



# Larkswood

*Valerie Mendes*

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**Larkswood** Valerie Mendes

**In the tradition of *THE FORSYTE SAGA*, a sweeping historical novel that spans three generations, telling the dark secrets of a family torn apart.**

Larkswood House. The very name suggests birdsong, peace and elegance. It is home to the Hamilton children - Edward, Cynthia and Harriet - who enjoy the freedom and excitement of privilege. But in the glorious summer of 1896, with absent parents and a departed governess, disaster strikes the family, leaving it cruelly divided.

More than forty years later, on the eve of the Second World War, Louisa Hamilton, newly presented at court but struck down with glandular fever, is sent to Larkswood to recuperate. There, for the first time, she meets her grandfather, Edward, home after decades in India. Haunted by terrible memories, the arrival of his granddaughter begins to gladden his heart.

But as Louisa begins to fall under the spell of Larkswood, she realises it holds the key to the mystery that shattered her family two generations before. Will she find the courage to unravel the dark secrets of the past? And can Larkswood ever become home to happiness again?

## Larkswood Details

Date : Published January 16th 2014 by Orion (first published January 1st 2014)

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Author : Valerie Mendes

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Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Mystery, Gothic

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# From Reader Review Larkwood for online ebook

## Rebeccadowler says

one dimensional characters, very heavily cliched. I had no empathy with the characters , unbelievable story line. Mills an Boon ending....utter tosh, I was actually tutting out loud as I further got into the book at the silliness of the language used by the characters.....Drivel

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## Lucinda says

Exquisitely evocative and multilayered this profoundly poignant novel is a must-read!

**Capturing the elegance of “Downton Abbey” (or Netherwood)** and ideal for fans of *Julia Gregson* and *Kate Furnivall* this is a story targeted towards a wide-readership. This **delicious debut** spans across a vast three generations and alternate time periods, in the vein of Bee Ridgeway’s *the river of no return* {or likewise a Barbara Erskine historical novel}. Larkwood House tells the dark secrets of a family torn apart, and is **filled with thought-provoking connotation** and reflective parts. This is a story of one house that *touches the hearts* of all its occupants over the years, similarly to many other literary works regarding ‘great’ houses and drama’s {for instance **Marchlands**}.

The very name ‘*Larkwood*’ suggests birdsong, peace and elegance. It is home in **1896** to three children; Harriet, Edmund and Cynthia who delight in the privileges that present them with freedom and excitement. One summer when the governess is absent and so too are their parents, a disaster strikes that leaves the family cruelly divided...**40 years later** and during the time of WW2, Louisa Hamilton is sent to Larkwood, where she unexpectedly encounters a long-lost relative who holds the key to hidden secrets. And so the mystery surrounding her past, spanning across two generations begins to unravel and with it such **darkness**. It then begs the question if Larkwood will ever be home to happiness again?

This deftly woven mystery that is shrouded in sinister secrets, is a remarkably compelling and utterly fascinating read. I was drawn into this house’s past like a moth to a flame, completely enchanted by the interlacing events that **link the present to the past so seamlessly**. Deliciously dark and full of spine chilling tension that builds to such a dramatic climax, I was **incredibly impressed** by this beautiful book. I just loved how the author combined all the elegance and atmospheric ambience within a contemporary, modern felt tale. Refreshingly original and tangible {so as to *get under your skin*}, I was most impressed by an unforgettable story. Larkwood is so tempting – **it is both alluring with its formidable ancient façade seeped in history and yet there is something so mysterious about it that its almost unnerving and chilling to the core!**

I would urge readers to add this to their ‘*Wish List*’ for a \*new\* New Year’s read to start 2014!

[www.valeriemendes.com](http://www.valeriemendes.com)

I won an ‘*Uncorrected Bound Manuscript Copy*’ of Larkwood by Valerie Mendes, through a Goodreads first-read book giveaway. I would like to thank both the author and **Orion** publishers.

**4.5 STARS!!**

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### **Inés says**

2'5 ? Bien narrado pero nada nuevo, algo leído, visto o escuchado mil veces. Ha querido dar originalidad a la resolución con una parte del secreto del pasado y me parece que roza el absurdo la naturalidad con que todos aceptan ese secreto que a mi entender es horrendo y todos están tan felices... Pinta continuación que desde luego no leeré.

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### **LindyLouMac says**

A sign of a good story is that I stayed awake last night to finish the last 100 pages when I should have asleep!

April 2016

I read this in October 2015 and sadly never got round to reviewing properly. I know I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Proof of this is that I stayed awake to finish the last 100 pages when I should have been asleep!

Recommended to anyone that enjoys a family saga with plenty of drama and intrigue.

<http://lindyloumacbookreviews.blogspot...>

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### **Vivienne says**

I thought this was a lovely first adult novel from Valerie Mendes on similar lines to Kate Morton and Rachel Hore. The ending left you wondering if there was another book about Louisa and Tom

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### **Idoru says**

I've been hesitating about putting this review up, as I received the book for free through the First Reads scheme, and I wasn't sure how fair it might be to put up a rather luke-warm review. But I decided in the end that it's in the spirit of First Reads to be totally honest. So here's my review.

The synopsis of this book was really intriguing: dark secrets, families torn apart, a historical reach spanning generations. What's not to like? The introductory chapter didn't disappoint, either, setting up the mystery nicely.

The story begins with Louisa Hamilton and her coming out, along with her older sister. Louisa is then set for a season in London, which she really isn't looking forward to. However, she becomes ill and is sent to Larkwood House, the family home to which her grandfather, whom she has never met, has only just recently returned.

As she recovers, Louisa begins to love Larkwood, her grandfather Edward and, more unfortunately, the hot gardener. She also discovers what appears to be a family secret and endeavours to investigate. Some 40 years ago, when Edward was a teenager living with his two beloved sisters and with absentee parents, disaster

strikes the family, tearing it apart.

The two stories are told in parallel to each other; we don't learn what the terrible secret is until near the end, but I found it easy to guess. That said, there were plenty of other twists along the way that I didn't see coming. As a thriller this all works very well and I read the book in just a couple of days – the mystery is such that you really want to find out what happened.

One of the things that often seems to suffer with thrillers, though, is characterisation, and this is the case here. The characters are all rather clichéd and one dimensional. Edward is never more than the gruff, bluff grandpa. Louisa's sister is the beautiful, shallow one interested only parties and securing a good marriage. Louisa herself is plain and bookish, intended no doubt to appeal to a rather bookish audience, or at least one that sees itself as such. Parallels between the two sets of sisters are clear but never examined.

I didn't buy Edward's acceptance – and tacit approval and encouragement – of Louisa's relationship with the gardener. Their differences in station would have been enough for him to put his foot down and his own past would mean he would want to keep them apart. I can't say much more without giving away the secret, but I found the ending unsatisfying. It was wrapped too easily for my liking.

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### **Renita D'Silva says**

A poignant, wonderfully researched story that transported me.

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### **Nicki says**

This book is a frothy concoction with a dark secret at the heart. The writing is very "golly gosh!" and utterly cringeworthy much of the time. The rather unsavoury secret isn't actually revealed until 75% in, but it's heavily signposted very early on and is very easy to guess. When it is revealed, everyone seems to sweep it under the carpet as insignificant, which is odd to say the least.

The characters are flimsy cut-outs, with nary a stereotype unused. Our heroine, Louisa, is a busybody of the highest order, pushing her way into people's lives and demanding they tell her their deepest, darkest secrets. And even though most of the secret-keepers have been holding their cards close to their chest for forty-odd years, they spill the beans to Louisa with barely any pressure. Then they all tell her how brave, clever and gutsy she is. And they all repeatedly call her Louisa Hamilton all the time instead of just Louisa.

I think Larkwood House is supposed to be a character within the book too, but there's not sense of place or menace. It's just a place where something happened a long time ago. The pre-war setting doesn't really matter either. I think it's supposed to be part of a build-up of tension, but simply setting out facts in letters or having flighty characters talk about how "that silly little man" Hitler is "simply ruining" their season doesn't do the job.

This book wants to be gothic melodrama, but it never quite hits those heights. There's no cliché left unused and no happy ending left to wither and die on the vine. This would have been a much better book if the author didn't have such a desire to wrap everything up in a giant pink bow.

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### **Susan says**

This novel begins with Louisa Hamilton and her coming out as a debutante in 1939, alongside her much prettier sister, Millicent. For Millicent, and her mother Gloria, the season is all that matters; but Louisa finds it a chore. When she is taken ill with glandular fever, her mother is more concerned that Millicent's marriage chances will be ruined than with her younger daughter. Louisa is sent to Larkswood Hall, deep in the heart of Hampshire, where her grandfather has just returned after more than forty years in India. Now widowed, Edward Hamilton is delighted that he been has asked him to care for his granddaughter. He has been estranged from his family for many years and is determined to make Louisa's stay happy. At first, Louisa is horrified to be sent away. War is looming and she is hoping to convalesce quickly and return home, despite her dislike of the social season. However, before long she is entranced by Larkswood and the handsome gardener, Thomas Saunders....

The story alternates between that of 1939 and the 1890's, when Edward was a young man. Louisa discovers a locked tower and evidence of Edward having two beautiful sisters, but he refuses to speak of them. This is a tale of cruel parents, long buried family secrets, forbidden love and scandals – all set in a beautiful, country house. If you enjoy novels with a good period setting and a lot of family intrigue, then you will probably enjoy this.

Rating 3.5

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### **Jessica says**

What a silly story with a byline that might make a few readers uneasy.  
This reader was certainly not impressed.

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### **Becky says**

This really is a rather silly book, it is beyond melodramatic, a real modern gothic novel. Certain parts of the writing made me cringe, for example all of the villagers seemed to end every sentence with the phrase 'certain sure' this was rather irritating. However despite the obvious flaws of this book I found myself really enjoying it. The story goes from one extreme to another; set in 1939 and in the late 19th century this story has a huge rambling gothic house, incest, cruel parents, disinherited children, lesbians, secretly burried children and true love across the class divide. It left me feeling caught up in the romantic gothic insanity of the whole thing.

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### **Dawn Boukhatem says**

This book is a children's book. With incest.

Although it's easy to read; the lack of depth, characterization, and being chock-a-block full of age-old

cliches, leaves this book severely lacking.

And kind of laughable.

And extremely frustrating.

There was a basis of a good story there, but, unfortunately, the author failed to deliver it.

It was a little like reading through treacle.

Everything seemed to be coated with sugar. There wasn't anything that struck a real emotional cord within. I couldn't comprehend why the characters did what did, thier motivations: the book had some pretty hard hitting themes to explore, yet treated them with a pat on the back and a 'there there, deary' attitude.

Like a book written for young children. With incest.

After reading the author's notes, I wasn't surprised to learn that before this - her first effort into adult literature, she was a writer of childrens books.

It showed. And her writing style really didn't suit her subject matter: It was like an old Mill's and Boon novel, for children. With added incest.

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## **Louise says**

Ok... Odd....

So the incest is ok, all carry on as normal?

It could have been so much better.

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## **Monique Mulligan says**

“A sweeping historical novel that spans three generations, telling the dark secrets of a family torn apart.” So said the publicity material for Larkwood by Valerie Mendez, and of course, that was enough to make me want to read it. The cover is also appealing to me – what secrets lie behind that window? With the promise of melodrama and intrigue, I settled down with this book, hoping for a read that left me content and as much in love with reading as ever.

Using the popular dual time period/narrator device, Larkwood alternates between the stories of Harriet and her siblings in 1896, and Louisa, the grand-daughter of Harriet’s brother. It starts in typical fashion – a young girl, running through the woods in an attempt to conceal a secret, worried that someone will see her and questions will be asked. She’s burying a baby ... but whose is it? The reader soon realises that Cynthia, Harriet’s elder sister, has given birth to a stillborn child while their parents are away. Until now, the Hamilton siblings have enjoyed a privileged existence, albeit with disinterested parents; the birth of this child, means change to all they know.

More than 40 years later, new debutante Louisa Hamilton is sent to Larkswood to recuperate from glandular fever. Her grandfather, fresh from years in India, agrees to let her stay, and Louisa soon comes to enjoy country life. As romance blossoms between Louisa and the young, handsome gardener, she becomes aware that the house is shrouded in mystery, and no one wants to talk about it. Questioning her grandfather leads her nowhere, so she takes matters into her own hands. But at what cost? Can the wounds of the past ever be healed?

As I read Larkswood, I couldn't help but be reminded of the Flowers in the Attic series, and while I liked that as a teenager, as an adult I have a rather different response to that series. Readers familiar with the V.C. Andrews series may have an inkling of what I'm alluding to, but for those not, I won't spoil it here. What I will say is that I felt like the actions of certain characters were condoned, with the reader manipulated into feeling sorry for them because their parents were so self-absorbed. Sorry, that didn't sit right with me. Nor did the parents' response, which was reprehensible, but that fit more with the darkness the novel was aiming for.

On the whole, I found myself a bit underwhelmed by this book; something about it just didn't work for me in the way I'd hoped ... and this was before the deep, dark secret was revealed (and there were plenty of hints, so it was no big surprise). I really wanted to love this because it had many of the elements I adore in novels (although the house was less of a "character" than is usual in this genre), but I had a hard time maintaining interest towards the end. It started with such promise, but I'm afraid I didn't feel it delivered the punch I hoped for. I also felt that the romance between Louisa and the gardener needed more work to make me feel it.

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## Oda says

This. This. It has all the things I like in a light read, with it's grand old mansion in the English countryside, it's hints at family secrets, it's estranged family members and the dual time narrative which flashes back and forth between the 1890s and the onset of WW2. But then we get to know the secrets in question and it's just so SILLY. So unbelievable and so very, very silly, even stupid. Come on, lady, YOU HAD ONE JOB. Please don't write anything again, ever.

In this tale of utter unlikeliness and super one-dimensional characters, everything starts as it should. Mostly. It seems like a promising book, despite it's cheap moves and superficial character building. We then find out that some of the family members did something terrible, and after that it's just ACCEPTED. Just like that. By all of the family members. I promise it's something that wouldn't have been accepted today, and certainly not in 1940 England! But here they're all like, you did what now, oh well, time for tea. So they all gather for a happy family reunion. People believed dead are no longer dead. Everyone moves in together and overcomes their differences. Churchill calls with a job offer. They open a hospital. The end.

I think I actually lost IQ while reading this.

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