

The Sisters

“What the hell...?”

“Don’t talk. Let’s just go in here.”

“What are you doing?”

“Cappuccino, right? I’ll get them in. You take that booth. Quick! Someone else will get it.”

The girl rushed off. Polly thought of making her escape, right then, but for some reason decided to claim the booth instead. Then she sat there, territorially facing down anyone who approached.

The girl came back with a number on a stick, and sat down next to Polly. “I’m Molly. Who are you?”

“I’m Polly. Oh, my god! You practically kidnapped me!”

“Sorry.” Molly was scanning the crowd in the coffee shop. “I think we’re OK.”

“Why? Why did you drag me in here?”

“Mmm? Was cappuccino OK? It’s what I usually drink.”

“Me too. What is going on?”

“Do they call your number here? Or do they deliver to the table?”

Polly stood up.

“What?” said Molly, startled. “Wait! I was afraid that someone would kill you.”

“What!?”

“Oh, there’s our coffee. Thank you, dear,” she said to the waitress.

Polly slumped down in her seat. “Kill me? Why would anyone kill me?”

She looked suspiciously at her coffee.

“Because someone is trying to kill me, and you look a lot like me.”

Polly said “What!?”

She was saying it a lot.

“Yeah. Same shape face. Same eyebrows. You must tell me where you had them done. Same eyes. Same teeth, and I think that you are the same hair colour as me. Underneath that blonde dye job. You’re the same build as me, and you are wearing similar styles to me, and the same makeup. And you drink cappuccino. You’re my twin!”

Polly looked at the girl. She did look very similar to Polly. “Twin? How old are you? I don’t think the blonde look suits me.”

“Twenty-two? You? Yeah, I went blonde once. Regretted it.”

“Twenty. Where do you come from?”

“Here, in the city, I think. I was an orphan. Raised at Saint Peter’s Orphanage, then adopted out.”

Molly looked at her. “Why do you ask?”

“A guess. I was an orphan too, but I was raised at Saint Margaret’s.”

“Oh, the little gods! You think that we might be sisters?”

“It’s possible.”

“Why do you think that someone is trying to kill you?” Polly asked as she lounged back into Molly’s soft sofa. “Mmm, nice sofa. I’ve been thinking of buying one like it.”

“Someone tried to run me down! Just as I was passing the bakery down the road. They swerved off the road and towards me. I jumped out of the way, and the car turned back onto the road again. The guy who helped me up said that it looked like the driver aimed for me!”

“It could have been an accident.”

“Yeah, but someone pushed me when I was going down the stairs to the train. Luckily I grabbed the handrail and didn’t fall. Some woman said ‘People are so rude these days’.”

“That could have been an accident too.”

Molly sighed. “Yes, I guess. But I’ve been getting notes too.”

She showed Polly. One note said ‘I want what’s mine!’, and another said ‘I will kill you all. Give it to me!’.

“Kill you **all**?”

“This is the last one,” she said.

It read ‘You have one week. I’m losing patience with you.’.

“What are the notes talking about?” asked Polly. “Someone seems angry.”

“I don’t know! They just appeared in my postbox! The week was up yesterday.”

“Have you talked to the police?”

“Yes, twice. First, when the car nearly hit me. They couldn’t do anything as no one got the number or make of the car. The second time, after the incident on the stairs. I showed them the notes I received, but they didn’t believe me! The detective asked me if I’d written them myself. She talked about ‘wasting police time’. She warned me that it was a crime!”

Polly stood in the middle of the wreckage of her flat.

“Molly, can you come over, please? Can you come now? I’ve been burgled! Thanks.”

All the drawers had been pulled out and the contents dumped on the floor. Pictures had been removed from the wall. In the kitchen every cupboard had been opened and the contents were spread across the floor. In the bedroom, the bed had been stripped, the mattress had been pulled aside. All her clothes had been pulled out of her closets, and her bedside cabinet was open and the contents were strewn over the floor and over her mattress.

Polly went back in to the lounge and investigated the small cabinet that she used for her home office. All her records were scattered over the floor, but everything still seemed to be there. She found her passport, her post-adoption birth certificate, her education certificates, and other documents.

“Holy heck!” said Molly from the doorway.

Polly picked up a chair and set it upright. “Oh, the little gods! What’s happening?”

She collapsed into the chair, shaking.

Molly crouched down and held her hands. “It’s OK, Polly. It’s OK!”

“No it isn’t! Someone’s wrecked my flat! Someone came into my flat. Why? I’ll kill them!”

“That’s the spirit! It looks like someone was searching for something. Let’s sort it out, shall we?”

“Oh, yes, Molly! Thanks!”

They set about tidying the flat.

“Um, was the lock broken on the door? Hey, I like this dress!”

“No, I opened it as usual. That’s funny. You got the notes, but I was the one that got burgled. I can’t remember where I got that dress.”

“When did you last check your mailbox?”

“Oh, ages ago. All I get in there is junk mail.”

“Give me the key. I’ll go down and check it.”

Polly continued to tidy up. She was pleased to see that not much was damaged, except some of her crockery. A handle had come off a cupboard, but that was already loose, and the tin box that she collected spare change in had been forced open. The money was scattered around on the floor. Then she found that her favourite mug had been smashed.

“Oh, bugger!”

She was still staring at the bits when Molly came back with a handful of junk mail and four envelopes. The envelopes contained similar notes to the ones that Molly had received.

“Are they postmarked, Molly?”

“No, not stamped. So hand delivered.”

“It doesn’t answer the question, does it? Why was my flat searched and not yours?”

“Well, thanks to the rich couple who have the top flat, we have a security guard in the lobby most of the time, there are two cameras, and we have a card access system. You only have a security lock with a password of two letters and four numbers. The buttons are probably worn. I’d bet that I could break in to this building, and I’d bet that you keep a key under the doormat, don’t you? I’ll talk to the guard. See if he’s seen anything strange.”

Polly hesitated. “Molly, would you stay over tonight in my spare room? I’m a bit shaken up.”

“Sure, pal. Let’s send out for some food. Indian?”

“Yeah. And a bottle of Chardonnay?”

“Sounds good. Let’s get online!”

“Can you take a day off tomorrow? I’d like to visit the orphanages. For clues, you know.”

“Yes. I’ll call in sick. They won’t mind.”

The detective considered her report. She frowned. When Molly had come in, she was sceptical, but when Polly had reported her burglary and produced similar notes to Molly, she revised her initial theories. She picked up the phone.

“Dick, I’ve got a job for you.”

The building was dark. Dark stone and solid architecture.

“Saint Peter’s. I’ve not been here for years,” said Molly. “It wasn’t that bad, I suppose, but I was glad when I was adopted out. I finally got my own bedroom! Let’s go in.”

“Can I help you?” asked the receptionist. Her tone was frosty.

“Yes, we’d like to see the Superintendent, please.”

“Can I ask why? She’s very busy.”

“That’s private. Personal. I used to be a resident.”

The girl looked as if she was going to say something, but Molly stared her down.

“I’ll see if she can see you.” The receptionist disappeared into a room behind her.

Polly looked around. The décor was a decade or so old, but pleasant enough. The furniture was old, but solid. A print of an old painting hung from the wall, but Polly didn’t recognise the painting. The voices of children could be heard faintly from behind the closed doors.

“It’s much like Saint Margaret’s. It smells much the same.”

“Mmm. Does it? Slightly musty, slightly sweaty? A bit of cooking, and a lot of laundry?”

“Yes.”

The receptionist returned.

“Please come this way.” She looked even frostier than before.

“What can I do for you?” asked the woman behind the desk. “Please, take a seat. My name is Pat, and I’m the Superintendent of this home.”

“My name is Molly and I used to live here, ma’am. I was wondering if you could tell me anything about my life before I came here?”

The Super frowned. "I can't tell you much, dear," she said. "Most of the information about residents is confidential and protected by law. What did you say your name was? And can I see some ID, please?"

Molly gave her name again and showed her driver license. The Super typed the information into her computer.

"Well, as I said, I can't tell you much. Just your date of birth and date of arrival here, and when you were fostered out. That's about all... Oh, wait a minute! There's a note here at the bottom."

She paused. "Can I see your ID again please?"

The Super rechecked Molly's ID, this time taking a good look at the photo and comparing it to Molly's face.

"I've never seen that before! There's a note here that says that if you come here inquiring about your origins, we are to refer you to a lawyer. I'll give you his details. Oh, if you go to see him, he'll probably want more ID than that, I'd guess. Your post-adoption birth certificate, perhaps."

A piece of paper popped out of the Super's printer, and she passed it over.

"Thank you," said Molly taking the sheet.

The Super sat back in her chair. "Are you sisters?" she asked.

"We think that we might be. That's one of the reasons we came here."

"One of the reasons?" The Super changed the subject. "Did you enjoy your time here, Molly?"

"Ma'am? Well, I wasn't unhappy here. I remember some fun times. But I was happier after I was adopted out, ma'am. It could be a bit dull."

The Super sighed. "Yes, well, we try very hard to make sure that our kids are not unhappy while they are here. I hope we succeed. Anyway, good luck, girls."

"The lawyer?" asked Polly.

"Yeah. Saint Margaret's will probably tell us the same."

The lawyer was harder to find. It seemed that he was no longer practising, but they tracked down the firm that he had worked for.

"Hi, I'm Peter." The young man ushered them into his office. "George Martin retired, well, about two years ago now, and he passed the few cases he had left on to me. How can I help you?"

"I'm Molly, and she's Polly. We're trying to discover our origins, Peter. We think we are sisters, but we are not sure. We were both orphans, but we lived in different orphanages, and when I went back to mine, they referred me to George."

Peter frowned. "Mmm. I don't recall George saying anything about this. What did you say your name was? Do you have ID?"

He looked at Molly's ID. "One moment."

He went to a big filing cabinet in the corner of his office.

"Hmm. We haven't digitised this yet. Ah, here!"

He pulled out an old manilla folder and opened it on his desk.

"Hmm. Do you have some ID, please, Polly?" he asked.

"Thank you. Well, ladies, I can confirm that you are sisters."

They gasped and looked at each other.

"I don't know much more than that. Oh, your other sisters were also declared to be orphans at the same time as you were."

"Our other sisters?"

"Yes. You didn't know? You have twin sisters. Um, they would be eighteen. They were sent to Saint Patrick's Orphanage."

“Twin sisters?”

“Yeah. Holly and Sue. I can’t tell you anything else about them for privacy reasons, but of course you could search for them yourselves.”

“Can you tell us about our parents, please?”

“No, sorry. But the reason that you were sent to the orphanages was given as ‘No living relatives’. That could mean that your parents died.”

“What other reason could there be?” wondered Polly.

“Well, that was the reason given, but that may not be true. George did a lot of this sort of work, and sometimes he’d sigh about one case or another. When I asked him why he’d say something like ‘I wonder what really happened there’. Oh, everything was one hundred per cent legal of course.”

“Is our case unusual, then, Peter?”

He looked at them. “Multiple orphans from the same family spread over several orphanages? Yes, it is, but George never mentioned it to me. Usually they try to keep families together!”

“Is there any way to find out more, Peter?”

“Well, maybe. You can request your original birth certificates. These forms, here. If you fill them in, I can send them off for you. But your birth parents may have requested anonymity, and the information would then be redacted.”

The girls left and Peter picked up the phone. “George? This is Peter. Something has come up...”

“So how do we find our sisters?” said Molly. “I’m fed up with just waiting.”

It was a few days after their visit to the lawyer, and Molly and Polly were relaxing at Molly’s place. They seemed to end up at one or other’s place much of the time these days, making up for lost time, perhaps.

“The Internet? But how?”

“Image search? Your image? My image?”

“Yeah. That’s assuming the twins look like us.”

“Hopefully.”

“I wonder if we will get our original birth certificates.”

“Peter thinks we will. Apparently there is no request for anonymity attached to them. But it will take time.”

“Peter thinks...”? Molly! You’ve been seeing him?”

“Yeah, well. He’s nice. Mmm. We went to see a film together.”

“Anyway,” said Polly, after giving her a long look. “Let’s do the search.”

But nothing of interest came up in the image search. They then searched for the names ‘Holly’, and ‘Sue’ with no luck. There were far too many results.

“How about ‘Holly’ and ‘Susan’?” suggested Molly.

But they still found nothing useful.

Polly beefed up the security on her apartment. She now had two new locks on her door, and a chain. An electronic system was linked to her door and most of the windows. A camera was mounted outside her door, and the recordings were sent automatically to a security firm for safe keeping.

“Impressive,” said Molly, nodding her head.

“Thanks. What about your place?”

“Well, I have the security guard, thanks to the people upstairs, but I might put in an electronic system like yours. But my windows are pretty high.”

“Did the guard come up with anything? Anything unusual? You were going to ask him.”

“No. He’s nice, though. He let me look through the security tapes. The little gods, that was boring!”

“So we are working on the theory that my place was easier to break in to, then? I’ve a feeling that’s right. What about the shove at the station?”

“I wonder if that was really just normal pushing and shoving. I might have been injured, but it’s unlikely that I would have been killed.”

“That’s true. But then again, I could have been a warning.”

“Shall we visit Saint Patrick’s? I’m fed up with sitting around waiting for our birth certificates.”

“Yeah. You were six years old when you were taken to the orphanage, weren’t you? I was four. So we know roughly when the twins were taken to Saint Patrick’s, don’t we?”

“That’s true. You know, I really can’t remember anything from back then. Only a birthday party, and I’m not even sure it was mine. Or if I really remember it.”

“So I wasn’t in it?”

“Do you know, I hadn’t thought of that! No, I don’t remember anyone. Maybe someone told me to blow out the candles.”

The receptionist at Saint Patrick’s was a bright and breezy girl of about their own age.

“Sorry, Ian, Mr Hunter, is out on business at the moment. Actually he’s off playing golf, but I shouldn’t have told you that. I’m always opening my big mouth!”

“We can come back later. When does he come back?”

“Oh, he’ll not be back today! He should be in tomorrow. But after ten.”

“We’re looking for some previous residents.”

“Like me! I’ve been here for ever! Well since I was three. Who were you looking for?”

“Two girls. They would be about eighteen now. Holly and Sue.”

“Oh, my goodness! I remember them!” The receptionist was squeaking in excitement. “Things got so dull when they left. They got adopted by the Worksworths, but I shouldn’t have told you that!”

“Why was it dull, Lorraine? What did they get up to?”

“How did you know my name? Oh, it’s on my nameplate! Well, they set off the fire alarm, once, and we all had to stand outside in our PJs. It was freezing! Another time they flooded the boys’ upstairs bathroom. Reggie got the blame for that, but I know it was them. Then they led the way into the roof and Ollie put his foot through the ceiling. We would have been in so much trouble, but Ollie told us to get lost, and took all the blame. Nice boy, Ollie. They were such fun that people would take the blame for them! But the punishment was only a few chores anyway.”

“So we should be looking for Holly and Sue Worksworth, then?”

“No, silly! Well, maybe. Their new parents called them Rosemary and Sandra. But I don’t think it stuck ’cause they came back here once with their parents and even their parents called them Holly and Sue.”

Lorraine paused for thought, which was evidently a difficult business, going by the frown on her face.

“There was someone else looking for them the other day. A boy. I might have accidentally told him about them. I shouldn’t have.”

“A boy?”

“Yeah. Richard Smith. I had to wake Ian, Mr Hunter, up from his afternoon nap. Ian, Mr Hunter, practically threw him out. ‘You’re not a relative and you don’t have legal authority to know about them. Get lost!’ he said. Then he scowled at me and went back into his office. What did I do?”

“Told Richard Smith about Holly and Sue, perhaps?”

“Oh! I shouldn’t have told him that, should I?”

“So we have some leads, thanks to loquacious Lorraine. ‘Richard Smith’ indeed. It’s obviously a fake name. Let’s do a search. ‘Holly Worksworth’?”

“Yes.”

“OK. Bingo! Here they are! Their blog is called ‘The Fashion Twins’, and it’s all about clothes and makeup and stuff like that.”

“So they are ‘influencers’. How many followers?”

“About two hundred.”

“Not much influence then. Wow! Look at them!”

The twins had dark skins and dark curly hair.

“Different mothers?”

“Yeah. I think. Has to be! Hey, this blog is not too bad, actually.”

“I think that we should contact their parents first. We don’t know what they have been told of their origins.”

“True. What are their names?”

“Let’s see. Adrian and Isla. Should I tell them everything?”

“Mmm. Good question. Leave out the attacks and the burglaries for now. Say we are researching our origins.”

Polly’s fingers flew.

“Done!”

“What do you think about this ‘Richard Smith’?”

“Hmm. Well, it’s fake, isn’t it? I’ll look him up. Well, there are lots of them.”

Polly typed something else and waited. “Still too many. I can’t narrow it down.”

“Never mind. Anyway, we have an appointment with Peter tomorrow. Did I mention it?”

“No, but never mind. So we might get our pre-adoption birth certificates?”

“Yes. It’s exciting, isn’t it?”

When they walked into Peter’s office an older, silver haired man was also waiting for them.

“Hullo, I’m George. I just had to come to meet you! We’ve got copies of your original birth certificates here.”

He passed two pieces of paper to Polly and Molly.

“Oh, the little gods! My hand is shaking,” said Polly.

“Me too. Oh, those are our parents’ names?”

“Just so you know,” said George, “They are both dead. Your mother died in the pandemic, and your father remarried. Unfortunately your father and your stepmother died in a car crash not long after your sisters were born. Do you want to see some photographs?”

“Yes, please. George, we tracked down our sisters, Holly and Sue. We haven’t contacted them yet, though.”

“Fine. That’s up to you, of course. Here are some pictures of your parents and your stepmother.”

Polly and Molly looked at the pictures, then looked at each other.

“We don’t recognise them, George. Sorry.”

“But we’d like copies of those pictures, please.”

“Sure. Here are some of you and your sisters when you were young.”

“Oh, the twins were so cute! Look at them!”

“Um, George, we think that someone wants to kill us. Maybe,” said Polly.

George and Peter looked at each other.

“Are you sure?” asked George.

“Well, no. I think some tried to run me down, and someone shoved me on the stairs at the station. That last bit might have just been normal push and shove, though. Here’s a copy of the police report,” said Molly.

“I see, Molly. Has anything happened to you, Polly?”

“No, but we’ve both had notes dropped into our mail boxes. And I was burgled.”

“Can I see the notes, please? Mmm. Mmm. Interesting. No stamps. A4 page. Printed rather than typed. Well, I don’t know what this is about. Maybe if you make contact with your sisters you might find out more.”

“Thanks, George. We will let you and Peter know how it goes.”

“Oh, by the way, your father was quite rich. I’ll give you his lawyer’s details.”

When the girls were gone, the two lawyers looked at one another.

“Should we have told them what we know?”

“No,” said George. “Our hands are tied.”

“It’s hard. I’m going out with Molly, and I have to keep secrets from her.”

“I know. But they are probably not in any physical danger.”

“Really? What about the car that nearly ran her down.”

“Did it? Here’s the police report.”

Peter read it. “I see. The witness said that the car was aimed at Molly, but swerved away at the last minute. Cold feet?”

“Yes. Perhaps.”

Molly’s phone rang.

“Molly Fletcher? I’m Adrian Worksworth. You and Polly sent me an email about the twins. You say that you are their sisters? Do you have any proof?”

“Ah, yes. Our lawyer’s letter, sir. I will email it to you.”

“Thanks. Erm, I appreciate you approaching us first, but the twins are legally adults now, since their last birthday.”

“Yes, sir, but we didn’t know if they knew that they were adopted. We do want to make contact with them, but we don’t want to cause trouble.”

“Thank you. Please call me Adrian. Well, the girls know that they are adopted. You’ve seen pictures of them? Well, my wife and I have pale skins, so it would have been hard to hide their adoption as they got older!”

“Polly and I have pale skins, um, Adrian. We wanted to contact them because we received some strange notes. Someone dropped them into our mail boxes.”

The phone line was silent for a long while. “You’d better come down and see us. The twins have had some notes too. Come for a meal. I’ll discuss it with my wife, and we will call you.”

“Nice house, Polly.”

“Yes. Gosh, I’m nervous!”

“Me too.”

They knocked on the door.

“Come in! Come in! Welcome. This way.”

Adrian showed them through to a pleasant lounge, where two girls were waiting for them. They had dark curly hair and brown skins. They looked anxious.

“Are you really our sisters?” asked one of them.

“Yes, we believe we are. Half sisters,” said Molly. “Erm, this is Polly. I’m Molly.”

“I’m Isla,” said an older woman. “Adrian you’ve met. The one on the left is Holly and the one on the right is Sue.”

There was a chorus of hellos.

“Let’s eat,” said Isla. “This way.”

They had a pleasant meal, then Adrian sat back in his chair. “So when did you get these notes?” he asked.

“Molly, you got yours about three weeks ago, didn’t you? I don’t know exactly when mine arrived, but probably around the same time.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“That’s about when the twins got theirs. Can I see them?”

He browsed the notes. “Hmm, not many clues there. Here, have a look at the ones that the twins received.”

“Did you each receive a note each, then?”

“No,” said one of the twins. Polly thought it was Holly. “The notes were addressed to both of us. I think...”

“What do you think. Holly?”

“That the person is not very up to date. They used actual notes and envelopes and didn’t do it on line.”

“That’s interesting,” said Adrian. “Maybe they didn’t want to be traced?”

“So, they know you are twins,” said Polly. “Has anything strange happened to you?”

“Someone fiddled with our brakes on our car,” said the other twin. Probably Sue.

“Yes!” said Holly. “The brake stuff ran all the way down the drive! Dad was annoyed at first, then he said not to drive the car.”

“Yes,” said Adrian. “The mechanic said that whoever tampered with the brakes had had two or three goes at cutting the brake lines before they succeeded. It was a sloppy job.”

“It was scary, though! How did you guys meet up?”

Molly and Polly told everyone how they had met.

“No one’s attacked me,” said Polly, “but my flat was burgled. Everything was pulled out and dumped on the floor.”

“Oh, wow! Hey Dad, should we go to the orphanage? See if we can find anything out?”

“Shall we take you, girls?” asked Molly. “But let’s make an appointment. When we went there, the Super was off playing golf!”

“How did you find the twins?” asked their mother, Isla.

“The receptionist accidentally let slip a few things. Loquacious Lorraine. But the lawyer told us that we had twin sisters, so we would have found them eventually.”

The four sisters climbed the steps to the door of the orphanage.

One of the twins looked up.

“It’s not changed since we were last here,” she said with distaste. “Dark and sombre.”

“Lorraine!” cried one of the twins, as they entered. “Are you still here, then?”

“Holly and Sue! Yeah! I wasn’t fostered and I couldn’t get a job, so Ian, Mr Hunter, made me the receptionist! Ian, Mr Hunter, is waiting for you. He’s so excited! Through here.”

Lorraine fussed around and made sure that they were all seated. She stayed in the room as they all introduced themselves.

“Lorraine?” said Ian.

“What? Oh, I’ll go and make some tea. Won’t be a minute.”

“Well, this is exciting! Nothing much happens around here. Can I see your IDs please girls? No, just Holly and Sue, thanks.”

He took a close look at the ID cards and the girls, and passed the IDs back. The twins looked at them and swapped.

“Um, you want to know about your origins, I understand. Well, um, we aren’t allowed to tell you much, by law, unfortunately. But I’ll tell you what I can.”

He sat back and clasped his hands together, cracked his knuckles and addressed his keyboard.

“Um, Ian, Molly and I are the twins’ sisters. Half sisters. We have been looking into our own origins, and when we went to our orphanages, there was a note in our files.”

“Ah yes. OK.”

He looked at his screen, and hit a few buttons. He frowned.

“I don’t see... Oh, wait a minute. You’re right.”

Lorraine brought the tea and gave them each a cup. She looked at Ian, but didn’t move.

“Lorraine, you can leave us now,” Ian said.

“What? Oh, yes, Ian, Mr Hunter.”

Lorraine left, and Ian shook his head.

“Well, anyway, the file contains a note, as you said. You need to talk to a lawyer. He might be able to help you out. Here are his details.”

“Thank you,” said one of the twins. She showed the piece of paper to Polly and Molly.

“Yes, that’s the same lawyer,” said Polly.

They thanked Ian and made their way out of his office.

“So nice to see you again, guys,” said Lorraine to Holly and Sue. “It was so much fun when you were here!”

“Say, Lorraine,” asked Molly, “what did that boy, Richard Smith look like?”

“What do you want to know that for? He was just normal. Oh, um, sandy hair. Er, blue eyes. Not my type.”

“About our age?”

“Yes! But he could be a little older. But definitely not ancient, like Ian, Mr Hunter!”

“You’re scowling at the waiting staff, Holly.”

They were waiting for their drinks in a cafe down the road from the orphanage.

“I’m Sue.” It was said offhandedly, as if it was simply a knee-jerk reaction. “Yeah, last time we were here we asked for a discount. We said we’d mention them on our blog, but they said no! Can you believe it?”

“I guess they didn’t want to lose the money?” suggested Molly.

“Yeah, but think of the exposure we could have given them!”

“Yeah, but it would soon get out that they were giving out free coffee for reviews. Everyone would be trying it. Hmm. What if you bought your coffee...”

“And buns.”

“... and buns and still reviewed them?”

“For nothing?”

“Yeah. Then you send the link to your review to them so that they can see it.”

“Oh, yes! They’d give us stuff for free the next time?”

“Maybe. Maybe if you gave them a few reviews?”

Sue looked at Holly. “Yeah. Maybe that would work. We’d give them good reviews!”

“No, no! Honest reviews.”

“Really? Why?”

“If your followers came here, and you had given them a good review, and they were awful, you’d lose your followers, wouldn’t you?”

“Oh, yeah. But if we gave an honest review, wouldn’t the cafe be pissed?”

“Only if they were really terrible. If they were any good, you could emphasise the good bits.”

Holly and Sue looked at each other again.

“But that would be hard and take a long time.”

“Yep. But it would be worth it, wouldn’t it? Anything worthwhile takes a bit of work.”

“That’s what Dad says!”

“Cool,” said the other twin. “We could do the same with clothes shops, too!”

“Yeah, Good luck there, though. Most of them are franchises. But hairdressers and nail salons aren’t.”

“Oh, wow! You’re so clever, Polly.”

Sigh! “I’m Molly.”

“So, you found your sisters?” said George. “Welcome, girls!”

“Yes, thanks, George. Erm, I think Holly and Sue want to get a copy of their original birth certificates, don’t you, girls?”

“Yes please, George,” said one of the twins.

“OK, girls. Fill in these forms and we’ll organise that. Polly and Molly had no problems, so it should be straightforward. Erm, have there been any other incidents?”

“Incidents? Oh, yeah! Our brakes were fiddled with! But we noticed it and Dad wouldn’t let us drive the car.”

“It was a pretty amateur attack. Can you think of any reason why the girls would be attacked?” asked Polly.

George and Peter looked at each other.

“There’s nothing that we know about. I presume that you are going to check up on your family when you get your birth certificates?” asked Peter.

“Yes. You think it could be a relative of ours?”

“Well, it seems the most likely case, doesn’t it?”

“James Lombard.”

“What, Polly?”

Holly was tending to Polly’s hair and makeup. Polly looked into the mirror and conceded that Holly and Sue were good at this stuff.

“That was our father’s name, and we know that he was Holly and Sue’s father too.”

“Yes, we should search for things that happened just before we were put into the homes, Molly. Surely there would have been something in the papers about his death.”

“Let’s do a search!”

“There’s one thing,” said Holly, with a frown on her face.

“Yes?”

“Well, if we were fostered out and it was done secretly, then there must have been a reason for that. We could be getting into danger, just by looking into it.”

“That’s a good point, Holly. What do you others think?”

“Holly’s right that it could be dangerous, but I vote that we carry on. I really want to know why we all ended up as orphans in different orphanages, don’t you?” said Molly.

They all agreed.

“We’ll have to be careful,” said Molly.

Polly took her laptop and cast the screen onto the TV so that they all could see it. She type ‘James Lombard death’ into the search engine.

“James and Anna Lombard killed in a car crash. So your mother was called Anna, girls. Hmm. ‘Accident’. ‘No survivors’. Here’s a quote from his brother, Harold. ‘Sad accident’. He goes on to say that the family will ‘look after their daughters’.”

“Anything else, Polly?”

“Ah yes! See that other link? ‘Family fortune’. ‘Dispute’. Um, ‘put in trust’. ‘Daughters vanished.’! So we got lost somehow!”

“Or hidden away for safety.”

“Oh yeah!”

“Hmm. Let me search again. ‘James Lombard lawyer’. Yes. Here we are. ‘Lombard family lawyer’, ‘Graham Bessel’.”

“So do we go to see him?” suggested Sue.

“Yes, but let’s be cautious.”

“Yes, I was James Lombard’s lawyer. How can I help you?”

“Um, we think that we are his daughters. Molly and I were by his first wife and Sue and Holly by his second wife. We were told that our father and both his wives are dead.”

“Yes, that is true.” The lawyer regarded the girls. “Mr Lombard’s first wife died in the pandemic. Tragic. Then he and his second wife were killed in a car crash. It was sad.”

He looked at them intently, one by one.

“Do you have proof that you are his daughters?”

“Yes, sir. Our original birth certificates, our post-adoption birth certificates, and our driver licenses.”

Polly passed them all over.

“Hmm. You were all adopted?”

“We were all sent to orphanages. Did you not know that, sir?”

“Please call me Graham. No, we paid some people to make you disappear, because you were in danger. Legally, of course. Your uncle was a violent man. But he is now dead.”

“Dead?”

“Yes, nothing suspicious. He had a heart attack. Wilson!”

A young man stuck his head around the door. “Yes, Graham?”

“Wilson is one of the clerks of our practise. He does some the routine stuff around here,” said the lawyer, smiling. “Can you please check these documents, Wilson? Sit over there, please.”

Graham turned to the sisters. “Now, our firm paid a lot of money to keep you girls safe, so I don’t know what has been happening to you until now. You were all adopted? Ah, you can speak freely as anything you tell me or Wilson is confidential.”

The sisters told their stories while Graham and Wilson both nodded along.

"I see. I see," said Graham eventually. "Well, I'm disappointed that someone has somehow tracked you down, and is threatening you. 'Richard Smith'? An obvious alias. But anyway, ladies, everything was about to be revealed shortly, as Sue and Holly have reached the age of eighteen. Your father's money, and for that matter, the money of both of your mothers, becomes accessible to you."

"Oh, wow! How much is there?" That was one of the twins.

"Um, including interest, earnings, less taxes and fees, around twenty-two million dollars. You also have shares in your father's company and your mothers' companies, but you don't get full control of those. I and another two lawyers control those through a trust."

"Twenty..."

"Yes. But you have already benefited from the fund. Sue and Holly. You bought a little car, didn't you. Was that with a grant?"

"Yes, from a fund associated with the Orphanage, set up by some former inmate, they said."

"I don't know the details," said Graham, "but a request came to the fund for money for a car. Polly and Molly, you bought your flats with a grant, didn't you?"

"Yes, but a charity owns half of mine. Oh! The fund?"

"I don't know how they handled it, Molly, but in fact you own the whole flat. Similarly, Polly, you own your whole flat."

"Wow!"

The sisters looked at each other.

"It's like winning the lotto," said one of the twins.

Graham laughed. "Yes, but you can't just take the money and spend it. Well, the bottom line is that you could do that, but we would strongly advise that you don't do that. With any big windfall like this, just like the lotto, there is a temptation to spend, spend, spend and have nothing left."

"But this would give someone a motive to try to kill us off, wouldn't it, Graham?" asked Molly.

"Yes. But any claimant would have to have a legitimate reason to claim your inheritance, and killing you all off would invalidate such a claim. So you would all have to die in what looked like accidents."

"Wow, this is scary!" exclaimed one of the twins. "Who would do such a thing? A relative?"

"Yes, you are correct, my dear. A relative would be most likely. You have two relatives who would inherit if you all passed away. One is your cousin, the son of your father's brother, Harold."

"The crazy brother?"

"He had some mental problems, it is true. The other is an uncle of Holly and Sue. Your mother's brother, girls."

"Do you have a picture of them, please, Graham?" asked Polly.

"Um, yes, I think so. This is your uncle."

The uncle had a dark skin and his dark hair was going grey.

"Definitely not 'Richard Smith'," said Polly.

"'Richard Smith' could be someone working for him, ma'am," Wilson pointed out.

"This is your cousin," said Graham as he handed over a second photo.

"Now, he could be 'Richard Smith'." commented Molly. "Sandy hair, blue eyes. Youngish."

When the girls had left, Graham turned to Wilson.

"We have to do something."

"Yes, Graham. I noticed that you didn't tell them that I was also an investigator."

"Yes, Wilson. I'd like you to check out what the uncle and the cousin are doing these days. But first, we should arrange some protection for them."

"I thought you would want that. I know just the people."

Polly knocked on the door.

"Here goes," she said to Holly.

The door was opened by a middle-aged man with a dark skin.

"Can I help you?" he asked, with a tinge of suspicion.

"Um, yes, sir, Mr Marlowe. We believe that you might be Holly's uncle."

"What? I've got no nieces. My sister... Oh. Are you claiming to be Anna's girl? But Anna's twins went missing!"

"We have proof, sir."

"But you're not..."

It was obvious that Polly was not Holly's twin.

"Can we come in, please, sir?"

"Oh, yes, yes, please do. I'm Alex. Jane! Jane, we have some visitors! They say that they are Anna's girls. The ones who disappeared!"

"No, Alex. I'm James' daughter by his first wife. My name is Polly."

"Nice to meet you, Polly, and you too, Holly," said Jane as she ushered them to a sitting room.

"Where is your twin, Holly? I'm trying to remember her name!"

Polly answered. "She is called Sue, and she couldn't come today. I have a full sister, Molly, and she couldn't come either."

"Don't get me wrong," said Alex, "but do you have any proof that you are who you say you are?"

"We understand. Here are our documents. Our father's lawyer can confirm our identities too."

"Thanks. So why have you suddenly reappeared after all these years? I'm very pleased to see you, though! Oh, it was very frightening at the time, with Harold demanding a share of your father and mother's estate. He threatened to kill you all, after he wasn't allowed to adopt you and get control of your inheritance that way. Then you disappeared, and at first we thought that he had done something to you all, but James' lawyer said that you were safe. Harold died a year or two ago, I understand."

"Well," said Holly, "Sue and I just turned eighteen and Dad's lawyer informed us about our inheritance, and we're making contact with our family."

"Yes, well, there isn't much family, actually. James only had one brother, Harold, and he only had one son, Richard. Gwen, who was your mother, Polly, was an only child. Anna was my sister, and Jane and I have a son and daughter. You'll have to meet them! There might be some more distant relatives though."

"Richard? Our cousin is called Richard?" Polly looked at Holly.

"Yes. Why? What's interesting about that?"

Polly explained about the notes that the sisters had received, and Molly's near miss, and her own burglary.

"... and the boy who was asking questions at the twins' orphanage called himself 'Richard Smith'," she concluded.

"I'm sorry to hear of your troubles," said Alex, with a glance at his wife. "We don't keep in touch with Richard. It may be that he has picked up some of his father's obsessions. One of the notes said 'Give it to me', you say?"

"Yes. We don't know what it means."

“Well, Richard’s father, your Uncle Harold, was convinced that James had made another will, giving Harold a share of James’ estate. Anna told me that James didn’t like Harold, so I think that it is unlikely. Maybe Richard thinks that one of you has the supposed will.”

Polly and Holly chatted with Alex and June for a while, then took their leave.

“Do come again, and bring your other sisters!” said June.

As Polly drove them back home, Holly said “They seemed to be nice people.”

“Yes, didn’t they? They’re not the sort to send people nasty notes, I think. Let’s talk to Graham. Maybe we can set up a meeting with this Richard.”

“Are we going back to Molly’s place? Maybe we could order in. Mexican?”

“You two are obsessive about Mexican food!”

“You and Molly are obsessive about Indian food!”

“Ah. Maybe Chinese for a change, then. Szechuan?”

“Yeah. We’ll discuss it with the others.”

“I will not tolerate threats to my clients, Richard! If you sent the notes to them, then it was extremely unwise of you.”

Richard looked angry for a moment, then slumped back.

“I’m not admitting anything, but I’m not like my father. He beat both me and my mother until we left him. I do have a temper, but I couldn’t harm anyone. I couldn’t, for example, run them down with my car.”

“But you could use your car to scare someone?” asked Molly.

Richard stared at her. “I’m sure that I wouldn’t have the nerve to go through with it.”

“What about pushing someone down some steps?”

“What? What are you talking about?”

“Never mind.”

Graham looked at Richard.

“Richard, in the notes that my clients received, there was a reference to something, ‘Give it to me’, the note said. Do you have any idea what that refers to?”

“No idea! A new will, perhaps? My father had been trying to make up with Uncle James before he was killed. He was convinced that Uncle James was going to leave him something in his will. When Uncle James was killed, Dad told me about the new will, and was convinced that he was being swindled. He was furious. He told me to investigate.”

Graham cleared his throat. “He made such a nuisance of himself that we took out restraining orders against him. He tried to gain custody of the girls, and when that failed, he said that he was going to kill them. He tried to kidnap them. We hid them for their protection.”

“Yeah,” said Richard. “We never did find them. Then I got lucky. Holly and Sue were talking to some friends in a cafe, and I happened to be close by. They said that they were adopted and their friends referred to them as Holly and Sue. I suddenly realised that they could be Uncle James’ daughters. They mentioned Saint Patrick’s and I went there. The receptionist was a motor-mouth, and as good as confirmed my suspicions.”

“What about Polly and Molly, Richard?”

“What about them? Oh, I see. I found that the twins came from an orphanage. I just checked some other orphanages for Polly and Molly. Public records. After all, once I knew that the twins had been hidden in an orphanage, it seemed likely that Molly and Polly had been too.”

“Then you sent them those notes, trying to find the supposed missing will,” said Graham sternly.

“I’m not admitting anything!”

Graham pushed a button on his desk.

"It doesn't matter, Richard. I believe that this detective wants to ask you some questions."

After Richard and the detective had left, Graham turned to the girls.

"I don't think that Richard will be a problem. Please let me know if he bothers you. Erm, there is one more thing. Among your parents effects there was a locked box. James' will asked for it to be given to you all when you came of age. When you were hidden, it was hidden too. Can I ask if it has been given to you?"

Holly looked at the others who all shook their heads.

"No, Graham, we don't know anything about a box."

"I see. The orphanages referred you to a lawyer, didn't they? I suggest you consult him."

When the girls had gone, Wilson came into the room.

"Ah, Wilson! Any problems?"

"No, Graham. My agents report no threats to the girls. Um, their uncle hasn't done anything suspicious. Their cousin, Richard, has been splitting his time, watching the girls, but he's not been doing anything else, so far as I can tell."

"Fine, fine. Let's keep an eye on Richard, but I think that he's run out of options."

"Yes. The police will keep him busy for a while. Um, the detective told me that she thinks they could make a case against him, but she wasn't sure."

"Mmm. Keep an eye on him for now."

"Sure, boss!"

"Hullo, girls! Nice to see you again. Has everything been sorted out?"

Molly had been elected as spokesman. "Erm, yes, thanks, George. There is one thing, though..."

"Yes?"

"The lawyer, Graham Bessel, mentioned a box. Apparently, it 'disappeared' at the same time that we did. It has never been found."

"How is Graham? He was a junior in my firm at one time. But anyway, we do hold a security box for you, girls. Peter, could you get it please?"

"Graham was your junior? He didn't mention it, George."

"Well, he didn't know that our firm was involved in this matter. Or if he suspected it, he wouldn't have mentioned it."

"Here's the box," said Peter, and they all looked at it with interest.

"Er, you have the key, Peter," said George. "I left it with you when I retired."

"Oh, yes. One moment."

Peter left the room and returned with a key.

"OK. Does one of you want to open it?"

"Go on, Sue! You do it!"

"OK!"

Sue took the key and opened the box.

"Oh, there's a pearl necklace. Nice! And some other jewels. Cool! And some papers."

She handed the papers to George. Peter looked over his shoulder as he read them.

"What do you think, Peter? This is officially your case now."

Peter laughed. "Thank you, George. Well, girls, the papers aren't that important. Just some notes about your mothers' jewels, and some certificates authenticating them. And a copy of a will..."

"So Uncle Harold was right! There was a new will!" exclaimed Sue.

“Don’t tease them, Peter! It is only a certified copy of your father’s will, Sue. It is exactly the same as the one that was executed by Graham Bessel. It may have been useful if the original was lost, but I’m sure that Graham would have had more than one copy made. There was no new will!”

“This has been an interesting case, but now I can close it,” said Peter. “There is one more thing to do.”

He walked out of the room and returned with a tray of glasses of champagne. Everyone took one.

“This is the end of our firm’s business with you, girls. Our job was to look after you from the time that you all entered the orphanages until you no longer needed to be kept hidden. I hope that you were all reasonably happy?”

Molly looked at the others. “Well, speaking for myself, I have been happy. We were all adopted out of the orphanages pretty quickly, and we all love our adoptive parents. But I’m glad that we know all about our birth parents now, and we’ve found out that we have cousins! Thank you, George and you too, Peter. Thank you very much.”

“Thank you!” said Peter. “We’re pleased that it all turned out well. Please raise your glasses and drink to the future and your health and happiness!”

“And to yours,” added Polly.
