

BETWEEN DESPAIR AND DISTANCED SURETY: *YULETIDE BLUES*

Yuletide blues. R.P. MacIntyre. Thistle-down Press Ltd., 1991. 176 pp., \$16.00, paper. ISBN 0-920633-84-6.

The cover of *Yuletide Blues* features a photograph of the main character of the novel (Lanny Reich) sitting beside a hockey bag and gear, dressed in a hockey shirt, and staring dejectedly out a window. The back cover gives an ambiguous plot summary: it describes Lanny as an "avid hockey player," yet goes on to describe the novel without mentioning hockey again. The plot summary given is also so complete it carries the would-be reader up to chapter 23 in this 24 chapter novel. While the cover is both misleading and overly revealing, the story is a warm, well-written novel for adolescents.

The plot is relatively simple, and MacIntyre carries it out in a pleasing and direct first-person style. Lanny discovers that his parents have decided to take a winter vacation without him, and that he will be staying with his aunt. He is shocked when she tries to commit suicide soon after Christmas, before his parents leave. Having to face the problems of feeling alienated from his parents, and pondering his aunt's sad view on life, he stays with his great-aunt, who is clearly from another, much older, generation. MacIntyre's use of the first-person point of view—though an overused fictional device currently—is effective here; we experience almost first-hand the subtle shiftings in Lanny's emotional state as his frustration with his parents, his "blues" generally, encounters, and is placed into perspective by, the despair of his aunt on the one hand, and the distanced surety of his great-aunt on the other.

Lanny is a rich character, with a thought process that belies his age; although there are some darker undertones to this novel, Lanny deals with his problems in a humorous, insightful way. One example occurs when he tries to revive his great-aunt's cat with mouth-to-snout resuscitation after starting a fire in her house. There are also some truly touching moments here. When Lanny's father and uncle almost come to blows on Christmas Day, his Aunt Daphne arrives, and being totally oblivious to the situation, reacts with true Christmas spirit, kissing both of them and bringing a sense of goodwill in with her. A relieved Lanny tells us: "She doesn't know it, but she's already brought everyone a present. It's called PEACE."

While I liked *Yuletide blues*, I also became aware that it is very much a novel oriented towards males. While the roles of the characters aren't always stereotypical (Lanny's father is a poet), the female characters are often plagued with more personal problems than the males. However, given the depth and overall quality of the writing, I would strongly recommend it to most boys aged eleven to sixteen.

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