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The Hollow Ground: A Novel

Natalie S. Harnett

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The Hollow Ground: A Novel Natalie S. Harnett

Winner of the 2014 Appalachian Book of the Year Award in Fiction
Winner of the John Gardner Fiction Book Award

We walk on fire or air, so Daddy liked to say. Basement floors too hot to touch. Steaming green lawns in the dead of winter. Sinkholes, quick and sudden, plunging open at your feet.

The underground mine fires ravaging Pennsylvania coal country have forced eleven-year-old Brigid Howley and her family to seek refuge with her estranged grandparents, the formidable Gram and the black lung stricken Gramp. Tragedy is no stranger to the Howleys, a proud Irish-American clan who takes strange pleasure in the "curse" laid upon them generations earlier by a priest who ran afoul of the Molly Maguires. The weight of this legacy rests heavily on a new generation, when Brigid, already struggling to keep her family together, makes a grisly discovery in a long-abandoned bootleg mine shaft. In the aftermath, decades-old secrets threaten to prove just as dangerous to the Howleys as the burning, hollow ground beneath their feet.

Inspired by real-life events in Centralia and Carbondale, where devastating coal mine fires irrevocably changed the lives of residents, *The Hollow Ground* is an extraordinary debut with an atmospheric, voice-driven narrative and an indelible sense of place. Lovers of literary fiction will find in Harnett's young, determined protagonist a character as heartbreakingly captivating as any in contemporary literature.

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