

Inheritance

Pages: 286

Format: pdf, epub

Language: English

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Angelo Mifsud

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First published in Australia in 2014 by Potted Tree Books

ISBN-13: 978-0-9873562-5-3

ISBN-10: 0987356259

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Nothing becomes real till it is experienced – even a proverb is no proverb to you till your life has illustrated it.

John Keats

Acknowledgement

My gratitude goes to my family for their patience and support.

I also wish to thank my friends Cleon Walters, Helen Ayres and David Whelan for their advice and assistance during the various rewrites.

Most importantly, my sincere gratitude goes to my RAAF colleague, Sue Adams, who dared me to create and write this story so long ago.

Chapter One

Nick Kenby stepped onto the platform of Sydney Central Railway Station. People rushed past him. He looked lost and overwhelmed by the confusion around him.

'It's this way dear.' An elderly woman took his hand and led him towards the iron gates at the end of the platform, and went through to the concourse.

'Thank you for your help.' He said. The woman smiled and left him to gaze about him.

'Get out of the way yer mug!' A man shouted as he pushed Nick out of the way. Nick quickly sat on the nearest bench he could find and waited for the crowd to pass, and as he did, he took out two letters George Pankhurst, his mother's solicitor, had given him that morning. One was a letter of introduction, and the other were instructions to get to his Aunt's house.

He was tired from the day's travel as he read the instructions, and then stopped a man rushing past.

'Could you tell me where Eddy Avenue is please?'

'Over there, it's the exit over there.'

Nick made his way to the exit and came out onto a wide and crowded footpath. As he pushed and jostled his way to the kerb, a heavysset man, in a wide brim Fedora and a tan overcoat, followed him. He stood beside Nick near a newsstand as it sheltered them from the cold gusts of wind that

blew down the street.

Suddenly, he saw the taxi rank. He hurried to join the people in the queue and then, from within the newsstand, heard the start of the national evening news.

'It is six thirty, eighth of June 1960. Here are the headlin...'

Nick hurried to the end of the queue as the man went and stood beneath an old sandstone archway, and watched.

Nick, apprehensive that he now was to meet his mother's sister moved to the front of the queue, and the man rushed to a parked black Studebaker.

A taxi pulled up and a short thin man jumped out.

'I take bag?' He took Nick's case and put it in the boot. 'Where to Mista?' He asked as he sat behind the wheel.

'To 131 Dillon Street, Paddington, please?'

The taxi moved out in to the heavy evening traffic and slowly made its way through the city, down Oxford Street and through major road works. Nick was finally to meet his Aunt and after he buried his mother a fortnight ago, she was the only relative he had left. Now, as his mother had instructed, here he was, to claim his father's inheritance. Suddenly as he gazed out the window, he was thrown against the seat in front of him.

'Mista, you okay? That black car, almost run us off road.'

'Where, where are we?' Nick asked, as he struggled into his seat, wound the window down, and stuck his head out into the cold air. He drew a deep breath when he saw the deep hole they had just missed. The taxi forced its way back into the traffic.

'Do you know where you are?' Nick asked, concerned as they passed empty and partially demolished buildings. But suddenly they drove into a well-lit street, lined with denuded trees and neat terraced houses. The taxi stopped, the driver jumped out and placed Nick's case on the footpath.

'Two pound fifteen shilling.' He said as Nick stepped out under a streetlight and searched his pockets for the fare. Finally, he handed the driver three pound notes.

Nick put the change in his pocket and as the taxi drove off faced a small cream terrace house. The 131 stood out clearly in the grey moonlight, and looking around he saw the light in the window.

'Aunt Mary, like it or not, here I come!' He said aloud, took a deep breath, and boldly walked to the wrought iron gate. A strong smell of the sea permeated the air as foghorns sounded in the distance. The cold mist seeped into his clothes as he placed a hand on the gate's cold frame. It opened to a loud high-pitched screech that echoed in the quiet street.

Startled, hesitated, his teeth chattered, and then continued up the short path to the veranda steps. He stood at the front door, as the ghostly shadows flickered on the wall. Trembling, he lifted a hand to the knocker. His fingers numb from the cold, he lifted and brought it down hard against

the plate. He stood back to wait.

A slender woman, in a black knee-length dress, stood in the doorway.

'Can I help you?'

'Hello? I think you're expecting me? Nicholas Kenby, Mary Jamieson's nephew?'

'Yes Mr Kenby, we've been expecting you. Please come in.' She stepped aside and he came into the narrow hall. She smiled reassuringly as she closed the door behind him. She then led him down the hall and stopped halfway in front of a closed door.

'Leave your..' She stared at the battered old school case. 'Is that all the luggage you have?'

'Yes, I don't have many clothes.'

'Sorry, I didn't mean to pry. I'll tell Miss Jamieson you're here.' She opened the door, went inside, and closed it behind her.

'Mr Kenby, please come through.' she said when she came back.

He straightened himself and followed her inside. They stood in the middle of the room, classical music played in the background in the subdued light. He could just make out a person seated in front of him by the fireplace.

The room was smoky from the crackling embers that floated up the chimney. The haze and dim light added to the intrigue of the occasion. The room brightened as the light came on and revealed a smallish white haired woman sitting in an armchair.

'Miss Jamieson, this is Nicholas Kenby, your nephew.'

'I know who it is, you stupid girl! Go and make the coffee.' She waited for the woman to leave.

'Sit down young man.'

Nick sat at the far end of the settee.

'Sit here!' She said sternly and pointed, with her walking stick, to a spot closer to her. Clumsily, he shifted down avoiding her stare.

'Is there a letter you're supposed to give me?'

'Oh sorry I forgot.' He chuckled nervously, as he stood and handed her the letter of introduction. 'Here you are. Sorry, it's a bit crumpled.'

Distracted by its appearance, she angrily flattened and smoothed it out on her lap. She put on her spectacles and read.

He looked around the room. It had an old and dusty smell. A white desk with curved legs and gold trim sat under the window. There was a tall wide cabinet in the corner, and bookcases lined the wall filled with china and statuettes, and not many books.

She folded the letter as the other woman returned with the coffee.

'How do you like your coffee?' Mary asked.

'I'm sorry but could I have tea instead?'

'Glenda get Mr Kenby tea, and pour me a Scotch.'

'Yes Miss.' Glenda replied and left.

Mary stood up and followed Glenda, his letter still in her hand. She was a small framed woman, and the pink full-length long-sleeved dress, the scarf around her neck, reflected the fashion popular before the War.

He yawned, tired, and looked at the time, twenty past seven. He had been up since five, and all he needed now was a good night's sleep.

Glenda soon returned with a teapot and put it on the coffee table.

'I'm sorry, I haven't introduced myself. I'm Glenda Delaney, your Aunt's maid.'

He stood up and extended his hand. 'It's nice to meet you.' They shook hands.

'Shall I pour?' She asked.

'White with two please.'

He stared at her lustfully and sat down as she leant over in front of him. He continued to stare. She sensed his gaze and looked up with a smile. Embarrassed he looked away. She poured his tea and the milk and then firmly placed the cup and saucer in his hand. She offered him the sugar bowl. He quickly took two spoonful's and stirred the tea monotonously as she went to the cabinet.

She took out a bottle and a small glass and brought them back to the small table by Mary's chair. She filled the glass with an amber liquid, and left the room.

As Glenda left Mary returned and, he, immediately stood up.

'Thank you Nicholas, please sit down. Good, I see Glenda has brought your tea.' She said, sat down and picked up her glass.

'I had a dog. I called Tee, can't remember why, do you have a pet?' She took a sip, her eyes fixed on his face.

'Yes.' He replied, puzzled by her question. 'Actually, it was a cat.'

'What's its name?'

'Flea, a kitten, I remember we called it that because it was full of fleas, and in the end that's what killed her.'

'I see, yes, thank you.' She stood and walked over to him. 'Welcome nephew.' She kissed him on the cheek. 'Only you, your mother, and Ben knew about Flea.' She sat down. Who told her about

Flea?

'Sorry I didn't see your mother before she passed away, God bless her.'

'No one in the family ever contacted her.'

Mary, ignoring him, went to the cabinet and with an empty glass came back to the small table. She filled both glasses and then handed him one.

'May she rest in peace?' She raised her glass in salute. 'And I hope through our kinship we will be friends.'

He raised his glass in reply, and they drank. He coughed and gasped for air as he fought to get his breath.

'Glenfiddich, your father's favourite.' She smiled vindictively and sat down. She now faced the fireplace and stared at the embers floating up the chimney, twirling the empty glass in her hand.

'Tell me about yourself.'

'What would you like to know?' He still held his throat, and then sat down.

'What did you do when you left school?'

'Worked on the land and helped Mum, especially after Uncle Ben died.'

'No University, like your father? He would've liked that.'

'I know he went to University but I prefer the outdoors.'

'How old are you?'

'I'm twenty-one.'

'Still, you're young enough to learn.' She paused. 'Do you have a girlfriend?'

'Not strictly a girlfriend, just a friend.' He chuckled. 'She helped so much after Mum died I would not have known what to do if she hadn't been there.' He put his glass down.

'What's her name?'

'Amy Kingsley. Mum liked her a lot, but her father doesn't like me, reckons I'm reckless.'

'Well we won't worry about her?' She replied.

Nick, tired, and the effect of the Scotch didn't help, wanted to go to bed. She saw his angst and smiled, rang a small bell on the side table.

Glenda appeared instantly and surprised them both as she rushed in, and waited in the doorway.

'Show Nicholas to his room, he's had a long day and needs rest.' She refilled her glass and

returned to stare at the fireplace. 'Good night Nicholas, we'll talk more in the morning.'

'Thanks for putting me up tonight, and hope it isn't too much trouble. Good night, see you in the morning.' He said and went to Glenda who led him out to the hall.

Chapter Two

His Case was not there, He became frantic and stared angrily at her.

'It's okay, I've taken it up to your room.' She closed the living room door.

'I thought someone nicked it.'

'Come on, I'll show you the downstairs so you'll know your way around.' They walked down the hall. 'This is the dining room.' She pointed to a room opposite the stairs. They continued on, made a hard right then a hard left into the kitchen, and out the back door.

She showed him the bathroom, come laundry, a small room with a concrete floor. A copper, to boil clothes, stood in a corner near a bath and washbasin. A small mirror and cabinet, near a gas water heater, was above the basin. She showed him how to work the gas heater, which gave him a chance to get closer to her.

'Betcha it's cold in here at night. Are there any towels?' He said as they went outside.

'There's a fresh pair in the bottom drawer of the chest in your room.' She pointed to a door next to the bathroom. 'The WC is in here.'

'Gee, I'd have walked a mile back home.' He replied excitedly and followed her inside. She went through the kitchen to the hall and then up the stairs.

They stood in front of his bedroom at the end of a narrow corridor at the back of the house. She pushed him inside. His room was large, as big as the living room in Somerton.

'This room is huge.' His case was on the end of the bed, its sheets turned down. A fireplace crackled and hissed at the end of the bed, its glow added to the dull light that came from an antique chandelier, and the dark purple floral wallpaper.

'I hope you'll be comfortable but if you need anything, just ask.'

'Thanks, this is great.'

'Good night Mr Kenby, see you in the morning.'

'Good night Glenda and thanks.'

She left closing the door behind her as a clock, downstairs, chimed a quarter to ten.

He stood at the end of the bed, yawned and stretched, and opened his case. To his surprise he found his clothes ruffled and in a mess. Could it have happened when the car ran off the road?

As he unpacked, he found his mother's letters and photos scattered amongst the clothes, which made him suspicious. Amy found them at the back of his mother's wardrobe. He gathered them up and put them back in the envelope, and as tired as he was, took a letter from the bundle, and placed it on the pillow.

He changed into his pyjamas, climbed into bed and sighed with delight at its firmness, laid back and read the letter. Funny enough, it was from Mary, and dated the 19th December 1959. It began with the normal niceties but halfway down the page, the scrawny hand made it difficult to read, mentioned David, his father, had passed away on the 20th of November, and although Nick never met him, he was still saddened by the news. Then, Mary asked for his mother's forgiveness for the hurt she had caused.

Angrily, he folded the letter and returned it to the bundle, got out of bed and turned the light out, and in the dark, stumbled back into bed.

He slept in patches and snatches, tossing and turning. His mother's image continually appeared in his half sleep. He could see her in the hospital bed as plain as day, ashen faced and eyes closed.

'Hello gorgeous.' She opened her eyes as he hugged her. 'You sure know how to scare a guy.'

'Nicholas.' She paused. 'I'm sorry.'

'It's okay Mum, it's okay.'

She patted the bed and he sat down beside her. She held his hand and squeezed it tight.

'Everything will be fine. They're taking good care of you, aren't they?'

'I'm all right, but I want you to listen.' She paused wetting her lips. 'It's time for you know the truth about your father and your Aunt Mary.'

'Don't worry about it now, you can tell me later...'

'You have to know and should've told you before. When you hear, you'll understand.' She wiped her face and eyes with her lace-trimmed handkerchief. 'My sister, Mary, and I went to our first real high society ball, and that's where I met and fell in love with your father. He was tall and handsome and much older than me. He was influential in the social set of Sydney. As a solicitor, he had a small office in Pitt Street. We courted, and after a short time, he proposed marriage, which I accepted.' She grimaced with pain. 'Your grandfather would not give his permission saying David was too old. I vowed to marry David no matter what.' She paused and tears welled in her eyes. 'I wanted to show my father that I could make up my own mind, and married in the Registry.' She fought for breath. 'We went on a short honeymoon and when we returned rented a flat above David's office. The first months were full of love and tenderness; we went everywhere together, dined in exclusive restaurants, the theatre and society balls. People now knew of us and David's law practice grew with new clients and contacts. My father still refused to acknowledge us.'

Nick remembered fetching a towel for her, and a drink. He tried to persuade her to rest, but she refused.

'My mother was ill but father refused to let her see or speak to me and then when she passed

away, God bless her, I lost my best friend. Mary worked for father and after Mum died, visited us secretly every day. On her visits, she told David about father's scrap metal business and David used this knowledge to increase his international contacts. With Mary's help I hoped to reconcile with my father but it was not to be.' She paused and took a drink. Nick remembered her distraught appearance and urged her to rest.

'Mary's advice, as time passed, was important for David and they corroborated more. Then he offered her a place and share in our business, and knowing Mary's obsession for wealth, I wasn't surprised when she accepted. Our father blamed me for Mary's betrayal and it was then, I found I was pregnant.' She smiled and stretched out her trembling hand and stroked his face.

'I was so happy, but when I told your father, he flew into a rage and walked out. Distraught, I didn't know what to do and went to Mary. She was happy with my news but defended David saying he was under a lot of stress with the business. Our father was spreading lies, which was driving our clients away. With David, and now Mary, gone I was scared. David came home and rushed into my arms begging forgiveness as he hugged and kissed me. Believing all was right I looked forward to having my baby. The months flew by and you were almost here. I saw less and less of your father. Mary said he was working long hours to build a future for you and wanted financial security for us. Finally, you were here, early in the morning. It was the happiest day of my life.'

Nick stirred as his mother's image squeezed his hand.

'Your grandfather refused to see you, which disappointed me.' Nick remembered rubbing his mother's arm and again asked her to rest, but again she refused. 'We came home and got you settled. David was cold and distant, and to make things worse Mary acted the same. At the time I didn't see the deceit and believed it to be normal with a new baby. After a few days, I couldn't cope with feeding or caring for you. It was then your father said he arranged for you and I to leave Sydney. We were to go to the country to rest. They had organised for a friend to look after us. I refused to go, but Mary convinced me it was for the best, especially for my baby...'

Nick, half asleep, heard the noises and whispers downstairs, as the clock struck midnight.

Glenda was half way up the hall when she heard the knock.

'Who in the hell is this? For goodness sake, it's midnight!'

Mary came out of the living room with her walking stick, joined Glenda, and together made their way to the front door. Glenda, hesitated, and then opened the door. She sighed and stepped out on to the veranda with her hands on her hips.

'Hi Glenda, it's only me and Shorty. Is MJ still up?' Lofty asked.

'Do you two know what time it is?' Mary whispered sternly as she rushed past Glenda waving her walking stick menacingly.

'Yeah, it's midnight.' Shorty pulled him back by his coat-tail and beyond the swaying walking stick.

'You missed didn't you! There's nothing you can do now, good night!' Mary went back inside. 'Glenda closed the door and go to bed!'

'Yes Miss Jamieson.' Glenda went inside and closed the door behind her, and watched Mary go up the stairs. What did she mean they missed? She went to the living room, cleared up, then to the kitchen, and washed up. She then checked doors and windows, and went to bed.

Lofty and Shorty sat in the black Studebaker and watched the house, and waited for the lights to go out.

Nick, now awake, listened to his stomach grumble and gurgle. He had not eaten since lunch on the train. He sat up, the fire was out, and the house was deadly silent. Slowly he got out of bed and fumbled his way to the bedroom door. He stuck his head out and could hear the tick tock of the clock downstairs, and looking up to the end of the corridor could see the moonlight through the glass door. Cautiously, in the chilled air, he crept towards the banister and the landing, and quietly made his way down the stairs. When he reached the bottom, hesitated and got his bearings then continued to the kitchen.

He felt his way along the dark corridor and finally walked into the kitchen. The moonlight, from the window above the sink, gave him enough light to see. He closed the door and switched on the light and then went straight to the fridge, opened it, and looked inside. A plate, with a cooked chicken, was the closest piece of food he saw. He took it out, sat down at the table, his back to the door and, using his fingers, took chunks of chicken and shovelled it into his mouth as fast as he could.

The door opened behind him, he turned and expected to see his Aunt, but instead, it was Glenda, she stood in the doorway but from a different door and next to the one he came in.

She stood there, in a heavy red tartan robe, with her hands on her hips, and stared at him menacingly.

'What are you doing?' She whispered angrily. 'You should b....' She paused. 'Oh dear, I didn't offer you anything to eat when you arrived. I'm so sorry can I get you something hot rather than that cold chicken? I'll make you a cup of tea?'

'Its fine Glenda, I've had more than enough, thanks.'

'I should've asked.' She now faced him. 'Miss Jamieson will be angry when I tell her. And I made sandwiches too they're at the back of the fridge. Would you like those?'

'You don't have to tell her, do you? Anyway, the chicken has filled the hole.'

'All right, I won't say anything.' She looked away so not to stare at his ill-fitting pyjamas. She felt sorry for him and stood at the sink. He must feel very lonely, she thought.

'I'm going to make a cuppa, are you sure you won't have one?'

'Well, if you're having one, yes please.' He finished the last of the chicken.

He watched her as she made the tea, her body moved gracefully back and forth, and intimate images rushed through his head. She felt his gaze, turned, and seductively stared back. She placed the kettle on the gas stove and took the lid off the sprout, and felt a little special by his attention. Nick felt cocky as she organised the tea, pot and two cups, which she put on the table with the sugar bowl. He pushed the plate with the remnants of the chicken away. The kettle boiled with

beads of condensation dripping down the wall. She filled the pot with boiling water and turned it three times, just like his mother did, and placed it on the table.

'White with two, isn't it?' She poured the tea and sat down opposite him.

'Yes thanks.'

She put two teaspoons of sugar in his cup and pushed it towards him. He stirred the tea and drew the cup towards him, and stared lustily at her. He felt strange sitting there alone with this beautiful woman. What would Amy think if she was here? Cripes, she'd have my guts for garters, he thought.

She sensed his awkwardness and felt sorry for him. She knew all about his sheltered life, his mother's death, and his inheritance and the obstacles he'd face to get it.

'How long have you worked as a maid?'

'About two months.'

'This is a great cup of tea.'

The Studebaker came down Dillon Lane and parked behind the Jamieson house. Shorty got out and quietly climbed up the stairs to the back gate. As he pushed it open, the bottom scraped the concrete path and set dogs off barking in the distance.

He waited, and then continued up the narrow path to the back door. He passed the woodpile; rats darted in and out in front of him. He felt his skin crawl, and fought to ignore the temptation to throw a lump of firewood at them. He had to get inside to the Kenby kid.

He placed the key, which the boss gave him earlier, in the back door lock. As he went to turn the key, the kitchen light came on, and he, surprised, dropped down and slowly crept to the kitchen window. He raised his head up to the windowsill and peeked in. It was Kenby and, he was at the fridge. What's he doing? And why isn't he in bed?

Just at that moment, two rats ran out from under the house and over his cowboy boots. He jumped onto a large rock and crouched down motionless. He trembled at the thought that the vermin actually touched him. He got his breath and raised his head again, but now, Glenda was with the kid.

Shorty ducked down onto his haunches, not sure if she could see him. She was one smart cookie, that one, he thought. He listened for voices but could only hear muffled tones. He had to take a chance, and stood up. Kenby sat at the table feeding his face, while Glenda stood at the sink, right in front of him. Did she see him? It did not seem so but he ducked down anyway.

He cringed as more rats came from under the house, but this time chased by a black and white cat. He ignored his trepidation and lent closer to the wall, balancing unwieldy on the uneven rock. His short plump frame, difficult as it was, edged closer and closer, and strained to hear what they were saying.

Glenda, her back to the window, rubbed the back of her neck. She sensed someone behind her. She turned quickly but only saw her reflection in the windowpane. She dismissed it as her imagination and returned to the conversation.

'Have you been to Sydney before?' She still had the sensation that someone was watching.

'I think so, but it was a long time ago. I was twelve, and came on a school excursion to the Zoo. I don't remember much, but Mum asked me if anyone had spoken to me? I remember how disappointed she looked when I said no.' He stared into his cup.

'What did she mean?' She asked, her interest aroused and moved closer. 'I don't understand?'

'She expected my father to come and see me.'

'Oh, so you haven't seen Miss Jamieson since then?'

'Well I didn't know she existed until three weeks ago.'

'I'm sorry. What do you mean?'

'Three weeks ago, before Mum passed away, she told me about my father, who I never knew, and my inheritance.' He paused. 'That's why I'm here.'

'So your Aunt never knew you existed until a few weeks ago?'

'No. She was there when I was born, and Mum lost contact with my father and her family. There's so much I don't know or understand.'

'I'm sure your Aunt will tell you everything?'

'Mr Pankhurst said it was a large International Company. It imports goods and Aunt is taken care of it for me. Do you know it?'

'Yes, I know it. And you'll take over from your Aunt?'

'Yeah, that's the plan.'

She stood up abruptly, and cleared the table. Nick, surprised, stood and helped her put things in the sink. Was it something he said?

She threw the chicken bones into the garbage bin by the back door, and started to wash up. She ignored his appearance as he wiped, determined not to laugh and offend him.

Suddenly the window rattled with a loud thud. It came from outside and Nick unsure, started for the backdoor. Glenda stopped him with her raised hand, grabbed a carving knife from the drawer, and crept towards the backdoor.

Glenda, with the knife held tightly in her hand, had almost reached the back door.

'Meow meow, meow.'

She stopped, looked at Nick, and let out a sigh.

'Ha, it's only a cat!' Nick said relieved.

She remained motionless and suspicious, and then put the knife on the bench.

Shorty had lost his balance, hit his head on the wall, and fell landing on an Azalea bush under the window. He sat there motionless, the cat sound was the only thing he could think of to stop them coming outside. His head hurt as he felt the lump on his forehead, and as the seconds ticked by, he grabbed the backdoor key and crept away, crouched as low as he could back to the car.

'I think you should go to bed, you must be very tired.'

'Yeah, I am a bit, but I'm right now.' He smiled and patted his stomach.

'Breakfast is at eight sharp. She'll expect you to be on time. Do you have an alarm clock?'

'Nah, don't need one, I'm up early of a morning and, I won't be sleeping in, not tomorrow anyhow.'

'C'mon I'll take you up.'

'Okay, I don't want to get lost.'

He sneaked a look in her room as they left the kitchen, but she closed the door.

'Your Aunt is a light sleeper, so don't make any noise, or we'll both be in trouble.' She whispered and led him upstairs to his room. 'Now, are you sure you don't need the alarm clock?' She paused, pointed down the corridor. 'Your Aunt's room is the second door. Don't go in the first, it's locked?'

'Why's that?'

'It's your father's room. She wants it as he left it and no one goes inside. Rumour is the last maid was sacked because she tried to go in.'

'It's my father's room? Then I should be allowed in.'

'I'd ask first; she isn't very nice when angry.'

She stepped aside and let him enter the room. His arm brushed up against her firm breasts, he felt the nipples hard and erect, and gently pressed up against them. At first, she didn't move as his arm encircled her waist.

'Good night Mr Kenby.' She pushed him away. 'See you in the morning.' She whispered and disappeared down the stairs.

He waited until the downstairs lights went out, and then closed the door.

'Why won't she let anyone in the room?' He stood in front of the dressing table mirror. 'Oh heck, I've spent the last hour talking to her in my old pyjamas, looking like a dork.' His pyjamas were torn and threadbare. He smiled as he turned out the light, got into bed, and curled up under the covers. He drifted off to sleep, and again his mother's image came vividly to life.

'We boarded the train for Tamworth, and your father promised it would only be for a short time. The trip was long, and with you crying most of the way, was very tiresome.'

Nick remembered how she grabbed and twisted the bed sheet.

'Uncle Ben met us at the station and took us to his house. He warned me not to speak to the towns people, and if they asked, I was his sister. We were in enough trouble as it was, so I followed his direction.'

Nick could almost reach out and touch her.

'The months passed, I wrote to your father and Mary often and gave news of how much you had grown, and how we missed them. I gave these letters to Ben to post and never received a reply. It was almost your first birthday and I so wanted your father to share it with you. It was then that Ben revealed that David had abandoned us. I didn't believe David could do that? My father by now would have inquired about us and would come to help us. But Ben, ashamed, said my father died after we left Sydney, after David and Mary told him we died in childbirth. They even arranged our burial plot. How could my husband and sister, of all people, do this? I knew I had nowhere to go and no one to turn to, and accepted that I could never leave, I was a prisoner here.'

Nick remembered the tears, her heartbreak, and the pain in her face.

'Uncle Ben and I had become close, he protected us, and last Christmas we lost a friend. Mr Pankhurst, our solicitor, contacted me. Your father had passed away last November and left everything to you, on the condition, that you would get the inheritance only after I died.' She became agitated. 'You must claim your birthright. They must not take it from you. Don't trust anyone, especially Mary.'

Nick, covered in perspiration, woke up, rolled over, and drifted back to sleep.

'Good morning Mr Kenby, you'd better get up or you'll be late for breakfast, it's seven o'clock.' She said pulling the heavy curtains apart flooding the room with a burst of brightness, and left. He climbed out of bed. He had an hour to get dressed. He grabbed his tatty old dressing gown, towel, a change of clothes, and rushed down to the bathroom.

He hurriedly bathed and came back to his room. He dressed into his Sunday best; a western style blue checked shirt, a tight fitting light blue casual trouser, and black pointed dress shoes. They were the last clothes his mother bought him; he smiled when he remembered the argument they had about the colours and styles.

He stood before the dressing table mirror, arranged his clothes for the last time, and lovingly touched his mother's photo. He hurried downstairs, it wasn't eight yet.

He knew very little about his Aunt, and their relationship, although pleasant last night, how will it be from now on? What did she really think about him? She had not spoken to his mother for a long time and now controls his inheritance. Will he have to fight her for it?

As he reached the dining room door Glenda came from the kitchen with two plates in her hands. He stood back, she smiled, and he followed her in to a narrow room. An old ornate buffet was against one wall and extra chairs were against the other.

Mary, hidden from view, sat at the far end of the table behind a broad newspaper, the Sydney Morning Herald.

'Good morning.' He said unsure whether he should call her Aunt.

Glenda placed one of the plates in front of Mary, and then pointed to the chair at the other end, and his place set for him. He sat down and waited. Glenda took a silver teapot from the buffet and poured Mary's tea.

'Good morning Nicholas. I hope you slept well?' Mary folded the newspaper, and put it aside. Glenda took the other plate and placed it in front of him.

'Yes, thank you.' He stared at his bacon and eggs. 'Thanks for putting me up.'

'Thanks Glenda.' He whispered as she poured his tea and left. The radio in the hall sounded the eight o'clock news theme. They paused and listened.

'Typhoon Bloody Mary hit the China coast early this morning causing a considerable loss of life with damage to property....' Nick chuckled at the typhoon's name. Mary caught his gaze.

'You're here because of your father, that's what he wanted! Now finish your breakfast or we'll be late.'

Glenda returned with toast, and on her way out smiled and winked at him. He finished breakfast in silence.

'Were you and your mother close?'

'We were, and did a lot together. She was my friend as well as my mother, and talked about anything and everything.' Mary stood up and came towards him.

'She stole the one thing I loved and cherished. The one thing that would've made my life complete.' She clasped her hands. 'I've never had children because of your mother. He loved me but because of you I could never have his children.' Her voice quivered as she stood at the door, and faced him. 'The times I wished you were dead. I wish things were different between us, but they're not.' She blurted out and then left.

He stood up, stunned by her outburst, as Glenda came in.

'Mr Kenby.' She paused. 'Are you all right?'

Nick, upset, remembered the accidents, and near misses, he and his mother had had over the years.

'Mr Kenby.'

'Sorry?'

'You're to go with your Aunt to the Office. Be in the living room at nine sharp.'

'I might have another cup of tea please?' She poured him another cup. He stood and took the cup out to the backyard. He found and sat on an old bench on the other side of the kitchen window. Mr Pankhurst, at the reading of the Wills, said his Aunt was the executor of his father's will. He looked down the backyard and one side was an unkempt garden, while the other was a pile of soil and rocks. What did he come to? How long would he stay here? She had made it clear she hated him and his mother.

He now made his way to the back door, and as he walked past the window, he fell heavily on his knees. A broken Azalea branch, across the path, tripped him. He had torn the only good pair of trousers he had, and now they had a brownish green stain, and the cup smashed on the concrete. He kicked the branch into the garden and picked up the broken pieces of china. He hurried inside, left the broken cup on the kitchen bench, and went to the living room.

The clock was just striking nine o'clock when he walked into the living room. Mary came in. She had changed into a pale blue ankle-length dress and white gloves. Diamond rings abound on her fingers and jewelled bracelets on her wrists. A matching light coloured scarf around her neck with a cameo brooch. She held a white wide-brimmed hat and wore low-heeled shoes, a small matching handbag, and a large black briefcase.

'Good, you're on time. Now let's see what we can teach yo...' She frowned. 'Do you have a suit or another clean pair of trousers?'

'Don't have a suit, these are my only pants. I tripped in the back yard, sorry.'

'We'll fix that on our way to the office.' She turned and headed for the front door, with Nick after her.

A black Mercedes waited out front, the driver, dressed in a black uniform and cap, stood by the open door. He tapped his cap as Mary came up to the car, took her briefcase, and helped her into the backseat. Nick got in the other side and sat beside her. The driver placed the briefcase on the front passenger seat, and once settled behind the wheel, drove off.

'Sam, go to Ruben's Tailor Shop in the Cross first.'

'Yes Ma'am.'

Nick sat up when he heard the name. He had heard many stories about the Cross from his friends at the Somerton pub. They told of their experiences; the bohemians, criminals, prostitutes, and pimps. Kings Cross, a magnet for many men, young and old, was an infamous icon of Sydney and, now he'll see it firsthand.

He saw police, on foot and on horses, instead of sultry women standing on the corners. His excitement now turned to disappointment as they passed old and dirty shops. The car turned down a narrow lane and stopped outside a small shop.

Sam helped Mary out of the car and she went inside, while Nick, taking the time, looked at the tall buildings around him. He felt Sam tug at his elbow.

Nick went into a narrow shop, where rolls of cloth filled the walls. An interesting smell engulfed him as a small white haired man in a white shirt and dark trousers, held up by braces, stood talking to Mary. Nick guessed he was in his sixties. His spectacles sat on the end of his nose and from time to time would glance at Nick.

'Nick.' She said and waited for Nick to join them. 'Jacob will measure you for a suit.'

Jacob went over to the counter, and fetched a tape measure.

'But I don't have money for a suit.'

'Just stand still and let Jacob measure you.' Jacob took Nick's measurements and then disappeared through a black curtain, while Mary inspected shirts at the counter, and Nick walked around feeling the cloth.

'Madame, this is the closest I have in the young gentleman's size.' Jacob held up a charcoal coloured suit and handed it to Nick.

'Thank you Jacob.' She replied, and handed Nick a lemon coloured shirt and a mustard tie. 'Try these on with the suit, and come out so we can see how it fits.' Jacob guided him into a cubicle.

Nick was surprised how well the suit fitted. He stepped back out of the cubicle.

'That, looks much better, don't you think Jacob? You don't know how to tie a tie, do you Nicholas? Let Jacob show you.' She stepped back. 'Shoes, Jacob do you have shoes?'

'Yes Madame.' He again rushed off to the backroom and returned with three pairs of shoes. He placed them on the counter, and finished to tie Nick's tie.

'I'll never be able to do this.' Nick said frustrated as Jacob finished.

'Try these on.' She handed him a pair of tan shoes.

Nick, initially dubious, sat down and put them on.

'How do they feel?' She asked.

'Yes, very comfortable.'

'Jacob, make five suits from this material.' She handed him samples of; dark Blue, Grey, Black, light Tan, and Brown material. 'And shirts and shoes to match.'

'How many shirts would Madame wish?'

'We'll have twelve shirts and four pairs of shoes. We'll pick them up next week.'

'Yes Madame.' He wrote it all down in an old tatty exercise book on top of the counter.

'Nicholas we're late, goodbye Jacob.'

'Goodbye Madame, young Sir.' Jacob escorted them out to the street.

Nick, in his new suit, followed Mary to the car. It felt different in a way he had not felt before, he thought as he gave Sam the brown paper bag that contained his old clothes, which went into the boot.

They travelled a little way before Sam parked in front of an old sandstone building not far from the famed Sydney Harbour Bridge. Mary got out and went in the main door. Nick followed and looked up to see 'Kenby House' carved in the stone above the door.

'We own this building.' She stopped at the door. 'Sam, pick us up at twelve sharp.' She said and continued inside.

'Yes Ma'am.' Sam replied and drove off.

The smell of the sea was overpowering as he followed her through to a narrow door at the end of the foyer. He followed her into a very small room, and awkwardly stood beside her. She pressed a button on the wall, the door closed, and everything began to move. He felt his stomach drop and, in a panic, grabbed at the wall.

'I'm sorry, I forgot you haven't ridden in an elevator before, I should've warned you.' She laughed at his fear.

'I didn't know what was happening.' He said bemused. The elevator stopped and the door opened.

He followed her out onto an open space and towards two wide doors. She pushed them open and they walked into an open area with desks, organised in aisles, and people milling around them talking.

She now walked, her head held high, spoke with authority, and emitted a sense of superiority and power. The staff greeted her with enthusiasm and then their attention turned to him. Who was he?

Mary continued down the aisle, closely followed by Nick, passed a vacant desk and through a door. They walked into a lavishly decorated office. She went and stood at a large desk in front of a wide window overlooking the harbour. He stood at the window.

'Well, what do you think? Nice, isn't it? This was your father's office. He sat here for many years and, when he passed away, God rest his soul. I, on your behalf, had to take over. Soon it will be you who'll sit here.' She removed her hat and gloves, and placed them with the briefcase on the desk. She sat down while he stood at the window fascinated by the Ferries as they steamed across the vast expanse of water. She pointed to a chair in front of the desk, and as he sat down, there was a knock at the door.

'Good morning Miss Jamieson?' A tall burly man came in and stood at the desk.

'Good morning Mr Featherby. I'd like you to meet David's son, my nephew, Nicholas Kenby. He arrived last night and will take David's place.' She paused. 'Mr Featherby is our business manager.'

Featherby, with an extended hand stepped across, grabbed Nick's hand, and maliciously squeezed it.

'It's pleasure to meet you.' Nick replied and pulled his hand away, and waited for the circulation to return to his fingers.

'Likewise Mr Kenby.' Featherby smirked. His black hair had a shiny gloss and combed to hide the baldness. Nick took an immediate dislike to Featherby who towered over him.

'Mr Featherby, I want you to show Nicholas around.' She opened the briefcase. 'Explain, and show him, what we do here.' She hesitated. 'You know what I mean. Take him through the warehouse and introduce him to the staff.' She took papers out of the briefcase, and put them on the desk.

'Nicholas, listen carefully.' She looked to Featherby, but he remained motionless.

'Can I speak to you, alone please?'

'Nicholas, could you wait outside?'

Nick came out of the office and waited at the vacant desk. As he sat there, he looked about him and watched the people on the floor go about their work. They were whispering, about him no doubt, then a young woman stared at him and when he smiled, she looked away.

'Do what you're told!' Mary shouted as Featherby came out and slammed the door, which drew everyone's attention in his direction. 'What are you all looking at? Get back to work. Mr Kenby this way.'

Nick followed him to a desk in the centre of the room.

'Ladies and Gentlemen, can I have your attention please.' He waited for them to assemble around him. 'I'd like to introduce Mr Nicholas Kenby, the late David Kenby's son.' They murmured shallow greetings. 'Please make him welcome.'

A few of them came up and shook his hand.

'Thank you.' Nick replied.

Featherby then took him around and introduced them, and they briefly explained what they did. Nick listened, but found it hard to remember it all.

They went downstairs to the warehouse. Small vans were in the dock, and workers were either loading or unloading boxes. Featherby's unfriendliness was obvious, especially when Nick asked a question. They then moved to an area where large boxes were unpacked.

'Here, we unpack the goods and store them, like, for example, this Thailand silk.' He said pointing to a box at the back of the warehouse. 'It's come via Hong Kong and Taiwan, and over there, those ornaments, are from Singapore and other Asian countries.'

Nick walked up to the nearest box. It contained small Buddha statues. There were small bags lying amongst them. He checked its markings, which clearly stated 'contents: SILK - Quantity 200

ROLLS - PRODUCT OF THAILAND'.

'What if you receive the wrong thing? What do you do with it?'

'What are you on about?' Featherby retorted.

'It says this box contains rolls of silk, but there are no silk rolls here.' He paused. 'I reckon you've got the wrong box. What are those small bags with the statues?'

'Oh yes. Ah, sorry we've removed the silk and using the box for Buddha heads. The bags, ah, ah, are silica gel. That's it, silica gel. We use it to absorb moisture to protect the goods during shipping.'

'You're pulling my leg, mate!'

'Don't be a smart-ass! You've no idea what we do here. So, my advice is to listen and ask your questions when I've finished. Remember, you haven't taken over ye...!' Featherby went and spoke to a young man who moved the boxes out of sight. 'Now come this way.'

Nick followed, he saw what he saw, and Featherby had lied. He would speak to Aunt later, but was unsure how he would approach her on the silica gel question, and knew Featherby would deny everything.

Nick left Featherby and went upstairs to his Aunt's office. A young woman now sat at the desk outside the office.

'Hello, I'm Nick Kenby, is my Aunt in?'

'How do you do Mr Kenby. I'm Michelle Lang, your Aunt's secretary. Just a minute and I'll see if she can see you.' She picked up the phone. 'Your nephew is here?' She smiled seductively. 'Go right in Mr Kenby.'

She stood up, and opened the door for him.

'Thanks Michelle.' He winked as he walked passed.

Mary was at her desk signing papers. Could he trust her, but then there was his mother's warning?

'Well Nicholas, did Mr Featherby show you everything?'

'Yes thanks, but there's a lot to learn, isn't there?'

'Do you have any questions?'

'No not just yet. I don't know what to ask.' He stood by the desk. 'There's a lot to remember.'

'All right, but don't hesitate to ask.' She placed the cap on her fountain pen. 'This is all yours.' She spread her hands wide. 'So don't be afraid. You can trust me, you know.' She placed the pen on the large blotting paper and leant forward. 'You will get the hang of it.' She collected the papers and put them in the briefcase.

The phone rang. She picked it up and listened.

'Yes?' She stared at him. 'Leave it with me.' She put the phone down. 'Are you hungry? I've ordered a table at a restaurant not far from here.' She closed the briefcase, and stood up. 'We'll talk over lunch.' She locked the desk, picked up the briefcase, and they walked out of the office.

The Mercedes was waiting for them out the front, and after a short drive into the city centre, Sam pulled up in front of a tall building. They made their way down a flight of stairs and met by a man in a white shirt, a black waistcoat and trousers, and a black bow tie.

'Good afternoon Madame Jamieson, your table is ready.' He ushered them to a table in the middle of the large dining area.

'Thank you Andre, this is my nephew.' She said as they sat down.

'Nicholas, this is Andre, your father's dear friend.'

'Young Sir.' Andre gave a bow. 'Madame, how have you been? We haven't seen you since Mr Kenby passed away.'

'Well Andre, thank you. We'll have today's special, and Champagne.'

He left and soon returned with a bottle in a silver bucket and a stand, which he placed by the table. He showed the bottle to Mary, and after she approved, removed the cork, and then methodically filled their glasses.

'Madame, Monsieur, bon appétit.' He placed the bottle back in the bucket and left.

Mary lifted her glass high.

'To us. And Kenby Imports.' They both drank. Nick screwed up his face. It tasted like vinegar.

Chapter Four

The entree, the main meal came and went, and as they ate, discussed the differences between Sydney and Somerton. She drank most of the Champagne while he had the one beer. He waited for the opportunity to ask her about his mother but always found an excuse to put it off, and then, there was the silica gel incident.

André arrived with the coffee, Nick's experience with coffee had not been good, and so he did not have any.

'Aunt Mary?'

'Yes, what is it.' She slurred her words and took a sip of coffee.

'What do we buy and sell at the company?'

'Didn't Ken explain all that?'

'Yes he did, but I didn't understand it all. I'm still confused.'

Suddenly, she became alert, stared past him, and then quickly gazed down. She fiddled with the cup handle, her fingers following the curve continuously.

'I need to powder my nose.' She stood up and unsteadily made her way across the room. He sat back and waited. Why did she avoid the question?

She returned and sat down as a woman came up behind her, stopped, stared at Mary, and then went to her table.

'Now where were we? Ah yes, don't worry if you can't understand it all.' She paused and again stared behind him.

'Remember Nicholas, there's a lot to learn and...' There was a pause. 'Ken said you were confused, it's the silica gel thing, isn't it?' She fiddled with her cup. 'It's used to prevent moisture build up.' Her attention still focused behind him. 'Ken explained the reason, but you didn't believe him. I'd be careful that you have all the facts before you accuse people wrongly.'

'I didn't accuse anyone. I didn't believe the answer Mr Featherby gave me, blind Freddie could see through it. Anyway, I wasn't going to ask about that.' He said angrily.

'Treat this as a caution, do not cause trouble, remember you're the outsider, and the people you're dealing with play hard and dirty. Don't put yourself in a position where I can't help you.' She took a sip of coffee. 'There are many who are unhappy you've left Somerton.'

'Are you threatening me, like you did my mother?' He thumped his fists on the table. Everyone in the restaurant turned in their direction. 'You destroyed my mother's life and, now you want to stop me from what's rightfully mine.'

The attention was now on them. Embarrassed, he calmed down and waited for Mary's reply, but she had not heard him, and instead stared behind him. He turned around, to a couple who were in deep discussion, who looked in their direction.

Suddenly, she grabbed her handbag and ran to the exit. She paid Andre, and disappeared up the stairs. Nick rushed after her. Why did she leave like that? Who were the couple at the table behind him?

Mary sat in the back of the car. Nick jumped in the front and Sam eased the Mercedes into the traffic. After a short journey, they soon parked outside the house in Paddington.

'Good afternoon Miss Jamieson, Mr Kenby. How was your day?' Glenda asked from the doorway. Mary walked past her and did not answer.

'Good thanks.' Nick replied as they followed Mary into the living room.

'Glenda. Bring tea and coffee!' She stood by the fireplace, and waited for Glenda to leave. Nick

was by the sofa, and as she was about to speak, Glenda returned. She placed the tray on the coffee table and left. Mary poured her coffee, added a drop of milk, and sat in her armchair. Nick sat down and Glenda, unexpectedly, came back with cake and sandwiches. She sensed the tension between them and seeing he did not have a cup of tea, poured him a cup.

'It's white with two?' She asked keeping an eye on her mistress. Suddenly, the cup overflowed and made a mess. She rushed out and soon returned to clean up, and then she left the room.

'I don't appreciate our linen aired in front of strangers. I'm sure your mother would be disappointed with your exhibition. In future, we will discuss our affairs in private.'

'I'm sorry.' He replied dejected.

'Now, like civilised people, I'll explain my relationship with your father.' She stood. 'Your mother gave you her version and now, I'll give you my version, and it may be different from the one she told you in hospital.'

'How do you know that? We were alone ...' He stood and clenched his fists.

'Sit down!' She stared fiercely, and he sat down. Don't do anything stupid, he thought.

'Do you know who that is?' She pointed to the portrait above the fireplace. 'It's your father. We had met at Sydney University long before he met your mother. We were seeing each other and quarrelled, and went our separate ways.'

She moved closer to the fireplace and put her hand on the mantelpiece. 'We, your mother and I, went to a ball. He didn't notice me and danced with your mother the whole time. She fell in love with him, as I did, and after a short courtship, they were married.' She mumbled under her breath. 'After a while, he and I began to work together. He didn't remember me but our love was rekindled. Margaret...' She paced the floor agitated. 'Yes, Margaret, fell pregnant, and as much as I loved my sister I could not bear to lose him again.'

He listened as she told her story, and so far, it matched his mother's.

'I decided to kill two birds with one stone.' She poured herself another cup of coffee and then stirred it monotonously. 'After you were born, I suggested we send you and your mother away, to stay with a friend, to a place called Somerton.'

But your father, at first, disapproved, and I convinced him that your mother needed to rest, away from the hustle and bustle of the city. He agreed and you both went to stay with Ben Lawrence.' She waited for Ben's name to hit home as Nick sat there shocked and dejected.

'Lawrence was wanted for murder.' She said mockingly. 'So here, we had a man who would keep his mouth shut and never allow your mother to leave Somerton.'

'Ben a murderer, I don't believe you, not Ben.' He stood threateningly.

She sensed his anger and pushed her hand between the cushion and arm rest, and found the knife.

'Sit down Nicholas.' She waited for him to sit. 'A few months after your mother left, your grandfather died, and I now, had my father's estate, and your father.' She walked over to the window and looked out, as if expecting someone.

She turned and picked up an envelope from the desk, frowned as she flipped it over, put it down, and went back to her chair.

'Your father's business was sucking my inheritance away. Luckily, a friend invited us to join a partnership. David went with him on a buying trip with the last of my money. He returned and sold everything before they landed on the wharf. David returned my money and pocketed a fortune.'

Suddenly, she sat silent and Nick, in the dim light, could just make out her silhouette.

'We sent Lawrence money and bought Margaret the house. Your father wanted it for your comfort and safety.'

'The house, it was ours?' He remembered how hard his Mum worked to repay Ben's kindness. And all the while the house was theirs. His hate grew and wanted to make them pay.

'He did love you, and in his own way, probably still loved Margaret. As well, he loved the good life, and that, he could only have through me. So we became partners, your father and I, in the import business. He became ill, some disease in his lungs, and passed away. I had to fill his shoes in the business and the rest you know.' She stood up, took a handkerchief from her sleeve, and dabbed her eyes.

She went to the door, turned and faced him. 'I'm not asking for your forgiveness or pity.' She said and then left the room.

Nick stood under the portrait and felt nothing but hate for his father. A muffled voice came from the hall. He crept over to the door and peeked out, and saw Glenda on the telephone.

'A letter ...' She stopped when she saw him behind the door, and put the phone down. 'Mr Kenby, you gave me a fright. We've been having trouble with the phone lately and I wanted to check if it was working.' She walked away from the phone and headed to the kitchen. 'Dinner will be at six.'

He followed her to the stairs and waited, and then stared back to the phone. What letter? Who was she talking to?

He went upstairs and as he was about to enter his room, and went to his father's room instead.

'Bloody thing is locked!' He whispered. *

Nick Kenby comes to Sydney to claim his inheritance and unwittingly becomes involved in a number of murders. Immediately he is a suspect, and his Aunt, Mary Jamieson, will do anything to retain control of his inheritance. But after her business partner is murdered, she accuses Nick. He has the motive for both murders, his revenge for the past.

Nick struggles to right the wrong of the past against violence, drugs, police corruption, and his own survival.

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