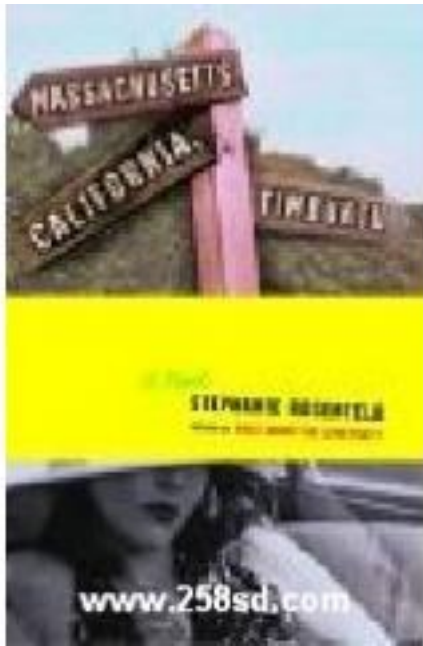


# Massachusetts, California, Timbuktu



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From Publishers Weekly Justine Hanley, an amazingly resourceful 12-year-old, battles endlessly in this sparkling, madcap first novel to make an ordinary life for herself, her depressive mother, Colleen, and Rona, her cranky five-year-old sister. Rosenfeld, author of the short story collection *What About the Love Part?*, adeptly portrays the family's slide into disaster, using just the right amount of humor and pathos. In California, the latest loser in Colleen's life, her abusive born-again boyfriend Dale, alienates Colleen from her friends and family. When she finally decides to leave him, she takes Justine and Rona on a cross-country journey to Massachusetts, ostensibly to hook up with some guy she met during her single years. The three move in with Colleen's old friend Marie, who has her own family to look after and grows more and more impatient as Colleen slips into paralyzing depression.

As the achingly vulnerable Justine looks on, Colleen ricochets from one boyfriend and job disaster to the next, always looking for love in the worst places and never finding the right kind of job to support her family. Through it all, Justine does her best to keep up her mom's spirits, humor her younger sister and face her own demons in the form of bullying kids at school and a hopelessly clueless teacher. Justine's first-person narration is wry and engaging ("`Go with the flow, " was a stupid, hippie way of saying, "`Do what other people want you to do'"), and Rosenfeld's decision to intercut the story with ongoing excerpts from Justine's pioneer diary-a school assignment that turns into a coded life story-is a clever device. Insightful and bitterly funny, this is a winning effort. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From School Library Journal Adult/High School-Justine Hanley, 12, the story's narrator, has learned to read the signs. As soon as a Ryder box shows up in her California home, she knows that Colleen is planning another move. Irresponsible, immature, and self-absorbed, her single mother is unable to keep a job or settle down. After a trip to the library to search through telephone directories for the current addresses of rock musicians from her youth, she and the children head for Massachusetts. Justine remembers to copy a map. She has to do a lot of thinking for them, and keeps lists of things that stress Colleen. At school in Massachusetts, she gets an assignment to keep a diary for a pioneer family going west. In the voice of Zebulina Walker, wife of a handsome, useless fiddler, the girl begins a second narrative whose passages are interspersed with her own tale. The account soon begins to mirror Justine's problems. As she is forced to feed herself and her younger sister on bits of food cleaned from the car's floor, Zebulina boils part of an ox hide to feed her hungry children. Both Justine and her fictional alter ego finally realize what they must do to save themselves. This is a compelling, sympathetic tale of an adolescent taking charge while she waits for her feckless mother to grow up. The vocabulary is worthy of OzzFest, so readers shy of graphic language should be warned. Kathy Tewell, Chantilly Regional Library, VA Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. See all Editorial Reviews

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