

Editor's Note: Mark Leslie submitted chapters 9 and 10 of *A Canadian Werewolf in New York* for Mick Halpin's comment. I have inserted Mick's comments in bold at various points in Mark's text for easy referral. --PB

A Canadian Werewolf in New York Chapter Nine

"Andrews, you're such an ass," Gail said, seeing that I'd noticed the ring and was shocked. "A sweet, lovable, stupid ass. As I told you last night, his name is Howard. I met him about six months after you and I broke up.

Mick says: Remove the diminishers. Instead of "I met him about six months after you and I broke up," have Gail say "I met him six months after you and I broke up."

He asked me to marry him two weeks ago today." She stepped back and sat in the armchair again.

Mick says: Chapter Nine opens with "'Andrews, you're such an ass,' Gail said." Is this a direct continuation of the scene where Gail was introduced? The one that ends with our hairy hero declaring: "I was never unfaithful to you"-?

If so, why a chapter break? Mary Higgins Clarke writes very short chapters, and the "just one more..." effect generated in readers keeps pages turning and turning. That effect sells her a great many books, but I don't recall that the earlier excerpts of ACWWINY took this approach. Providing a mix of relatively short chapters and long chapters can be good, but do make sure that lengths are not horrendously uneven when performing your "final format" edits.

For instance: the break between chapter nine and ten is not necessary. Chapter nine closed with Andrews thinking in the shower. Chapter ten opens with him drying off and dressing after completing his bathing. No change of location, no change of point of view, nor time... a little section break (dropping down a line and centering a # or three) would provide all the breathing space a reader needs. Even that might not be necessary: the two could flow directly into one another with nothing more than a paragraph break.

"And what the hell are you wearing anyway?"

I stood up and then looked down at my clothes. Oh yeah. I'd completely forgotten about that. That was certainly one thing that I always appreciated about Gail -- she could take an uncomfortable situation and quickly switch topics to ease me my embarrassment.

"Let me get changed," I said.

The flash of understanding finally rang on her face. "Oh, you're just getting back from last night, then, aren't you? You haven't been home since last night's full moon escapade, have you?"

Mick says: Remove the diminishers. Several sentences can have their "And" trimmed off the front, their "have you?"s lopped off their tail.

I smiled sheepishly at her, then moved into the bedroom calling out: "Let me get cleaned up, okay?"

I took off the dress shirt I'd been wearing and let it fall to the carpet.

Mick says: I recommend rewriting certain phrases to add specifics. For example, "I took off the dress shirt I'd been wearing..." What make? What color? Seville Row or Aisle 3 at Wal-Mart?

Then I removed the jeans, seeing evidence that they'd been chaffing me pretty badly, especially given the fact that I hadn't been wearing any underwear.

Mick says: Instead of "Then I removed the jeans, seeing evidence that they'd been chaffing me pretty badly," just provide "evidence that they'd been chaffing me badly." Better yet: add other senses. At the sight of the injury have its raw, scraped feeling made conscious to the poor man. Have the red flesh ooze and sting. Let readers feel it.

From the other room she raised her voice so I could hear her better. "You don't remember seeing me last night, either time, do you?"

Either time? I had no idea what she was talking about. "No," I opened my dresser and picked out a cotton golf shirt.

"And you have no memory of the time when you're a wolf then?"

I fished a pair of boxer shorts out of my top drawer and selected a pair of khaki shorts. "Uh, no."

Mick says: Be specific. "I fished a pair of boxer shorts out of my top drawer..." What kind of undies would he select in Gail's presence?

While on the subject: why wasn't he wearing any underwear-? It may be a good idea to mention whether or not he remembers dressing in the clothes that he was wearing. (If he did remember putting his good silk boxers on last night, and now they and they alone are missing- wouldn't that be a mystery fit for a crime fic writer? Who got them off him?)

While the mind is here in the gutter: I recommend offering a physical description of the dude's manly body while he is showering. Chicks dig descriptions of muscles, so maybe they can be worked into the narrative? *"Safely behind frosted glass and a locked bedroom door, I flexed my tanned pecs, let water splash off rock-hard delts. I'd been working out for the last three years. Had Gail noticed? What did she think? She hadn't mentioned anything, though I knew that my vein-crossed bicep had been visible through the ripped sleeve. She hadn't said anything. It must be this Howard chump, this fiancé- the standard she was now judging all men against. Maybe he was so pumped, it made me look less than average. I'd let my abs slide. Shit. There was still definition there, but no six-pack. She'd have liked that. Gail. Shit, this was Gail just outside...!"*

"I figured as much." She mumbled something else that a normal person wouldn't be able to hear but which I could pick up quite easily. I think she was testing me. "Then let me catch you up on the fact that we already had a brief discussion about this last night."

"Okay. I'll be right out. Let me take a quick shower first, okay?"

Mick says: After retreating into his bedroom to change, don't simply have Andrews call, "Okay. I'll be right out. Let me take a quick shower first, okay?" Inform readers why he supplemented his original plan, and use this opportunity to add another sense. *"As I lifted my arms to pull the rags of my Moxy Fruvous tee shirt over my head, woah! A wolf's enhanced sense of smell can be a curse. Even Gail's normal human nose must have been smarting from my pits. "I'll be right out, Gail. Let me take a quick shower first, okay?"*

She agreed and I could hear her fiddling with the doors of the

stereo cabinet. By the time I'd turned the water on, I could hear the steady beat of John Cougar's "Hurts So Good" -- Cougar or Mellancamp, or whatever he was calling himself these days, had always been one of her favourites.

As I showered I must have turned red, and not just from the hot blast of the water hitting my body. Red from embarrassment.

I'd just made a fool of myself in front of Gail, but, in that manner that she had, she'd allowed an out and quickly changed the course of the conversation. She was a very special woman that way. Oh, who the hell am I kidding -- she's a pretty special woman in many ways.

And it was funny that, as soon as we'd taken care of the initial business, and getting across a few details like "I'm a werewolf" and "I'm engaged to another man" we'd easily slid into the comfortable types of conversations we used to have.

There was another deep and mournful pang in my heart at the thought that she was so close, just in the next room, yet so far away from me at a deeper level. I turned to let the hot water pound against my face.

I didn't realize the depth of how much I missed her until seeing her again.

But she'd mentioned that we saw each other last night. And I had no memory of that. It must have been some time between my walk up Fifth Avenue and when I got to Central Park.

Mick says: Be specific. "But she'd mentioned that we saw each other last night. I had no memory of that." What does he remember? Show us what racking of a brain looks like.

I rushed through the rest of the shower, eager to find out the details of last night from her.

Chapter Ten

When I'd finished drying off and dressing, I walked out of my bedroom to an empty room. Cougar's CD was still playing, now on "xxxx".

But Gail was nowhere to be seen.

The mystery writer in me, of course, immediately suspected foul play. But I hadn't heard anything amiss while in the shower. And there was none of the sour sweet smell of sweat or angst in the room to indicate that something foul had occurred here.

She was just gone.

I looked around. No note, nothing.

Gone. Just like before.

I quickly rushed to the door, looked out into the hallway. Her scent was still lingering there, both the scent of her earlier arrival and the more recent scent of her departure. My own scent was there too, but I've long since learned to block that out. And there was no other scent in the hallway -- meaning, to me, that she wasn't abducted or dragged out of my apartment unwillingly. No, she'd left of her own volition. I considered following the easy trail she'd left. But, if she'd wanted me to, she'd have left a note, wouldn't she?

Mick says: Segueing neatly into my major recommendation: how does he feel about this woman? He sees her and "...we'd easily slid into the comfortable types of conversations we used to have." Is there anything stronger than that? Isn't he ripped open by seeing some other chump's rock weighing down her ring finger?

Final point: Gail mysteriously disappears. Good stuff! It might be an engaging clue if she left something behind. A handbag that is clearly not Gail's, a cell phone with a cryptic text message displayed, maybe a black statuette of a Maltese falcon. (OK, not the falcon. That's been done, and originality is golden.) Wouldn't that be cool if Gail left some curious item that will raise questions and no doubt reveal its importance later in the novel? Just a thought.

Oh, there was some good stuff in these chapters, too. Moved the plot forward. But I'm here to challenge you, Mark, not be all back-patty and weepy eyed and shit.