



## The House of Pearl

**Robert Max Bovill**

**Susan B. Flanagan**

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*The tale of a haunted house and its inhabitants over 120 years is both ominous and heartwarming in its stories of love and ghosts.*

*The House of Pearl*, a dark but captivating paranormal romance novel, traces the history of a Victorian home built in Sausalito, California, in the late 1880s. It recounts the hopes, dreams, and heartbreaking experiences of its inhabitants.

The plot by Robert Max Bovill and Susan B. Flanagan reads like several short stories knit together with the house as a common thread. The lives of the many couples who lived in the 120-year-old home are recounted by Elia Pearl, a popular singer, who serves as a narrator of sorts as she tells her newfound love, Paul, a boat captain, about the home she recently returned to after many years away.

The home, owned by Elia's ancestors, was built by Captain Edwin "The Pearl" Harrison, the nickname originating from his work as a pearl importer. He built the home for his Japanese bride, Oshima, whom he met in the course of business dealings with her father. Their love story, and Oshima's journey to a new country, is exciting, and tragic. When Oshima is murdered in the home, her spirit continues to live on there, haunting future residents, including Elia's great-grandparents and grandmother, Prima Pearl, who lived there in the 1930s when it was a brothel. The later residents eventually embody Oshima's spirit while in the home, and some are taken over by the spirit of another dangerous but unknown soul.

The two authors maintain one voice throughout, creating a coherent, ominous tone. The descriptive writing paints a vivid picture, but one that is also disturbing, as violent and graphic scenes are depicted. Each love story—from Edwin and Oshima to Prima's parents to Prima and her savior, Stanley, and then Elia and Paul—is heartwarming and, at times, alarming. The stories are unusual and compelling, but most of the focus is on the earlier couples, which pulls attention away from Elia and Paul's tale. As a result, the two present-day characters are less developed, and the connection Elia and Paul say they feel is not as convincing as with the more developed characters, such as Edwin and Oshima.

Some awkward sentence constructions and misplaced punctuation disrupt the flow of the narrative in places. There are also confusing and contradictory passages, such as when Elia wonders about her reaction to the house: "Why didn't she have any real fear of this place? She felt uncomfortable and confused by it, but she also had an intense fear to run away." There is also confusion around the Pearl name. Early on, it is described as a surname Edwin's descendants adopted, but Prima Pearl is often referred to interchangeably by her full name, or as only Prima or only Pearl, and when Elia and Prima meet for the first time, they discuss the name Pearl as if it's an uncommon first name they share, creating confusion.

*The House of Pearl* is full of adventure, fulfilling the expectations of the genre by providing an extraordinary,

fantastical narrative with many paranormal elements, but one that is a multilayered love story at its heart.

MARIA SIANO (May 19, 2014)

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