



## The Poisoned House

*Michael Ford*

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Abi is a servant in Greave Hall, a stately London home. She runs away, but is soon recaptured, to suffer once more under the tyrannical rule of Mrs Cotton, the housekeeper. The house, though, has a dark secret. Something ghostly inhabits the corridors, leading Abi to the very truth someone has tried so hard to bury.

## **The Poisoned House Details**

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Author : Michael Ford

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# From Reader Review *The Poisoned House* for online ebook

## **daisychainbooks** says

Greave Hall, the setting for *The Poisoned House* is one of those creepy, atmospheric old houses that can send shivers down your spine as soon as you step inside its doors. Full of creaking floorboards, creepy cobweb-filled cellars and things that go bump in the night, it holds a lot of dark secrets. It is also home to Abigail Tamper, a teenage servant girl who we first meet as she tries to make her escape from the house. She is soon captured and returned to the clutches of Mrs. Cotton, a menacing housekeeper, who treats Abi with contempt and rules the house with a rod of iron.

It soon becomes apparent to Abigail on her return to the house that certain happenings in the Greave Hall may be of the otherworldly variety. Her mother, who died a year previously is not at rest, and is a ghostly presence throughout the house. It is up to Abi to uncover the mystery of her mother's death, which she increasingly believes could have been sinister. There are definite gothic undertones to proceedings, although I felt that the ghostly theme was too underdone here. I love horror, and the house in this book really reminded me of the creepy Eel Marsh House in Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*, so I was expecting some really big frights. However, that never happened, and while most readers will be happy with that, I really wanted a good scare. This book is a slow burner rather than an all-out horror, and while it is tense and atmospheric at times, I felt that it failed to deliver that final punch!

That said, there are some good twists in the tale, and the characters in the book are well written and believable. Abi is an easy character to warm to, and I felt for her as she went about her work in the house, watched over by the eagle eyed Mrs. Cotton, a character who reminded me of the devilish Mrs. Danvers from Du Maurier's *Rebecca*. There is also a good cast of supporting characters in the book. Abi has good friends amongst the servants, and then there's the return to the house of her childhood friend Samuel, who certainly makes life more interesting in Greave Hall.

Overall, this is a good tale for younger readers who might like something a little spooky to add to their winter reading list. The writing style is simple and direct making this a quick read. While I do think that the ending was a little rushed and inconclusive this book was, for the most part, entertaining, and would be best read curled up by the fire while there's a storm brewing outside.

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## **karen** says

i have *got* to stop reading mediocre books. this was my second in a row, and it is making me cranky.

i am trying to only read spooky books for october, and i thought this would be a good place to start. (it is also my first YA book in a month - did you miss me, YA publishing industry?)

but then i remembered: i don't find ghosts particularly spooky. and the ghost in this one is more of the casper the friendly helpful ghost variety rather than the "boo, i'm gonna getcha" kind. the people in this book are much spookier than the ghosts. (view spoiler) the beatings, the locking in the cellar, that i understand. while it is repugnant, it is something that is accepted as a means of punishing fellow-servants. (view spoiler), and then hiding so you can see a fourteen-year-old girl's reactions to (view spoiler) is crazyland on ice.

as a historical page-flipper, it is fine. this is probably totally appropriate for a younger-than-teen audience (view spoiler). but that's really just one brief sentence in an otherwise pretty safe book. get a sharpie, you'll be fine.

the historical element was good - there is enough detail included that it feels authentic (sorry, ceridwen), and it gives a good sense of the hierarchy within the servant-world.

but overall, i gotta say "meh." it's fast and fine for the kiddies, but i don't see this one crossing over into adult readership. and nor should it - teenagers put "keep out" signs on their bedroom doors for a reason.

and dana! i have just read TWO BOOKS IN A ROW in which there are amputations. how you like me now?

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### **Wendy Darling says**

A haunted house, a forbidding lady, a master who has gone mad, and a servant girl caught up in the middle of the whole mess. If this premise appeals to you, there's no doubt you'll delight in this book. I'm a big fan of Victorian fiction, and the author does a superb job of making the era come alive and keeping the language and decorum pretty true to the period.

Abigail Tamper is a 14-year-old servant at Greave Hall, where she's lived all of her life. Her mother died under mysterious circumstances not long ago, and the troubled Master of the house seems to know more about her death than he will admit. Abi has few confidants among the other servants, and her only protector against the cruel Mrs. Cotten, who rules the household, is her childhood friend Samuel, who is the Master's son who is badly wounded from his service in the Crimean War. Abigail's terror and loneliness are palpable, and readers will feel for her as she tries to unravel the mystery and figure out whether there is more danger in the supernatural forces present in the house...or from the earthly ones.

This is an enjoyably creepy, atmospheric Victorian murder mystery with a strong heroine and wonderfully detailed, moody setting. The descriptions of Abigail's duties as a housemaid are particularly well done, as well as the hierarchal interplay between the servants. While experienced readers may guess the villain before he's revealed, this is a quick, enjoyable read and a terrific addition to the gothic genre, especially for the younger teens for whom it's intended. Plus there's an embroidered fabric Ouija...how fun is that?

This review is also posted in The Midnight Garden. An advance copy was provided by the publisher for this review.

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### **Tiffy\_Reads says**

A easy smooth read that has plenty of murder, mystery, ghosts, and drama. With a huge plot twist I didn't see coming and a great ending this book was a fun read.

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## Tammie says

3.5 stars. The Poisoned House is set in Victorian London where 15 year old scullery maid Abigail Tamper has lost her mother to cholera. She works in the home of the aging widower Lord Greave who is becoming more and more distant and seems to be losing his sanity. His sister-in-law, Mrs. Cotton is the head house keeper and has pretty much taken over the household, acting as if it belongs to her, while being incredibly mean and nasty to Abigail. Lord Greave's son Samuel is off fighting in the Crimean War at the beginning of the story, but returns home injured. Strange things begin happening in the house that eventually convince Abi that there is a ghost. I won't go into any more detail than that, because I don't want to spoil anything.

If you are looking for something to really scare you then this book is not for you. While there were a couple of rather creepy scenes, mostly this book is very mild. I will admit I was a bit disappointed that this book wasn't creepier, but at the same time I really liked the writing and the characters. The mystery of who the ghost is, why the ghost is haunting the house, and who did what isn't very hard to figure out either, but the book just kept me reading anyway.

Review also posted at Writings of a Reader

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## Whatchyareading says

I mentioned in an earlier review that I really enjoy books set in England. When I was looking at titles on Netgalley and saw *The Poisoned House* by Michael Ford, it was not only set in London, but Victorian London AND it was a ghost story. Also, super creepy cover art. I had to request it.

*The Poisoned House* starts off very cleverly. Old diary-like pages were found in a locked drawer and donated to a library. They tell a fantastical tale, but the events were so long ago. Did they really happen as written? The reader is transported back to 1855 and meets the novel's protagonist, Abigail Tamper. The first person narrative of the story allows for the reader to slip seamlessly into the past, and Mr. Ford does an excellent job of taking you back to a time where a fifteen-year-old girl with no social standing or family is able to solve the mystery that haunts Greave Hall.

Books set in Victorian England can be tricky as so much research on behavior and etiquette is involved. A story can become too bogged down in all the minutia and lose readers to boredom, but if you don't adhere to the strict nature of that time period, you can lose readers due to inaccuracies. I felt like *The Poisoned House* was an excellent example of how to write a novel set in the Victorian era and have it be both fascinating with all the intricacies, as well as very relatable to readers who might not be familiar with how strict it truly was. Perfect blend for a YA ghost story.

Greave Hall is filled with secrets and overseeing all of it is one of the most awful characters I've read in quite awhile, Mrs. Cotton. As Housekeeper, she's in charge of everything, and she truly is just despicable. The reason behind her extreme cruelty towards Abi is just one of the hardships the poor girl has to overcome. I really liked Abi as a main character. She has faced so much over her short life, but still has this innate strength about her that makes her perfect to center a book around.

As *The Poisoned House* is a ghost story, there are "ghostly" things that happen, and there were several times I had to laugh at myself for just how scared I let myself get, but that's also a sign of just how well Mr. Ford

has crafted his novel. There are several seriously creepy moments that left my heart pounding. Fair warning if you're easily rattled, but another aspect of the book that I thoroughly enjoyed is Abi's resolve to solve the mystery, it was carried out so well. Abi uses her wits (okay, she gets some help from beyond the grave and from a great set of supporting characters that are part of her "downstairs" life) and figures things out to a very satisfying conclusion.

The Poisoned House will be released in the US on September 1st. If the words "Victorian ghost story" intrigue you, I highly recommend picking up a copy and enjoying it on a dark and stormy night.

Reviewed at WhatchYAreReading on July 25, 2011.

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## **Sesana says**

Creepy ghosts and a well-written mystery. Although I figured out the twists a chapter or two before the main character, it was a near thing, and the twists caught me entirely by surprise when I figured them out. A great October read.

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## **Small Review says**

Originally posted at Small Review

### **A recipe for success**

All of the ingredients for a great Gothic story were present here. You have the master of the house, slowly going mad and harboring a dark secret, the evil housekeeper, a ghostly presence, the attractive son returned injured from war, a murder mystery, and the plucky scullery maid caught up in the middle of it all in a spooky old mansion. Sounds good, right? And it was. Except it also wasn't.

### **The good**

Abi is easy to like, though I sometimes wondered if I could trust her narration wholly. Likewise, her fellow servants made for a cast of characters I both liked and couldn't help but suspect.

Tension was kept high in that I never knew who to trust because every friendly face seemed to have an equal amount of motive as well. This was creepy and unsettling, which only made me turn the pages faster in order to find out the identity of the murderer. Combined with the steady pacing and short chapters, and I pretty much flew through The Poisoned House.

Mrs. Cotton, the housekeeper, is an excellent villain and someone I couldn't help but despise. She evoked such strong negative feelings from me. Heads up: there's one scene in particular where she commits a horrifying act of animal cruelty that underscored how vile she is in her core.

The big reveal at the end concerning the history of the household was satisfying, perfectly capturing the essence of Gothic fiction without feeling stale or overdone.

## **The not so good**

I was really hoping to be scared, but I was only scared once and it was a minor scare at that. Even the human/psychological aspects of the story weren't as frightening as they could have been.

Like the scare factor, most of the things in *The Poisoned House* lacked a certain spark for me. The characters were good, but nothing special. Abi was nice, but largely forgettable. The "secret" behind one of the characters is predictable. And while I didn't see everything coming, much of it did seem overly familiar and a little less vibrant than the other Gothic stories I've read.

## **Bottom line**

I think my biggest problem is that I've read a lot of books in this genre already, and they were better. If you're new to Gothic fiction and want to get your feet wet, then *The Poisoned House* is a perfect introduction. All of the classic elements are there, and while this ultimately took away a little for me because I'm so used to them, they probably won't feel that way to someone less familiar with the genre.

The lack of scariness might also be appealing to readers looking for Gothic fiction, but not looking for something to terrify them. Aside from one scene, the ghost parts are extremely tame. This is a good, solid Gothic book that will probably go over well with younger readers and Gothic fiction newbies.

Originally posted at [Small Review](#)

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## **Paige Bookdragon says**

Really. The only reason why I finished reading this book is because I want to give this book a chance to scare me.

You know, the made-my-hair-raised-and-make-me-cover-myself-with-blankets-when-I-sleep kind of scare.

But nooooo~

I was disappointed.

And get this.

There's a scene here where one of the characters **drown three cute kittens** just because she's a bitch!

And what the hell happened to Mrs. Cotton?!

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## **Kate says**

I read this ARC via Netgalley.

Abigail Tamper hates her life as a servant in Victorian England. Ever since her mother died a year ago, she went from being a carefree child allowed to play with her master, Lord Greaves's son Samuel, to a person of no status whatsoever, constantly beaten and abused by the housemistress Mrs. Cotton. After a failed runaway attempt, Abigail begins to notice strange goings-on in the house: handprints that appear on freshly cleaned glass, missing objects, and messes that clean themselves. Abigail contacts a psychic who visits Mrs. Cotton and believes the ghost to be that of her mother, and she vows to find out who murdered her. Things are complicated when Samuel returns home with a war injury.

I wanted to like this book more than I did. I love ghosts and gothic and Victorian England, and the story had a solid mystery and some creepy scenes. But the scenes weren't as creepy as they COULD have been, and I had a hard time feeling sorry for Abigail. I wanted her to have a little more spunk rather than whine about how hard it is for her as a servant - especially once I discovered she'd only been a servant for a short time, when the others like Rob, Adam, and Lizzy had been servants their entire life. My lack of connection with Abigail as well as Abigail's lack of connection to any of the other characters made this a bit lackluster for me, but anyone who loves a ghost story will probably enjoy this.

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## **Tara Chevestt says**

A decent yarn. I found this entertaining, mysterious, and dark.

Abigail is a servant in the home of wealthy man. There's an invalid son coming back from war, a wealthy man dying of grief, a cruel housekeeper, a cook that drinks the cooking sherry (figure of speech), a butler hiding his master's secrets, and a maid that is dallying with another families' coachman. It's all the workings for a good scandalous mystery.

Except for one incident, the story never even leaves the house. This did not hurt the story in any way, however. There's a ghost and Abigail thinks it's her dead mother trying to tell her that she was murdered. Abigail is most certain that the evil housekeeper was the murderer.. but if she's wrong.. and doesn't realize it in time, then Abigail could very well be next.

Slightly long winded and predictable, but still a good yarn. Had a rather gothic feel to it. Loved the hand prints appearing out of no where, very spooky.

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## **Maria - (STOP adding me to [roleplaying] groups; even if i accept, i will NOT participate!) says**

Ok so, this is my first review on ANY book actually. So, it might be rather long & unfinished as well, cause well, I like to write and sometimes my essays & notes come out to be a little TOO long. And this might be too. So, I'll just get started on my opinion on this AWESOME book!:



**COVER:** When I first saw the cover at the library, the thing that drew me in the most was the hand reaching out for help. And of course, the little block letters written underneath the title: **A GHOST STORY**. And anyone whose seen some of the books I've fav'd or have in my library, know that I L♥V3 these kinds of books. It's practically my whole life! So, I knew for sure this book was going to entertain me.

**FIRST PAGE:** When I saw the first page and when I came up to the sentence in the 3rd paragraph & the 3rd line which read: *A cold draft of cool dust blew over me, the smell reminding me of Adam, the delivery boy*. I knew for sure that her and Adam were destined to be! Yeah, that's me - guessing things without all the info. =) But, as I read on, there were parts - well, many parts actually where I figured her & Rob would be together! I mean, I could just see it in the way that he spoke with her & smiled at her. It was almost obvious!

**BEGINNING:** There was just one thing how the arrival of Samuel took so dang long! I mean, the news that he was returning home around ch. 4 & he ended up coming around ch. 15 & 16. Well, the chs. are pretty short though & may be that's why it kept me more and more interested with the ending of each one.

**MIDDLE:** Um, basically the same as the beginning. Not much to really say here.

**ENDING:** Ok now, I have a little secret: Before reading ANY book, I...skim the ending! Yes, yes, I know that's a total spoiler alert, but I just can't help myself. And since I did, I fallen in love & despair as well with it even more. I couldn't wait to get to the ending & find out how that figured out the whole truth. The ending's really sad, btw, it really hurt me. =(

#### CHARACTERS:

**ABIGAIL 'ABI':** Ok, she was my absolute FAVORITE character in this whole book! I mean, she's smart, she can fight - real good too, btw! I mean, she has just total girl power! I L♥V3 her! She has lost her mother & she has been tortured & put through hard labor work by the His Lordship's sister-in-law, & still she's so brave to even attempt to runaway. I'm glad she didn't runaway though, because then she wouldn't have had the chance to find out all the secrets that that house had kept inside or big surprises either. =)

**SAMUEL 'SAMMY':** Ok, so when I first heard of this guy & how him & Abi used to be the best-est friends ever, another thought crossed my mind: **NOW THESE TWO HAVE GOT TO BE TOGETHER! I JUST KNOW IT!** And I swear to God, if the author had been lady, she would've definitely, definitely, *DEFINITELY* made at least *SOME* romance between those two instead of leaving them as a bro-and-sis type. Ah, so sad.=) (And even after how she took such good care of him while he came back from war all hurt & whatnot. The ending is pretty sad for him too. =(

**ELIZABETH 'LIZZY':** To me this character seemed the most...ah, I don't even know the word for it. Well, basically, she rather trust what she's seen & heard rather than what her best friend says. & that's basically what I really hated about her. (view spoiler)

**MS. COTTON:** I thought Ms. Cotton was pretty smart, because she really is. She can sneak up on people, she can always find out when Abi's about to do something bad or even think of doing it. (view spoiler) I mean, she was so evil, I kinda got why Abi would suspect that *she* was the one who killed her mother. (view spoiler)

**HIS LORDSHIP:** The only reason he seemed insane to me was cause of the fact that he acted it & plus the fact that he always used to call Abigail as Susan, her mother. Now that got me thinking that maybe there was something going on between the two. But, then I noticed that he had a wife, but she died right after Sammy

was born. So, that got thought sidetracked for a while & I thought he was insane because of that reason.

**COOK:** Though she acted rather mean & cocky, I still thought of her as an old sweetheart. Not much to say about her.

**MR. LOCK:** What I figured out from him was that he knew more than he let on. He may have been an old geezer, but he knew more secrets than most of the other staff in the house. That's all I've got to say about him.

**ROB:** I liked him at first, but he didn't get described as much as the others, probably cause he wasn't as important, but still, it wouldn't hurt for him to appear a bit more.

**ADAM:** Him, I liked a lot too. =D Though he appeared even less times than Rob, he still had a big impact on the story. (view spoiler)

Ah, I think that about covers it all. There might be a few more that I'm missing such as: Alexander 'Alex' - Sammy's friend, Dr. Reinhardt - who helped out Abi, etc. But, they weren't *that* important & besides, my fingers are starting to hurt a little. - They're extremely bony & small, & yet I can type like the wind! =D

This was actually fun & might add some more review soon. Keep a look out, will ya? =)

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## **Stephanie A. says**

To paraphrase *Crimson Peak*, this less a ghost story than a story that happens to have a ghost in it. Mostly, it's a great, if darker, tale of working in a stately manor and seeing firsthand how wealth, power and societal conventions get all tangled up and twisted under the right (or wrong) circumstances. The atmosphere was everything I dream of in books about spooky historic houses; I could see it all playing out like a movie in my head. I only predicted a couple of twists, and only just before they happened, so it was very satisfying to see them played out. And I thought it was brilliant how the epilogue showed that the truth had been obfuscated in favor of a more acceptable public narrative, with multiple secrets taken to the grave.

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## **Cheryl says**

YA Victorian mystery. A ghost's appearances in a house give clues that help solve a family mystery. A quick, entertaining read.

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## **Vicki says**

\* 3.5 stars \*

I LOVE a gothic Victorian ghost story, so when *The Poisoned House* by Michael Ford dropped through my mailbox for review I was very excited and sure it would be right up my street. And mostly it was.

Set in Victorian London, *The Poisoned House* tells the story of fifteen-year-old Abi Tamper. Since her mother's death a year ago, Abi has found herself in the lowly position of scullery maid in the Greave household. Previously the well treated daughter of the much loved nursemaid, without her Mother's protection and the Lord of the house quickly descending into insanity, she is now cruelly abused and forced to work long hours by the master's sister in law and housekeeper, Mrs Cotton.

But there's another presence in the house, one of the ghostly kind, and it seems to want to tell Abi something. Unravelling the sinister secrets of the house puts Abi in even more danger, and someone very human is determined to stop her.

From the very first page I knew I was going to really enjoy this book. It starts with Abi running away from Greave Hall, only to be brought quickly back again. The descriptions of London late at night are extremely atmospheric, Abi's terror drew me in straight away and the tension as she returns is palpable. As we find out more about Abi's tragic background I started to really sympathise with her. This is a girl who has not only lost her Mother, but has been cast down into a position of slavery. Quite rightly, she's meek, vulnerable and frightened, but she also has a curious and questioning streak and a quiet courage that ensures she seeks the truth.

Mrs. Cotton is the archetypal gothic villain, a woman in a position of power she doesn't deserve or is entitled to, cruel, bitter and heartless. The ghostly presence is subtle and sinister, you're not really sure if it's friend or foe and there were some real jump out of your skin moments throughout the book. The Greave family are deliciously disturbed, just what you want in this kind of book. The Master is mostly just in the background wrapped up in secrecy and insanity. The dashing Samuel, son of the master, provides some lighter and tender moments when he arrives home injured from the Crimean war, as do the other servants who stick together in their fear and misery. The characters may have been a little clichéd at times, but let's face it, they are exactly what we want from a book like this and Ford gets them pretty much spot on.

*The Poisoned House* has many secrets to reveal and while I predicted some of them, I was also proved wrong at times too. Right up until the big reveal at the end I would have said this book is fantastic. Unfortunately the ending was a bit of a let down. It felt very rushed; I was left with unanswered questions and wanted much more. This is a very short book at just 230 pages and I do feel at least another 50 could have been afforded to make it truly satisfying. Everything seemed to just fall in too neatly and there was very little explanation for the character's actions. After the fantastic character development, tense build up and red herrings the half hearted ending seemed contrived, which is truly a great shame.

I really did enjoy this book. It has a sympathetic main character, a thoroughly evil villain, dark family secrets and atmospheric setting...hell, there's even a crazy old medium and some ouija boards going on! I tore through the pages at an alarming pace, holding my breath for many of them. It's a good book, the easy style and compelling story would tempt even reluctant readers and without being too graphic I think this is one that would be suitable for anyone aged 11 up. Unfortunately the ending left me less than completely satisfied and stopped it being a great book, but I'd definitely check out Michael Ford's work again.

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