

# True Inheritance

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*A tale of family, and of finding one's Truth.*

<http://www.storiesspace.com/stories/drama/true-inheritance-1.aspx>

I can't let myself think about him. The sun is shining down on my pale back for the first time in days. A black butterfly with white spots is dancing around in the light breeze delighting in the day and inviting me to join in. But he comes to me unbidden. His face. His walk. His presence. His. Him.

Breath in. Breath out.

He is my past. Any chance of a future with him is gone.

Chloe Brown loved gardens. Her earliest memory was of sitting in the flowerbeds of her Grandmother's garden holding a handful of warm earth, and squealing with delight as it ran through her five year old fist. Now those flower beds belonged to Chloe, and as she wandered through them on her daily strolls, she often felt that her Grandmother was following her around the magnificent garden, pointing out weeds that needed pulling and remarking on the state of the tomato crop this season.

"It's in your blood", Matilda May would always say to her Granddaughter. "All of the women in our family have green blood".

Chloe never saw any evidence of this in herself. Her mother, Joyce, all she had to do was look at a plant and it would bloom. Victoria, her sister, had prizewinning rose bushes. But Chloe? Chloe could kill a hardy Camellia plant at ten paces. Nope - whatever magical green abilities her family possessed had skipped her entirely. Her inherited gardens were kept alive by her gardener, Tom, who had stepped in to take over from his father, Bill, after Matilda May's passing. In fact, Chloe had wondered on more than one occasion why her Grandmother had left HER the treasured garden rather than her mother or her sister. They had wondered the same thing.

"Chloe!" Victoria and Joyce had exchanged looks as the Will had been read after Matilda May had been found lying peacefully amongst the lavender and rosemary bushes last year. "Well!"

Joyce had remarked in an injured tone. "I see".

Things had been strained between them all since then.

Today as she stood watching the black and white butterfly and feeling the sunshine, Chloe couldn't stop the reasons why she hadn't left the house for so long from flooding through her; her now ex-love, Robert, who happened to have been her boss, had an affair with a younger colleague at the University Pharmacy Department where they had all worked; Chloe's contract as receptionist to Robert, the Head Of The Department, had ended, and Chloe, feeling too defeated to re-apply, had left meekly. The affair had ended in marriage and a new job as receptionist to the Head Of The Pharmacy Department for the new wife. And, Chloe's sources informed her, they were trying to get pregnant, something she herself had been told she would never be able to do.

"Never mind dear- perhaps next time you could try wearing some make-up or styling your hair? Men like that", Joyce had said to Chloe.

"I knew she'd blow it", Victoria had said to Joyce.

"I'm going to lie down for awhile", Chloe had said to both of them.

Overwhelmed with the painful memories, Chloe felt herself being drawn down to the warm earth under her bare feet. As if acting on a deeply held instinct, she bent and scooped some of the warmth into her right hand. Suddenly her Grandmother's rose scented hand cream filled her nostrils and Chloe felt the heaviness within her draining away. For a moment she thought Matilda May was standing right beside her but she quickly dismissed the idea, laughing at her own folly. It was being in the garden that made her remember her Grandmother's familiar scent - nothing more. Enjoying the sensation of being outside, she sat down and let her fingers dig aimlessly through the soil.

"Miss Brown?"

Chloe looked up, startled, to see Bill standing in front of her, holding a small red box with a six pointed purple star on its' lid.

"Oh Bill, I didn't hear you coming!" she exclaimed, standing up to face the elderly gardener.

"What a nice surprise! What can I do for you?"

Bill tipped his hat in deference to Chloe, and held out the box to her.

"Your Grandmother asked me to give this to you when the time was right".

"What is it?" Chloe wondered, reaching out to take it.

"That was something I was never privy to", Bill answered and then, smiling, added "She was a woman of great mystery, your Gran".

He nodded at Chloe, then turned and left before she had time to ask anything more, leaving her confused, but also excited as she shifted her gaze to the last thing that Matilda May had asked Bill to take care of for her. She ran her fingers over the raised purple star with wonder and slowly lifted the lid.

"Oh my god, how beautiful!" she gasped as she lifted a chain holding a silver metal key out of the purple velvet lining. The key had a long body, with an exquisite right facing crescent shaped moon on the top, and the bottom part you inserted into the lock was also crescent shaped, but only an outline. Looking more closely at the top crescent, Chloe realised that it was in fact a locket. She opened it and gasped again as the brilliance of the mother-of-pearl inlay met the sunlight, and a small folded piece of paper nearly fell out. With shaking hands, Chloe unfolded the paper and as she recognised her Grandmother's writing she felt tears well up, causing her eyes to resemble a watercolour painting as they changed from midnight blue to daisy yellow.

*Up to the trees  
where you once did play  
is where dear Chloe,  
you must now away.  
There you will find  
another key,  
in the jewelled case,  
from you to me.*

Chloe re-read the note several times, wondering if Matilda May hadn't been as solid in her mind as they'd all thought she'd been. But in a sudden flash of insight, she remembered the treehouse in the fig tree behind her Grandmother's house, where she'd spent many happy hours far from the rules and restrictions of her everyday life. She looped the chain with its' beautiful key around her neck, replaced the lid on the box and took a short cut through the stone and timber house to reach the ancient Moreton Bay fig which dominated Matilda May's back yard. As she approached the back door, Chloe placed the box ontop of the antique glass cabinet that kept her Grandmother's collection of rare books dust free. Technically, they were hers now - as was the house - but Chloe was still living in her one bedroom fourth floor apartment, ("where I can't kill anything green"), because she still didn't feel she deserved Matilda May's grand house - and because that was where she and Robert had once

planned their lives together.

Stepping out onto the back verandah now, Chloe stared up into the enormous branches of the fig. There it was - and looking as fresh and new as if it were thirty five years ago and her Grandfather, Nicholas, had just revealed his "big Spring surprise" to his jubilant Grandaughters. Someone had been maintaining it Chloe realised as she climbed up the wooden rungs that seemed to disappear into the green expanse above her. A rush of memories greeted her as she pulled herself into the little house and sat staring at her history. Victoria was ten and Chloe eight when the treehouse has become theirs, and Chloe remembered how that Spring and Summer had been the last time that she and her sister had been friends. When Winter had come, so had Victoria's interest in boys, and that was that. The things which once were of no concern to two little girls, suddenly became important, and slowly grew to become an established thorny hedge which continued to divide and separate them to this day.

"Why does Chloe have violet eyes and I don't?" Victoria had asked her Grandmother as they were gathering firewood. Mothers and daughters in their family had always had the same bright violet eyes.

"Oh, perhaps they needed to skip a generation or two so that you could have lovely blue eyes, like your mother", Matilda May had answered, her own violet eyes shining brightly. Victoria had turned to look at her sister's eyes which she had begun to covet, and Chloe saw that the sky blue eyes which she herself desired, were regarding her with an unfamiliar distaste. It got worse when Chloe turned seventeen and the eyes which might have made some girls feel special, betrayed her even further when they started to constantly change colour to reflect her inner and outer worlds. Chloe's status as an outcast, became official.

"Like a tacky seventies mood ring!" Victoria would say when Chloe entered the rumpus room where her sister's boyfriend and University friends would hang out. She'd begged her parents for contacts, and once the medical tests had shown that their daughter wasn't having some kind of brain aneurism or seizure, they had finally relented on her eighteenth birthday. After Matilda May's death, Chloe had stopped wearing the lenses which turned her eyes the blue she had once longed for, remembering how her Grandmother had been at once surprised and overjoyed at Chloe's restlessly shifting eyes.

She shook herself back to the present, exhaled, and concentrated.

"Jewelled case..."she murmured as she looked carefully around her, taking in the scattering of remaining childhood treasures...her old pet rock with the orange spots, a pile of yellowing Archie comics, some brightly coloured plastic cups. Then her eyes fell on "the secret box", an old wooden chest where she and Victoria had stored their most precious possessions. She crawled over to it

and peered into its' depths. There were a few fairy and flower covered diaries, still with their little locks and keys, some coloured shells and painted pine cones and various other items, all of which had once held life and death meaning to the sisters. But it was the shell covered wooden case which drew Chloe's attention. Matilda May must have placed it there, as it used to live on her bedside table. Chloe had made it for her Grandmother, just because.

Matilda May had pretended the shells were glittering jewels...Chloe reached in and picked up the case, as curious as the eleven year old girl who had created it. Holding her breath, she sat down, opened it, and there, within, was a second silver key.

"Oh..." she breathed as her fingers lifted the key out of its shelter. It was the same length and style as the key she wore, but the shapes that adorned the top and bottom were of the full moon. Balancing the case on her lap, Chloe quickly opened the locket she held and inside was the same mother-of-pearl decoration, and another note.

*We stand alive  
though silent we be.  
Out of love we grew  
for you to see.  
Amongst our group  
are ladies Sacred.  
Come hunt us out  
there's no time to be wasted.*

Immediately her mind started to whirl as she tried to figure out the clue. Alive but silent? Ladies Sacred? What had Matilda May meant? Still holding the full moon key, Chloe replaced the shelled case amongst the tearest memories and crawled back to the entrance. She sat with her feet on the top rung of the ladder, stared out the window in front of her and tried to still her mind. From her vantage point she could see the gardens that stretched out behind the house - the Japanese Zen garden, the children's butterfly garden, the roses, all looking completely at home amongst the wild abundance of Matilda May's other informal plantings.

"Sharing space", was what her Grandmother said her many plants were doing, "like we all need to".

Chloe's gaze roamed the greenery and splashes of vibrant colour looking for signs, until with a start she realised she'd already been looking right at the answer. Matilda May's sculptures - they were scattered throughout the gardens, and Chloe was staring at the three female forms that graced the rose garden. Quickly she added the second key to her chain, climbed back down the ladder and ran to the trio. The scent of the roses engulfed her before she actually saw them, and as she reached the

entrance, Chloe stopped and took in the scene that greeted her. Three Goddess figures, resplendent in white draping robes, moss tinged, with roses trailing across their heads and shoulders. The central figure held a bow, and had a quiver of arrows slung over her shoulder. A passionately hued red Mr Lincoln was her crown and cape, and it was to her that Chloe now moved. She knew this was Artemis, the hunter and protector of the wild. This was where her Grandmother had wanted her to come. Now what?

She circled the Greek Goddess, noting the detail in Matilda May's craftwork. It was something to do with hunting, she was sure of it. She watched as a black butterfly with white spots alighted on the bottom of the quiver. Looking closely, she noticed a raised ring, and instinctively she reached out to run her hands over the ring and tried to unscrew it. Once again Chloe found herself gasping as the false bottom in her hands revealed itself to be a container. And, though she was expecting it, Chloe was still surprised as she withdrew a worn leather pouch. She unwound the leather strap that bound it, and unfolding it, saw the silver key, this time with a left facing crescent. She added it to the chain, opened the locket and withdrew the note. Tucking the keys inside her shirt, she read.

*All three keys are yours to use  
the Quest is almost over.  
The true inheritance, the buried wealth  
in the circle you will discover.  
Under the marker where once I visited  
is where you'll find your answers.  
Chloe dear, your Heart is pure,  
it's your turn to join life's dancers.*

Chloe's misty pink rose eyes threatened to overflow down her cheeks and she stood for a moment, gathering herself. She already knew where she was meant to go next and what she needed to do once she got there, but she couldn't do it alone.

"Are you ok Chloe?"

She whipped around clutching her chest, feeling her Heart beating quickly. Tom stood at the garden's entrance, a look of concern across his face.

"Tom! You almost...Yes, I'm fine, I...hang on" Chloe felt her mind racing in time with her Heart. "I need your help".

"Of course - what do you need?" Tom answered, stepping forward.

"I need you to take me to Matilda May's island, and dig for buried treasure!" Chloe exclaimed. Tom considered her for a moment, and then nodded. "Let's go".

They made their way through the winding garden paths, stopping only to grab a shovel from one of Tom's sheds, until they came to an expanse of emerald green grass. Chloe all but ran across its' luxuriant surface to the footbridge which hung over two small ponds. Today she barely noticed the gold and orange fish that lived amongst the rocks and ferns, so intent was she on reaching the small row boat that lay bobbing on the much larger body of water at the end of the bridge. She'd all but forgotten that Tom was behind her, until his hands reached around her to untie the rope which kept the boat fastened to the bridge. Chloe stepped into one end, and Tom settled into the other, picking up the oars as he did so. Not a word passed between them in the short time it took to get to the island which lay in the centre of the lotus filled water. Chloe couldn't wait for Tom to pull the boat up onto the shore - she leapt out into the ankle deep water and set off at a dead run as soon as her feet touched dry land. She could see the tops of the majestic Wollemis poking out above all of the other trees, and it was to them she headed.

Many years ago, Matilda May had been entrusted with ten Wollemi seedlings which she and Nicholas had planted in a circle to make what had become Matilda May's private meditation grove. Once a week, Bill would row her over the water and wait on the shoreline as Matilda May went to sit beside the clay tablet which commemorated her and her husband's last creative act together on Earth. It was this marker which Chloe now knelt before, running her hands over the smooth surface and reading the words inscribed on it with fresh eyes.

*Within this circle*

*Matilda May and Nicholas*

*Our love for eachother*

*Our commitment to our task*

*Never ending*

To what task Chloe wondered? And under the marker? But that would require...She hesitated, not wishing to make a mistake and ruin what had been sacred to Matilda May. And then it came - the rose scent that she knew so well, and Chloe was certain this time that it was indeed her Grandmother's presence. She felt her doubt leave her and stood, turning to face Tom who was standing silently beside her, waiting.

"I need you to dig under here", she said, pointing at the marker. "Please dig until you find - well I don't know. But I know there's something there to be found".

Tom simply rolled up his shirt sleeves, gripped the shovel and brought it down to shatter the clay.

Chloe didn't even wince.

Half an hour later, Tom was wiping his brow with his shirt and Chloe was staring at the plain metal trunk which he had hauled up from the Earth's belly. More specifically, Chloe's eyes were focused on the unusual keyholes. Right facing crescent, full moon, left facing crescent. Slowly she lifted the chain from around her neck and for a second, held the keys in her clasped hands. Then, one by one, she inserted them in their matching shapes, turning first one, then two, then three. Click, click, click. She sat back, filled with the enormity of the moment. Taking a deep breath, Chloe reverently lifted the curved metal lid. A blue tarp was tucked over some kind of bundle, and she pulled it back to reveal a journal, wrapped in plastic, sitting on top of a sheepskin coat.

"Chloe?" Tom had come to crouch beside her. "Is everything alright?"

Chloe turned to look at him.

"Yes Tom. I'm just a little overwhelmed".

Tom smiled at her. "Well, I'm here, and if I can make", he swept one hand over the trunk, "this easier for you, I will - ok?"

Chloe smiled back. "Ok".

Feeling comforted, she returned her attention to the contents of the trunk, lifting the journal up and unwrapping it. It was leather, and on the cover was a raised silver moon in its three stages.

Opening the journal, Chloe saw her Grandmother's script once again.

*Dearest Chloe,*

*welcome to your destiny. You come from a long line of Earth Guardians, and up until now we have all been Custodians of this Ancient Tool. Upon your seventeenth birthday, I saw the sign in your beautiful eyes; you are the Chosen One - the one to wield this Tool with the wisdom and grace necessary for this role. This journal contains all of our guidance and knowledge, passed on from Custodian to Custodian, stretching back through the mists of time. All of our wisdom is now yours to access. My love is with you.*

*Matilda May.*

As if a veil had suddenly been lifted, Chloe felt the truth of Matilda May's words. It was as if she suddenly felt how she fit into the big scheme of things - as if suddenly, she belonged. Placing the journal beside her, she lifted the sheepskin bundle into her arms, let the coat fall away, and found



herself holding a simple wooden drum. Smiling, Chloe placed the drum between her legs and started to play, her eyes showing the green that her Grandmother had always told her was within her.

Several weeks later, Chloe strolled through her gardens which were now teeming with people, all marvelling at the abundant beauty surrounding them. It had all happened quite quickly after Chloe had first played her newly discovered heirloom. People had just started to turn up at the front gates, asking if they could pay to see the gardens. Then there'd been the tour bus companies asking for "those amazing NSW gardens" to be included in their itineraries. And as she continued to play the drum in the Wollemi grove, the people kept coming. The pleasure Chloe saw in her visitor's eyes as they passed by her filled her in turn with joy, and her new found sense of purpose made her feel confident enough to respond to the women who were currently standing in front of her with criticism in their eyes for her new direction, by hugging first her stiff mother, then her shocked sister.

"Come on you two", she said to them with a grin. "Lighten up already!"

Turning, she left the stunned women behind her as she made her way to the one part of the garden that remained as Chloe's private space. Making her way down the footbridge, Chloe felt Tom's gaze upon her. Looking up, her ocean eyes saw him standing beside the boat and as she reached the end, he held out his hand. A black butterfly with white spots fluttered merrily around them, and the smell of roses filled the air.