



KATIE COTUGNO

Birds of California

READING GROUP GUIDE



Former child actor Fiona St. James dropped out of the spotlight after a spectacularly public crash and burn. The tabloids called her crazy and self-destructive and said she'd lost her mind. Now in her late twenties, Fiona believes her humiliating past is firmly behind her. She's finally regained a modicum of privacy, and she won't let anything—or anyone—mess it up.

Unlike Fiona, Sam Fox, who played her older brother on the popular television show "Birds of California", loves the perks that come with being a successful Hollywood actor: fame, women, parties, money. When his current show gets cancelled and his agent starts to avoid his calls, the desperate actor enthusiastically signs on for a "Birds of California" revival. But to make it happen, he needs Fiona St. James.

Against her better judgment, Fiona agrees to have lunch with Sam. What happens next takes them both by surprise. Sam is enthralled by Fiona's take-no-prisoners attitude, and Fiona discovers a lovable goofball behind Sam's close-up-ready face. Long drives to the beach, late nights at dive bars . . . theirs is the kind of kitschy romance Hollywood sells. But just like in the rom-coms Fiona despises, there's a twist that threatens her new love. Sam doesn't know the full story behind her breakdown. What happens when she reveals the truth?



BIRDS OF CALIFORNIA

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The media turned on Fiona once she started acting erratically and “Birds of California” was canceled. What are some real-life examples of female celebrities who are reviled for their supposed bad behavior? Do you feel like those reputations are deserved? Why or why not?

2. Sam feels pressure to act like everything in his life is going well, even in front of his family and his agent, while Fiona has shut out nearly everyone in her life altogether. Why do you think they’re able to open up to each other?

3. Part of the reason Fiona loves being an Angel City Player is the freedom she perceives for herself in the theater—she thinks of it as a place where nobody knows who she is. Do you have any hobbies or passions you’re able to lose yourself in?

4. Thandie mentions to Fiona that the world is “less forgiving of bullshit from people who look like [her].” In what ways are celebrities of color held to different/higher standards than white celebrities?

5. Throughout the novel, both Sam and Fiona reflect on their relationships with Jamie. How were these relationships similar? How were they different? How does the way each of them feels about Jamie change over the course of the book?

6. Sam lies to Fiona, both directly and by omission, throughout the novel. Do you forgive him for this by the end of the book? Why or why not?

7. Two of Fiona’s most important relationships are with Estelle and Claudia. What are the strengths of these relationships? What are the limits?

8. Fiona feels an obligation to come forward about what happened with Jamie because she suspects he has victimized other girls as well. Do you think speaking out is her responsibility? Why or why not?

Katie Cotugno is the *New York Times* bestselling author of six romantic young adult novels including *99 Days* and *You Say It First*, all published by Balzer + Bray/HarperCollins. She is also the co-author, along with Candace Bushnell, of *Rules for Being a Girl*. In addition to her young adult novels, she has ghostwritten six romance novels and self-published three more under the pen name Ruby McNally.

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