



House of Glass

Susan Fletcher

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June 1914 and a young woman - Clara Waterfield - is summoned to a large stone house in Gloucestershire. Her task: to fill a greenhouse with exotic plants from Kew Gardens, to create a private paradise for the owner of Shadowbrook. Yet, on arrival, Clara hears rumours: something is wrong with this quiet, wisteria-covered house. Its gardens are filled with foxgloves, hydrangea and roses; it has lily-ponds, a croquet lawn - and the marvellous new glasshouse awaits her. But the house itself feels unloved. Its rooms are shuttered, or empty. The owner is mostly absent; the housekeeper and maids seem afraid. And soon, Clara understands their fear: for something - or someone - is walking through the house at night. In the height of summer, she finds herself drawn deeper into Shadowbrook's dark interior - and into the secrets that violently haunt this house. Nothing - not even the men who claim they wish to help her - is quite what it seems.

Reminiscent of Daphne du Maurier, this is a wonderful, atmospheric Gothic page-turner.

House of Glass Details

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Author : Susan Fletcher

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From Reader Review House of Glass for online ebook

Kelly says

Oh my goodness what a book. This is absolutely exquisite; so lyrical and vivid and such an amazing protagonist. I don't want to say too much as I don't want to spoil any of the experience but I will say if you enjoy beautiful writing and intense character connections, this is an absolute must!

Melanie (Mel's Bookland Adventures) says

I had such high hopes for this one. It does some things well. A main character that has a disability and is different and she stayed clear of the “this girl has a disability so she must be sweet and lovely” trope which I was grateful for but apart from that this book just did not quite know what it wanted to be. All over the place.

Kate says

Although this is set during the summer (in the days leading up to the outbreak of World War I), this is one of those books that is definitely well suited to winter reading by lamplight. A large, decaying mansion, rumoured to be haunted, in which picked flowers die within hours. Clara Waterfield is a marvellous heroine - fragile due to her brittle bone disease but still rooted in soil, plants, the outdoors. I enjoyed the first half particularly. Beautiful writing. Review to follow shortly on For Winter Nights.

Lou says

House of Glass is award-winning, historical fiction writer Susan Fletcher's first foray into the Gothic novel scene and creates a wonderful atmosphere and feelings of claustrophobia. Set in the run-up to the First World War, we meet Clara Waterfield, our narrator for the journey. Although Clara isn't really that likeable you can relate to most of her behaviour and thoughts. I found that in some parts of the story the revelations were very drawn out and as a result, everything became quite disjointed. Then there were other parts where the unfurling of the surprises came out of nowhere with absolutely no warning or clues. This made the whole book feel like a very stop-start affair and led to me placing it down several times.

Don't get me wrong, the author has the talent to create a dark and unsettling story, but there were too many little annoyances that really had an impact on the way it held together. Shadowbrook, the setting for the story, is beautifully described and vividly imagined, and the air of mystery that surrounds the property was intriguing. The balance between Clara's medical condition, causing her to have brittle bones, and her strong, fearless personality was expertly done, and I appreciated that she had some fight left in her despite her condition.

Many thanks to Virago for an ARC. I was not required to post a review, and all thoughts and opinions expressed are my own.

Amalia Gavea says

“This was the time of day my mother had warned me against, years before. The half-light, she explained, can change how things appear so that distances may seem less. Our eyes might detect movement when in fact there is none; a shadow might become a living shape. In short, I was more likely to fall at twilight. Remember this, Clara. But she’d loved it, too. It was an hour of potency. In India, this had been the time of the leopard’s waking, in which jasmine smelled at its strongest.”

England, a few months before the Great War turns Europe into a bloody terrain of madness. Clara, a wealthy young woman, is invited to a mansion, undertaking the task of creating a unique glass house. However, the house and the community Clara finds herself in are anything but ordinary or peaceful. Clara herself isn’t ordinary. Inflicted by a rare syndrome that can leave her bones fractured in the blink of an eye, graced with strangely beautiful hair and eyes, with a personality that is the definition of an atomic bomb (which is always a good thing for us women), Clara begins to witness events and behaviours that make her doubt her own firmly grounded, ardently supported convictions. Coming into a place haunted by secrets and death, wounded by the loss of her mother, Clara has to face a task that is much heavier and perilous than her own afflictions.

“An insufficient reply. Perhaps he had misheard me. But perhaps, too, it was an aversion, a step away from what I wished to know.”

We’ve read many books using the trope of the young woman arriving in a strange mansion, toying with spectres and suspicions and secrets but Fletcher’s novel has a great asset. An extraordinary heroine and a wonderfully balanced told through exciting, confident writing. Atmospheric and complex, making use of the characteristics of the Haunted House in all its good, old British glory, the plot is so much more than that. Born through an utterly successful combination of Gothic and Historical Fiction, Fletcher provides food for thought on issues that have excited our imagination and divided us for centuries. Through the footsteps, the falling paintings, the scratches and the shadows, the withering flowers, the mysterious owner and the village life during a rather hot English summer, we’ll find the chance to ponder on Faith and Proof, on Belief and Certainty. On a journey where Faith can be seen as a refuge and Proof can be supported as a form of security in a changing world. Make of this debate what you will, draw your own conclusions. Fletcher manages to present everything in a balanced, respectful manner, resulting in a novel that will make us feel uncomfortable for things that lurk in the shadows and for the conviction adopted by many of us that everything can be explained, that science has an answer to every question. I am sorry but this is not accurate....

A fine novel is a result of a well-told story and a successful cast of characters. *House of Glass* contains both. Set in an era when women finally decided to claim rights that should have been provided to them all along, when most men viewed the rising cry for equality and justice, dismissing them as temporary clutter (the way a certain contemporary “leader” does...), Clara speaks with a voice that demands of everyone to listen. Now. To look beyond her syndrome and answer her questions clearly. She reminded me of Lib from Emma Donoghue’s masterpiece *The Wonder*. She gets into so much trouble to prove that there is nothing supernatural in those weird incidents and she rejects religion and the idea of the afterlife. And then, she learns to doubt. I loved her. The way she wasn’t afraid to speak her mind, ignoring etiquette and political correctness. The way she refused to let anyone take her for a fool or make use of what others viewed as “deficiencies”. She is surrounded by characters that will accompany you on an exciting, thoughtful journey.

Mr Fox, Mrs Bale, George and Kit.

After a streak of horrible reads, *House of Glass* was a breath of fresh air, a beautiful reminder of why Historical and Gothic Fiction (when done right) create a unique reading experience.

“Such bone dreams had frequented my London life. My fear of fractures, by day, would move into dreams in which my teeth rained into my hands; I’d see myself as piano keys on which unknown fingers played. But the opiate brought the darkest dream. In it, my bones would be taken from me; faceless men would dismantle me, removing ribs from my nose or my femur through my mouth like an ancient ritual to which I’d not consented.”

Many thanks to Virago Books and NetGalley for the ARC in exchange for an honest review.

My reviews can also be found on <https://theopinionatedreaderblog.wordpress.com>

Kirsty says

Susan Fletcher is an author whose work I have always very much enjoyed. My first encounter with one of her novels was in the glorious Harper Perennial edition of *Eve Gree*, quite some time ago. I have since read almost all of her other work, and when I saw that she had a new novel - *House of Glass* - coming out in 2018, I borrowed it from the library just as soon as I could.

Many of the reviews of *House of Glass* mention its ‘darkly gothic’ tone, as well as the way in which it is such things as surprising, moving, and mesmerising. Tracy Chevalier notes that whilst the novel ‘may start as a ghost story’, it ‘turns into something much more profound: a lyrical examination of how women carve lives out of a male-dominated society, even with a war looming that will change everyone.’

House of Glass opens in June 1914, in which protagonist Clara Waterfield is ‘summoned’ to a large house in rural Gloucestershire, in order to fill a glasshouse with ‘exotic plants from Kew Gardens’ at the owner’s request. The house is named, perhaps appropriately given the Gothic atmosphere, Shadowbrook. When Clara arrives, the owner, Mr Fox, is absent, and she is soon informed that he rarely spends any time in the house. Around this time, she begins to hear rumours, and to her, ‘something feels wrong with this quiet, wisteria-covered house.’ The blurb concludes by stating that over the summer, Clara ‘finds herself drawn deeper into the dark interior rooms - and into the secrets that violently haunt Shadowbrook.’

The novel opens with quite a vivid description of Clara’s disability, osteogenesis imperfecta. It begins: ‘My structure is not quite right. By this, I mean my bones - the part on which the rest of me is stretched, stitched into place... My skeleton is frail. I creak with any transference of weight. In my childhood, I fractured so frequently - with small gestures, with the simple act of looking up - that doctors winced and shook their heads. She is imperfect, they said.’ In consequence, her mother is ordered to keep Clara inside, sheltering her from the dangerous outside world - at least until she has stopped growing. Clara thus spends the majority of her childhood reading, largely in the library of the house, which her parents converted from their old dining room for her benefit. I felt that Fletcher’s depiction of Clara’s ailments was well-balanced, and did not feel dramatised in any way. I also liked the way in which Fletcher used Clara’s own voice to describe herself. The contrast between Clara’s past and present - in which she is able to leave the house and regain some independence - is well balanced.

Clara was drawn to Kew Gardens quite by chance following the death of her mother, something which she was entirely unprepared for, despite the illness which ensued. She is grieving and desperate, and walking is the only thing which helps to take some of the pain away. She learns, in her own way, to navigate her own city, learning to board omnibuses which take her to distant parts of London. On one such journey, she decides to alight at Kew: 'And on a February morning, I stepped down from the bus in a place called Kew. This was a name I knew. For here, there were famous gardens, with rhododendron walks and glasshouses and pergolas. I'd read of them in books.' Spending around a decade indoors, with only glimpses of the outdoor world from windows, she is mesmerised by the wealth of plants she is able to wander amongst at Kew, now that she is older and her bones have 'strengthened and settled themselves'. Fletcher's descriptions of the gardens are quite lovely; on a cold, 'grey, desolate' day, Clara finds an 'extraordinary domed building of glass' before her. She enters, and 'left February behind. England, too, was gone. For the Palm House at Kew contained canopies and ferns and damp wooden benches; palm leaves brushed my hair as I passed... Now I wanted to be nowhere else. I was done with crowds and London's streets. Here was a new beginning.' This discovery, the comradely relationship which she strikes up with the keeper of the glasshouse, a man named Forbes, and the subsequent offer to travel to a new place in order to 'establish a room of colour and scent and spectacle', allows Clara to affirm her place in the world. In this way, and given the alterations which Clara's character undergoes, *House of Glass* can certainly be called a coming of age novel.

When she finds herself in Shadowbrook, after a long journey by train, Clara is met with 'a house of pale stone. Clematis grew on its walls. Its courtyard was bordered with dark, leafy shrubs in which I could hear movement - nesting birds, or the scurrying of mice. Two storeys to it, no more. A small right-angled wing.' At her point of arrival, Fletcher begins to introduce elements of oddness, or of ghostly occurrences. The man who picks Clara up from the station, for instance, tells her not to worry about any noises which she might hear in the night, as old houses were prone to movement. As she roams the grounds, and spends time within the house itself, she begins to notice something unsettling: 'I had a curious sense of being watched; throughout the garden, I felt it. It was as though I had entered a part of it - the orchard, the lime bower - at the very moment that someone else had risen and left; I felt that any metal chair might retain that person's heat. It was an unsettling notion. I chastised myself for it - it was foolishness - yet I also looked down the lines of hedges. On the croquet lawn, I turned in a slow, complete circle to see it all.'

Later, and unable to discover a rational solution, she muses over what the feeling of being watched, and screams and scratches in the night, could be the effects of. After discussing the goings on with the members of staff at Shadowbrook, she says: 'Ghost. The word had not been said but we'd heard it even so. It had hung above the kitchen table; it had circled us... A thin, inconsequential, fictitious word. It had no place in diagrams.'

In her other novels, two of Fletcher's real strengths are her ability to create both atmosphere and realistic characters. My experience with her newest book was much the same. I very much admired the way in which she had not made Clara into a martyr, following the emotional and physical pain which she had to struggle with daily. Rather, Clara was realistic; she had tempers, and spoke her mind quite wonderfully, particularly in those situations where she was challenged by other characters. She felt entirely three-dimensional, holding within herself a myriad of worries and hopes, and a believable backstory. Clara felt like a progressive, modern woman; she does not go to church, or believe in God, and does not allow her voice to be silenced by anyone. She is opinionated and stubborn, and not at all a likeable character, but I found her quite fascinating.

Fletcher's prose is rich and sensuous from the outset of *House of Glass*. Of Clara's confinement, she writes: 'Ours became a house of cushioning. Of velvet and goose down, embroidered pillows, Persian rugs and silk. There was, too, a globe. A rocking horse that I could touch but not ride. And they'd bring home what they thought I might miss from the blustery world: fir cones and pigeon feathers, the scent of horses on my

mother's red gloves which I'd inhale, eyes closed. Tales of how the river had looked at twilight. How the carol singers sang, despite the rain.' The descriptions of the library share gorgeously vivid imagery: 'There was a chaise long which was, at first, the colour of moss. But in time - as I read more, studied more maps - this deep, velvety green became the shade of hummingbirds' wings or Othello's envy or the gems which hid in equatorial soil. The green of a tiny jungle frog.'

Whilst not my favourite of Fletcher's novels - an accolade which must go to *Oystercatchers* and *Let Me Tell You About a Man I Knew* - I did enjoy many elements of *House of Glass*. Whilst there is far less commentary on the outbreak of the First World War than I was expecting, I found that the period was very well evoked, and the novel itself was both immersive and atmospheric.

At no point, however, was I entirely captivated by the story, and despite the real strengths in character building, I felt as though the denouement of the novel was a little disappointing, and something of an anticlimax, and the ending was drawn out. The story does come together, but I did not find the twists to be overly clever or original. I also found the pace a little awkward in places, and the tension which Fletcher had striven to create was not as heightened, and therefore not as successful, as it could have been. Whilst there are many things which I admired in *House of Glass*, I have to say that it is probably my least favourite of Fletcher's books to date.

Travel.with.a.book says

A great story that I have never heard or read quite like a story that the author wrote.

Amazing book that starts in the 90' century.

I have always craving to read a story that is fresh and an original book.

I give the book 4.5 stars and thankfully I started reading it in 2019 with a perfect start.

Something that I have had never read and the book did not disappoint me at all.

Starting from the sample that I read which satisfied me from the start to the instagram when I saw it in others feed and I fell from the absolute amazing cover.

I want to thank the publishers who provided me with a copy for an honest review.

The book written by the amazing talented Susan Fletcher the style she chose to write a book to this serious story about ghost stories what I'd say a great thriller with perfect timing published and told story.

The author explores a universe that is the exact same as ours connections between souls from the past.

The sample of the book: June 1914 and a young woman - Clara Waterfield - is summoned to a large stone house in Gloucestershire. Her task: to fill a greenhouse with exotic plants from Kew Gardens, to create a private paradise for the owner of Shadowbrook. Yet, on arrival, Clara hears rumours: something is wrong with this quiet, wisteria-covered house. Its gardens are filled with foxgloves, hydrangea and roses; it has lily-ponds, a croquet lawn - and the marvellous new glasshouse awaits her. But the house itself feels unloved. Its rooms are shuttered, or empty. The owner is mostly absent; the housekeeper and maids seem afraid. And soon, Clara understands their fear: for something - or someone - is walking through the house at night. In the height of summer, she finds herself drawn deeper into Shadowbrook's dark interior - and into the secrets that violently haunt this house. Nothing - not even the men who claim they wish to help her - is quite what it seems.

Reminiscent of Daphne du Maurier, this is a wonderful, atmospheric Gothic page-turner.

Lisa says

This had the potential to be a 5 star read for me but as you can tell from my 3 star rating, it didn't live up to the admittedly high expectations I had going in. There were some things it did very well, such as evoking a deliciously creepy gothic atmosphere alongside some reasonably well-drawn characters, but my main problem with it was that it was far too slow in terms of its pacing. The plot moved at a snail's pace for at least 2/3 of the book, with page after page of little to nothing happening. I normally don't mind a slower pace, particularly if there are some really intriguing characters to help hold your attention, but this was just too slow and although the characters were fleshed out and interesting enough in their own ways, I wouldn't say any of them particularly stood out or made up for the times when very little was happening in terms of plot momentum. I seriously considered abandoning this several times as it was such a slog to get through. However, I had this feeling in my gut that it would make up for it somewhat in the end and it was this feeling that prompted me to continue, despite my reservations. I'm glad I did because the last third of the book did see a marked increase in pace and it was then that the plot finally kicked into gear. At this point I struggled to put it down and I would have certainly rated this book higher if all of it had been as engaging as the final third was. All in all, not a bad book but certainly not a great one either.

Ova - Excuse My Reading says

Reminded me of *The Silent Companions* and *Little Stranger* from time to time. Quite gothic and dark.

We follow the story of Clara, a young woman almost made of glass, with a medical condition that curses her with easily broken bones. A childhood of suffering due to broken bones, she grows up to be a crippled young woman with a mind beyond her tiny body. After the loss of her mother she starts working for Kew Gardens. Until one day she's appointed to set up a glass house in a house in Gloucester.

The house is called Shadowbrook and the owner, Mr Fox, is not usually around, constantly away trips and the house workers are not allowed to go upstairs to his quarters.

By the time she arrives Shadowbrook Clara faces with a cloud of mystery. The two maids and the housekeeper Mrs Bale are terrified, saying the house is haunted by a ghost. Clara also experiences the disturbances, scratched doors, footsteps in the night. But she doesn't believe in ghosts and thinks an intruder is causing the disturbances.

The story flows beautifully with a surprising ending, and the air of mystery surrounding the house, Mr Fox, and Shadowbrooks's previous owners keeps the reader engaged and entertained until the end.

A really good historical mystery with a lot of feminism in it, I would highly recommend this one if you like historical books.

Jo says

It's 1914 and England is on the cusp of war. Clara is a young woman with what we now call brittle bones disease who takes a job at Kew Gardens whilst grieving for her mother. She's sent to the countryside to stock the glasshouse of a mysterious estate owner where she encounters a staff terrified by the ghost of a former

owner. This was a wonderful piece of historical fiction with a slight supernatural undertone.

Dem says

A perfect read for a winter's night. An intriguing, and genuinely eerie slice of gothic fiction which was entertaining and atmospheric.

I love gothic style stories and *House of Glass* by Susan Fletcher has all the elements of what I was looking for. A Manor House set on the edge of an English Country Village, it's reclusive owner who only visits occasionally and remains in his rooms for the duration of his visit. A Village of wary residents who remain tight lipped when asked about the House's history. June 1914 and a young woman Clara Waterfield is summoned to a large stone house in Gloucestershire. Her task: to fill a greenhouse with exotic plants from Kew Gardens, to create a private paradise for the owner of Shadowbrook. But all is not what it seems in the Big House and Clara tries to discover its secrets and past.

This is a well written book with a great sense of time and place, interesting and vivid characters and while I enjoyed the story the first 3/4 of the novel was very sluggish and I would normally read this in a few days but took me over a week to finish this 368 page novel. There was very little happening and while the writing was descriptive and vivid the plot was very thin to begin with and needs patience to hang in there. However the last quarter of the book really does liven up and was well worth the wait.

I think readers who have enjoyed books like *The Thirteenth Tale* or *The Silent Companions* might well enjoy this book, just be prepared for the slow reveal.

Joseph says

A house is meant to be a place of safety and intimacy. The haunted house is a powerful symbol of horror precisely because it shows us a haven of domesticity upturned by an intruder, and a supernatural one at that. It is hardly surprising that from being just one of many Gothic tropes, the haunted house eventually became the basis of a rich supernatural sub-genre.

House of Glass is a historical novel within this tradition. It is set just before the outbreak of the First World War and features a sprawling mansion – Shadowbrook – marked by dark, old rumours about its previous owners, the evil and hated Pettigrew family. The last Pettigrew to inhabit Shadowbrook was the sensual, decadent and possibly mad Veronique - her ghost still walks its corridors and the pages of this book. So far, so familiar. Indeed, this novel shares many elements with other books within the (sub-)genre. It has been compared to Du Maurier's *Rebecca* but I would say that its mixture of Gothic thrills, historical novel and social commentary is closer in spirit to Sarah Water's *The Little Stranger*. What makes *House of Glass* particularly original is its protagonist and narrator, Clara Waterfield. Conceived out of wedlock in India, and born in England where her mother Charlotte is dispatched to avoid a scandal, Clara suffers from osteogenesis imperfecta or "brittle bones disease", a condition which causes fractures at the least pressure or impact. As a result, Clara lives a secluded London childhood, fiercely protected by her parents. The premature death of her mother thrusts Clara into adulthood. Notwithstanding her syndrome, her walking cane and ungainly gait, Clara ventures out into the world. The gardens at Kew become her refuge and she finds herself turning into an amateur botanist – "amateur" in the best sense of the word, that of a lover of knowledge. This earns her

the respect, friendship and support of Forbes, the foreman of the glasshouses. It also leads to an unexpected invitation. One day, Clara is summoned to Gloucestershire by the new owner of Shadowbrook, to oversee the installation of exotic plants from Kew in a new greenhouse in the mansion's gardens. It is here that the ghost story proper begins. For Clara finds herself surrounded by mystery and secrets, by things that go bump in the night and malevolent attacks by an unseen visitor. The housekeeper and maids cower in fear of the ghost of Veronique Pettigrew, a woman seemingly so evil that a mere mention of her name is enough to unleash poltergeist activity. Clara is sceptical but her rationalist approach is put under severe test. That summer will mark her coming to age, as she questions long-held certainties and beliefs.

At one level, *House of Glass* is enjoyable as a good old piece of storytelling. But there is so much more to it. What struck me at first is the blend of realism and the supernatural. Shadowbrook and its gardens are inspired by the real-life Hidcote Manor Gardens (a National Trust property in Gloucestershire) and they are lovingly and minutely described. At the same time, Fletcher uses small details (closed, dust-filled rooms; peeling paint; a blood-stained billiard table) to evoke an atmosphere of fear and dread. The scene has already been set for the nocturnal visitations which considerably ratchet up the tension.

The novel also manages to take an established form and inject it with a strong dose of feminism. Clara's condition becomes a symbol of female rebellion and resistance, her physical imperfections as transgressive as her assertiveness and inquisitiveness. There is a parallel between the "cripple" Clara and the uniquely beautiful Veronique, both of them strong women trying to hold their own in a patriarchal society. Clara ruefully notes that despite the fact that the male Pettigrews were violent and criminal, it was Veronique and her 'sex orgies' which gripped the attention of the sleepy village where she lived and which marked her forever as an epitome of immorality. This leads to another theme which is central to the novel, namely that of truth and falsehood, and how accounts can be manipulated to propagate the worldview favoured by their narrator.

My only reservation when reading the novel was that there are a number of narrative gear-changes late in the book. Engrossing as it is, the plot moves forward at a leisurely pace until about three-quarters in, when a raft of unexpected revelations propel the tale forward and lead us closer to the "sensation novel". In the final chapters then, there is yet another shift, as the work ends with a meditation on war. The more I think about it, however, the more I tend to feel that my initial doubts were unfounded – the different facets of *House of Glass* ultimately add up to a convincing whole, held together by Fletcher's lyrical and elegiac writing style. For this is also a story about the passing of an era, and what are ghosts if not remnants, in one way or another, of a half-remembered past?

A longer version of this review, featuring a selection of music to accompany the novel, can be found at <https://endsoftheword.blogspot.com/20...>

pennyng says

It starts as a ghost story but is so much more. It's tone is a bit different from her other books but has the same beautiful writing, same uncanny ability to depict emotion that is spot on and a sense of place that is almost as vital as the characters. The story is about a strong willed but physically fragile young woman discovering who she is and what she believes, set in 1914 during the suffragette movement and right before the war, braving the world on her own for the first time at a grand estate with beautiful gardens and a glass house filled with exotic plants and a lot of mystery. Loved it.

Helen Carolan says

Another terrific Gothic read. Clara suffers from brittle bone disease and has spent much of her early life cocooned indoors. When her beloved mum dies Clara starts to question her own identity and wanders the streets of London trying to banish her grief. This leads her to Kew gardens where she learns about exotic plants. This in turn leads to a commission at Shadowbrook in Gloucestershire. The owner is a mysterious recluse and the locals have nothing but bad to say about previous owners the Pettigrews. The house seems to be haunted and Clara decides to investigate. When she does she makes an astonishing discovery about her own past. Loved this one.

Lynn Williams says

<https://lynns-books.com/2018/10/30/ho...>

I am on a winning streak with my gothic reads these past few weeks and here is yet another little beauty to add to your wishlists. I know, I know, I'm sorry, you have too many books already but you and I both know you don't want to miss a good book – after all that's how your TBR grew into such a monster in the first place and, whilst I hate to add to your ever growing stacks, trust me, this book is worth it. Don't miss out. Described as being reminiscent of duMaurier I would suggest this also gave me Jane Eyre vibes and yet at the same time it absolutely stands on it's own two feet. Beautifully written and powerfully evocative it contains all the elements that woven together make an engrossing gothic story.

The thing I love about this book is the voice. Clara is a wonderful narrator and I was quite hooked to the page as she recounted her early years. Clara was born with a condition that makes her skeleton incredibly vulnerable, apologies but I didn't make a note of the name but it seems to be akin to 'glass bones'. A simple fall can result in serious damage and Clara spends her youth spent largely recuperating, mainly in the company of her mother and in a house that is all but wrapped in cotton wool to prevent, as far as possible, further injuries. As she grows older her condition stabilises a little but of course by that time, and with so many broken bones already in her past Clara finds it difficult to walk without the aid of a stick. On top of this her appearance is almost ethereal. With a diminutive frame, strangely entrancing eyes and white blond hair she certainly catches attention although quite often of the negative variety. And, finally, with a lack of social encounters in her past she has a certain way of interacting with others that is brutally frank and often borders on abrupt. Here we have a female character, set in a period where societal restrictions would prevent her having any freedom, enjoying a lifestyle that is totally unexpected. She is a wonderful creation, I loved her and I absolutely applaud the author for taking a character, born with such difficulties to surmount and instead of letting this restrict the story using it instead to create a strong and no-nonsense woman who isn't afraid to speak her mind or talk frankly. I want more of this.

The story moves forward to approximately 1914. Unfortunately Clara's mother and only friend has passed away and Clara needs a purpose. She takes to visiting Kew Gardens, fascinated by the plants and keen to learn. She develops an almost teacher/student relationship with one of the head gardeners and from there stems an invitation to a country manor where the new owner, having recently built a grand greenhouse, requires someone with the expertise to fill it with exotic plants. Shadowbrook House is appropriately named. The villagers whisper about it, the housekeeper and maids are convinced it's haunted and there are certainly plenty of strange noises of an evening. Noises that whisper of footsteps treading along creaking floorboards,

or perhaps just noises of an old house settling in to sleep at night.

I don't think I need to really elaborate too much on the plot, this is a house with a history, it could be haunted or maybe it's simply a house that is haunted by it's past, people unable or unwilling to forget the 'goings on' that took place within its walls. It has a forbidden attic, a reclusive owner and plenty of dark secrets just waiting to be unveiled. I certainly didn't foresee the final outcome but I confess I never try overly hard to second guess the endings to books – I prefer to let them reveal themselves as intended so it's possible that others might not find the reveals as surprising as I did. Undoubtedly this ticks a lot of the trope boxes that you would expect from a gothic read and I can almost picture you rolling your eyes thinking the 'same old, same old' but, apart from the fact that these tropes are so enjoyable anyway, what makes this book refreshingly different is the main protagonist who is such an original character. Clara is an intelligent and practical woman. She has a scientific mind and so as such refuses to believe in ghosts and things that go bump in the night. Instead she looks for rational explanation where others simply give in to superstition and she isn't afraid to go and investigate. Obviously, her nature is tempered by her easily broken bones. Clara can't go flinging herself around or dashing about the countryside, she has to take certain precautions but she doesn't let her condition dictate who she is or use it as an excuse not to get on with life.

Added to a great protagonist and an eerie tale is of course the writing. Susan Fletcher is a wonderful writer. She has an almost magical way with words that simply transports you into whatever vision she is currently creating. I've read a couple of her books before and it's always the same for me – I rush through the book, devouring the words like a raging maniac and then finish the story feeling almost teary eyed and bereft. There's almost a poetic beauty to her words and yet at the same time a simplicity that just brings forth memories. For this particular book it's the garden, the scent of the flowers and the herbs, the beautiful colours and the feeling of nature doing what it does best. Please, don't take my word for it – go and pick up a copy and see what you think.

In terms of criticisms. I have nothing. I think the only proviso I would make is that whilst this is a ghostly tale I don't think it's a tale of terror – which I think is mainly down to Clara's unwillingness to give in to flights of fancy. But, I don't really think of that as a criticism, just something to note.

I received a copy through Netgalley, courtesy of the publisher, for which my thanks. The above is my own opinion.
