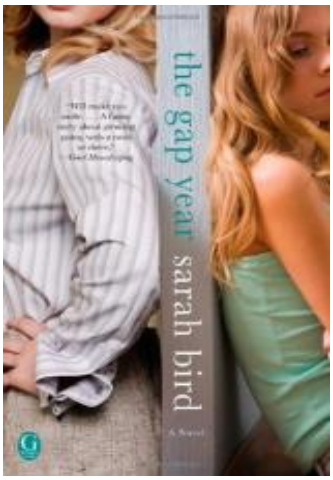
The Gap Year

by Sarah Bird



About the Book

From the widely praised author of **The Yokota Officers Club** and **The Flamenco Academy**, a novel as hilarious as it is heartbreaking about a single mom and her 17-year-old daughter learning how to let go in that precarious moment before college empties the nest.

In **The Gap Year**, told with perfect pitch from both points of view, we meet Cam Lightsey, lactation consultant extraordinaire, a divorcée still secretly carrying a torch for the ex who dumped her, a suburban misfit who?s given up her rebel dreams so her only child can get a good education.

We also learn the secrets of Aubrey Lightsey, tired of being the dutiful, grade-grubbing band geek, ready to explode from wanting her ?real? life to begin, trying to figure out love with boys weaned on Internet porn.

When Aubrey meets Tyler Moldenhauer, football idol --- sex god with a dangerous past, the fuse is lit. Late-bloomer Aubrey metastasizes into Cam?s worst silent, sullen teen nightmare, a girl with zero interest in college. Worse, on the sly Aubrey?s in touch with her father, who left when she was two to join a celebrity-ridden nutball cult.

As the novel unfolds --- with humor, edge-of-your-seat suspense, and penetrating insights about love in the twenty-first century --- the dreams of daughter, mother, and father chart an inevitable, but perhaps not fatal, collision?

Discussion Guide

1. How does Bird use humor to convey character? What about the characters who aren?t particularly funny?

2. On page 14, Cam observes a group of mothers with their young children, ?They wanted what we all want: reassurance that they had made the right choices.? Does Cam believe she has chosen wisely? Does Aubrey agree with her? How do

Aubrey?s own choices reflect upon Cam?s?

3. Discuss the way Bird uses time --- setting Aubrey?s story in one period and Cam?s in another. How do the two timelines play off each other?

4. Cam believes that Tyler is the reason for the friction between her and Aubrey, but how does the secret that Audrey is keeping about Martin affect her rebellion against Cam?

5. ?My mother hovered and clung more than any helicopter mom that was ever invented after her. But even she couldn?t control any of the most important events in my life.? (page 50) How does Cam?s distaste for her own mother?s parenting style affect her relationship with Aubrey? Why is Bobbi Mac so important, in contrast?

6. What do Aubrey?s and Cam?s notions of independence and individuality say about their decisions in life? Who seems more comfortable following her own path?

7. Discuss the notion of maternal sacrifice. How are Cam?s and Dori?s sacrifices interpreted by their daughters?

8. Why does Martin allow himself to be sucked into Next? Why doesn?t Cam do the same?

9. Throughout the novel, Cam and Aubrey make assumptions --- about each other, about Tyler, about Martin. Why can?t they communicate more openly? Why have they lost each other?s trust?

10. On page 225, Martin tells Cam, ?For some of us, being right is so much sexier than sex.? What does he mean by this?

11. How does the revelation about Tyler?s upbringing change your perception of him? What do you think Cam?s response would be?

12. Martin tells Cam she is ?a true rebel,? who always knew exactly who she was and what she wanted. (page 264) How does this differ from the way Aubrey sees her? From the way Cam sees herself?

13. Discuss the ending. How does Twyla?s newborn, Aubrey, help Cam to accept her own daughter?

Author Bio

Sarah Bird?s novel, ABOVE THE EAST CHINA SEA, was longlisted for the Dublin International Literary Award. A Dobie-Paisano Fellowship helped in researching DAUGHTER OF A DAUGHTER OF A QUEEN. Raised in an Air Force family on bases around the world, Sarah is the child of two warriors, a WWII Army nurse and an Air Corps bombardier, who met at a barn dance in North Africa. She lives in Austin, Texas.

Critical Praise

"Writing so sharp, smart, funny, and addictive, it?s as if Molly Ivins had given birth to a novelist daughter."

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