

# KIRKUS

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# REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### SOME RISE

Richard Snodgrass  
Calling Crow Press (312 pp.)  
July 25, 2018

## BOOK REVIEW

A sequel follows a family freighted with dark secrets.

Harry Todd Sutcliff returns home to Furnass, Pennsylvania, for the first time in 25 years mostly because he has nowhere else to go—he's broke, alone, and all but unemployable. Despite the fact that he neglects to attend the funerals of both his sister, Kathleen, and his father, he's wholeheartedly welcomed by his mother, Kitty. But Harry Todd's younger brother, Dickie, is infuriated by what he interprets as a prodigal son's return and warns his daughter, Jennifer, to keep a watchful distance. As far as he's concerned, Harry Todd is an unabashed narcissist, and his arrival can only be the result of some cold, self-interested calculus. Being back in Furnass floods Harry Todd with unbidden memories about his shiftless past and his family's twisted dysfunction. As a teenager, he impregnated his girlfriend, Donna Bruno, and his father, a prominent doctor, arranged for her to be sent away and for Harry Todd to be shipped off to California for college. Harry Todd was profoundly resentful—he thought he loved Donna—and shocked to learn that Dickie later seduced her during her time of vulnerability. But an even darker remembrance haunts Harry Todd. As a teenager, he had a deeply intimate relationship with Kathleen that was also contaminated by an illicit sexual energy that spelled their doom as siblings, a dangerous electricity unflinchingly depicted by Snodgrass (*The Building*, 2018). Harry Todd cut her out of his life, and she later died, presumably of a heart attack. But as he digs deeper, suspicious about the way Kathleen's death is cloaked in mystery, he disinters a family history long buried and disturbingly grim.

Snodgrass sensitively portrays not only the Sutcliffs' festering wounds, but also Furnass' debasement, a once prosperous mill town now wheezing for breath like an emphysema victim. And the author brooks no facile demarcation between hero and villain—Dickie is at least as morally compromised as Harry Todd, and his real estate company stands to profit handsomely from the shadiest of deals. Kitty, too, encompasses nearly the entire moral spectrum, by turns tenderly maternal and cynically cunning. This is the second installment of Snodgrass' Furnass Towers Trilogy, and while there is a narrative continuity between it and its predecessor, the sequel remains fictionally self-sufficient. The author's prose is confidently expressive, even poetical, but can become melodramatic to the point of ponderousness, especially the dialogue: " 'This is crazy. This is against the natural order. . . . ' 'I know, you told me that. But it doesn't matter. I'll redefine the natural order. Or I'll learn to live in the unnatural one.' 'But what can come of it?' 'Nothing. And everything.' " In exchanges like these, Snodgrass too strenuously grasps for a moment of emotional poignancy. Nevertheless, the author artfully conjures a mesmeric juxtaposition of the quotidian and the forbidden—the Sutcliffs are not wanting in familial love, but their passions are so intense that affection only appears in a grotesquely disfigured form.

An artistically daring examination of the line that separates love from fanatical possession.

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