



## Three Story House

*Courtney Miller Santo*

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Renovating an historic Memphis house together, three cousins discover that their spectacular failures in love, career, and family provide the foundation for their future happiness in this warm and poignant novel from the author of *The Roots of the Olive Tree* that is reminiscent of *The Postmistress*, *The Secret Life of Bees*, and Kristin Hannah's novels.

Nearing thirty and trying to avoid the inescapable fact that they have failed to live up to everyone's expectations and their own aspirations, cousins and childhood best friends Lizzie, Elyse, and Isobel seek respite in an oddly-shaped, three-story house that sits on a bluff sixty feet above the Mississippi.

As they work to restore the almost condemned house, each woman faces uncomfortable truths about their own failings. Lizzie seeks answers to a long-held family secret about her father in her grandmother's jumble of mementos and the home's hidden spaces. Elyse's obsession with an old flame leads her to a harrowing mistake that threatens to destroy her sister's wedding, and Isobel's quest for celebrity tempts her to betray confidences in ways that would irreparably damage her two cousins.

Told in three parts from the perspective of each of the women, this sharply observed account of the restoration of a house built out of spite, but filled with memories of love is also an account of friendship and how relying on each others insights and strengths provides the women a way to get what they need instead of what they want.

## Three Story House Details

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Author : Courtney Miller Santo

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## From Reader Review Three Story House for online ebook

### **Mel says**

It took me two weeks to finish this book. Maybe longer. A book that would have typically taken me a day or two. I was picking up other books and reading them. I wasn't on a reading hiatus. It was probably a 1.5 though. The story of Lizzie, Isobel, and Elyse opens as Lizzie, her mother and "step father" are driving to meet her step dad's family for the first time. Isobel and Elyse are her age. They are immediately drawn to each other. That starts their friendship. I can't really put into words what I disliked about this book. The way it was written. It was split into three parts. One for each point of view. That was fine. I don't have a problem with books written that way. But, I don't even feel like the reader is given a lot of information on who they are reading about. Then, at certain points it's written like there are things you should know. But, don't. I guess there's no cohesion. I didn't care about the characters. Then, there were things (like Lizzie's relationship with TJ, her teenage soccer team, her relationship with her parents, Isobel's relationship with Tom, Elyse's feeling for Landon, etc.) that are left unresolved. The biggest question in the story is who Lizzie's dad was. I wasn't even surprised when I found out. The storyline with Benny was unnecessary. But, I guess a little racism and alcoholism spiced things up. I can't say I wouldn't recommend. It might be great to someone else.

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### **Terri says**

Review also found at <http://kristineandterri.blogspot.ca/2014/08/review-three-story-house.html>...

I received an advanced copy of this book from the publisher William Morrow via Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review. The expected publication date is August 19, 2014.

This is the story of Lizzie, Elyse and Isobel as they come together to renovate a house and simultaneously attempt to put the pieces of their lives together. I have to give kudos to the author for the appropriately named title of the story. It is told in three stories giving a perspective to each of the cousins. Hence Three story house...well done.

This was a nice read where I enjoyed some of the characters more than others. For example I enjoyed Lizzie and her determination to reach her goals. I also enjoyed watching her struggle with the realization that these goals may be out of her reach. On the flip side I felt that Elyse was a little too desperate to truly identify with. Isobel fell somewhere in between.

While the story was good I did find that there were some glitches in the execution of the story. Many times the transitions did not work and I had to re-read portions of the book to find out what was going on. Also the majority of the romance happens "off-screen" which left me wondering how they had progressed. Lastly I struggled with the character of Benny. I found that he was a surplus character that should have had more involvement in the outcome of the story. Although I knew he wasn't what the reader is led to believe he was (no spoilers here I promise) he was present too much in the story to not have a greater significance to the storyline.

This story entertained me. If you can overlook the inconsistencies in the story and the fact that everything seems to only touch the surface then I say read it.

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### **Jen Davis says**

I don't understand why this book has so many decent reviews. It reads like a really good short story from a high school English class. (Don't get me wrong, those can be great, but most are a far cry from being publishable.) I can't tell if this is supposed to be chick lit or just really bad literature. I don't think I would have rated it as poorly if I hadn't been expecting so much more. Characters - blah. Storyline - eh. The whole thing was just kind of bland. There are better books out there.

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### **Becky says**

Spite House, a historic landmark in Memphis, Tennessee and the house where Lizzie spent much of her childhood, has fallen into grave disrepair. In the time since her grandmother passed away the house was apparently abandoned and left to rot. Now the city has stepped in and Lizzie and her mother are in danger of losing it unless it can be fixed to code. Enter Lizzie's cousins Elyse and Isobel.

Best of friends since Lizzie's mother married into the family, the three girls are as close as siblings. Together they'll work to fix Spite House and uncover its secrets. But the renovations also offer each of them a chance to fix their own lives as well. Lizzie, who dreams of a chance at the Olympics while recovering from her latest surgery hopes the house will finally give her the opportunity to learn about her father. Elyse is using Spite House as a chance to escape her sister's looming marriage - a marriage to the man Elyse has been in love with much of her own life. And Isobel has always dreamed of recapturing the attention and celebrity she had as a child. For her Spite House might prove to be exactly what she's looking for.

As with her debut, *The Roots of the Olive Tree*, Courtney Miller Santo once again offers up something of a family saga. This time it's one year in the life of three cousins, each on the brink of thirty and each unsure what to do next in life.

The book is split into three sections, each piece told from one of the girls' viewpoints. This is a format I usually enjoy quite a bit but I'm not sure that it was the best option here in *Three Story House*. First, the house itself was of the most interest to me. Spite House - there's a story there! Unfortunately it's pushed to the background and only generally glossed over. The girls never really became fully developed or fleshed out either. Sadly I never really felt like I was seeing anything beyond their surface stories - I never felt like I was really getting to know any of them and ended up having quite a hard time connecting with them and becoming invested in their stories.

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### **Kari says**

*Three Story House* ended up just being an OK read for me. The story was interesting, but it just fell short. The story told through the eyes of the three cousins each in their own section instead of alternating throughout the book. I'm not sure this format worked for me because I felt like I missed out on the other characters perspective.

I guess I wanted more out of it. I never really ended up connecting with any of the characters or their stories.

I felt kind of like I was reading an outline of the story and not the meat. For instance, we never got to see any of the romance between the characters. Both Lizzie and Isobel find men and we are just kind of told how things are progressing almost as an after thought. That was weird for me. As I said, I wanted more. The reveal about who Lizzie's father was came out of nowhere and was too creepy for words. I don't fault her for her reaction.

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### **Ann says**

I liked this book. It's essentially a family story of Lizzie, Elyse and Isobel, three cousins who move to Memphis to renovate Lizzie's grandmother's house. Lizzie is an Olympic soccer player who is recovering from an ACL injury. Elyse and Isobel are also at loose ends and the three girls, all in their 30's spend a year renovating the deteriorating old home. The three all find peace with their families, a love interest and the ability to move on with their lives. The interaction between these three cousins is a great moving story.

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### **Patty says**

Title...Three Story House

Author...Courtney Miller Santo

My " in a nutshell" summary...

Lizzie, Elyse, Isobel...cousins...or triplins...the family name for them...all have personal issues that need to be dealt with.

My thoughts after reading this book...

Lizzie...a "wannabe" Olympic soccer player with a major knee injury...Isobel...former child actress who is not sure what she wants to do...Elyse...failed inn owner in love with her sister's husband...these are women with issues! They are cousins who take a time out in their lives to connect, heal and fix up Lizzie's grandmother's nearly condemned house in Memphis. The house has major problems and seems to hold many secrets. The big secret is who is Lizzie's father. This is something that her mother has always refused to talk about.

What I loved about this book...

I enjoyed the cousins and the way they connected and worked together. I did not get the significance of the title until I got to the second story...which was Elyse's story...then I "got" it! Also...I love the way this author does family life...I felt as though I knew the key players really well!

What I did not love about this book...

I found the cousins and their issues just a teensie bit dull at times...I think I wanted them to have more scandalous issues than they did. Plus...once we find out who Lizzie's father is...it just doesn't truly seem like that big of a deal...her mother should have told her...and Lizzie should have asked more questions.

Final thoughts...

Would this be a good choice for you...potential reader?

I started this book with such high hopes...the writing is good...the house stuff is interesting...the cousins personalities unique enough but I just did not connect with these characters as much as I needed to in order to really love this book. It's nothing I can actually pinpoint...just sort of a disconnect on my part.

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### **Carin says**

I lived in Nashville for my first twenty-five years but I've never been to Memphis. Almost drove through it once on my way to Jackson, MS but I ended up taking the bypass. All the time I lived there, we looked down on Memphis, who once lorded it over Nashville as the bigger and more famous town. Now that I live in a town that is the biggest in its state but not the capitol and therefore doesn't get its share of funding, I am more sympathetic to Memphis. Also, I have lived in a boom town and Nashville has become one as well in my absence, and I am drawn more to the older, shabbier cities, with more history and culture, rather than the shiny new cities (although I know, I live in Charlotte which is not the type of town I say I want to live in but it has a lot of offsetting benefits.)

In this novel, three cousins (well, two cousins and a step-cousin) move in together to renovate the quirky house built by the grandfather of one of the women, Lizzie. All three are going through rough times and they have always fallen back on each other for strength in times of trouble. Lizzie has a knee injury which might be the one that finally ruins her professional soccer career and denies her her dreams of Olympic gold. Elyse is in love with a childhood friend who has recently announced his engagement... to Elyse's younger, prettier sister. Isobel, once a child star on a sitcom (I'm picturing Tina Yothers from *Family Ties*), has been unsuccessful in restarting her acting career as an adult. The book is told in three parts or "stories," as each of the women faces and deals with her crisis. I am not a big fan of this type of shifting narration, but it did mostly work here (Lizzie and Elyse's voices were much stronger than Isobel's, and their emotions much more understandable.) It is interesting to see in this type of narration, how the author wraps up the storylines of the first two narrators within their sections, but then how she extends those and how she continues to keep the reader invested in them without the same level of knowledge we had before, through to the end. It's a shame she ended with the weakest of the three characters, as that didn't leave the very best impression, but the book still held up and was entertaining throughout.

The house in the book is based on real "spite houses" which I would love to see in person one day. They look hilarious in pictures and I can understand the motivation behind them (although the ones that are built to block another's view just seem to put the owners in even closer quarters with the hated neighbors so those are confusing. This is one where someone inherited an awkward piece of land and a sibling was trying to force them to sell it by making it an unusable shape and size.) One day I'd also like to get to Memphis. Meanwhile, it was excellent to read a book about my part of the country that doesn't make fun of the South nor trade on stereotypes and cliches. It acknowledges that despite its Elvis connections and such, Memphis is just another big city, not solely a kitchy tourist trap. In that regard, it's an excellent addition to Southern lit.

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## **Hannah says**

This book was crap. There will be spoilers because I disliked the story so much that I don't care to preserve it.

The story is about three cousins - Lizzie the soccer player, Isobel the actress, and Elyse the fat one. Yes, that is the big trait that they give Elyse. And she's not fat, she's pudgy and likes to bake. Way to go on personality there. These three cousins have been friends for life and when all three of their lives are at a crisis at the same time, they go to Memphis to restore a house and fix everything.

I felt like the author didn't really like her characters. She made little attempt to have them be likeable and she didn't go too deep into their emotions. She divided the story into three parts, so that you could focus on each girl. In Lizzie's section she is struggling with a soccer injury that could and does end her career. She's extremely focused on making the olympic soccer team. When, in a later section, you find out she doesn't make it, that's all you know. You don't know if she was upset, or if she had accepted her fate by then or what.

And Isobel, in order to try and spruce up her career, is having a reality crew film the three of them fixing up the house. The crew, in order to spice up ratings, keeps throwing weird situations at them and surprising them with weird guests, and everything. And someone will get mad...for a paragraph. And then it's just not talked about. It's not resolved. It's just...there. Isobel throws them out finally and nobody really says anything. Don't worry. She got a long great with the cameraman and he comes back with a great show idea that will help Isobel revive her career. Problem solved. No emotion.

And poor old Elyse is hiding out because the man she loves is marrying her sister. Turns out they were childhood friends and she was just waiting until one day he and her sister come into the living room and announce they're getting married. WHAT?! When she finally has the big confrontation with the guy, he has the perfectly logical explanation that he loves Elyse like a friend, but he LOVES her sister. Okay, fine. I can roll with that. But where's the big tantrum of "WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME YOU WERE DATING MY SISTER? WHY DIDN'T SHE TELL ME?" I feel like these are logical questions. If my sister showed up with her fiancee that none of us knew about, I wouldn't cut down my prize roses for the centerpieces (which the mom does). I would have a serious talk about open communication.

Idiots! Also, while fixing up the house, the sisters discover some secrets. Such as...incest! Yes, a niece married her uncle. This is literally how the book puts it "and the three sat around the phone while aunt Anne related the story as she knew it." And that's all the reader gets to know. Seriously. Why bring it up if you weren't going to talk about it?

I don't know if the author walked around so long with the story in her head that she forgot she hadn't actually transcribed it to paper, or if she would just try to throw in a quirk once in a while but have no idea where to go with it.

Don't read this book.

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## **HelenDolly Plumb says**

I got this book from the library and then put it in my bag with a cup of home made soup which spilled all

over it ruining it. Because I am a decent person I fessed up to the library and they said I could either replace it or pay for it. So I bought a copy off ebay and took it into the library but they said it wasn't in good enough condition so I paid for it. Then read the one that I'd bought off ebay.

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### **Nikki says**

Wat een draak van een boek. De recensie staat nu online: <http://bookswithabeautychick.blogspot...>

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### **Amy says**

Much like in her first book (The Roots of the Olive Tree), Courtney Santo has created lush, vibrant, REALISTIC family dynamics that ring true. From the point you meet the three cousins Lizzy, Elyse, and Isobel as children (affectionately known by their family as the triplets+cousins - the Triplins), their relationship is honest and authentic. There is no saccharine sweet fictional familial love here - they fight and squabble just as real cousins, but their deep bond to one another is always evident.

The book is cleverly crafted, following each cousin through her own story as together they renovate the Spite House built high on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi. As they work through the highs and mostly lows of making the house habitable, story by story, each cousin also goes through a personal renovation as life challenges them in myriad ways. The family secrets they uncover in the process only serve to bind them closer together.

The writing was able to do what only the best of books can do, and that is sweep me away to where I was totally involved in the story. I felt their joy and success as keenly as I did their disappointments and mistakes. I also enjoyed the love letter to Memphis written between each line of the novel, as much like the author, Memphis is my adopted home.

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### **Alissa says**

I would call this smart chick lit - it's very clever in that each cousin narrates a section (giving more meaning to the title. I also loved the portrayal of the cousin relationship - which I feel is a very special relationship. There's some light romance and suspense and it's a bit of a coming of age novel for these women in their twenties. I liked how it went back and forth. A very satisfying beach read.

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### **Laurel-Rain says**

The three girls met in 1993, at Silver Beach, Massachusetts. Lizzie Linwood, as the only child of an only child, was improbably now related to these two girls because of her mother's marriage to Jim when she was seven years old.

They formed a unique connection, these three unexpected cousins, all born during the same month and year. Elyse and Isobel were full of questions for Lizzie, about her life and her dad. But Lizzie, who had lived only

with her mother and grandmother in her Grandmother Mellie's house in Memphis, had no knowledge of her father. Not his name, who he was, or what had happened to him. This fact of her life would haunt her.

Fast forward to November 2011, in Los Angeles, where Lizzie and Isobel have been living in their adulthood, and to a phone call that will take the two of them, joined also by Elyse, back to Memphis and a crumbling, condemned house. The three story house that had been home to Lizzie, and which needed major repairs, rested on a hill overlooking the Mississippi River, and would take them out of their real lives during its restoration. During the process, the house would come to symbolize all of their own failings. Struggling to overcome the challenges they will each discover truths about themselves and what they must do next.

Isobel had starred in a TV show in childhood, and now seeks to find her place in the industry via a reality show during the restoration. Elyse is trying to overcome her obsession with her old lover who is now going to marry her sister. And Lizzie, an athlete, is recovering from her third knee surgery, and wondering if she can ever play soccer again.

Three Story House took place mostly in Memphis during the restoration, but also flipped back and forth in time, revealing significant moments in the lives of the women, now almost thirty.

Divided into three sections, the story focused on each young woman, and I found parts of it fascinating. Within the walls of the old house were clues that could be sorted and assembled to point to some of the answers.

Strange and somewhat disconnected characters filled out the canvas, all having something to do with the past, or with the restoration. While the story dragged for me at times, in the end, there was a satisfactory resolution for each of them, in a sense; however, the revelations felt a little like a balloon that has gone flat. A lot of furor over nothing much. 3.5 stars.

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### **Susan Johnson says**

3.5 stars

This book is from Bookreporter.com, a delightful site for booklovers.

The title is a pun and it sets the tone right away. Not only is the story about a three story house called the Spite House but the different stories of three cousins who come together to save the house. It's a lovely story for a hot day when you want something light and fun.

Lizzie is a star soccer player whose career is winding up due to injuries. Isobel is a former child actor who has not found successful film career as an adult. Elyse, the weakest character as far as I am concerned, has not found her way in life. At the end of their 20's they are have to reevaluate their life's directions so they come together to save Lizzie's grandmother's house in Memphis.

I loved the fact that they are cousins. It's a relationship that's not explored very much. I have three female cousins and they are so special to me that I enjoyed this book that much more. It's also about their relationships with their parents that's not unexpected. It's in your 20's that you redefine that relationship.

I recommend this book when you're in the mood for a light, upbeat read. I had a lot of fun reading it.

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