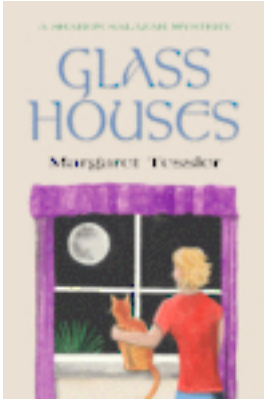


A SHARON SALAZAR MYSTERY

# GLASS HOUSES

Margaret Tessler





*When Sharon Salazar agrees to house-sit for a friend on beautiful Mustang Island, she envisions relaxing on the beach with her husband, or curled up with a good book with the resident cat on her lap. Instead, she finds herself embroiled in a troubling chain of events that involves the family next door, and exposes their closely guarded secrets...*

# Glass Houses

by Margaret Tessler

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# *Glass Houses*

*Margaret Tessler*

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ISBN: 978-1-63490-548-0

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida, U.S.A.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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Booklocker.com, Inc.  
2015

First Edition

*Glass Houses*

## Dedication

In fond memory of Edie Flaherty, Jeanne Knight,  
Marcia Landau, & Mary Zerbe

*Margaret Tessler*

## Acknowledgements

I owe so many people a debt of gratitude, it's hard to know where to start. Among those who come to mind are members of my various writing groups: Mary Blanchard, Charlene Dietz, Diane Flaherty, Annie Kyle, Joan Taitte, Jan McConaghy, Pat Wood, Dave Bachelor, Helen Pilz, Penny and Omar Durant, Lucille Friedman, Larry Kemp, Pat Sutton, and Kelly Williams. Without their help, I wouldn't have gotten past the first page.

In addition, I want to thank my husband, Howard Tessler; my daughter Valerie Coffee; my daughter-in-law Beth Tessler; Rebecca Roybal Jones; and my niece Christina Richmond, for reading the manuscript and making invaluable suggestions. I also appreciate the expertise of Joe Alarid, my daughter Mary Behm, Darryl Johnson, my cousin Brandy Malec, and Mike Schaller.

A special thanks goes to friends who cheerfully agreed to lend their names to the policemen in this story: Don Bullis and Damon Fay (retired peace officers); and my niece's husband, Dennis Richmond (mechanic and musician in "real life").

Another special thanks goes to Harlen Campbell, who reminded me of the fun of writing fiction. To paraphrase his advice: If the facts don't fit the story, make them up.

I take responsibility for all mistakes and for the times I made things up. It's been fun. Enjoy the ride!

*Margaret Tessler*



## RECURRING CHARACTERS

Sharon Salazar—protagonist

Ryan Salazar—Sharon's husband

Sharon & Ryan, both 40 years old,  
live in San Antonio, Texas.

Sharon is a lawyer.

Ryan is a high-school Spanish teacher.

Geneva Rivard—owner of the home  
where Sharon is house- and cat-sitting.

Geneva, an octogenarian, lives in a mobile-home park  
in Port Aransas, Texas, on Mustang Island.

Charlotte Avery—Geneva's next-door neighbor—  
also an octogenarian

Edmond Woodbridge—Charlotte's uptight nephew

Jason Woodbridge—Edmond's 19-year-old son

Tangerine Woodbridge—

Edmond's 17-year-old daughter

Mildred Merwig—Charlotte's gossipy neighbor

*Margaret Tessler*

Rinda, Todd, & Otis—friends of Jason & Tangerine

Misty—Rinda's stepsister

Lt. Dennis Richmond—lead investigator

Sgt. Bullis and Sgt. Fay—police officers

Barbara Woodbridge—Edmond's first wife; Jason's mother

Nancy (Woodbridge)—Edmond's second wife;  
Tangerine's mother

Cassie Doherty—Edmond's love interest between marriages

Sam Arnold—Cassie's present husband

## Author's Note

The narrow barrier islands that curve around the Texas coastline stretch for about 600 miles. Mustang Island, located toward the southern end of the string, is only 18 miles long and a few miles wide.

At the northern end of Mustang Island is the town of Port Aransas. Across the channel (about 7 miles away) is the town of Aransas Pass. These towns are connected by a ferry that runs 24/7, free of charge.

Near the southern end of Mustang Island is Mustang Island State Park. A few miles farther south, a causeway links the Island to Corpus Christi.

*Margaret Tessler*

## SPRING 2004

### Chapter 1

I never thought of myself as a busybody, let alone a Peeping Tom. But that's what insomnia can do to you. Maybe I'd better explain.

You see, my friend Geneva Rivard had asked me to cat-sit while she left town during spring break, which is notoriously rowdy along the Texas Gulf Coast this time of year. Geneva said she was too old to put up with the shenanigans, but didn't want to leave her home vacant. I was fond of Marmalade, her large short-haired tabby, who was—as Geneva put it—a dedicated homebody who hated to travel. So I agreed to look after both cat and property.

And no, I didn't meddle in Geneva's belongings. But I did become curious about her next-door neighbor, Charlotte Avery.

The two women live in Playa Bonita Resort, a gated mobile-home park on Mustang Island, not far from Corpus Christi, which is across the bay. The park is small and not as posh as the name suggests. However, it is modern and attractive. The "beautiful beach" is a good three or four miles away, as is the nightlife, so it's unlikely the spring-break commotion would impede on the residents' safety and comfort. But if Geneva needed her own kind of break, I was happy to help out.

The timing was good for me too. I'd been working night and day on a lengthy and grueling case that had finally been resolved, and I needed to get away and recharge. So, with the blessing of my law firm, I left San Antonio to come stay at Geneva's for a couple of weeks. My husband, Ryan, who's a high-school Spanish teacher, planned to join me the second week.

The living rooms of Geneva's and Charlotte's double-wides face each other, with carports in between. Daytime offers an aura of privacy, but nighttime is a different story.

I missed Ryan and couldn't quite get used to sleeping alone, although Marmalade tried to console me by curling up next to me whenever I went to bed, or sat down, or stood anywhere near the fridge.

Midnight always found Marmalade and me on the living-room couch watching ancient re-runs or movies on TV. That's when I discovered Charlotte watching TV in *her* living room.

The first night at Geneva's, I had started to close the blinds when I noticed that Charlotte's were still open. An overhead Tiffany lamp cast a soft glow around the room, giving me a clear view of the back of Charlotte's flowered couch and the back of her smooth white hair, gathered into a French twist. Across from her I could see flickering images of whatever program was showing.

Her presence was somehow comforting, and I changed my mind about closing my own blinds. Besides, if Charlotte looked across the way, she wouldn't see much except pictures on the wall. Unlike Charlotte's living room, Geneva's is arranged so that her sofa is on the far side of the room, well away from the window, with the TV in a corner diagonally across from the sofa.

I'd met Charlotte, a spunky octogenarian like Geneva, with a gentle manner and quick sense of humor. I hoped that at their age—some forty years from now—I'd have their same lively attitude.

Right now, it was nice to know Charlotte was nearby, and I gradually drifted off to sleep. This unspoken camaraderie lasted the first three nights of my stay. The spell ended Monday morning. I'd fallen asleep on the couch

## *Glass Houses*

and woke up to bright sunlight streaming in the window and Marmalade pouncing on my pillow.

I sat up and stretched, then padded over to the window to adjust the blinds against the glare. I was surprised to see both a sleek sports car and a dilapidated Chevy pickup parked in front of Charlotte's. I hadn't heard anyone drive up. I must have slept more soundly than I realized.

Ryan phoned before leaving for school, which got the day off to a good start. I wish I could have clung to the good start, but I've learned that beginnings have a way of meandering haphazardly in unexpected directions. This certainly turned out to be a zigzag day.

Marmalade and I went through our typical morning activities, which included breakfast and cleaning up. After brushing him, I put his leash on him, and we set out for his customary stroll. Not all cats like to take walks this way, but Marmalade was a pro.

Charlotte's house seemed awfully quiet. On impulse, I crossed her front porch and rang the doorbell. No answer. I rang again, pressing the bell insistently. A middle-aged man came to the door and showed me his teeth, his version of a smile I suppose. Unlike me, in my light-blue shorts & halter, he was nicely dressed in a gray three-piece suit and striped tie.

I gave him my own version of a fake smile and got right to the point. "Hi. I came to see Charlotte."

In the background I heard Charlotte's voice. "Is that you, Sharon? Come on in."

She appeared at the door then, a genuine smile on her face. Mr. Uptight moved over a few inches so she could let me inside. Marmalade assumed the invitation extended to him, wriggled out of his harness, and slipped in ahead of

me. Charlotte's eyes twinkled as she bent down to scratch his head, and he purred in appreciation.

"You forget I'm allergic to cats, Aunt Charlotte," Mr. Uptight chided in a pinched voice.

"I'm sorry, dear." Charlotte looked embarrassed, caught between soothing her nephew's alleged allergies and evicting Marmalade and me from her home.

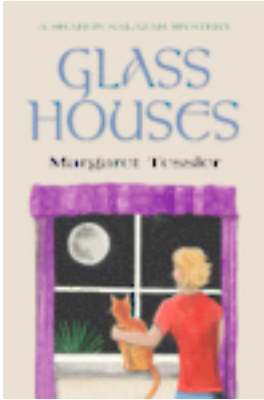
I guess the sensible step would have been for me to apologize and leave. But some stubborn part of me chose to ignore her nephew's lack of hospitality.

I picked up Marmalade and turned away to take him home. "I'll be right back," I said over my shoulder, "if that's all right. I don't want to interrupt your morning."

"Oh, Sharon, don't be silly. You know you're always welcome!"

Her nephew's eyes narrowed, but I dashed away before he could offer any objections.





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