



Girl with a Future

Parker Ames

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In the hopeful novel Girl with a Future, a complicated young adult struggles to embrace the unconventional.

In Parker Ames's down-to-earth novel *Girl with a Future*, a smart Canadian girl's plans derail in the vulnerable years between the end of high school and early adulthood.

At seventeen, Angie is unhappy and restless. Her father just died, and her ideal future—which once centered on swimming, college, a job in finance, and getting away from her mother—takes a backseat while she takes over and sells his business. She proves adept at the task, but despite her talent for succeeding on her own terms, she's unsatisfied. She postpones college and leaves for Paris.

During this transformative interlude, Angie forges a relationship with a painter and has an abortion, prompting her to go back to Canada. Once she's home, alcohol and job-hopping fill her days until she enrolls in college. At twenty-one, though, starting college isn't easy, and Angie ends up transferring to Vancouver in search of inspiration. Her story works toward an unresolved, abrupt conclusion.

The eventful plot is at various points both a sympathetic portrait of a risk-taker who's trying to find her place and a familiar tale of growing up that involves sudden, sobering wake-up calls. These include a car accident, sexual assault, and self-talk about needing to change. The latter often results in bursts of productivity, after which Angie resumes her carefree habits.

Angie's characterization is full of intriguing contradictions, such as that she seems competent but is prone to self-sabotage. However, the story moves at such speed that Angie's contradictions are underdeveloped. For example: between first meeting her Parisian lover and becoming his art manager, several months pass, but a gulf of implied savvy occurs behind the scenes. Angie's more clear-minded, practical decisions, such as investing in stocks, are mature compared to her impulsive judgment elsewhere. Repetitive drinking scenes and forthright explanations of Angie's thoughts and feelings are painful and sometimes circuitous—a picture of what it's like to teeter between uncertainty and confidence.

Angie's realistic romances and friendships reflect her shortcomings and capture the awkwardness of first sexual encounters. Angie's habit of holding people at a distance is clear, too. Most of Angie's relationships fade, their short-lived nature reflecting her self-sufficiency; however, that there's no other strong character means that the reading experience is uneven. So much emphasis is placed on Angie herself that it's tough to see her from a balanced perspective. The winsome, late arrival of Samuel, an aspiring screenwriter, provides Angie with necessary warmth and insight. The conversations between them are tender, though the book concludes too soon for Angie and Samuel's relationship to fully develop.

In the hopeful novel *Girl with a Future*, a complicated young adult struggles to embrace the unconventional on her rocky path to coming of age.

KAREN RIGBY (November 20, 2019)

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