

Inheritance

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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

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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 heavyset 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.

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‘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.

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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.

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‘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.

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