

## Reader's Guide to *Some Rise*

### Summary

Told from the perspectives of multiple members of the Sutcliff family, *Some Rise* covers territory mapped out by perhaps the most urgent and confusing of all human experiences: love. When Harry Todd Sutcliff returns home to the small town of Furnass, Pennsylvania, after a twenty-five-year absence, penniless and out of options, he quickly stirs up talk about the death of his sister, Kathleen, which occurred years earlier. Harry Todd had always assumed she succumbed to the severe asthma that plagued her for the duration of her life, but he quickly realizes that much darker forces were at play. During Harry Todd's quest for the truth, several family secrets are unearthed, and the remaining members of the Sutcliff family—especially Harry Todd's youngest sibling, Dickie, and their aging mother, Kitty—are forced to confront painful memories. Set in the 1980s against the deterioration of the steel industry, the novel takes several unexpected turns as the Sutcliffs recognize the inescapable bonds that keep them tied to one another. In *Some Rise* Snodgrass has woven a poignant and enthralling tale of small-town dynamics, familial strife, and the unconscious undercurrents present in human relationships.

### Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. This novel is told from the point of view of several characters, each, at times, with varying recollections of past events. As you read, which character did you trust the most? Did these views change as the book progressed?
2. In what ways do you think the setting—a town in the midst of economic decline—contributes to the Sutcliff family dynamic? How does the setting reflect the family's position within the town of Furnass? And how do the Sutcliffs respond to the setting—do they do what they can to counter it, or do they accept it?
3. *Some Rise* is reminiscent of John Irving's *The Hotel New Hampshire* in the sense that it concerns complicated and taboo familial relationships. How do Irving and Snodgrass differ in their approaches to this topic?
4. Discuss the ways in which the author maintains Kathleen's place at the center of the novel, despite never writing a passage from her point of view.
5. Why does Harry Todd keep thinking he sees a woman in his mother's house? Why do no other characters seem to experience this?
6. At one point, Doctor tells Kitty, "People think love is pretty, but it isn't. It's usually ugly on some level, because it means one person wants another person's mind or soul or body for his or her own purposes. Love is one person trying to devour another in some way." Do you think this is inherently true within the context of *Some Rise*? In your own experiences?

7. *Some Rise* offers several glimpses into Kitty's past. How do you think her experiences as a young woman influenced her role as a mother? In what ways can both her shortcomings and achievements as a parent be attributed to what we know of her back story?
8. Toward the end of the novel, Kitty remarks, "I spent all those years trying to protect her father from Kathleen, and the one time that counted most I didn't do it," to which Dickie responds, "Don't you mean protect Kathleen from her father?" Discuss, in your opinion, which character(s) in *Some Rise* needed to be saved or protected, and from whom. Did they get the protection they deserved?
9. Dickie has had a very linear career path in business and real estate, while Harry Todd has worked a series of odd jobs in various industries. How do their occupations offer insight into the development of their characters and the ways in which they interact with the people around them?
10. Compare the ways in which Harry Todd and Dickie have understood and dealt with Kathleen's death. In what ways have these discrepancies contributed to the strained relationship between the two brothers?

### **About the Author**

*Richard Snodgrass's* short stories and essays have appeared in the *New England Review*, *Bread Loaf Quarterly*, *South Dakota Review*, *California Review*, and other publications. He is the recipient of a fellowship from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and has been artist in residence at Light Work, in Syracuse, New York, and at the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation, in Taos, New Mexico. His other books include *An Uncommon Field: The Flight 93 Temporary Memorial*, published in September of 2011 by Carnegie Mellon University Press, and *Kitchen Things: An Album of Vintage Utensils and Farm Kitchen Recipes*, published in 2013 by Skyhorse and named one of the year's "best books to get you thinking about food" by the Associated Press.