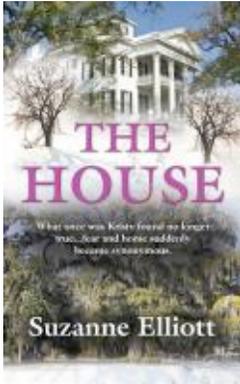


# THE HOUSE

What once was Kristy found no longer true...fear and home suddenly became synonymous.

Suzanne Elliott



*Ghosts, murder, explosions, blackmail, hidden rooms, and love are packed into the exciting novel by author Suzanne Elliott. Kristy Vance comes home to discover her aunt was murdered. She faces attempts on her own life as she reconnects with a lost love. Together, they endure the attacks, and must escape through a hidden cave just as an explosion blows up Kristy's beloved house. Do they get trapped? And, what happens to the vicious killer?*

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Suzanne Elliott

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## **Dedication**

### **God Bless America!**

To my son Rand for enduring my pleas to proof read this book and for taking his precious time to do the reviews. I love you!

To my friend Iulia Diana Heisler for coming to my aid numerous times when I had a computer crisis I give a big thank you! I am forever grateful. Hugs!

And last but not least, to my family and friends.  
Blessings and love,  
Sue

**A fictional story dedicated to my  
childhood home and the memories....**

## Chapter One

The plane taxied to the arrival gate at JFK. Kristy glanced at her watch and wondered if she would make her connection to Nashville. Her flight had arrived twenty minutes behind schedule. She gathered her things and prepared to make a mad dash the minute she stepped off the plane.

Customs took longer than expected. With a worried frown she rolled her suitcase down the airport corridor and scolded herself for wearing heels. There wasn't a courtesy cart in sight.

She hurried on until she spied the Nashville gate. Kristy scooted in front of a man standing a few feet back from the service desk reading a newspaper and plopped her ticket down in front of the agent. She slipped off a shoe and rested her stocking foot on the cool cement floor. *Ah, pure bliss!* She dug a Kleenex from her purse and wiped her forehead and leaned against the counter taking in a deep breath. She had been on the go for twenty-some hours. Her body actually shook from pure exhaustion. She turned around and found thirty pairs of glaring

eyes standing in a line directly in front of her. Her stomach churned.

“Oh no,” she expressed aloud realizing her mistake. Nerves sent pin pricks throughout her body.

“I was in such a hurry I didn’t notice the line. I am so sorry everyone.” *A warm flush inched up her neck.*

“I’ll go to the back of the line,” she announced hoping to avoid more embarrassment.

She grabbed the handle of her case and started toward the back when the man she’d cut in front of gestured for her to go ahead of him. He took in her disheveled condition and thought she looked about to collapse.

Strands of hair were falling into her face. Her clothes were wrinkled. She was devoid of make-up. Loss of sleep had caused dark circles to appear under her eyes. Obviously in a frantic state she was nevertheless a strikingly beautiful woman. The man gave a second look and wished he were young and single.

Kristy took hold of his sleeve, stood up on her tiptoes and whispered, “Thank you,” to the tall older man. “I’ve been a wreck since I got

the call my aunt died.” Her voice broke and she lowered her head. “Aunt Pauline was all the family I had,” she added tearfully. She shunned away from the other travelers and wiped tears running down her face. A look of compassion showed on the man’s face. He placed a comforting arm around her shoulders. She was about the same age as his daughter and his heart went out to her.

“I understand. Death is hard for the survivors no matter what age the victim. I am so sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you for understanding,” she mumbled and hiccupped. “Excuse me,” she said, and took in a deep breath and held it.

The customer service agent raised her eyebrows, checked Kristy’s ID, stamped her ticket and passed it on to an employee at the departure gate, obviously glad to send her on her way.

Kristy turned back to the man.

“Goodbye and thanks. Hic,” She gave an awkward smile and proceeded down the walkway to the plane. She found her seat number and placed her carry-on in the compartment above and sat down to fasten her

seat belt, fatigue settling on her small frame. As soon as the plane obtained cruising altitude she pushed her seat back and closed her eyes. The hiccups had finally stopped....

Memories flashed across her lids. The morning she left for Paris the last image Kristy had of her aunt she was standing at the front door waving goodbye, her fragile body stooped from osteoporosis. The memory tugged at Kristy's heart strings. *How could she have left her?* Her eyes opened at the realization and she sat up abruptly. She never should have accepted the teaching job at the American school in Paris!

She swallowed back the lump in her throat and shook her head. Granted she had written to her aunt faithfully, but sadly hadn't been back for a visit. She would never forgive herself.

*"Darn it, Aunt Pauline! I'm so sorry I wasn't there to take care of you when you needed me," she murmured.*

The throb of a headache became more intense. She dug in her purse for the Advil and asked the flight attendant for a bottle of water. Swallowing the pill, she massaged her forehead. As she relaxed, her eyes drifted shut

*The House*

and was awakened just as the wheels touched  
down on the tarmac at Nashville  
International....

## Chapter Two

Kristy lived in a suburb of Nashville in a little town called Riverview, population 10,000. Her father had been the main stockholder in Vance's Department store in Nashville. It was a blow to the community when both parents were killed in a private plane crash. Kristy was just twelve years old. Her father's maiden sister Pauline moved into the large home to care for her brother's young daughter.

Her hands began to perspire. Excitement spiked. She was just a mile or two from home. Seven Gables sat on a hill above The Cumberland River. Paris had the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame de Paris, and The Louvre, but Kristy had come to realize it meant nothing compared to the love she felt for her Tennessee home.

She pulled the rental car into the driveway and paused just taking in the moment. She noted the beautiful old mansion stood out with its brick embankment and matching posts on either side of the driveway. The comforting

porch had welcomed many guests including congressional figures.

She glanced up at the roof and absentmindedly began to count the seven gables on the house as if she had to check to be sure they were still there. *Silly whim she thought... she laughed to herself. It was just hard to believe she was really home.*

She continued her appraisal, taking in everything about the house. She noted the grey stucco. It seemed to be in good shape. As a child she loved the little stones and sparkles in the siding's original exterior.

The house was built around 1850 by a Quaker family sympathetic to the Negro cause. They ran an escape network helping slaves move to Free states. Later the house was bought by Kristy's Quaker ancestors. It consisted of fourteen rooms and sixty-five French pane windows, plus the hidden rooms used to house the slaves while in transit. Over the years the home had been handed down from one generation to the next.

Walking up the steps to the porch, it suddenly occurred to her no one would be there

to welcome her. Her breath caught and she choked back a sob.

Her hand shook as she unlocked the front door. A tinge of fear accosted her. Her heart skipped a couple of beats. *Could it be a premonition of something sinister about to happen?* Her aunt's death had certainly brought back the memory of her parents' tragic deaths.

The door swung back and she caught sight of the beautiful winding staircase and the fear was instantly forgotten. She was reminded of the many times as a child she ran up those steps to the landing pretending it was a stage and sang at the top of her lungs. She brought a hand up to her mouth and laughed at the memory.

Kristy glanced into the music room where a concert grand piano stood. She walked over and ran her fingers over the ivory keys. Joy coursed through her. Everything appeared to be as she had left it...with the exception of course, the absence of Aunt Pauline.

What happened to her aunt to cause her death? Did she fall and break a hip or die from a heart attack? She guessed she'd find out when she met with the family lawyer the next morning. All she'd been told on the phone by

the lawyer's assistant was that her aunt was dead and to come home. She'd tried to pry more particulars but the assistant had cut her off. She grimaced. She couldn't bear to even think about the heartbreaking call.

She ventured on through to the large dining room and on into the breakfast room, her taste buds remembering the delicious dinners that were served on gold rimmed china eaten with solid bronze flatware implements her mother had treasured. Her parents had entertained often.

She walked down the little hall that led to the galley kitchen and a connecting utility room. A stairway at the end of the kitchen led to the basement and to a back door. She shrunk back... she knew it was silly but as a little girl she'd always been afraid in the basement unless she was with a parent. Even now, the hair was standing on her arms just thinking about it. She turned and hurried away.

Further down the main hallway, there was a powder room and a guest bedroom. A little alcove off that same hallway led into the living room and housed a large desk and a secretary. This brought her back around to where she'd

left her suitcase. Giving a quick glance at the large fireplace, she remembered the times as a little girl she'd climbed on her father's lap as he sat by that fireplace and read the newspaper. Her eyes misted.

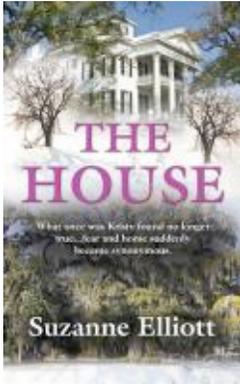
She grabbed the suitcase and lumbered up to the second floor. She stepped into her bedroom and sat the case down contemplating when the rest of her things would arrive by overseas mail.

Kristy scanned the room. A child's rocking chair was in its usual place just as it had been since she'd moved into that room so many years before. Raggedy Ann, her favorite doll sat in the seat like she owned the place. Moistness clouded Kristy's eyes. Some would call her overly sentimental. So be it! She wiped her eyes and turned and walked down the long hallway. It was a delight just to see the lovely old house again.

Stepping on a loose floorboard, nostalgia hit her. She laughed to herself, delighted her aunt hadn't called the handyman to fix it. It used to be a source of irritation but now it gave her a warm cozy feeling...she didn't need to pinch herself. She was really home!

She peeked into three other bedrooms. Her aunt's housecoat lay across the bed in the room she had chosen as her own. Tears came to Kristy's eyes when she spied her aunt's tiny house slippers laid neatly beside her bed. She paused and said a quiet prayer.

At the end of the hall was a full bath. The master was off to the right. She stepped across the threshold and on into the master. Cold air engulfed her in the spot where she stood. She walked on further. *The windows were closed and furnace vents were putting out warm air. So why was it so cold in that one area?* She clutched her arms across her chest to ward off the chill. *Suddenly, she felt a presence in the room....* She checked under the bed and in the closets and on into her father's library where there was another cold spot. *This is ridiculous she thought. But it was hard to keep from jumping to conclusions when the hint of her mother's favorite perfume lingered in the air... Who had been in there and why?*



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