

Before We Sleep

Jeffrey Lent

In Lent's (*In the Fall*) elegaic sixth novel, 17-year-old Katey Snow sneaks out of her Vermont home while her parents sleep, hitting the road in search of answers to a family secret. Armed with three years of savings and a pack of old letters, Katey embarks on a journey of self-discovery that takes her from the coast of Maine to a small town in Virginia: it is the summer of 1966, and the winds of change are in the air. Chronicling Katey's parents' fledgling marriage with piercing acuity, Lent devotes half the narrative to that earlier generation. For Ruth and Oliver Snow, World War II changed everything: he returns home from service unable to communicate or take pleasure in anything, save for a family tradition of repairing fiddles. But a fateful visit from an old army buddy triggers something in Oliver and sets in motion an indiscretion that forms the reason for Katey's quest. As the past catches up with the present, Ruth and Katey, from their own vantage points, strive to find understanding in each other. **VERDICT** Lent's luxurious and deliberate writing is in no rush to deliver its ample rewards. For admirers of Emma Cline's *The Girls*, here is a less sensational but worthy companion.

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