

## Getting to Yes

**Tim Hunnicutt**

Welling Up

(260pp)

979-898874202-9

*An earnest but misguided college freshman falls in and out of love with a variety of women in the musing romance novel Getting to Yes.*

In Tim Hunnicutt's winding romance novel *Getting to Yes*, a college man is eager to find lasting love.

In the 1970s, Chris has just completed his first year at Florida State University. He has a summer job at a pizzeria. There, a new employee, Chloe, strikes his interest.

After Chris and Chloe meet, the novel makes an abrupt shift away from its present to focus on Chris's past. A conversational narrator, Chris decides to list the young women he met before Chloe. The ten chapters that follow each name one such woman, introduced with matter-of-fact details and a hint of nostalgia. One woman invited him to a "hellfire and brimstone" sermon; with others, he experienced period-specific pastimes like disco or had youthful escapades, attending football games, enjoying dorm life, and drinking.

Though most of his accounts of his past near-romantic entanglements are lighthearted, Chris seems to be eager to prove that no woman prior to Chloe was the right partner for him. Indeed, his freewheeling attitude means that he is prone to fall into romantic feelings for people at first sight; they depart his life with equal ease, often because of differences in expectations or outside circumstances. This approach shortchanges the book's character development, though. And even after Chloe is introduced, she is relegated to the story's backdrop for lengthy intervals. Further, the other young women are described primarily in terms of their physical attributes, quirks, and attractive qualities; many are present for single incidents.

The result is a book made up of isolated anecdotes and moved forward by a man's loose assessments of women whose ultimate influence on him is limited. Indeed—beyond brief tangents related to his anxiety and a troubling memory involving his mother—Chris evades much reflection throughout. And because the women are ill fleshed out, his experiences with them seem interchangeable. The Florida setting is also vague—covered by naming towns and including minor details, as of the weather or Chris's date spots, absent richer descriptions.

When the story at last returns to Chloe, delays concerning work schedules and her lack of availability mean that her first date with Chris must be postponed. The pair wrestles with the minutiae of getting to know another person, asking common questions that contribute to a lagging pace. Scenes that are too similar in nature (Chris and Chloe are seen parking and making out, for example) further dilute the narrative tension. In the end, this is a too-simple view of the couple's relationship, marked by the anguish and fervor of youth more so than by legitimate conflicts.

In the coming-of-age romance novel *Getting to Yes*, a young man meets an interesting girl and lists his past romantic interests.

KAREN RIGBY (December 5, 2023)

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