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TO: Anne LeMieux
FROM: Linda Seger
RE: DO ANGELS SING THE BLUES

Introduction

First of all, let me mention how very much I enjoyed reading this book. Your writing is absolutely splendid, and it was such a pleasure to read. Your original way of describing events and feelings, your wonderful unique characters, your depth and insight into feelings and the "why" of actions - you have a real gift.

It seems that you also have excellent editors. I found their comments to be cogent and both conceptual and specific. I have also been blessed with a wonderful editor on my books - but others tell me that's not to be taken for granted.

I have made a few markings on the book. Sometimes my love of the writing would just cumulate so I had to say something (i.e., "what wonderful writing!") Other times, there might be a line that was not absolutely clear. Because there were so few of these, I thought I'd just mark them as I found them, since you were still doing book editing.

Adaptation Decisions

There are many decisions you could make with this adaptation - and many of them would be valid. At this point, you are making choices and figuring out what choices have the best chance of getting you a deal, and of also furthering your career. So, I first want to discuss some general choices to think about.

Technically, you wouldn't need to write a script in order to sell this for film or television. Executives and producers often read novels, and the novel is such a good read and a fast read, that anyone interested in a young adult story should be most willing to read this. In order for you to be considered to write the script, you could enclose a treatment about how this could be translated. I can't remember how many scripts you've written so far, but

if you had one or two to show as writing samples, you wouldn't need to write this one in script form. The writing samples, book, and treatment should convince them to let you write it.

The advantage of this approach is that you spend less time writing a script on spec which may not get made, which gives you time to write your next novel instead. IF this sells to a producer, you would then be paid to write the script. And, I'm not sure that this is going to sell as a script if there's not interest in the novel.

Of course, if you are very eager to write a script, then write it "for fun" because having the script may not make any difference in terms of a sale. Also take into consideration the career you already have as a young adult novelist. I can't remember how many novels you've published, but it does seem that you have a niche in the young adult market, and you could be developing a loyal readership. You have considerable talent in this area, and you may wish to focus on the novels, while not eliminating the possibility of a sale to t-v and film. But you won't be eliminating that possibility by building up your reputation in the young adult market. The more well-known you are in that market, the more likely it is that they will be very open to your works, and to you writing the script if you want to.

So - how you decide to proceed - treatment or script or just sending the manuscript to potential producers - is also dependent on how you see your career proceeding. Whatever you do - I hope you keep writing these young adult novels. You're just too good not to.

Secondly, think about your market. Although an after-school special is a possibility, those tend to deal with psychological and social issues, and this storyline doesn't quite seem to fit. There's a very small market with afterschool specials - I'm not even sure to what extent they are still doing them on television. You may want to explore that market by sending a manuscript to the few producers that do them (I think Scholastic Productions might still be doing some). Otherwise, your obvious market would be a market similar to MY GIRL, which did very well (which surprised many people, including the producers.) That film came out of Imagine Productions - Brian Grazer's and Ron Howard's production company. This kind of a story could be done low budget, and the youth and family market are growing. I don't know much about the young adult market, but find out who has done all these family films (even the HOME ALONE ones). You might want to work with Donie Nelson (phone is [redacted]) in order to have her help you research these markets. I may have mentioned her. She's [redacted]/hour and is a consultant

who helps writers break into this business. It would be a good use of your time to research these markets and then get the manuscript to interested parties.

Issues for the Adaptation

Although there are many potential choices, here are some key issues that suggest workable solutions.

I. Time Frame: Since most of the action takes place the senior year, this fits well to play most of the story within this 9 month time frame. The shorter the time frame, the more focused the story. Since there are some scenes that take place between age 10 and age 17, you could use a Pre-Credit Sequence of the Meeting of Theo and James when ten, and then begin the story, after the credits, with the senior year.

To do this, you could COMBINE a number of scenes and ideas. For instance, if you use a pre-credit sequence, you could establish some musical interreaction that happened when they were on that raft. Include the raft scene with the beginning, so you would have Theo take James to the raft, and maybe they sing on the raft before the police stop them, or maybe they pretend they're in a band - a kind of pretend 'jamming'. I think you could establish a special bond established at that moment, and that bond includes music. Then the police come for them, but just as they are going away from each other, there's a moment between them - humming the song they jammed to? singing a bar? some music that can be used as a transition to the present.

As you move to the present, there are a number of possibilities. I presume that the band has to form before the senior year, otherwise they couldn't be a viable band with just a month or two of practice. So, you might be able to use the Credit Sequence to establish both the friendship and the forming of the band. The obvious way is through photographs of Theo and James playing together, making music together, being with a band. Or you might use newspaper clippings, etc. Think of some less obvious ways since photographs can be over-used. You might be able to do something with music and live action as a MONTAGE. For instance, you could have a transition from the boys taking one last look at each other and maybe humming a song as they part in the pre-credit sequence (even if they're parting with the help of the police) and that song goes into the boys singing along with a recording (perhaps when they're 12) and then singing along with Danny and maybe Keith, perhaps, when they're 14, and then the actual movie starts when we see the band has been formed by the end of the credits, and it's now their

senior year.

These sequences have to be very tight - but you probably could do the pre-credit scene in about 3-4 pages, and then the montage in 2 pages or less.

It seems as if the two important elements that need to come in toward the beginning are the name of the band, and the love of Blues music. IF you do an opening montage with a few lines of dialogue here and there (perhaps 3-4 short scenes) you can show Theo sharing his discovery of Blues in these under-credit scenes, and then show the naming of the band. It might be that Theo shares the love of blues with the whole band, rather than just with James, so that this montage focuses on clearly setting up the band.

Then, since one of the selling points of your story is going to be the music, start the movie with the band playing right after the credits end - perhaps at the 8th grade graduation party. You can then add HUMOR, i.e., we see the band in Close-Up, playing its heart out, really rather good, and then we see (unexpectedly) the group of 13 year olds dancing to their music.

You can then establish that the group wants to break out of playing for 8th grade graduations, and so Act One can establish them trying a way to get known in a bigger way.

So, in this beginning, think about the time period and information that you need to cover in order to start the movie with the senior year, think about the humor and style of the piece, and think about keeping music to the forefront as a real selling point of this script. Also, you would establish a band that clearly has gotten started, they're good, but they need to go to the next level in terms of audiences and their work.

II. The Structure - The Plot: The story does break down structurally fairly well, with only some minor shifting. One of your main plotlines is The Band - and James finding his musical identity. Since the Climax is going to be more concerned about James continuing with his music, finding his voice after Theo's death, you will want to focus throughout on James' love for music that is probably greater than the love of the other boys. It's James that will continue as a musician - and there might be some build up of CONFLICT with the other boys who don't take it as seriously.

Structurally, you could then SET-UP the name of the band and the style of the band and the desire of the band to break out of small-time. During Act One, probably during

the Set-Up, they do the gig where they win at the Beach Club and the band gets their name on a bumper sticker, (which are then, perhaps, passed out throughout the Act, and throughout the story we see them on various cars. There could be nice opportunities for humor here.)

So, the end of the Set-Up could be winning this contest, perhaps even then given the invitation to perform at the Harvest Dance. So in Act One Development, we'll see the harvest dance.

IF you establish James investing a great deal in this band, being business manager, trying to work out how to get them bigger gigs, more opportunities, perhaps even seeing them as getting big after graduation and becoming a major band, THEN the 1st TURNING POINT could be the announcement of the Headhunter's Contest. Here the need for original material, and original songs, forces them to accept Carey's participation.

So, throughout Act One Development, you can focus on James' love of music, his passion about opportunities, his visions and dreams of this band, which really aren't shared to that same extent by the other guys. This doesn't need to be a major conflict, but just a bit of shading so that when James goes on with music at the end, and the other boys don't, it's been shaded in.

ACT TWO then can focus on them planning and then doing the demo tape, Carey finishing both songs, more practice and excitement over this Headhunter's contest, Carey's self-esteem perhaps getting better as her song is played (maybe the song is going to be played at Natalie's birthday party for the first time which would justify Carey being there) and then she really crashes after Natalie's cruelty which is both toward her and toward her song.

The 2nd TURNING POINT would be Theo getting grounded, they can't continue with the contest, the money is all wasted on the demo, the band is breaking up, and James' resulting anger and depression over this. You could continue with this throughline, though, of James' music, by having him, apart from the band, do some music. Whether it means that he listens to his father play, gets interested in jazz - some sense that he is finding that he can continue with his music without the band.

Then, the CLIMAX of Theo's death, is coupled with the stopping of his music - he puts aside his guitar(s), perhaps even packs up his music that has meant so much, etc. Then, with the gift from Theo, he's able to go on - finds some new music within him.

This plotline can be combined with a strong IDENTITY THEME - finding his musical identity - and also be combined with a FRIENDSHIP THEME - that Theo might, throughout, let James know that he's the best of them, he's the one that's truly talented, he's the one that can go on without them even though James sees his whole musical future tied in with the band. This would be similar to Chris' encouragement of Gordy in STAND BY ME in relationship to Gordy's writing.

You might even further clarify exactly what James' musical talent is. Is it composing? playing the guitar? a combination of many talents? Does he put together types of music in some new combination of tunes and harmonies? Does he actually have more talent singing than he thinks he has?

III. The Subplots. There are certainly many choices of subplots here. The most necessary are:

The Theo-Carey-James Subplot.

The Set-Up - they meet. James is unsure about Carey. Not happy about her getting in between his friendship with Theo.

Act One Development - Their relationship develops. We learn more about her backstory. Theo clearly cares for Carey, protects her against Natalie, etc.

1st Turning Point - the contest is announced. However, they need original music. Carey writes the tune, but James is jealous and unsure about her involvement with their band.

Act Two - Further development of problems of Carey and Natalie, Carey with her father, Theo siding with Carey to the extent of leaving Natalie's graduation party, etc. which leads further to James seeing Carey as getting in the way and being unsure about her.

2nd Turning Point - James breaks off all communication with Carey. Angry at Theo.

Climax - A reconciliation of James and Carey. New understanding from James as he recognizes Carey's grief as well as his own. And, maybe Carey says something to James that affirms his talent as a musician.

The James-Charlie-Allie Subplot.

Set-Up - Est. Allie as a girl "coming of age". James agrees to help Charlie learn guitar.

Act One Development - He begins giving Charlie lessons. It may be that James is more experimental with Charlie than with the band, or that James is more experimental and James learns something from Charlie which then helps him further formulate his musical identity.

1st Turning Point - Charlie comes to his house. Meets Allie.

Act Two - You might decide to build up Charlie's role a bit by allowing him to come to some of the parties to hear them play. He might then dance with Allie, we could see a growing affection between them.

2nd Turning Point - He leaves Anchor House. James gives him the guitar. You might consider having Charlie ready to leave Anchor House when James presents the guitar so this is on-screen action, rather than off-screen action.

Act Three - possibly James hears about the boyfriend returning. He is unsure whether to tell or not, but has promised Allie he wouldn't. Maybe he even tries to talk Allie into allowing him to say something. Maybe he decides he doesn't need to get involved - neither of them need to get involved. Maybe Allie thinks about telling, but James continues this attitude of "it's not our problem", in the same way that he has an attitude about not getting involved with love, etc. So, as James learns about Allie's willingness to get involved, and sees Theo's willingness to get involved with Carey as well as with the Bensons, James learns about love and about allowing others to affect him and touch him.

Climax - James goes to him in the hospital. Invites him to live with them. Perhaps suggests they'll play together - he has some new music he wants to show him.

Natalie-Carey Subplot.

Set-Up - Establish Natalie. Then establish that Natalie doesn't like seeing Carey with Theo at Harvest Dance.

On-going tension with Natalie.

1st Turning Point - Natalie jealous/angry that Carey wrote song that band will play at her party. Tells Carey to leave - doesn't want song to be played.

Act Two - Natalie at Christmas Party.

2nd Turning Point - Natalie mentions re Theo leaving and Theo's father getting the new job.

Climax - Natalie at funeral. Perhaps add some come-uppance for Natalie, i.e., Stones and James' parents comfort Carey, not Natalie, and make it clear who it was that Theo loved.

Your story can handle these subplots. You don't need the subplot with Sharon although you can imply that James doesn't want to get involved with women. If you don't show a specific person having rejecting him, you might show rejection from an early age that continues, i.e., it's the girls on the soccer team that call across the street and call him "fatty", therefore rejecting him and leading to this lack of desire to fall in love. So, even as he gets slimmer, or more confident, he continues to reject the idea of getting involved. It may be that Carey, at some point, says something about love to him, or that Allie says something. But you would carry through this idea with a few beats, showing his lack of desire to get involved.

Other Throughlines in the story can work well because they don't need to be developed as a subplot, i.e., the "Allie-Mom" arguments throughline, the "Carey drinks too much" throughline, the Benson throughline. All of these only need 3 or 4 beats throughout the story to work.

IV. The Theme.

Some of your choices about subplots will depend on your choices re the theme.

One of the themes is about IDENTITY, specifically MUSICAL IDENTITY. James has found his identity through the band, through his friendship with Theo, through other people's music. Probably, since James will end up alone at the end, you will want to establish some new musical identity for him that lets us know he'll be fine, his music will continue, and that he's very good and can go on. He'll be better because of what Theo offered him.

There's also a LOVE THEME. It seems that James has a few things to learn about love. He shies away from commitment, would rather play music than get involved. So one of the THEMATIC THROUGHLINES shows him willing to get involved and to give to others - to be involved with James, to be more sensitive to Carey and to Theo, to care more about Allie, to see Natalie more clearly. By observing the love relationships around him - Theo and Carey, the Bensons, Allie and Charlie (even if this one is somewhat platonic), and James' parents - he'll begin to see that it's not either-or with music, but both-and.

V. The Characters.

Your characters are very rich and interesting. There may be some small changes you want to make for the script.

IF you decide to have a bit of a romance of Charlie and Allie, you might want to increase Allie's age, perhaps to age 15. Dating is a distinct possibility, and certainly friendships with male, dancing and interest in a boy, etc. probably work a bit better at 15 than 14. I think the Allie-Charlie relationship has a nice contrast with the Carey-Theo relationship, so I see no problem with leaving it as a small developing romance.

Be careful that Natalie doesn't become the stereotyped bully. She's the only character you have that isn't quite as fresh as the others. Perhaps find some good quality that she has. Or give some sense of the motivation behind this meanness - getting approval of her parents? because she has such a crush on Theo? because of...? Or simply paint her in some very interest way - she's not so attractive? there's something unique about her style (an Annie-Hall style? always wears heels? something about her hair or style of clothes or affected speech or...?)

VI. Voice-Overs

I don't see any reason for voice-overs in this story. If anything, I'd advise against doing anything that makes this too "literary", too "bookish". The story plays well dramatically. It needs no sentimentality. I don't think we need to know that Theo dies up front. I don't even think you need to focus on "Theo's voice in his head". IF Theo is really a good friend, and really encouraging about James' music throughout, then we know that finding the harp will make him feel that, on some level, Theo is still with him, encouraging him. So the "voice in his head" really gets translated to Theo being encouraging about him throughout in the STAND BY ME kind of way. You might even decide that it's not the harp that gets sent to him, but a new guitar to replace the one that was broken by Charlie. Then, you'd build up, a bit, this whole thing of having given his favorite guitar away, and although he feels fine about it, he's clearly missing it on some level. And, when Theo lying for Carey has stopped his playing, then Theo will see James put aside his guitars, perhaps make some negative comment about not being sure if he should continue to play or if he's any good, or saying it's not the same - the band's not the same, the guitar's not the same, etc. So the ultimate gift to encourage James to keep playing really could be the new guitar from Theo. And, there's something to be said for having a last gift

affirm that long-term friendship, rather than focus on Carey at the end.

IN SUMMARY, I think that much of this structure will fall into place if you condense the beginning years, place the Headhunter contest as the 1st Turning Point, pull out the theme more about James' musical identity and his gifts, pull out the theme of Love more by showing James not wanting to get involved, make Theo more of an encouragement to James and have James a bit unsure about his talent with music, and then have the last gift be to James rather than to Carey.

Think of this as a musical low-budget market. That doesn't mean not going to the studios or any other possible market, but there's no reason for this to be an expensive movie, and that's a real plus commercially since it gives you many possibilities for buyers. You might want to look at some of the movies that have appealed to the young adult market - MY GIRL, SALSA, REALITY BITES, etc.

Good luck with this. It's such a pleasure to work with you and read such good writing!