

"Northline" by Willy Vlautin (HarperPerennial)

*May 25, 2008*

*Los Angeles Times*

*By Richard Rayner, Special to The Times*

"Jimmy Bodie stood watching, drinking a beer while the girl sat near the video games, drunk. She was in her early twenties, an average-looking girl, thin with black hair and blue eyes," writes Willy Vlautin at the beginning of his second novel, a mournful and compelling story of working-class lives in Las Vegas and Reno. Vlautin leads the country rock band Richmond Fontaine, and this book comes with a CD soundtrack, but his fiction succeeds on its own. His heroine, Allison Johnson, is frequently drunk and frequently wounded, but we completely believe in the proud and sad and dangerous people she encounters. Raymond Carver and Tobias Wolff come to mind rather than Nick Cave, which isn't to knock Nick Cave, only to say that Vlautin has a literary voice that feels more grounded.