

Cheyenne Blue

LOVE'S INHERITANCE



CHAPTER 1

The Daily Grind

Clea glanced up as the bells on Yarra Grind's door jangled. "It's red-hat woman and her friend who never speaks," she said to the barista, Kayla.

Kayla nodded. She reached for two of the bright, mismatched mugs they used and set them next to the espresso machine in readiness. She finished the drink she was making with a swirl of espresso art on the foam. "Latte for Eden," she called out.

Clea inclined her head at red-hat woman and her silent friend. "Hello, again. Your usual?"

Red-hat woman didn't smile. "Yes, please. And maybe we'll break the pattern and have a piece of macadamia shortbread to go with it."

"On it." Clea picked up the tongs and slid a piece of the shortbread onto a plate, then added a smaller piece with a jagged edge. "Take this one as well in support of you breaking with tradition."

Red-hat woman gave her a blank look. "Thanks." She followed her friend to their usual table in the corner.

"I don't know what they'll do if ever anyone's sitting there," Kayla said as she started on their flat whites.

"It happened once," Clea whispered back. "They didn't stay, just walked out again."

"Each to their own." Kayla nodded. "I get like that when my favourite kebab shop is out of garlic sauce. At 2 a.m., after the clubs have shut, I need that sauce."

"Obviously you don't get lucky often," the baker, Ji-hoon, called from the back of the shop where he was drizzling honey over the orange-almond

cake he'd just taken from the oven. "Who wants to kiss a face full of garlic sauce?"

Kayla wrinkled her nose at him. "Don't knock it until you've tried it," she said in a singsong voice.

A flush rose up Ji-hoon's neck. Clea suppressed a smile. Maybe one day, Kayla would stop looking for her soulmate in nightclubs and on Tinder dates and see who was under her nose—but today was not that day.

The bells jangled again, and a middle-aged man entered. His steel-grey hair barely brushed the collar of his polo shirt, and faint lines radiated from his eyes as he smiled at Clea behind the counter.

Kayla nudged Clea. "Time for your break. Your sugar daddy's arrived." She reached for two cups.

Clea nudged her back. "That joke is as old as your garlic-sauce breath. For the last time, Patrick is not my sugar daddy."

"I believe you. Thousands wouldn't. But I'm sure you're about to take your break."

"I am. Because I'm the manager, and the manager can take their breaks at a suitable time of their choosing," Clea fired back. "Lucky I like you, Kayla. Of course, I'd like you more if you stopped with that old joke."

"Stopped what?" The man, Patrick, now stood in front of the counter. "Are you causing trouble again, Kayla?"

His Irish burr fell softly on Clea's ears as she turned to him. "Kayla is flirting with insubordination again. Ignore her."

Patrick smiled. "She's all bluster, Kayla; I'm sure of it. Anyone who makes a double espresso as hearty and full-bodied as you can do no wrong in my eyes."

Clea removed her apron. "I'm on my break, Kayla. Try to not bankrupt us in the next fifteen minutes."

Kayla grinned. "I'll do my best."

Clea picked two pieces of apple-spice cake from the cabinet and weaved her way between the small tables to where Patrick now sat at the counter by the window, looking out at the street. Outside, traffic idled along Johnston Street, baking in the heat of the Melbourne summer. A train rattled over the rail bridge, and at the lights on Hoddle Street a driver leaned on the horn when the car in front seemed likely to miss the filter.

Kayla brought over their coffees and set them down.

Patrick picked up the teaspoon and stirred his, then moved the complimentary biscotti from the saucer. "How's things with you, Clea?"

"Nothing much changes in my life." Clea sipped her macchiato. "And that's the way I like it. Although Ji-hoon tried a new recipe today." She nudged the plate in Patrick's direction. "See what you think."

He picked up one piece and took a bite. "It's good." He set the cake down again.

Patrick was probably in his mid fifties but obviously looked after himself. He was trim—no beer gut hung over the waist of his casual pants—and his lightly tanned face was relatively unlined. Clean living, Clea had decided some months back when Patrick had first started coming into Yarra Grind.

She was never sure how it came about that she started taking her breaks when Patrick arrived. That it was usually a quiet time of day helped—after the morning takeaway-coffee-and-muffin crowd, before the mothers and toddlers. Sure, she'd noticed the polite older man with the Irish accent that sounded like cream and mist and heather, and their polite exchanges had morphed into longer chats. Then he'd invited her to sit with him, saying she must take a break at some point, and Clea, surprising herself, had agreed. The two or three mornings each week when Patrick came in were now a fixture for her breaks. And despite what Kayla joked about, she'd never once got the sense he had an ulterior motive or was trying to hit on her. There had to be a twenty-something-year age gap at least, and he'd mentioned his wife and daughter.

"Life is about change, Clea," he said now. "Whether we want it or not."

"Is that a roundabout way of asking if I applied for the marketing position at the Rialto?" She took a bite of apple cake. "Because if it is, the answer is no, of course I haven't, and I'm sure you knew that without asking."

A beat of silence. "I never presume. But I thought that position had potential, and the Rialto's a strong company. We all have to start somewhere."

She took a sip of her coffee and resisted the urge to shuffle in her seat. Surely, he didn't think she was lazy? She glanced around to see who was in earshot. Ji-hoon was nowhere to be seen—no doubt preparing the lunchtime baguettes—and Kayla was humming to herself as she restacked the mugs next to the espresso machine. The only other customers were

red-hat woman and her friend. "I didn't apply because it's not right for me. Marketing isn't my strong point, and I can't work my way up if I'm crap at the job they hired me for."

"If you're going to use your newly minted master's in business, you're going to have to start somewhere. How old are you?"

"Twenty-nine." She rolled her eyes. "That's what happens when you're a late starter and have to work your way through uni."

"And now you're in the job market competing against other new grads. Don't leave it too long, Clea." He paused, studying her. "I could put the word out for you."

"Or find me a job in your sausage factory." She winked.

His smile curled one side of his mouth. "Shamrock Sausages is a little more upmarket than just a factory. If I had a management position open, I'd hire you. But I don't have an opening. That's the problem with a family business—"

"I was joking," she said. "You know that, right?"

"I do. Don't worry, Clea. If I did have a position, I'm sure you'd turn it down."

He was right. And that made her squirm inside. But every time she imagined herself walking into a job interview, her impostor syndrome raised its head. She was one of hundreds with the same master's in business. Just another wannabe in chain store clothes trying to look professional. No matter how much she practiced interviews with Sage, the only ones she'd done, her mind had emptied faster than Yarra Grind's cake cabinet. But it was never going to get any better unless she at least tried.

What exactly was she waiting for? When she thought of her nebulous future business career, her dreams were of her in a power suit in a corner office with a polished desk of rainforest timber, the CEO of at least a statewide chain. So not going to happen unless she at least made a start.

Maybe next week.

"How's Zara doing with the new social media campaign?" she asked Patrick.

His lips tightened a fraction. "She's still working on it. She hasn't shown me anything yet. It's been months."

Months? That didn't sound right for what seemed like a standard campaign. But she couldn't say that to Patrick. "She's your daughter; when she does deliver, it will be stupendous and blow up the Internet. Shamrock

Sausages will be the toast of the gourmet-breakfast scene. Melbourne will be eating your blood sausage—”

“Black pudding.”

“Black pudding,” she amended, “and slicing your traditional Irish-style pork-and-sage sausages into their sandwiches, serving them up with chips, a fried egg, and a plateful of beans.”

“I hope so,” Patrick said. “I’ll bring you a sample pack for the café. If you like them, you can order more.”

“You do that.” She drained the last of her coffee.

“In return, you can give me some advice. Tell me, how would you encourage Zara to work faster?”

“One-on-one meeting,” Clea said. “It would be hard as she’s your daughter, but you need to find out—tactfully—if she’s struggling or if there’s another reason why she hasn’t produced yet. Ask if she needs more training, or different software. And give her a firm deadline. If you don’t want to do it, involve your HR person.”

“That’s sound advice.” Patrick’s eyes crinkled. “I should hire you.”

Kayla approached them. “Sorry to interrupt, Clea, but can you sign this delivery order?”

“Sure.” She felt inside her apron pocket. “Let me get a pen.”

“Here, use mine.” Patrick pulled out a silver-coloured pen from his shirt pocket.

Clea took it and removed the cap. “A fountain pen! I haven’t used one of these since calligraphy classes.” She signed her name with a flourish and handed the docket back to Kayla. “It writes beautifully.”

“Keep it,” Patrick said with a wave of his hand. “Nice to see it appreciated.”

She tried to hand it back to him. “I can’t, Patrick. It must be expensive.”

“No, it just looks it. Keep it, Clea. I have more back at the office.”

“If you’re sure, then thank you.” She recapped it and tucked it into her apron pocket. “Now, before I go back to work, tell me how your squash ladder is going. Have you finally displaced Roland, who’s topped the ladder every season since about 1980?”

“Not yet. But I play him next week. If I win, I’ll be the leader. At least for a blink and a heartbeat until he retakes it.”

“You’ll do that. I never asked you. Why squash and not, say, tennis, where you’d be outside in the sun?”

"It's high thirties out there now. Who in the name of God would want to race around a baking tennis court in this? The squash courts are air-conditioned."

"So don't play on the five days of summer we have."

He laughed. "There is that. But also, I played squash when I was a lad back in Ireland. There wasn't a tennis court in our town, but there was a handball alley and squash courts. I started playing then. We hid from the rain, not the sun."

"And you kept it up when you came here?"

"I did. Jumped off that Qantas plane in Melbourne when I was twenty-three and went straight to the squash courts," he said. "Via the backpackers and the employment agency, of course. The day I got work as a butcher was the day I joined the squash club."

"Guess that's why you look so young," she teased. "No sunlight on that pale Celtic skin of yours."

"There is that." He studied her. "What did you say your heritage was? Sure you're not Irish with that pale skin and light-brown hair?"

She laughed. "Aussie all the way. Well, three generations at least. My mother's ancestry is Polish."

"Guess that's where your pale skin comes from then." He finished his coffee and stood. "Thanks for the chat, Clea. Always a pleasure."

"You too, Patrick. Thanks for the pen. Guess I'll see you next week to find out about that squash ladder."

"You will." With a wave to Kayla, he left the shop.

Clea watched him striding down the street. Now, there was a man who had his life together.

Unlike her. For a second, she wondered if she was as bad as Zara in not moving forward. But Clea had looked at the ad for the Rialto position and seen only the skill sets she didn't have and had skipped over those she did.

Maybe she needed to focus on the positives. As Patrick did.

CHAPTER 2

Good Morning, Starshine

A few days later, Clea trudged up the two flights of steps to the apartment she shared with her best friend Sage.

She opened the door, and a waft of tepid air seeped out, the rattle of the ancient air conditioner nearly drowning out the traffic noise from Hoddle Street. Sage was in the kitchen, back to her, their ponytail brushing their narrow shoulders as they stirred something at the cooker. They lifted their wooden spoon in salute.

Clea walked up and peered around their arm. "Is that dinner? Smells... funky."

Sage stirred faster. "It's just paella—you're probably smelling the prawns. They were marked down to stupid level, but they seem okay." They picked up the container of dried chilli and shook it liberally over the rice.

Clea nodded. "Gourmet" had not been in their vocabulary when they were two impoverished students living together. Now they both had reasonable jobs, things had improved somewhat, but old habits died hard. "Wine?" she asked. She pulled open the fridge without waiting for an answer and hauled out the five-litre cask of nondescript white.

At least they had moved on from using Vegemite jars as wine glasses. She pulled two glasses from the shelf and filled both. "Sláinte."

"Bazooka!" Sage replied. They lowered the stove heat, then took the few paces to the couch and threw themselves down, long legs draped over the end, the wine in their glass miraculously not spilling. "So, what's new and exciting today?"

Clea sucked her bottom lip. "Ji-hoon made a passionfruit custard slice. It was divine. I would have brought you a piece, but it sold out by lunchtime. You?"

"I don't start until ten tonight. But Shout About It is playing, if you want to come down."

"I'll think about it. Early start tomorrow. Six."

"And this is why you did your master's in business." Sage sighed theatrically. "So you can get up at five every morning to open a coffee shop."

She nudged them. "And this is why you did your master's in psychology, so you can start work at ten every night to throw drunk people out of nightclubs."

"We're a pair of losers." Sage took a mouthful of wine and rested the glass on their bony knee. "You need that old Irish dude to offer you a job in his sausage factory."

"He didn't come in again today." Clea took a mouthful of wine. Its sour aftertaste had long ceased to bother her. "Not since last week. That's unusual."

"He's a customer; he doesn't have to report in."

"I know. But he tells me when he's going to skip. I guess something came up."

"Most likely." Sage drained their glass in two large swallows. "Another? When you've drunk it, I have something to tell you."

"I'm not going to like it, am I? Tell me now." She watched as they went to the kitchen and refilled their glasses.

Sage placed Clea's glass on the side table. "Your junker of a car is one wheel closer to the wrecker's yard. I had to hit the starter motor with a hammer to get it to turn over. It's in the footwell if you need it again."

"I don't have the money to fix it." Clea took another slug of wine. She should have applied for the job at the Rialto. Patrick was right; she had to start somewhere. And although it was an entry-level position, the salary was more than she earned at Yarra Grind.

"I've put fifty in our emergencies jar," Sage said. "And payday's next week. Hopefully the car will keep going a bit longer."

"I don't suppose the landlord called you about the aircon? It's been two weeks since he swore he'd have it fixed. Be nice to sleep in temperatures under thirty degrees."

"This is Melbourne, honey, and this heatwave is about three days too long already. Cold snap is promised. The landlord'll ignore our request and hope we forget about until the next hot spell."

Clea drank more wine. Life was again lurching from minor annoyance to major stressor. Patrick was right; she had to force herself to get serious about the job hunt.



"Clea Winneke?" The unknown voice on the phone had an Australian accent, but the vowels were smooth and polished. Professional.

"Speaking. How can I help you?" It must be the new job agency she'd signed up with.

"My name is Michael Richmond from Richmond Carlisle Lawyers in Collins Street."

Clea suppressed a sigh. So, not an employment lead, then, just another scammer. "I suppose a Nigerian prince has left me two million dollars. Again. That's getting a little old, sweetie. Time to think of something new."

A silence on the line. "I applaud your caution, but this is a genuine call. Please, can you use whatever search engine you trust to find the number for Richmond Carlisle, then call it and ask for me, Michael Richmond? Take as long as you want. Give your name, and you'll be put straight through. I have something important to discuss with you. I look forward to talking with you."

The call ended.

Clea stared at the phone. A Collins Street lawyer calling her? She ran through possible scenarios. No one had any reason that she knew of to sue her. She hadn't been in any vehicle accidents. Her mother would never use a lawyer—Tamsin's handwritten will was in the quinoa container at the back of her pantry. And she had no other relatives that she knew of, rich or otherwise. Tamsin was an only child, Clea's grandparents were dead, and her father had never been in the picture. Despite the lawyer's assurances, it smelled like a scam.

She searched Richmond Carlisle Lawyers on her mobile. There they were, with an address at the Paris end of Collins Street. The street view showed an imposing bluestone building with discreet signage. Zooming in, she was able to read the brass plaque by the door which had Richmond

Carlisle engraved in blocky letters. She scrolled through the Google reviews, which dated back many years. All glowing. She clicked on the website link.

Sure enough, Richmond Carlisle handled wills and estates, estate litigation, and family law. She found details of Michael Richmond, senior partner, Wills and Estates. His photo showed a stern-looking man with dark hair dressed in a grey business suit, white shirt, and navy tie with a subtle pattern. Probably some old boys' association. He was leaning forward, fingers steepled, with a serious expression for the camera.

So Richmond Carlisle existed. Michael Richmond existed.

Clea scrolled through the services offered. Nothing that implied litigation, unless it involved a deceased estate. It couldn't possibly be that. Her finger hesitated over the call button on the website. What had she got to lose?

Sure enough, when she gave her name, the receptionist put her straight through.

The same voice from a few minutes ago answered. "Thank you for returning my call, Ms Winneke. Before I continue, I need you to verify a couple of personal details for me."

Faint alarm bells twanged, but she pushed them aside. The firm existed. They checked out.

"What is your full name?"

"Clea Starshine Winneke." She waited for the slight hesitation she always heard when she gave her middle name. *Thank you, Tamsin. "Jane" would have been perfectly fine.*

"Thank you," Michael said without a pause. "And where do you work, and what is your job title?"

Strange. "I'm the manager at Yarra Grind in Johnston Street, Abbotsford."

"Thank you. Ms Winneke. This will come as a shock to you. I understand you know Patrick Shanahan."

She frowned. "Somewhat. He's a regular customer at Yarra Grind."

Michael cleared his throat. "Ms Winneke, I'm sorry to inform you that Patrick passed away unexpectedly last week. A major heart attack while playing squash. He was given immediate assistance, and paramedics attended quickly but were unable to save him."

Clea's lips felt numb, her throat tight over the words she should say. Patrick. Dead. Here one minute and gone...somewhere...the next. Tamsin

would say his essence had been reabsorbed into the earth, his soul mingling with others. The formal religion she'd been briefly taught before Tamsin had pulled her from the class—saying she wanted Clea to find her own spirituality—would believe Michael was in heaven. Or hell. Clea simply didn't know.

Tears pricked the back of her throat. She hadn't known Patrick long. He'd started off as just another customer but had become a friend. A pleasant person who'd drunk double espressos and pushed notes into the shared tip jar had become that bit more. That bit kinder. That bit more interested in Clea and her life. He'd become a friend *and* a mentor.

She'd never told him how much she'd enjoyed their conversations. How she'd valued his advice.

And now she never would.

"Ms Winneke?" Michael said, his voice a soothing baritone. "Clea? I'm sorry. I realise this is a shock."

She cleared her throat. "Thank you for letting me know. When is the funeral? I would like to attend."

"I believe his widow is finalising the arrangements. The reason I called you, however, is that you are a beneficiary of Patrick's will."

"Oh." Surprise made her voice rise. "I didn't know him that well; I certainly didn't expect that." It would be something small, maybe something jokey he thought she'd like. "I'm sure you'll let me know when and where I can collect it."

Another pause. Then Michael said, "It's a bit more complicated than that. Unusually for this day and age, Patrick requested that his last will and testament be read to the assembled beneficiaries. This is happening Thursday at 11 a.m. at my office. I would appreciate if, at all possible, you attend. Patrick was adamant the reading not proceed until all beneficiaries were gathered."

She thought quickly. "I'm working that morning. Do I really have to be there for something so small?"

"I'm following his explicit instructions. If you can't attend, I will have to reschedule with the rest of his family and friends."

"I see." Clea bit her lip. "I guess I could manage that."

"Thank you," Michael said briskly. "I will see you Thursday at eleven. I'll put you through to my assistant so she can send you directions."

The call clicked over to an efficient-sounding woman who said she'd forward directions and instructions for accessing the complimentary parking. Clea thanked her, imagining her beat-up Subaru cosying up to the no doubt luxury cars in Richmond Carlisle's car park.

She sat for a few moments on the window seat in the apartment, hugging her knees. Patrick was dead. A twist of sadness clenched her heart. In uni, her friend's mother had died. Others had lost uncles, even a brother. But for her, with no relatives other than Tamsin, she'd never lost anyone she'd considered a friend. Her eyes were damp. Swiftly, she wiped them with the hem of her shirt.

She'd go on Thursday as she'd said she would. At the least, it would give her a chance to express condolences to Patrick's widow and daughter and find out the funeral arrangements.

CHAPTER 3

Not Just a Trinket

Despite rejigging the roster, Clea still had to work a few hours at Yarra Grind in the early morning. An unexpected rush saw her still serving customers at half past ten.

“Go.” Kayla squeezed Clea’s arm. “We’ll manage.”

Clea flung her apron over the chair in the tiny office. Wisps of light-brown hair were escaping her ponytail, but there was no time now to go home and change. She looked down at her dark pants and teal shirt with the Yarra Grind logo. At least she was tidy. She would have to do.

She was lucky and caught a train within a couple of minutes, which rattled her to the city. She glanced at her phone. 10:50 a.m., and a couple of blocks to walk. She would only be a couple of minutes late.

She was out of breath as she stepped out of the lift into the foyer of Richmond Carlisle. The dark-tiled floor and timber-and-steel reception desk exuded an air of understated opulence. A black leather couch and two easy chairs filled with sombre-looking people lined the walls. Clea flicked a glance at them as she approached the desk. Maybe these were Patrick’s family, or maybe they were here for another matter.

She gave her name in a low voice to the impeccably made-up receptionist, half expecting to be told so sorry for the inconvenience, but there was no need for her to attend.

The receptionist offered a brief smile. “If you’d like to take a seat, Ms Winneke, Mr Richmond won’t be long.”

Clea thanked her and looked around. The only free seat was on the couch next to a blonde woman dressed in what had to be a designer suit. Her knees tilted to one side, and sheer stockings encased her slender legs.

Clea suppressed a smile. Who wore stockings in the Melbourne summer? No one she knew. The woman smoothed down the lavender skirt of her suit and glanced at the receptionist with an irritated expression. She was maybe in her late forties or early fifties. Maybe she was Patrick's widow.

Rather than sit next to her, Clea moved to stand by a tall rubber plant alongside one curved wall. She licked her lips and tried to remain unobtrusive as she studied the gleaming floor.

"Excuse me," a woman's voice said. "I'd like a long black, please. Double-shot."

Clea smiled. It seemed coffee orders were the same everywhere. She glanced around to see whom the woman was ordering from.

"I'm talking to you," the same voice said, now with a thread of impatience running through it. "And my mother would like the same."

Clea jerked her gaze to the woman now standing in front of her. Piercing blue eyes under immaculately styled blonde hair stared back at her. Patrick's eyes, she realised with a start. This must be his daughter, Zara. A rush of sympathy had her reaching out a hand, and she summoned polite words of sympathy.

Before she could say anything, a door next to the reception desk opened, and Michael Richmond stood there. "Good morning. All those here for the reading of Patrick Shanahan's will, please follow me to the boardroom."

With an impatient *tsk*, Zara swivelled on her heel and took the older woman's arm, sweeping them through the knot of people to follow Michael.

Clea hung back, waiting until everyone had left the reception area before she followed a pace behind. She'd thought the reception area was lavish, but the boardroom was next level. A granite table that would easily seat twenty dominated the room. Water jugs and glasses dotted the surface.

Michael closed the door behind her. "Thank you all for coming. Please take a seat. Before we begin, would anyone like tea or coffee?"

Zara's lips tightened. "Your assistant ignored me before. I'd like a long black. Double-shot." Her gaze swept the room and lit on Clea, where she hovered uncertainly behind the seats. "Pronto, please. Click, click."

Michael followed Zara's stare. "Ms Winneke isn't here to make coffee." He pulled out a chair halfway along the table. "Please take a seat, Ms Winneke."

Clea's faced burned hot as she slunk into the chair. The disdain in Zara's stare drilled into the side of her neck. And now the other people in

the room were also staring at her, no doubt wondering what she was doing here. She tugged the collar of the Yarra Grind shirt, wishing she'd taken the time to change.

She darted glances at the others. The icy blonde she'd noticed earlier was almost certainly Zara's mother, Patrick's wife. *Widow*, she corrected herself with a sharp pang. The other people in the room were a middle-aged man—as soft and squishy around the edges as Patrick's wife was sharp—and a teenage boy who sat next to him scrolling on his phone.

An assistant entered and passed around the table, taking coffee orders. Clea shook her head when asked. Unease and nerves twined in her stomach. The sooner she could leave, the better. There was no sense prolonging it with coffee.

She sank lower in the seat. She shouldn't be here; that much was clear. The others were obviously family. Patrick's wife—Maeve, Clea remembered—and Zara. The man who bore a similarity to Patrick underneath his padding could be a brother, and the teenager was likely his son—Patrick's nephew. And then there was her, and she surely didn't belong here and didn't need to be here to learn of a small bequest. Maybe not even that. It had to be a mistake.

A few minutes passed, during which everyone stared at their phones. Then the same assistant returned with a tray of drinks.

Clea gripped the plush arms of the leather chair, preparing to rise, mumble an excuse, and flee. But then Michael strode to the end of the table.

"Thank you for coming, everyone. As you know, Patrick was insistent that his last will and testament be read in the old-fashioned way, with everyone gathered together."

"He always liked to garner attention," the man who looked like Patrick said quietly.

"I understand." Maeve's Irish accent was less pronounced than Patrick's had been, as if she'd worked at smoothing it out. "But what is she doing here?" One long, immaculately polished fingernail pointed at Clea. "The rest of us are family. I don't even know who she is."

Michael cleared his throat. "Shall we continue?" Without waiting for an answer, he picked up a marbled green folder from the desk, undid the blood-red ribbon holding it closed, and withdrew some sheets of paper. He took his time smoothing the papers on the desk, then looked around the table, studying each person in turn.

Clea flushed and dropped her gaze when his stare rested on her. She couldn't leave now—it would be unutterably rude.

"This is the last will and testament of Patrick Eamon Shanahan of 15 Dendy Circuit, Brighton, in the State of Victoria. I revoke all wills and other testamentary dispositions that I have previously made." Michael's sonorous voice added weight to the solemn words. A performance.

"I appoint my brother Fionn Paul Shanahan as executor and trustee of this will. If Fionn Shanahan predeceases me, refuses, or is unable to act, I appoint Michael Richmond of Richmond Carlisle Lawyers to be the executor and trustee of this will."

The man Clea had flagged as Patrick's brother nodded and bowed his head.

Michael continued reading what sounded like standard clauses regarding the payment of funeral and other expenses.

Clea glanced around from under lowered lashes. Fionn's son patted his father's arm awkwardly. Maeve tapped a lacquered fingernail on the granite table, while Zara simply looked bored.

"To my nephew, Seamus Shanahan," Michael continued, "I leave the sum of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars and the vintage Morgan Plus 4 he has always admired, along with the wish that he drive it safely and well."

Seamus's phone dropped to the tabletop with a clatter, and his eyes shone with pleasure.

Clea swallowed hard. A quarter of a mill and a car worth many tens of thousands for a boy who looked too young to drive. This group was so not her place.

"To my brother, Fionn Shanahan," Michael continued reading, "I leave the sum of one million dollars, plus the beach house at Aireys Inlet. May he continue to enjoy it for many years to come."

Fionn's lips curved into a smile even as his eyes glistened with moisture. Seamus leaned against him for a moment and allowed himself to be briefly hugged.

"To my daughter, Zara Shanahan." Michael paused, and his gaze swept up and down the table. "I leave my rental property portfolio, consisting of three houses and two apartments in the suburbs of Port Melbourne, Hawthorn, North Fitzroy, and Albert Park, together with the sum of two million dollars for her use and benefit entirely."

Clea gulped and wished hard for a glass of water, but to reach for one would draw attention to herself at this moment. Two million was a staggering amount. Plus a property portfolio that had to be worth several million. It was almost incomprehensible, but Zara merely nodded and leaned over to whisper something to her mother.

Maeve nodded tightly. Her fingernails tapped faster on the granite.

"To my beloved wife Maeve Shanahan," Michael continued. "I leave our home in Dendy Circuit, Brighton, the remainder of my vintage car collection, and the freehold land and factory buildings in Mordialloc, comprising the premises of Shamrock Sausages. I also leave the remainder of my estate not otherwise explicitly mentioned, and all my remaining personal effects that she may keep or dispose of as she sees fit, with the exception of the following bequest."

Maeve's face relaxed, and a taut smile flickered and disappeared. "That land is worth millions. Once I wind up that damn sausage factory, I can consider subdividing."

Clea sat frozen. She was now the only person who hadn't been mentioned. The tension in the room had been broken by Maeve's words. Zara chatted to her mother, and Clea caught the word "liquidator" and mention of a well-known residential developer.

It had obviously been a mistake all along. Quietly, she rose and pushed her chair back. No one would notice if she left now. Michael was turning to the final page in the document—no doubt closing remarks. Maeve and Zara talked softly together. Fionn and Seamus sat silently, shoulders rubbing.

Michael's voice rose above the chatter. "My final bequest is to my daughter, Clea Winneke. To Clea, I leave her the choice of three of my personal effects, along with sole ownership of Shamrock Sausages, including all assets and liabilities, on condition that she put Shamrock Sausages back into profit. If she fails to do this after one year, Shamrock Sausages will pass to my wife Maeve with no conditions whatsoever."

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LOVE'S INHERITANCE

BY CHEYENNE BLUE

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