

Steplings: A Novel - Cw Smith

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C.W. Smith's gift for creating three-dimensional characters, abundantly demonstrated in his previous TCU Press titles including *Understanding Women* and *Purple Hearts*, lends *Steplings* an unexpected quality of honesty and sophisticated narrative rarely seen in contemporary young-adult fiction. Mary Powell, author of the TCU Press books *Auslander* and *Galveston Rose*, describes Smith's prose as rich and sophisticated, yet accessible, and the dialogue is right on. *Steplings* doesn't romanticize the misadventures of its protagonists. Though Jason and Emily grapple with universal teen issues, Emily searches for acceptance in her new middle school, while Jason balks when confronted with new adult responsibilities; their troubles feel like uncharted territory when expressed through pitch-perfect narrative voices. Watching Jason self-destruct, according to Powell, is akin to watching someone in a horror film go down into the basement. The authentic quality of Smith's prose extends to the Texas setting; readers will recognize their neighbors in the characters that populate Mesquite and Austin. Kate Lehrer observed that Smith also draws subtle distinctions among social classes. Smith invokes tension between Jason's no-frills lifestyle and Lisa's country-club upbringing, and paints a widening gulf between Burl's small-town mannerisms and Lily's cosmopolitan tastes. Powell called *Steplings* a friendly, hopeful, humorous, and thoughtful book about growing up. Growing up, however, doesn't belong exclusively to the young, and *Steplings* is a story that can't be shelved neatly in the young-adult category. Both teen and adult readers will see themselves in this multifaceted narrative of self-discovery.

Author: Smith, CW
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