

The Half Sister by Catherine Chanter

4 stars

Family secrets and sibling rivalry – a catastrophe waiting to happen!

This is Catherine Chanter's second book following the superb debut novel 'The Well'.

The book opens with the results of an inquest into the death of Valerie Steadman.

Valerie appears to have had an unfortunate life up to this event but the high point seems to have been her nine-year-old son Michael or Mikey. Having been in an abusive relationship, her present partner is in jail for a crime he may not have committed.

When Valerie's mother dies, she feels that she must inform her long-estranged half-sister, Diana, but the ramifications of this decision ripple far and wide. Having left home many years earlier and not having been in contact with her mother, Diana is unsure of what is expected of her in this situation, apart from forking out to pay for the funeral! However, she invites Valerie and Mikey post-funeral to stay overnight at the historic country home she and husband Edmund occupy.

Following arguments that night, an earthquake occurs and Valerie, having been assigned to the tower rooms of the house, suffers fatal injuries.

What follows in the rest of this book are the dark and long-fermented emotions that can fester within families. Mikey becomes mute after Valerie's death but is constantly aware of everything that goes on in the house and soon becomes the conscience that Diana thought she did not have.

A story of dark secrets, manipulation and both mental and physical cruelty. It looks at the relationships between the sisters, between Diana and husband Edmund, and the conflicting pulls and pushes that the 'adoption' of Mikey into the household inevitably produces.

This is a dark read – possibly a little on the OTT-side at times - but it is also an obsessive one. Once you pick it up you will not want to put it down!

Sméagol

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review