

BEST SELLER  
(former title: Book Show)  
by Joe Hanrahan

small table/2 chairs/books on table

(TALBOT on phone. AMY will enter during his conversation.  
He'll acknowledge her and finish call.)

TALBOT: No, that's not going to work. Not going to happen. Look, we have to have the author's photo on the inside back cover of the book. Has to happen. No we can't leave it blank and say anonymous. They'll think - especially with this book, that he's got some CIA connection or something, he's undercover. Yeah, it might give us a bump up front, but in the long run, it's not going to work. We have to have a picture of the author on the inside back cover, but not this author. I know he wrote the book. Have you read the book?  
No, I haven't read the book, but my assistant did, and she told me all about it. It's action-packed, blood-soaked, an explosion every other page, a revenge and rescue ex-Navy Seal Team Guys knocking down the enemy. All the violence any reader would want.  
Have you looked at the writer's picture. He looks like an intern barista at Starbucks! He looks about 12 years old. We can't have him on the book.  
Get me somebody else. An actor, a model, a construction worker.  
Somebody big and beefy.  
With a beard or mustache.  
Hey, and a scar would be good. Get back to me!  
(clicks phone off)

AMY: Mr. Talbot?

TALBOT: Yes.

AMY: Hi, I'm Amy Smith.

(after a few blank moments)

TALBOT: Oh, yes. Sit down.

AMY: Thank you.

TALBOT: Amy Smith with the...manuscript?

AMY: Yes.

TALBOT: Yes...uh-huh...

(he picks up manuscript, starts paging through it; increasing frowns, increasing murmurs; long long pauses, between murmur;. she starts filling in the pauses)

AMY: Yes. Yes.../I was so excited.../my first novel.../to get the call... /about it. /I'm so.../and to hear from your company.../I hear you're starting to do some exciting things...

TALBOT: What is this? (referencing manuscript)

AMY: What?

TALBOT: This. Is this a romance? A romance book?

AMY: Oh, no. No, no. It's not...well, there is a love story...

TALBOT: Yeah, I see right here. "She kisses him. Hard."

AMY: That's from when she was younger...a kind of a flashback, memory... her first love...

TALBOT: So is that it? The...young, first love story...but then...then...no more romance.

AMY: No...well, she does marry...later in the story...

TALBOT: So, romance?

AMY: Uh, no, actually, it's...(laughs a bit)...it's far from a romance. It is my first novel...but it is a serious novel. I joke that it's the "Great American Novel." But nobody really expects that...coming from a woman...

TALBOT: (long stare) So it's not...definitely not...not...a romance novel. NOT.

BEVERLY: No, no. NOT...at all. (laughs a bit nervously.)

(TALBOT laughs a bit with her, she continues)

TALBOT: Well, that's fucked.

(TALBOT gets up, drops book on the table, paces.)

TALBOT: (to himself) Damn. Damn it all! My life. My luck. Do you know how many romance novels were sold last year?

AMY: No, I don't...

TALBOT: 39 million. 39 million! That was up more than 50% from the year before.

AMY: My.

TALBOT: And you know what did it, huh? You know what did it. Pandemic. The Wham Bam Damn Pandemic. Romance was big before, but that just sent it through the roof.  
Damn!

(TALBOT collects himself, sits.)

TALBOT: I'm sorry. I've been combing the hills for a new romance novel, and I thought I had one here. (picks up manuscript again)

"Love In The Time Of Mania." The title..."Love"...almost sounds like a romance novel.

We could drop the "Mania." What...what do you think of..."Love In Time"? Or "Love Just In Time." I like that. Hey, there's that song...

AMY: No, you see...

TALBOT: (singing) "Just in time, I found you just in time..." We could do a video thing with the song...

AMY: Uh, maybe, see I'm using the Love in the title as a metaphor...not for romantic love but for a state of grace, a loving existential spirit that I feel is the only way to survive in these...maniacal times!

TALBOT: Mmmm. "Love In The Time Of Mania." I don't like it. Mania.. nobody likes mania...and love, hey if somebody buys it expecting a romance novel and then it's...whatever it is, that's gonna come back and bite us!

(drops manuscript)

AMY: I see...

TALBOT: But let's dig a little deeper. (picks up manuscript) So it's not a romance novel? Got it, got it!  
(paging through manuscript) What's this? Wait. "She felt like she had gone through a black hole, or something like it. Everything seemed different, strange."  
I like that, the black hole. So it's more science fiction.

AMY: Ah, no...

TALBOT: (Up) Do you know how big science fiction is? Like \$600 million in sales. And audiobooks? Science Fiction is the biggest genre in audiobooks - like a billion and a half in revenue. I think the "mania" stuff would work for us here.

AMY: No, no, the black hole thing, the feeling she had, is more...

TALBOT: Audiobook. And if the book takes off, and you become a hot name, you read the book yourself. People love that.

AMY: I don't...

(he gets up, brings manuscript around to her)

TALBOT: Here, just read this sentence I just read. Just let me hear it.

AMY: I...OK..."She felt like she had gone through a black hole, or something like it. Everything seemed different, strange."

TALBOT: Um...all right...again, but a little...a little more science fiction in your voice.

AMY: Science fiction in my voice?

TALBOT: You know, a little deeper, mysterious...out there!

AMY: (after a pause, reads again, badly) "She felt like she had gone through a black hole, or something like it. Everything seemed different, strange."

TALBOT: Well, that was a bad idea. Maybe we can get an actress who does Sci-Fi to do the audio book. Charlize Theron, or Jennifer Lawrence...

(Talbot paces, paging through manuscript)

AMY: (Up, proclaiming) This isn't a science fiction book. That section was just to emphasize how mixed up she was, confused, after she'd just heard this story about her family, something she'd never heard before, and...

TALBOT: Ok. Ok. Family. Family, you said OK, now maybe we're getting somewhere. What story? About the family.  
(paging through book) Where is that?

AMY: (sits again) Uh, Well...she finally hears about her father...

TALBOT: Who's her father?

AMY: Uh, her dad, he...

TALBOT: So, was he in politics?

AMY: Poli...? No...

TALBOT: Was he some kind of a big deal Big businessman or something? What?

AMY: No, no...

TALBOT: Cause those are hot right now. Tell-all books, name names. If you came out about family scandals and stuff...

AMY: No, there wasn't scandals...

TALBOT: No scandals. So your father...did he abuse you?

AMY: NO!

TALBOT: Fuck. Ok. (sits) So what's your father's story?

AMY: He...my dad...he...it's there in the book, disguised a bit, of course, but... I didn't know, but he'd been married before, before my mom...

TALBOT: He what? He was married before your mother? Is that all? Christ. So, what did he do? What was his job?

AMY: He was just a teacher.

TALBOT: A teacher. Did he abuse his students?

AMY: He was a college teacher.

TALBOT: Well, he could. (pause, thinking) Was he cancelled...because of his statements about race or Israel...?

AMY: No! He's retired now.

TALBOT: OK. OK. Damn. Retired, thanks a lot, Dad! Maybe you can let him know that how much his refusing to abuse you hurt your career.

(pages through book) Wait, wait. This here..."She watched him from her car. He didn't know she was there. But she could see him going into the apartment."

OK, OK...We may have something here. "He didn't know she was there." So she was spying on him...she...what's her name...this character?

AMY: Uh, Allison.

TALBOT: Is Allison a spy? Is that her real name? Allison?

AMY: No...it's not real...this is fiction...

TALBOT: A fake name. OK. So who was she spying for? The U.S.?

AMY: She's not...

TALBOT: Is this is a period piece? World War II? Lots of great spy stuff in World War II. Or maybe Cold War?

AMY: No, not period...well, there are a few flashbacks...

TALBOT: Flashbacks. To...wait, look, right here! "She felt like a prisoner." Was she in prison. Maybe, Siberia...

AMY: No, she wasn't a prisoner. She just felt trapped in a job.

TALBOT: What kind of job?

AMY: She was just an office worker, but she wanted...

TALBOT: That's no good. Office. You never see spys in an office. You know what I think might be due for a comeback? James Bond!

AMY: There are still...James Bond movies...and somebody's writing new books...

TALBOT: Not James Bond James Bond...but something like him. A female James Bond! With all the action of a James Bond. But it's a woman! Allison. Allison Bond. That's not bad.

AMY: (stands) Please. Please. That's enough. You haven't read my book at all, have you?

TALBOT: Nobody reads.

AMY: What?

TALBOT: Nobody reads anymore.

AMY: What do you mean, nobody reads? You were saying...all the romance novels...and the money from science fiction...and...

TALBOT: Those are addicts. Genre addicts. They just read one thing. Romance. Or Science Fiction. Or Mystery. Most people read one thing. And the one thing they don't read...is novels. Fiction. New fiction. I'm just trying to make this a book that will sell.

AMY: Well, that's not why I wrote this book. I spent three years on this thing. Writing every day. Every day. Rewriting very day.

TALBOT: All right, all right, all right. Sit down. Sit down. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I was just trying to make this work for you.

AMY: (sits) Sounds like you wanted to make it work for you.

TALBOT: Well, yeah. Win win. Of course. We both want this book to sell. I'm sure you worked hard on this. I'm just looking for the right angle that'll appeal to the...the reading public...

AMY: Whoever they are, huh? Whatever readers are left out there.

TALBOT: Yeah. It's like a desert. OK, let's dig in, let's take a look at this thing. (surveys cover) "Love In The Time Of Mania." You like that title, huh?

AMY: Yes.

TALBOT: By Amy Smith. (thinks hard) A-m-y Smith.  
(jumps up) That's it. Amy Smith Amy Smith. It was staring me in the face all the time.  
You're a woman!

AMY: Uh-huh.

TALBOT: A woman. OK, we may have something here.

AMY: What's that?

TALBOT: Once upon a time...and that was not that long ago...women wrote less than 10% of all new books. Now it's over 50%. And women authors sell more than male authors, too, these days.

AMY: So that's good...

TALBOT: That's great!

AMY: ...for me, I guess.

TALBOT: You're darn tootin'! That's great!  
(he circles her, looks close)  
So, You! You!

So, so your dad didn't abuse you, that's no good!  
How about assault? Have you ever been assaulted?  
By a boss, or a teacher, especially.  
Me, Too? Have you got any Me, Toos?

AMY: What? Uh, well..

TALBOT: Yeah?

AMY: No, not really...

TALBOT: What? (stands back, looks) Now, I'd say you were... attractive. Why haven't you been assaulted?

AMY: Well, there's...every women has had times that got uncomfortable...

TALBOT: Yeah? Good.

AMY: But nothing serious. Nothing that went too far. Guess I've been lucky, I don't know.

TALBOT: Nobody's ever stuck a roofie in your drink?

AMY: No.

TALBOT: No, well there's still time.

OK, let's see, woman, woman...OK. You do sex?

AMY: What?

TALBOT: Sex.

AMY: Do I do...?

TALBOT: Yeah. Do you know any...I don't know, new stuff, hot tips...from the younger generation.

AMY: I don't...

TALBOT: Not your book. You could do a blog. You hear a lot about joy these days. Do a new "Joy of Sex" type thing.

TALBOT: Yeah. So you couldn't do something like her...

AMY: (up) NO! I can't do something like her. I can only do something like me! This is my book! My story!  
(grabs manuscript)  
And if you don't want it, I can...

TALBOT: Wait! Wait! I didn't say I didn't want it.  
Look I know t's your book. Your story.

(pause, as they take a breath)

TALBOT: So, just tell me. Tell me your story.

AMY: OK. OK.

This is the story of a girl...a young girl who sought love...grace, a spiritual way of life...ever since she was very young. She saw the world as a wonderland. A place full of sunshine, and



happy days, and friends, and family...and love.  
As she grew, she kept this feeling as part of her. And it didn't matter what life threw at her, she kept it, kept the feeling.  
Then life started to throw her. That family secret. Beloved Grandparents passing away. Friends letting her down. The disappointments... the inevitable disappointments that happen as you make your way in the world.  
And as she grew into adulthood, she became more and more aware of life around all around her.  
Not only the tragedies that happened all over - the wars, the famine, the injustice.  
But also the little tragedies that inflict everyone. Every single person she knew or met. She understood that every one of them faced challenges and difficulties in their own lives.  
So she forged ahead. College - with all the crazy stuff that happens at college - but she kept her head above water.  
And then work. Her first job. Her second job. Then the gigs in the new economy.  
There was...there was your "Romance." A few that she thought would last forever. And finally one that she vowed forever.  
But even that didn't last. Couldn't last...in these maniacal times.  
So she found herself at a crossroads.  
OK, maybe it was a cliff, an endgame from where she thought she could never return.  
And it was there - right there - where she made her stand. Where she proclaimed her vow.  
That no matter what happened - no matter what life did to her - she was not going to let it beat her.  
That she was going to go on - go on to the light. Go on to the love.  
The love of life. Of people. Of herself.  
And that's where the story takes it turn. When she volunteers for the group helping the poor, feeding the hungry. And she takes her love - her spiritual love with her - and works to infuse every thing - and everybody she meets - with that love.  
While doing that she rediscovers herself. And rediscovers - yes here's that romance you're looking for. She rediscovers her capacity to love another - when she meets the doctor who's also working as a volunteer.  
And that's how it ends. She's still not 100% - still not sure of where she's going - but now with two feet on the ground, and a place in the world.  
And a love - a love that can stay strong in the midst of the mania.

That's the story.

TALBOT: (nodding)

Mmm-mmm. OK. I see. I think I understand. Her story - the spirit - the love - the...growth. Her...

This is so boring! So damn boring.

AMY: (starts to walk away) That's it! I'm out of here.

TALBOT: (up) Amy! Amy, wait! (stops her) I'm not saying we're not going to publish it. I'm loving it. The story...your story...your telling it... it truly...inspired me.

(AMY comes back, sits again, holding her manuscript tight)

TALBOT: So this is what we do. A young girl - her life, her loves (it's not a romance), her disappointments, her discoveries, her...redemption. It all comes down to one thing.

(TALBOT stands)

TALBOT: Streaming.

AMY: What?

TALBOT: This isn't a novel...sure it's a novel...but it's a series. A streaming series. HBO MAX. Amazon. Netflix. This is a sure thing.

AMY: Streaming?

TALBOT: Yeah, we don't publish yet. We hold off. We start the rumors. Bidding war. Everybody wants in. Paramount. Peacock. Nicole Kidman.

AMY: Um...

TALBOT: It goes to the highest bidder. It's announced. And then we publish. Instant best seller. Everybody wants to read the book. They'll see the trailer...

AMY: Trailer?

TALBOT: Yeah. It'll be the talk of the town.

AMY: You said this was boring.

TALBOT: That's what people want with streaming. They want to sit home and be bored. Or they's dog it. The tv people will make it work.

AMY: Make it work? I don't...

TALBOT: Hey! You want people to buy your book. You want people to buy your book. You want your book to sell enough to quit that day job, and just write! Another book! This is the way. This is the only way.

(AMY thinks)

AMY: How many episodes?

TALBOT: Uh, at least 8. First season.

AMY: What's the production budget? Per episode?

TALBOT: Millions. Many millions.

AMY: And I get what - 2, 3% of that?

TALBOT: 3.

AMY: I want Executive Producer credit.

TALBOT: No problem.

AMY: And casting approval.

TALBOT: That would have to be negotiated.

AMY: And script approval.

TALBOT: Well, that...they change...

AMY: I know they'll change it. I still want approval.

TALBOT: All right. We'll go for it.

(AMY stands. Hands manuscript back to TALBOT.)

AMY: OK. Let's do it.

TALBOT: (shaking her hand) Congratulations on...Your Best Seller!

END

