

THE TRUTHS WE MAKE CHAPTER SAMPLE

HOUSE OF POE BOOK I

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GLASS HOUSE

WEDNESDAY, PRESENT

THE SLEEK, CHARCOAL TOWN car streaks through the rain-splattered roads. Drizzle pelts the window so that all I see are the shadows of a suburb beyond its pane. This neighborhood never felt like home to me, with its French doors and wrap-around parapets. Too rich for the likes of me and mine. Luck, the only reason my mother and I found ourselves a small live-in opportunity on a property that needed a governess. Luck, that the property's family didn't pry too closely into our past and welcomed a single mother into the fold. And luck, even if it was bad luck, that the family just happened to be the Poes.

I loved the Poe boys before we ever moved to the elegant streets of Weston. Even at seven, with my knobby knees and flat brown hair, my little heart understood what it meant to be special. And I knew Oliver and Paxton Poe were the closest I would ever come to it.

They were flames burning hot and wild against a blackened sky, and my soul felt rested being warmed by their opulence. Seeing them weave themselves in and out of my days had given me a hope that, while frayed at the edges, had never felt worn thin.

Until, one day, every thread snapped clean.

“The storm has flooded the main gate, so we’ll have to go in through the service entry, Miss Pierce,” the driver, Tad, calls back, eyeing me through the rearview.

I press on a polite smile and nod. I should say something. He’s been shooting me worried looks ever since he picked me up from the airport, no doubt searching for the girl he knew, waiting for her incessant questions and prodding nature. I should ask about his kids or his brother, Mike, who had surgery on his bad back last year, just as Mother told me to do. I should tell him about my promotion at the library last month, and the guy I’ve been dating for six, and how my mother recovered from her last cancer scare with only a few more battle wounds this time around. But I can’t bring myself to say a single word, my sealed lips a barrier between my life and the memories that threaten to overtake it.

The back gate pieces itself into view in front of us through the rain. The old iron swings in at the last possible second and the deep red brick lining the drive creates a knot in my throat big enough to choke on. I blink and behind my lids, I can see a hundred pictures from my past clamoring for my present.

The leaning tree where my palms were skinned so badly, I was sure they would never heal as Paxton dared me to slide down its trunk face first. Or the short A-frame rooftop that sits off to the left, and the way you can climb onto it from the second-story closet window—if you’re brave enough to try. Or the small kitchen entry, a single-paned door with a cracked jam from two stupid kids carving their names a little too hard into it, only getting the O and the E before being swatted away by Mrs. Brunskey.

The kitchen door in question lashes out as we turn into the circular drive as we come to rest beside it. Tad puts the car in park, hurrying out his door to open mine. I beat him to it. My flat black riding boots crunch the rocks beneath them and for five glorious seconds, the rain soaks me before an umbrella can block their chill. The dripping ends of my now nonexistent curls plaster my neck, and my mascara paints tears underneath my eyes and down my cheeks, but it was worth it. I needed the icy reminder that I’m not asleep and this is no dream.

Tad’s eyes question me, concern lining his brow. I imagine he sees this house swallowing me whole again, but is at a loss on how to stop it. Instead, he holds out his arm, which I take, and glides me forward under the cover of his umbrella, up to the door. A woman, not much older than me, with a white half-apron tied around her waist, waits for me. Her hair is slicked tightly into

a bun, pulling her grey eyes into a headache I recognize. She's newer to the house, the lack of a braid her tell. You can only take the constraint of the rules in this home for so long until you start looking for loopholes. I should know. I've broken more rules the Poes have set than anyone.

My hand brushes against letters, catching on a newer 'P' scratched in just like the others, as I take my first steps inside. I feel Tad's arm slip away as he hesitates. Of course he won't follow me here. The burn of fear at walking into this alone grips my heart, but I let him go, anyway.

"Your bags will be delivered to your room, Miss Pierce. Everyone should be waiting in the Nest when you're ready," Tad says behind me, his pity evident, making my cheeks heat and stain.

"Would you like something to go before you head back into Boston, Tad? You've been at it all morning and I know your blood sugar runs low." The woman's voice is a starting pistol in this silent room.

It spurs me forward without a single glance back. It's rude and unlike the girl I want to be, *that I am now*, so I can only hope I'll be forgiven. Even if I'm not, I don't care. Not enough to stop. Not anymore. Not when I'm back here. None of this will matter by the end of the week when I'm on my flight home.

I walk through the chef's kitchen, under an archway that leads into the hall. Dark ravens and murky grey walls follow me. If I take a right, I'll be on my way to the formal room, christened the Nest, streaked with less pleasant gloom and more sorrow, right where I'm expected. Instead, I go left, climbing the wooden stairs. Instinctively, I skip every third one as I spiral up, knowing the creaks they'll give if I don't, alerting the room above someone is on their way.

Muscle memory is the damndest thing. I have no reason to hide my entrance. As every letter I've received on every holiday and birthday since I left has said, Dellbrook will always be my home. My room still sits, second door on the left, the same as it always has. My mother is back home in New York, not within shouting distance. But all my nights sneaking in and out of this same staircase overtakes my common sense. My feet rush faster than my nerves want, but twenty-seven-year-old Evangeline Pierce isn't in control anymore. Right here, right now, I am just sixteen-year-old Eve, with a bed that will be checked in ten and a dress caked in mud from the yard.

The stairs end in narrow walls lined with doors, each bearing a name of a story written long ago, by a man steeped in strange. *Eleonora. Black Cat.*

Ligeia. I pass them all, unwilling to get caught up in the nostalgia of my room, or the ones like it, just yet. Pictures of the staff throughout the years smile out at me in black and white, my own childish face catching my eyes every few steps, giving a historic feel to our modern life. I ignore them, too, as best I can, heading instead for the open room at the back.

A living room sits before me under an open rafter arch. The pale wood gleams from a fresh coat of stain that the lights pick up. I can just smell the overwhelming Pine Sol scent. A sectional sits on an antique rug, faded between brown and red, with a purple ink stain a few inches from its center. It cradles itself around an old wooden coffee table, the large screen TV it's facing, out of time from the rest. I avoid it all as I make my way to the glass doors and out onto the iron-wrought deck.

It's slick from the rain that now blows sideways onto my face. I let it whip into my cheeks and hair, closing my eyes against its wrath. I think about crying. Letting it all out here where they cannot see. Where there is no proof. Before I have to say words I don't mean and placate people with stories I'd rather forget. The afternoon is growing dark and I'm running out of time to hide.

Illness could take us at any moment, too, Evangeline. If you've learned anything from the Poes, my darling, let it be that we all must face our demons before it does, my mother said when I told her I didn't want to come, her recovery keeping her at home. I hated myself for the envy I felt at her excuse, my guilt allowing her words to be true. Forcing me to promise to stay for the week and wallow in the pain of my past. And now was as good a time as any to face them.

My hands twist against the metal of the handrail in one last act of resistance, focusing on the burn of its curves in my palm. Hair lashes against my lips as I release it and spin, tendrils sticking to my gloss as I do. I freeze in the doorway, unable to breathe, let alone move another step.

In front of me, in the shadow of the hall, a dark suit leans. His feet are kicked out, his body spreading the width of the hallway. Thick black boots, wildly out of place from his trousers, are tossed casually across each other. His hands are in his pockets, shoulders slumped heavily against the wall as if he's holding the entire weight of history on them. Damp jet-black hair curls around his ears, his eyebrows, his chin. Messy, just like the smirk I know he must be forcing himself to give. His eyes give no quarter, let no secrets slip,

and yet I remember everything I need to when he looks at me. Or rather, what I need to forget.

There is one truth that is universally acknowledged. One lesson the past has tried to teach over and over again. Only the cursed fall in love with a Poe.

I know my voice is cracking before I can even break my silence—before his name reaches my lips—which is so perfect, it makes me want to laugh. Or cry.

“Oliver.”