

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Curtis Sittenfeld is the bestselling author of seven novels: [Prep](#), [The Man of My Dreams](#), [American Wife](#), [Sisterland](#), [Eligible](#), [Rodham](#), and [Romantic Comedy](#), which was picked for [Reese Witherspoon's Book Club](#). Her first story collection, [You Think It, I'll Say It](#), was published in 2018 and also picked for Reese Witherspoon's Book Club. Her books have been selected by *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *People* for their "Ten Best Books of the Year" lists, optioned for television and film, and translated into thirty languages. Her short stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, and *Esquire*, and in the *Best American Short Stories* anthology, of which she was the 2020 guest editor. Her non-fiction has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Atlantic*, *Slate*, and on "This American Life." A graduate of Stanford University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Curtis has appeared as a guest on [NPR's "Fresh Air,"](#) CBS's "Early Show," and [PBS's Newshour](#); four times been a Jeopardy! answer (see below), and once been a [Word Search puzzle](#).

Author's website.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The novel features a SNL-like sketch show. Do you watch SNL? What did you think about the parts dedicated to making the show?
2. What is your overall impression of Sally? Why was comedy writing the right path for her?
3. What compelled her to write the Danny Horst Rule? What message was she trying to convey? Do you agree with her viewpoints?
4. Appearances are covered quite a bit in the story. Why do you think there's so much pressure on women to have the perfect appearance?
5. Let's talk about the first meeting between Sally and Noah. What were your main takeaways?

6. After Noah's episode, the cast and crew go out to celebrate. Sally and Noah talk and have an easy rapport, which panics Sally and she becomes a bit mean and pushes him away. This happens a couple times throughout the novel. Why do you think Sally acted this way to Noah? What was she afraid of?
7. The story moves forward a couple years and it's the beginning of the pandemic with everyone staying at home. Sally receives an email from Noah out of the blue and they restart their banter but also get to know each other more. Why was email the best way from them to connect? What did you learn about the two of them through their email exchanges?
8. Would they have reconnected if not for the pandemic?
9. Ignoring her fear of rejection, Sally decides to take Noah up on his offer and come visit him in LA. Let's discuss their first in-person reunion since the show.
10. Despite public perception and even their own initial hesitations, what is behind Sally and Noah's strong connection? What do they bring out in each other?
11. The two eventually get caught by photographers and both are distraught but for seemingly different reasons. However, looks do come up and Noah acknowledges that Sally isn't the most beautiful person he's ever seen but she offers so much more than just looks. Curious to hear your thoughts on this. Was he simply being honest? How would you have reacted if you were Sally?
12. Eventually, Sally decides to leave the show behind and marry Noah. She also starts her screenwriting career. Let's discuss their love story overall. Do you feel they are a good match? Did you like the ending?

Bookclubchat.com.

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### Booklist

When yet another shmopey guy--this time, her office mate at the Saturday Night Live--style show where she works--starts dating an uber-hot and talented female celebrity, comedy writer Sally channels her rage/certainty "that a gorgeous male celebrity would never fall in love with an ordinary, dorky, unkempt woman" into a sketch. The host and musical guest for this week's episode of *The Night Owls* is the "outrageously handsome" superstar Noah Brewster, who seeks Sally's help punching up his own sketch--she's known around the studio as the queen of comedic structure. Sure that there could be nothing between them, due to the aforementioned law-turned-sketch, intimacy-phobic (and perhaps ordinary, dorky, and unkempt) Sally is her best, brilliant, warm self with Noah during the weeklong lead-up to the show, a fun and frenetic frame for the book's first half that's full of insider-feeling, behind-the-scenes excitement. You can see where this might be going, and yet how much you'll enjoy getting there. Dialogue zips and zings as hearts plummet and soar through Sally and Noah's meeting, misunderstanding, and years-later rapprochement as COVID-19 dawns. Sittenfeld's (*Rodham*, 2020) meta-romance is an utterly perfect version of itself,

a self-aware and pandemic-informed love story that's no less romantic for being either. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: Sittenfeld's fiction has flown off shelves since her debut, *Prep* (2005), and fans will flock to this pure-fun, feminist romp.

### Publisher's Weekly

The culture wars and political drama of Sittenfeld's best work are absent in her underwhelming latest (after *Rodham*), which follows a successful but insecure woman who catches the eye of a rock star. It's 2018, and Sally Milz, 36, is a seasoned staff writer for the sketch comedy show *The Night Owls*, a thinly disguised SNL. She is busy pulling all-nighters and writing up a storm of skits, one of which is a spoof on gorgeous women actors dating nerdy, wordy guys--and how the opposite would never happen--when Noah Brewster, the host and musical guest for the upcoming episode, asks her to help him with some material. Despite their chemistry, Sally cannot believe that a gorgeous celebrity could fall in love with her. Then Covid comes along before they reconnect, first with a long string of emails during July 2020. In the third act, a month later, they reunite in person. The email thread goes on a bit too long, sapping the narrative of momentum, though Sittenfeld does manage to evoke Sally's vulnerability ("because I'm in danger of confusing the romance of emailing with the romance of romance," she writes to Noah). There's some brilliant character work, but as Cinderella stories go, this doesn't quite stand out. Agent: Claudia Ballard, WME. (Apr.)

### Library Journal

Sittenfeld, known for creating complicated women (*Eligible*; *Rodham*), does the same with Sally, a quirky, whip-smart writer at a fictionalized Saturday Night Live--esque show called *The Night Owls*. Working closely with celebrities has made her cynical about fake romance in pop culture. When pop star Noah Brewster guest-hosts, Sally writes a few of his sketches, and sparks seem to fly. Fast-forward to 2020, in the depths of the COVID lockdown; Noah and Sally reconnect, and the sparks start a bonfire. The desire in both of them to connect is so strong it bursts off the page. Sittenfeld's writing is crisp and current, and her cultural references make this tender story sizzle. Reminiscent of 1999's *Notting Hill*, in which Hugh Grant as an everyman British bookstore owner falls in love with Julia Roberts's Hollywood actress, the novel also contains Sittenfeld's trademark themes of gender politics and social class. VERDICT Buy multiple copies and get ready for the movie that's sure to follow Sittenfeld's latest novel. She consistently proves herself as one of the most readable contemporary novelists. Her books are impossible to put down, and the characters will continue to swim around in readers' minds long after the final chapters.--Beth Liebman Gibbs

### Kirkus Reviews

A budding romance with a famous singer forces a TV writer to grapple with her insecurities. Sally Milz, a 36-year-old writer for the Saturday Night Live--esque show *The Night Owls*, believes that others see her as "a mild-mannered woman of average intelligence and attractiveness." Shot down years ago after confessing her love to fellow TNO writer Elliot (who went on to marry a gorgeous pop star), Sally now keeps romantic prospects at arm's length. At work, she channels her anger at sexist double standards into uproarious sketches like "The Danny Horst Rule," a reference to a schlubby co-worker who, à la SNL's Pete Davidson, is dating well above his station. (Per that rule, a less-than-stunning woman can't pull off the same feat.) Enter this week's host, Noah Brewster, a gorgeous singer/songwriter whom Sally initially views with skepticism but with whom she has undeniable chemistry--a fact that simultaneously delights and terrifies her and sends her running until two years later, when the pair reconnect during the Covid-19 shutdown. Sittenfeld has a gift for plumbing the neuroses of perceptive outsiders ("a spy or an anthropologist" is how Sally characterizes herself). But while in Sittenfeld's first novel, *Prep*, Lee Fiora alternated between simmering resentment for her popular classmates and hope that they might embrace her, Sally is both resigned to her fate and more likely to buck it. With an Austen-esque eye for social nuance, the author also deftly

teases out the currencies of Sally's world--physical attractiveness, talent, celebrity, youth--and explores how these elements intersect with gender. The book falters somewhat in its quick resolution; given how many pages Sally spends pondering the oddity of her dating Noah, it's disappointing that comparatively little time is devoted to exploring others' reactions to their actual relationship. Overall, though, the work is a pleasure, balancing probing analysis with an absorbing narrative. Romance artfully and entertainingly deconstructed. Copyright (c) Kirkus Reviews, used with permission.

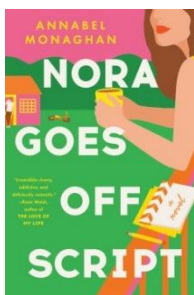
## SOLITO READALIKES - FOOTNOTES

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### ***The Book Proposal* by K.J. Micciche**

Forging an unlikely friendship with her long ago high-school crush, romance writer Gracie Landing uses his tales of his break-up as a source of material for her current work-in-progress, risking her career and chance at happiness when chaos ensues.



### ***Nora Goes Off Script* by Annabel Monaghan**

Nora Hamilton is slowly getting out of debt after her husband left her and their two children. She makes a living writing formulaic scripts for the Romance Channel, a Hallmarkesque network, in the little tea cottage behind her crumbling old house. Except after Ben left, she wrote a different kind of script, and now it is being made into a prestige film starring Leo Vance. Filming only takes a few days, but Leo doesn't leave. He needs a break from Hollywood, and he's charmed by Nora's small town and her mundane days picking up kids from school and grocery shopping. They start an affair, and it's just like one of her movies, until it's not, and Leo is called away to test for a big-budget superhero flick.



### ***Spoiler Alert* by Olivia Dade**

Geologist and cosplayer April (aka Unapologetic Lavinia Stan), and actor and secret fanfiction author Marcus (aka Book!AeneasWouldNever), are good friends in the online community dedicated to shaping the wildly popular internet couple Aeneas and Lavinia. What no one in the fandom realizes—since it could cost him his job—is that Marcus is Aeneas. Or at least, he plays him on TV. When April's latest plus-size Lavinia costume goes viral, Marcus asks her out to dinner to quiet the internet trolls but soon figures out their virtual connection.