



Among the Dead and Dreaming

Samuel Ligon

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Lost love and complex human nature are at the center of this novel about recovering from the past.

Nikki and Mark are initially drawn together when their significant others die together in a tragic accident. Their budding friendship is tested even further when a man from Nikki's troubled past threatens her new life and her young teen daughter in Samuel Ligon's unsettling novel, *Among the Dead and Dreaming*.

Their story is told from the unique perspectives of multiple characters—most living, but several deceased, who chime in with their thoughts from the periods that they were a part of Nikki and Mark's lives. Such interesting literary devices are not difficult to follow; names precede each section of text, and words from dead characters are italicized.

The "voices" depicted are distinct and easily distinguishable from one another. Thirteen-year-old Alina is combative, always questioning her mother's motives. Mark reflects on his past political career and is torn with regret related to his girlfriend. Burke Chandler, the shadow of Nikki's past, is seeking revenge for his brother's murder.

Nikki herself displays compelling fortitude: "I didn't know how to do anything but run, and I wasn't going to run. Not this time." At the same time, it's chilling to watch Burke spiral downward. He is drawn convincingly as a self-righteous man following a "guiding hand."

There are adult situations, adult language, and more than one scene of brutal violence in the novel. Themes repeat throughout: of first love, lost love, and searching for love in the arms of another, and of children left to search for their true paternity. In the last quarter of the book, the focus is solely on four pivotal characters, and other story lines sadly fall away.

Ligon's is a convincing presentation of human nature. Nikki laments at one point, "We'd end up getting married ... and I would shrink a little every year and lose pieces of myself until there'd be nothing left. But wasn't that what happened to everyone?" Fear is what's driven Nikki in the past, and now her past has caught up with her with a vengeance.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (Spring 2016)

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