
The Last Inheritance

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Scenes Two and Three, as read by the author at Climate Week NYC

SCENE TWO

INT. RAO FAMILY HOME: NIGHT

Three weeks later. The modest home is full of people and yet, feels strangely empty. Flowers crowd every surface, with handwritten notes and photographs shining through. Tokens of love and respect and memory. Evidence of a life that touched too many people to fit into one room.

A giant portrait of Asha dominates the living room. She is younger, smiling and...alive. Nearby, community members quietly help clear plates after the final remembrance gathering.

The front door opens.

KAVYA enters and immediately starts organizing things: moving chairs, sorting documents, giving herself tasks. There is a nervous tension to her movement because she'd rather do anything except openly grieve.

KAVYA

The archive team can collect the recordings tomorrow. They're not going to be moved tonight.

Nobody argues, because this is clearly how things have always worked.

Across the room, DEV watches.

DEV

It has only been four hours since she was consigned to the flames and you've already started colour-coding her absence.

KAVYA

Someone has to keep things moving.

DEV

She's not even buried in the archives yet, and you're already reorganizing them.

KAVYA

And you're helping by standing there?

The old rhythm arrives instantly. It has had years of practice. But before it can escalate, another voice intervenes.

MIRA

Could we maybe survive one evening without becoming ourselves?

Mira appears carrying a tray of tea. Everyone softens slightly, even Kavya. Mira hands cups around, keeping the peace through muscle memory.

Near the window, ARJUN films the room with a small handheld camera.

DEV

You're filming this?

ARJUN

I'm documenting it.

DEV

That's somehow worse.

ARJUN

History is always worse when nobody documents it.

Kavya rolls her eyes.

KAVYA

Please tell me you're not making another family documentary.

ARJUN

Don't flatter yourselves.

The room almost laughs. Then a difficult silence returns. The kind that only appears after someone essential has left.

From outside comes the sound of a crowd still gathered beyond the gates, long after sunset. People singing. Holding a respectful vigil with candles. The public grieving continues, even as Asha's four children refuse to.

Dev glances toward Asha's portrait.

DEV

Do you know what the woman outside just told me?

Nobody answers.

DEV (CONT'D)

She said Asha saved her village. Yesterday someone else said she saved their river. Tomorrow somebody will probably tell me she personally negotiated peace between dolphins and fishermen.

Mira smiles reluctantly, as Kavya laughs softly and then stops abruptly, as if realising she's being inappropriate.

DEV (CONT'D)

Did any of us actually know her?

The question lands. Nobody speaks. For the first time, uncertainty enters the room. Arjun lowers the camera, as Kavya looks away and Mira stares into her tea.

Outside, the crowd begins singing one of the movement's old songs. It was Asha's song - the one everyone knows. The family listens but none of them join in.

CUT TO BLACK.

SCENE THREE

INT. REGIONAL STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CHAMBERS: DAY.

The room is modest but formal. Large windows overlook the estuary. A circular table occupies the centre of the space.

No raised dais. No throne-like chair. No obvious seat of power. The architecture itself seems designed to discourage hierarchy.

KAVYA, DEV, MIRA and ARJUN sit together at one side of the room. Several members of the Regional Stewardship Council sit opposite them. Community representatives occupy the remaining seats.

A low murmur fills the room. Everyone knows why they are here.

At the head of the table sits ADVOCATE MENON, Asha's longtime legal advisor. At seventy years of age, he is precise and looks like nothing can shake his calm exterior.

He waits for the room to settle.

ADVOCATE MENON

Asha Rao left specific instructions regarding today's proceedings. My job is to ensure those instructions are followed.

A respectful silence.

ADVOCATE MENON (CONT'D)

The contents of her will were finalised eighteen months ago and have not been altered since.

Kavya shifts slightly. Not nervously, but as if she is ready for what comes next. This is the moment she has been preparing for her entire adult life.

Menon opens a file.

ADVOCATE MENON (CONT'D)

Asha Rao did not wish for any single individual to inherit stewardship over the western bioregion.

A flicker of confusion crosses Kavya's face.

ADVOCATE MENON (CONT'D)

Instead, stewardship responsibilities shall be distributed across five interconnected institutions.

The room stills as Kavya's expression hardens. Dev leans forward in apparent surprise. Mira raises her eyebrows. Arjun, who had been steadily looking at the floor, lifts his gaze towards Menon. The others in the room shift uncomfortably at the calm way with which Menon said the number 'five'.

ADVOCATE MENON (CONT'D)

Responsibility for the Regional Governance Council shall pass to Kavya Rao.

A small exhale. Not what she expected, but still significant.

ADVOCATE MENON (CONT'D)

Oversight of the Infrastructure and Ecological Systems Network shall pass to Dev Rao.

Dev starts cracking his knuckles in impatience.

ADVOCATE MENON (CONT'D)
Responsibility for Community Mediation and
Inter-Regional Conflict Resolution shall pass
to Mira Rao.

Mira's face reveals nothing.

ADVOCATE MENON (CONT'D)
Custodianship of the Public Archives and Oral
History Collections shall pass to Arjun Rao.

Arjun almost laughs.

ARJUN
Of course.

ADVOCATE MENON
Major decisions shall require unanimous
agreement among all appointed stewards for a
period of one year. The arrangement will be
reviewed after one year. Failure to reach
consensus will result in temporary reversion
of stewardship responsibilities to the
Regional Council.

DEV
What?!

ADVOCATE MENON
That was her instruction.

DEV
That's not governance. That's her making sure
she still gets the last word.

Mira rolls her eyes.

KAVYA
And who holds the fifth appointment?

The room quiets as something shifts. For the first time, Menon appears
aware of the tension he is about to create.

He turns a page.

ADVOCATE MENON
Custodianship of the Coastal Futures
Institute shall pass to...

Everyone turns as the chamber door opens. A young woman steps hesitantly into the room.

Late twenties. Backpack slung over one shoulder. Travel-worn. Clearly in the wrong place.

This is LEELA FERNANDES.

A council assistant rushes toward her.

COUNCIL ASSISTANT
I'm sorry. This session is private.

LEELA
Umm, I received a letter from Advocate Menon to come here.

Leela hands the council assistant a crumpled letter as advocate Menon studies her for a moment. Then nods.

ADVOCATE MENON
Ms. Fernandes.

The entire room turns. Leela freezes.

ADVOCATE MENON (CONT'D)
Please take a seat.

No one moves, because no one understands. Leela slowly sits at the only empty chair remaining. Directly opposite Kavya.

Advocate Menon opens the final page.

ADVOCATE MENON (CONT'D)
Custodianship of the Coastal Futures
Institute shall pass to Leela Fernandes.

Absolute silence. Kavya blinks once.

DEV
Who??

No one answers. Mira studies Leela carefully - already assessing and calculating. Arjun watches everyone, fascinated.

LEELA

I don't know what's going on. There has to be some mistake.

ADVOCATE MENON

There isn't.

Kavya turns to Menon.

KAVYA

Who exactly is she?

ADVOCATE MENON

Asha anticipated that question.

He reaches beneath the table and places five sealed boxes in front of the five new stewards.

One before each sibling. One before Leela.

ADVOCATE MENON (CONT'D)

Her instructions were very clear. The answer lies inside.

The camera lingers on the boxes. They're all identical and ordinary.

CUT TO BLACK.