# Detachment, Part Three, the Healthy Diva in Me

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I was going to write another impassioned column about Barak Obama and his official position concerning Israel (the party line: Israel is right every one else is wrong according to his website) but I have decided to let that go (for now). I believe he has to say that in order to get elected anyway. Instead I am going to write about the time I have been spending on a Bollywood esque/American film set and what I have learned about myself in the process, as well what has been reiterated for me about human nature.

About three weeks ago I was cast as "Athletic Mom" in a Bollywood spoof "Amar Ash and Anthony". It is basedwildly looselyon the classic "Amar, Akbar Anthony", a film I used to watch every time we stopped over in London to visit my cousins on the way to Bangladesh. They had it in their video collection. Even as a child I was struck by how a Muslim, a Hindu and a Christian could be brothers and love each other. This version is not about inter-religious tolerance and filial love. This is about poking good natured fun and celebrating the classic Bollywood films that influenced two generations of even South Asian Americans.

The director called me up and asked me to play a young mother of grown sons. That is the joke, that mom is impossibly younger than her three sons, two of whom she lost during a Walmart Labor Day sale in 1980. I read the script and agreed, though I did not immediately get all the film references.

I have been on a few film sets, including my own, where I was calling the shots, and each one is like a country unto itself with its own rules, regulations and culture and a special group of creative, sometimes talented, almost always wildly insecure and off kilter, citizens who have agreed to come together for that most exhilarating and arduous of tasks, filmmaking. I mean you really have to love the process to put yourself through it. Example: on Friday night, the director, assistant director, production manager, one of the actors, and producers all crammed together in a small one bedroom apartment in Harlem, New York with a dog, three cages full of birds and a first grader all night. This was our set and the call time for the next day was early enough that it made no sense for anyone to go home and come back. I was offered a chair or something to sleep in, and being older than a few of the cast and crew, and one of the stars and therefore, automatically, a diva, I declined (politely) and made my way to my niece's apartment and slept soundly until the next day. Not everyone on the set got a bed so I most assuredly made the right decision.

I walked on to the set not knowing what to expect, having never worked with this director before but this is what I have been observing: it is an atmosphere that is dominated by masculine energy and all that implies. Meaning that it is in turns, childish, sexist, silly, assertive, fun loving, and smelly. Ten hours of non-stop shooting under hot lights would make a saint smell, let alone mere mortal men. Throw into that mix, South Asian male entitlement and you got yourself a party. But not always for the women. Luckily there are some very, very strong, opinionated women besides myself on the set and we allow the masculine energy to spiral out of control for only so long.

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At one point I was waiting on the sidelines for the crew to finish shooting a scene and I made myself a cup of coffee. We were in the midst of snow storm and the production assistant could not make it to the set and so all the talent were more or less taking care of themselves. In between shots, the actor on whom the shot was focused kept making gestures to me to give him coffee. Standing next to me was a white male crew member also drinking coffee but this actor (desi) kept making gestures towards me. Not even asking, just flicking his finger. So I simply said to him, "I am not here to serve you." And continued to enjoy my coffee. Even after I said that to him he continued to ask me. Please understand, I am more than happy to make coffee for someone, but I felt strongly that this was inappropriate and when I saw he did not ask the male crew member to get him coffee I knew it was sexist, pure and simple. Now this actor is actually a very nice person, he is just clueless. I explained to him later that one cannot make flicking gestures at a fellow actor and demand things from them. Another actor, while I was sitting, waiting for a scene to start, stuck his hand in my pocket and start pinching me. So I did the only thing I could, I smacked his hand and glared at him and refused to talk to him or make sustained eye contact for the duration of the shoot. He got the point and now dislikes me energetically. But he got the point. And I am finally at a stage in my life where I don't need to be liked by silly men and women.