



ALL NEW EPISODE



## Book Gang Podcast Transcript: **Spinning a Bad Review Into Literary Gold With Laura Hankin**

Laura Hankin (00:00)

Hi, my name is Laura Hankin and I'm the author of One Star Romance, as well as a bunch of other books.

Amy Allen Clark (00:15)

“Perhaps if I make myself write, I shall find out what is wrong with me.”

That's a quote from I Capture the Castle that kicks off this adorable romance, which embraces one of my favorite themes, books about books. Laura Hankins' writing has taken readers on such a journey from satire to thriller, but today's conversation is to celebrate my favorite book by the author yet. It is her debut romance of the summer One-Star Romance.

Natalie and Rob couldn't have less in common in this enemies to lovers romance. Nat's a messy artist and Rob's a rigid academic. They really only share one thing. It's their devotion to their respective best friends who just got engaged. But some chemistry is starting to develop at the beginning and Natalie is cautiously optimistic about being the maid of honor to Rob's best man. However, in the ultimate plot twist minutes before the ceremony, Nat learns that Rob wrote a one-star review of her new novel, which has them both reeling.

Nat from some imposter syndrome, and Rob over why he needed to write it in the first place. If you love books about books, you will love this week's bonus book list that I've created on MomAdvice, which celebrates books about books from bookstores to libraries to the world of publishing. I really went hard on this assignment. I hope you'll enjoy all the book lists that you're going to get to browse today and you can find those in today's show notes.

I've gathered some literary adventures that include upcoming titles, the best in backlist books, and adorable new releases like the one that we are celebrating today.

If you're new here, hi, I'm Amy Allen Clark, the voice behind the Book Gang podcast. This podcast celebrates debuts, backlist books, and under-the-radar book gems. This novel is part of my 2024 Summer Reading Guide, which you can grab for just seven bucks to help our show stay on the air. I'm just so grateful whether you purchase that through a one-time purchase or offer continuing support through our \$5 a month Patreon.

Patrons can join our June discussion of [American Fever](#) by Dur E Aziz Amna on June 28th at 8 p.m. Eastern time. This book club book explores the complexities of being an exchange student, uncovering the challenges faced by Hira, a 17-year-old Pakistani girl navigating life at a rural Oregon high school.

Readers can unlock an hour with Dure to discuss her writing process for this novel and learn more about the courage that was required to immerse oneself in a foreign land as a teenager, which is an experience that she shares with her character. Don't miss our 52 page June Fully Booked newsletter that's created in

collaboration with Bookstagrammer Get Booked with Larry, my best friend forever. This will really make your summer stack.

Now let's meet this month's guest. Laura Hankin is an accomplished author, screenwriter, and performer known for her captivating novels, which are perfect for beach reads and book club discussions. Her previous works include The Daydreams, Happy and You Know It, and A Special Place for Women. Beyond her books, Laura has developed TV and film projects and received a claim for her musical comedy from the Washington Post and the New York Times. She's based in Washington, D.C. One Star Romance is her romance debut.

Finally, if you love this show, leaving a review on iTunes is just a free way to support my work. And if you do it, like consider it a gold star on your Book It pin. It's like my little personal pan pizza. Thank you. I appreciate you. Now let's get chatting.

Amy

I can always count on you, Laura, to switch up my stack a little bit. I have been such a fan. I am almost a thousand percent positive. Happy and You Know It was one of my first book of the month picks, and I loved it so much and that I've been following you everywhere that you've gone with all your different genres. I loved The Daydreams last year. It was so good. And I told you this, but you are like the dark horse in the romance stack. I did not know that you were going to pull ahead by a million miles compared to all of my seasoned writers that I usually read every summer.

It is so good to see you in the romance space. I'm so excited for people to get their hands on this book.

Laura (04:35)

Oh my gosh, thank you. My ego thanks you too. And I'm so glad that you reached out for this one.

Amy (04:43)

I would love for you to just give us your elevator pitch for this book for people that have not got a chance to read it because it is such a good setup.

Laura (04:56)

Thank you. So One Star Romance is about a struggling writer who has to walk down the aisle at her best friend's wedding with a man who gave her book one star on Goodreads. And even though this maid of honor and best man would prefer to never see each other again, the book follows them over the course of 10 years, each time they're forced together because their best friends are celebrating some new life event.

Amy (05:20)

It's such a great setup. I was thinking when I read it that it reminded me, kind of a combination of when Harry Met Sally meets Happy Place. So it has a little bit of emotion and angst with it that I felt from just like the wrestling with critiques from the community and the emotions behind it as well as some of the other layers that readers will get to uncover later. But the setup and the structure of this book felt very when Harry met Sally.

I don't know if you were thinking about that when you were creating it because of how, you know, it's like these two people get brought together for all of these momentous occasions and they don't necessarily want to be together, but yet these two other friends keep pulling them in.

Laura (06:06)

Well, I am honored by that comparison because that is one of my favorite movies. Also, of course, always honored to be compared to Emily Henry with Happy Place. And, you know, I think what When Harry Met Sally does so well is the slow burn, right? Like over years and years, these two people who you just want to see on kiss. And you are just on the edge of your seat waiting for that as the chemistry builds and builds and builds, the tension builds and builds. And so I really wanted to channel that in One-Star Romance.

Although it's funny, I wasn't actually thinking about When Harry Met Sally when I wrote it. I think if anything, I was thinking a little bit more about something like

Four Weddings and a Funeral with the time jumps from event to event. And another thing that I think when Four Weddings and a Funeral does so well, the movie version, I haven't actually seen the TV version, is it builds out the friend group. And those relationships are almost as important as the main romantic relationship.

Amy (07:09)

That makes sense. I feel like when Harry Met Sally might be so fresh in my mind because I feel like every listener is like, we've already heard this story, but maybe you haven't heard this story. We have been working through the rom-com list from Lynn Painter's Better Than the Movies YA book. And each one of those chapters is set up with a film, a nod to a film, like through a quote or a moment. And my daughter is turning, well, she's 18 now. She's a senior this year and we have been working through the list together. So we've gone through all of these different movies. I want to say that movie's on there and we just haven't gotten into it yet. And so each one of those she's been ranking and rating and like giving feedback on and it's so cute to see like what Gen Z thinks about our rom-com films.

Laura (08:00)

I would be so curious to hear the highlights of that.

Amy (08:04)

You've Got Mail like she was like, what is going on with this like modem sound and like people sending these letters and I'm like, that's how the internet sounded back then.

Laura (08:17)

What an amazing mother-daughter activity, too.

Amy (08:20)

Yeah. I actually, so she designed a printable for our readers of all the movies because there wasn't one and we're like, this is something that moms and daughters should do together. And it's a little checklist that she made. She's going to school for UX design. So she's really into designing things.

And I asked her if I could hire her to make a printable so other moms and daughters could replicate this rom-com moment. And we sent it out and I tagged Lynn and she replied back immediately. And she was like, your daughter is amazing. And I was like, you have no idea the ego boost that Lynn Painter offered to her. I was like, Lynn Painter thinks you are the coolest. Like she even shared it on her account. And she was just like, this is amazing. So.

We are just big fans of this as a mother-daughter activity. And it just ties so well into what I was immersed in. And I'm reading these great witty banter segments back and forth that you created between these two characters and just dying laughing. I'm pretty sure I have like 50 pages of highlights of witty banter.

And it's funny because I kept talking about this book so much and I'm like, I just, I can't wait to talk about it with Laura in person. I think we should start with your TikTok moment that, I was like, this came from a TikTok moment? I haven't gotten to look it up. I will try to find it and link to it. But what happened on TikTok that you were like, I gotta live this out in real life.

Laura (09:50)

Okay, so I experienced walking down the aisle at a friend's wedding with a man who had given my book one star in Goodreads. This is a real life inspiration. And it's funny because I had told that story to so many friends over the years as just a fun anecdote, but it never hit me that it could be the basis for a romantic comedy because in real life, you know, we did not see each other again. There was not particularly a spark and my husband asked me to clarify in all interviews that he would never give my book one star in Goodreads. And this man is not him.

But I think there was some conversation on TikTok about Goodreads, you know, a few years ago. And so kind of unthinkingly, I just hopped on and was like, Ooh, everybody's talking about Goodreads right now. Here's my little Goodreads anecdote about how I had to walk down the aisle with this guy and you know, then like, we had these competing wedding toasts and I drunkenly on the dance floor was like, what would you rate my speech?

And the video unexpectedly blew up. And in the comments, everybody was saying like, where is the rom-com? I want to read the rom-com now. And so for the first time, I was like, wait a minute. This actually is a very good basis for a romantic comedy. And so the novel sprang from there. So I have TikTok to thank.

Amy (11:22)

That is amazing. I love that this like, not that I love it for you. I love that this moment happened in real life and you're like, I'm going to do something with it. I'm just picturing him reading this book. And maybe he might one star this one too. Do you think he'll be like, what?

Laura (11:40)

Well, you know, I don't go on my Goodreads anymore. So I don't know if he does. But also he gets to be a romantic hero now. So it is.

Amy (11:52)

I mean, really, in the grand scheme of things, this could go all different kinds of ways. It could be sideways. He could get turned into a thriller, honestly. We do have some thrillers out there right now that are running with people's feedback and vengeance happens after.

Laura (12:07)

Oh yeah. I read one recently, The Last Word maybe. Yes. It was very scary.

Amy (12:17)

It's a book flight, you guys. You could have like a happy rom-com or like the thriller that goes with it. I mean, and see how these two scenarios could play out together.

Well, I want to know if writing romance was hard for you because you have tackled a lot of different genres. I mean, what genre haven't you tackled yet? I am wondering if you had to approach this differently as a writer.

Laura (12:41)

It's a good question. Yeah, The funny thing is that with all my previous books, which some of which were more mysteries or just like fun, juicy, almost soap opera-esque stories, I always wanted to sneak in a little romance somewhere. And I think from book to book, the romance kept getting more and more fleshed out and becoming a bigger side plot. And I kept wanting to spend more time on it and then having to be like, okay, okay, no, no, you go back to the main plot of the book, Laura.

So it actually felt like a natural evolution, I think, because I've written many rom-coms before and just snuck them in like a book about witches. And my editor was very encouraging to me, she's actually the one who was like, hey, for your next book, maybe you should explore a relationship between two people. So I felt lucky to have the support and encouragement from my team on that.

And I just, perhaps similar to your daughter, I was like really raised on a diet of romance and rom-coms. So I really loved them and loved all the tropes and the banter and all of that. But yeah, it's always scary to enter a new genre and like, want to do it right and satisfy those readers.

I have found that the romance community is just so welcoming and warm and wonderful, which is, it's really cool to get to finally enter it.

Amy (14:19)

Yes, I do agree with you. I think romance readers are truly some of the best like and romance writers as well. Just there's something magical over in that space. I feel like we also, I don't want to say not critical of romance, but I think we're seeking a different kind of experience with a book than in other categories. And so as long as I'm getting to my happily ever after, if I'm getting the beats of certain aspects of romance, I feel really satisfied with that experience. And it doesn't always feel like that in other genres as readers, or even just being someone who, you know, has to critically review books in any aspect of your job. It's like, as long as I feel like I'm smiling at the end, I feel like that's a really satisfying kind of experience as a reader.



Laura (15:11)

Yeah, and it's so nice as a writer, like when you know that you're riding your way towards the happily ever after, you can put your characters through some real stuff in the meantime, because you know that ultimately they're going to get that like beautiful moment at the end. And you know, with this book, I was so excited to enter the romance world. But I also wanted to bring some things with me from my previous books and really be able to focus on, you know, female friendships and like, keep a little bit of twisting and turning and maybe going to some places that you might not expect, like in my previous novels.

Amy (15:53)

What was the writing process like for this one? Did you always intend for it to be segmented the way that it was because it has?

I believe seven parts into the sections of your story. How did you get to that? Like with the sections or did you always intend to go that route?

Laura (16:10)

It was actually very tough to figure out that I wanted to go that route. That was the hardest part of this writing process. So I made that TikTok. I knew like, okay, this idea of the maid of honor and the best man and this negative review is really fun. And I figured out why he gave the negative review. But then I was like, so then what they're just at this wedding and they fall in love over the course of the wedding weekend? Or is it like, I don't know, they're stuck together the week afterwards, house sitting for the married couple while they're on their honeymoon? Like what, what is going on? It doesn't feel like they're going to be able to grow and change enough in that period of time to really fall in love in the way I need them to.

And so I must have been like a month or two where I was walking around just being like, I don't know where to go with this. It's not clicking yet. And then one day I, I now live in Washington, DC with my husband, but I spent most of my twenties living in New York. And so one day I went back up there for a book event and I spent much of the day just kind of wandering the city. I like went to see a movie by myself and I went to a bar by myself with a journal and just like

had a little martini and was journaling about stuff and thinking about all the time in my 20s that I spent feeling lost and behind where all my friends were and worrying that my life wasn't going to work out the way that I hoped it would.

And you know, I was like, thank goodness, I feel so much more rooted now and I'm really happy with my husband, my career and my life. And it's sort of like I needed to go through all of that, all of the questioning of my 20s and early 30s to get to the place where I am now. And somehow like sitting there in that feeling, I realized, this is what the book is about. This is the structure of the book. It actually takes place over the course of a decade from mid 20s to mid 30s, as these characters have to grow separately while also challenging each other to become better people.

And from there, I was like, well, why did they keep running into each other? It's clearly because their friends are tearing through these big exciting life events while they themselves are not. And so then it was just a matter of thinking, OK, so what are the different life events? And you go through a lot of them yourself. So you're like, sure, babies, home owning, all of that. So that's how the structure came together.

And then once I figured that out, it was like a joy to dive in and start writing and the characters, their voices came to me pretty easily. And I think I outlined this one a bit before actually starting the writing and the outline is pretty similar. Like the draft of the outline is pretty similar to what ended up on the page.

I will say the one other big challenge that I had in writing the first draft of it is that the final third of the book, by the time I got to that, I was pregnant for the first time and having severe morning sickness. And trying to write a love scene while you're just super nauseous. I was like, don't do it guys. This is what could happen.

Amy (19:44)

Oh my goodness. Well, I love that we're hearing this. Had you outlined your other books or was this the first time you were like sitting down with an outline?

Laura (19:51)

I'd say each book that I write, I tend to write a more thorough outline. You know, so the first book I ever wrote, I was like, here's a general sense of the beginning and a general sense of the end. And by the time The Daydreams came around, I had maybe like two or three pages of ideas. And then this one was like a pretty full-fleshed out outline that you could read and be like, wow, I feel like I just read a story. Cool!

Amy (20:19)

I would think that as a new mom, you're just gonna have to keep on that outline path. I'm just gonna tell you. Outlines are a beautiful thing, especially when your brain feels foggy or you're up all night with kids. Like it is just a lot to balance both of those.

you know, mentalities with your brain. So I get it.

Laura (20:37)

Yeah, I'm gonna be very interested to see how my writing changes now that there's a baby in the mix.

Amy (20:43)

Well, I want to talk about how you open with this quote, which is new to me. So this is my, I don't know, literary confession. I haven't read I Capture the Castle. And I feel like I'm not doing good work here. So maybe I will do that so that I can feel like I own this moment.

But one of the quotes that you had picked to start the story, which I was like, I have to ask her about, is, "Perhaps if I make myself right, I shall find out what is wrong with me." It kind of sets the tone of where we might be going with the story. And of course, what we think about as readers is, have you faced a similar situation as Natalie has, where negative reviews on Goodreads are significantly impacting your perspective, your emotions?

One element of following her story is just seeing her kind of spiral and going there, even though she knows it's not a good place to be, to see what people are

saying and to ensure that her ratings are staying high. You were telling me you don't go on there anymore, but I'm wondering if when you were first writing, if this was a hurdle for you.

Laura (21:55)

My gosh. Yes, absolutely. 100%. Well, first of all, just go back for a second. Plug for I Capture the Castle. And you know, if nothing else, I hope that readers take away from this book that they should go read that one. But also, I'm not necessarily surprised that you haven't read it because I feel like it never quite reached the level of classic like something like Little Women or Pride and Prejudice, both of which I feel like it's kind of in conversation with. But it's a wonderful coming of age story about this young British woman who lives in this crumbling castle with her family.

Her dad is this writer suffering from writer's block and she herself is trying to figure out how to become a writer. And then these rich American boys come to town and there's love and family. It's great.

To your actual question, yeah, when my first book came out, it was like a very small printing. I had not learned anything yet about how to protect myself as a writer. I was quite young. And so I was on my Goodreads all the time because most of the reviews that I was getting were from friends and family. So it was just a nice little ego boost, you know? But I still remember the first one-star review I ever got word for word. You know, I have probably gotten thousands of nice reviews since then. And yet, like, this negative one is the one that sticks, right? Like, I think it said, stunningly boring and pedestrian.

The fact that 10 years later, I can recite that whereas I probably can't recite anything from a nice review I just got of One-Star Romance on Instagram last night. It's not something... I think it's easy to assume that anybody who says something nice to you might have an ulterior motive or just not want to hurt your feelings or something like that. But that the criticism is what's actually true because why else would they say it? But you know, you have to realize that it's impossible to write a book that everyone is going to love and do what you need to do to protect yourself.

But yes, definitely some of Natalie's like spirals very much came from my own emotions back when I was starting out.

Amy (24:23)

I feel like it's very hard to not think about that kind of negative feedback or to not, you know, fixate on it. It's really kind of reviews in general are just kind of a tricky like landscape, I feel like. Part of it is, you know, as a reader, writers are kind of in cahoots with each other, right? And they review each other's books. And, you know, those are our friends and family, right? That's your circle.

And then we also have, you know, people who feel connected to your work and they, regardless of what you write, will always give you good reviews.

And then we also have the camp of, I don't know what I would call it. It's almost like Twitter, like where they just like come and they just like leave these devastating one line things that, you know, when you talk about that, I'm like, my gosh, you know, I've been really drawn to Letterbox for my movie life, which is kind of like Goodreads for film. And I do find myself wanting that quick one-liner, you know, funny summary of how someone feels about it. But we often don't think about, okay, this person who created this or like gave their life, you know, savings or their time, you know, books are a really extensive, long project to come in and just leave these devastating one liners that can throw, you know, this is exactly what's happening in the story.

One review shifts the whole thing down, right? And people will often go in there and look and see, okay, if it's below this, I won't read it, right? Because, you know, it, you only have so much time to read. And unfortunately, I just don't feel like that's a very good gauge for a reading experience for me, at least. And I have to like, not think about other people's feedback about experiences with books. So it doesn't taint what I have in my experience with a book.

Laura (26:23)

Yeah, it's funny. Sometimes I'll read a book not knowing anything about how it's been received and love it passionately and then go on and look at the readings

and find that they're actually quite low. And that's, I think happened to me in previous books, I think the book of mine that might have the lowest rating. The people who didn't like it didn't like it, but the people who loved it are like, this is my favorite book. And I think it goes back to that thing of like, you can't please all people. And if you try to, you might write something that just is kind of inoffensive and can be wonderful, but maybe isn't grabbing people who need something particular at a particular point in time.

Amy (27:12)

I completely agree. So I was thinking about Rob's honesty in leaving a one-star review on Natalie's book. And I feel like that was very crucial to who he is. Like, if he was bending, it wouldn't be Rob, right? Like he has to be that way because it is just; it is right. And he is willing to like stand up for what's right.

I was thinking about my spouse being very similar to that. I don't think that he would leave a one-star review because he would be worried about people's feelings, but he also would not give you a review that you did not deserve. And I'm wondering if you think people like Rob are beneficial to both writers and other people within the community, or do you see this as being detrimental to writers to have people like Rob leaving reviews?

Laura (28:03)

You know, I think readers should be as honest as they want to be.

I think there are probably situations in which you pull your punches. Like if it's a family member, if it's somebody you know in real life, like maybe then just focus on the things that you did like, or as your husband might do, don't leave a review at all. You know, if my brother went on Amazon and left me a four-star review even for something, I'd be like, what are you doing? You have to give me five stars because you're my family. But I think beyond that like if you don't personally know the author, you don't owe them anything.

And like, do I think that we all might be happier, more well-adjusted people if we tried to focus on the good in something and appreciate the effort that somebody put into something? Maybe. But also, as you said, with Letterbox, like sometimes

it is fun to just be like, here's a little snarky thing that I feel about this book that I didn't enjoy. And that is like 100% every reader's right to do. And I think then authors just need to take care of themselves by not seeking that out. And, you know, on the other hand, I think readers can be considerate to authors by not tagging them in negative or even mixed reviews.

But they absolutely have a right to review anything, any way that they want to. And I think even a negative review shows that they were engaging with your book, which is a good thing, all in all.

Amy (29:43)

Good point. I am wondering, though, how did you start creating boundaries for yourself with Goodreads? Have you had any advice from other authors or people in the industry that have helped you process feedback? Are you meeting with a therapist? What is happening here, Laura? We need to know all the details.

Laura (30:03)

My gosh. Am I meeting with a therapist? Not currently, but maybe I should start again. You know, I, for a little while, I think I would go on and just filter. So I only could see the five-star reviews, which was kind of nice, but still you would see your rating and stuff and you would wonder. Now what I do, actually is like, my husband occasionally goes on and will just send me some of the nice reviews whenever I need a little ego boost. But for the most part, I kind of just try to forget that it exists, you know, and I go on my social media and when people tag me in reviews, generally they are nice reviews. And so that feeds the part of me that's like, I hope people are engaging with my book. So I don't, I don't need to go on Goodreads, but that took years of time to stop feeling that urge to check it.

And there are authors that I know who love to go on their own Goodreads and who read every single review, no matter how negative and who say, you know, I'd like to do this because it actually helps me become a better writer. And I can take this criticism in and then for my next book, try to address it and grow beyond that. And I personally choose to believe that I can get feedback from my editor and my agent and my writing group and they can help me grow as a

writer. And I probably don't need to just read whatever negative reviews are out there online. And I kind of think that the authors who are able to do that must just have these superhuman senses of self so that they're not destroyed by that and more power to them.

But I think there's no shame in being an author who needs to protect yourself from that sort of thing. And I will say another little tip, if you're ever feeling down about, you know, what people might think about your books is you can go on somebody else's Goodreads, like find a book that you absolutely love and just go and read the negative reviews of that and be like, okay, well, this book changed my life. And yet, you know, I Captured the Castle, which we were just talking about. I think I went on Goodreads at one point over the past few months and the top review on there is overall, you know, has many lovely reviews, but the top review on there is like vicious. And yet I've read that book multiple times and underlined it and love it so much. So,

Amy (32:43)

Well, that's great advice. I had watched, I guess it was a video of an author also saying that she takes the critics' reviews, not Goodreaders' reviews. But she goes, and then whatever point that she sees that maybe they're being critical about, she just answers that question on her social media. If this particular plot point doesn't make sense to someone, it's a way to be like, hey, this is why I chose this. And processing that feedback in a way that for the public to be like, OK, I didn't really understand that, or I didn't really connect to this element of the story and being able to control the narrative of what that feedback was. I thought it was so smart. I'll try and find the video of it. But just taking that critical feedback and saying, okay, I see what you're saying here, but let me explain why I did that. Setting it up so that when you have new readers, they have that experience where maybe they also feel similarly to the critic, but then they get to understand why you made that decision.

Laura (33:48)

That's really interesting.

Amy (33:50)



Well, I am really, really excited because Laura is going to stick around for a bonus episode. I hope that you are in our Patreon community. It is only \$5 a month, but you get a lot back, not just spoiler episodes, but get to participate in our book club. And I guess at the end of this, I would like to ask you, Laura, how you feel; like if you were going to give a star rating to your experience on the book gang.

How many stars would you give us knowing that we're going to be promoting?  
No, I'm just kidding.

Laura (34:23)

One. No, I'm just kidding! Five stars all around. my gosh. I was saying earlier that this is actually my first interview about this book because we're recording this in April and it's been a perfect entry into publicity for this book. So thank you.

Amy (34:43)

I love it. Laura, you know, at the end of all of our interviews, we always ask, you know, what you might be particularly feeling proud of. It can be in general, like with your life in general being as a new mom, or it can be about this project itself. But I would just love to hear what's bringing you a lot of joy right now.

Laura (35:02)

I think so. You know, my daughter is seven months old at this point. And it's been such a joy having her in our lives. And it's also really exciting to like start going back to work. And I think finding the balance, I feel excited and proud about that. Like just making more space in my life.

Amy (35:27)

I love that. Well, you definitely want to be part of the spoiler chat because we are going to talk through some really surprising twists that happen in this story and find out how those came to be.

It's been such a joy to have you on here, Laura. I'll meet you over on the other side.

Laura (35:43)

Thank you for having me.

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