



Chasing Stars

Meg Gaertner

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A poignant story of sisterhood and coming-of-age, Meg Gaertner's novel *Chasing Stars* follows changes to a seventh grader's life that leave her floundering and searching for stable ground.

Libby and her sister Erica were born just two years apart. Erica is Libby's closest playmate; they are used to doing everything together, from playing dress-up to having snowball fights. But Erica has recently become distant; now, everything Libby does seems to irritate her sister or be met with a cold shoulder. At the same time, the girls' grandfather comes to stay as his dementia worsens; no affordable memory care facilities are available, forcing Erica to give up her room and move in with Libby. Close quarters do nothing to improve the sisters' relations. Then, Libby discovers that her sister will be leaving for boarding school in just a few months.

Bewildered and hurt, Libby reveals her feelings via careful introspection throughout the book, trying to figure out her sister's motives as well as her own. The pressures of intergenerational living and chronic illness weave through the plot, resulting in both tension and an opportunity for growth. Libby sees her parents' vulnerability in grieving their own aging parents and, in a deft parallel, her grandfather's loss of memory comes just as Libby is trying to save her childhood memories from being dismissed by her sister's new insistence that they are "cringe." And outside of the family circle, the cultures of the seventh and ninth grades are captured with detailed litanies of babysitting jobs, dances, tone-deaf friends, and movie marathons.

In the empathetic and warm novel *Chasing Stars*, once-close sisters navigate accumulating changes to find their ways back to each other.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (January / February 2024)

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