

Baxter's Requiem by Matthew Crow

5 Stars

Oh! What a pure delight. Perfect Read.

Mr Baxter is ninety-four-years old and has been forced to move into the Melrose Gardens Retirement Home. This is not to his liking. His independence curbed and rules and timetables to govern his day, can he survive in this environment?

Greg Cullock is eighteen-years old. Thrown out of school, after trying to defend his deceased brother's character, he has reluctantly become a member of staff at the Retirement Home. He's a broken soul. He has a lousy relationship with his father, more so now than ever before as his father seems incapable of acknowledging that his younger son Michael's suicide was a result of being bullied for being gay.

Baxter realises that somehow Greg must be helped to once again find enjoyment in life and invites Greg to accompany him to France where his partner, Thomas, lies in an unmarked grave in a war cemetery.

This is truly one of the most beautifully written books that I've had the pleasure to bury myself in for a long time. Mr Baxter (we never do find out what his first name is) is a solid, wonderful man who has made the best of his life, regardless of the sadness at losing his soulmate during the war. He is exasperating, as he will not conform to how a ninety-four-year old man is supposed to "behave" but with all of this, still loved and admired by all.

Greg's story is tragic, and even more disturbing is the fact that his brother suffered years of abuse and bullying because he was "different" to what society considers to be the "norm."

There are others in this story who, too, are larger than life and yet never too overpowering.

This is a book that should be read with a cup of hot chocolate next to you. Maybe have a box of tissues at the ready (I don't often get emotional while reading, but this book found me reaching for the tissues several times) and a sign on the door saying "Do not disturb" until you've reached the final page.

I want to add a paragraph that so perfectly sums up this book and the central character perfectly. Baxter's reminiscence - *"Life, it is safe to say, had been exhausting. The entire thing seemed just a messy cacophony; a song played once that could never be repeated. And yet given the chance, he'd do it again in a heartbeat, without changing one moment, whether or not he could survive it a second time over."*

Matthew Crow, this is one novel that I shall remember for a very long time.

Imbali

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review.