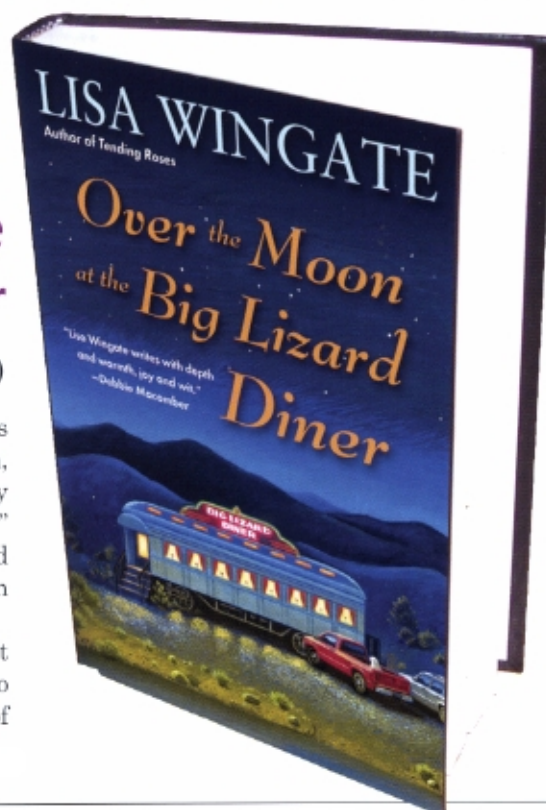


# Confusion Reigns in Texas Heat

## Over the Moon at the Big Lizard Diner

By Lisa Wingate (Penguin, \$13.95)



Lindsey Attwood is a woman with hang-ups. What she wistfully describes as the “debris of my life” comprises custody problems, low self-esteem, non-existent romance, loneliness, a suspicious nature and a propensity to fret about everything. She even refers to herself as a “sniveling weenie.” Not exactly brimming with self-confidence, our heroine. Plus she is conflicted about her maternal abilities, or lack thereof, and doesn’t trust her own instincts.

By trade a paleontologist, Lindsey toils away in a Denver basement while raising alone her daughter Sydney, who miraculously appears to have evaded her mother’s less salient qualities. The child, who is all of

eight years old, leads a fuller life than her mother does, and feels guilty about it.

The drudgery of Mom’s existence has not escaped her nearest and dearest, who suggest in no uncertain terms that she vacate her Colorado cocoon and embark on a little journey out West to immerse herself in a caper that will open her eyes, it is hoped, and give her a much needed kick in the rear. Off she goes to Texas, ostensibly to do a bit of sleuthing on the theft of valuable fossils from a ranch which provides lessons in horse psychology, of all things. A fool’s errand, perhaps, but surely some resolution will emerge. Too bad she has no clue how to handle a horse, let alone the attentions of a strapping cowboy who makes her knees go all wobbly. Along the way, Mom manages to save a stray sheepdog from certain death and promptly starts feeding him a steady diet of cheeseburgers, thereby, it could be argued, hastening his demise. She communicates with her daughter via neurotic daily e-mails, the poor child having been packed off to spend the summer with her errant father in Mexico. Now re-married, he has problems of his own, which soon become

Sometimes you want to grab this woman by the shoulders....

evident and serve to amplify Lindsey’s many anxieties.

A fling develops with the aforementioned ranch hand and provides her with an ally in the search for clues to the mystery and its probable perpetrators. Sometimes you want to grab this woman by the shoulders and shake the tremulousness out of her, and studly Zach is happy to oblige. The fact that she narrates the tale gives us a continuous peek inside her messy but rather endearing thought process, as we see her meandering through endless convolutions.

The plot lands her in plenty of hot water, of course, from which she manages

to extricate herself with increasing dexterity. Lindsey overcomes herself, up to a point. In spite of a tendency for cuteness, the book moves along briskly enough. We actually start to like the woman, and figure she can look after herself from now on. We no longer feel the urge to say, “Grow up, already.” So inevitably there is a metamorphosis of sorts, an awakening, and our protagonist shakes off a sizeable amount of her confusion and nagging overall ambivalence, learns some lessons and confronts the demons lurking within while developing a philosophy of survival and courage. She intones severely: “Trust is the invisible string that binds a relationship. Fear is the knife that severs it.”

*Kevin C. Madigan is a writer and translator who currently lives in Atlanta.*