



## **A Desirable Residence**

*Madeleine Wickham*

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## A Desirable Residence Madeleine Wickham

Liz and Jonathan Chambers were in trouble. Mortgage trouble. They'd stretched themselves to busting with their new exciting project - well, Liz thought it exciting - buying and managing the Silchester Tutorial College, and now couldn't sell their old house. Here they were, stuck with two mortgages, mounting debts and a miserable adolescent daughter who hadn't wanted to move anyway.

Then Marcus Witherstone came into their lives - and at first it seemed he would solve all their problems. Marcus, senior partner in Silchester's leading estate agency, was large, assured, and wore an expensive overcoat. He knew the perfect tenants from London who would rent their old house - glamorous PR girl Ginny and almost-famous Piers. Everything was going to be OK.

But soon Marcus found himself involved with Liz in a way he'd never intended. Keeping his adulterous trysts secret from Anthea was uncomfortably easy - most of the time her head was firmly buried in Improve your Child's IQ. Meanwhile, as Liz was lost in blissful dreams of Marcus, Jonathan was left to run the tutorial college. Neither of them had time to notice that teenage Alice was developing a desperate passion for the tenants, Piers and Ginny.

Everyone seemed to be entangled with everyone else, in the most awkward possible way. And as events closed in on him, Marcus began to realise that some deceptions are just a bit too close to home.

## A Desirable Residence Details

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Author : Madeleine Wickham

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## Meg says

As much as I became initially engaged in Madeleine Wickham's *A Desirable Residence*, all the attraction here is centered on unlikeable, misanthropic people finally getting their just desserts in the end. From scheming, bored Marcus to ungrateful, uncharitable Liz, I struggled to find one character with whom connect in this British novel.

Bratty Alice couldn't have been more unjust to Jonathan, her bumbling but sweet father, and more than once in the book I found myself wanting to reach in and slap her. She's a self-absorbed teenager, yes, and I could respect the fact that her behavior was *realistic*, but who wants to spend 293 pages reading about a rude, deluded 14-year-old? As she began forcing her presence on Ginny, Piers and Duncan, I became more and more agitated. Couldn't she see she wasn't wanted? That she was intruding? That she was *annoying*? Even if the new residents of her old house didn't feel that way, *I* certainly did.

What could have saved this book from becoming a soulless mess was a dash of humor, warmth or humanity. Demonstrating some *growth*. Some maturity. Some *sincerity*. And though I did find myself smiling inwardly toward the end at an unexpected turn of events, for the most part? The bad people stayed bad. The selfish people stayed selfish. Marcus redeemed himself slightly in my eyes, but Liz -- Liz, one of our central characters -- didn't get what she deserved. I wanted a blow-out, a reckoning . . . I wanted an epic battle complete with tears and divulsions. But I was disappointed.

Wickham is better known to most of us as Sophie Kinsella, the nom de plume under which she wrote the best-selling *Shopaholic* series. While her writing is fluid and enjoyable, her characters -- the anchors of any story -- were terrible. You won't find me complaining about any "distance" between myself and these people, because I definitely felt like I got to know them through the course of *A Desirable Residence*. The real question is would I actually *want* to know them?

And the answer to that is, of course, a resounding no.

With so much great women's fiction and chick lit out there just waiting to be devoured, I can't recommend this one. It was boring, lifeless and grating -- though I *did* manage to finish it, so I guess that says something . . . mostly about the quality of Wickham's writing, which was fast-paced and readable. I didn't hate it -- but didn't love it, either. For good British chick lit, look no further than Jill Mansell -- and don't waste your time reading mediocre books.

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## Cathy says

Why do I love Sophie Kinsella, but hate Madeleine Wickham? They're the same person, but their characterizations are apples and oranges. Wickham's main characters have such horrible moral judgment, and are so generally unlikable. The secondary characters are so put upon by the main characters that you want to say, "Pay attention. She's getting away with murder!" Figuratively, of course. While Wickham's characters are more sophisticated, I prefer the charming naivete that causes Kinsella's main girls to unwittingly get in scrapes. There's hope yet, as Madeleine Wickham's "new" releases are really books written earlier and released to the American masses.

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### **penelopewanders says**

This story never really got off the ground, as far as I am concerned. The characters were fairly interesting although almost all rather unpleasant in some way, and I never greatly enjoy spending time with people I don't particularly like - in real life or in books. It wasn't particularly funny, not very sad or tragic, just a bit dreary, really.

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### **Jessie (Ageless Pages Reviews) says**

What an utter waste of time. The consolidated three hours it took for me to complete this tome of one-dimensional, unlikeable characters is 180 minutes I'd like back.

There are seven characters; none of which seemed remotely convincing or valid. Most were vapid and so distasteful I wanted them to be caught out on their nefarious deeds. One character, Liz, was especially heinous and off-putting. I loathed that character. Any time the narrative was about Liz was a nadir for the book; just unrepentantly selfish, awful and unsympathetic.

This is certainly a misfire from an author who usually writes warmhearted, lovable characters with interesting and personal storylines. Nothing really clicked or felt more than average in scope or detail; the love affairs aren't steamy, the revelations aren't that shocking, and the last quarter of the novel lacks any real resolution for ANY of the characters. A very frustrating, pointless read.

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### **J.Elle says**

I really enjoy reading most of what Sophie Kinsella writes. It's just really great, entertaining chick-lit. This did not fall into that category. This story just dragged on. Liz and Jonathan are financially over-extended (aren't we all). Liz ends up having an affair with the man who starts solving some of their money problems, but things quickly go south when everyone involved starts running in the same circles. Frankly, I read this over a month ago and any significant details escape me. I'm just writing this so that I can cross it off my list and get to the other eight books I read after this one in September. If you like Sophie Kinsella, you probably won't really enjoy this.

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### **Carrie Morrison says**

I have NEVER returned a book to the library without finishing it... this was the first. Before this book, I have enjoyed many of Madeline Wickham's novels - including the ones she wrote under her pseudonym, Sophie Kinsella. I simply could not get into this book - I could tell where it was going within the first 20 pages. I enjoy quick-read Chicklit, but this one simply stunk. I am guessing she cranked this one out to meet her contract requirements.

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## Colleen says

This book, though not what I expected, was quite a good read. Despite the fluffy description on the flap, this book is actually a very frank and serious look at relationships, love, and betrayal. Wickham does a marvelous job with these characters, though it is upsetting how very irresponsible almost all of the adults are throughout the novel. Fourteen year-old Alice was particularly well-drawn; the pain of her adolescent experience reached off the page to grab me. Her conflicted feelings about the adults in her life (she loves her parents while simultaneously writhing inside when confronted by their eccentricities) rang very true and helped make her character so honest and poignant. All in all, an impressive offering from an author usually associated with chick-lit.

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## Diana says

I feel like this book was so abruptly ended with no real tying up of loose ends. The characters were very one-dimensional.

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## Kathy says

So, this is actually Sophie Kinsella however since Sophie Kinsella is her writer name, it really is Madeleine Wickham. Confused? No worries, this whole book is confusing. This book was written way before the popularity of the Confession of a Shopoholic Series. Elements of the Shopoholic series are evident everywhere throughout the book and all I can say is that she definitely pulled the best of this book and tightened up her writing in order to create a mass sensation with that series.

The plot: bored housewife who believes she deserves better in life, hooks up with a rich guy (who is also married and has a myriad of problems himself) and begins to think that her life is on the way up. Add in the troubled husband and a daughter who is resentful that the family moved out of the house in order to make way for a new venture.

My thoughts: a pure waste of time! I think I just kept waiting for the humour that is in the Shopoholic books. I really hated the main character. She was so whiny and self-entitled that I was hoping that she would have something really nasty happen to her.

Recommendations: If this is the only book available to you, then go ahead and read it. If you have other options... then forget it. Read the Shopoholic series for a good laugh. There is no laughing in this book.

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## Ciara says

another terrible madeleine wickham book. i don't know if i even have the energy to go into it. but i'll try.

so, liz is married to jonathan. they own a home in silchester. liz convinces jonathan to put the home on the

market in the hopes of using the proceeds to pay down the mortgage on the "tutorial college" they just purchased. it took me forever to figure out what a tutorial college is. i guess it's like an american SAT prep company, sort of. liz & jonathan have a disaffected teenage daughter named alice. alice is sad about her parents selling the house, so she spends a lot of time sneaking into the garage of her old house to chain-smoke.

marcus whitherstone is one of the owners of the realty company liz & jonathan are using to sell their house. he is married to some uptight supermom whose name i forget. they have two sons. the older one is about to sit the scholarship exams for a prestigious high school. supermom enrolls him in extra class at the tutorial school to help him prepare. marcus happens to be in the office one day when liz has to take a meeting regarding the fact that the silchester house hasn't sold yet. he offers to pull some strings at the bank so she can carry two mortgages, & also find her a tenant.

the tenants he finds are ginny, a PR agent who does a lot of work for the realty company, & her husband piers. piers is an actor who has fallen on hard times, but he has an audition for a popular soap opera coming up. both he & ginny are hopeful that he'll get it.

while marcus & liz are waiting for ginny & piers to come see the house, they end up kissing, & it soon blossoms into a full-fledged affair. liz is over the moon about it. marcus takes her to posh hotels & lets her raid the mini-bar & buys her expensive jewelry. she begins to fantasize about him declaring his love for her & asking her to run away & get married. she mostly seems excited about marcus solving all her money problems for her. she daydreams about being his wife, going to fancy parties, & wearing designer clothes. she seems totally oblivious to the fact that marcus is quickly running out of patience with her & isn't that interested in continuing the affair.

marcus is also distracted by how he did some appraisal work on a fancy estate for a big-time banker named leo. leo asked marcus to under-value the estate so that leo could flip it & make a huge profit. marcus does as asked & is paid handsomely for it, but then people start asking questions & he kind of freaks.

alice makes the acquaintance of piers & ginny after they move into the rental home & they kind of take her under their wings, even though she's just 14 years old. alice has a little crush on piers, which everyone seems to find cute. alice goes over to hang out with them pretty much every single day.

blah blah. this all goes on for like 200 pages. finally ginny & piers decide to have a big party to celebrate...something. i don't know what. they invite alice & her parents, as well as marcus & his family (they rent from one couple & ginny works for marcus, remember). liz is thrilled to see marcus again. she thinks the party might be the setting for the marriage proposal she's been dreaming about. marcus pulls liz into the garage to break things off & liz makes an ass of herself. & it turns out that alice is in there smoking (marcus & liz didn't see her). so now she knows that her mom has been having an affair & she kind of freaks. meanwhile, piers just got the call about the soap opera gig. he was rejected. he & ginny are crying hysterically in their bedroom while everyone else parties. when alice tries to tell ginny about liz's affair, ginny screams at her & tells her to go away.

jonathan talks alice down & alice decides not to tell him about liz's perfidy. marcus has clearly decided to re-dedicate himself to his family after his brush with danger, engaging in fraud for leo. liz is chastened & ashamed. marcus's son did great on his scholarship tests & word is spreading, bringing tons of new business to the tutorial college, so jonathan is pleased. at the end of the book, there's some hint that maybe jonathan knows that liz was cheating on him but chose to turn a blind eye. & marcus uses the proceeds of the fraud he committed to buy the silchester house & invites jonathan & liz to move back in for a reasonable rent. of

course, he doesn't tell them he's the owner.

basically, this book is boring & manages to make no sense at the same time. skip it!

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### **Sandie says**

What we have here is a failure to communicate". That line from the old Paul Newman movie Cool Hand Luke could just as easily apply to the characters in Madeline Wickham's A DESIRABLE RESIDENCE. Although this book was published in the UK several years ago, it is just now making its way into the US marketplace.

Ms. Wickham's book addresses several issues. We have overbearing, social climbing mothers, hen-pecked, wimpy fathers, underemployed actors, children seeking acceptance and friendship from teachers and household help, characters who are overextended financially, everyone worried about what everyone else will think, and of course the titillating extra-marital affair. Through all of these scenarios, most of the characters are looking for happiness and fulfillment, but no one is talking. It's obviously not "cool" to divulge your innermost feelings to your parents or your spouse. For me, Liz Chambers was a particularly unlikable character with Marcus Witherstone running a close second. Billed by the publishers as a "wicked comedy", RESIDENCE is more a social commentary that is melancholy rather than amusing. The book is, however, a quick, easy read that keeps you curiously fascinated.

Wickham previously authored the "Shopaholic Series" under the name Sophie Kinsella, but do not expect to find a Rebecca Bloomwood gracing the pages of this book.

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### **Meagan says**

I wasn't a fan of this book. None of the characters really engaged me, and I really didn't like how it ended. It was very abrupt.

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### **Melita says**

Through this book I learnt that Sophie Kinsella's real name is Madeleine Wickham. All is well, I thought. This one looks good.

I read the book by borrowing it from my friend when we're on a class trip. We were on a bus, and I am dead bored. I don't want to sleep, so I asked her whether I can read her book. She said yes and I am so grateful for that! Finished half of the book by the time we ended the bus trip. Finished the rest of it during the week end. Found this to be a page turner. All of the Kinsella's element is here. Yes, maybe less humour than Kinsella writings. But still: surprise, suspense, interesting character, story lines, good details. When I gave it back, the owner was like, "What? Finished already? You're not busy or something?" I just thought there's always time for a good book which I can't put down.

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## **Shannon says**

[want waarom zou je zo vaak langs gaan bij je oude huis, terwijl je er van bewust bent dat je zo vaak langs gaat. Ook haar gedrag tegenover haar ouders en met name haar vader was erg irritant (hide spoiler)]

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## **Cisz Strasters says**

Hoewel ik echt hou van de boeken van Sophie Kinsella/ Madeleine Wickham heb ik me door dit boek heen moeten worstelen, net zoals bij de Tennisparty. Duidelijk een van haar eerste boeken waarin nog heel erg gezocht word naar een verhaal. De eerste 100 blz heb ik me meerdere malen afgevraagd of ik uberhaupt wel verder wilde lezen... vanaf 120 zat ik eindelijk lekker in het verhaal, maar bleef me ergeren aan de personages. Ook het einde was niet echt bevredigend helaas. Gelukkig heb ik van al haar andere boeken wel met volle teugen genoten!

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