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Young Adult Fiction

The Space Between Trees
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Sixteen-year-old Evie doesn't mind that she's the oldest paper carrier by three years, and the only girl, too. She knows that every Sunday morning as she's delivering papers in the trendy Hokepe Woods neighborhood, she'll eventually see Jonah, a college dropout whose job it is to clear out any dead animals from the woods each week. Her world changes radically when Jonah discovers the body of murdered high school student Elizabeth "Zabet" McCabe during his rounds.

Although Evie knew Zabet in elementary school, the loner teen hasn't been friends with Zabet or any other classmates since her father left the family. Before she realizes why she is doing it, Evie passes herself off as one of Zabet's best friends at her funeral and quickly becomes the companion of Zabet's real best friend, bad girl Hadley, who likes to smoke and remains at the center of school gossip. Evie, who's never even been kissed, is thrown into some intense social situations in the course of her newly acquired friendship. She is dragged to college parties where a controlling Hadley experiments with alcohol, pills, and her flirtatious sexuality, and she is forced to confront her guilt about using Zabet's reputation for her own needs.

This need for friendship also compels the teen, despite her misgivings, to join Hadley's obsession with finding Zabet's killer. As they work through the ever-growing list of suspects, including their homeroom teacher, the entire soccer team, the driver of a mysterious burgundy car, and even Jonah, Hadley's intensity and Evie's submissiveness mount until tragedy strikes again.

A debut young adult author, Williams serves on the English faculty at the Academy of Art University. She earned her MFA in writing at the University of Texas at Austin, and has published numerous short stories for adults in such publications as *Indiana Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Subtropics*, and *AGNI*.

In this edgy, atmospheric coming-of-age novel, Evie not only feels caught between her

own convictions and the wild ride Hadley creates, but also between different parts of her own self. “Sometimes I feel like I shouldn’t count as a teenager at all, that I’m much younger or maybe much older than I should be,” she explains. Realizing that she can never go back to undo the past, the teen must make sense of her current life as she’s introduced to terrible and inexplicable parts of humanity. While readers will want to reach in and save Evie, she must find herself first.

Angela Leeper