

## **Kirkus Reviews**

A young woman engulfed by alcoholism is summoned home when her abusive father suffers a massive stroke and her mother kills herself. Narrator Alexandra, aka Cat, has only one friend—Jack Daniels. Now in her late 20s, she's been absent from Wilton, her small Ohio hometown, for ten years, working as a stripper and cocktail waitress, living in rundown motels. Back at the family farmhouse, Cat learns that her mother shot herself in the kitchen, first considerately masking off the walls with plastic, even putting her suicide note in a Ziploc bag. The note, addressed to Cat, says, "He isn't who you think he is." At first Cat assumes "he" is her now-comatose father. Younger sister Wendy and older brother Jared arrive for Mom's funeral; only Wendy inquires about Dad. That becomes understandable as the narrative alternates between the summer Cat turned 17 and the present. Slim, girly Wendy was her father's princess. He directed much of his hostility and aggression against tomboyish, overweight Cat, molesting her almost in plain sight while her mother retreated. As the inevitable deathbed confrontation with Dad looms, Cat drifts in and out of sobriety, refusing to recall the ultimate violation that exiled her from Wilton. Her alcoholic daze and denial provide justification for the withholding of several crucial revelations (though of course the underlying reason is to heighten suspense). Other story problems are not so handily sidestepped. Wouldn't a wife seek help after her husband chops off her fingertip, forcing the children to watch? Would an entire town stand by as a father drags his daughter out of an Elks Club dance by her hair? Although belief is sometimes beggared, economical storytelling and Cat's snarky rejoinders to every attempt at polite sanctimony keep disbelief as precariously suspended as the rickety footbridge Dad forces the family to walk for his own amusement. Coyne's sure-handed debut wrings new insight from the overexploited topics of incest and domestic violence. (Kirkus Reviews, July 15, 2009)