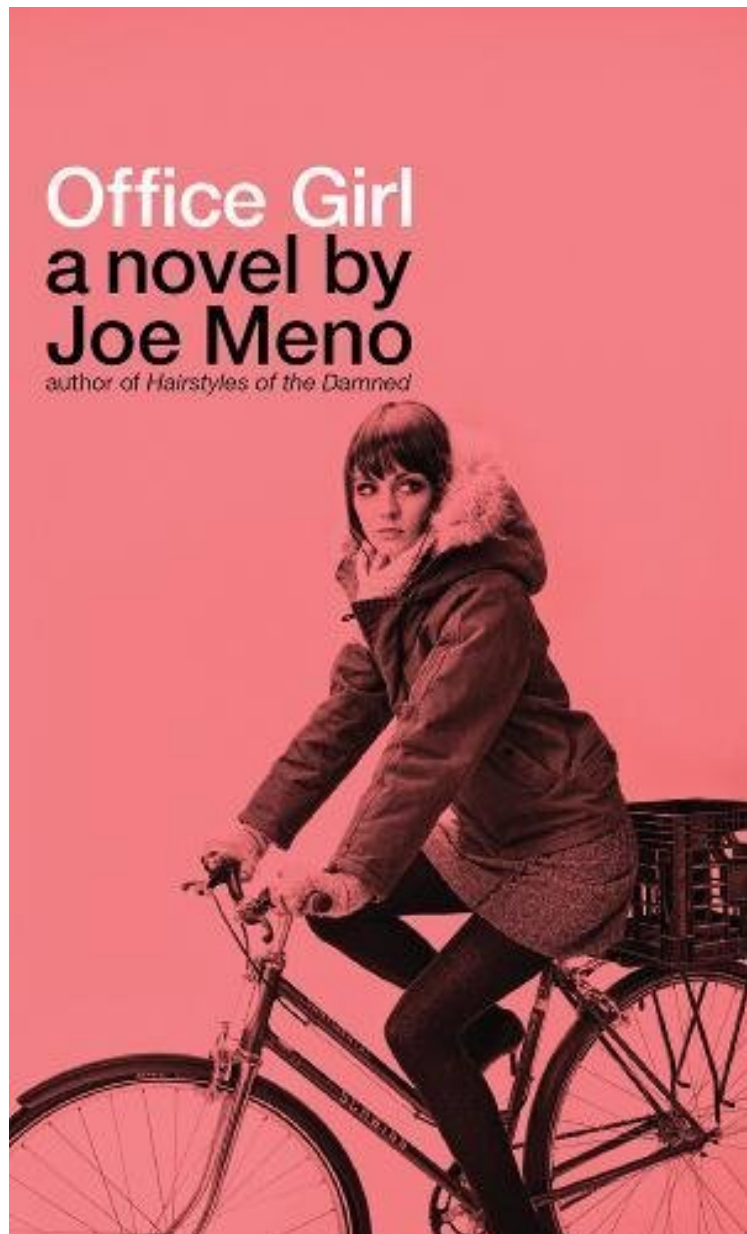


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## Office Girl

*Joe Meno*

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**Joe Meno : Office Girl** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Office Girl:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Two totally lost young people stumble into each otherBy PatriciaThis book is about two lost souls who flounder around and find some brief comfort when they stumble into

each other. A guy and a girl - they are both good, kind people who have no idea what they want or how to live. They meander from job to job, pranks, drugs, sex - and find it all unfulfilling. I suspect they represent a lot of people in this world and in that way they break your heart. It is well written but for me it was not a fulfilling book. Somehow reminds me of Samuel Beckett - which I suppose is a great compliment! As a footnote, the girl's name is Odile, which she finds uncommon. I grew up in South Louisiana and that name was fairly common among the older French people. I still remember an "Aunt Odile". 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Alternately Irritating and Entertaining By kcucciaEhhh. After finishing this book yesterday I spent a while trying to figure out why I alternated between liking bits of it and being totally irritated by most of it. I liked the idea that life is really about the small moments we experience or create, but was totally annoyed by the characters. Neither Jack nor Odile was particularly likeable or original. They both seemed to act much too young for their age and neither seemed quite believable - they both felt too much like a stereotypical hipster. Their angst was pretty cliched. The writing was blah with a few good bits. The emphasis on color was interesting if you paid attention to it. The illustrations and photos were an interesting idea and sometimes quite entertaining, but it all seemed to be trying a little too hard to be clever. I enjoyed the little acts of art terrorism, but wasn't really moved by it, but rather admired the ideas from a distance. You never really get close to feeling anything real in this book - it's a pretty quick, superficial read. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Cute and quirky, like every indie romantic comedy ever made... By Larry Hoffer "What do you do with the rest of your life when you realize you don't like anything?" This is one of the questions raised by Odile, one of the main characters of Joe Meno's newest book, *Office Girl*. Odile is a 20-something art school dropout working in a series of boring office jobs and dreaming of creating something special, of making people take notice. She finds herself falling into inappropriate relationship after inappropriate relationship, all because she's afraid of not being liked. When she meets Jack, an amateur sound artist whose marriage has ended and who doesn't know what to do with his life, the two forge an immediate connection while trying not to fall into their regular behavior patterns. Odile and Jack start an art revolution, which combines performance art (spontaneously breaking into a scene from a movie while on the subway), graffiti, and creating an imaginary persona, Alphonse F., to whom they attribute their "art." All the while, the two find themselves falling in love, experiencing all of the joy, comfort, insecurity, and doubts that young love brings, with the hopes and fears that come with opening yourself up to another person. And with love often comes self-discovery and the ability to make changes in your life, even if they may not be the right ones. Joe Meno is at his best when he's capturing the angst, insecurity, and eccentricities of 20-somethings or even high school students, as he did in his terrific *Hairstyles of the Damned*. The book honestly feels like an aggregation of every quirky independent movie about a couple ever made. You can totally see this book as a movie, and in fact, I think these characters might even be more vivid on the screen than they were on the page. This was a tremendously quick read, light and enjoyable, with a hazy ending you may or may not like.

"Meno's tender, hip, funny, and imaginative portrayal of two Chicago misfits...dramatizes that anguished and awkward passage between legal age and actual adulthood."--Booklist, "Core Collection: New Adult Fiction" Named "Best New Novel by a Chicagoan" and "Best Book for the Disillusioned Artist in All of Us" by the Chicago Reader Selected by The Believer's readers as a favorite fiction work of 2012 One of DailyCandy's Best Books of 2012 "An off-kilter romance doubles as an art movement in Joe Meno's novel. The novel reads as a parody of art-school types...and as a tribute to their devil-may-care spirit. Meno impressively captures post-adolescent female angst and insecurity. Fresh and funny, the images also encapsulate the mortification, confusion and excitement that define so many 20-something existences."--The New York Times Book Review "Wonderful storytelling panache...Odile is a brash, moody, likable young woman navigating the obstacles of caddish boyfriends and lousy jobs, embarking on the sort of sentimental journey that literary heroines have been making since Fanny Burney's *Evelina* in the 1770s. Tenderhearted Jack is the awkward, quiet sort that the women in Jane Austen's novels overlook until book's end. He is obsessed with tape-recording Chicago's ambient noises so that he can simulate the city in the safety of his bedroom, 'a single town he has invented made of nothing but sound.' Mr. Meno excels at capturing the way that budding love can make two people feel brave and freshly alive to their surroundings...the story of the relationship has a sweet simplicity."--The Wall Street Journal "In Joe Meno's new novel, set in the last year of the 20th century, art school dropout Odile Neff and amateur sound artist Jack Blevins work deadening office jobs; gush about indie rock, French film, and obscure comic book artists; and gradually start a relationship that doubles as an art movement. They are, in other words, the 20-something doyens of pop culture and their tale of promiscuous roommates, on-again/off-again exes, and awkward sex is punctuated on the page by cute little doodles, black and white photographs (of, say, a topless woman in a Stormtrooper mask), and monologues that could easily pass for Belle Sebastian lyrics ("It doesn't pay to be a dreamer because all they really want you to do is answer the phone")."--Publishers Weekly (Pick of the Week) "Meno has constructed a snowflake-delicate inquiry into alienation and longing. Illustrated with drawings and photographs and shaped by tender empathy, buoyant imagination, and bittersweet wit, this wistful, provocative, off-kilter love story affirms the bonds forged by art and story."--Booklist (starred review) No one dies in *Office Girl*. Nobody talks about the international political situation. There is no mention of any economic collapse. Nothing takes place during a World

War. Instead, this novel is about young people doing interesting things in the final moments of the last century. Odile is a lovely twenty-three-year-old art-school dropout, a minor vandal, and a hopeless dreamer. Jack is a twenty-five-year-old shirker who's most happy capturing the endless noises of the city on his out-of-date tape recorder. Together they decide to start their own art movement in defiance of a contemporary culture made dull by both the tedious and the obvious. Set in February 1999 just before the end of one world and the beginning of another, *Office Girl* is the story of two people caught between the uncertainty of their futures and the all-too-brief moments of modern life. Joe Meno's latest novel also features black-and-white illustrations by renowned artist Cody Hudson and photographs by visionary photographer Todd Baxter.

.com Best Books of the Month, July 2012: Light but not fluffy, spare but not small, this novel from the Chicago-based playwright and novelist is a love letter to youth, art, and, well, love. It is 1999, and 23-year-old Odile (think the actress from *Amlie* or *The Entertainer*, except she's American; ever self-aware, Meno concludes the book with a note expecting a movie version) and Jack, a 25-year-old semi-slacker, meet through their excruciatingly dull cubicle jobs and decide to start their own unboring art movement. Along the way, they talk, ride bicycles, and do graffiti. But the plot here is not the thing. Meno's style is charmingly simple: He writes in short chapters mercifully light on irony and peppered with black-and-white illustrations and photographs that stop just this side of cute, raising this tale of frustrated Gen-Xers way above the clichéd boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl story of any era. --Sara Nelson "The talented Chicago-based Meno has composed a gorgeous little indie romance, circa 1999...When things Get Weird as things do when we're young, Meno is refreshingly honest in portraying lowest lows and not just the innocent highs. A sweetheart of a novel, complete with a hazy ending." --Kirkus s"Along with PBRs, flannels, and thick-framed glasses, this Millennial Franny and Zoey is an instant hipster staple. Plot notes: It's 1999 and Odile and Jack are partying like it was...well, you know. Meno's alternative titles help give the gist: *Bohemians* or *Young People on Bicycles Doing Troubling Things*. Cross-media: Drawings and Polaroids provide a playful, quirky element." --Marie Claire"Odile and Jack are...two characters in search of authentic emotion...their pas de deux is...dynamic. Meno's plain style seems appropriate for these characters and their occasions, and the low-key drawings and amateur photographs that punctuate the narrative lend a home-video feel to this story of slacker bohemia, the temp jobs, odd jobs and hand jobs." --Chicago Tribune"Meno's book is an honest look at the isolation of being a creative person in your twenties living in a city...Cody Hudson's hand-drawn illustrations, which relate to the text only laterally, add a charm akin to the small doodles that break up long New Yorker articles. The photos by Todd Baxter add a third level to the package, helping to make Meno's book feel more like an artwork." --The Daily Beast, "3 Must-Read Offbeat Novels""A beguiling and slyly disquieting storyteller, Meno forges surprising connections between deep emotion and edgy absurdity, self-conscious hipness and timeless metaphysics. In this geeky-elegant novel, Meno transforms wintry Chicago into a wondrous crystallization of countless dreams and tragedies, while telling the stories of two derailed young artists, two wounded souls, in cinematic vignettes that range from lushly atmospheric visions to crack-shot volleys of poignant and funny dialogue. With bicycles in the snow emblematic of both precariousness and determination, Meno's charming, melancholy, frank and droll love story wrapped around an art manifesto both celebrates those who question and protest the established order and contemplates the dilemmas that make family, creativity, ambition and love perpetually confounding and essential." --Kansas City Star"A wispy, bittersweet (emphasis on the bitter, not the sweet) romance, *Office Girl* is the story of Odile and Jack, a pair of alienated twentysomething bohemians whose artistic ambitions are being worn away by one soul-killing call-center job after another in Chicago." --Chicago Sun-Times"Office Girl is a bittersweet little love story framed by Bill Clinton's 1999 impeachment trial and the turn of the millennium...By letting his characters be emotionally vulnerable, even shallow or trite which is to say...real--Meno supplies an off-kilter, slightly inappropriate answer to the Hollywood rom-com. Meno is a deft writer. The dialogue in *Office Girl* is often funny, the pacing quirky, and some of its quick, affecting similes remind me of Lorrie Moore." --Chicago Reader"Meno's books have become increasingly liminal and idiosyncratic. In this latest, it feels as if Meno has written the book he's been wanting to write for years, combining all of those classic elements of his previous work: the stop-and-start of youthful inertia, the painful purity of romance, the way childhood informs (i.e. wrecks) us as adults and a direct prose cut into vignettes and montage. He also works with longtime collaborators photographer Todd Baxter and painter Cody Hudson...Gorgeously packaged, it's like a Meno box set 15 years in the making." --Time Out Chicago"It might be a standard boy-meets-girl tale, if not for the fact that the boy likes to record the sounds of gloves abandoned in snowdrifts, while the girl has a penchant for filling elevators with silver balloons. It's 1999. Odile has left grad school while Jack's wife has recently left him; after both stumble into jobs at the same telemarketing firm, they meet, and it isn't long before he is supporting her attempt to create a whimsical, anti-establishment art movement." --Time Out New York"Office Girl might be Joe Meno's breakthrough novel. Set in 1999, *Office Girl* tells the story of a pair of young, intelligent drifters who decide to start their own art movement. It's a stripped-down experience of a novel which means Meno's crystalline prose has a chance to shine." --The Stranger"Office Girl is a relatively simple love story: You know most of the beats and understand from the beginning how the story needs to end; the pleasure comes from the way Meno hits those beats, how he manages his characters and moments. And some

of those moments are really excellent: Jack and Odile's drift toward a first kiss, for instance, or their lovers' conspiracy, mirrored in Cody Hudson's naive drawings. And the heavier ideas that Meno stuffs into the corners around his self-consciously slight characters--like an ongoing struggle with sound and music that's part of the last-act climax--give the book more weight."--Philadelphia City Paper"A lithe, winking take on the boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl cliché, Meno's newest novel is like *Perks of Being a Wallflower* for the 20-something set--and just like that iconic novel of creatives-in-crisis, this one is quirky, clever, and full of bitten tongues and youthful dreaming. Add bicycles, fingerless gloves, and one of the most twee art projects we could have ever imagined, and you've got a charming and unpretentious hipster love story destined to be the next cult classic."--Flavorwire"Office Girl shelves neatly into the anti-establishment, punk-rock canon Meno created with books like his breakthrough, *Hairstyles of the Damned*."--Onion A.V. Club"Mr. Meno approaches his title character's potentially depressing combination of disadvantageous circumstances and poor choices with sufficient aesthetic distance to find levity amid the angst. And while *Office Girl* is a quick and easy read, it is not insubstantial."--New York Journal of Books"While *Office Girl* features illustrations by artist Cody Hudson and photographs by Todd Baxter, its real substance lies in the story itself. Set in Chicago right before the new millennium, Meno, a Chicagoan, explores the start of an art movement through the eyes of two twenty-something dreamers in this novel."--Michigan Avenue Magazine"Joe Meno's newest novel *Office Girl*, isn't some end-of-the-Millennium gloomy read. Rather it's an unconventional call to action encapsulating the lives of two 'creative souls' set adrift in urban Chicago at the end of the twentieth century...Don't be fooled by its lack of chapters and intermittent doodles, there are sections that you will likely have to reread before you can truly grasp Jack and Odile's motivations. At times it can even be a bit disheartening, but that is actually what makes *Office Girl* brilliant. Whether you are 13 or 30, it's the perfect book to pick up when that nagging feeling of unrest captures you over your current condition."--Revel Rouse Magazine"I was completely charmed by its boy-meets-quirky girl romance. *Office Girl* is unabashedly earnest. It's so sweet and sincere...The most important detail is the year: 1999, a moment of uncertainty in the world and the lives of the novel's couple...Today, when it seems that most media is hellbent on constantly reflecting on and reinventing our childhood and adolescence, it's refreshing to read a novel that can be nostalgic without being ironic."--Grantland"*Office Girl* is packed with whimsy and soft terror. It's emotionally affective and its scenes are sometimes too familiar, as if you have once been here yourself, in this same office, in that same bedroom, on that same street. It's the tale of a weeklong romance that cuts to the heart. At times you remember it like it was your own. Both Jack and Odile suffer from their own inability to translate their thoughts into words, and they possess a certain innocent, curious sexuality. There's nothing graphic here, but the feelings are laid bare. And, as if in a dream, you can watch those feelings winding themselves through Jack and Odile's increasingly complex layers of consciousness...It's a specific book about general rite of passage; an investigation of that strange, dream-like transition between youth and adulthood, where everything seems possible and terrifying and wonderful all at once. Meno does good here."--Anobium"Joe Meno's *Office Girl* draws the awkward love story of two twenty-somethings with grace and empathy in this exceptional novel."--Largehearted Boy"Wistful, heartbreaking, and melancholy, a sneakily tight manuscript that gets better and better the farther you read."--Chicago Center for Literature and Photography"With a format reminiscent of J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey*, *Office Girl* lets the reader develop his own ideas about each of the two characters...There is a spark. There is momentum."--The Wichita Eagle"The book is a love story but one with a different twist on your typical boy-meets-girl, then boy-loses-girl story...*Office Girl* by Joe Meno has an indie feel...Meno captures perfectly the fleeting thoughts of fancy of young people...Set in the whimsical, uncertain time of young adult life when you don't know what you are doing yet...What happens next is just like love...unpredictable. Joe Meno has done a remarkable job of capturing an age old story, in a brand new way. This is a bright read."--California Literary "The writing in this novel is crisp and clever. It's art that's at times beautiful without getting in the way of the story. Chicago becomes a character in the novel the way it does in the works of Nelson Algren and Saul Bellow, but it's Chicago that is between Algren's gritty streets and Bellow's upscale avenues...It's the kind of book that makes you blow off what you're supposed to be doing so you can keep reading."--Razorcake"Young love. Bicycles. Art school. Joe Meno's hipster romance about a couple going against the grain bubbles with funny dialogue and the charm of a French new wave movie (chalk it up to the whole defiant-youth-run-wild thing). Black-and-white illustrations by artist Cody Hudson and photos by up-and-comer Todd Baxter set the mood."--DailyCandy"Fresh and sharply observed, *Office Girl* is a love story on bicycles, capturing the beauty of individual moments and the magic hidden in everyday objects and people. Joe Meno will make you stop and notice the world. And he will make you wonder."--Hannah Tinti, author of *The Good Thief*"I'm terrible, I bail on most books. Recent ones that delighted me the whole way through were...*Office Girl* by Joe Meno."--Maria Semple, author of *Where'd You Go, Bernadette*, in the New York Times Book 's "By the Book" feature