

“Poe: Nevermore” – Rachel M. Martens

The Curse

I found Mrs. Aaron in the kitchen, scrubbing the grout between the white tiles in the floor. She was wearing her cleaning clothes, old jeans and a t-shirt left over from a bake sale she'd helped to host five years back, the outfit completed by elbow-length rubber gloves. Upon my entrance, she seemed to freeze and looked up, her face immediately breaking into concern and guilt. She tore off the gloves and scrambled to her feet, on the verge of tears, and pulled me into a fierce hug. I grimaced and hoped she didn't notice my rigidity and my arms at my sides. Didn't she know by now how much having my personal space violated upset me? The hug literally made me nauseous. A voice whispered in the back of my mind, *But you let Frost hold you two nights ago. You never flinched.*

Mrs. Aaron pulled away, though not to a comfortable distance, and immediately fell into endless apologies. “Poe, I am so sorry. I know you'll probably never forgive me, but I really do want to be a good mother for you and I want to help you so badly, Poe...”

I cut her off abruptly, my anxiety getting the best of me. “Mrs. Aaron, please, I told you over the phone that I forgive you and I meant it.”

Softly, tears in her eyes, she touched the bruise at the corner of my mouth from her husband's ring and I jumped back a step. She gave me a look of silent apology and I returned it. It was natural for her to be this upset. She really did love me, even if it didn't

always show, and I had seen the bruise in the mirror this morning. It had grown in size and turned nearly black, the sort of shade that no amount of make-up could fully conceal. She had every right to feel guilty and alarmed. “Please,” I said quietly, my voice near a whisper. “There’s something very important that I came to ask you. It’s about my family.”

Mrs. Aaron wiped her eyes and nodded. I took that as a hint to go on and struggled with the right words. Just how did one ask if their family inherited a curse from Edgar Allan Poe? “In the hospital two days ago, I had a strange dream.” Mrs. Aaron’s eyes seemed to narrow infinitesimally, as if she already anticipated my question. The slightest trace of fear seemed to take residence in her eyes as I stumbled over the next words. “In the dream...I spoke to Edgar Allan Poe.”

My foster-mother turned away abruptly, as if trying to hide her reaction. I pushed on, my voice growing more urgent. She had reacted. She didn’t think this was some kind of delusion or simple dream. Was this actually possible? “Mrs. Aaron, he told me that my family is cursed and to ask you about it. He wanted to warn me. He said that I am in danger.”

She shook her head silently and in the tension in her shoulders, I saw the beginning of more tears. I softly touched her arm, whispering gently, “Mrs. Aaron, does this mean something to you?”

After a seemingly endless moment of hesitation, she whispered her answer. “Your father had the same dreams.”

My eyes went wide and I felt my heart begin to race. I could hear my pulse pounding in my head as the weight of the realization fell upon me. It was true. I

tightened my hand on her arm and urged her, "Please, Mrs. Aaron. I need you to tell me everything you know. If it's true...if it's true, my life is at stake, or at the least my sanity. I need to know what this is."

She shook her head once more and brought her hands to her face, beginning to sob. "Oh God, I prayed it would never come for you. Every time I laid eyes on you and saw your father, saw *him* reflected in your eyes, your face, your habits, I prayed to God that it would be satisfied and stop."

Fear began to infect my mind, my blood, every cell in my body. She was joking. She *had* to be joking. "What is it?"

Mrs. Aaron turned to me and I saw more horror than I'd ever seen in someone, myself included, burning in her eyes and countenance. "It's true!" she gasped, every ounce of her voice tinged with terror and confession. "All of it! Your father was haunted by his curse since he was even younger than you. Edgar Allan Poe's blood runs in your veins and with it a horrific curse."

"But what is it?!" I snapped, beginning to panic.

She took my hand in her own and gripped it so tightly that I thought my fingers would break. "It is his nightmares, Poe. Your parents told me in their will that it would come for you. The curse began with nightmares haunting Edgar Allan Poe, nightmares that would contribute to and inspire his writing, as well as destroy his life. Your father had learned in his lifetime that over two hundred years ago a man named John Allan hired a woman he didn't entirely understand to curse his foster-son. He didn't intend the injury she would cause, not to such an extent, but that witch's curse was cast to live on through every last direct descendant of Edgar."

I gaped at her in disgust. “My God, why would he do such a thing to his own foster-son?”

She stared at me levelly. “Why would my husband want to kill you? Something terrible came between them, something that no one else knows about, much less understands, and it led to something terrible.”

“What is the curse, then?”

Mrs. Aaron released my hand, seating herself heavily, wearily, upon the nearest stool. “Edgar Allan Poe’s nightmares, his writings and his life, will haunt you, just as they did your father. Some of the nightmares can be prevented, but you will not always recognize them until it’s too late. Your family was killed by this curse, Poe.”

My eyes tightened in pain and fear. “Is it only after me?”

She nodded. “Yes, but often indirectly. Your father’s best friend died brutally as a casualty. Buried alive. The curse will try to destroy you psychologically and emotionally as well as physically.”

I shook my head and felt my nails drive into my palm as I fisted my good hand. “I cannot do this, Mrs. Aaron. This is...impossible and horrible. And I do not have the strength to handle it. I don’t want this.”

Tears streamed down her face as she looked at me with something eerily like grief, a foreshadowing of the tragedy to come. “Poe. If you can’t prevent these nightmares or find a way to end the curse, you will lose everything.”