

Psychological thriller set offshore

"Goodnight Stranger"
by Miciah Bay Gault

Park Row Books, 2019

"Losing a child is the most traumatic event in a woman's life. It defines you." That's the comment of a woman to whom the book's narrator, Lydia, has gone to inquire about her family's past. As she hears it, she realizes the extent to which her mother made her own loss define her whole family. Lydia and her two brothers were triplets, but only she and her brother Lucas survived infancy. Colin, or "Baby B" as he is known in the family, died when he was six weeks old, and Mom, the dominating figure in the family, never let the children forget it.

Initially, Lydia escaped the household's perpetual mourning (the candles, the picture, the baby remembrances that bypassed their father's death) by going to college. But during her freshman year, she found her mother was dying, and she returned to their home on tiny Wolf Island, off Cape Cod. And there she has stayed, looking after pathologically shy Lucas. There is very little to sustain them.

They have inherited their parents' house, its attic and closets still filled with their parents' books, papers, and clothes, and its captivating view of the bay and a red houseboat deserted since its owners also lost a child. Their two jobs (on the island, almost all jobs are summer jobs) garner enough money to pay the taxes and the groceries, but no more. As the book opens, Lydia has been her brother's keeper for nearly

10 years, surreptitiously having an affair with her now-married high school crush, secretly filling out college applications, but assuring herself that she and Lucas love each other.

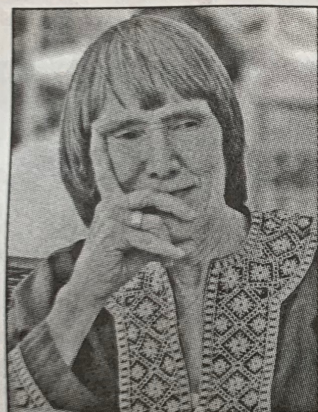
Into this isolated life walks a stranger. He could be a tourist, but he clearly knows Wolf Island. Lydia is attracted to him, and when she brings him home, Lucas instantly "recognizes" him as Baby B. Cole, the stranger, accepts Lucas' welcome, and the two become inseparable. Lydia gradually realizes that Cole is worming

his way into their lives, but the things Cole knows—the location of old restaurants, the placement of the spigot on the family's house, the way their mother used to meditate on the dock—make her doubt her own suspicions. Her research leads her off the island and into a friendship with Tuck, a friendly man who works at the information booth at Carson Cove. Gradually, the two of them bring Cole's history to light, but Lydia faces the danger of her knowledge alone.

The plot has two threads. The more suspenseful is the mystery of Cole and his power over Lucas and Lydia.

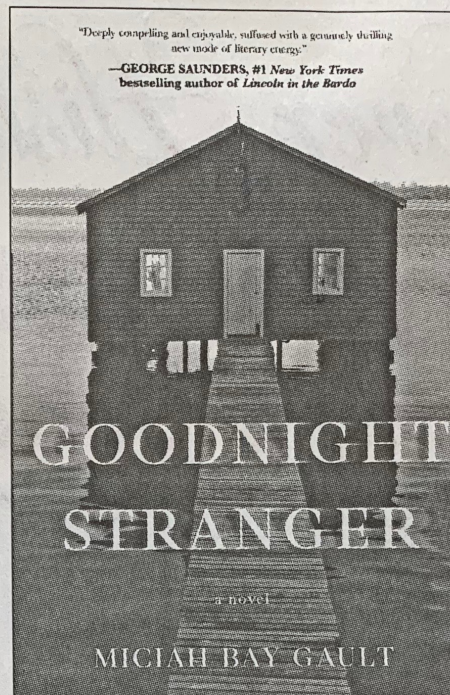
The other is the character study of Lydia, a 28-year-old kept in a state of arrested development by her mother's trauma. As Lydia unravels her mother's history, she is forced to come to grips with her own isolation (symbolized by the island setting) and crumbling of her family assumptions (symbolized by the decaying foundations of her house).

An attentive reader will have intuited a fair amount about Cole's identity early on in the book, thus weakening the suspense, and



One-Minute Book Reviews

Laura Stevenson



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the attention to Lydia's growth necessitates the anti-climactic ending that follows the fine climax. It is, however, an interesting read, wonderfully supported by its setting, which beautifully portrays a tiny community of people who all have known each other for years, the rhythms of their lives dictated by seasons, ferries, tides, storms, and the deceptive timelessness of the sea.

Laura Stevenson lives in Wilmington and her most recent novels are set on Boyd Hill Road.

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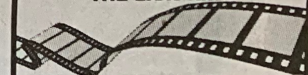
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RATED PG

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