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Driftless Quintet

Joe Sacksteder
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In Joe Sacksteder's *Driftless Quintet*, a high school hockey star settles in a mysterious new town for his senior year.

Hoping to further his career as a hockey goalie, Colton transfers north to a school in Driftless, Wisconsin. There, he is hosted by the Rentschler family of NHL legend. While in Driftless, Colton falls for Charlie, who seems out of reach from the beginning, and whom he learns is involved with his host brother, Ben.

Colton is the focus in the book; other characters are scant presences who function to move Colton's story forward. They are filtered through his realistic internal perspective, which reveals more about him than what he says in conversation. This is apparent in an exchange with a girl from his class; she tries to engage him in conversation, but Colton's focus remains on Charlie, and his tone is disinterested.

Because he's a musician, too, Colton's story is punctuated by references to classical music. Pieces are described in a way that heightens suspense, as when Colton's thoughts drift to Charlie and Ben during a piano performance that becomes more and more tense.

At first seeming like an ordinary town, Driftless's apparent normalcy crumbles after unsettling encounters with Colton's host family. Then Colton learns that the accident that resulted in Shane, the former goalie's, incapacitation may not have been an accident at all. Colton, too, could be headed toward a tragedy, and it might be too late for him to leave.

The story moves at a swift pace, and ambiguity surrounds its progression. Every scene escalates the sense of foreboding: Colton passes by the hockey rink and sees a display photo of Driftless players who are now dead; Shane's photo is included, even though he's still alive. Towards the end, past secrets come to light; when Colton is violently attacked, he comes to understand the real reason he was invited to Driftless.

A sports-centered coming-of-age story, *Driftless Quintet* is suspenseful and complex.

EDITH WAIRIMU (November / December 2019)

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