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Boy Meets Girl

Christie Hodgen
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The intertwining of the personal and the political is at the heart of Christie Hodgen's *Boy Meets Girl*, a smart, funny novel.

In 1992, rich Ben meets poor-ish Sam in a New Hampshire sandwich shop. Ben is working on a political campaign with Kurtz and Boris, two colorful characters whose bickering adds energy to his observations of American campaign politics. Days before, Sam met Bill Clinton; these two meetings become glowing etchings in her mind.

This is a tender, humanistic dissection of the on-again, off-again romance between Ben and Sam. Ben becomes a New York therapist and almost gets married; Sam becomes a literature professor in a Midwest college and has an unplanned pregnancy. They love each other, but can't seem to meet on equal grounds. They toggle between love and friendship.

And Ben and Sam's circumstances are shared against manifold accounts of American politics: the book covers Bill Clinton's election, September 11, 2001, the invasion of Iraq, the housing-bubble burst, Occupy Wall Street, Guantanamo, and Hillary Clinton's bid for the presidency. Ben and Sam's ruminations and exchanges include trenchant commentary on these events, incorporating references from culture and literature and subtle, often mordant humor.

As the novel zigzags between 1992 and 2017, its temporal interludes become evocative of conversations with a therapist. They are poignant in revealing Ben's emotional paralysis and inability to risk his heart for love, as well as Sam's patient, almost pathetic, yearning and years of waiting for him. As they pursue happiness, they become aware of how unbridgeable the chasms between them are.

Portraying American political life through the prism of romantic realism, *Boy Meets Girl* is an ambitious and beautiful trawl through liberal, middle-class America that captures the deep emotional rifts between the haves and the have-nots.

ELAINE CHIEW (March / April 2022)

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