

THE BOOK WAS BETTER

"PILOT"

Written by

Michael A. Gainey

COLD OPEN

**EXT. GENTRIFIED NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - DAY**

ROB, 30s, at a red light, straightens his thrift-store tie in the rearview, then licks his palm and flattens a cowlick until...

HONK-HONK!

His jalopy chugs past local shops in the new "historic" district of hip new storefronts and restaurants. Several of the young businesses display "HELP WANTED" signs.

**EXT. HISTORIC DISTRICT - SIDEWALK - DAY**

Rob's car SPUTTERS as he parks along the street.

He steps out of the car holding AN OLD MANILA FOLDER. He closes his eyes taking a long, deep breath. It's a new day.

He opens his eyes as a BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN rides by on a restored vintage bicycle. She waves to Rob with a smile.

Rob smiles, walking backwards, watching her pass. Reaching the sidewalk next to his car, he turns directly into...

OOF! A SHINY NEW PARKING METER.

Rob gives the meter a puzzled look. He scans down the line. Meters along the entire block. Across the street: Meters. A few blocks away: Meters. Meters EVERYWHERE.

He reaches into his pocket. Empty.

Rob reaches for the passenger side door, and throws his hip against it as he pulls, the only way the broken door will open these days.

He fishes in ashtrays and compartments until...

A dime!

Rob happily puts the dime in the meter, giving him...

3 MINUTES?!

Rob swallows his frustration, forces a smile, and walks away.

**INT. COPY SHOP - DAY**

At the helpdesk, Rob holds a beat up copy of his resume with a smile.

ROB  
I'd like to make ten copies,  
please.

TEEN EMPLOYEE  
That'll be fifty cents.

In his other hand, Rob holds a faded ID card, at least a decade old.

ROB  
Do you offer a student discount?

TEEN EMPLOYEE  
(SIGH)

ROB  
You guys hiring?

**EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY**

Rob checks out a "NOW HIRING - DISHWASHER" sign.

**INT. RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER**

In the back room, Rob meets with the Manager.

MANAGER  
Minimum two years experience.

Rob holds up his finger to say "one sec". He walks out to...

**EXT. RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER**

Rob checks the "NOW HIRING - DISHWASHER" sign once more.

**INT. RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER**

Rob takes a seat. Clears his throat.

ROB  
Really?

**INT. LOCAL STORE - DAY**

Rob meets with the boss.

BOSS  
It's nine bucks an hour.

ROB  
Sure! And I am a real hard worker.

BOSS  
You get one twenty minute lunch  
break a day for five minutes.

ROB  
I don't even eat lunch.

BOSS  
You got a laptop computer?

ROB  
No.

BOSS  
A smart phone?

Rob again shakes his head.

BOSS (CONT'D)  
An iPad? Gotta have an iPad.

Rob's shoulders sink.

**INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY**

Rob meets in the manager's office.

GROCERY CLERK  
(CONDESCENDINGLY) Tell you what,  
here's my e-mail address. Why  
don't you e-mail me, tell me in 500  
words why you're the best man for  
the job?

ROB  
... corralling... shopping carts.

GROCERY CLERK  
And mopping.

**INT. STORE - DAY**

Rob meets with the store owner.

OWNER

You'll start as an intern, but it's  
a great opportunity for  
advancement.

Rob smiles politely through the tears in his eyes.

**MONTAGE**

The end of each of Rob's interviews.

MANAGER

We'll let you know.

BOSS

We'll let you know.

GROCERY CLERK

We'll let you know.

OWNER

We'll let you know.

ANGLE ON:

Rob forces a polite smile.

ROB

Thank you.

**EXT. GENTRIFIED NEIGHBORHOOD - SIDEWALK - DAY**

Rob sulks, dragging his feet as he walks until...

ROB

Hey! Wait! I'm here! I'm right--

Rob sprints, but a METERMAID has already left a ticket and whizzes away on her SEGWAY.

ROB (CONT'D)

Aww.

Rob picks up the ticket. Fifty bucks!

Frustration wins, he repeatedly kicks the fender of his car. It falls off with a metallic CRASH.

**EXT. USED CAR DEALERSHIP - DAY**

Rob haggles with a USED CAR DEALER.

USED CAR DEALER  
Hunnerd bucks.

ROB  
The stereo alone is worth more than that!

USED CAR DEALER  
Ten years ago. It don't even have bluetooth or Siri.

ROB  
So!

USED CAR DEALER  
So hunnerd bucks.

Rob clenches his teeth and his fists and marches in a frustrated circle.

ROB  
Okay.

USED CAR DEALER  
Great! Hey, could you fill out a performance survey?

Rob eyes the dealer with a hate-filled gaze.

**EXT. CRUMMY NEIGHBORHOOD - DUSK**

Rob walks home, defeated.

**EXT. CRUMMY APARTMENT BUILDING - DUSK**

Rob grabs his keys from his pocket at his apartment door, but his keys don't work!

A smoker's COUGH behind him freezes him in his tracks. It's his LANDLORD, MR. TOMASEK. A short, Eastern European man.

ROB  
Mr. Tomasek! Hey, my keys don't--

MR. TOMASEK  
Change locks. No rent. No room.

ROB  
You keep raising the rent!

MR. TOMASEK  
Is in rental agreement.

ROB  
I just need some time. I have  
some... really promising leads.

MR. TOMASEK  
Come back with money.

ROB  
Can I get my things?

MR. TOMASEK  
When you have money.

ROB  
All I have is a hundred dollars.

Rob shows Mr. Tomasek a hundred dollar bill. He snatches it greedily and walks away.

ROB (CONT'D)  
Can I get my stuff?

MR. TOMASEK  
Come back with more money. (THEN)  
Oh, your wife, she give me message.

ROB  
(HOPEFUL) Pam?

Mr. Tomasek SLAPS Rob in the face HARD, like it's been building for years.

MR. TOMASEK  
Git job, you slob.

**EXT. GENTRIFIED NEIGHBORHOOD - SIDEWALK - NIGHT**

Rob wanders the streets.

In the distance, a VAGRANT pulls a dismantled cardboard box over himself.

Rob takes a seat in an alleyway, but a HOMELESS MAN sits up from behind some garbage bags.

HOMELESS MAN  
 (GARBLED WORDS, THEN) It's not  
 proper! (MORE GARBLED WORDS)

The Homeless Man HISSES through an indian corn smile as Rob backs out of the alley and runs.

**EXT. GENTRIFIED NEIGHBORHOOD - SIDEWALK - NIGHT**

Rob paces on the sidewalk outside *LE MADELEINE*, the shop's new sign spelled out in fancy script.

He stops. He's made his decision.

Rob ties a bandana over his face. His hand falls on his TIE. He straightens it, but then RIPS it off defiantly. It's a clip-on. He throws it to the ground.

Rob marches towards the store, but soon walks back. He picks up the TIE and tucks it in his pocket. Rob again walks toward the store.

**INT. LE MADELEINE BOOKSTORE - CONTINUOUS**

Rob bursts in! A hanging bell on the door JINGLES. Rob looks around.

The place is a dump. Bookshelves in disorder, DUST and CAT HAIR everywhere.

A black cat peers out from behind a shelf and HISSES, but an OLD MAN shoos it away.

This is ART, 60's. He's been wearing the same sweater for 30 years. The elbow patches have patches.

ART  
 Shoo! Another hiss and it's chow mein for you! Now, what may I do--  
 (NOTICING THE MASK) Ah, is it  
 Halloween already or will you be  
 rounding up a posse?

Rob raises a GUN in his right hand.

ROB  
 I don't want any trouble, old man.

ART  
 I'm 62.

ROB  
So?

ART  
People are growing much older these days.

Rob holds out a GROCERY BAG with his left hand.

ROB  
Put the money in the bag.

ART  
No, thank you. Do visit us again though.

ROB  
Just put the money in the bag and no one gets hurt.

ART  
I shall do no such thing.

ROB  
I have a gun.

ART  
And I'm wearing a sweater. Both are equally irrelevant.

ROB  
Look, old m--

Rob takes aggressive steps towards Art, but Art puts up one hand and clutches at his chest with the other.

ART  
Oh! Oh, dear!

ROB  
What? What's happening?

ART  
My heart! Call an ambulance!

Art falls to his knees taking pained GASPS for air.

ROB  
Oh my God. No no no no.

Rob approaches Art.

ROB (CONT'D)  
You have to lay down.

ART  
Lie down.

ROB  
What?

ART  
Grammar, you ignoramus! And one should never lie down... during a cardiac event!

ROB  
Uh... you have any aspirin?

ART  
In... my pocket.

Art attempts to reach it himself, but WINCES with pain. Rob reaches towards Art's pocket.

But Art STEALS Rob's gun! He stands quickly and confidently.

ART (CONT'D)  
Ha HA!

ROB  
Hey!

ART  
Old man, am I? Hands in the air, you ragamuffin.

Rob LAUGHS.

ART (CONT'D)  
You've been bamboozled. I hardly think you should find humor in it.

ROB  
I guess you'll have to sh--

Art pulls the trigger and the TOY GUN SPARKS playfully.

ROB (CONT'D)  
(SHOCKED) Wow, you didn't even hesitate.

ART  
(TOSSING THE GUN) Rubbish!

Rob makes an aggressive move for the register, but Art intercepts him. They wrestle.

ART (CONT'D)  
No! Get out of my shop!

ROB  
I need the money!

ART  
No, you-- Oh!

Art weakens and clutches his heart.

ROB  
Oh, come on. You think I'm stupid?

ART  
Don't... make me... laugh.

Art GROANS, taking a knee, then falling unconscious to the floor.

ROB  
Just stay down. I'm gonna take the money and you won't ever see me again.

Rob opens the register. It's nearly empty, totalling about six dollars.

Rob looks from the meager cash to the unconscious body next to him. He gives Art a probing kick.

ROB (CONT'D)  
Old man?

No response.

ROB (CONT'D)  
Ah, fuck.

END COLD OPEN