

Sixty-Thirty-Ten

Would I say my dad was a good guy? Yeah, I guess I would. He was a lot of fun to be around, I'll say that. One reason was that there were never any rules with my dad. Having that kind of freedom means a lot when you're a kid and it made me idolize him even more, as opposed to my mom, who had rules for just about everything. I realized much later why she had to be the enforcer of rules—the bad cop if you will—or the whole house would have fallen apart. Someone had to do it, and that responsibility fell on my mom because my dad sure as hell wasn't going to be that person. He despised rules, almost as much as he despised working for someone and having to answer to a boss.

He never had a real job as far back as I can remember. Pretty much came and went whenever he pleased. Most of the time he would barter for things. Paid cash only when he had to. Fixed whatever needed fixing. Then he'd turn around and sell it for as much as he could get for it. Sometimes he would trade the item he repaired for something else he needed. Some things he bought he wouldn't sell. We would use them at home, like appliances, furniture, and cars. The machinery and tools he bartered for he would use to help him make money. That was how he made a living, or what you could call a living. I only realized much later how little of a living he made. But you don't notice these monetary things when you're a kid; they're not important. Besides, it was how a lot of men in the rural part of Maine where we lived made money. It was a badge of honor to be a jack-of-all-trades and master-of-none, never being exceptional at any one thing but figuring out how to do just about anything when the need arose. The problem was that he left the entire burden of providing for us on my mother and it took a toll on her and their marriage. That was my father and good luck trying to change him. Despite all his character flaws, I miss him. I miss hanging out with him most of all.

He always seemed to have a pocket full of cash. And maybe that visual of him always carrying around a wad full of cash in some way influenced me to be a professional gambler. Maybe it was the first trip to Vegas that hooked me. Who knows? Without a doubt, I would have to say that the type of person he was influenced the person I turned out to be. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. I also could never stomach a nine-to-five job or have to work for someone else. The things I learned from him prepared me to be good at what I do today. I will never have the negotiating skills he had; he was the best negotiator I have ever seen. But the one skill I was able to master from being around my dad was how to spot value. I have this knack for spotting value in certain bets that others don't see or can't see, and I bet accordingly. I owe this skill to watching him work and marveling at how he used to operate.

It makes me smile when I think back to those days when I used to watch him work his magic on a daily basis. His negotiating skills were so revered where we lived that few locals would dare transact a deal with him for fear of getting the short end of the stick.

He was that good. He ended up traveling to nearby towns and into New Hampshire where people didn't know who he was, or buying from tourists. Often, after he shook on a deal and we were alone again, he would say to me in that thick Maine accent of his, "Those flatlanders didn't stand a chance." He was so confident in his ability to outwit his opponent. He had this innate sense of knowing when to walk away from a deal and when to pull the trigger when the price was right. Maybe it was this confidence that drove him to do what he did every day. It amazes me to this day how good he was at what he did.

I'll never forget the day the two of us were sitting in his beat-up pickup truck. It was early in the morning, and for some reason, we had time to kill. I think we were waiting for someone to meet us, which we did a lot. Anyway, we're sitting in his truck and I ask him what the greatest deal he ever made was. He thought about it for a second or two, took a drag on his cigarette, and casually said to me, "Oh, that's easy—the deal I made with my two brothers after my sister died."

I said to him, "What deal? I never heard about this."

"That's because I never told ya about it before," he says. "I don't want your mother to ever find out about that money. She'd kill me for sure."

"What money? What happened?"

He looked at me sternly. "If I tell ya, ya have to promise never to breathe a word about this to anyone, especially your mother."

"Okay, okay. I promise."

He cranked his window down an inch or two before he lit another cigarette and looked out aimlessly through his window. I remember the sun was blinding, piercing through the trees and hitting us smack in the face. The snow on the ground certainly didn't help. I was home for the summer from college and would often give him a hand when he needed one. I liked driving around with him, watching him work his magic. I think he enjoyed having me tag along, even though he never told me so.

"I wanted no part of that goddamn money," he said. "I was afraid of what it would do; I knew what it would do. Somehow, it would have been pissed away. So I made a deal for what I thought, at the time, was the best thing to do with it."

"Dad, what in God's name are you talking about?"

"The money your Aunt Becca left me when she died," he says.

"I didn't know Aunt Rebecca left you money," I replied. "What happened to it?"

“Nobody knows what happened to that money except the three of us, Becca’s partner, and the lawyers that were there.”

“Dad, can you please tell me what the hell you are talking about?”

“What time is it?” he asked abruptly.

“It’s almost seven-thirty,” I said. He never knew what time it was because he didn’t wear a watch.

“Where is that sonuvabitch?” he says, shielding his eyes from the sun with his hand as he looks out the window.

“Dad! The money?” I pressed. I was dying to find out what the hell he was talking about—most of all, why he considered it the best deal he ever pulled off.

“Your Aunt Becca dies, and I get this letter in the mail a week later.” He pauses as if he’s just remembered something, or something just clicked in his head, and it did. He reaches over and pushes the chrome button, opening the glove box door on this rusted-out metal dashboard. There was a heap of crumpled papers in there, and out of this mess, he pulled out a white envelope that was folded in half.

“Here, read it yourself,” he says, dropping the letter in my lap.

I started reading it. I remember it being typed on nice white paper with her name signed in blue ink. The paper had yellowed, and the ink had smudged and made an impression where the folded paper had touched it. The date at the top read May 12, 1983. Let me see if I can remember what it said.

My dearest brothers, if you are reading this letter, it means I am no longer alive. I’m sorry each of you did not get to come out here for a final visit and say your goodbyes, but you know how small our place is, and well, it just wasn’t feasible. I also couldn’t bear the thought of you seeing me in my wretched, diseased state or those pitiful stares. Besides, I want you to remember your big sister when life blew through my hair like a Pleasant Point breeze.

I lived a full life and have no regrets. As you know, I have lived a vastly different lifestyle than the one we were raised in. But “thy own self be true,” and I was. I was also fortunate enough to sock away a nice little nest egg before the cancer spread. I intended to leave it all to Lynda, who has been the love of my life since the day we met. She doesn’t want the money or the hassle. All she wants is the house—bless her heart. We never needed much to live on out here in Wyoming, and well, my little nest egg has grown to more than three million dollars. Can you believe it?!

I have decided to leave what's left of my money to you, my brothers. How much? You'll just have to come out here and find out. I have prepared a will, and it will be read by an attorney from the estate firm I hired to manage my affairs. Each of you personally needs to be present at the reading to receive your share. No one other than you will be allowed in during the reading. The reading will take place on the second Saturday following my death at 9:00 a.m. sharp in Jackson Hole. You will receive further instructions in the mail. You've been forewarned: The doors to where the reading will be held close at the stroke of nine. Don't be late! You know how much I hate people who are late. Your loving sister, Rebecca.

I read the part about the money two or three times just to make sure I had read it right.

“Three million dollars!” I shouted.

“Ayuh, three million dollars.”

I remember him repeating the figure as he stared out the windshield, recalling the letter in his mind. He took a long drag on his cigarette. He was lost in thought, his calloused hands wrapped around that steering wheel. I can still picture him in the truck at that very moment.

“I kept in touch with Becca every now and then; she never said a word about sockin’ away that much dough, and I never did find out how she made it all. It doesn't matter. She had it sitting in the bank. What're the chances her girlfriend doesn't keep it?” he says.

He said *girlfriend* in a weird way that made it clear how he felt about homosexuality. I wasn't going to give him a hard time about that now. I wanted to hear more of the story.

“Few days later, another letter comes in the mail,” he says. “This time it's from the lawyers. In it, there's a plane ticket and hotel reservation, with a car reserved for me at the airport. It said the reading of the will was going to be held on Memorial Day weekend—on Saturday morning—and I was to travel out there to Wyoming on the Friday before.”

“So you went out to Wyoming? I didn't know you did that. How come I don't remember any of this?”

“I didn't say anything except to tell you that your aunt Becca had died. I didn't dare tell your mother what the letter said. I told her I had to go out there for the funeral and was going to see my brothers. Thank God she hates to fly 'cause she said nothing to me about coming out there with me.”

By this time I'm chomping at the bit to hear more about this money. I also know my dad is going to remember every detail even though it took place years ago. He has this incredible memory. I do too, but not like him. If someone quotes him a price for selling something and months or even years pass by, he can remember that price and the day he inquired about it. Of course, the guy selling the item doesn't remember a thing about it, which always pissed my dad off.

"So I fly out there from Boston," he says to me. "Fly into this tiny airport. Sure enough, there's a car waitin' for me when I get there, and I drive straight to the hotel. I remember being tired 'cause it took me all day to get out there. I had some supper and went straight to bed."

He paused to take a drag on his cigarette, inhaled the smoke, and blew the rest through the crack in the window. I eyed him intently as the ashes fell from his cigarette onto his shirt and pants. He calmly brushes them onto the floorboard and continues the story.

"I wake up supah early the next morning on account of the time change and end up going for a drive. Never been out west before. Beautiful part of the country. I can see why Becca fell in love with it. Those Tetons are something else—the most beautiful mountain range I'd ever laid eyes on. Anyway, I get back to the hotel to get some breakfast, and who do I run into? My brothers are sittin' in the restaurant having breakfast. So we catch up a bit 'cause we ain't seen each other for a while, and naturally, the only thing they wanna talk about is the money—especially your Uncle Jack." Another drag off the cigarette and he goes on.

"Three million dollars this and three million dollars that. The way he had it all figured, there's three of us and three million dollars—and wouldn't you know—doesn't that split up nice and even? Besides, who else is she gonna give the money to? The letter said her girlfriend didn't want the money. Becca's leaving her the cabin and those three-and-a-half acres with the Tetons in her backyahd. Worth a pretty penny, you ask me. Course your Uncle Jack don't give a rat's ass 'bout the land or the mountains. He's got his sights set on that money. That will readin' couldn't come fast enough for him."

As my dad is telling this story, I can't help thinking of how different those Davis brothers are from each other. Different as stars are from stripes. They weren't brought up that way though. They all grew up in the same place, in Eastport, Maine. I guess their personalities just took over at some point. Grandpa Davis was a 'Mainah' through and through. He grew up on a skiff ride from Eastport, in a town called Edmunds. Spent his whole life living ten miles from where he was born. Imagine that? They say he could swim and run an outboard as soon as he could walk. He ended up managing a small marina near Point Pleasant for some guy. He worked at that marina nearly his whole life. He used to tell stories of renting boats on Campobello Island when FDR and the whole Roosevelt clan used to summer there.

My father told me Grandpa Davis worked on fishing boats, repaired motors, and painted them—that kind of work. In the off-season, he built houses and ran heavy equipment. If there was a buck to be made, Warren Davis was the first in line. He and my grandma Carolyn raised four kids in Eastport, and they were all taught to work hard, that your word is your bond, and that whatever you do, don't pay more for something than you have to.

Jack was the oldest of the boys and the second born. Bright and a good student, Jack wasn't much into athletics or partying. What he liked most was making money. From the time he was seven through high school graduation, he worked all kinds of odd jobs to earn money. He was entrepreneurial from the get-go. He had a paper route, mowed lawns, shoveled snow, and cleaned out garages. He didn't like boats; he got seasick, so he spent very little time at the marina. He was a good worker, though, and wasn't afraid to speak up when it came to getting paid what he was worth. He was hell-bent on saving his money as soon as he was old enough to count it. So it was no surprise to anyone that Jack went to college on a scholarship and majored in business. He went straight to Boston after graduation to work in the financial world, and he's been there making money ever since.

Roger was the third child to be born to Warren and Carolyn Davis. As a kid, Roger had little interest in school and no interest in sports, even though he had exceptional hand-eye coordination and was athletic. He wasn't interested in working menial jobs to earn money, like his older brother. He was a good-looking guy—the best-looking of the three brothers—and that brought him more attention from the girls. It wasn't that Roger wasn't a bright kid. He excelled when he set his mind to doing something. He was more interested in pursuing artistic and intellectual growth than academic or financial growth. He was a voracious reader and spent most of his adolescence writing poetry, playing guitar, and drawing on an art pad he always carried with him. He had no interest in going to college, which was a major source of concern for his parents, who fretted about how he was going to support himself after high school. Roger, however, remained unfazed by what job might lie ahead for him. He always found a way to make a living, survive, and be happy.

Gordon, my dad, was the last of the four children born, and if they saved the best for last, that was a great misnomer in this instance. He had no interest in school, even though he had more raw intelligence than any of his siblings. He barely graduated high school. He was athletic but had no interest in organized sports. Too many rules, he said. He was mechanical and good with his hands, like his father. He bought and fixed up old cars. Loved boats and loved to fish too. So it's no wonder that he spent most of his free time working on boats for his father at the marina. He also had a penchant for drinking beer and drag racing. He was a hell-raiser, and there were plenty of stories I'd heard from his friends about the shenanigans my father was involved in. He was never

arrested, but he should have been several times. It was all good, clean fun back then, I guess, and he was more of a mischievous kid than a juvenile delinquent.

I watched my dad get out of the truck to go inside the house and call his buddy, the guy who was supposed to meet us where we were. He gets back in, lights up another Kool, and tells me why his friend hasn't shown up yet. Something about his car.

I didn't care why his friend hadn't shown up. I wanted him to finish the story, and I told him so.

"The next morning, the three of us are in the room where the reading is to take place," he goes on. "A private dining room with this massive, hand-carved table in the middle of it. As soon as we get there, these four lawyers in suits jump up, shakin' our hands and handing us their business cards. All I can think of is the payday these shysters are pocketing for puttin' this whole thing together. Becca's partner is there, Linda, but spelled with a y. Boy, was she all butched out—big ass woman, covered in tattoos, with three-four earrings in each ear—wearin' a denim vest with the sleeves cut off. The other woman with her, we found out later, was one of the vets from the animal rescue."

As my father is telling this story, he's leaning against the driver's side door with one of his work boots on the transmission tunnel, and the window is cranked a third of the way down to let the smoke out. It's the middle of winter, and he's got the goddamn window open!

"So there's the three of us sittin' at one end of the table," he continues. "Becca's partner and this other woman are sittin' in the middle, and the four lawyers are sittin' at the other end. Nine of us all together. One of the lawyers—the oldest one with hair down to his shoulders—is sittin' at the head of the table with paperwork spread out in front of him. He starts by welcoming us to Wyoming and making small talk about the town and whatnot. He has this western drawl, which I imagine lots of folks out there do. Finally, he gets to the will, identifying everyone who's getting something from my sistah. He starts with the animal rescue place and reads off the name of the woman sitting there. Becca leaves them two hundred grand. Nice chunk of change. Then he reads off the partner's name—Lynda so and so. Becca leaves her the cabin, the property, her Jeep, all her belongings, plus a hundred grand in cash. Then he gets to us, reads off our three names, and says something about there being a conditional gift."

"Conditional gift?" I ask. "What the hell does that mean?"

"That's what I said. Apparently it means there's strings attached." He looks directly at me and raises his eyebrows as he takes another drag of his cigarette.

He recites to me what the lawyer read that day, remembering it as if it were yesterday.

“To my three brothers, I leave the remaining balance of my life’s savings in Wells Fargo Bank with the following condition: You must decide amongst yourselves, over the next forty-eight hours or sooner, how the money will be divided up between you. You are to determine which of you gets sixty percent, which of you gets thirty percent, and which of you gets ten percent. The money cannot be divided any other way. Your agreement on the split must occur before 9:00 a.m. on Monday, at which time you will report your decision to the attorneys in this same room and sign the appropriate paperwork. The attorneys will coordinate the transfer of funds accordingly. If you cannot agree on how the money should be divided, you will forfeit the entire amount. If this is the case, I have made arrangements for the money to be divided and distributed to five deserving charities that Lynda and I have selected. I am hopeful you can come to an amicable agreement. No back door deals! Honor my wishes. The last thing I want to do is start a rift between my brothers. If you do what’s right and what’s in your heart, it will all work out. I love you and wish you luck. Your loving sister, Becca.”

“Holy shit,” I said.

“Holy shit is right,” my dad replied. “Turns out she left three point two five million to us. The older guy asked us if we had any questions. There were a few I recall; none from me. Then he said that since there were no further questions, we would meet back here at nine o’clock on Monday morning. Or sooner if we can reach an agreement. The lawyers left. Becca’s partner and the other woman left, and it was just the three of us sitting there. Jack was the first one to speak.”

“He says, ‘Listen, this is a no-brainer. We split it up however they want us to on paper, and then we divide it three ways once we have it. It doesn't matter what percentages we choose. They can’t tell us what to do with it once it's ours.’ ”

“I told them straight away that I didn't want the money. So Jack says to me, ‘Whatta ya mean you don’t want the money?’

“ ‘Just what I said,’ I repeated.

“ ‘You have to accept at least ten percent,’ he says to me.’

“ ‘Okay,’ I told him. ‘I’ll take ten percent and donate it to one of the charities Becca picked out.’

“That's when Jack says to me, ‘You don’t have two nickels to rub together, and you're gonna turn your nose up at a million dollars. What are you, some kind of lunatic?’ He shakes his head and says, ‘You do whatever the fuck you want; Roger and I will split the rest.’

“He turns to Roger and says, ‘I have an escrow account. We can deposit the money there. I’ll take the sixty; you take the thirty. And as soon as the money’s there, we’ll split it down the middle. Take your half if you want. Or, you could leave it with me for like three years, and I guarantee you’ll never have to work another day in your life.’ ”

“Why didn’t you want the money?” I asked him, even though I knew why he didn’t.
“Lord knows we could’ve used it at the time.”

“You mean we could’ve easily spent it,” he says.

“What else do you do with money?”

“You don’t understand. All of a sudden I got all this money that I didn’t earn—it would’ve affected me is what I’m sayin’. In ways I couldn’t live with. I didn’t want that. What kind of example would that have been for you? I like my life the way it is. And the only way I can keep doing what I do is to leave every mornin’ knowing that I gotta earn some money on just my wits. Same as you do. You can’t do that with a million dollars lying in the bank. It corrupts you, poisons your mind, and makes you lazy. Laziness will kill you faster than alcohol or tobacco ever will.”

“So is that what happened?” I ask him. “You let Jack and Roger split the, whatever it was, two point seven million, and you donated the three hundred thousand to charity?”

“Not quite,” he says with a mischievous smirk. He lights up another Kool, inhales the smoke deep into his lungs, and exhales the rest out the window.

“So I see that Jack has this all figured out, right? He’s over there acting all high and mighty, and for some reason, it enters my mind that this money could do a greater good than falling into Jack’s greedy mitts. I didn’t mind Roger having the money—he could use it—but Jack didn’t need that money, that’s for sure.

“So I said to ‘em, ‘I changed my mind.’ ” I noticed a sly smile creeping on his face as he told me this.

“ ‘Here’s what I think we should do with the money’, ” I said to them. ‘I think the largest portion of the money should be donated to people who really need it. There are people out there who could use this money a helluva lot more than we do. We can all agree on a charity. Roger can keep the thirty percent, and since you already have plenty of money, Jack, you can have the three hundred grand. I’ll take the sixty percent and give it to the charity we choose. I still won’t take a dime of it.’ ”

“Uncle Jack must’ve blown a gasket when you said that,” I said.

“You shoulda seen the look on his face,” he said. “He’s just starin’ at me—red as a beet—steam pourin’ outta his ears.” He laughed at the recollection. “I looked over at Roger, and I could see he wasn’t opposed to doing something like that. He was still gettin’ a million. But I knew your Uncle Jack would never go for it, so we’d be right back to square one. And if we couldn’t agree on the split, then we’d each get nuthin’, which was fine by me.”

“You had them by the balls,” I said.

“Ayuh,” he says. “I can tell Jack is livid. He wants to lay into me real good, but he can’t. So he says to me, ‘How come you’re the one deciding how we split the money? It should be a democracy. If there are two votes to one to split it a certain way, then I say the other guy has to go along with it. That’s the *fair* way to do it.’ ”

“Good comeback,” I said.

“He’s no dummy, your Uncle Jack. So I said to ‘em, ‘I’m just givin’ you my position on how we should split the money. I’m not sayin’ ya have to agree with me. Becca didn’t specify that it had to be democratic. She only said we need to come to an agreement, and if we can’t, then the money would go to the five charities of her choosing.’ ”

“ ‘But you’re sabotaging this deal for us,’ Jack says, standing up and getting hot. ‘Just because *you* don’t want to accept the money. That’s *your* fuckin’ problem. Don’t expect me to live by your twisted morals. If my sister wants to leave me some money, I’m gonna take it. If you don’t want to take it, that’s fine; that’s *your* choice, but don’t fuck Roger and me out of our share because of *your* beliefs. Right, Roger?’ ”

“What did Roger say to that? I would think that he wants the money.”

“He doesn’t say a word. You know Roger. Jack starts hollerin’ at me again: ‘If you were a standup guy, you’d take the lowest percentage and let Roger and I split the rest. That’s fair. Anything less and you’re fuckin’ us over. Don’t you think he’s fuckin’ us over Roger?’ ”

“ ‘I’m not fuckin’ anybody over,’ I said. ‘I’m just tellin’ you what I think we should do with the money. It’s not like you’re walking away empty-handed, Jack.’ ”

“ ‘You know I’m never going to agree to that. I can’t fucking believe this! Can you believe this, Roger? This sonuvabitch is trying to sabotage us. That’s what you want to do in that twisted fucking mind of yours—sabotage this for us. It’s jealousy, isn’t it? You’re jealous of how I live and what I make. That’s it. This is because of jealousy.’ ”

“ ‘I’m not jealous of you, Jack. You can think whatever you like. I’m giving you—both of you—an opportunity to take that money and do some good with it. What the hell’s

wrong with that? Do you really need a bigger house at the Cape, Jack? Don't you have enough money already? Do you really need a million more? ”

“Jesus, I can't believe you never told me about this!”

“Wait. It's far from over. Jack keeps carrying on and shouting at me, ‘Listen to mister high and mighty, will you listen to this big-heart bullshit? I've given more money to charity than you've made in your entire life! Who the fuck are *you* to imply that I don't give money away?!’

“Roger steps in at this point because Jack's losing his cool. ‘Okay, okay,’ he says. ‘Let's calm down. We're not going to settle this by insulting each other. I've listened to both sides, and I think each of you makes a good point. Gordon thinks we should give most of the money away to charity. And Jack thinks Gordon can do what he wants with his share, but he should do it with the smallest portion. That also makes sense. What do I think? I could go either way. I'm not going to say no to more money, but I also know my life isn't gonna change either way. I guess what I'm saying is, if I got a little money out of the deal, I'd be fine with that, and if we gave away most of it to charity, I'd be fine with that too.’ ”

“ ‘See,’ I said to Jack. ‘Roger's fine with not being greedy and giving away the rest.’ ”

“ ‘He said he could go either way,’ Jack said. ‘He said he wouldn't turn down more money if that's what we decided. Look, this is going nowhere. I'm not going to sit here all day and argue with you about something so fucking ridiculous. You two figure it out. You know where I stand. I'm not budging. I say Roger and I split the two-point-seven million. If you want to give away your ten percent, that's up to you. Anything less than that is bullshit! Let me know what you decide.’ And he stormed out of the room.”

I could see how much my father enjoyed getting underneath Jack's skin. He knew Jack wanted that money, and whether he was doing it to be benevolent and see it go to a good cause or he was just enjoying the hell out of bustin' Jack's balls, I don't know. I can tell he relished being in that position. He's in control. I think what amazes me most is that he is willing to walk away from such a large sum of money. There aren't too many people who would do that. Hell, I couldn't. But he can. He's comfortable with who he is and how he lives, and he knows what that money would do to him if he took it.

Then I think about my mom. Why couldn't he accept the money for her? Lord knows what she has had to put up with all these years. Couldn't he have done it for her? She deserved to have a few nice things. Maybe that's how this ends? He thinks of her and accepts some of the money.

“So what happens next, Dad?” I asked when my mind stopped wandering.

“Roger and I sat there and talked it over, as I recall,” he said. “He didn’t think Jack was gonna budge, and I told him I wasn’t gonna budge either. So we were at a standstill. I remember telling him that I didn’t come all this way not to climb up that mountain and fish in those trout-filled streams. So for the rest of the afternoon, that’s what we did. Roger and I took a boat ‘cross this lake and climbed up those Tetons.”

“How was that?”

“Amazing,” he said, his eyes twinkling as he savored the memory. “Saw a few deer and a big ole bull moose. You’d have loved it. We hiked out there for about three or four hours. If I ever thought about livin’ someplace else...”

“Who are you kidding, Dad? You’d never leave Maine.”

“Guess your right ‘bout that,” he replied. “Anyway, by the time we got back, it was pretty late. Roger and I were too tired to go out, so we had supper in the hotel. I had a few beers and called it a night. I told him I was goin’ fishin’ early the next morning and if he wanted to come along, he was welcome to. He said he wanted to sleep in. Next day I bought a one-day license and some gear and drove out to one of them rivers.” He smiled as he took another long drag on his cigarette.

“Catch anything?”

“Quite a few. Some cutthroat, which are like Northern Pike; a few Lake Trout; and two brown trout—what beauts they were. I was tryin’ to land a rainbow but never did.”

I knew my father could sit there all morning and talk about fishing, but I wanted him to finish the story. Thankfully, he went back to it on his own.

“I know you want to hear the end of this,” he says. “We can talk about fishing another time. So I got back early in the afternoon, I think it was. I don’t remember the exact time, but it was after lunch. I see the two of them sittin’ in the lobby, and they say they’re waitin’ on me. I tell them I have to grab a sandwich first and I’ll meet them upstairs. We agreed to meet in Jack’s room.

“So I get up there and Jack starts hammerin’ away at me the minute I sit down. Makin’ the same argument he made yesterday. I’m just eatin’ my sandwich at this desk, not saying anything, while your Uncle Jack is pacing ‘round the room, swearin’ up a storm. I knew I wasn’t going to sit there for two hours while he tried to change my mind.”

“What’s Roger doing while this is going on?”

“Nothin’. He’s just sitting there. When I finish eating, I get up and say I’m going to take a nap. I’d been up since four thirty; I was tired. Your Uncle Jack ‘bout has a heart

attack. Starts calling me every name in the book. The whole floor could hear him it was so loud. So I turned to Roger and said, 'I'll meet you two for dinner if you're up for it.' And I left. I sure as hell wasn't going to listen to him all afternoon."

"You and Uncle Jack were really going at it," I said. "Neither one giving an inch to the other. I'm surprised it didn't come to blows."

"He ain't stupid," my dad says, flicking his ash out the window. "Besides, that wasn't my intention. Just wanted to wear him down some. He's a stubborn sonuvabitch, your Uncle Jack. I was ready to let all that money go and he knew it. When you have that kind of leverage in a negotiation, you just keep squeezin' till things go your way."

"So I meet up with them later, and we're havin' a few beers in the restaurant. First time we had a chance to talk 'bout something other than the money. Good dinner. We order steaks—the whole nine yards. Jack and Roger drink a couple bottles of wine. Bill comes; Jack grabs it. I didn't see the amount, but I'm guessin' it has to be well over five hundred dollars on account of the expensive wine Jack ordered. I said to him, 'No way, let's split it.' He looks across at me and says, 'What? Like Becca's money?' Without missin' a beat. Sonuvabitch got me there. He whips out this black credit card and says, 'I got it.' Roger and I look at each other and shrug. I let it go 'cause I know what he's tryin' to do."

"He figured if he picked up dinner, it would soften you up some," I said. My dad looked at me with this look on his face as if to say, 'He ought to know me better than that.'

"After supper, we go back upstairs," he continues. "We all agree to come to some kind of compromise. I stop off at my room to grab a few beers from the fridge. First thing Jack says to me when we're in the room is, 'What if I agree to donate some money from what Roger and I split in addition to your ten percent? I'm thinking maybe another couple hundred grand. That'll make it over half a million. You pick the charity.' I shake my head. 'Why not?' he says. 'Not enough,' I say. He starts cussin' me out again. When he calms down a bit, he says, 'Okay, what if we give back five hundred grand of what we get?' 'Still not good enough.' I say."

"Finally, I just laid it on the table for him. 'Jack,' I said, 'The only split I'm agreeing to is the one that has sixty percent going to a charity. Roger can have the thirty percent, seeing he could use it, and you can have the three hundred twenty-five thousand, which is a decent chunk of change— certainly better than nothing. That's the deal,' I said. 'Take it or leave it.' He screams that I'm not compromising and that I'm doing it out of spite. I really didn't give a shit at that point if we walked away with nothing, plus I knew Jack would never let that happen."

"What did he say to your ultimatum?"

“He sticks both of his middle fingers in my face and tells me to fuck off. Tells me to get the fuck outta his room,” he recalls with a chuckle. “Roger speaks up at this point ‘cause he knows that things are going south real fast.”

“Someone had to,” I said.

“Ayuh. So Roger says, ‘How ‘bout this? I’ll agree to split my thirty percent with Jack. I’ll give him roughly \$475,000 of what I get, and with the ten percent he takes, he’ll have over \$800,000. We can still donate the sixty percent, which is what you want. I’m good with that if Jack is.’

“I told Roger that he shouldn’t have to do that since Jack already has more money than he knows what to do with and he could use that money. Jack doesn’t say a word to this, ‘cause Roger’s offer makes him look bad. It makes him look like the greedy bastard that he is. But Roger keeps insisting that he’s fine with it. He’d be happy with the \$475,000. It’s late at night now; we have to have a decision by tomorrow morning, and nothing has been decided. Finally, Jack gives in and says he’ll agree to split the forty percent evenly with Roger—\$650,000 apiece.”

“You did it; you broke him.”

“I broke him. Next mornin’, we told the lawyers what we decided and what the split would be. Lynda was there, I guess to make sure we followed the rules. They asked each of us if we agreed with the split. We said we did. We signed some papers, got up, and left. That was the last time I’ve seen or heard from your Uncle Jack.”

“He’s *still* pissed off at you?” I remember asking him.

“I imagine so.”

“What did you do with the money? How much was it again?”

“Almost two million.”

“Two million dollars! Jeez Louise.”

He took a long drag on his cigarette. “It went to the Dana Farber Cancer Center in Boston. I never saw it. I had them wire the money straight from Bea’s bank account to the hospital. Those folks couldn’t believe it when they found out about it. They wanted to make a big deal out of it, but I wanted no part of that. I told ‘em it was a gift from my sistah. If you go down there, in the lobby, they have her name up on the wall somewhere. Maybe we’ll take a ride down there someday and have a look at it.”

“Yeah, sure.” I sat there for a second or two, in shock. I didn’t know what to say.

“That’s some story, huh?” he said, gazing out the driver’s side window. “Lost a sister *and* a brother in the deal, but...” He paused for a second or two. “Money ended up going to a good place, so I guess it was worth it.

It sounded to me like he was feeling a little guilty about what he had done.

“I imagine that money has saved countless lives,” I said, trying to make him feel better.

“Ayuh,” he said.

By the look on his face, I could tell that the best deal he ever made didn’t leave him with the satisfaction he had expected it to. Maybe, as he was telling me about it, he felt he should have handled things differently and regretted the way he treated his brother. He would never admit to it, but I sensed that was how he was feeling. We never talked about it again, and I have never said a word to anyone about what he told me. As far as I was concerned, it was a secret that died with him. It was his sister who gave nearly two million dollars to the cancer center in Boston, not him. Her name is the one on the plaque.