

Independent Assiduity, part one

by J. Mykell Collinz

This is me pitching a recently completed screenplay to a film producer at lunch the other day:

"A young woman follows her older brother into the army. She wants to escape her low paying food service job and she's attracted to the educational opportunities the army claims to offer. She's not an exceptionally large woman yet she excels at marshal arts, use of weapons, battlefield tactics. Our military is stretched so thin around the world, she's trained for combat and deployed with an infantry unit."

The producer responded without looking up from his plate:

"A women in combat? No, I don't like that, Jackie. Give me something else."

"I have a feeling about this one, Buzz."

"Okay, tell me."

"She finds herself up close in a firefight for the first time in her short army career when her infantry unit is ambushed while entering what appears to be an abandoned village. The firefight quickly concludes due to our military's overwhelming firepower and tactical supremacy. From the dead bodies of the attackers it's apparent the ambush had been carried out by young men and boys from the village. The other villagers, after being held hostage a short distance away by an armed resistance group, are freed to return and discover what our soldiers have just done to their children, and to their village. It breaks our heroine's heart to witness the older people's agony."

The film producer dropped his knife and fork on the table in front of him, brushed his lips with a linen napkin, looked up, and said:

"So it happens. Doesn't mean I wanna make a movie about it."

I continued undeterred:

"She returns to civilian life, haunted by combat memories. She drinks, takes drugs, stays high all the time. Prostitutes her body for money. Goes from being a heroine to using heroin."

"Why not write something good about our county's military for a change, Jackie?"

"The story is about her, Buzz, not about the military. The combat episode is a defining event in her life, a postscript to everything afterward, and it culminates in her death at the age of eighty nine when she finally dies at the end."

"Nobody wants to see a film like that, not these days. They want it a little more uplifting."

"Uplifting episodes abound throughout this story, Buzz. One of my favorites is when she finally overcomes depression and kicks her heroin habit using medical marijuana."

"That's uplifting?"

"In the context of the story, yes, audiences will empathize with the woman warrior and her disillusionment."

"How soon can I have it?"

"The screenplay's ready. I'm working on a storyboard, visualizing production designs for critical scenes. I'd like to direct this script myself, Buzz."

"You can't be serious."

"I'm serious, it's a comedy."

"What's comical about it?"

"The woman's journey. Her pursuit of spiritual redemption while following a path of worldly indulgence. Her heart's search for a saving wisdom. It requires a subtle nuance of expression. I should be the one guiding it through the filmmaking process."

"I'll check it out, think it over, let you know."

"Make snappy, please."

"Snappy be my middle name, you know that. By the way, Jackie, how are things going with you, how's your money holding up?"

"I'm good."

"What about doctor bills, pharmacy expenses, insurance payments? You're getting up there in age."

"Don't need insurance, Buzz, don't have a doctor, don't use prescription drugs. I've converted to medical marijuana."

"Come on, you can't be serious."

"I don't wanna be serious. Life's a comedy, a tragic comedy, so ironic all you can do is laugh. That's why laughing is the best medicine."

"Without a name director and well know stars, it's a risky proposition, you know that."

"You'll like the return on your investment, Buzz, I guarantee it."

"You guarantee it, huh? Is that some of your medical marijuana talking?"

"No, it's confidence in my ability to portray this material well enough to realize a profit on the business end."

"Confidence isn't enough to guarantee success, you should know that."

"It's a gut feeling, Buzz."

"It's more like talking out your ass, Jackie. Don't call me, I'll call you. Thanks for the delicious meal."

Hey, I'll go the independent route if necessary. Raise the money myself. The army training camp and the combat scenes will be the most expensive scenes to locate, organize, and shoot, although they are relatively short episodes in the film's overall timeline. I have a woman in mind to play the main character. She even has a young daughter who looks like her. I'm hoping the mother will allow me to use her daughter to play the part in an early childhood sequence. Meanwhile, my storyboard outline could evolve into a novel.

