



American Fallout

Brandon Wicks

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Avery Cullins lives an unconventional life. His current “family” includes a live-in boyfriend and pet turtle, very different from the traditional Southern upbringing and family that he left so many years ago. But when Avery’s father commits suicide, his worlds collide in surprising and meaningful ways. Now, Avery must travel cross-country with both his mother and his boyfriend, and somehow reconcile the past with the present without losing his grip on either.

The novel begins with four powerful words: “I need to explain.” From there, Avery details a journey of both self-discovery and growth. Wicks does not provide easy answers for Avery. His pilgrimage involves confronting and coming to terms with a family that had trouble accepting him, though the novel also focuses on shifting relationships and the difficulties that come along with navigating the self in a world where the meaning of “identity” constantly changes.

American Fallout is a powerful novel about family and change. Avery Cullins is a smart, sharp, and casual narrator with the self-awareness to understand the impact of the little changes that pile up over the course of his journey. What results is a strong work that refrains from generalized questions and neat answers, and that ends with a powerful image of the lessons Avery has drawn from his father’s suicide and the resulting fallout.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (Summer 2016)

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