



## The House at Old Vine

*Norah Lofts*

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## **The House at Old Vine** Norah Lofts

Beginning in the fifteenth century and concluding at the time of the Restoration, this is the second volume in the 'House' trilogy. The House at Old Vine is a colourful account of a turbulent period in English history containing religious persecution, war, rebellion and social change. The house in Suffolk is a dramatic link between the six characters who inhabit it during this period and whose heartfelt stories we are told.

## **The House at Old Vine Details**

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Author : Norah Lofts

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## From Reader Review The House at Old Vine for online ebook

### Mary says

In a trilogy that spans five centuries - beginning in the fourteenth century and concluding during the middle of the twentieth century - this is the second volume of the Suffolk House Trilogy. This is the continuing story of a town house and the various people who live there. The trilogy follows the story of Martin Reed and his descendants, men and women who found their place in the fascinating years of England's early history.

Starting in the late fifteenth century, and concluding during the time of the Restoration - The House at Old Vine follows the story of Josiana Greenwood - an illegitimate descendant of Martin Reed. For generations while the Reed family endured, England faced what was perhaps its most turbulent and troubled period. Josiana lived through this period of great upheaval - and it is through her that the family of the House will continue.

In a time when the Tudors fought for the throne and the violence of Oliver Cromwell's war threatened the safety of the nation, Josiana faced a tremendously difficult task. She was young, beautiful and very much in love. Yet the man to whom she had pledged her heart was a man whose fate was sealed. And, although her heart belonged to only one man, she was promised to another...

As with everything that I have previously read by Norah Lofts, I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. In my opinion, Ms. Lofts is a tremendous writer whose stories are always well-detailed and historically accurate - she really knows her history. I really appreciate her writing style - and even though the story was slightly longer than I was expecting - it still was an intriguing plot. I give this book a definite A+!

I must say that although I have read almost every one of Norah Lofts' books, I'm not quite sure if I've ever read this one in particular. While I certainly remember reading the first book of the trilogy, as well as the third, I can't really remember reading this book. When I initially started reading it, I had thought that it was a reread for me from at least twelve years ago. However, the further I got into the story, the more I realized that I had absolutely no idea how the story would progress.

I suppose that doesn't necessarily mean that I haven't read this book before, but I just thought that I would have some inkling of the plot or perhaps a vague memory of the characters. However, I really couldn't recall anything about the story, so it was entirely new to me. I'm completely amazed, and will definitely be keeping this book on my bookshelf to read again some time soon.

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### HDubois says

The book is about: THE second of the house-trilogy, covering the 15th to the 18th century centred on a house.

I liked: it depicts real people and throughout the chapters we see what the 'beautiful young heroine' turns out to be when she becomes old and how stories around her get passed down from generation to generation.

Some (for me) little known aspects of English history appear like the drying of the marshes.

I didn't like: some characters are evidently good or bad and therefore a little shallow..

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## Mela says

*...people who cannot forgive themselves are unable to forgive anyone else; forgiveness, like charity, starts at home.*

Another **masterpiece of historical fiction** by Norah Lofts. Like I have written in my review of 'The Town House' also this family saga (that took thread dozens of years after the end of previous part of series) was ***gripping with historical details and accuracy. It was a great journey through the everyday life of the common people***, this time the story started at the end of XV century and ended almost at the end of XVII. Again, I was not at the court or on the battlefield, I was in the house of a tradesman, an innkeeper, a schoolmaster - in other words amongst common people.

Of course, their life was touched by big events, like religious movements and changes (English Reformation), the plague, English Civil War. Nonetheless, more important to them were their home, food, children, first love, broken hearts...

*That was the year 1485, the year of great changes in the outside world. Even we, on our Flaxham farm, beard in due time news of the Battle of Bosworth, and how the crown had fallen from King Richard's head and landed in a thornbush, whence Henry Tudor plucked it as though it was a berry, and set it on his own head. To us it was a story of no importance; to us all kings were tax-extorters and one no better than the next. Much more important to us, in the autumn of that year, was the news that Lady Maude Rancon was to set about reviving a dead business and, late as it was in the season, was hunting all over the countryside for wool.*

**I adore Norah Lofts' storytelling, the way she intermingled lives of people, how their lots mingled also through their descendants.**

*...I learned it myself, the hard way, when you do things in anger you're more like to hurt yourself than anybody else - in the long run.*

And her characters were flesh and blood.

*So I looked at her with fury and hatred, and respect and admiration which was painfully near to love. "Cod knows how you do it," I said, "but you always strike the right note. You're old," I said brutally, "old and mined, beaten to your knees. Anybody else would be done for. But you're struggling up, ready to fight again. What else, by the flames of Hell, can I do but come in and fight alongside?"*

I think you must simply try The Town House (the first novel of the series). I am sure that after a dozen of pages you will know that you love it.

Here is an example of historical information she put in her books:

*Once upon a time, Mother said, dues had been paid at the gateway but the town walls were breaking down and people would squeeze in and set up in the market without paying, so nowadays a monk and another man walked around the market all the time. They took two of our cockerels and at least half of the apples and in exchange gave Mother a token, a piece of metal stamped with a pattern, which could be shown if, when they made their next round, they asked for the dues again. All these pieces of metal had to be put into a box when the market was over. "And it's no use taking it home because they have tokens of different sorts and if you show the wrong one, ever, you can never trade on this market again," Mother explained.*

PS You can read the book as a standalone but I recommend to start with 'The Town House' - you will be able

to find some connections and references.

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### **Nikki says**

I'm sure I've read this book and its companions more than once, and may yet read them again. A house, especially an English house, has many inhabitants through its useful life, and these books follow the house through several centuries. History, romance, intrigue -- these books have it all, along with Lofts' mastery of setting. Highly recommended.

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### **Eurydicegirlgmail.Com says**

#### **2nd of the trilogy: again, superb**

The House at Old Vine jumps forward to the era of England's civil war. Again, several interlocutors, narrated by in first person by principal and fifth person characters. Quite captivating, the writer has a gift for revealing the enlightened thoughts one gains after passage of time in a stream of consciousness format.

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### **Laura says**

The second book of the trilogy on the town house, not so engaging as others Lofts books.

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### **Robin says**

Can't put it down. So good.

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### **Kristen Smith says**

Lofts is an excellent writer. She handles a variety of characters believably and her execution of the historicity is masterful.

However, you'd think she was very bitter towards men and marriage and had a detestation for fat people.

Like The Townhouse, this is another distillation of life across many generations all set within the setting of Old Vine. It's depressing that not one of the relationships of these people is positive. They all end, or even begin, very badly. Mercenary. Self-preserving. Infidelity galore. Faithless. I know there was a lot of misery. I don't think Lofts tries to make the misery the point of her stories. But in this one in particular, the relationships were unpleasant, to say the least. This book left me with a cold, cold feeling.

But yes, Lofts is a very good writer and I will be reading the final book in the trilogy just to say that I had given it good shrift.

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## Olrie says

The second book of the trilogy covers 1496 to 1679. The narrative has the same structure: stories told by different people, mostly members of the family taking their roots from Walter (Martin) Reede, and "Interludes" covering the events in between the stories.

Compared to the first book, the narrative has expanded to include a wider historical background. While in the first book the storyline mostly focuses on the local events (uprising led by the citizens of Baildon against the Abbey, while larger historical events, such as peasants rising against the landlords are only briefly mentioned), in the second book, the main characters often directly participate in the historical events: (view spoiler)

However, the historical events are rarely described in the 1st person's narrative as a live action scene; rather, the reader is shown their consequences. (view spoiler) I personally was hoping for a more detailed description.

Also, I felt that the narratives became somewhat briefer focusing on one key episode in the character's life rather than presenting the whole picture. This is not necessarily a drawback but it did make me feel as if the narrative were somewhat rushed at times.

I quite enjoyed the "mirror effect": many events are an echo of similar events in the past. (view spoiler)

Yet, the new set of characters are not mere copies of old ones. They are more fleshed out, and while reading book 1, I felt mostly engaged with Martin as a central figure and to a lesser extent, his granddaughter Maude, there is no central character in book 2. I found myself sympathizing with Josiana Greenwood, (view spoiler). Elizabeth Kentwoode was not a sympathetic but nevertheless a very interesting character, and the story of the priest dying of thirst and hunger is one of the most memorable - it stayed with me for 15 years since I have read the book. My personal favorite is Ethelreda Benedict with her quiet fortitude, which reminds of Griet in "The Girl with a Pearl Earring".

In general, women in this book are stronger personalities, who take charge of the house (Elizabeth and Barbara) and create their own destiny (Josiana and Ethelreda). Men are somehow less remarkable and more submissive. (view spoiler)

I enjoyed tracking family traits running through generations; although, after a while, all the Walters and Henrys are somewhat mixed up in my mind. It is yet another evidence for the fact that male characters are less fleshed out and altogether less memorable.

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## Jeanette says

WHEW! I cannot wait to start #3 House at Sunset.

This one is a 4.5 star. I rounded up because it holds some of my most favorite characters in all of Norah Lofts' HUGE output. This is the Townhouse in Baildon (Suffolk) which was begun by Martin Reed upon diseased vineyard land. It grows over centuries to "Old Vine" a hostel/inn and then to a boys' school. But it is in great flux once again now at the ending of this center portion of this House series trio.

The characters in this one are epic, IMHO. Especially the 3 women. I remembered the girl in the portray with the Elizabethan ruff named Elizabeth and her long life with most of the details for about 3 or 4 decades myself. She is A PIECE OF WORK! Probably I should say "WAS" a piece of work. But then again, maybe

she still is.

And her daughter-in-law and the eventual owner after the Civil War and Restoration, does her legacy differently but in double time. The final woman, Ethelreada, is from the Fens isles and a pagan Viking at heart and in reality of her cognition (never seeing anything but a marsh and about 4 other people in her entire life before 15). So now we have Saxon, Norman, Romany, Norse in the bloodlines.

And England becomes a different place in culture after the "old" queen (Elizabeth I) is gone. Building and growth in great upsurge during the years after her death, indeed on all that confiscated land. And the great Abbey is now in ruins- yet our Townhouse has neighbors and streets that hold carriages beyond the double horse width.

But the culture! Inns with liquor are out! Refined and staid starkness is in! Cromwell and the fanatic Puritans have initiated their own "hope and change". Entire words and phrases have been banned. Nothing can tweak of popery or gleam any twinge of non-judgment that is apart from the current "correct". Neighbor against neighbor and lots of "calling-out". Does it sound familiar?

And then the wool too has changed to silk for more clear profit and less availability in England. But the weavers and looms are eventually lost and burnt out. Spies who seek out priest holes! More ancestors in the fire?

We end this one far past the Restoration and with more than a spattering of modern domestic "in-house" issues. And the school will fall, that is certain. Where will it go now? These are people of the "new money" and merchant classes, not nobel. And will that ugly and snappish stick of a woman let down that knee length hair again?

Oh, I would love to see that portray in that room that was moved from the hall way of our smiling little 8 year old!

I note that the reviews for this one are mixed. This is not happy face story, nor as fast moving as other Lofts. Nor is it constant action. This is personality cored far more than the others. But more mundane drudgery and nuance of manner and approach. This is the reality behind the faces. This one reminds me of Hilary Mantel but with far more servant "eyes" to the smallest motions.

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### **Kayli says**

I love reading these typical Norah Lofts books that go through the generations. So interesting, though I must confess, fairly depressing in many of the chapters.

The coolest thing though, is that I happened to find this book at a used bookstore in Bern who had English paperbacks for 1 frank. And after a few short minutes of browsing, while my kids are waiting impatiently, I found two books by one of my favorite authors! What a great day.

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### **?Ruth? says**

Still very much enjoying this ambitious and well written historical trilogy which follows the fortunes of the

inhabitants of The Old Vine. It's almost like a series of short stories - a format I'm not normally keen on - but in this case it works so well because of the ongoing links between the protagonists of each story.

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### **Marie Louise says**

Lovely story and you can't stop reading it. You feel that you have known the persons depicted in real life. Always sad when we move on to a new family story, because I can't help wondering what happened next. Shows how well written it is. Norah Lofts is a very good author.

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### **Lisa says**

This story covers 6 generations that all have ties to the home Old Vine. It is broken down into each persons story. I enjoyed the tales and would have rated it higher - except the ending left me dissatisfied. It was almost like the author tired of her tale and just ended the story.

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### **Magda says**

There seems to be much more bitterness in this volume than in the first (The Town House), which was all the sweeter for Maude Reed's Tale. However, this volume of the series was quite interesting.

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