

Mick Halpin's Feedback on the "Scene with Gail" from *A Canadian Werewolf in New York*

Compliments!

Many thanks for this scene with Gail. I found it enjoyable, more rich with detail and heavier with emotional impact. My interest is peaked and then maintained.

Some concerns....

My main concern with this scene is its length. There are words, sentences and passages that can be cut. I've highlighted some of these, below. An innovative exercise for you to try: trawl through the manuscript looking for words and phrases to cut, sentence by sentence- backwards. Start with the last one, ala the film Memento. That way, every sentence is seen in isolation rather than quickly skimmed and slapped onto the pile of what you the reader already know.

There are phrases which you may also wish to reconsider. "wishing I could pull her close right there and *make sweet love* to her." Come on! That's overused and silly. It's also something romance-novelesque that blokes like me say only when messing.

"So! Ten-second Ted! That new bubblegum-popping loungegirl I saw you generously tipping last night at the pub! Didja get her back to the Bed of Ted and make sweet love to her? Only a little sweet love? Ah, with you we all hear it's always a little!"

Anyway, Michael the werewolf expresses himself thus three times in this scene, without a hint of irony or sarcasm. The big sap!

Finally: I'd have liked to have heard Gail speak more, especially in the flashbacks. It's hard to bring a character to life if we can't hear their voice, listen to their observations and reactions.

Jumping right into the specifics.....

"When I opened the door to my room," – I gather from later context that this scene takes place in The Algonquin. "my room" could mean many other things, though. Hotel room? Bed room? Austere cold-water flat where Michael does his writing? Set the scene at the start of a scene.

"I wasn't surprised to see Gail sitting in the armchair, despite the fact that we'd broken it off a few years ago." ---- "a few" is unnecessarily vague. Two? Six? Nineteen that have flown? I recommend sharpening this to a specific number or axing "a few" altogether.

"We'd broken it off" may just be Michael underplaying Gail's importance to him. It might be a good idea to use a term that is more tension-packed, more emotive. That's how Michael feels about this girl. Convey it! Or at least hint to the reader that Michael is playing it cool.

"She'd switched perfumes." From-? To-? The names alone might help readers catch a whiff of Gail's character.

"That.... curveball." – axe this sentence, leave the paragraph with the intimate detail that even X years later Michael has noticed the change in Gail's scent. That says it all.

"Knowing... ended." - axe this paragraph, too. Cut right to the encounter. Also: I found the "I wasn't surprised / it was surprising" confusing.

"Her heartbeat started racing the moment I opened the door." – good revealing detail, and a detail that a wolf would pick up.

The description that follows caught my interest. That's a lot from one glance! A few words can be changed or cut – "quite nicely" for instance- but I liked how it was stated: this is not characteristic of the Gail he knew. That plants the questions, "how did she used to dress?" and "what change in her personality is thus reflected-?"

One correction is necessary: "...her sunglasses tucked just above bangs that framed her cute face in a gently curving cascade down past her shoulders." Bangs that cascade down past her shoulders? This girl has one strange hairdo!

OK, so I am miss-reading, it's Michael's *gaze* that cascades down. Reword this passage so that no eejit can misread it and imagine that the girl dated Michael because she had a fringe that she couldn't see through.

"I'd been lucky to even be seen in her presence in the past, never mind sleep with her." --- Is "sleep with her" the height of all they reached?

"wishing I could pull her close right there and make sweet love to her."--- Sorry, I just can't see a man with the blood of a wolf in his veins expressing his desire this way.

"But underlying it, a fear of sorts." – Try to remove all diminishers such as "of sorts," "somewhat," "kind of," "sorta like" A hint of fear? A pang of fear, maybe?

"She was afraid. Afraid of me. Her heart raced even faster." Good stuff! But cut it there, cut right to her "I know the truth about you" line.

"throwing a copy of that morning's New York Press at my feet. "I know you're a werewolf." --- might be a good idea to let the headline of the paper tell the story, rather than have Gail speak it aloud?

"as if I would find my jaw there somewhere." – good.

"suddenly felt a pang in my heart." --- "felt a pang" may not convey the depth of Michael's emotion. Do you feel a snapped lawnmower blade "contact" your anklebone? When gasping desperately in sulpheric air, do you feel the volcano's hot coals "nestle tidily" within your nostrils? If your heart is levered from your chest with a kitchen spoon, is it merely an act of "decluttering" your ribcage?

Tome of Terror--- Tastes differ, but TOT sounds like a Hardy Boys mystery or a ride at Disney MGM Studios. I've enjoyed both at different times in my life, mind you. Everything has its place- so! What place do we want Michael's titles to put him in? The cappers of Michael's books will reveal a great deal about his personality, his audience, his outlook. Choose carefully! What type of man would write, for instance, a mystery called A Hungry Kiss? What kind would write The Corpse Vault? Who would pen The Mysterious File of Marquis Moneybone and who would spend years on The Gates of Heaven Budge an Inch? Whose dream is to write:

Moon Justice?

The Rights Fighter?

Terrible Boots?

Juan Honest Man and its sequel, Juan for the Money and then Juan Nation Under God?

Cries of the Dead?

Biggie and Kowalsky: The Ice Badge?

The Crutch Keeper?

The Miranda Band?

And a Desert Eagle Named Zeus?

Monkeyspanner?

"Gail was my field expert in the realm of the occult." --- Change this to start our flashback prior to their meeting. "Gail had been recommended to me as a field expert...."

"I'd gotten her number from Anne Lee" --- Stan Lee in drag?

"I remember walking to the appointment, a quick jaunt from the Algonquin ..." Axe "walking to the appointment "

"And I knew exactly who she was when I walked into the coffee shop. Even if she hadn't been wearing an outfit ..." --- axe "and" and "when I walked into the coffee shop. "

"a black cotton shirt with a lacy frill from her neck to the top of her cleavage, a black collar studded with silver rivets, not unlike a dog's, tight black leather pants and a shiny black leather jacket" --- nothing to comment on here, just wanted to copy it in and maybe hear this hottie read aloud on the podcast. Yowza!

"I didn't attribute..." start cutting here, end at "another table." We've just met his love and she's a babe. Don't slow things down with asides and diversions!

"from the photo on one of my book jackets" --- this can be updated to the Internet age buy mentioning M's website or YouTube promo clips. Be careful not to get too specific on today's trendy tech, though. That dates really poorly. Read Patricia Cornball's long passages professing that "UNIX is fun!"

"she was actively participating in the room's flow, in its very essence"-- good

"I remember reading once that..." axe this paragraph.

"As Hamlet told his dearest friend..." Come on! Enough Hamlet!! Get back to Gail's cleavage!!

"by the time I got to the table, I knew that we shared a special kinship, that, like me, she had a quick fix on the others we shared the coffee shop with." --- reverse that: "by the time I got to the table she had a quick fix on the others we shared the coffee shop with. We shared a special kinship."

"For example, I knew that she could tell that at the table in the corner the young short guy with the crew-cut hair, the sideburns that extended..." Man! You really did take my comments on the Scene With Mack to heart! As vivid as this coffee shop is, I would recommend that the description here is both abbreviated and the observations are demonstrated in conversation. Show don't tell, and keep it moving along. Also:

the more Gail speaks, the more she'll come to life. Dialogue gives great impressions of people.

Does Gail wear the dog collar in the fancy restaurant? Just wondering.

"I was extremely thankful for the timing of the cycle of the moon." -- One suggestion, maybe to come up in conversation: as an occultist, wouldn't G be impressed if M off the top of his head knew the phase of the moon?

"And again, we walked the entire evening, sharing intimate details of our lives." --- What details? Can plant good hints and questions here, defining character.

Speaking of character... does Gail always wear black? Her change in clothes in the present is immediately noticeable. Show us what she used to be like.

"where I was drinking a xxx... the moment suddenly right between us." Well, I suppose a drink called an xxx would have Viagra in it... &:)

Seriously: "smooch" is probably too cutesy for a superhero sex scene. Liven it up! If you're shy, I'll get you started: Gail shirt is black and lacy. Does G's underwear continue this theme? Give us some literary lingerie!

"making sweet love with this woman," --- man do I hate that phrase. It's totally wrong, especially if Gail is still wearing that dog collar!

"instead of working on my novel," --- details of the novel-? What were Michael's dreams, fantasies, points and observations before Gail? How have these things (conveyed in his writing) changed after meeting Gail? And, of course, let us know the title of this one. Still TOT?

Here are some more theoretical thrillers weighing down imaginary shelves. Try to picture each one, its blurb, genre and (most important) author photo:

Busted in the Blinding Lights

Once for the Devil, Once for Christ

The Johnny Walker Wisdom

The Angel of Compassion

Live at Eleven

Flame on Fifth Avenue

The River Tolls

Fiery Death and Bright Hateful Sparks

Sherriff Killer!

Heinz's 57

On Deaf Ears

The Orphan

Her Canine Teeth

Schizo Massive

Dogman

The Deal Maker

Lil' Miss Floozie Packs an Uzi

Twin Cities Twist

Murder Takes the Cake

(What fun! A game for insane librarians: I have included at least two actual titles in these lists of make-believe mysteries.... Which are real? Which are Mick's cracked examples? Be the first in your book club to know!)

"We'd broken up by the time I went into the next cycle."—Details!! Come on! Did he come home and find a voodoo doll pinned by its penis to his hotel door? Make it rich, emotive, memorable. Just mentioning, "oh, we broke up" is generic and lifeless as a McDonalds hamburger. Everyone's had dozens of those, feeling only mildly heartburned afterwards.

One possible strategy: mention that Mack notices a change in Michael's writing. Some comments on the style and mood changing, a deadline ignored. Rather than just say it himself, have it shown through the interaction of another character.

"For Christ sake, Michael, I run an occult shop..." – do occultists say "Christ sake?"

"I . . ." I began, not sure what I wanted to say. "I was never unfaithful to you, Gail." --- To be honest, this is not the strongest teaser to compel readers on to the next scene. How to fix that, I leave up to another Writing Show listener.

That's it! No more hypercritical hooey.

Best of luck, Mark! More cleavage, please. Erm, I meant to type "Gail." I'm curious to see what happens between her Michael. Once again, I'm looking forward to the continuing story of a Canuck who's gone to the dogs.