

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

ALL FALL DOWN

Richard Snodgrass

Calling Crow Press (274 pp.)

\$9.95 paperback, \$7.99 e-book

ISBN: 978-0-9997249-8-9; December 3, 2018

BOOK REVIEW

The sudden death of a prominent businessman with a long list of enemies raises suspicions in this last installment of a trilogy.

Dickie Sutcliff is a powerful figure in Furnass, an economically addled mill town in western Pennsylvania memorably described by Snodgrass (*The Building*, 2018, etc.). Dickie owns a successful real estate company working on a multimillion-dollar development that could hold the key to the area's revitalization, but he's found dead in the office—apparently he fell and hit his head on his desk, a fatal blow. Bryce Orr, the reverend who delivers Dickie's eulogy and an old classmate of his, finds it peculiar that no one seems all that interested in investigating the entrepreneur's death, despite his reputation as a ruthless businessman who left a trail of resentments in his wake. Bryce performs his own independent probe—a strange decision for a man of God who wasn't at all fond of Dickie—and finds no shortage of suspects. Dickie's mistress, Pamela DiCello, is convinced he was murdered: "There was a dent in his skull, an open wound, the edge of the desk punctured his skull. Do you have any idea how much force it would take to create a wound like that?" Tinker, Dickie's wife, was recently served divorce papers, and had plenty to lose financially. In addition, Julian Lyle, a business associate of the dead man, had been taken advantage of by Dickie, forced into a deal that was ruinous for him. And Dickie's shiftless brother, Harry Todd, returned to town after an extended absence and openly pined to claim his ownership of the company.

Snodgrass creates an atmospherically suffocating image of a town plagued by secrets and recriminations, a repository of family histories rarely spoken of but never forgotten. Dickie, despite already being dead at the commencement of the novel, looms large over the story—he's a deftly drawn hybrid of community patriarch and gangster. Dickie's daughter, Jennifer, almost takes it for granted that a man like her father would eventually be murdered: "The price of being who he was. What all he did. His position in town." The author dives deeply into the town's collective repression of its own darkness: Despite evidence of foul play, an autopsy is never ordered and the chief of police seems strenuously devoted to ensuring a thorough investigation is never done. In addition, Snodgrass' writing is unpretentious but poetically evocative, an ambitious attempt to combine a realistic portrayal of a gritty working-class town with literary style. While it's the third installment of a trilogy, the book is self-sufficient enough that it can be read on its own. But the audience's experience will surely be deepened by consuming the preceding volumes first. The author's tendency is to lean toward an excess of complications, and the story's conclusion feels anticlimactic, partially because it's merely one of so many alternative possibilities. Nevertheless, this is a fitting end to a dramatically gripping series.

An immersive murder mystery wrapped in an emotionally astute look at the burden of a town's moral history.

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