

An exclusive excerpt from...

Billionaire Blend

A Coffeehouse Mystery

by Cleo Coyle

Includes a *wealth* of tasty recipes!

★ **Starred Review** —*Kirkus*

“**Top Pick**” —*RT Book Reviews*

The Village Blend is a charming coffeehouse in the heart of New York’s Greenwich Village. When a car bomb goes off outside this landmark shop, manager Clare Cosi comes to the aid of an anonymous customer, one who turns out to be billionaire tech whiz Eric Thorner.

In gratitude for saving his life, Eric hires Clare to create the most expensive coffee blend on the planet. But as Clare is pulled deeper into Eric’s world—a mesmerizing circle of cutting-edge luxuries and cutthroat rivalries—Clare can’t help but wonder: Is this charming young CEO truly marked for termination? Or is he the one making a killing?

To solve this case, Clare will have to bribe a bomb squad lieutenant; conjure up a menu for a “billionaire’s potluck”; fix her daughter’s love life; stop a Slayer while working with one; and stay alive while doing it.

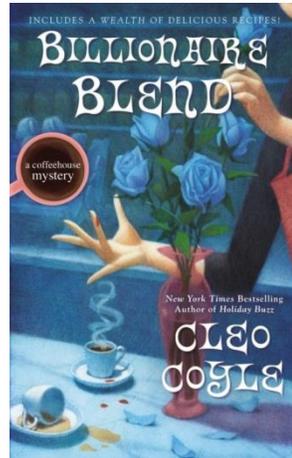
Coffee. It can get a girl killed.



Published in hardcover
and digital formats by Penguin

Billionaire Blend
by Cleo Coyle

“...a highly
satisfying mystery.”
—*Publishers Weekly*



A Note from Cleo

*Although **Billionaire Blend** is the 13th book in my amateur sleuth series, any newcomer should be able to enjoy the book as a stand-alone experience. To my longtime readers, I thank you sincerely for your kind support for more than a decade. To my new readers, welcome! I hope this will be the first of many return visits to Clare Cosi's Village Blend, where coffee and crime are always brewing...*

CHAPTER ONE

*As long as there was coffee in the world,
how bad could things be? —Judith Rumelt*

“**G**uess where I am? You can't imagine . . .”

Pressing the phone to my ear, I waited for Mike Quinn's gravelly voice to ride a cellular wave up the Eastern Seaboard.

“Given the choice,” he said, “I'd rather imagine . . .”

That shouldn't have surprised me. After all, Michael Ryan Francis Quinn was a decorated narcotics detective, and if there was one thing the NYPD looked for when recruiting from their uniformed force, it was imagination—that and “inquisitiveness, insight, and an eye for detail.” (According to Quinn, the New York brass referred to these as “the four I’s,” although I had pointed out the last one started with an E.)

For the past six months, Quinn had been working in Washington, DC, where a U.S. attorney had drafted him for a special assignment. He wasn't permitted to tell me much about his Justice Department job, although I did deduce his Federal Triangle desk phone had caller ID because he always answered my rings with a husky hello reserved only for me.

Just the sound of his voice relieved the tension I'd been feeling about the night ahead. Of course, I didn't have a clue what was really ahead. If I had, I might have gone straight home and pulled the covers over my eyes. In a short space of time, I'd be bribing a bomb squad lieutenant, cracking a mathematician's seventeen-digit password, and conjuring culinary ideas for a billionaires' potluck.

That I could handle. But battling a giant octopus; raiding a forbidden coffee plantation; defusing a nitro-packed knapsack; stopping a Slayer (while working with one); and fixing my daughter's love life? I think even 007 would have flinched.

At this point in my story, however, my life was manageable, even pretty nice. I was sitting on hand-rubbed leather in a private limo, and a good cop was purring in my ear.

“Let's see now . . .” Quinn continued. “I'm imagining you in your duplex above the coffeehouse. You just

stepped out of the shower, and I'm holding your robe. I've got a nice blaze going in the bedroom, the champagne's poured, and I'm about to—"

"Mike!"

"Yes?"

I glanced at the glass partition separating me from the male chauffeur. It wasn't raised all the way.

Okay, phone sex in front of an audience (even an audience of one) might have been acceptable for your average world-weary urbanite—and, yes, after living in the Big, Bad Apple for years, I was weary enough for any middle-aged single mom.

But I was still my nonna's granddaughter. (Not that my dear daughter would agree. I could just hear her now: "That's why my generation does sexting, Mom! Type it out and it's totally private!" Right, honey. And nobody shares stored data in cyberspace.)

"I'm not at home," I explained to Quinn. "I'm on my way to dinner. You'll never guess where—"

"You better just tell me, Clare. I have a conference call in twenty."

The "boyfriend voice" was gone, the warmth chilling into a tone I knew far too well—stoic, emotionless cop.

I should have replied with something generally reassuring, like: "I miss you" (which I did); "I wish you were here" (ditto); or even . . . "On your next visit, I'm baking you up a Triple-Chocolate Italian Cheesecake like the one you inhaled on New Year's Eve" (which I planned to).

But I didn't say any of those things. My excitement level was so high that I simply blurted the news—"I'm riding in a chauffeured limo, on my way to dinner at the Source Club!" The silence stretched on so long I was sure our connection was lost.

“Mike?”

“You’re pulling my leg.”

“I’m not pulling anything.”

I couldn’t blame the man for doubting my words.

Even I had trouble believing it. The Source Club was one of the most élite enclaves in Manhattan. With my anemic bank account, I was lucky to get into Sam’s Club, let alone a zillionaires club.

“So what’s the story? Did your former mother-in-law give up and sell the Village Blend to a national chain?”

“Bite your tongue.”

“You inherited a fortune from a lost relative?” He grunted.

“Maybe I’d better get you to the altar already—in handcuffs, if necessary.”

“It’s nothing like that, and I’d rather you kept those handcuffs on your belt, if you don’t mind. The last time you used them on me, I needed an ice pack.”

“Are you fishing for another apology, or another bunch of flowers?”

“Neither . . . although I did love the daffodils and white tulips.”

“I’m glad,” he said. And I was, too, because the warm tone was back, and on that blustery evening in late January, I needed all the warmth I could get.

Outside, frosty flurries were beginning to fall, and the inviting lights of my coffeehouse were no longer in sight; neither were the cozy pubs and intimate bistros of Greenwich Village.

The golden glow of the historic district had been replaced with the silver glare of downtown skyscrapers. “You would love the limo he sent for me, Mike. It’s an antique Rolls-Royce—or is it a Bentley?”

“A Bentley is a Rolls, and who is he?”

“It’s so British, like something the late Princess Diana would have ridden around in, but he’s modernized the inside with all these gadgets—”

“I repeat, who is he? And how did you end up in his limousine?”

“That’s kind of a long story.”

“Give me the short version.”

“You know part of it already. Remember that poor guy I helped out the other day?”

“The billionaire? I wouldn’t call him poor, Clare.”

“You know what I mean. This special dinner is his way of saying thanks.”

Suddenly I was listening to a whole new dead zone. The cellular waves kept rolling up from DC, but Quinn’s voice wasn’t riding them.

“Maybe you’d better give me the long version,” he finally said. “And start at the beginning.”

“I thought you had a conference call in twenty?”

“The Los Angeles District Attorney can wait.”

Uh-oh. “It’s completely innocent, Mike. Why do you think I’m telling you?”

“Go on.”

“You remember, don’t you? This all started with a coffee drink order.”

“A coffee drink order?”

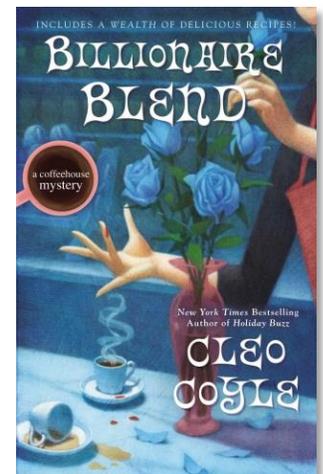
“Actually, more like two dozen coffee drink orders...”

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Billionaire Blend *A Coffeehouse Mystery*

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her books at her online coffeehouse*

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Praise for ...
THE COFFEEHOUSE MYSTERIES

★ **Starred Review:** “Coyle’s Coffeehouse books are superb examples of the cozy genre because of their intelligent cast of characters, their subtle wit, and their knowledge of the coffee industry used to add depth and flavor to the stories...Highly recommended for all mystery collections.” —*Library Journal* on **ESPRESSO SHOT**

“Clare and company are some of the most vibrant characters I’ve ever read. Coyle also is a master of misdirection and red herrings. I challenge any reader to figure out whodunit before Coyle reveals all.” —*Mystery Scene*

“Coyle’s coffeehouse mysteries (Espresso Shot, French Pressed, Murder Most Frothy, etc.) are packed with believable characters and topped with serious coffee lore and holiday recipes. This one will keep your cup piping hot.”
—*Kirkus* on **HOLIDAY GRIND**

“Both new and returning readers will love this ninth outing for Clare Cosi, amateur sleuth extraordinaire who remains sweet yet strong; bold yet fallible...Even readers who normally don’t pick up cozies will be right at home with the fast pacing and clever dialogue...” 4-1/2 stars —*RT Book Reviews* on **ROAST MORTEM**

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