

A supernatural thriller and mystery.

THE HOUSE OF SIN AND SPLENDOR

By Dianne Lininger

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DIANNE LININGER

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ISBN: 978-1-64719-495-6

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2021

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data
Lininger, Dianne
The House of Sin and Splendor by Dianne Lininger
Library of Congress Control Number: 2021906084

Cover Artwork by April Sampson.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Immediately after returning home Arlene learned Wade was furious she had taken the Porsche. He was indignant about having to drive the truck into L.A. to audition for a commercial.

"I'm surprised you didn't run into each other." Carmina chuckled.

"Thankfully not." Arlene smirked.

"I hope you had lots of fun, cause he was pissed!"

"While I was out I did some digging into the history of our mansion after the disappearance of Betsy Bellweather."

"Find anything interesting?"

"Oh yes! During the 1940's a screen writer named Daryl Rogel lived here. A renter and close friend to Ryan Mazewell, Edric's son. Eventually Rogel drank himself to death. That's when the place fell into ruin."

"I wonder if he died within these walls," Carmina thought aloud.

Arlene shrugged.

"I'm betting he did!"

"The Mazewell family wanted to sell this place, but Edric forbade it until proven beyond doubt that Betsy Bellweather was actually dead. She loved this house! However so much time has passed, there's no way she could be alive. The grandchildren were more than eager to be rid of it."

"Yes, you told me that before."

"And I learned that Clark Mason has a daughter, an only child, Vivian Claiborne. She now resides in a nursing home. I'm thinking of paying her a visit after the downstairs rooms are restored."

"They're almost finished. Be sure to take the Porsche!"

"Don't worry, I will," Arlene grinned. "Wade'll be upset, but I don't care."

Several busy days passed.

Wade came to bed sooner than usual and would be up earlier. To avoid a morning tantrum Arlene left early in the Porsche. Her ears were still stinging and raw from the swear words he threw at her the time before.

The retirement home was an old, but a well kept building that spanned several acres with beautiful landscaping. It was clearly high end. Security guards were posted outside. Inside a guard confiscated Arlene's Driver's License before she was allowed entry into the lobby.

"You'll get it back when you're ready to leave," she was told.

A tall grim-looking nurse was stationed at the front desk. Arlene asked to see Vivian Claiborne.

"Mrs. Claiborne values her privacy and you must respect that." The nurse glowered down at her. "After the last reprinting of her father's book she was besieged by the press, as well as fans, autograph seekers, and the curious. Unless you can prove you're a family member I must ask you to leave."

"Tell Mrs. Claiborne that I'm the current owner of the Mazewell mansion, the one featured in her father's book. If she still doesn't want to see me, then I'll go."

Arlene took a seat in the lobby and waited. She gazed at her watch. Nearly twenty minutes had passed. Finally a different nurse emerged and beckoned her to the elevator.

"She's on the top floor," Arlene was curtly informed.

The nurse led her into a spacious room with a queen sized bed. Adjoining was a sitting area with a big overstuffed sofa and chairs. A huge window overlooked a sprawling nature walk below and a majestic mountain range beyond.

Vivian Claiborne emerged from the bathroom in a wheelchair. She instructed the nurse to leave and told Arlene to make herself comfortable.

"So you own Betsy Bellweather's former abode. It must be in shambles now!" the old woman declared.

"My husband and I are restoring it. I'm curious about what occurred there in the years after Betsy's disappearance"

"My father was planning a sequel, but sadly he died before he was able to begin. As you probably know, he was a police investigator at the time of the Bellweather incident. Often he was frustrated and downright angered because his investigation was hampered. Not to mention the outright obstruction of justice due to the fact so many wealthy and influential people were involved. He used to say there were two sets of justice, one for the hoity-toity and another for the rest of us."

"Yes, unfortunately that's still the case today," Arlene agreed. "So what was the sequel to be about?"

"There was another inexplicable disappearance there, believe it or not! A young Mexican gal named Yesenia Dominguez. From what my father uncovered she was the plaything of both Daryl Rogel and Ryan Mazewell. A couple of lowlife slimeballs for sure, white trash with cash, I call them. Ryan Mazewell took over the studio after his father passed in 1936. However he was better known for his casting couch than his movies. Back in his university days he was accused of getting a fourteen year old child drunk and raping her. He denied it and because his best buddy Rogel provided an alibi, he was never charged."

"Do YOU think he did it?"

"I'd bet my very soul on it! There was another, a young hat-check girl at a club who also accused him of rape. This one had witnesses who saw her getting into his limo after work. However, the case was settled out of court. Mazewell paid the family off with generous checks every month! Once, the girl's brother angrily confronted him about the rape. Mazewell threatened to cut off the funds putting an end to the family's now affluent lifestyle."

"Where is the brother now?"

"He was drafted and later killed in combat during World War II."

"What happened to the girl?"

"In 1957 after the death of her parents she committed suicide. She slashed her wrists, also the back of her knees, her feet, and even her own throat before jumping into her swimming pool. A neighbor spotted the bloody red water from his balcony and called police."

"How horrid!"

"And then there's the disappearance of actress Dixie Hughes! She vanished right after signing a movie contract with Ryan Mazewell. It remains a cold case to this day!"

Arlene closed her eyes and took a deep breath trying to digest all of this. "For the moment, I'm more curious about the disappearance of Yesenia Dominguez and her relationship with Rogel and Mazewell. What can you tell me?"

"Everything about that is suspicious; Daryl Rogel lived in the mansion rent free until his death in 1948. And Mazewell purchased numerous movie scripts from him but not one ever made it onto the screen, nor was one actor ever cast."

"Yes, that is highly suspicious. But where does Yesinia Dominguez come into play?"

"Daryl Rogel owned a vacation bungalow overlooking the bay down in Acapulco, claimed it inspired him." She chortled. "That's where he met her. From what I gather, she possessed the kind of beauty that knocks the breath right out of you!"

"I know. I've seen her."

"Excuse me!" the old woman exclaimed.

Arlene suddenly became self-conscious. "I probably shouldn't have admitted that. Now you'll think I'm some kind of nutcase, my husband certainly does. However she's haunting my house. I'll bet you want me to leave, now."

Mrs. Claiborne laughed loudly. "At my age it's comforting to know there's an afterlife!"

"I feel her reaching out to me, that's why I'm here." Arlene continued. "Perhaps together we can solve her disappearance. Please tell me everything you know."

The elder woman wheeled herself closer to Arlene and leaned in. "Daryl Rogel promised Yesenia the moon and stars. He claimed to be a major screen writer and loved boasting of his close camaraderie with big shot Mazewell. It didn't take much convincing to persuade her to return with him. They lived together in the Mazewell mansion, your current home. However she became frustrated when he did nothing to launch her career as promised, not to mention his cheating with movie starlets."

Arlene shook her head in disgust absorbing every word.

"Eventually," the old woman continued, "She threatened to leave him. So he talked his buddy Ryan into giving her a screen test. Ryan Mazewell never tested any female who refused to have sex with him, so now Yesenia became a shared woman. But still no movie career!" She paused to take a deep breath.

"What happened?"

"Mazewell claimed her English was too poor to cast her, plus she had no talent. Bullshit! I say! Mazewell could have hired a tutor. As far as talent goes, there are plenty of actors who can't act their way out of a garbage bag, yet they still land parts and manage to become rich and famous!"

"That is true indeed," Arlene agreed.

"Anyway, it was shortly after the screen test that she vanished. A younger brother and sister came from Mexico searching for her. Rogel insisted that Yesenia left him for another man, a tourist and went back east together, somewhere. But her relatives didn't believe him. Yesenia had been writing letters to her family, abruptly they just stopped."

"That IS highly suspicious!"

"The brother and sister continued to badger Rogel for answers. That's when Ryan Mazewell stepped in. Since they were here illegally, he threatened to have them arrested and deported if they didn't drop it. They refused! Mazewell followed through on his threat. However they returned the following year with enough money to hire a detective. This time, Mazewell threatened to make them disappear along with Yesenia if they returned, again. They didn't!"

"That is chilling!"

"Wealth and power go together, we all know that."

"Daryl Rogel mostly became a recluse after that. He slowly drank himself to death. The cleaning crew found him dead in the room where Betsy held her infamous Circle of Pleasure."

"So he died in the mansion, too."

The old woman nodded.

"Damn! This is too much!"

"If you read the movie mags or the gossip columns you know what's going on with the Mazewell family today."

"Not my thing, Arlene said." "We bought the mansion from one of Ryan's children, Michael Mazewell. But we never saw him! He signed the papers in private having no desire to meet with us."

"That doesn't surprise me a bit! They're all entitled jerks! Everything left of the Mazewell Movie Empire is now run by Ryan's oldest, a daughter, Joanna. She loathes Hollywood and has a studio in London. However, she is fiercely protective of the Mazewell name, insisting the public remember only her grandfather's great works rather than the debauchery of the era and afterward. She's the child from Ryan's marriage to New York socialite, Andrea Fennington. They both led separate lives on opposite coasts. It's amazing there were offspring at all. Joanna was largely raised by her mother."

"Good for her!"

"After Fennington's death sixteen years later, Ryan eventually had two more marriages, both to extremely pretty but air-headed starlets. Wife #2 gave birth to a son Michael, and wife #3 gave birth to identical twin daughters. I forget these silly girls' names although they're constantly featured in the tabloids."

"Perhaps I can get answers from one of Edric's grandchildren, what do you think?"

"Don't be surprised if not a one wants anything to do with you. But, you can always try."

"And I will!" Arlene thanked Mrs. Claiborne before bidding her good-bye. "I'll keep you posted," she promised.

"Make sure you do!"

Upon her return home Arlene promptly dug out all the legal documents from the sale of the mansion. "Eureka!" she exclaimed. Now she had Michael Mazewell's address and phone number.

However each turned out to be his office. Not surprisingly she reached a secretary when calling. Arlene introduced herself and explained that she needed to speak with Mr. Mazewell concerning the mansion.

"I'll get back to you," Arlene was told. However she had doubts judging from the secretary's tone.

At that moment Wade came through the doorway flashing a broad smile "I landed a job!" he announced. "It's a background spot in a commercial for a tire salesman over in Bakersfield."

"Do you have any lines?"

"No, but it's a start! Where are the guys? We'll all go out to celebrate!"

"They're in the back. Don't you think we should wait for a paycheck, first?"

"Whoa, there you go spewing acid again! Why can't you just be happy and ride the flow!"

"I just think we need to be more careful with expenses."

"Fine! I'll celebrate without you!" He stormed away.

Arlene felt relieved. She didn't feel up to going out, anyway.

Minutes before sundown she watched Wade jump into the Porsche and take off. The workers all piled into their individual trucks and cars following behind. Carmina had left hours before. Arlene was now all alone in the mansion. A long night, she told herself.

She strolled into the notorious Circle of Pleasure chamber. So Daryl Rogel died here, she thought. Why wasn't he haunting? Perhaps he didn't want to make himself known due to guilt and shame. She could only surmise. Automatically she began walking from room to room carefully avoiding the one in the back hall off the kitchen.

"Yesenia! Yesenia Dominguez!" she called out. "I want to help you! But I need your help to do so!" Arlene expected Yesenia to make an appearance for certain that night and was disappointed when she neglected to appear. Disheartened, Arlene retired to the bedroom to finish reading Clark Mason's book.

The following morning she awoke in bed alone. And she had over slept! Where the Hell was Wade, she wondered. Did he come home at all? Quickly she showered and dressed.

Downstairs, Carmina was busily at work sweeping.

"Glad you're here!" Arlene exclaimed.

"I left early yesterday for a dental cleaning so I'm making up for it now. And you're up late."

The phone started ringing. Carmina being the closest grabbed it. "It's Michael Mazewell's secretary," she handed the receiver to Arlene.

"Mr. Mazewell insists that you contact him through his attorney concerning any issues with the mansion," she was curtly told.

"All I need is some info!" Arlene replied with exasperation, "just a few minutes of his time! Please tell him this!"

"Mr. Mazewell is a busy man and his time is valuable," responded the secretary tersely, before hanging up.

Arlene slammed the receiver down in frustration. She filled Carmina in on the events of the day before. "I have an address for Mazewell's office, I'm going to pay him a visit! And where is Wade?"

"He was passed out on the sofa when I came in the morning, but he's gone now. The guys are all recovering from a hangover. Must have been quite a night everyone had!"

"Where did Wade go?"

"He didn't say. He just took off in the Porsche."

Arlene took the Chevy truck into Los Angeles to look up Mazewell's address. Seeing the stares she received from people who passed in pricy cars caused an awful self-conscious feeling to emerge. Arlene found herself more understanding of Wade's need to take the Porsche.

At Mazewell's office Arlene came face to face with that same curt secretary; a skinny middle-aged woman who was dressed like a teenager. Arlene demanded to see Mr. Mazewell and would accept no excuses!

She was abruptly informed by the secretary that he was at home recovering from an injury and had no idea when he would be returning. Arlene felt she was lying; however she had no choice but to go home disappointed.

Once home, she was surprised to find Wade there. He was quite agitated with her.

"I called the bank after receiving our statement! What's this thousand dollars cash you withdrew?"

"Oh, I treated myself to a fancy spa as a belated birthday gift since I've limited access to my Porsche. That was more of a gift you gave yourself!"

"Well you should have checked with me first. And don't do it again!"

"I will if I damn well please, It's as much my money as yours!"

"Why you bitch!"

"What did you call me? How dare you!"

"No time for this now, I'm leaving in a few seconds. Tahra Croft is sending me on another cattle call. I'll probably be home late."

"Be sure not to wake me. What about that tire commercial you landed?"

"Next week the filming starts."

However the following week Wade was fired from the commercial. "They recast the part!" he snarled. "The owner of the company seemed to think I was all wrong for it. Tahra disagreed, but the owner had the last say," Wade heaved a sad sigh and hung his head.

"Oh Wade, I'm sorry, truly I am," Arlene lamented.

"There's another commercial, this one a speaking part up in Petaluma. Tahra wants me to try out for that. I'm leaving soon. I may be gone a week or more."

Arlene helped him pack and said nothing when he left in the Porsche. Watching him drive away she felt less than optimistic about his chances.

Carmina arrived for work shortly after. "B.B. and I have a gift for you!" she announced. "With her help, I was able to track down Michael Mazewell's home address!"

"What!? Well let me see!"

"However this doesn't guarantee he'll meet with you. He has a houseboy, one like a guard dog from Hell. You'll need trickery to get through the door. His secretary didn't lie about the injury, but that can be used to your advantage."

"What's the plan?"

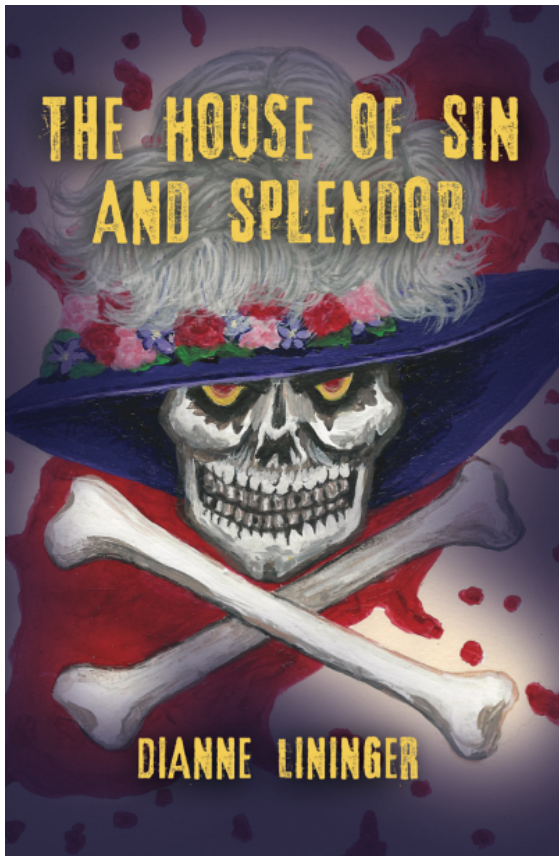
"First, fix your face up all pretty and wear that purple dress same as the evening that Tahra Croft came over. Wear your pink blazer over it, it'll look less like a cocktail outfit, but keep the front unbuttoned."

"I don't like what I'm hearing."

"But hear me out! That's the look of ladies here and the men expect it. Plus he likes brandy! When face to face with that Hell dog of a houseboy, you'll need to do some acting. It's Hollywood, remember? Consider it a stroke of luck that Mazewell twisted his ankle in a polo accident."

"I suppose it's worth a shot. Damn! I just remembered Wade took the Porsche! That means I'll be showing up in the old Chevy truck. That alone will blow it for me!"

"Take my car! I've got a new Subaru; it's not a Porsche, but still better than the truck."



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