

## Black Heart on the Appalachian Trail

T.J. Forrester

The Appalachian Trail is a source of restorative power as well as sudden violence in Forrester's second novel (after *Miracles, Inc.*). Taz Chavis, an ex-con whose long-estranged father has recently committed suicide, is seeking to sober up and reclaim his life by hiking the 2160-mile trail. He meets fellow thru-hikers Simone Decker, who struggles to control a potentially fatal compulsion, and Richard Nelson, a Blackfoot Indian given to flights of booze-induced revelry. The three debate whether people truly have the ability to change: Chavis desperately needs to believe they can, but Simone knows otherwise. Chavis's sharp-edged narration is broken by portraits of others living along the trail, from a woman whose husband develops an interest in the swinging lifestyle to a man who runs a B&B with his lover. All of these seemingly unrelated stories converge in a brutal climax that Cormac McCarthy readers will appreciate. VERDICT This slim but potent novel is carried along by a creeping dread, but it is Forrester's memorable characters and vivid descriptions of the trail (drawn from firsthand knowledge) that linger longest.

Copyright ©2012 Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. Reprinted with permission