is an ongoing colloquy on the creative process coordinated by Hannah Louise Shearer. Inquiries about writing for this column should be directed to Ms. Shearer through the Journal.