

Sins of the Fathers by Anthea Fraser

3 stars

Well written and engaging, but slightly vapid

Recently estranged from his wife, Mark Richmond plans a solitary walking holiday in Yorkshire to try and forget his troubles. However, at the train station he runs into Helena Crawford, who persuades him to, instead, accompany her to her parents' ruby wedding anniversary in Scotland and pose as her fiancé. Mark agrees and ends up spending a week with Helena's family, all of whom seem to be concealing secrets of their own. Meanwhile, Mark's family has its own problems – his father-in-law Peter Kingsley was unexpectedly taken ill at his sixtieth birthday party six months earlier and his best friend and Mark's father Charles thinks that Peter may be hiding something from him. The two families may in fact be linked by their secrets, and their deceit may eventually lead to tragedy.

This was a very well written story with prose that flowed effortlessly from page to page and never felt stilted or jarring. Whilst the story follows two separate timelines – the present day, when Mark goes up to Scotland, and the six months prior to his trip – it never felt too confusing and the two stories eventually intertwine neatly to produce some surprising, although not wholly unpredictable, twists. The author touches on many difficult topics through her characters and has a way of writing about family troubles that feels familiar and keenly observed. The plot contains enough drama and dilemmas to keep you reading and eventually concludes in a satisfying happy ending.

Unfortunately, the main plot point of this story – that Mark would willingly go to Scotland with a total stranger and pose as her fiancé for no reason – didn't make any sense and seemed unbelievable, which negatively impacted the rest of the story for me. Similarly, some of the characters felt a bit unrealistic, and the characters themselves were quite two-dimensional and not exceptionally well developed, although this wasn't helped by there being so many of them. Whilst the author touches on several different interesting topics, she doesn't focus heavily enough on any of them to really get the reader thinking, and the result is that what could be built up into novel-carrying, dramatic revelations become rather anti-climactic reveals since the characters affected by them have very little background or personality explored in the story.

Altogether, this was an enjoyable and mostly light-hearted novel that will appeal to people looking for a non-taxing read. However, it was a bit too lifeless for my taste and could have done with some tweaking of the plot and a little more character development.

Daenerys

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review