

SYNOPSIS

In-Between by Sandra Webb Smith

In the fictitious town of West Woods, Leah Tatum, 16, is a lithe, fresh-faced sophomore when she begins a new school in a new town. And she's deaf. Her world has never been normal. She hears sounds with the aid of a cochlear implant, and she communicates by speaking, although she has a definite "accent". Her father left the family when she was young, and she and her mother now barely get by. Leah secretly believes he left because of her, and she immerses herself in her artwork, which she sometimes uses to escape. She also likes to climb trees.

Now her father, who has recently been rehabilitated from an alcohol addiction, wants to make restitution to Leah and her mother. He tries to reappear in her life, but she is forcefully opposed. His abandonment helped to mold Leah's already heightened feelings of unworthiness and difference. (Even a deaf friend from her old school who uses sign language thinks Leah is "different" because she doesn't even know sign language and is able to speak.)

At school, Leah's mother pushes the school board for a transcriber to type written notes for Leah's classes. She succeeds. This service provides a valuable tool which "opens the door" for Leah academically. But Leah encounters prejudice and disapproval from some teachers and students. A vivacious girl befriends Leah and encourages her to join the school rock climbing team. When Leah proves her natural ability, a bully on the team, Hawkins Bennett, 17, feels threatened. He makes every effort to verbally oppose her and keep her from being on the team. Hawkins also tries to emotionally sabotage Leah's reputation at school and make her miserable. Hawkins' mother is a sadistic teacher who disapproves of Leah, adding to Leah's misery.

An attraction blossoms between Leah and a reserved male student on the team who is intrigued by Leah's talent and determination. Leah is attracted to him, but she becomes angry when he makes a move on her after hearing rumors about her.

At an overnight state rock climbing competition, Hawkins becomes a menacing threat to Leah, physically and emotionally. During an earthquake, Leah's skills and strengths are tested, not only on the rock, but in her character as well. She uses this strength to rescue Hawkins when he falls into a deep ravine and temporarily loses his hearing.

Leah's arc develops and changes dramatically as she gains the respect and acceptance she seeks. Her peers, teachers and townspeople now look at her differently. Her guilt-ridden, unworthy perception of herself fades as she realizes her talents and strengths, and she learns the real reason her father left her family at such a young age. She finally embraces and accepts who she is. In the end, Leah confidently begins down the path that was meant to be hers.