



From the MixCache.com library

SAMPLE COPY

The Glass Orchard

MixCache.com

SAMPLE COPY

Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** - Edenvale's Gathering Storm
- **Chapter 2** - The Reading of the Will
- **Chapter 3** - Fractured Roots
- **Chapter 4** - The Photograph in the Conservatory
- **Chapter 5** - Unspoken Goodbyes
- **Chapter 6** - Letters in the Attic
- **Chapter 7** - Echoes from the Greenhouse
- **Chapter 8** - Intruders in the Night
- **Chapter 9** - An Unwelcome Visitor
- **Chapter 10** - The Past Unearthed
- **Chapter 11** - Sibling Faultlines
- **Chapter 12** - Veiled Truths
- **Chapter 13** - The Pact
- **Chapter 14** - The Locket's Secret
- **Chapter 15** - Among the Orchids
- **Chapter 16** - The Cracked Foundation
- **Chapter 17** - Shadows in Glass
- **Chapter 18** - Revelations and Rifts
- **Chapter 19** - Under Watchful Eyes
- **Chapter 20** - Nightfall in the Orchard
- **Chapter 21** - Breaking the Silence
- **Chapter 22** - Crossroads
- **Chapter 23** - Inheritance of Truths
- **Chapter 24** - Forgiveness in Bloom
- **Chapter 25** - The Second Chance

Introduction

Every family has a story, but in the Dunning family, legend bleeds seamlessly into lived experience, and secrets grow as wild as the ivy that blankets their ancestral estate. In the heart of Edenvale—a town named for beginnings, but haunted by unforgotten endings—the Dunnings carved out their legacy among orchard rows and glass walls, nurturing fruit and family within the same tense boundaries. The estate's ornamental greenhouse, known to all as the Glass Orchard, stands as both crowning jewel and silent witness. It is a labyrinth of overgrown vines, shattered panes, and memories pressed between moss-stained bricks—a monument to ambition, isolation, and, most of all, to Viola Dunning herself.

Viola's life was marked by contradiction: generosity tightly wound with secrecy, warmth curdled by sudden distance. Neighbors might recount her sharp wit over local fairs or her triumphant roses at the annual flower show, yet even longtime residents of Edenvale admit they hardly knew the woman behind those violet eyes. Reclusive after a youthful scandal and withdrawn further with age, Viola's only true confidant seemed to be the greenhouse—her sanctuary, her laboratory, her treasure chest of enigma.

For her estranged grandchildren, the Dunning siblings, Viola's passing is not simply a loss but an unsettling summons. Grown apart by years of distance, misunderstanding, and the fractures that only families can inflict, they return to Edenvale as both mourners and strangers. The estate beckons with old comforts and new tensions—a tapestry of childhood games, hushed arguments, and the metallic tang of unresolved grief. The weathered perfection of the orchard vines belies the bitter disputes and private regrets that follow them down the lantern-lit corridors of the manor.

But this is no ordinary homecoming. Viola, in death as in life, has devised her own peculiar test: only by piecing together the truth behind her legacy can her heirs hope to inherit. Her last message—delivered in a tone at once affectionate and imperious—invites the siblings into a labyrinth far more perilous than the one of glass and green. Beneath the deliberate enigmas and sentimental clues lies something more dangerous still: an inheritance not just of property, but of secrets long buried and grievances long ignored.

As summer ripens over Edenvale, the Glass Orchard draws its new caretakers into a game in which the past is never truly past, and redemption—like any fruit worth savoring—must be earned. It is a place where light refracts through fractured panes, illuminating sins, truths, and the possibility for healing in equal measure. To cross its threshold is to confront the tangled roots of family, the perils of secrets, and the all-too-human desire for second chances.

Within these pages, you are invited into the Dunning family's world—where mystery and memory wind together, and the fate of an inheritance is nothing compared to the fate of their hearts. Welcome to Edenvale. Welcome to The Glass Orchard.

SAMPLE COPY

CHAPTER ONE: Edenvale's Gathering Storm

The call had come just after dawn, slicing through Liam Dunning's fitful sleep like a shard of glass. His phone, usually a lifeline to a world of deadlines and digital design, felt cold and alien in his hand. "Liam? It's your aunt Clara. It's about Viola." The words, delivered in Clara's usual clipped tones, still managed to convey an unfamiliar tremor. Liam hadn't needed her to finish the sentence. He'd known. Viola, the immovable matriarch, the formidable architect of both his childhood fears and his earliest fascinations, was finally gone.

He ran a hand through his perpetually disheveled dark hair, a futile attempt to smooth away the exhaustion etched into his features. The news hadn't hit him with a wave of grief, not precisely. More like a slow, deliberate deflation, the air hissing out of a balloon he hadn't even realized he'd been holding. Their relationship, if one could even call it that, had been a careful dance of avoidance for the better part of two decades. Still, the idea of Edenvale, of the sprawling estate, without Viola Dunning at its stern helm, felt impossibly hollow.

Packing was a blur of practicalities: a week's worth of clothes, his laptop, a battered copy of a botanical guide he'd found tucked away in a dusty corner of a secondhand shop. He'd always been drawn to the hidden language of plants, a silent echo of the Glass Orchard's allure he'd tried to suppress. The drive from the city, usually a chaotic symphony of horns and hurried curses, was instead a quiet meditation on absence. The urban sprawl gradually gave way to rolling hills, then familiar signs for Edenvale, a town that smelled faintly of damp earth and ripe fruit, even in late summer.

Edenvale itself seemed to brace for the influx of the Dunning siblings, or so Liam imagined. It was a picturesque town, almost aggressively quaint, with its historic clock tower and its main street lined with independent boutiques and a surprisingly robust artisan bakery. But beneath the surface, Edenvale held its breath. Everyone knew about the Dunnings, about their old money and their older secrets. Viola had been both the town's eccentric benefactor and its most impenetrable enigma. Her death was less a tragedy and more a significant shift in the local ecosystem.

As Liam's car crunched gravel beneath its tires, approaching the familiar wrought-iron gates of the estate, he felt the first true pang of unease. The Dunning manor stood on a gentle rise, a grand old house with more turrets and gables than strictly necessary, its stone façade softened by creeping ivy. It was beautiful, undeniably, but also formidable, a structure built to withstand generations of storms, both literal and metaphorical. And then, off to the side, glinting in the afternoon sun, was the Glass Orchard, a sprawling emerald jewel, its panes reflecting the sky in a thousand

fractured pieces. It looked just as he remembered, a glittering, fantastical edifice, yet somehow more imposing, more silent than he recalled.

He parked next to a sleek, expensive-looking sedan he recognized immediately: Julian's. His brother, the golden boy, the successful architect, always arriving in style, always impeccably dressed. Liam sighed. This reunion was going to be a minefield of unspoken resentments and carefully constructed facades. Julian, two years Liam's senior, had always been the polished counterpoint to Liam's artistic disarray. Their last conversation, nearly three years ago, had ended with a slammed phone and a vow never to speak again. Viola's passing, it seemed, trumped even their stubborn pride.

He hauled his duffel bag from the trunk, the familiar scent of damp earth and ancient wood smoke filling his lungs. As he approached the front door, the heavy oak swinging open before he even reached it, he saw Julian framed in the entryway, looking exactly as he always did: handsome, composed, and utterly unreadable. Julian's dark suit was pressed to perfection, his silver tie a stark contrast to the casual rumple of Liam's travel clothes. His eyes, the same piercing blue as Viola's, held a glint of something Liam couldn't quite decipher. Relief? Resignation? Annoyance? Probably all three.

"Liam," Julian said, his voice level, betraying nothing. It wasn't a question, more a statement of fact, of inevitability.

"Julian," Liam replied, just as neutrally. The air between them crackled with years of unspoken history, like a static charge building before a storm. He noticed a faint smudge of dirt on Julian's otherwise pristine cuff, a small detail that snagged at Liam's observational eye. Odd. Julian was meticulously clean.

Before either could break the uneasy silence with something truly regrettable, a third figure emerged from the depths of the foyer, her vibrant red hair a defiant splash of color against the somber tones of the house. Willow. Their sister. She moved with a nervous energy, her hands fluttering at the collar of her floral dress. Willow, the youngest, the dreamer, the one who had always tried to bridge the chasms between her brothers, and inevitably failed. She looked pale, her freckles stark against her skin, but her eyes, wide and green, held a familiar spark of anxious hope.

"Oh, Liam!" she exclaimed, her voice a little breathless, and then she was launching herself into his arms, a rare spontaneous gesture in their family. Liam, surprised, hugged her back awkwardly. Willow always felt like a delicate bird, easily bruised, and he found himself instinctively protective.

"Hey, Will," he murmured, patting her back. He could feel the tension radiating off her, a nervous hum beneath her forced cheerfulness. "You alright?"

She pulled back, her smile wavering. "As alright as can be, I suppose. It's... strange.

Being back here. Without her.” Her gaze flickered towards Julian, then away, as if unable to hold the weight of his stoic presence.

Julian cleared his throat, breaking the momentary intimacy. “Aunt Clara’s in the drawing-room. She’s been making calls all morning. The funeral is set for Tuesday. Small affair, as per Viola’s wishes.” His tone was efficient, businesslike, as if discussing a corporate merger rather than their grandmother’s last rites.

Willow wrung her hands. “She didn’t want a fuss. She always said that. But it still feels... wrong. So sudden.”

Liam nodded, remembering the abruptness of the news. Viola, for all her age and reclusiveness, had seemed immortal. “What happened, exactly?”

Julian’s jaw tightened almost imperceptibly. “Heart attack. In her sleep. Peaceful, they said.” There was a pause, heavy with unspoken questions. “The doctor confirmed it. No foul play.”

No foul play. The phrase hung in the air, a peculiar emphasis from Julian. Liam raised an eyebrow, but said nothing. He simply nodded, pretending to accept the pronouncement without question. He knew Julian, knew the subtle shifts in his demeanor, the way he stressed certain words when he was either entirely certain or trying very hard to convince himself of something.

“Come on,” Willow urged, tugging at Liam’s sleeve. “Let’s go see Aunt Clara. She’s been beside herself.”

As they walked through the hushed grandeur of the foyer, Liam’s eyes scanned the familiar surroundings. The grand staircase, the faded tapestries depicting bucolic hunting scenes, the heavy, dark furniture that looked as though it had been in the family for centuries. Every object held a memory, a whisper of a past he’d tried to forget. He could almost hear Viola’s sharp voice echoing from the study, or the tinkling of her teacup in the parlor. This house was a museum of their childhood, and every artifact was tinged with the complicated emotions of growing up under Viola’s formidable shadow.

The drawing-room was exactly as he remembered it, a cavernous space filled with antique furniture and the scent of lemon polish and dried potpourri. Aunt Clara, a frail woman with Viola’s sharp features softened by worry, sat huddled on a velvet armchair, a teacup trembling in her hand. She looked up as they entered, her eyes, though red-rimmed, lighting with a fragile relief.

“Oh, my dears,” she whispered, her voice reedy. “You’re all here. Finally.” She looked from Julian to Liam, then to Willow, a silent plea in her gaze for unity, for something

resembling a family. It was a plea that had gone unanswered for years.

Liam offered her a small, sympathetic smile. "We're here, Aunt Clara."

Julian gave a curt nod. "Anything we can do?"

"Just... be here," Clara murmured, gesturing vaguely at the room, at the heavy air thick with unspoken grief and decades of familial discord. "It's just so much. And the will... well, that's another matter entirely." She wrung her hands, then took a shaky sip of her tea. "Mr. Abernathy, Viola's lawyer, he's coming tomorrow morning. He said... he said it's very specific."

Willow frowned. "Specific how, Aunt Clara?"

Clara wrung her hands again, her gaze darting to the window, towards the distant gleam of the Glass Orchard. "Just... Viola specific. Cryptic. He seemed rather... amused, if I'm honest. Said it wouldn't be simple."

A sense of foreboding settled over Liam. Nothing with Viola had ever been simple. Her life was a tapestry woven with threads of hidden meaning, of subtle challenges, of riddles she expected you to solve without ever truly knowing the question. And now, even in death, she was still playing her games. He exchanged a brief, knowing look with Julian. For once, they seemed to be on the same wavelength, united in their shared exasperation, their shared history with their enigmatic grandmother. This was only the beginning. The storm, it seemed, was just gathering over Edenvale.

This is a sample preview. Purchase the book to read the full content.

Visit MixCache.com to purchase the complete book.

SAMPLE COPY