

KIRKUS REVIEWS

"A shared road trip creates a bond between two step-siblings, but this inward-looking character study focuses at least as much on their parents.

"Mapping a complex web of emotional ties and stress fractures, Smith constructs long paragraphs of rumination and painful flashbacks that move among all the major characters' points of view (with one significant exception). Exercising a real knack for making poor decisions, 19-year-old dropout Sanborn impulsively sets out one night to hitch from his Dallas suburb to Austin to confront his longtime girlfriend Lisa, who has just sent a "Dear John" letter from college—and finds himself saddled with 11-year-old stepsister Emily, desperate to see her divorced (and philandering) father. Meanwhile, Sanborn's widowed father Burl and Emily's mother Lily, both recovering alcoholics, find their sincere efforts to forge a marriage sharply challenged by their children's unexplained disappearance. The author tucks in complications and minor adventures for all (the young folk are never put into real danger), plus a realistic if poignant resolution, but these only form a backdrop for his exploration of each character's constellation of strengths and flaws. Self-analytical teen readers who find plenty to ponder in the heads of Sanborn, Burl, Emily and Lisa may be disappointed, though, that the author never gives Emily a fair chance to have her say.

"Slow, a little weak in the plot department, but rich in psychological insight and lit by occasional flashes of humor. (Fiction. 15-19, adult)" August 1, 2011