

# *The Inheritance*

## The Inheritance

by

Thomas G. Kimpel

1989

Jamie

I'm on the floor factoring trinomials, trying to do them the stupid way our math teacher says we're *supposed* to instead of the easy way. What a waste of time. The doorbell buzzes, but I pretend not to hear. Anyway, it's never for me. It's probably someone selling magazines, or the latest miracle cleaning detergent, or some other ridiculous thing we can't live without. Jehovah's Witnesses are the worst. They'll stay at your front door for hours if you let them. The last time they came, thank God, dad answered the door. "Nobody's home," he said as soon as he saw them. Then he closed it. It was awesome, but I don't have the nerve to do it. Another buzz. On the other hand, it might be one of Julie's disciples. Julie, that's my older sister, is a senior in high school. She's everything I'm not; popular, pretty, superficial, and slutty. Well, it's the truth, and, besides, everyone else knows, so you may as well too. Did I mention she's popular? All in all, though, she's a decent sister. At school she totally ignores me, but that's okay; I understand. There she's the queen bee, but at home, she's just my big sister. I'm lucky that way because, unlike most of my friends' families, the four of us get along pretty well. We actually *like* doing stuff together. Sometimes we play cards or board games, like monopoly, but mostly we just hang out, talking and teasing each other. We laugh a lot. There's no TV in our house and, believe it or not, that's cool. The shows are so stupid; all they do is waste time and cause brain rot. But, oh my God, do we ever read—even Julie, when she's not on the phone. The best is right before bedtime. Every night me and my big sister crawl into bed beside mom

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and listen as dad reads aloud to us. We've gone through all of the *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* books, just to name a few. I think it's a big part of why we're so close. Julie likes it too, though she'll never admit it to her friends. Buzz, buzz. I look up. My dad smiles at me, but it's not a real smile. It says 'get your ass off the floor and go answer the door.' Can't he see I'm busy? He pouts. Alright, already, I give in.

### John

No one in our family likes answering the front door. A design flaw, my fault, has it situated downstairs, well away from the family room and kitchen, which, in our reverse two-story, are upstairs and the only areas of the house we truly live in. I lower the book I'm reading, a fifty year old hardbound edition of *Huck Finn*, so that Jamie, my precocious 12-year-old daughter, slowly comes into view. Already, she's glaring at me. Not wanting to disappoint, I nod and gesture for her to answer the door. The buzzer sounds again and I urge her on with a rueful smile. She doesn't buy it; just makes a huffing sound and rolls her eyes at me. Still, she uncoils herself from the floor where she's been studying, sitting, if one can call it that, in her usual pretzel-like repose and stalks off to do my bidding. Had she been stubborn and refused, as she often does, it would have gone unanswered, and then, perhaps, our lives would not have been shattered beyond recognition. But she does and they are. My fault again.

"It's for *you*," the words screech up the stairs like a nuclear missile and explode in my ears.

I sigh. "Okay, dear, I'm coming." She elbows me in the ribs as we pass each other in the hall. Coughing and sputtering, feigning a most severe degree of agony, I say, "I'm cutting you out of my will, young lady."

She puts a hand to her heart, bats her eyes then looks up, and, in an airy, high-pitched voice says, "Oh, such a relief, I just don't know what I'd ever do with all those pennies you have stored up in that old shoebox. Why, the taxes alone would be staggering."

*How does she know about that?* The door buzzes again. I give up and answer it; a man is waiting for me. He looks odd, out of place, as if it's one of those Star Trek episodes and he's been beamed into the future. He's short, maybe five-foot-five and stocky, wearing a pinstripe suit with 1930 style lapels, perfectly polished black oxford wing tips, and a fedora hat. "Hello, what can I do for you?"

"Are you John Robbins?" he croaks, voice like a bull frog.

"Yes."

"And your father's name?"

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“My father?” I say, indignant. The man nods and looks at me in such a way that makes me think it best to answer, and so I do. “John Carol Robbins, but he’s been dead for over thirty years. What the hell is this all about anyway?” He doesn’t answer. I stare at him but the man doesn’t flinch. Instead, without a word, and in a motion so smooth and practiced I’m hardly aware of it, he slips a beefy hand behind the lapel of his perfectly pressed suit and pulls something from his inside vest pocket. An envelope, and, across the front, written in bold, beautiful calligraphy, is my name. Reflexively, I hold out my hands. The late afternoon sun reflects shimmers of reds and yellows off the expensive linen paper. The man places it in my open palms like a bouquet of sweet scented flowers, and yet, to me, it smells like trouble. Don’t be paranoid, I tell myself. It could be something good; or maybe it’s nothing at all, and for a fleeting moment I hold on to this hope. Then the man starts talking again.

“Yes, I suppose that is the only name you knew him by, but it wasn’t his God-given name.” The man tips his hat and smiles. “Good day, sir,” he says then turns and takes off down the driveway as if returning to an FTD delivery van instead of having just handed me a bomb.

I stand in the doorway, frozen in place by legs gone leaden and feet too numb to move, watching. A limo, a late model Lincoln with tinted windows, comes out of nowhere. Its Black jaws open, swallow the man up, and he’s gone.

Unable to resist temptation, I finally give in, peek inside the envelope. The words jump out at me like blasts of machine gun fire. *Last will and testament...Raffaele Romano... only surviving heir...John Edward Robbins... son of John Carl Robbins (a.k.a. Geno Romano), deceased... son of Raffaele...* Forgotten memories surface from somewhere deep inside, little tidbits; my father speaking Italian in his sleep; my mother, angry, yelling Geno instead of John. Connecting the dots in my mind I watch, helpless, my hopes being cast in concrete. Then, like others before me who were dressed in pavement then plummeted to a watery grave, I feel the unbearable weight of my heritage pull me down into the icy waters of a new reality. And then I’m gone, too, transported from this false threshold of a time that no longer exists to the threshold of a different life...

Like most children, I normalized my childhood. Dad was weird, a bit uptight, but no big deal. Except, I now understand, it was. It wasn’t normal; he wasn’t normal. A news hound and compulsive newspaper reader, or, at least, a compulsive buyer of newspapers, my father knew precisely where and when to acquire the latest editions. He arrived at *Dog Daze Dailey Rags and Periodicals*—one of those old-fashioned, street-corner newsstands—at precisely six-twenty-five in the morning and waited. At six-thirty old Mr. Griffith rolled up the storefront, spitting,

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snorting, and sneering at my father. “Goddamnitall Robbins, if it weren’t for you a man might get enough fuckin’ sleep to call himself human.” Then he’d pull a pair of blue wire cutters from his ink-stained apron and snip the band off the top bundle of papers. Fifty copies of *The New Paradise Morning News* burst out like an accordion. “Here you go,” he’d say, flinging one at my dad, pages flapping in the breeze. Dad said nothing, simply gathered up the pages and pointed to the shiny nickel on the counter. At nine-thirty he was back for a copy of *The New York Times*, and then, again at eleven o’clock, for *The Washington Post*. On his way home at five o’clock it was time for *The New Paradise Evening News* and a copy of that morning’s *LA Times*. I didn’t know what he was looking for, but I knew when he found it. I knew to steer clear. He was generally a docile, even pathetic soul, but on those days he turned into Kafka’s worst nightmare. My mother downplayed it and so I didn’t think too much about it. He was a quirky guy, but hey, he was my dad.

Until July 22, 1959...

I’m thirteen. It’s one of those days, only worse. Mom is a basket case. I have to get away from her. Stepping into the garage to fetch my basketball I find him, car running, slumped over the wheel. For reasons that will never be entirely clear to me, finding my father dead like that doesn’t bother me half as much as telling my mother about it. She cries for hours, sobbing and moaning until I can hardly stand it. But I stay, holding her and comforting her through the night with genuine sympathy for her—and a faux grief for him.

I’m ashamed not to feel more than I do, and yet, there just isn’t any sense of loss or sadness inside of me. Not for him, anyway. My mind is consumed with only one thought, a question: *why did he do it?* Maybe that’s what blocking out my feelings; I honestly don’t know. But that’s the way it is.

The next morning I wake up and it comes to me how to answer the question. Such a simple thing, really, I’m bit chagrinned not to have thought of it before. The library; they keep newspapers around for at least a couple of weeks. All I have to do is go there and look up yesterday’s news. *The New York Times*’ headline from July 22, 1959: *Underworld Kingpin Raffaele Romano Indicted*. Similar headlines, two and three inches thick, sit atop the other papers. Of course I’ve heard of the guy, everyone has, but what does he have to do with dad? Deep inside my brain a memory tries to break free and tell me something, but I don’t want to know. So I shove it back down again; blow it off and chalk the whole mess up to dad’s weirdness. And that was that...

Until some thirty years later when a man in a pinstriped suit hands me an envelope and, in a single minute, my whole life’s history is rewritten. I’m no longer a happy-go-lucky, small-town nobody, but the grandson of a notorious gangster. Slamming the door and cursing under my breath I head upstairs.

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I'm exhausted. My head, a field of hidden memories exploding like landmines, pounds with the pain of history, and aches for innocence. Where am I? I blink, realize I'm at the kitchen table, and vaguely become aware of someone talking. Then they're gone. Long forgotten fragments, pieces of my past that never made sense before, come together like an absurd jigsaw puzzle. For the first time in my life, everything falls into place. It's like I'm being sucked into the vortex of a tornado.

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**Julie**

I'm on the phone, downstairs in my bedroom. Dad slams the front door so hard the whole house shakes. My ceramic hippo takes a few steps and nearly walks off its shelf. Shit, I grab him before he falls. I love that hippo. On the other end of the phone my friend asks what the hell is going on. "I don't know. I'll call you back later." I step out of my room and see my dad, a fat white envelope clutched in his right hand, shaking. His entire body is trembling. I've never seen him like this before. It scares me. I follow him upstairs. He sits down at the kitchen table, a vacant look in his eyes, skin gone pale.

"Dad, are you okay?" I wait. "Dad?"

What the fuck? I wonder, because dad isn't hearing or seeing me; he's just staring out into space like a dead ghost. Is that even possible? Whatever, who cares. My sister is in the other room, miss pretzel logic, curled up on the floor doing her homework, clueless as usual. "Hey, Nerdette, what's going on with dad?"

"How should I know?" she says, not bothering to look up.

"Jesus Christ, what I mean is, get your little buns over here because, I'm telling you, something is wrong."

"You're supposed to be the big sister," she complains, but gets up anyway. Then she sees him, "What did you do to him?"

"I didn't do anything to him."

"Right," she says, giving me the hairy eyeball. I blow her a raspberry.

Now she's working on him. "Dad, are you okay?" she says, and when he doesn't answer, "Are you okay?" louder. She looks at me, no longer accusing but worried. We're both worried.

"Jesus," I say, because Jamie has his head in her hands, shaking it like a gourd. "Be careful."

"Dad, talk to me," she yells, right in his face.

He pinks-up as he looks back and forth between the two of us, and then stares down at the envelope. "Sorry, girls, I guess I kind of spaced out. I'm okay. I just need some time to think about things, that's all."

"Things," I say, "like what's in the envelope?" He nods.

"Yeah," says Jamie. "What *is* in the envelope?"

"Not right now, I need some time."

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“Daaaaad,” we whine in unison.

“Not now.”

I ask him if he’s all right and he says he is. So, what the heck, I rip the envelope out of his hands.

“Julie!” He says, not quite yelling, as he reaches for it. But I’m already across the room, pulling out a sheaf of papers.

Jamie is beside me in a heartbeat. “It’s a will.” She says and looks at dad. “Who died?” He doesn’t answer; he’s gone blank again.

Frantically, I scan the document until I find what I’m looking for, the only thing I’m interested in, and there it is. I blink, do a double take. No, I’m not hallucinating. Jamie sees something in my expression because she looks at me and says, “What?”

I let all the papers except one flutter to the floor and hold it out for Jamie to see.

“There must be some mistake,” she says. I smile, shake my head. Jamie screeches and starts jumping up and down.

Then I do something I haven’t done in years, throw my arms around my little sister and pick her up. She’s really not so little, weighs about as much as I do, but right now she feels as light as a two year old. I twirl her around and around, all the time screaming, “We’re rich, we’re rich!” After a few turns Jamie joins in. A few turns later I stumble and we fall to the floor, laughing, and lay on our backs grinning at each other.

“What in the world is going on?” Its mom, she must’ve come in during the commotion. I look up and see her standing next to my zombie-looking father.

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Joanne

I can hear the kids screaming before I even get to the front door, so I run inside and throw my satchel down in the foyer. When I realize the screams are not frightened ones but joyous ones, I'm relieved and take my time walking upstairs. Then I see John. He's sitting at the kitchen table looking like a specimen from a wax museum. The girls are rolling on the floor across the way, hysterical with laughter. The picture makes no sense. "John," I say, putting a hand on his shoulder, what the hell is happening?" When he doesn't answer I ask again, this time louder, hoping for anyone to answer. "What in the world is going on?" The girls run over and give me a hug. It takes a few minutes, but they bring me up to speed and fetch the papers for me to look at. We're all sitting around the kitchen table now, Jamie works on getting her father's attention while I look through the documents. I read aloud, a letter dated July 22, 1989:

My dearest grandson;

You know who I am, of course, but you don't really know me. I regret that. But it was your father's wish, and I honored his request even after his death. Until now. I beg you indulge an old and dying man. Your father would say I'm just being selfish, and perhaps I am, but, in the end, we all are who we are. At any rate, the closer I am to death, the more intolerable it is to think of dying without leaving something to my only living heir. Most of my money and possessions are gone; however, I did make some provisions before taking up residence in this institution. There's a key to a safe deposit box (details enclosed in a separate document) in the envelope. In the box are a variety of stocks and bonds that, despite the stock market's abysmal performance of recent years, should still be worth somewhere in the neighborhood of two and half million American dollars. And don't worry; I've made sure there won't be any legal hassles.

Signed,

RR

That day was a nightmare. John was in and out, mostly out. I don't know where he went at those times but he wasn't with us. Then, when he was present, my usually accommodating husband was not to be reasoned with. He wanted nothing to do with the money, said it was dirty and wasn't going to touch it. Julie thought he was nuts, but I knew better. One of the things I loved about John was his moral fortitude but sometimes, like then, it drove me crazy. I wanted that money. As soon as those seven figures registered in my brain I saw college educations and new cars and money for retirement and not having to live paycheck to paycheck—on my paycheck. Once those images were in my mind it was as if they were drawn with indelible ink; I couldn't let go of them. Or at least, I wouldn't let go, just as he wouldn't let go of his own convictions.

Neither of us gave in and the argument went on and on. We were so wrapped up in our own self righteousness we didn't see our family falling apart around us. Jamie took it the hardest. I failed her that day, we both did. I think we were waiting for her to pull us together, like she usually did. Put out the fire, so to speak. But this was an out-

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of-control wildfire like she'd never seen. The stakes were too high; we weren't able to deal with it, let alone a little girl. In any case, it wasn't her job. She was only twelve, and on that day she reminded us just how much of a kid she still was. By the time we noticed Jamie needed some attention it was too late. My sweet little girl was rolled up in bed, sucking her thumb with this vacant look on her face. It was awful. She's never been the same.

2010

Julie

Who would have guessed? The 1989 homecoming queen of New Pleasant PA, me, a diaper-changing, Hamburger Helper using housewife from nowheresville, PA. Ridiculous, isn't it? But it's true. And here's the best part: I'm happy. That doesn't mean life is easy, it's not. Kind of strange coming from a girl who once thought the biggest struggle she'd ever have to face was getting her eyeliner straight. Makeup? You've got to be kidding, not with three kids running around and another on the way. I've grown to believe the hard times are there to make the good times sweeter. Even so, right now I could do with one less struggle.

My husband, Jimmy, he's out of work. Travel industry. *Adventure Travel*, founded by his grandfather, had been in business over forty years. Now it's gone. Jimmy feels terrible about it, but it wasn't his fault. In fact, during the last recession back in the 80s, it was Jimmy, fresh out of high school, who saved it. He's a good business man, but it's hard to sell frills in a bad economy. We'd still be all right if he hadn't given his four employees a full year's severance *and* paid the cobra on their health insurance. But that's the kind of guy he is, and, I suppose, it's one of the reasons I love him so much. Anyway, he'll end up on his feet, but right now we're hurting.

Why don't I just borrow some money from mom and dad? That's easy; they're not together and the inheritance is gone. A good chunk of it went to lawyers while mom and dad squabbled. When, thank God, they got divorced a year later Dad washed his hands of it, gave it all to her. To begin with she invested poorly and then the Twin Towers came down and bit off another humongous chunk. There was enough left to put my sister and I through college—Wellesley and then Yale Law for Jamie, Penn State for me— but, between tuition and paying off the mortgage on her too expensive house, it was gone. Most of the time I'm glad, but right now...

Other than selling the house, which is the absolute last resort, there's only one viable option left: Jamie. We haven't talked since that big blow-up a couple years ago. She was defending some murderer; what was his name? Anyway, it doesn't matter; he was acquitted on some technicality. A brilliant legal maneuver, granted, but still, everyone knew he was guilty. After the trial she calls me up all excited, thought I'd be excited too, proud of her.

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“But he’s a murderer,” I said, “how do you even live with that?” She blasted me to kingdom come; everyone deserves a fair trial, and so forth. Problem is, when Jamie’s involved, there’s no such thing. She has a 75% acquittal rate as a criminal defender, which is, I guess, pretty good. It’s also pretty scary considering the scumbags she represents. It’s sick, really. But now I need her, and I’m hoping blood is thicker than all the other shit that’s come between us.

Okay, so I’m procrastinating; I don’t want to call Jamie. But, when your kids’ welfare is at stake, you swallow your pride and do what you have to. I’m not going to let my precious little family be torn apart on account of money, no way.

I call her office in Seattle; convince the secretary to put me through to her royal highness—she’ll never call back if I leave a message. “Hello?” Jamie snaps.

“Hey, it’s me, Jules, your big sister.”

“I didn’t know I had one.”

A predictable response and I’m ready. Without missing a beat I say, “Not to mention three nieces and another one on the way.” That gets her, I can tell by the silence; can almost see the look on my little sister’s face as she tries to pull herself back together. Of course, it doesn’t take long.

“Well then, congratulations to both you and the fathers, whoever they are.”

Bitch. It’s hard to let that one drop but I bite my tongue, remembering that I need her. “Sorry to disappoint, sis, but they’re all Jimmy’s. Which brings me to the point...”

“The point being you need money. Right?”

Of course she’s right. “Guilty as charged.” I say. With Jamie it’s always better to be upfront. Besides, she’d never believe otherwise.

“Well then, that’s easy. The answer is no.”

I sense her putting the phone down and yell, “Jamie, just listen. For a minute, please.”

After a few seconds, which seems like an hour, she gets back on the line. “My, my, we do sound desperate.”

Thank goodness. Maybe she feels sorry for me. Then again, no, she just likes to hear me beg. Fine, whatever it takes. “Yeah, well, maybe not desperate, but closing in on it. Jimmy’s travel company went out of business on account of the economy. He’ll land on his feet, though, you know Jimmy.” She doesn’t really know Jimmy, but if

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I make him seem familiar she's more likely to help us. I knew that psych major at Penn State would be good for something.

“As a matter of fact, I don't know Jimmy. I don't know him at all. Far as I know he could be the biggest asshole on the planet. He probably blew all your money on prostitutes and gambling. I'm not going to bail him out of that shit.”

So much for psychology. “Okay Jamie, I give up. Uncle. How much do you want me to grovel? I've got three kids, a husband out of work, and about enough money for a week's worth of groceries.”

“I don't need you to grovel, sister,” she says, hissing, and I feel the need to wipe her spittle off my ear. “What I need is security. Is there any equity in that cracker box you call a house?”

“What the fuck are you, some kind of loan shark?” Shit, now I've lost it. Deep breath. Okay. “I'm sorry, you got to understand, I'm just a bit stressed out. I've never asked you for money before and I don't like doing it.” I explode, unable to control myself. “It's alright though, don't worry about us. We can sell the house for about half what we put into it and that'll be enough to get by until Jimmy's is on his feet again. I can raise my four kids in a studio apartment for a while. No problem. You just go ahead and buy yourself another Lexus and another beach house in Mexico. Have a good time.” I slam the phone down and feel better. But only for a minute, then I realize what I've done. Shit.

Next day, four o'clock in the afternoon, I'm at the bank and my teller/friend, Amy starts waving, frantic-like, when she sees me. And so, even though I'm about to drop from carrying around our fourth—and last—child, I wait in line for her customer to finish his business. Thirty-seven is definitely too old; I'm hardly showing and already I can tell this is going to be one hell of a pregnancy. It's our only unplanned one and it's Jimmy's fault, romantic son-of-a bitch. I close my eyes, send him a telepathic message: This kid better be worth it or you are in big trouble. There's plenty of time to think because the hundred and thirty-year-old hunchback in front of me, Mr. McFarlane, better known as Scrooge to the people of Deer Valley, is depositing the afternoon booty from his dime store/soda shop that's been a fixture on Main Street longer than anyone can remember.

Amy tries to urge him along, “Mr. McFarlane, why don't you just spill the bag on the counter. It'll be easier to count that way.”

He looks at her and frowns, “Easier to rip me off that way, too.” Then his bony hand pulls another small potpourri of loose change and wadded bills, none of it rolled or wrapped, from an old moneybag and spreads it out carefully on the counter in front of her.

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“Arghh!” says Amy when I finally step up to the window. “Will that old man never die?”

Perhaps it sounds a bit harsh but she has to deal with him three and four times a day, so I commiserate. “Not soon enough,” I say. She smiles and leans forward.

“Where did all the money come from?”

“What money?” I ask, confused, “McFarlane’s?”

“No, not his,” she says, and studies my face. “You you don’t know, do you?”

“Know what?” Amy shakes her head and types something into her machine. It spits out a paper and she hands it to me. One hundred thousand has been deposited into our bank account this morning.

“This isn’t a joke, is it?”

She gives me a look, “Solid as granite, you don’t joke about money when you work at a bank.” I don’t say anything so she repeats her question, “Where did it come from?”

My sister, I think, but can’t speak. Who would have guessed?

Two weeks later...

Twenty minutes of singing *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* and my cranky two-year-old, Lizzie, is almost out. Her eyes cycle, the lids slowly closing then fluttering open, but only for an instant—a moment of rebellion she’s too tired to maintain—before they surrender and close again. With each cycle they stay shut a little longer until soon... a fucking knock at the door. She startles and, this time, her eyes open wide and she’s fully awake. God, I was looking forward to a nap, now, instead, I get an overtired Lizzy for the rest of the day, a nightmare beyond description. I pick her up before she screams, put her on my hip, and set out to answer the door. I’m about to pull it open when whoever the asshole is on the other side knocks again. It’s so loud I almost fall over. Lizzie screams. “Put the fucking sledge hammer away,” I say and open the door. A slender fairy looking young man about twenty-five wearing a goofy blue uniform smiles up at me.

“Sorry, ma’am.”

“What do you want?” I ask without any pretense of civility. I bounce Lizzie on my hip and kiss the top of her head, “Shoosh now, everything’s alright, mommy’s here.”

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The man hands me a large manila envelope and holds up one of those electronic doo-dads for me to sign. I find Lizzie's binky and give it to her. She pops it in her mouth and attacks it. My little shark is happy now. I scrawl my name and slam the door then take the package upstairs and toss it on the kitchen table.

Jimmy comes home a couple hours later and I hand Lizzy to him. "She's all yours, sweetheart," I say and give him a kiss on the lips. He doesn't mind. I sit down at the table and open the envelope. It's from Jamie. I read through it, heat rising in my face. "Fucking bitch," I say, somewhat louder than I intend to.

Jimmy turns and looks at me, "What's the matter?"

"It's a goddamned payment plan from my little sister. Let me see, there's an interest only option we can do for up to two years."

"What?"

"Wait, that's not the best part. She's got a place here where we have to sign away our lives or mortgage the house or something as collateral."

"Let's let me see that," he says and hands me the baby.

"Thanks," I say.

Can you believe that? We'll pay the little bitch off as soon as we can, she should know that. Christ, I knew it wasn't a fucking gift, why does she do things like this? There is a return envelope for me to send the forms back in, all I have to do is call that fagot courier back and give it to him. That part's pretty nice, anyway. I don't sign the papers; instead I give her something else. There's a Dylan concert in New York Jimmy and I were going to see, bought the tickets a long time ago, but now it's out of the question. I never got around to selling them online so I put them in the envelope along with a note that says Fuck off and have a good time.

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Jamie, 2010

For only a hundred thousand dollars I get a pair of Dylan tickets. The venue is only 3000 miles away and the show was last week. Some deal, hmmm? Oh well, she'll pay me back eventually. Even though I can't use the tickets, they do make me think, which I'm sure is precisely why she gave them to me. Think about things I don't want to think about, things I haven't thought about in years. Things I wish would just stay buried. My dad. My family. But it's no use, the trap has been sprung and the memories have escaped. Shit.

My dad loved Bob Dylan, used to play Dylan's songs on the guitar and we'd all sing along with him. As a young girl, I worshiped my dad. He was smart and idealistic and a great parent. He wasn't afraid to get down on his hands and knees to play with me, doing whatever I wanted to do—even if it bored him out of his skull. He made me feel like a queen, but he also taught me to be compassionate, to love myself, and how to love others, even when they aren't nice to you. Then, after mom got custody of me and my sister in the divorce I changed, got all angry and hostile, and forgot it all. The last time I talked to my dad was just after 9-11.

Dad's favorite Dylan song was *My Back Pages*. I remember the main chorus line, *Oh, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now*, and it makes me wonder if I've learned anything or if I've just busied myself with success. It takes a long time for some of us to grow up, or, as the case may be, to un-grow-up.

It's been two weeks now since I got the tickets and my brain is a mess. Thanks a lot, Julie. These growing pains, especially condensed into a short timeframe like this, hurt like a son of a bitch. Oh well, no pain no gain, right? I easily find Dad's number listed on the Internet. Still, I stare at the phone for an hour before diving in.

"Hello, you've reached the residence of John Robbins. It's the twenty-first century; you know what to do so do it." That's my dad; I leave my name, my cell phone number, my private line at work, my landline at home, and tell him that I miss him and I love him. I get a call back that night, but it's not Dad. It's Julie. I can tell right off something's wrong.

"What's the matter, Jules?"

She's crying, can hardly talk. I wait. "It's dad," she says. It takes a while but eventually I get the story. He's had lung cancer for several months, advanced, incurable, but didn't want to worry anyone. Julie only found out a week ago. He died yesterday.

***Thomas G Kimpel***

A cavernous hole opens up in my heart. The phone falls from my hand, and I'm freefalling. I reach out for my big sister and wonder if Julie will catch me.

***The Inheritance***  
Christmas Day 2012

Joanne

“Hey guys,” yells Jamie from the top of the stairs, “I hope you’re about ready. I don’t think I can hold these kids back much longer.”

“Send them on down,” says Jimmy and the kids nearly plow right through their Aunt Jamie. She picks up little John just in time before he tumbles down the stairs headfirst.

“Me walk, me walk!” He says trying to wiggle out of her arms.

“You can walk when we get on level ground,” she says and hustles him downstairs with the other children. John is Julie’s youngest, a little over two years old now. He not only looks like his grandfather but acts like him too. Independent and stubborn.

This is the first Christmas we’ve spent together since nineteen ninety-eight and that’s one I’d rather forget. It’s also the first one in Julie and Jimmy’s beautiful new house. Jimmy’s business is going gangbusters and when little John started walking it convinced them they needed more room. I wish John was here. He would be proud at how our girls have turned out and he’d have loved the grandchildren. They’re good kids; Julie and Jimmy do a great job with them. Jamie has moved to Pittsburgh, only 100 miles away now and runs a different kind of law practice. She works for various civil rights and minority organizations, does a lot of pro bono work. And she is good. She’s also got a boyfriend, Max. He’s a wild thing, but he’s also wild about Jamie and that’s all that really matters. She’s happy and, if I’ve learned anything in this life, it’s that happiness and family is what it’s all about.

Julie’s oldest, Sarah, runs over and looks up at me, all wide eyed and excited. “Come on, Grandma,” she whines, and drags me over to the mantel place where my stocking is the only one still untouched. She lifts it off its hook and thrusts it at me. “Open it, Grandma!” She says then whispers in my ear, “Santa Jamie put something in there for all of us, except the baby, that is.”

I pull out an orange and a couple pencils and then I see them. A set of concert tickets: Bob Dylan at The Mellon Arena, February 21st, 2013.