



The House at Midnight

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On an icy winter weekend, seven friends celebrate New Year's Eve at Stoneborough, a grand manor in the English countryside. They've been brought together by Lucas Heathfield, a young man who recently inherited the property after the tragic death of his uncle Patrick. Though still raw from the loss of his last family member, Lucas welcomes this tight-knit group of friends to the estate he hopes will become their home away from home-an escape from London where they can all relax and rekindle the revelry of their college days.

Lucas's best friend, Joanna, finds herself oddly affected by the cavernous manse, with its lavish mythological ceiling mural and sprawling grounds, and awakened to a growing bond with Lucas. Much to her surprise, he reveals that he's loved her for years. But as they begin to find their way from friendship to romance, Joanna can't shake the feeling that the house is having its own effect on them.

Back in London, Joanna is stunned when Lucas announces that he and their impetuous friend Danny are moving into Stoneborough full-time. Her concern seems justified as Lucas, once ensconced, becomes completely ensnared in the turbulent past that seems to haunt the house - a past that is captured in old movie reels featuring Lucas's now-dead family: his charismatic uncle Patrick, his lovely mother, Claire, and his golden-boy father, Justin.

Over one decadent, dramatic year, as the friends frequently gather at the shadowed residence, secrets slide out and sexual tensions escalate, shattering friendships and forever changing lives. And all the while, the house cradles a devastating secret.

By turns taut and sensual, mesmerizing and disturbing, *The House at Midnight* is a gripping psychological novel that pulls the reader into the thrall of its ominous atmosphere. Newcomer Lucie Whitehouse has written a tense and captivating story that will linger long after the final, shocking pages.

The House at Midnight Details

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From Reader Review *The House at Midnight* for online ebook

Tundra Morscheck says

I enjoyed the change of reading a book written in the first person as you weren't trying to absorb numerous opinions and angles to events. It was just a straight forward unfolding. I think the downside was that it just got a bit repetitious and drawn out examining the past events and trying to bring the mystery to a slow boil. Entertaining nonetheless.

Alex Cantone says

Chick-lit is not my usual genre, and this one I picked from the "Readers Also enjoyed....." category.

The story begins on New Years Eve, where six friends from Oxford (plus ring-in boyfriend Greg, who went to Cambridge) gather at a stately pile "Stoneborough" in the Cotswolds, recently inherited by Lucas from his uncle Patrick, a London art dealer who we learn committed suicide. The weekend seems to be an excuse to relive the excesses of their student days, and there are shy glances between the narrator, Jo, partner of Lucas, and Greg, partner of Rachel, with the Machiavellian figure of Danny hovering in the background, Martha from New York and gay Michael making up the numbers.

When Danny is fired from his job in London he persuades Lucas to ditch his job with a law firm and that they should both live at "Stoneborough" where Lucas can write. The discovery of a box of old film reels from Patrick's youth becomes an obsession with Lucas as he watches his parents and uncle enjoying the ambience of the house decades before, and they invite one of Patrick's former girlfriends, the model/actress Elizabeth over to lunch.

As months pass passions and jealousies ignite. Lucas behaves badly and rebuffs Jo, who falls into the arms (and other bits) of Greg and is then accused of damaging the group dynamic, even by her parents, as Lucas spirals out of control and emotional blackmail begins.

Overall the book is very well-written if pedestrian in pace, and then I stopped reading and went back to the beginning to see if I had missed something; what was lacking was detail on the house. When was it built? Who owned it before it was acquired by Patrick, and, did the artwork come with it or added later by Patrick? Jo is unsettled by the painting of Zeus in the hall staring down at their Bacchanalian activities, but is it haunted or just the effects of grog and whacky bacci?

Finally I skipped forward to read at random to find more of the same first world problems of a tiny elite, and then to the end which I'd already guessed.

Steve Lindahl says

Many of the reviews posted for *The House at Midnight* by Lucie Whitehouse mention other books that are like this novel in certain ways. *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt and *Rebecca* by Daphne Du Maurier were both mentioned. (I haven't read the first one, but loved the second.) I think finding similarities is a great way

to discover new books, but hanging on to those comparisons can lead to false expectations.

The House at Midnight is about a group of friends. The house provides a place where these friends can live a lavish lifestyle apart from other people. It's nice atmosphere, but the book's about the people not the house. Their friendship started when some of them were in college and has continued as they've begun their careers. The book is written from Joanna's point of view. She's a writer for a tabloid and dreams of becoming a serious journalist. Lucas has inherited the house along with a great deal of money from his Uncle Patrick, the owner of a successful art gallery. He's also inherited a number of psychological issues from a family with some serious problems. In some ways this novel is as much about memories of people who aren't in the book as it is about the characters we get to know.

Although some of the characters, including Joanna, have real careers, they all seem happy to live and party on money they haven't earned. Martha is the least self indulgent of the group and Lucas is the most, but all the characters have their flaws, at least all of the ones we get to know. I wouldn't want to know most of these people, but it was interesting getting to know them in the novel.

I listened to the audio version which was read by Kate Reading (interesting name for someone who is the voice of many audio books). Her voice is sophisticated yet vulnerable and absolutely perfect for this book.

Steve Lindahl – author of *White Horse Regressions* and *Motherless Soul*

Misha Mathew says

I have a love for all things gothic. This book was the perfect recipe for my addiction to gothic novels.

The actual reason why I loved it so much was that it reminded me so much of *The Secret History*. I don't know whether that's a bad thing or a good thing. But I really enjoyed *The House At Midnight*.

The House at Midnight is very atmospheric and gripping. It is an edge of the seat novel and the psychological suspense is intriguing. Throughout the book, there is feeling of hidden evil, of something horrible about to happen. I admit there are parts where I was pretty creeped out and scared.

Its not a horror story, yet its scary. The subtlety is more terrifying than horror itself. The author describes the house, the setting so well , that you almost believe that you are there in the novel.

The numerous twists and turns kept me awake for two nights in a row. At the same time, it is not just meaningless thrills , but also an intelligently written novel. The dark and disturbing novel kept me hooked to the last page. The writing was beautiful. The imagery was great without which the atmosphere would never have built up. The suspense element and the creepy feeling is because Lucie Whitehouse has a way with words. She can make the most ordinary things seem scary.

The house at Midnight was mesmerizing and unputdownable. The atmosphere, the mystery and the words enthrall you, they take you in and don't let you go until the very end.

The book is about how the myriad of human emotions - love, lust, anger, jealousy- can lead to utter chaos. This captivating story is not only disturbing but very sensual too. Its a novel that will stay with you a long

time.

Overall:

Compelling gothic suspense with great writing!

Recommended?

Yes! Especially to those who like intelligently written suspense/psychological thrillers. However this is not a light read.

Dannii Elle says

Stoneborough is a secluded, countryside manor house, once home to Patrick Heathfield, star of the art world, and, after his unexpected demise, now owned by his nephew, Lucas. Bereft without the companionship of his last surviving family member, Lucas invites his college inner-circle to treat the grand home as their own - a shared abode, to escape from the bustle of city life and to re-live the revelry of their fading youth. But the house seems to have other intentions for them...

I know this is often a source of contention for many readers, but the score of unlikable characters that littered this text made the novel for me. I found the gothic elements of the text diminished as the story-line progressed but the group drama, shady undertakings, and constant mysteries that circled the friends were still of continual interest. I was anticipating the possible supernatural elements to form a larger focus and was consistently eager to return to the manor setting, when the characters moved away, but even these parts did not fail to keep me turning the pages and provide me with the unsettling atmosphere and high intrigue that haunted the entire tale.

Blair says

Absolutely excellent! I was instantly gripped and devoured the whole book within a day. The intrigue is subtle rather than overtly dramatic, but I found myself fascinated by the characters and their relationships, and desperate to know more about them. I loved the way their histories unfolded slowly as the story progressed, turning each into a wholly believable personality - after finishing the book I realised I had come to picture them so vividly that I found it shocking to think of them as fictional. I was left a little frustrated by the ending, but I think this was because I had become so absorbed in the story that I naturally wanted to keep reading about the protagonists' lives. I actually liked the fact that some loose ends were left (Greg's ultimate fate and Jo's career issues, for example); it enhanced the realistic feel of the novel. It would perhaps be going too far to say this book is a masterpiece or a classic, but it's certainly a fantastic debut and, on a personal level, I can find very little fault with it. I think this is partly because I saw a lot of similarities between the narrator and myself; but the book was also one of those rare, wonderful discoveries that really makes me want to write. My only regret is that, in my hunger to know more, I raced through it instead of taking my time to enjoy the subtleties of the plot. I'll definitely re-read this in future, and next time I'll make sure I savour each development slowly.

Susan says

Okay, warning, spoiler alert, I want my entertainment to have a happy ending. Or at least satisfyingly cathartic. Any book that fails on this count I will not love. I did not love this book. Don't say I didn't warn you. Aside from the ending, the writing is okay, although I don't really get why we had to know about every cigarette that every character lit. And they lit a lot. Maybe if I were a smoker I might have thought the characters were interesting. And I'm not buying that the house did it. I have no idea what happened at midnight. And I was looking for it, given the title. Things happened at all other hours. Ugh. On to better, I hope.

Rowena says

This book was pretty fantastic! A great story with many twists and turns, the kind of book that's really difficult to put down.

Philippa says

Some parts of this novel were really well written, and I guess that was what kept me reading, because I kept hoping it would redeem itself. I think the biggest flaw is in the characters - they weren't particularly likeable or well developed. I found myself not really caring what happened to them! The final few chapters really fell short of the tension and drama that had been created prior and didn't really resolve the way I thought it would. If you haven't read *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt, I would read that instead - now THAT is a page-turner, up all night kind of thriller.

Amy says

I bought this cheaply from Amazon as a treat to cheer myself up because, quite simply, several people on here whose taste I like had enjoyed it. I was sadly disappointed. I wanted this to be excellent but, although I found it quick and easy to read, I didn't enjoy it very much at all. I think the characters were a peculiar bunch whose motivation to do the odd things they do escaped me. It didn't drag but I kept thinking it would pick up the pace and thrill me a little. It never did.

I think this book had sparks of potential that failed to ignite. I liked the premise and I didn't dislike her writing style but it all felt so flat to me. The whole book is supposed to be creating this tense, almost spooky atmosphere and it never came close to achieving that for me. The twisted relationships, tormented grief, threats of violence and hints of evil never felt real, just cartoony and fake. When a cartoon character is hit by a mallet it doesn't mean anything to you. It's not remotely realistic! That's how I felt about these characters.

And, worst of all, *The House at Midnight* sets itself up to lead to a bang of an ending but when I finished the book I couldn't believe that IT, the big finale, happened entirely off-stage. What a cop out. I felt cheated, actually.

And I don't care what happened to the characters or about any of the loose ends. Kill them all off, for all I

care

Holli says

Wow. Just finished this book and I have to say that it's been a long time since a book swept me up in it like this one did. What a powerful story about the dynamics of a group of friends and the wonderful and horrible things that can happen within it. I loved it. Couldn't stop reading about the lives of these people to see what could possibly happen next. Great psychological drama....would really make a perfect movie I think!

Kerstin (under_moonlit_skies) says

I was disappointed in this book. The cover promised it to be a gothic masterpiece, but that aspect of the story fell flat. The main character mentioned a strange atmosphere she could feel in the old mansion, but that was about it. The house never became its own character and the haunted, mysterious atmosphere I had hoped for was pretty much absent.

Other reviews led me to believe that this story was influenced by books like 'The Secret History', which could have saved this novel for me. Unfortunately the characters were never properly fleshed out and in addition all of them were unlikeable. I found myself just not caring about what happened to them.

The ending was a big disappointment as well. The mystery itself wasn't all that gripping, but to then realize that the big finale happened while we were off somewhere else with the main character and only found out about what had gone on second hand was really upsetting.

Maybe I went into this book with too many expectations, but in the end I just didn't enjoy my time reading it. The writing though was quite beautiful in places and if the characters and story could have matched it, it would have been great.

Leonie says

In part my dislike for this book is exacerbated by the way it's sold as a Gothic mystery type thing. I expected something supernatural to do with the house and all I got was a couple of references with the main character talking about the house's wild, evil pulse or something. The author was clearly working on influences like *The Secret History*, *The Turn of the Screw* etc, and while I don't necessarily demand originality, I am almost shocked that she couldn't knock together something better.

I hated all the characters. I was slightly puzzled by the way there's a supposed conflict between the main character's background and that of her friends. I mean, I guess there is a chasm between solidly middle class and huge-country-house-owning, but she was so solidly middle class it was strange to be asked to identify with her as the underdog. The whole thing was really stewed in a late 20's-early 30's middle class aesthetic that made the characters seem a little more whiny and half-baked and unsympathetic than they need have done.

The sex scenes with Joanna's need to be claimed by Greg as a wild, nakedly submissive woman or whatever were cringe-inducing.

There's the requisite dramatic revelations and dire they-all-go-mad ending, but it was far too melodramatic for me to enjoy it. Before that, the book's one long she said-he said-she slept with drama among a completely unlikeable group of friends. The whole thing felt amateurish.

karen says

okay, i understand this one's comparison to donna tartt. and i accept it. i really enjoyed this, even though it is about shitty people being shitty to each other in the name of friendship: sexual betrayal, emotional blackmail, financial expectations and passive-aggressive behavior galore! i thought the story was interesting and relatable - to a point... but the point where it gets novel-y rather than true life-y was at least interesting and fun. not fun like meadows and hopscotch, more "fun if you think medea or italian operas are fun." fun where everyone is sad. and complicated. i would definitely recommend it and could stand to read more by her in the future. the first near-five-stars in a long time.

Allison says

Bleah. Blech. And also, ick. Oh, the searing melodrama. The sense of failure and desperation and regret but oh, wait, let's have some more sex and booze, that's worked out for us so well so far. Can I talk? Well, I'm in the middle of the biggest career opportunity of my life and this will probably totally destroy it, but what the hell, tell me all about your new girlfriend, my boss who's staring directly at me won't mind. And sorry about cheating on you with my girlfriend's boyfriend who's so much more confident and sexually mature than you are, but -- what? would we both like to keep hanging around with you and the rest of the group at your big, dissolute, slightly haunted mansion left to you by your uncle (who was in love with your mother and committed suicide) every week-end? Sure, what could go wrong?

Geraldine says

I'm giving this 2 stars as a rounding up, in order to avoid three consecutive 1 star reviews.

I wrote the thoughts below halfway through. The second half did little to change my mind.

None of the characters became any more rounded, likeable or developed in the latter part of the book. The ending, and the lead up to the ending, didn't ring true. I will stress again that the best fiction is based on the 'unlikely' but it has to be written in a way that makes it seem unsurprising, and be set in a context that the reader doesn't need to question.

Overall, it was decent writing, and decent plotting, but it wasn't well enough written to make me care about any of the characters or their fates. Perhaps that was the main problem: the characters seemed to be concocted and artificial, a useful aggregation of status acquisition, consumerism, and conveniently contradictory 'fatal flaws'. I think perhaps Lucas was based closely on someone the author knew, and I pictured him as played by Ben Wishaw. The narrator Jo was obviously the author, and her bland two

dimensional existence was the key to why this, ultimately, is a failure as a novel, because she can't really read people or understand their motivations and conflicts - she seems only able to see people in terms of how they relate to her, and when they're not relating, they cease to exist.

It's rare to come across a fiction writer so lacking in empathy you're almost tempted to wonder if she's either borderline sociopathic or perhaps unknowingly on the autistic spectrum. I would suggest that someone lacking in human insights isn't ever going to write a particularly credible character driven psychological novel!

Mid way review - to be revised

This is not a good book and I think the main problem is that its basis premise is ridiculous. Man inherits house from uncle, invites friends to share it. Already been done by Barbara Vine/ Ruth Rendell in A Fatal Inversion.

A friendship group that was forged in the first term at University ten years previously. A 'coming of age' novel about people approaching the age of 30.

I just don't think that a friendship group so formed would last unchanged and so inward looking over that time. Not so as they spend every weekend together. Hey, gosh, they all happened to end up working and living in London!

One member is gay but rather than having gay friends or hanging out on the gay scene, he spends every weekend with this bunch of straights. One has a boyfriend she's been seeing for several months. However, they don't go out or stay in as a couple or see his friends, they spend every weekend with the friends she met at 18.

One is said to be a 'feminist' and working in Women's Aid, so she spends every weekend with her spoilt privileged Uni friends rather than ever making a friend via her social activism and hanging out with people who share her values.

They have been out of Uni for about 7 years, but none of them seems to have cultivated any other friends via work or hobbies...oh, silly me, how can people without interests, a hinterland, meet people via hobbies? Or have any family ties or old school friends (except Lucas and Danny) or any of those randoms that normal people pick up in their twenties.

Having been 'best friends' for 10 years Jo and Lucas suddenly become lovers. Because that can happen, and I've known it to happen to people, but the portrayal of it is entirely without credibility.

In case you missed it, they were students at Oxford University. Actually, there's no way you would miss it, because the author/narrator keeps telling us. Two read Classics (because the author did). Two read English, because that's what authors have their characters doing, because it's beyond their imagination that somebody could have done a degree in Economics or Chemistry or Modern Languages, say.

We have a plot device of a 'Lions match' in late February. Yeah, the British Lions definitely play rugby matches bang in the middle of the Six Nations tournament. Oh, Jo has a front page splash in her local paper because a councillor awarded a catering contract to his wife's firm. I don't think the author knows the first thing about procurement or about local government, and certainly didn't give a single clue about the

investigative journalism that went into that scoop! Was it in a Committee report, was there a whistleblower? What was the reaction from the councillor, what steps did the newspaper take to ensure it wasn't potentially libellous? What was the reaction from the Borough Solicitor, Chief Internal Auditor or Council Leader? No, the writer didn't consider any of these matters, just wrote a throw away line which is difficult to substantiate.

Also, the pace is really really really slow. Almost halfway through and almost nothing has happened.

Kelly says

There were a lot of *Secret History* comparisons before I picked up this book. That shit is lazy, you guys. Do not listen to it. This book is like the Secret History if what you got from Secret History is big houses and overprivileged young adults and probably something fucked up happening at some point. This is not the Secret History.

It is its own thing, which is good because I have to be just about the only person in the entire world who does not worship at the shrine of *The Secret History*. *The House at Midnight* focuses around a group of friends from college who have come together a few years later to have a party at a house that one of the group has just inherited from a rich uncle. He is a lonely, quiet intellectual sort who always seems somewhat "apart" from the group and has a tragic family past. The narrator has always been into him, their close bestfriendship never quite developing into something more. But then all that starts to change... and maybe not entirely for the best. Complicated sexual and power dynamics emerge and power games that characters have been playing on a subterranean level come to the fore at last.

So the beginning is super annoying. It's definitely got some DNA from all those social-status-comparing stupid books supposedly aimed at women that I've ranted about before. The author characterizes people by their clothes and hair and body weight and how much money they have, or by whatever societally valuable "image" she can cloak around them (yup, even Lucas and his quiet, self-possessed intellectual thing counts because let's face it- the kind of people reading this value that). If the main character never mentioned she was "middle class" again to show how *real* and *relatable* she was after page ten, I would have heard it enough times already. (As you might imagine, we definitely do hear it a LOT more after that.) Okay, so I guess the beginning was the most "hey read this because it is like the Secret History!" part in the book (so maybe a lot of people just read this part? anyways). But again, I assume this is not why you guys read that book, right? If it is, by all means read it, otherwise, I repeat, that is a lazy comparison.

Oh yeah, I've got more to say! In addition, I was also even more suuuuuuuuupppper irritated by one of the major relationship plotlines of the protagonist, which seemed there mostly to be a fantasy of how awesome the girl was by getting to push jealousy of her awesome relationship in everyone's faces (I suspect an author standing, or her projection of a reader stand-in, which tells you what she thinks of her readers). She's one of these girls who must have some sort of perfume made of pheromones or something, one of these girls who just "smells good" because I don't generally get what the deal with totally hot men and this "perfectly ordinary girl" is. Sigh. So there's that ugly, unfortunately deeply female and gendered "being better than everyone while being totally normal and relatable!" fantasy to deal with.

But I pushed past because so many people had said positive things. I did skim for a little while, I'll be honest. And then things did get a little bit more interesting. The main character proves not to have been in a societally valuable, fated rich man relationship after all. She is proven to have some real insecurities and thoughts that really ring true, she's got some relatable moments she experiences with a guy that any woman

who has ever dealt with a clingy partner will recognize, particularly if the man is bigger than you are and you're starting to feel uncomfortable.

I liked some of the characterization of Daniel, for sure. He was way more motivationless for being that way than I wanted him to be, but a lot of what he did and said was at least intriguing. I also liked the two-generation element of this whole mess and seeing how the parents had fucked it up and then handed off the whole fucked up mess to their children. Some of the atmospheric stuff, when she focused on the house itself and what it was like to be there, was pretty good. And the worst part of me always likes a good scandal, and this book had a lot of them.

I think it went overboard, and I think it had a cop out of an ending, so that one group of people wouldn't accuse her of giving us a pat, unrealistic ending, and another group wouldn't be too mad at her for stealing away their happy ending. It was a "well, you decide what happens, readers!" sort of ending, without any reason to be that way. It definitely stopped a chapter too soon and I can't think of any other reason for it to do so other than the author being able to avoid making a decision that would have upset a portion of the reader base. I mean, obviously I don't know anything about her process, but I fail to see what the alternate reason would be.

So I don't know. Maybe it deserves two stars after all? But if we're rating it for enjoyment, I probably liked it in the end. I finished it, and there were parts I was caught up in in the middle and back half. There was some writing I liked, and at least some successful character work and observations. I am also predisposed to like this sort of dark, velvety thing to begin with, so there's that. If you're going to read a Lucie Whitehouse book, I'd certainly recommend this miles ahead of *Before We Met* anyway.

Bree T says

Lucas inherits the palatial country pile Stoneborough Manor from his uncle Patrick, who was like a father to him. He thinks that it would be a great place for he and his college friends to spend the weekends and summers, drinking wine, listening to music and generally relaxing away from their city jobs. At first the weekends are fun, everyone gets along and enjoys themselves... but gradually it all starts to unravel.

Firstly Lucas and Joanna finally get together after what is close to 10 years of dancing around it but things are not off to a good start when Lucas decides to quit his job in the city as a lawyer and move to Stoneborough full time with Danny, who has just been sacked from his high powered advertising job for doing coke in the toilets. Jo is apprehensive about the move – she knows that Lucas has also inherited a pile of money to go with the country pile so she can see Danny bleeding him dry now that he will no longer be working. Lucas wants to write and Danny make films but what they will mostly be doing is drinking – drinking exorbitant amounts. Lucas also develops an unhealthy obsession with some cine films he finds in his late uncle's office which shows his uncle and his eclectic artistic circle of friends spending time at Stoneborough when they were all about Lucas's age.

Suddenly the trips to the country aren't as fun anymore. Tensions are running high as Danny attempts to exert influence over Lucas and oust Jo as the most important person in Lucas's life. Jo finds her attention diverted elsewhere and begins to wonder if this relationship with Lucas is really going to work with her in the City and him down here in isolation, which is affecting his personality. Add in the problems with Danny

and Jo starts to feel like she doesn't want to be a huge part of this anymore. Unfortunately for her, Lucas isn't going to give her up lightly – his hold on her will extend long past the natural length of her relationship with him. Tied by the bonds of a decade long friendship, Jo will find it hard to turn her back on Lucas completely, even after he totally changes. And the once tight knit group of friends will splinter and break apart.

The House At Midnight is billed as a bit of a gothic piece but to be honest, the atmosphere was never really 'there' for me. The big imposing sort of house isn't really given the character it should, nor are the descriptions detailed enough to really enable me to be able to picture it clearly. The references to the 'pulse' of the house, which appears to be something only Jo can hear/feel, are vague and don't flesh out the house itself as a real living, breathing piece of the novel.

The protagonist Jo frustrated me. The background of her friendship with Lucas is briefly described as they move forward into a relationship but as a reader, you don't get a chance to even assess them as a couple before they are falling apart and Jo is moving towards a character that she herself doesn't even know. She made choice that annoyed me, so much so that a couple of times I had to put this book down and take a few deep breaths. When someone is emotionally manipulating, you can walk away. She was in London. Lucas was at the house, hours away. I never felt like his hold over Jo was enough to make her do the things she did, to keep going to the house. And it seemed even more ridiculous that the man she dated after Lucas also chose to continue going with her. It was ludicrous and not at all believable.

But my biggest problem is with the ending. If you spend half your book building up to something sinister, please don't have it all occur "off screen" while we're with some other character who turns out to not be involved in the final climax/showdown. That's just insulting to the reader who has invested so much of their time in reading your story only to get to the end and find out that everything interesting has happened without the reader actually being an active part of it. I find that incredibly off putting in a book and it always taints my view of it.

The House At Midnight started off really promising – I enjoyed the first few chapters that introduced the characters and the house and gave us some background information on Lucas' uncle and his eclectic circle of friends. Their weekends/summer spent at the house were mirrored by Lucas and his friends and it looked like it might be a nice little history repeating story line but then I just got bogged down in drama and unlikable characters. And drinking. Way too much drinking. It was boring, reading about this spoiled rich boy Lucas and all his big inheritance money drinking bottles of expensive wine and champagne. I don't find that sort of lifestyle interesting at all. I find it needlessly extravagant and self-indulgent and it makes me want to stop reading.

Jessica says

I had high expectations about this book because it had been compared in reviews to Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* -- books I loved. What a disappointment! This book is definitely not even in the same league as the aforementioned books. The group of friends, the indulgent lifestyle, the haunted house -- the elements were all there, but the novel fell flat. The beginning of the book had a lot of potential, but I found the ending to be especially vague and rushed, as if the author was tired of writing and decided to quickly finish the manuscript. I think the shoddy plotting could have been forgiven if the characters had been written well. I enjoyed some of them, but I could not figure out most of their motivations. The main character was especially unlikeable; I could not empathize or connect with her at all.

Rachel says

This was such a guilty pleasure book and I would have had no problem with giving it a higher rating along the lines of 'this wasn't a literary masterpiece but I thoroughly enjoyed it,' but the problem is I didn't. It started out at about a 4 star level (I really was in the mood for something light after reading mostly classics lately) and I was prepared to forgive its many flaws, but ultimately the list of complaints just piled up too high. Sorry Lucie Whitehouse, I tried.

The House at Midnight chronicles a year in the life of a group of friends, one of whom, Lucas, recently inherited a mansion in a small English town, following his uncle's suicide. The story focuses on Joanna and her relationship with Lucas as it shifts from friendship to romance, and the tension and betrayal that follows.

An abridged list of grievances:

- The author's attempts at rendering the house as a dark and sinister force are almost embarrassingly heavy-handed. We can't go a full ten pages without Jo reflecting on how the house feels like a sentient being. Okay, Joanna, we get it.
- The mystery of Lucas's family history took a backseat and instead we get 200 pages of relationship drama, before the author seems to remember the story's core mystery, which is hastily wrapped up in the final pages.
- It's almost like Lucie Whitehouse had a Point A and a Point B in mind for this story, but didn't know how to get from one to the other. The narrative meanders in an awkward, directionless fashion, focusing on all sorts of weird, irrelevant details. There was something off about the pace, too; we'd spend four chapters on a single evening and then randomly skip ahead two months. It was hard to keep track of at times.
- The characters, though initially compelling, end up being rather underdeveloped. Jo doesn't have much of a personality, Danny's villainy is never fully examined, Michael is a complete nonentity, Rachel disappears altogether, and Lucas hovers in the grey area between victim and villain, but I was unable to care one way or the other. If you're someone who needs your characters to be likable, you're going to hate this book. I'm not that reader, so I was able to enjoy certain elements of the group dynamic presented here, but by the end I was underwhelmed, especially since these characters started out with a lot of potential.
- The lazy depiction of feminism as a hindrance to Jo experiencing the sort of romance and sex life she craves is just embarrassing. There are literally lines like 'I thought the idea of being pregnant with his child was sexy, and the inner feminist in me shuddered' (not a verbatim quote but pretty damn close).
- The book ends on a cliffhanger, which is totally fine! But here's the thing: the narrative is told in the first person past tense, complete with lines like, 'Years later, I wasn't sure how I managed to drive the car home without getting in an accident' and 'Even now, I can't remember what happened in the week that followed.' This means Joanna is looking back on these events years after the fact, and if that's the case, why would she stop her narrative right in the middle of an event? The cliffhanger is completely incongruous with the way the rest of the story is told. Writers, take note. Tense and number aren't arbitrary, irrelevant factors; they have to suit the narrative. Present tense would have been a much more appropriate choice here.

All that said, parts of this book were certainly gripping and addicting. Reading through some reviews here, I

do think this book suffered especially from its comparison to Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. The similarities with those two books lie solely in the themes and setting, not the way they're presented. That isn't Lucie Whitehouse's fault. Books are compared to other books in order to sell, and sometimes this backfires. I initially wanted to be able to give this a higher rating for that reason. But there was just too much potential here and not enough payoff.
