

The Manor of Dreams

by Christina Li



About the Book

MEXICAN GOTHIC meets **THE SEVEN HUSBANDS OF EVELYN HUGO** in Christina Li's haunting novel about the secrets that lie in wait in the crumbling mansion of a former Hollywood starlet and the intertwined fates of the two Chinese American families fighting to inherit it.

Vivian Yin is dead. The first Chinese actress to win an Oscar, the trailblazing ingénue rose to fame in the '80s, only to disappear from the spotlight at the height of her career to live out the rest of her life as a recluse.

Now her remaining family members are gathered for the reading of her will, and her daughters expect to inherit their childhood home: Vivian's grand, sprawling, Southern California garden estate. But due to a last-minute change to the will, the house is passed on to another family instead --- one that has suddenly returned after decades of estrangement.

In hopes of staking their claim, both families move into the mansion. As Vivian's daughters race to piece together what happened in the last weeks of their mother's life, disturbing visions and bizarre behaviors start to take hold of everyone in the house, forcing them to realize they are being haunted by something far more sinister and vengeful than their regrets. After so many years of silence, will the families finally confront the painful truth behind the house's origins and the last, tragic summer they spent there --- or will they cling to their secrets until it's too late?

Told in dual timelines, spanning three generations, and brimming with romance, betrayal, ambition and sacrifice, **THE MANOR OF DREAMS** is a thrilling family gothic that examines the true cost of the American dream --- and what happens when the roots we set down in this country turn to rot.

Discussion Guide

1. Brainstorm some adjectives you would use to describe Vivian, Lucille, Rennie, Madeline, Elaine and Nora. What

traits do they have in common? What aspects of their identity create the biggest rifts between them?

2. Why do you think Christina Li chose to begin the story with Nora's character?
3. How are the relationships between the mother-and-daughter pairings in the novel similar and different?
4. Did you enjoy the chapters from the past more, or the chapters from the present day? How does Li build tension within and between the two timelines?
5. Consider how each character interacts with their cultural and class identity. In what ways are these identities present in the narrative? How do they affect characters like Elaine, Ada and Vivian differently?
6. During Rennie's last visit to the house while her mother was alive, Vivian says to her, "I built this up. I endured more than you can imagine. And now you and your sister are just circling me. Like vultures" (page 12). Why does Vivian feel resentment toward her daughters? How is that emotion in conversation with bigger themes in the novel?
7. What were your favorite moments of the budding romances between Ada and Sophie, and Madeline and Nora?
8. How does Li depict Richard's increasingly abusive behaviors? Was there a moment early on where you suspected that he was a violent, controlling person?
9. Li reveals Lucille's hidden desires and vulnerabilities as the novel progresses. What do you think about the choices Lucille makes throughout the novel? Did you have more sympathy for her by the book's end?
10. What scenes frightened or disturbed you the most? How does Li create an atmosphere of dread --- and how does she curate the house's haunting for each character?
11. What do you think happens to Madeline and Nora after the book ends?
12. Ultimately, what does the house represent?

Author Bio

Christina Li is the award-winning author of children's and young adult books *CLUES TO THE UNIVERSE*, *RUBY LOST AND FOUND*, and *TRUE LOVE AND OTHER IMPOSSIBLE ODDS*, which have been selected as a *Washington Post* summer book club pick, one of the NPR and New York Public Library Best Books of the Year, and recognized for the Asian Pacific American Librarians' Award for Best Children's Literature. She graduated from Stanford University with degrees in Economics and Public Policy. She grew up in the Midwest and California, but now resides in New York. *THE MANOR OF DREAMS* is her adult literary debut.

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