

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

BYRON'S LANE

Rogers, Wallace

Langdon Street Press (312 pp.)

\$15.99 paperback, \$7.99 e-book

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BOOK REVIEW

A debut novel about two old school pals who reunite to reminisce and confront demons past and present.

Rogers starts this novel off with a bang, with the shooting of a suicide bomber in Iraq, where Jonathan Adams, earnest boyhood friend of the narrator, Tom Walker, works as a civilian contractor spreading “the democracy gospel.” Adams returns home to the U.S., and though he’s a successful college professor and state senator, his friend Walker sees he’s profoundly chagrined and disillusioned—despite the two having grown up on Byron’s Lane in a freshly plowed subdivision of Maplewood, Ohio, the once-small town transformed during their childhood into a seemingly golden middle-class suburbia. Adams, Walker discerns, is “incapable” in his own life though “abundantly blessed” at managing others. Ominously, Adams has bought a house that’s been the scene of a series of unfortunate events, including a bullet that whizzed by his head. Adams writes it off as a wild shot by a teenage hunter, but when he begins to get strange phone calls, Walker starts to wonder. Are terrorists to blame? A whodunit undercurrent runs through the novel, though it’s largely a book of manners and discussions between two old chums as they relive their past, review botched relationships and share the shame of their youth, like when they harassed an aged local farmer done in by suburbanization and didn’t help him when he collapsed from a heart attack. Rogers’ novel has much to say about the lost promise of the babied baby boomer generation—its greed, angst, sense of entitlement, narcissism and duplicity. “It’s our generation’s moment—it’s our once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to define ourselves. And we’re squandering it,” laments Adams, a kind of latter-day Hubert Humphrey, the last shred of America’s dying liberal class. Rogers nicely evokes suburban anomie and angst. Occasionally, however, stilted dialogue and overwrought metaphors weaken the book: “The big, bad wolf is here and I’m the pig who built his house with straw,” Adams tells Walker. Still, much of the writing is workmanlike and sometimes even better. One bad guy is “a mouse of a boy who grew into a rat of a man.”

Despite some flaws, a worthy novel about the lost hopes and embraced hypocrisies of a self-absorbed, overhyped generation.

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