



Rule of the
Bones
Russell Banks
opening of a
novel

JUST DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING

You'll probably think I'm making a lot of this up just to make me sound better than I really am or smarter or even luckier but I'm not. Besides, a lot of the things that've happened to me in my life so far which I'll get to pretty soon'll make me sound evil or just plain dumb or the tragic victim of circumstances. Which I know doesn't exactly prove I'm telling the truth but if I wanted to make myself look better than I am or smarter or the master of my own fate so to speak I could. The fact is the truth is more interesting than anything I could make up and that's why I'm telling it in the first place.

Anyhow my life got interesting you might say the summer I turned fourteen and was heavy into weed but I didn't have any money to buy it with so I started looking around the house all the time for things I could sell but there

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wasn't much. My mother who was still like my best friend then and my stepfather Ken had this decent house that my mother'd got in the divorce from my real father about ten years ago and about that she just says she got a mortgage not a house and about him she doesn't say much at all although my grandmother does. My mom and Ken both had these cheesy jobs and didn't own anything you could rob at least not without them noticing right away it was gone. Ken worked as a maintenance man out at the airbase which is like being a janitor only he said he was a building services technician and my mom was a bookkeeper at the clinic which is also a nothing job looking at a computer screen all day and punching numbers into it.

It actually started with me roaming around the house after school looking for something that wasn't boring, porn books or videos maybe, or condoms. Anything. Plus who knows, they might have their own little stash of weed. My mom and especially Ken were seriously into alcohol then but maybe they aren't as uptight as they seem, I'm thinking. Anything is possible. The house was small, four rooms and a bathroom, a mobile home on cinderblocks like a regular house only without a basement or garage and no attic and I'd lived there with my mom and my real dad from the time I was three until he left which happened when I was five and after that with my mom and Ken who legally adopted me and became my stepfather up until now, so I knew the place like I knew the inside of my mouth.

I thought I'd poked through every drawer and looked into every closet and searched under every bed and piece of furniture in the place. I'd even pulled out all these old Reader's Digest novels that Ken had found out at the base

and brought home to read someday but mainly just to look good in the livingroom and flipped them open one by one looking for one of those secret compartments that you can cut into the pages with a razor and hide things. Nothing. Nothing new, I mean. Except for some old photograph albums of my grandmother's that my mom had that I found in a box on the top shelf of the linen closet. My mom'd showed them to me a few years ago and I'd forgotten probably because they were mostly pictures of people I didn't know like my mom's cousins and aunts and uncles but when I saw them again this time I remembered once looking for pictures of my father from when he was still alive and well and living here in Au Sable and finding only one of him. It was of him and my mom and his car and I'd studied it like it was a secret message because it was the only picture of him I'd ever seen. You'd've thought Grandma at least would've kept a few other snaps but no.

There was though this stack of letters tied with a ribbon in the same box as the albums that my father'd written to my mom for a few months after he left us. I'd never read them before and they turned out pretty interesting. The way it sounded my father was defending himself against my mom's accusations that he'd left us for this female named Rosalie who my mom said had been his girlfriend for years but he was claiming that Rosalie'd only been a normal friend of his at work and so on. He had good handwriting, neat and all the letters slanted the same way. Rosalie didn't matter to him anymore, he said. She never had. He said he wanted to come back. I almost felt sorry for him. Except I didn't believe him.

Plus I didn't need the letters my mom'd written to him