

THE SALES RANK ALSO RISES

John Yunker

**CAST LIST** (1M, 1F, 1M/F)

**CATHY** (F)

**ED** (M)

**UPS DRIVER** (M/F)

**TIME:** Present.

**SETTING:** Two home offices separated by a dining room. Cathy's office is austere – a desk, laptop, bookcase. Ed's office is a paper-cluttered mess, with an old desktop computer, printer, speakers, wires stretching everywhere. In the middle is the dining room, which consists of a table, two chairs, and cupboard.

**PRODUCTION NOTES:** As indicated, a number is projected above (or below) each desk. Additional props include books, boxes, and a hand truck.

**SCENE 1**

*(ED and CATHY are seated at their respective desks and address the audience.)*

ED

*(Holds up his book.)*

As an author, it's such a thrill to see your first novel published.

CATHY

Self-published.

ED

My wife is traditionally published. Agent. Editor. Publicist. It's nice for her, but I see no need for the major publishing houses.

CATHY

He was rejected by the major publishing houses.

ED

And I've always taken a more entrepreneurial approach to my writing.

CATHY

Control freak.

ED

This afternoon at the library, out of the blue, I was asked to sign my first book.

CATHY

He donated a copy.

ED

These days, it's all about word of mouth.

CATHY

Want a free copy? Tell my husband you're a book blogger.

ED

Did you know that word of mouth is responsible for half of all book sales?

CATHY

Not that he's counting.

ED

Not that I pay attention to my sales ranking.

CATHY

He's obsessed with his sales ranking.

ED

Well, maybe on occasion, while shopping online, I'll glance at it.

*(He looks down at his computer. The number 124,134 is projected above him.)*

CATHY

*(stands)*

It all began innocently enough.

ED

To maintain a sales ranking below 200,000, you have to sell one book a day.

CATHY

Just one book.

ED

That may sound trivial, but most people read only six books a year.

CATHY

I read 57 books last year.

ED

I read five. Which is why it's such an achievement when you sell a book. It's not just a sale, it's a relationship.

*(ED's number increases to 179,782.)*

Now if only I could figure out how to have more than one relationship per day.

CATHY

*(shouting)*

What did you say?

ED

*(shouting back)*

Nothing.

*(then)*

Not everyone has a major publisher.

CATHY

Speaking of my publisher, I recently approved my page proofs.

ED

*(stands)*

Cathy loves publisher-speak.

CATHY

ARCs will be going out soon.

ED

Advance review copies.

CATHY

I suggested we celebrate my forthcoming novel. Ed agreed to cook.

*(CATHY takes a seat in the dining room. ED pours wine.)*

ED

Shells with pesto sauce.

CATHY

And a Willamette Valley pinot.

*(The number increases to 355,331.)*

ED

Crap.

CATHY

I thought the wine was lovely.

ED

Not the wine. It's. It's nothing. How do you like the pasta?

CATHY

You've outdone yourself. I'd love to see what you could do with penne.

*(The number increases to 429,331.)*

ED

So you hate the shells?

CATHY

No.

ED

You just said you wanted penne.

CATHY

I was kidding. This is all wonderful. I love shells.

*(The number increases to 591,622. ED sighs loudly.)*

Are you feeling okay?

ED

So now you think I'm moody?

CATHY

No.

ED

You do know that I spent hours on that dish, hours I could have spent marketing my book, blogging, texting...

CATHY

You just looked at your sales rank, didn't you?

ED

I couldn't help it.

CATHY

At the dinner table?

ED

I downloaded an app to my phone. Now I can be depressed wherever I go.

CATHY

This morning you said your book was selling like crazy.

ED

That was five hours ago. Sales rank updates every hour. Every hour a new number. Every hour a measurement. A judgment. Embarrassment.

CATHY

Word of mouth takes time.

ED

And with each hour it becomes clear how little word of mouth I have.

*(The number increases to 1,233,222. ED stands.)*

CATHY

What's wrong now?

ED

I'm not hungry.

CATHY

You know that number is meaningless.

ED

It's not so meaningless to those numbered one through a hundred.

CATHY

It's not about the books at the top. It's about *your* book. Your readers.

ED

All nine of them.

CATHY

It's about the reason you got into writing in the first place. Remember?

ED

I wanted a bestseller. Is that so much to ask?

*(ED returns to his office, carrying the wine bottle. Stares at his computer screen. CATHY stands and meanders back to her office.)*

CATHY

I wanted to tell a story. Because I was raised on stories. Generations of writers and the books they left behind. Those books.

*(CATHY gazes at her bookcase, selects a title.)*

ED

Those books.

CATHY

Books that inspired my book.

ED

Books ranked ahead of my book.

*(ED reads from his computer as his number continues its painful, sporadic escalation.)*

<i>Ulysses.</i>	CATHY
	ED
<i>Twilight.</i>	
	CATHY
<i>As I Lay Dying.</i>	
	ED
<i>Conversations with God.</i>	
	CATHY
<i>The Sun Also Rises.</i>	
	ED
<i>Breaking Dawn.</i>	
	CATHY
<i>Madame Bovary.</i>	
	ED
<i>The 10-Day Green Smoothie Cleanse.</i>	
	CATHY
<i>Lord of the Flies.</i>	
	ED
<i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid.</i>	
	CATHY
<i>Lolita.</i>	
	ED
<i>50 Shades of Grey.</i>	
	CATHY
<i>The Bell Jar.</i>	
	ED
<i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition.</i>	
	CATHY
So many books.	