

MOJO REVIEW

NORTHLINE

* * * * (4 stars)

Faber & Faber

*From Richmond Fontaine frontman-a heart-rocking
Novel plus CD soundtrack.*

Her boyfriend's idea of romancing features shagging in the gents at a casino and moaning, "I hate talking when I'm fucking, you know that," when she complains. Pregnancy results and that's what finally see her leave Las Vegas for Reno. After the storytelling triumph of Richmond Fontaine's *13 Cities* album, songwriter Vlautin follows his excellent first novel, *The Motel Life*, with a raw tale of America's underclass. Allison Johnson is 22, intelligent, sweet, poor, weak natured, alcoholic. As she slips deeper into shame and despair, the driving question is whether she can scabble her way out to an existence of even modest day-to-day work-ability. Meanwhile, the cool clarity of Vlautin's simple prose, perfectly listened-to dialogue and unsentimental realism hold reader gloom at bay. The accompanying CD by Vlautin and his band's pedal/lap steel man Paul Brainard is a discreet sequence of instrumental(narrative lyrics would have competed with the book). All around, Willy Vlautin is becoming one of America's most fundamental artists in words and music.

Phil Sutcliffe