



Hooked

Allen Wolf

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A young man with autism falls for a hooker in this heartfelt, out-of-the-ordinary romance.

In Allen Wolf's novel *Hooked* (adapted from his award-winning screenplay), a romantic twentysomething fails to spot that his new girlfriend is a prostitute because he is autistic. The situation has ample comedic potential, but it isn't just played for laughs. This warm, witty story does not shy away from serious themes like exploitation, redemption, and true love.

Twenty-four-year-old Shawn designs algorithms for a dating website. Although he's barely dated since his college sweetheart died, he's a pure romantic, keeping lovebirds, displaying a bobblehead bride and groom, and surfing wedding websites. At a "Pimps and Hos"-themed staff party, he makes a date with Violet, unaware that she's a real hooker. They make an odd couple, but Shawn gives Violet strength to face her abusive past and make a final break from her lifestyle. A strong anti-trafficking message pairs with the Christian narrative of redemption in this sweet romance.

The novel paints a convincing picture of autism. Shawn is wary of physical touch and has trouble looking people in the eye, but notices everything around him. Synesthesia means his sense impressions combine in creative ways: "clanging tree leaves, humming violin petals, and tinkling water." Meanwhile, Shawn's naïveté contrasts perfectly with Violet's worldliness. "You're a different wavelength," he tells Violet, while for her, "his innocence was energizing."

Dramatic irony dominates the first two-thirds of the novel: Shawn believes Violet is an aspiring actress whose many appointments are auditions. With Shawn's indifference to social cues and innuendo, it is easy to believe he would not notice her racy attire. It becomes noteworthy that Shawn has been working on building a "history rating" into dating profiles; his objective criteria clash with the subjective experience of falling in love, while his assumption that a person's past determines his or her future is proven wrong.

Shawn and Violet's courtship feels sudden, but creates an overall brisk pace. At first the Christian content seems heavy-handed, but the language of salvation takes on significance for Violet's circumstances. Hearing "Amazing Grace" at church gives her hope. As in Marilynne Robinson's *Lila*, the redemption plot echoes the biblical book of Hosea. "Everyone has a past but God gives us a new beginning," Shawn reassures Violet.

Hooked explores heavy issues with a light touch. The romcom setup blends easily with the largely inoffensive religious agenda. It's easy to see this being adapted into an enjoyable movie for fans of *The Rosie Project*.

REBECCA FOSTER (April 21, 2015)

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