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Young Adult Fiction

Ethan Between Us
Anna Myers
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A young girl, Clare, looks back three years to the time when Ethan came into her life pushing best friend, Liz, aside. This is more than the story of one's first love and its effect on friendship. Ethan is handsome and musically talented. Clare is immediately drawn to him and his music, so unlike the constant drone of oil rigs which is the music of her mind and a constant reminder of the monotonous Oklahoma setting. When Clare is informed that Ethan just spent time in a mental institute, she tries to understand his explanation of his "visitor," a young composer named Friedrich. Ethan's claim that he'd rather die than return to the hospital gives one of many clues that something tragic will end this tale.

The author's retrospective approach also gives the reader a premonition of the story's outcome, although it's unexpected for the tragedy to involve a fire rather than a self-inflicted wound. A fourth character, Motie Ann, a "retarded" schoolmate, lends an understated balance to one of the book's themes of treating all people respectfully no matter their handicap. The book's only real questionable, albeit intriguing, moment comes when Motie Ann reveals she, too, can see Friedrich, an avenue left unexplored as Motie Ann also dies in the fire. While at times the book lapses into adult-speak, giving Clare some rather mature insights into love, Clare comes across as an intelligent high-schooler grappling with several intense issues simultaneously. Her falling out and subsequent resolution with Liz feels authentic and is a strong steadying backdrop for all of the book's other events. The book ends nicely as the author brings full circle the story's main plot of the lives of three people forever linked. Teen-agers will certainly enjoy this book's fresh perspective and direct, honest approach.

Martha Topol