In 1866, tragedy strikes at the exclusive Windfield School. A young student drowns in a mysterious accident involving a small circle of boys. The drowning and its aftermath initiates a spiraling circle of treachery that will span three decades and entwine many loves... From the exclusive mens club and brothels that cater to every dark desire of Londons upper classes to the dazzling ballrooms and mahogany-paneled suites of the manipulators of the worlds wealth, Ken Follett conjures up a stunning array of contrasts. This breathtaking novel portrays a family splintered by lust, bound by a shared legacy... men and women swept toward a perilous climax where greed, fed by the shocking truth of a boys death, must be stopped, or not just one mans dreams, but those of a nation, will die...

From the Paperback edition.

The author, a masterful storyteller, weaves an intriguing and mesmerizing tapestry of events that surround the wealthy Pilaster banking family in the latter part of nineteenth century England. Its panoramic sweep will hold the reader in its thrall. This complex story tells of the ebb and flow of their individual personal fortunes and the personalities that are to profoundly affect them, for better or worse. Augusta Pilaster is the scheming, socially conscious, self-appointed matriarch of the family. She is a woman who will stop at nothing to ensure that her reckless and easily manipulated husband, Joseph, and their indolent, dissolute, and lackluster son, Edward, will get and retain control of the Pilaster banking enterprise. Her machiavellian machinations, however, will eventually trigger the downfall of the familys fortune. Hugh Pilaster, Augustas nephew by marriage, is the Pilaster who has the brains and work ethic to take the Pilaster banking fortunes to a new level.
His Achilles heel is that he seems destined to be attracted to working class women, a chink in his armor that Augusta Pilaster uses to her and her immediate family's advantage. He, too, is Augusta Pilaster's unwitting pawn, until the day of reckoning comes.

Micky Miranda is the romantically handsome scion of a wealthy, unscrupulous, and power hungry South American businessman. Micky attended an exclusive school with Edward and Hugh Pilaster, when they were young. While there, tragedy struck when a mysterious swimming accident took the life of one of their friends, an event that was to shadow their lives in ways no one could have imagined. Micky Miranda would eventually enter into a web of complicity with Augusta Pilaster that would impact on the fortunes of both the Miranda and Pilaster families.

This book takes the reader through all strata of English society, from the drawing rooms of the upper classes to the exclusive men's clubs and brothels that cater to exotic appetites. It is a totally engrossing and absorbing tale of love, hatred, and treachery that spans three decades. It is a story that the reader will thoroughly enjoy.

I originally read this book several years ago and enjoyed it so much that I decided to purchase the unabridged audiobook for a road trip. It provided seventeen hours of pure listening pleasure, as the narrator, Michael Page, is absolutely superlative. He manages to imbue each character with its own recognizable voice and personality. I was able to tear myself away from the car only with great difficulty, at times, as I was so engrossed by the story and its telling.

This is a terrific book. Whether one reads it or has it read to them makes no difference, as it is a captivating and wholly entertaining work of well written fiction. Bravo!

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