

## Q&A with Filmmaker & Author Allen Wolf

### How did you come up with the story for *The Sound of Violet*?

A friend and I were laughing about the challenges of navigating the dating world in Los Angeles years ago. Even though I was married, those days were still vivid in my mind. Those conversations inspired me to write *The Sound of Violet* about two dating-challenged people from entirely different walks of life who are the opposite of each other in significant ways. The woman is paid to be with men and has a skewed view of love. The man is autistic and struggles with forming relationships as well as physical touch. And he has his own idealistic view of relationships. I thought bringing those two together would make a fascinating and dynamic story and could teach us something about love.

I can relate to Shawn's dating journey because it reflects some of my own journey when I was a single man in Los Angeles. Even though I'm not on the autism spectrum, I struggled with many of my main character's issues, such as meaningfully connecting with women, being naïve in relationships, and struggling with building intimacy. The woman he falls in love with works as a prostitute, which he doesn't realize. I thought she would be a vivid contrast with Shawn, who has a faith background and saved himself for marriage. He resists touching because it's too intense for him, while she's forced to touch others. I thought that would make a compelling story.

### Can you tell us about the book?

*The Sound of Violet* is about a man who believes he has found his perfect soulmate, but his autism and trusting nature keep him from realizing she's actually a prostitute looking for a ticket out of her trapped life. The novel allows readers to experience a love story between two people who are unlikely to fall in love. The main character is autistic, and I mainly wrote the novel from his perspective. He's very trusting, so when he meets Violet, he believes she's an actress when she's really a prostitute. I wanted the reader to experience the rollercoaster of the relationship mainly through his eyes with glimpses into Violet's world.

### Can you tell us about your movie, *The Sound of Violet*, based on your novel?

*The Sound of Violet* is a romantic comedy about a man who believes he has found his perfect soulmate, but his autism and trusting nature keep him from realizing she's actually a prostitute looking for a ticket out of her trapped life, so the storyline is the same as the novel. When people enjoy the movie, I hope it also makes them more aware of human trafficking while helping them to see autism through a new lens. I wrote, directed, and produced the film. We had a fantastic team of actors and people who worked behind the scenes to make it happen.

The movie first opened in theaters, and it was a thrill to experience the audience reacting to all the moments that had come alive from the book. It was a strange sensation to see the characters come to life on the screen.

While the novel is set in New York City, I changed the movie's location to Seattle so readers will have a whole new experience in watching the film. We were able to film in some fantastic

places, which showcase areas of Seattle that you don't usually see in movies based there. I made some changes to the characters. Natasha, who is Russian in the novel, is named Nadia in the film. She's from India and is too shy to talk. I combined the characters of Flynn and Shawn's boss Jake so that Jake is more of a central figure.

In the book, I'm able to explore the inner lives and thoughts of the characters with words, while in the movie, you're able to experience the story visually, which brings a whole new dimension to the story. Our composer, Conrad Pope, created a lush score that also helps bring the story to life.

### **What was the process like bringing *The Sound of Violet* to life from the novel to the screen?**

It was a monumental effort to bring *The Sound of Violet* to life on the screen. I first relocated the story from New York City to Seattle, which I knew would be a friendlier city to make the film. I changed locations for scenes in the novel to be more visual for the movie. I wanted to explore Seattle's beautiful landscapes for the film, so I featured scenes in Gas Works Park, the shipping yards, alongside the enormous bridges and different spots around the city that you usually don't see featured in Hollywood movies.

I wanted to cast unknown actors in the lead roles so the audience wouldn't have any preconceived notions of who they were while watching the film. This movie is the debut of our two lead actors, and they pulled off stunning performances. I also had to find ways to tell the story in a tighter timeframe, so I condensed some scenes and took out others.

I wanted the experience of watching the movie to be different from the book, so while the story beats are identical, the movie's journey takes you on various twists and turns than the novel.

When I write a novel, I'm able to concentrate on the inner lives of the character. But in creating a movie, I have to communicate all of that through the actors' performances. There were several moments on the set when it struck me that the characters I had written for the page were walking and talking in front of me. That was surreal! I was so thankful to be surrounded by such a talented team of actors and the crew who worked tirelessly.

Composer Conrad Pope created the soundtrack for the movie, which we also recorded in Seattle with a 54-piece orchestra. I appreciate how he draws out the emotional beats of the story through his musical craftsmanship.

### **How have audiences responded to the movie?**

Audiences have been very enthusiastic about the film, which you can see through their reviews. People have written me emails or told me in person how meaningful the movie was to them. On the opening weekend, we were doing Q&As in major cities. At a Q&A after the New York City premiere, a woman told the audience she's a former 'Violet' and said she loved how our movie was "all about hope and reminded me of the importance of loving people, understanding people for who they are, where they are, and loving them anyway." She texted that to me, which is why I'm quoting it.

At other Q&A screenings, autistic audience members told me how much they could relate to the main character's challenging dating journey. Autistic people have reached out to me through social media, letting me know how much they appreciated the movie as well.

### **What was it like seeing the characters from your novel come to life in the movie?**

It was surreal to see the characters and story from the novel come to life for the film. It struck me that the characters I had written about in solitude had become living and breathing human beings. Now, when I read the book, I picture the faces of those actors.

### **How can we watch *The Sound of Violet*?**

Our movie is available to stream on Apple TV, Prime Video, Vudu, and Google Play. It's also available on Blu-Ray or DVD through Amazon or Walmart. The Blu-ray, DVD, and Apple TV version feature bonus content, including a discussion with the cast about the making of the film, the composer discussing the creation of the score, and the Blu-Ray and DVD exclusively features the director's commentary with the lead cast, and the music video "Anywhere But Here" from 5-time Grammy Nominee Brandon Heath. The film also has subtitles in Español.

### **You wear many different hats beyond being an author. How do you balance being an author, a filmmaker, a game creator, and a podcaster?**

I start most days around 4:00 a.m. and sometimes even earlier. In those early morning hours, I'm able to work on my creative projects without interruption. I try to work on a project consistently and chip away at it day after day. Then, one day it's finished, and I'm able to move on to something else. Starting any new project feels like standing at the base of an enormous mountain, and it can feel overwhelming to think of what's ahead. But if I can move forward with one small step after another, eventually, I will discover I've made it to the summit. It takes a lot of perseverance, but it's worth it when I see my creative work come to life and hear how what I'm doing is having a positive impact on people's lives.

### **Where do you find inspiration?**

Since I started hosting the Navigating Hollywood podcast, I've been inspired by my guests, who have overcome tremendous odds to succeed in the world of film and television. I'm also creatively inspired by my family, friendships, and adventures I've taken around Los Angeles and the globe. I love watching my kids create entire worlds using boxes and construction paper. Their limitless imaginations spur me on. I always feel creatively recharged when I visit museums, experience a great movie, enjoy a game night, or visit Disneyland.

### **What did you learn when writing this story?**

When I first started writing the story of *The Sound of Violet*, Violet's character was an "empowered hooker" that you typically see portrayed in Hollywood movies. But then, as I researched prostitution, I realized that the vast majority of these women are being trafficked. Or,

they were sexually abused, and they're reliving that trauma as prostitutes. I then consulted with several organizations that work with trafficked people, which opened my eyes tremendously. I took a whole new direction in creating Violet's character, and I think it reflects the reality of someone caught up in prostitution today.

I also learned a lot about autism while researching Shawn's character. I have a relative who is autistic and consulted with several others to accurately portray Shawn's character. There isn't one standard description of an autistic person, so I crafted a character I thought was best for this story. While I was prepping the story, I talked to two different mothers whose autistic sons had unknowingly started relationships with prostitutes, which brought some realism to the story I had created.

While we were making the movie, one of our key cast members was autistic, and he consulted with our lead actor to make sure his portrayal was authentic.

### **What does the title mean?**

The title *The Sound of Violet* has a double meaning. The main character Shawn has a condition called synesthesia which allows him to hear sounds in colors. So if he's staring at the color violet, he will hear a sound. The main character's name is also Violet, and she comments to him that he should be with someone whose colors sound right to him.

### **What do you think happened to the characters after the book ended?**

I'm working on a sequel to answer that question.