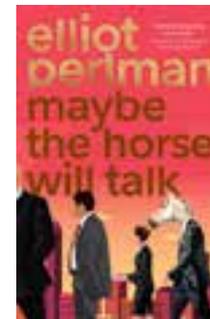


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**MAYBE THE HORSE
WILL TALK **

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“I thought, let’s tell a story of adults in this incredibly precarious world of work where so many ... people are subject to what gets called ‘work-family conflict’ – that situation where the demands of the world of work are incompatible with the demands of family and social bonds,” Perlman says.

“You can’t properly satisfy both. And, that’s the case whether you’re experiencing overwork in a competitive workplace or insufficient work and insufficient income in the ever-growing, ever-threatening sideshow that is the gig economy.”

At the heart of his novel Perlman has created an environment where workers are in constant fear of being sacked by their all-powerful, unstable overlords; where sexual harassment is routine, and corruption is rife – material all gleaned from Perlman’s own early days as a lawyer and by talking to younger lawyers and professionals today.

“I didn’t suffer as badly as Maserov did, personally, but I saw people who did,” he says. “And, I didn’t love it. I much preferred my life as a barrister to my life as a solicitor.”

He recalls secretaries coming into his office and crying. He became a shoulder to lean on.

“And all I could do was tell them that maybe they should try to work for somebody else. You know, it was pretty basic advice but I didn’t know what else to tell them because the powers-that-be didn’t care.”

On the day we speak, sexual harassment is again in the news, this time in the highest court of the land with allegations of sexual misconduct made against former High Court justice Dyson Heydon QC. Meanwhile, the economic crisis caused by the pandemic has weakened job security even further, making the stakes of speaking up against improper behaviour at work even greater.

Perlman is under no illusion his tale will start a revolution but hopes it will help some people feel less alone: people who are too busy keeping their head down at work to think about these issues.

“I’m telling them, ‘You know how you do this, and you do that? Isn’t it crazy? Isn’t it unhealthy? Do you realise that everybody is feeling this way?’

“Nothing is going to change if we don’t start talking about it.” ●