

# KIRKUS

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# REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### **SPLIT ROCK ROAD**

McAllen, James

CreateSpace (204 pp.)

\$9.99 paperback, \$4.99 e-book

ISBN: 978-1481121361; February 19, 2013

## BOOK REVIEW

McAllen's short story collection deals with love, death, sex, loss and pain.

One man's apartment is taken over by lizards who read his newspaper and smoke his cigars. Another man, fresh out of bed with one woman, bonds with a second woman when they share a train ride and a conversation about Norman Mailer. A third man reminisces about a baseball game and seeing Mickey Mantle take the field. These varied characters populate McAllen's strong debut collection. The imagined lizards appear in "Love and Lizards," the heartfelt story of Stanley, a man who pays visits to his psychiatrist and can't quite come to terms with the losses he's experienced in his life. The four-page title story is a standout. In a passage that highlights McAllen's evocative prose, young Larry is walking home alone along a cracked road and imagining that the wind is talking to him and that there are wild animals following him. He tilts his "head skyward and sniffed at the air the way he had watched wild animals doing it on TV....For a moment, he thought he smelled bacon, but as the air rushed in, the scents and smells changed; leaves, dirt, leather, horses, all of the smells in his recollection seemed to pass by in one swift moment." The simple snapshot of a boy walking along the road while imagining a wild animal in his midst becomes a meditation on contemporary culture and familial relationships. While this story succeeds, some are too brief to reveal much about the characters. McAllen's writing, however, is strong, and he does an excellent job of building scenes and settings and creating memorable characters, such as a widower who poignantly recalls his last days with his wife. Some of the 20 stories are more successful than others, but overall, it's a promising debut.

Tracks wide-ranging characters through love, loss, paranoia and desire.