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Short Stories

Drowned Boy: Stories
Jerry Gabriel
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Two twentieth-century masters of the bildungsroman were James Joyce (Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man) and Ernest Hemingway (The Nick Adams Stories). Now the literary world has Joyce and Hemingway's twenty-first century successor: Jerry Gabriel offers readers a superb new collection of stories about two brothers coming of age in rural southern Ohio.

Nate Holland and his older brother Donnie live in Moraine, an isolated community where strained relationships, lackluster sporting events, mind-numbing monotony, and the surprising suddenness of death encroach upon everyone's lives. In spite of these bleak challenges, Nate's and Donnie's lives-as portrayed in eight splendid stories spanning eighteen years of the brothers' experiences-serve as examples of how to survive in spite of seemingly insurmountable odds.

The book's title story invites readers to consider the complicated ways in which a boy's accidental drowning in a nearly frozen river serves to bring Nate and a young woman together at the dead boy's house. It is significant that neither of these so-called mourners really knew the victim very well, but-perhaps more significantly-the real reasons for their curious pilgrimage to the drowned boy's wake offer each an opportunity for personal discovery.

In other stories, readers experience more of Nate's and Donnie's emotional and physical challenges during their young adult years. In the opening story, a runaway from a nearby boys' reformatory challenges the brothers' spirit of adventure as well as their understanding of the subtle differences between right and wrong. In one story, the brothers' father struggles to fit in with the rest of the family during a rain-drenched outing; and in another, the father surprises everyone when he tries to make sure that another man's son is never again physically abused. While the town faithfully supports a local basketball team, several fair-weather fans learn an important lesson about the meaning of community and loyalty. Later, a romance suddenly ends but neither Donnie nor his girlfriend are prepared for a father's reaction or the effects of the

weather. Finally, after a long time away from home, Nate goes looking for his brother but instead finds his family in crisis and their home in flames.

Sublime and stark, the stories in Drowned Boy showcase Jerry Gabriel's lean diction, crisp characterization, and exquisite storytelling. Readers eager to experience the very best in contemporary short stories need go no farther than this perfect collection. (January) Tim Davis