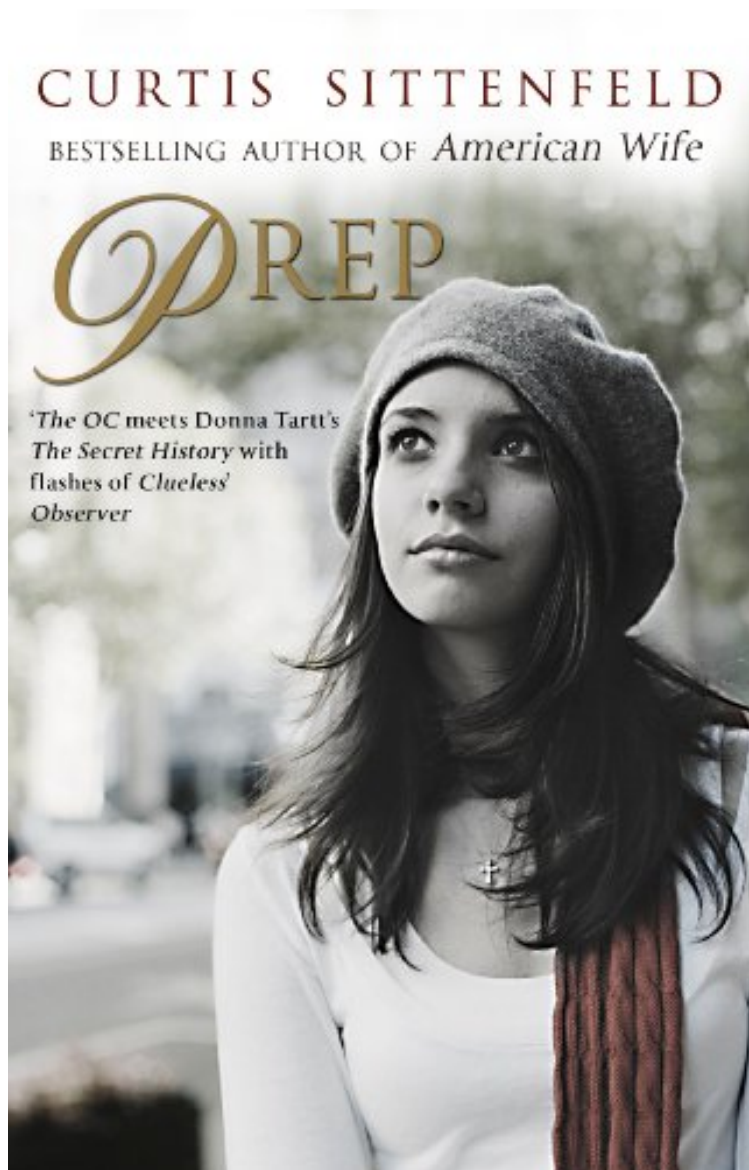


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Prep



Par Curtis Sittenfeld
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA stunning novel in the great tradition of American coming-of-age novels from Catcher in the Rye to The Secret History.Lee Fiora is a shy fourteen-year-old when she leaves small-town Indiana for a scholarship at Ault, an exclusive boarding school in Massachusetts. Her head is filled with images from the school brochure of handsome boys in sweaters leaning against old brick buildings, girls running with lacrosse sticks across pristine athletics fields, everyone singing hymns in chapel. But as she soon learns, Ault is a minefield of unstated rules and incomprehensible social rituals, and Lee must work hard to find - and maintain - her place in the pecking order..comCurtis Sittenfeld's poignant and occassionally angst-ridden debut novel Prep is the story of Lee Fiora, a South Bend, Indiana, teenager who

wins a scholarship to the prestigious Ault school, an East Coast institution where "money was everywhere on campus, but it was usually invisible." As we follow Lee through boarding school, we witness firsthand the triumphs and tragedies that shape our heroine's coming-of-age. Yet while Sittenfeld may be a skilled storyteller, her real gift lies in her ability to expertly give voice to what is often described as the most alienating period in a young person's life: high school. True to its genre, Prep is filled with boarding school stereotypes--from the alienated gay student to the picture perfect blond girl; the aching earnest first-year English teacher and the dreamy star basketball player who never mentions the fact that he's Jewish. Lee's status as an outsider is further affirmed after her parents drive 18 hours in their beat-up Datsun to attend Parent's Weekend, where most of the kids "got trashed and ended up skinny-dipping in the indoor pool" at their parents' fancy hotel. Yet even as the weekend deteriorates into disaster and ends with a heartbreaking slap across the face, Sittenfeld never blames or excuses anyone; rather, she simply incorporates the experience into Lee's sense of self. ("How was I supposed to understand, when I applied at the age of thirteen, that you have your whole life to leave your family?") By the time Lee graduates from Ault, some readers may tire of her constant worrying and self-doubting obsessions. However, every time we feel close to giving up on her, Sittenfeld reels us back in and makes us root for Lee. In doing so, perhaps we are rooting for every high school student who's ever wanted nothing more than to belong. --Gisele Toueg

Extrait 1. Thieves Freshman fall I think that everything, or at least the part of everything that happened to me, started with the Roman architecture mix-up. Ancient History was my first class of the day, occurring after morning chapel and roll call, which was not actually roll call but a series of announcements that took place in an enormous room with twenty-foot-high Palladian windows, rows and rows of desks with hinged tops that you lifted to store your books inside, and mahogany panels on the wall one for each class since Aults founding in 1882 engraved with the name of every person who had graduated from the school. The two senior prefects led roll call, standing at a desk on a platform and calling on the people who signed up ahead of time to make announcements. My own desk, assigned alphabetically, was near the platform, and because I didn't talk to my classmates who sat around me, I spent the lull before roll call listening to the prefects exchanges with teachers or other students or each other. The prefects names were Henry Thorpe and Gates Medkowski. It was my fourth week at the school, and I didn't know much about Ault, but I did know that Gates was the first girl in Aults history to have been elected prefect. The teachers announcements were straightforward and succinct: Please remember that your adviser request forms are due by noon on Thursday. The students announcements were lengthy the longer roll call was, the shorter first period would be and filled with double entendres: Boys soccer is practicing on Coates Field today, which, if you don't know where it is, is behind the headmasters house, and if you still don't know where it is, ask Fred. Where are you, Fred? You wanna raise your hand, man? There's Fred, everyone see Fred? Okay, so Coates Field. And remember bring your balls. When the announcements were finished, Henry or Gates pressed a button on the side of the desk, like a doorbell, there was a ringing throughout the schoolhouse, and we all shuffled off to class. In Ancient History, we were making presentations on different topics, and I was one of the students presenting that day. From a library book, I had copied pictures of the Colosseum, the Pantheon, and the Baths of Diocletian, then glued the pictures onto a piece of poster board and outlined the edges with green and yellow markers. The night before, I stood in front of the mirror in the dorm bathroom practicing what I'd say, but then someone had come in, and I pretended I was washing my hands and left. I was third; right before me was Jamie Lorison. Mrs. Van der Hoef had set a podium in the front of the classroom, and Jamie stood behind it, clutching index cards. It is a tribute to the genius of Roman architects, he began, that many of the buildings they designed more than two thousand years ago still exist today for modern peoples to visit and enjoy. My heart lurched. The genius of Roman architects was my topic, not Jamie's. I had difficulty listening as he continued, though certain familiar phrases emerged: the aqueducts, which were built to transport water . . . the Colosseum, originally called the Flavian Amphitheater . . . Mrs. Van der Hoef was standing to my left, and I leaned toward her and whispered, Excuse me. She seemed not to have heard me. Mrs. Van der Hoef? Then later, this gesture seemed particularly humiliating I reached out to touch her forearm. She was wearing a maroon silk dress with a collar and a skinny maroon belt, and I only brushed my fingers against the silk, but she drew back as if I'd pinched her. She glared at me, shook her head, and took several steps away. I'd like to pass around some pictures, I heard Jamie say. He lifted a stack of books from the floor. When he opened them, I saw colored pictures of the same buildings I had copied in black-and-white and stuck to poster board. Then his presentation ended. Until that day, I had never felt anything about Jamie Lorison, who was red-haired and skinny and breathed loudly, but as I watched him take his seat, a mild, contented expression

on his face, I loathed him. Lee Fiora, I believe you're next, Mrs. Van der Hoef said. See, the thing is, I began, maybe there's a problem. I could feel my classmates looking at me with growing interest. Ault prided itself on, among other things, its teacher-student ratio, and there were only twelve of us in the class. When all their eyes were on me at once, however, that did not seem like such a small number. I just can't go, I finally said. I beg your pardon? Mrs. Van der Hoef was in her late fifties, a tall, thin woman with a bony nose. I'd heard that she was the widow of a famous archaeologist, not that any archaeologists were famous to me. See, my presentation is or it was going to be I thought I was supposed to talk about but maybe, now that Jamie you're not making sense, Miss Fiora, Mrs. Van der Hoef said. You need to speak clearly. If I go, I'll be saying the same thing as Jamie. But you're presenting on a different topic. Actually, I'm talking about architecture, too. She walked to her desk and ran her finger down a piece of paper. I had been looking at her while we spoke, and now that she had turned away, I didn't know what to do with my eyes. My classmates were still watching me. During the school year so far, I'd spoken in classes only when I was called on, which was not often; the other kids at Ault were enthusiastic about participating. Back in my junior high in South Bend, Indiana, many classes had felt like one-on-one discussions between the teacher and me, while the rest of the students daydreamed or doodled. Here, the fact that I did the reading didn't distinguish me. In fact, nothing distinguished me. And now, in my most lengthy discourse to date, I was revealing myself to be strange and stupid. You're not presenting on architecture, Mrs. Van der Hoef said. You're presenting on athletics. Athletics? I repeated. There was no way I'd have volunteered for such a topic. She thrust the sheet of paper at me, and there was my name, Lee Fiora Athletics, in her writing, just below James Lorison Architecture. We'd signed up for topics by raising our hands in class; clearly, she had misunderstood me. I could do athletics, I said uncertainly. Tomorrow I could do them. Are you suggesting that the students presenting tomorrow have their time reduced on your behalf? No, no, of course not. But maybe a different day, or maybe I could do it whenever. Just not today. All I'd be able to talk about today is architecture. Then you'll be talking about architecture. Please use the lectern. I stared at her. But Jamie just went. Miss Fiora, you are wasting class time. As I stood and gathered my notebook and poster board, I thought about how coming to Ault had been an enormous error. I would never have friends; the best I'd be able to hope for from my classmates would be pity. It had already been obvious to me that I was different from them, but I'd imagined that I could lie low for a while, getting a sense of them, then reinvent myself in their image. Now I'd been uncovered. I gripped either side of the podium and looked down at my notes. One of the most famous examples of Roman architecture is the Colosseum, I began. Historians believe that the Colosseum was called the Colosseum because of a large statue of the Colossus of Nero which was located nearby. I looked up from my notes. The faces of my classmates were neither kind nor unkind, sympathetic nor unsympathetic, engaged nor bored. The Colosseum was the site of shows held by the emperor or other aristocrats. The most famous of these shows was I paused. Ever since childhood, I have felt the onset of tears in my chin, and, at this moment, it was shaking. But I was not going to cry in front of strangers. Excuse me, I said, and I left the classroom. There was a girls bathroom across the hall, but I knew not to go in there because I would be too easy to find. I ducked into the stairwell and hurried down the steps to the first floor and out a side door. Outside it was sunny and cool, and with almost everyone in class, the campus felt pleasantly empty. I jogged toward my dorm. Maybe I would leave altogether: hitchhike to Boston, catch a bus, ride back home to Indiana. Fall in the Midwest would be pretty but not overly pretty not like in New England, where they called the leaves foliage. Back in South Bend, my younger brothers would be spending the evenings kicking the soccer ball in the backyard and coming in for dinner smelling like boy-sweat; they'd be deciding on their Halloween costumes, and when my father carved the pumpkin, he would hold the knife over his head and stagger toward my brothers with a maniacal expression on his face, and as they ran shrieking into the other room, my mother would say, Terry, quit scaring them. I reached the courtyard. Broussard's dorm was one of eight on the east side of campus, four boys dorms and four girls dorms forming a square, with granite benches in the middle. When I looked out the window of my room, I often saw couples using the benches, the boy sitting with his legs spread in front of him, the girl standing between his legs, her hand...