

The Inheritance

By:

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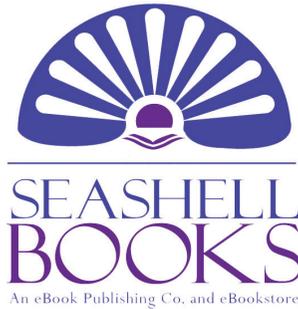
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Seashell Books

<http://www.myseashellbooks.com>

For:

Tanika Dunn

The crazy black woman I work with
who wanted a wild and crazy story!

You got it, girlfriend!

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Prologue

Chicago

“Oh, damn it!” Alisha knocked over her coffee cup and spilled the contents on her appointment book. The phone rang as she tried to mop up the mess with a tissue. “Hunter, Blake and Rees. — No, Mr. Hunter will be in court all day. — Yes, Mrs. Harkness, the moment he comes in.”

As soon as she was off the phone, Alisha hurried to the restroom to get a few paper towels. When she returned to her desk, she saw a man in a tan trench coat, brimmed hat and dark glasses carrying a briefcase.

“May I help you?” she asked, as she pressed the towels on her book.

“Ga day, miss,” the man said with an Australian accent. “I have an appointment with Mr. Joshua Blake.”

She tried to make out the name in her book, but the ink had bled across the page. “I’m sorry. I had a bit of a catastrophe here. And you would be?”

He grinned. “Aye, I can see that. Mick Dundee at your service.”

The secretary smiled and looked at him from the corner of her eye. “Hmm, that name sounds awfully familiar.”

“Yea, I get that a lot. And no, I don’t wrestle crocodiles, before ya ask.”

She laughed. “I’ll let him know you’re here. Just have a seat.”

“Thank ya’ kindly, miss.”

The secretary picked up the phone. “Mr. Blake, your 8:00, Mr. Dundee, is here.” After a moment, she looked up. “He’ll see you now. Down the hall and third door on the left.”

The man walked down the hall and entered the open door to Joshua

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Blake's office. Blake stood and approached him. "Mr. Dundee, won't you have a..." But before he finished his sentence, the man closed the door and took off his hat and glasses.

"Hello, Josh." The man smiled and extended his hand.

"What the hell?" Josh took the man's hand. "Stephen Caudill?"

"Long time no see, Josh," Stephen said.

"What's with the cloak and dagger bullshit and the phony name?"

"It's rather complicated, and I can't go into much detail. I need some legal work done, and I can't put it through my office."

Josh laughed. "So you fly all the way to Chicago? You could have just called."

"This requires a personal touch. I need someone I can trust."

"Now you've got me curious. Have a seat." Josh sat down behind his desk. "You're not in any trouble, are you?"

"No, not me. It has to do with issues in the Will of our mutual friend."

"Again? He's changed that Will six times that I know of. I've revised it twice."

Stephen smiled grimly. "Try eight times."

Josh chuckled lightly as he shook his head. "How is he anyway? The last time I saw his crazy ass was about seven or eight months ago when he visited."

"Dead, unfortunately," Stephen replied.

Joshua was surprised. "You're shittin' me! Sorry to hear that. How?"

"Heart attack — supposedly. About six months ago."

Josh knitted his brow when he heard the doubt in Stephen's tone. "Supposedly?"

"His death was considered natural causes, but I have a suspicion that it wasn't. However, the coroner's report didn't detect anything abnormal after the autopsy."

"You suspect he was murdered?"

"Possibly. But no proof."

Josh shook his head. "If there's anything I can do; you know I'll help."

Stephen smiled. "That's why I'm here. I'm the executor of his Will, and I'm telling you, serving notices to the potential beneficiaries has

been quite a challenge. What I need you to do is very simple, and it can only be handled by you. Not your secretary. No records can be kept and you can't discuss this with anyone. But remember the name of the person. You might be called to verify that this is legit."

"You're being very mysterious. I almost feel like a character in one of those old Mickey Spillane novels."

"How do you think I feel? But it's necessary."

"Well, fill me in."

Stephen opened his briefcase and pulled out a sheet of paper. "I need you to type this on your letterhead and sign it."

Josh read the letter and then looked up at Stephen. "It's pretty vague and not written in the usual legal jargon. And then there's the money. Are you sure you want to send cash and not a check — or a money order at least?"

"Positive. It's a stipulation in the Will. He also pre-wrote the note."

Josh shrugged. "Okay, you're the client." He turned on his computer, typed the few lines for the letter and printed it out. Afterward, he handed it to Stephen. "Good enough?"

"Good enough. Now you can delete it." Stephen watched him hit the delete button.

"Gone and forgotten," Josh replied.

Josh signed the letter, put it in one of his firm's envelopes and handed it back. Stephen then slipped the envelope into a FedEx mailer in his briefcase. He then pulled out a stack of cash. "I'm sure this will cover your time and charges."

Joshua scratched his head and chuckled slightly. "It's not often I get paid in cash. Over paid at that."

"So, take your wife on a cruise courtesy of our deceased friend."

The two men stood and shook hands. Stephen put on his glasses and hat then opened the door.

"Cheerio, Mr. Blake. Your advice was very helpful," Stephen said, reverting to the Australian accent once more for anyone who might be listening.

"My pleasure — Mr. Dundee." Joshua closed the door. The whole thing was very odd, but one thing he was sure of. Even though there would

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be no records, he would definitely remember the name of the recipient.

A man waited outside the offices of Hunter, Blake and Rees for Stephen Caudill to exit. When he did, he took out his cell phone and hit speed dial. “You’re right. He was here. His disguise is pretty lame. You think he left it this time?”

“No,” replied the garbled voice. “He’d send it himself. Follow and find out where it’s going.”

The man hung up the phone and followed Stephen Caudill to a FedEx store. As soon as Caudill left, he went in and stepped up to the counter.

“May I help you?” the clerk asked.

“I hate to bother you, but I’m from the office of Hunter, Blake and Rees. My partner just brought a mailer in a moment ago. He was wearing a trench coat and sunglasses. This is embarrassing, but the wind caught the receipt you gave him and it blew out into traffic. Could I get you to make a photo copy of the tracking information on the package for our records?”

“Sure, no problem.”

When the man received the copy, he left the building and looked at the receipt. “Shit! New York.”

Chapter 1

New York - Monday

The irritating buzz of the alarm clock sounded, until a hand reached over and slapped the snooze button. Five minutes later, it went off again. Tanika Daniels propped up on her elbows. “I’m up already!” she grumbled, and then turned it off. The time read 10:00 a.m., but she always kept the clock fifteen minutes fast to give her a few extra minutes before she actually had to get up. It was tempting to lie there longer, but that would just be delaying the inevitable. As of now, she had about an hour and a half to get ready to pull another shift at The Pancake House where she worked. That would give her time to enjoy her coffee, a bagel with cream cheese and take a leisurely shower.

Tanika sat up on the edge of the bed, yawned and got up. As she trudged across the bedroom floor, her little toe caught the edge of one of the many boxes stacked in her bedroom. “Crap!” She limped to the bathroom and sat down on the toilet to check her toe for damage. There was no blood, but the nail was hanging on by a thread. “Not good.” She closed her eyes, leaned her head back and sighed. “I hope this isn’t a sample of how my day is going to go.”

After bandaging her toe, she looked in the mirror and picked at the curls of her black hair which were starting to lose their shape. She needed a hair appointment badly, but, at the moment, her finances were tight.

Leaving the bathroom, she maneuvered around the boxes in the living room to get to the small kitchenette. Just as she turned on the coffee pot, the doorbell rang. There was only one person she knew of who’d be calling on her at this time of the morning. A look through

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the peephole proved her right. “Yep, I thought so.” It was the building manager. She opened the door. “Hey, Kaz.”

Kazeem leaned against the door frame and looked Tanika up and down. She was wearing tight purple shorts and tank top that formed perfectly to her body. “Mmmm, Mmmm! I haven’t had breakfast yet, and you could be the cinnamon on my toast.”

Tanika pursed her lips to hide a smile. “I don’t do burnt toast, Kazeem.” She turned her back and walked to the kitchen.

“That was cold, Tanika.”

She laughed. “Come on in. I’ve got fresh coffee ready.”

“For a minute.” He followed her to the kitchen and leaned against the refrigerator.

Kazeem Larson stood 5’ 10”, was thin as a toothpick and bald. Though he was a big flirt, Kaz was harmless. He even flirted with her neighbor next door, seventy-two-year-old Widow Davis, when she called him to come repair something. He always left her apartment with a plate of chocolate chip cookies or whatever she happened to be baking in the oven at the time. Once Tanika jokingly asked her why she didn’t hit him over the head with a skillet for being fresh. Ms. Davis told her that at her age, she considered being flirted with by a young squirt like him a compliment.

Everyone in the building liked Kaz. He was always Johnny-on-the-spot when it came to taking care of issues the building had when things broke down, which was on a daily basis, in almost every apartment. Of the three previous building managers Tanika had to deal with in the seven years she’d lived there, Kazeem, at age twenty-nine, had been the youngest and most responsible. But soon they would be demolishing the old building to erect a parking structure for the new medical plaza that was to be built. The owners of her building had been the last hold-out waiting for the right price.

“So what brings you here this morning, Kaz?” Tanika handed him a cup.

“Just carrying out my managerial responsibilities for the day until this job goes poof.” He looked at his watch. “Which will be at 6:00 tonight.” He smiled. “I’m reminding the tenants who are left that they

have two more weeks to move out before they start demolition.”

Tanika waved her arm toward the boxes. “As you can see, I’m ready. I just need to raise the money for the new place I’m moving to.”

“I thought you’d be moved out already. Notice was given ninety days ago.”

“I would have been, if it hadn’t been for some setbacks. I lost two days of tips by having to attend a mandatory first aid seminar for work a couple weeks ago. And then some jerk slashed all those tires in the parking lot — including mine,” she said angrily. “That was eight hundred bucks of what I had saved down the drain.”

“Oh yeah.” Kazeem nodded. “I was in a meeting with the building owners when that happened. If I’d been here, I’d a kicked the guy’s ass.”

Hearing his sincerity, Tanika reserved her laughter. She didn’t think Kaz could kick his way out of a paper bag. “Anyway, I’m having to pull double shifts just to come up with a deposit and the first month’s rent for the new place. My tips have been lousy lately.” Her tone then changed. “And then there’s Jack. He was supposed to pay half. If he hadn’t left...”

Tanika shook her head. Just the thought of Jack Mason pissed her off. Right after her tires were slashed, he bailed on her. When she came home from work, his things were gone and there was a note on the dresser. He didn’t even have the courage to break up with her in person. She’d always thought that the words, tall, dark and handsome could have been coined after him. He was 6’1” with long locks of almost waist-length hair and eyes that could suck you right into bed with him. But now when she thought of him, it was low-life, egg-sucking dog.

Kazeem looked into her warm brown eyes. She had all the right junk in all the right places, and her light brown skin didn’t have a blemish on it. Perfection was the only word for Tanika in both beauty and personality. “Jack’s an idiot for leaving some sweet brown sugar like you.” He took a sip of his coffee. “Why did he leave anyway? I thought you two had a good thing.”

“I thought so too.” She shrugged. “But...” She rubbed her fingertips together. “He found a sugar mama named Alice Carmichel. Her father is a rich dentist.”

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“Money isn’t everything.”

Tanika snickered. “Only because you don’t have any.”

“True.” He then leaned on the counter and said in a seductive tone, “You could always move in with me to my new place.”

Tanika almost choked on a swallow of coffee and cackled. “Now that’s funny.”

Kazeem pursed his lips. “What’s so funny about that?”

“Because you’re a slob, Kaz. That’s why Sheila left your skinny black ass. She told me that the cockroaches in your apartment even moved out.”

“And how do you know Shelia? I didn’t think you two ever met.”

“We share the same hair dresser.”

“You mean gossip central.”

Tanika giggled. “Same thing.” She finished her coffee. “Well, you better go. I wanna take a nice, long shower before I have to go in to work.”

Kaz looked at the clocks on the walls and then his watch. “Ahm, and what time is that?”

“11:30.”

“Well, I hate to break it to you, but you’ve only got about twenty minutes. It’s 11:10. Time changed. You forgot to set your clocks ahead last night.”

“Oh shit! I can’t be late again. See yourself out, Kaz!”

She ran into the bedroom, shut the door and quickly slipped on her uniform and shoes. There was no time to even wash her face. If she was late one more time, the new manager of The Pancake House said she’d be suspended for three days, and she definitely could not afford that right now.

Tanika was never intentionally late, but each time she was something unavoidable seemed to happen. First was the tire incident; then the bus got stuck in traffic due to an accident on the road; and then the electrical in her dilapidated building decided to shut down in the middle of the night. The manager at The Pancake House had told her that even though her reasons were valid, he wouldn’t play favorites. She may have been one of his best workers, but the rules were the rules and he followed

them to the letter.

Tanika left the bedroom buttoning up her dress at the same time. She looked up and saw Kaz was still there. “You haven’t left yet?”

“Thought I’d stay and give you a lift. Since this New York City weather has been unseasonably warm with no snow on the ground, my bike can get you there faster than your car. Going down the back alleyways, I can have you there in five minutes.”

“You’re a lifesaver, Kaz.”

“Just call me Superman. I’m here to save the day.”

She chuckled. “More like Underdog.”

Kazeem nodded. “I’ll buy that. I always thought Underdog was cool.”

Just as Tanika opened the door, she came face to face with a FedEx guy about to knock. “Tanika Daniels?” he asked, holding an envelope and a clipboard.

“Yes?”

“I have a package for you to sign for. I need to see some ID.”

“I really don’t have time for this,” she replied, digging into her purse for her driver’s license. After signing his clipboard, the FedEx guy thanked her and left. She took the cardboard envelope, flung it into the apartment and shut the door.

“You’re not going to open it or even see who it’s from?” Kazeem asked.

“No time. Let’s go!”

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