

# 1

## SUNSET TOWERS

THE SUN SETS in the west (just about everyone knows that), but Sunset Towers faced east. Strange!

Sunset Towers faced east and had no towers. This glittery, glassy apartment house stood alone on the Lake Michigan shore five stories high. Five empty stories high.

Then one day (it happened to be the Fourth of July), a most uncommon-looking delivery boy rode around town slipping letters under the doors of the chosen tenants-to-be. The letters were signed *Barney Northrup*.

The delivery boy was sixty-two years old, and there was no such person as Barney Northrup.

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Dear Lucky One:

Here it is—the apartment you've always dreamed of, at a rent you can afford, in the newest, most luxurious building on Lake Michigan:

### SUNSET TOWERS

- Picture windows in every room
- Uniformed doorman, maid service
- Central air conditioning, hi-speed elevator
- Exclusive neighborhood, near excellent schools
- Etc., etc.

You have to see it to believe it. But these unbelievably elegant apartments will be shown by appointment only. So hurry, there are only a few left!!! Call me now at 276-7474 for this once-in-a-lifetime offer.

Your servant,  
*Barney Northrup*

p.s. I am also renting ideal space for:

- Doctor's office in lobby
  - Coffee shop with entrance from parking lot
  - Hi-class restaurant on entire top floor
- 

Six letters were delivered, just six. Six appointments were made, and one by one, family by family, talk, talk, talk, Barney Northrup led the tours around and about Sunset Towers.

"Take a look at all that glass. One-way glass," Barney Northrup said. "You can see out, nobody can see in."

Looking up, the Wexlers (the first appointment of the day) were blinded by the blast of morning sun that flashed off the face of the building.

"See those chandeliers? Crystal!" Barney Northrup said, slicking his black moustache and straightening his hand-painted tie in the lobby's mirrored wall. "How about this carpeting? Three inches thick!"

"Gorgeous," Mrs. Wexler replied, clutching her husband's arm as her high heels wobbled in the deep plush pile. She, too, managed an approving glance in the mirror before the elevator door opened.

"You're really in luck," Barney Northrup said. "There's only one apartment left, but you'll love it. It was meant for you." He flung open the door to 3D. "Now, is that breathtaking, or is that breathtaking?"

Mrs. Wexler gasped; it was breathtaking, all right. Two walls of the living room were floor-to-ceiling glass. Following Barney Northrup's lead, she ooh-ed and aah-ed her joyous way through the entire apartment.

Her trailing husband was less enthusiastic. "What's this, a bedroom or a closet?" Jake Wexler asked, peering into the last room.

"It's a bedroom, of course," his wife replied.

"It looks like a closet."

"Oh Jake, this apartment is perfect for us, just perfect," Grace Wexler argued in a whining coo. The third bedroom was a trifle small, but it would do just fine for Turtle. "And think what it means having your office in the lobby, Jake; no more driving to and from work, no more mowing the lawn or shoveling snow."

"Let me remind you," Barney Northrup said, "the rent here is cheaper than what your old house costs in upkeep."

How would he know that, Jake wondered.

Grace stood before the front window where, beyond the road, beyond the trees, Lake Michigan lay calm and glistening. A lake view! Just wait until those so-called friends of hers with their classy houses see this place. The furniture would have to be reupholstered; no, she'd buy new furniture—beige velvet. And she'd have stationery made—blue with a deckle edge, her name and fancy address in swirling type across the top: *Grace Windsor Wexler, Sunset Towers on the Lake Shore*.

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Not every tenant-to-be was quite as overjoyed as Grace Windsor Wexler. Arriving in the late afternoon, Sydelle Pulaski looked up and saw only the dim, warped reflections of tree-tops and drifting clouds in the glass face of Sunset Towers.

"You're really in luck," Barney Northrup said for the sixth and last time. "There's only one apartment left, but you'll love it. It was meant for you." He flung open the door to a one-bedroom apartment in the rear. "Now, is that breathtaking or is that breathtaking?"

"Not especially," Sydelle Pulaski replied as she blinked into the rays of the summer sun setting behind the parking lot. She had waited all these years for a place of her own, and here it was, in an elegant building where rich people lived. But she wanted a lake view.

"The front apartments are taken," Barney Northrup said. "Besides, the rent's too steep for a secretary's salary. Believe me, you get the same luxuries here at a third of the price."

At least the view from the side window was pleasant. "Are you sure nobody can see in?" Sydelle Pulaski asked.

"Absolutely," Barney Northrup said, following her suspicious stare to the mansion on the north cliff. "That's just the old Westing house up there; it hasn't been lived in for fifteen years."

"Well, I'll have to think it over."

"I have twenty people begging for this apartment," Barney Northrup said, lying through his buckteeth. "Take it or leave it."

"I'll take it."

Whoever, whatever else he was, Barney Northrup was a good salesman. In one day he had rented all of Sunset Towers to the people whose names were already printed on the mailboxes in an alcove off the lobby:

OFFICE *Dr. Wexler*

LOBBY *Theodorakis Coffee Shop*

*2C F. Baumbach*

*2D Theodorakis*

*3C S. Pulaski*

*3D Wexler*

*4C Hoo*

*4D J. J. Ford*

*5 Shin Hoo's Restaurant.*

Who were these people, these specially selected tenants? They were mothers and fathers and children. A dressmaker, a secretary, an inventor, a doctor, a judge. And, oh yes, one was a bookie, one was a burglar, one was a bomber, and one was a mistake. Barney Northrup had rented one of the apartments to the wrong person.

## 2 GHOSTS OR WORSE

ON SEPTEMBER FIRST the chosen ones (and the mistake) moved in. A wire fence had been erected along the north side of the building; on it a sign warned:

*NO Trespassing—Property of the Westing estate.*

The newly paved driveway curved sharply and doubled back on itself rather than breach the city-county line. Sunset Towers stood at the far edge of town.

On September second Shin Hoo's Restaurant, specializing in authentic Chinese cuisine, held its grand opening. Only three people came. It was, indeed, an exclusive neighborhood; too exclusive for Mr. Hoo. However, the less expensive coffee shop that opened on the parking lot was kept busy serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner to tenants "ordering up" and to workers from nearby Westingtown.

Sunset Towers was a quiet, well-run building, and (except for the grumbling Mr. Hoo) the people who lived there seemed content. Neighbor greeted neighbor with "Good morning" or "Good evening" or a friendly smile, and grappled with small problems behind closed doors.

The big problems were yet to come.

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Now it was the end of October. A cold, raw wind whipped dead leaves about the ankles of the four people grouped in the Sunset Towers driveway, but not one of them shivered. Not yet.

The stocky, broad-shouldered man in the doorman's uniform, standing with feet spread, fists on hips, was Sandy McSouthers. The two slim, trim high-school seniors, shielding their eyes against the stinging chill, were Theo Theodorakis and Doug Hoo. The small, wiry man pointing to the house on the hill was Otis Amber, the sixty-two-year-old delivery boy.

They faced north, gaping like statues cast in the moment of discovery, until Turtle Wexler, her kite tail of a braid flying behind her, raced her bicycle into the driveway. "Look! Look, there's smoke—there's smoke coming from the chimney of the Westing house."

The others had seen it. What did she think they were looking at anyway?

Turtle leaned on the handlebars, panting for breath. (Sunset Towers was near excellent schools, as Barney Northrup had promised, but the junior high was four miles away.) "Do you think—do you think old man Westing's up there?"

"Naw," Otis Amber, the old delivery boy, answered. "Nobody's seen him for years. Supposed to be living on a private island in the South Seas, he is; but most folks say he's dead. Long-gone dead. They say his corpse is still up there in that big old house. They say his body is sprawled out on a fancy Oriental rug, and his flesh is rotting off those mean bones, and maggots are creeping in his eye sockets and crawling out his nose holes." The delivery boy added a high-pitched he-he-he to the gruesome details.

Now someone shivered. It was Turtle.

"Serves him right," Sandy said. At other times a cheery fellow, the doorman often complained bitterly about having been fired from his job of twenty years in the Westing paper mill. "But somebody must be up there. Somebody alive, that is." He pushed back the gold-braided cap and squinted at the house through his steel-framed glasses as if expecting the curling smoke to write the answer in the autumn air. "Maybe it's those kids again. No, it couldn't be."

"What kids?" the three kids wanted to know.

"Why, those two unfortunate fellas from Westingtown."

"What unfortunate fellas?" The three heads twisted from the doorman to the delivery boy. Doug Hoo ducked Turtle's whizzing braid. Touch her precious pigtail, even by accident, and she'll kick you in the shins, the brat. He couldn't chance an injury to his legs, not with the big meet coming. The track star began to jog in place.

"Horrible, it was horrible," Otis Amber said with a shudder that sent the loose straps of his leather aviator's helmet swinging about his long, thin face. "Come to think of it, it happened exactly one year ago tonight. On Halloween."

"What happened?" Theo Theodorakis asked impatiently. He was late for work in the coffee shop.

"Tell them, Otis," Sandy urged.

The delivery boy stroked the gray stubble on his pointed chin. "Seems it all started with a bet; somebody bet them a dollar they couldn't stay in that spooky house five minutes. One measly buck! The poor kids hardly got through those French doors on this side of the Westing house when they came tearing out like they was being chased by a ghost. Chased by a ghost—or worse."

Or worse? Turtle forgot her throbbing toothache. Theo Theodorakis and Doug Hoo, older and more worldly-wise, exchanged winks but stayed to hear the rest of the story.

"One fella ran out crazy-like, screaming his head off. He never stopped screaming 'til he hit the rocks at the bottom of the cliff. The other fella hasn't said but two words since. Something about purple."

Sandy helped him out. "Purple waves."

Otis Amber nodded sadly. "Yep, that poor fella just sits in the state asylum saying, 'Purple waves, purple waves' over and over again, and his scared eyes keep staring at his hands. You see, when he came running out of the Westing house, his hands was dripping with warm, red blood."

Now all three shivered.

"Poor kid," the doorman said. "All that pain and suffering for a dollar bet."

"Make it two dollars for each minute I stay in there, and you're on," Turtle said.

Someone was spying on the group in the driveway.

From the front window of apartment 20, fifteen-year-old Chris Theodorakis watched his brother Theo shake hands (it must be a bet) with the skinny, one-pigtailed girl and rush into the lobby. The family coffee shop would be busy now; his brother should have been working the counter half an hour ago. Chris checked the wall clock. Two more hours before Theo would bring up his dinner. Then he would tell him about the limper.

Earlier that afternoon Chris had followed the flight of a purple martin (*Progne subis*) across the field of brambles, through the oaks, up to the red maple on the hill. The bird flew off, but something else caught his eye. Someone (he could not tell if the person was a man or a woman) came out of the shadows on the lawn, unlocked the French doors, and disappeared into the Westing house. Someone with a limp. Minutes later smoke began to rise from the chimney.

Once again Chris turned toward the side window and scanned the house on the cliff. The French doors were closed; heavy drapes hung full against the seventeen windows he had counted so many times.

They didn't need drapes on the special glass windows here in Sunset Towers. He could see out, but nobody could see in. Then why did he sometimes feel that someone was watching him? Who could be watching him? God? If God was watching, then why was he like this?

The binoculars fell to the boy's lap. His head jerked, his body coiled, lashed by violent spasms. Relax, Theo will come soon. Relax, soon the geese will be flying south in a V. Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*). Relax. Relax and watch the wind tangle the smoke and blow it toward Westingtown.

## 3 TENANTS IN AND OUT

UPSTAIRS IN 3D Angela Wexler stood on a hassock as still and blank-faced pretty as a store-window dummy. Her pale blue eyes stared unblinkingly at the lake.

"Turn, dear," said Flora Baumbach, the dressmaker, who lived and worked in a smaller apartment on the second floor. Angela pivoted in a slow quarter turn. "Oh!" Startled by the small cry, Flora Baumbach dropped the pin from her pudgy fingers and almost swallowed the three in her mouth.

"Please be careful, Mrs. Baumbach; my Angela has very delicate skin." Grace Windsor Wexler was supervising the fitting of her daughter's wedding dress from the beige velvet couch. Above her hung the two-dozen framed flower prints she had selected and arranged with the greatest of taste and care. She could have been an interior decorator, a good one, too, if it wasn't for the pressing demands of so on and so forth.

"Mrs. Baumbach didn't prick me, mother," Angela said evenly. "I was just surprised to see smoke coming from the Westing house chimney."

Crawling with slow caution on her hands and knees, Flora Baumbach paused in the search for the dropped pin to peer up through her straight gray bangs.

Mrs. Wexler set her coffee cup on the driftwood coffee table and craned her neck for a better view. "We must have new neighbors; I'll have to drive up there with a housewarming gift; they may need some decorating advice."

"Hey, look! There's smoke coming from the Westing house!" Again Turtle was late with the news.

"Oh, it's you." Mrs. Wexler always seemed surprised to see her other daughter, so unlike golden-haired, angel-faced Angela.

Flora Baumbach, about to rise with the found pin, quickly sank down again to protect her sore shin in the shag carpeting. She had pulled Turtle's braid in the lobby yesterday.

"Otis Amber says that old man Westing's stinking corpse is rotting on an Oriental rug."

"My, oh my," Flora Baumbach exclaimed, and Mrs. Wexler clicked her tongue in an irritated "tsk."

Turtle decided not to go on with the horror story. Not that her mother cared if she got killed or ended up a raving lunatic. "Mrs. Baumbach, could you hem my witch's costume? I need it for tonight."

Mrs. Wexler answered. "Can't you see she's busy with Angela's wedding dress? And why must you wear a silly costume like that? Really, Turtle, I don't know why you insist on making yourself ugly."

"It's no sillier than a wedding dress," Turtle snapped back. "Besides, nobody gets married anymore, and if they do, they don't wear silly wedding dresses." She was close to a tantrum. "Besides, who would want to marry that stuck-up-know-it-all-marshmallow-face-doctor-denton . . . ?"

"That's enough of your smart mouth!" Mrs. Wexler leaped up, hand ready to strike; instead she straightened a framed flower print, patted her fashionable honey-blond hairdo, and sat down again. She had never hit Turtle, but one of these days—besides, a stranger was present. "Doctor Deere is a brilliant young man," she explained for Flora Baumbach's ears. The dressmaker smiled politely. "Angela will soon be Angela Deere; isn't that a precious name?" The dressmaker nodded. "And then we'll have two doctors in the family. Now where do you think you're going?"

Turtle was at the front door. "Downstairs to tell daddy about the smoke coming from the Westing house."

"Come back this instant. You know your father operates in the afternoon; why don't you go to your room and work on stock market reports or whatever you do in there."

"Some room, it's even too small for a closet."

"I'll hem your witch's costume, Turtle," Angela offered.

Mrs. Wexler beamed on her perfect child draped in white. "What an angel."

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Crow's clothes were black; her skin, dead white. She looked severe. Rigid, in fact. Rigid and righteously severe. No one could have guessed that under that stern facade her stomach was doing flip-flops as Doctor Wexler cut out a corn.

Staring down at the fine lines of pink scalp that showed through the podiatrist's thinning light brown hair did nothing to ease her queasiness; so, softly humming a hymn, she settled her gaze on the north window. "Smoke!"

"Watch it!" Jake Wexler almost cut off her little toe along with the corn.

Unaware of the near amputation, the cleaning woman stared at the Westing house.

"If you will just sit back," Jake began, but his patient did not hear him. She must have been a handsome woman at one time, but life had used her harshly. Her faded hair, knotted in a tight bun on the nape of her gaunt neck, glinted gold-red in the light. Her profile was fine, marred only by the jut of her clenched jaw. Well, let's get on with it, Friday was his busy day, he had phone calls to make. "Please sit back, Mrs. Crow. I'm almost finished."

"What?"

Jake gently replaced her foot on the chair's pedestal. "I see you've hurt your shin."

"What?" For an instant their eyes met; then she looked away. A shy creature (or a guilty one), Crow averted her face when she spoke. "Your daughter Turtle kicked me," she muttered, staring once again at the Westing house. "That's what happens when there is no religion in the home. Sandy says Westing's corpse is up there, rotting away on an Oriental rug, but I don't believe it. If he's truly dead, then he's roasting in hell. We are sinners, all."

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"What do you mean his corpse is rotting on an Oriental rug, some kind of Persian rug, maybe a Chinese rug." Mr. Hoo joined his son at the glass sidewall of the fifth floor restaurant. "And why were you wasting precious time listening to an overaged delivery boy with an overactive imagination when you should have been studying." It was not a question; Doug's father never asked questions. "Don't shrug at me, go study."

"Sure, dad." Doug jogged off through the kitchen; it was no use arguing that there was no school tomorrow, just track practice. He jogged down the back stairs; no matter what excuse he gave, "Go study," his father would say, "go study." He jogged into the Hoos' rear apartment, stretched out on the bare floor and repeated "Go study" to twenty sit-ups.

Only two customers were expected for the dinner hour (Shin Hoo's Restaurant could seat one hundred). Mr. Hoo slammed the reservations book shut, pressed a hand against the pain in his ample stomach, unwrapped a chocolate bar and devoured it quickly before acid etched another ulcer. Back home again, is he. Well, Westing won't get off so easy this time, not on his life.

A small, delicate woman in a long white apron stood in silence before the restaurant's east window. She stared longingly into the boundless gray distance as if far, far on the other side of Lake Michigan lay China.

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Sandy McSouthers saluted as the maroon Mercedes swung around the curved driveway and came to a stop at the entrance. He opened the car door with a ceremony reserved only for Judge J. J. Ford. "Look up there, judge. There's smoke coming from the Westing house."

A tall black woman in a tailored suit, her short-clipped hair touched with gray, slipped out from behind the wheel, handed the car keys to the doorman, and cast a disinterested glance at the house on the hill.

"They say nobody's up there, just the corpse of old man Westing rotting away on an Oriental rug," Sandy reported as he hoisted a full briefcase from the trunk of the car. "Do you believe in ghosts, judge?"

"There is certain to be a more rational explanation."

"You're right, of course, judge." Sandy opened the heavy glass door and followed on the judge's heels through the lobby. "I was just repeating what Otis Amber said."

"Otis Amber is a stupid man, if not downright mad." J. J. Ford hurried into the elevator. She should not have said that, not her, not the first black, the first woman, to have been elected to a judgeship in the state. She was tired after a trying day, that was it. Or was it? So Sam Westing has come home at last. Well, she could sell the car, take out a bank loan, pay him back—in cash. But would he take it? "Please don't repeat what I said about Otis Amber, Mr. McSouthers."

"Don't worry, judge." The doorman escorted her to the door of apartment 4D. "What you tell me is strictly confidential." And it was. J. J. Ford was the biggest tipper in Sunset Towers.

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"I saw someb-b-b . . ." Chris Theodorakis was too excited to stutter out the news to his brother. One arm shot out and twisted up over his head. Dumb arm.

Theo squatted next to the wheelchair. "Listen, Chris, I'll tell you about that haunted castle on the hill." His voice was soothing and hushed in mystery. "Somebody is up there, Chris, but nobody is there, just rich Mr. Westing, and he's dead. Dead as a squashed June bug and rotting away on a moth-eaten Oriental rug."

Chris relaxed as he always did when his brother told him a story. Theo was good at making up stories.

"And the worms are crawling in and out of the dead man's skull, in and out of his ear holes, his nose holes, his mouth holes, in and out of all his holes."

Chris laughed, then quickly composed his face. He was supposed to look scared.

Theo leaned closer. "And high above the putrid corpse a crystal chandelier is tinkling. It tinkles and twinkles, but not one breath of air stirs in that gloomy tomb of a room."

Gloomy tomb of a room—Theo will make a good writer someday, Chris thought. He wouldn't spoil this wonderful, spooky Halloween story by telling him about the real person up there, the one with the limp.

So Chris sat quietly, his body at ease, and heard about ghosts and ghouls and purple waves, and smiled at his brother with pure delight.

"A smile that could break your heart," Sydelle Pulaski, the tenant in 3D, always said. But no one paid any attention to Sydelle Pulaski.

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Sydelle Pulaski struggled out of the taxi, large end first. She was not a heavy woman, just wide-hipped from years of secretarial sitting. If only there was a ladylike way to get out of a cab. Her green rhinestone-studded

glasses slipped down her fleshy nose as she grappled with a tall triangular package and a stuffed shopping bag. If only that lazy driver would lend her a hand.

Not for a nickel tip, he wouldn't. The cabbie slammed the back door and sped around the curved driveway, narrowly missing the Mercedes that Sandy was driving to the parking lot.

At least the never-there-when-you-need-him doorman had propped open the front door. Not that he ever helped her, or noticed her, for that matter.

No one ever noticed. Sydelle Pulaski limped through the lobby. She could be carrying a high-powered rifle in that package and no one would notice. She had moved to Sunset Towers hoping to meet elegant people, but no one had invited her in for so much as a cup of tea. No one paid any attention to her, except that poor crippled boy whose smile could break your heart, and that bratty kid with the braid—she'll be sorry she kicked her in the shin.

Juggling her load, earrings jingling and charm bracelet jangling, Sydelle Pulaski unlocked the several locks to apartment 3D and bolted the door behind her. There'd be fewer burglaries around here if people listened to her about putting in dead-bolt locks. But nobody listened. Nobody cared.

On the plastic-covered dining table she set out the contents of the shopping bag: six cans of enamel, paint thinner, and brushes. She unwrapped the long package and leaned four wooden crutches against the wall. The sun was setting over the parking lot, but Sydelle Pulaski did not look out her back window. From the side window smoke could be seen rising from the Westing house, but Sydelle Pulaski did not notice.

"No one ever notices Sydelle Pulaski," she muttered, "but now they will. Now they will."

## 4 THE CORPSE FOUND

THE HALLOWEEN MOON was full. Except for her receding chin Turtle Wexler looked every inch the witch, her dark unbraided hair streaming wild in the wind from under her peaked hat, a putty wart pasted on her small beaked nose. If only she could fly to the Westing house on a broomstick instead of scrambling over rocks on all fours, what with all she had to carry. Under the long black cape the pockets of her jeans bulged with necessities for the night's dangerous vigil.

Doug Hoo had already reached the top of the cliff and taken his station behind the maple on the lawn. (The track star was chosen timekeeper because he could run faster than anyone in the state of Wisconsin.) Here she comes, it's about time. Shivering knee-deep in damp leaves that couldn't do his leg muscles much good, he readied his thumb on the button of the stopwatch.

Turtle squinted into the blackness that lay within the open French doors. Open, as though someone or some *Thing* was expecting her. There's no such thing as a ghost; besides, all you had to do was speak friendly-like to them. (Ghosts, like dogs, know when a person's scared.) Ghosts or worse, Otis Amber had said. Well, not even the "worse" could hurt Turtle Wexler. She was pure of heart and deed; she only kicked shins in self-defense, so that couldn't count against her. She wasn't scared; she was not scared.

"Hurry up!" That was Doug from behind the tree.

At two dollars a minute, twenty-five minutes would pay for a subscription to *The Wall Street Journal*. She could stay all night. She was prepared. Turtle checked her pockets: two sandwiches, Sandy's flask filled with orange pop, a flashlight, her mother's silver cross to ward off vampires. The putty wart on her nose (soaked in Angela's perfume in the event she was locked up with the stinking corpse) was clogging her nostrils with sticky sweetness. Turtle took a deep breath of chill night air and flinched with pain. She was afraid of dentists, not ghosts or . . . don't think about purple waves, think about two dollars a minute. Now, one—two—three—three and a half—GO!

Doug checked his stopwatch. Nine minutes.

Ten minutes.

Eleven minutes.

Suddenly a terrified scream—a young girl's scream—pierced the night. Should he go in, or was this one of the brat's tricks? Another scream, closer.

"E-E-E-e-e-e-e-e-e!" Clutching the bunched cape around her waist, Turtle came hurtling out of the Westing house. "E-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e!"

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Turtle had seen the corpse in the Westing house, but it was not rotting and it was not sprawled on an Oriental rug. The dead man was tucked in a four-poster bed.

A throbbing whisper, "Pur-ple, pur-ple" (or was it "Turtle, Tur-tle"—whatever it was, it was scary), had beckoned her to the master bedroom on the second floor, and . . .

Maybe it was a dream. No, it couldn't be; she ached all over from the tumble down the stairs.

The moon was down, the window dark. Turtle lay in the narrow bed in her narrow room, waiting (dark, still dark), waiting. At last slow morning crept up the cliff and raised the Westing house, the house of whispers, the house of death. Two dollars times twelve minutes equals twenty-four dollars.

Thud! The morning newspaper was flung against the front door. Turtle tiptoed through the sleeping apartment to retrieve it and climbed back into bed, the dead man staring at her from the front page. The face was younger; the short beard, darker; but it was he, all right.

### **SAM WESTING FOUND DEAD**

Found? No one else knew about the bedded-down corpse except Doug, and he had not believed her. Then who found the body? The whisperer?

Samuel W. Westing, the mysterious industrialist who disappeared thirteen years ago, was found dead in his Westingtown mansion last night. He was sixty-five years old.

The only child of immigrant parents, orphaned at the age of twelve, self-educated, hard-working Samuel Westing saved his laborer's wages and bought a small paper mill. From these meager beginnings he built the giant Westing Paper Products Corporation and founded the city of Westingtown to house his thousands of workers and their families. His estate is estimated to be worth over two hundred million dollars.

Turtle read that again: two hundred million dollars. Wow!

When asked the secret of his success, the industrialist always replied: "Clean living, hard work, and fair play." Westing set his own example; he neither drank nor smoked and never gambled. Yet he was a dedicated gamesman and a master at chess.

Turtle had been in the game room. That's where she picked up the billiard cue she had carried up the stairs as a weapon.

A great patriot, Samuel Westing was famous for his fun-filled Fourth of July celebrations. Whether disguised as Ben Franklin or a lowly drummer boy, he always acted a role in the elaborately staged pageants which he wrote and directed. Perhaps best remembered was his surprise portrayal of Betsy Ross.

Games and feasting followed the pageant, and at sunset Mr. Westing put on his Uncle Sam costume and set off fireworks from his front lawn. The spectacular pyrotechnic display could be viewed thirty miles away.

Fireworks! So that's what was in those boxes stamped *Danger—explosives* stacked in the ground floor storeroom. What a "pyrotechnic display" that would make if they all went off at the same time.

The paper king's later years were marred by tragedy. His only daughter, Violet, drowned on the eve of her wedding, and two years later his troubled wife deserted their home. Although Mr. Westing obtained a divorce, he never remarried.

Five years later he was sued by an inventor over rights to the disposable paper diaper. On his way to court Samuel Westing and his friend, Dr. Sidney Sikes, were involved in a near-fatal automobile accident. Both men were hospitalized with severe injuries. Sikes resumed his Westingtown medical practice and the post of county coroner, but Westing disappeared from sight.

It was rumored, but never confirmed, that he controlled the vast Westing Paper Products Corporation from a private island in the South Seas. He is still listed as chairman of the board.

"We are as surprised as you are, and deeply saddened," a spokesman for Julian R. Eastman, President and Chief Executive Officer of the corporation, stated when informed that Westing's body was found in his lakeside home. Dr. Sikes' response was: "A tragic end to a tragic life. Sam Westing was a truly great and important man."

The funeral will be private. The executor of the Westing estate said the deceased requested that, in place of flowers, donations be sent to Blind Bowlers of America.

Turtle turned the page of the newspaper, but that was all. That was all?

There was no mention of how the body was found.

There was no mention of the envelope propped on the bedside table on which a shaky hand had scrawled *If I am found dead in bed*. She had been edging her way against the four-poster, reading the words in the beam of the

flashlight, when she felt the hand, the waxy dead hand that lay on the red, white, and blue quilt. Through her scream she had seen the white-bearded face. She remembered running, tripping over the billiard cue, falling down the stairs, denting Sandy's flask and dropping everything else. , There was no mention of two suspicious peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on the premises, or a flashlight, or a silver cross on a chain.

There was no mention of prowlers; no mention of anyone having seen a witch; no mention of footprints on the lawn: track shoes and sneakers size six.

Oh well, she had nothing to fear (other than losing her mother's cross). Old Mr. Westing probably died of a heart attack—or pneumonia—it was drafty in there. Turtle hid the folded newspaper in her desk drawer, counted her black-and-blue marks in the mirror (seven), dressed, and set out to find the four people who knew she had been in the Westing house last night: Doug Hoo, Theo Theodorakis, Otis Amber, and Sandy. They owed her twenty-four dollars.

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At noon the sixty-two-year-old delivery boy began his rounds. He had sixteen letters to deliver from E. J. Plum, Attorney-at-Law. Otis Amber knew what the letters said, because one was addressed to him:

As a named beneficiary in the estate of Samuel W. Westing, your attendance is required in the south library of the Westing house tomorrow at 4 P.M. for the reading of the will.

"Means old man Westing left you some money," he explained. "Just sign this receipt here. What do you mean, what does 'position' mean? It means position, like a job. Most receipts have that to make sure the right person gets the right letter."

Grace Windsor Wexler wrote *housewife*, crossed it out, wrote *decorator*, crossed it out, and wrote *heiress*. Then she wanted to know "Who else? How many? How much?"

"I ain't allowed to say nothing."

The other heirs were too stunned by the unexpected legacy to bother him with questions. Madame Hoo marked an X and her husband filled in her name and position. Theo wanted to sign the receipt for his brother, but Chris insisted on doing it himself. Slowly, taking great pains, he wrote *Christos Theodorakis, birdwatcher*.

By the time the sun had set behind the Sunset Towers parking lot, Otis Amber, *deliverer*, had completed his rounds.

## 5 SIXTEEN HEIRS

THE MARBLED SKY lay heavy on the gray Great Lake when Grace Windsor Wexler parked her car in the Westing driveway and strode up the walk ahead of her daughters. Her husband had refused to come, but no matter. Recalling family gossip about a rich uncle (maybe it was a great-uncle—anyway, his name was Sam)

Grace had convinced herself that she was the rightful heir. (Jake was Jewish, so he could not possibly be related to Samuel W. Westing.)

"I can't imagine what became of my silver cross," she said, fingering the gold-link necklace under her mink stole as she paused to appraise the big house. "You know, Angela, we could have the wedding right here. . . . Turtle, where are you wandering off to now?"

"The letter said— Never mind." Turtle preferred not to explain how she knew the library could be entered from the French doors on the lawn.

The front door was opened by Crow. Although the Sunset Towers cleaning woman always wore black, here it reminded Grace Wexler to dab at her eyes with a lace handkerchief. This was a house of mourning.

The silent Crow helped Angela with her coat and nodded approval of her blue velvet dress with white collar and cuffs.

"I'll keep my furs with me," Grace said. She did not want to be taken for one of the poor relatives. "Seems rather chilly in here."

Turtle, too, complained of the chill, but her mother tugged off her coat to reveal a fluffy, ruffly pink party dress two sizes too large and four inches too long. It was one of Angela's hand-me-downs.

"Please sit anywhere," the lawyer said without glancing from the envelopes he was sorting at the head of the long library table.

Mrs. Wexler took the chair to his right and motioned to her favorite. Angela sat down next to her mother, removed a trousseau towel from her large tapestry shoulder bag, and took up embroidering the monogram D. Slumped in the third chair Turtle pretended she had never seen this paneled library with its bare and dusty shelves. Suddenly she sat up with a start. An open coffin draped in bunting rested on a raised platform at the far corner of the room; in it lay the dead man, looking exactly as she had found him, except now he was dressed in the costume of Uncle Sam—including the tall hat. Between the waxy hands, folded across his chest, lay her mother's silver cross.

Grace Wexler was too busy greeting the next heir to notice. "Why Doctor D., I had no idea you'd be here; but of course, you'll soon be a member of the family. Come, sit next to your bride-to-be; Turtle, you'll have to move down."

D. Denton Deere, always in a hurry, brushed a quick kiss on Angela's cheek. He was still wearing his hospital whites.

"I didn't know this was a pajama party," Turtle said, relinquishing her chair and stomping to the far end of the table.

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The next heir, short and round, entered timidly, her lips pressed together in an impish smile that curved up to what must be pointed ears under her straight-cut, steely hair.

"Hello, Mrs. Baumbach," Angela said. "I don't think you've met my fiancé, Denton Deere."

"You're a lucky man, Mr. Deere."

"*Doctor* Deere," Mrs. Wexler corrected her, puzzled by the dressmaker's presence.

"Yes, of course, I'm so sorry." Sensing that she was unwelcome at this end of the room, Flora Baumbach walked on. "Hi, mind if I sit next to you? I promise not to pull your braid."

"That's okay." Turtle was hunched over the table, her small chin resting between her crossed arms. From there she could see everything except the coffin.

Grace Wexler dismissed the next heir with an audible tongue click. That distasteful little man didn't even have the sense to remove his silly aviator's cap. "Tsk." And what in heaven's name was he doing here?

The delivery boy shouted: "Let's give a cheer, Otis Amber is here!" Turtle laughed, Flora Baumbach tittered, and Grace Wexler again clicked her tongue, "Tsk!"

Doug Hoo and his father entered silently, but Sandy gave a hearty "Hi!" and a cheery wave. He wore his doorman's uniform, but unlike Otis Amber, carried his hat in his hand.

Grace Windsor Wexler was no longer surprised at the odd assortment of heirs. Household workers, all, or former employees, she decided. The rich always reward servants in their wills, and her Uncle Sam was a generous man. "Aren't your parents coming?" she asked the older Theodorakis boy as he wheeled his brother into the library.

"They weren't invited," Theo replied.

"Itsss-oo-nn," Chris announced.

"What did he say?"

"He said it's snowing," Theo and Flora Baumbach explained at the same time.

The heirs watched helplessly as the invalid's thin frame was suddenly torn and twisted by convulsions. Only the dressmaker rushed to his side. "I know, I know," she simpered, "you were trying to tell us about the itsy-bitsy snowflings."

Theo moved her away. "My brother is not an infant, and he's not retarded, so please, no more baby talk."

Blinking away tears, Flora Baumbach returned to her seat, the elfin smile still painted on her pained face.

Some stared at the afflicted child with morbid fascination, but most turned away. They didn't want to see.

"Pyramidal tract involvement," Denton Deere whispered, trying to impress Angela with his diagnosis.

Angela, her face a mirror to the boy's suffering, grabbed her tapestry bag and hurried out of the room.

"Why hello, Judge Ford." Proud of her liberalism, Grace Windsor Wexler stood and leaned over the table to shake the black woman's hand. She must be here in some legal capacity, or maybe her mother was a household maid, but of one thing Grace was certain: J. J. Ford could no more be related to Samuel W. Westing than Mr. Hoo.

"Can't we get started?" Mr. Hoo asked, hoping to get back in time to watch the football game on television. "I must return to my restaurant," he announced loudly. "Sunday is our busy day, but we are still accepting reservations. Shin Hoo's Restaurant on the fifth floor of Sunset Towers, specializing in . . ."

Doug tugged at his father's sleeve. "Not here, dad; not in front of the dead."

"What dead?" Mr. Hoo had not noticed the open coffin. Now he did. "Ohhh!"

The lawyer explained that several heirs had not yet arrived. "My wife is not coming," said Mr. Hoo. Grace said, "Dr. Wexler was called away on an emergency operation."

"An emergency Packers game in Green Bay," Turtle confided to Flora Baumbach, who scrunched up her shoulders and tittered behind a plump hand.

"Then we are still waiting for one, no, two more," the lawyer said, fumbling with his papers, his hands shaking under the strict scrutiny of the judge.

Judge Ford had recognized E. J. Plum. Several months ago he had argued before her court, bumbling to the point of incompetence. Why, she wondered, was a young, inexperienced attorney chosen to handle an estate of such importance? Come to think of it, what was *she* doing here? Curiosity? Perhaps, but what about the rest of them, the other tenants of Sunset Towers? Don't anticipate, Josie-Jo, wait for Sam Westing to make the first move.

Light footsteps were heard in the hall. It was only Angela, who blushed and, hugging her tapestry bag close to her body, returned to her seat.

The heirs waited. Some chatted with neighbors, some looked up at the gilt ceiling, some studied the pattern of the Oriental rug. Judge Ford stared at the table, at Theo Theodorakis' hand. A calloused hand, a healed cut, the shiny slash of a burn on the deep bronze skin. She lowered her hands to her lap. His Greek skin was darker than her "black" skin.

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Thump, thump, thump. Someone was coming, or were there two of them?

In came Crow. Eyes lowered, without a word, she sat down next to Otis Amber. A dark cloud passed from her face as she eased off a tight shoe under the table.

Thump, thump, thump. The last expected heir arrived.

"Hello, everybody. Sorry I'm late. I haven't quite adjusted to this"—Sydelle Pulaski waved a gaily painted crutch in the air, tottered, and set it down quickly with another thump—"this crutch. Crutch. What a horrible word, but I guess I'll have to get used to it." She pursed her bright red mouth, painted to a fullness beyond the

narrow line of her lips, trying to suppress a smile of triumph. Everyone was staring; she knew they would notice.

"What happened, Pulaski?" Otis Amber asked. "Did you pull Turtle's braid again?"

"More likely she visited Wexler the foot butcher," Sandy suggested.

Sydelle was pleased to hear someone come to her defense with a loud click of the tongue. She had not even blinked a false eyelash at those offensive remarks (poise, they call it). "It's really nothing," she reported bravely, "just some sort of wasting disease. But pity me not, I shall live out my remaining time enjoying each precious day to the full." Thump, thump, thump. The secretary kept to the side of the room, avoiding the Oriental rug that might cushion the thump of her purple-striped crutch, as she made her way to the end of the table. Her exaggerated hips were even more exaggerated by the wavy stripes of white on her purple dress.

Purple waves, Turtle thought.

Denton Deere almost fell off his chair, leaning back to follow this most unusual case. First she favored her left leg, then her right leg.

"What is it?" whispered Mrs. Wexler.

The intern did not have the least notion, but he had to say something. "Traveling sporadic myositis," he pronounced quickly and glanced at Angela. Her eyes remained on her embroidery.

The lawyer stood, documents in hand, and cleared his throat several times. Grace Windsor Wexler, her chin tilted in the regal pose of an heiress, gave him her full attention.

"One minute please." Sydelle Pulaski propped her purple-and-white-striped crutch against the table, then removed a shorthand pad and pencil from her handbag. "Thank you for waiting; you may begin."

## 6 THE WESTING WILL

"My NAME," the young lawyer began, "is Edgar Jennings Plum. Although I never had the honor of meeting Samuel W. Westing, for some reason yet unexplained, I was appointed executor of this will found adjacent to the body of the deceased.

"Let me assure you that I have examined the documents at hand as thoroughly as possible in the short time available. I have verified the signatures to be those of Samuel W. Westing and his two witnesses: Julian R. Eastman, President and Chief Executive Officer of Westing Paper Products Corporation, and Sidney Sikes, M.D., Coroner of Westing County. Although the will you are about to hear may seem eccentric, I pledge my good name and reputation on its legality."

Breathless with suspense, the heirs stared popeyed at Edgar Jennings Plum, who now coughed into his fist, now cleared his throat, now rustled papers, and now, at last, began to read aloud from the Westing will.

*SAMUEL W. WESTING, resident of Westing County in the fair state of Wisconsin in the great and glorious United States of America, being of sound mind and memory, do hereby declare this to be my last will and testament.*

*/ returned to live among my friends and my enemies. I came home to seek my heir, aware that in doing so I faced death. And so I did.*

*Today I have gathered together my nearest and dearest, my sixteen nieces and nephews*

"What!"

*(Sit down, Grace Windsor Wexler!)*

The lawyer stammered an apology to the still-standing woman. "I was only reading; I mean, those are Mr. Westing's words."

"If it's any comfort to you, Mrs. Wexler," Judge Ford remarked with biting dignity, "I am just as appalled by our purported relationship."

"Oh, I didn't mean . . ."

"Hey, Angela," Turtle called the length of the table. "It's against the law to marry that doctor-to-be. He's your cousin."

D. Denton Deere, patting Angela's hand in his best bedside manner, pricked his finger on her embroidery needle.

"I can't tell who said what with this chatter," Sydelle Pulaski complained. "Would you read that again, Mr. Lawyer?"

*Today I have gathered together my nearest and dearest, my sixteen nieces and nephews (Sit down, Grace Windsor Wexler!) to view the body of your Uncle Sam for the last time.*

*Tomorrow its ashes will be scattered to the four winds.*

*SECOND • I, Samuel W. Westing, hereby swear that I did not die of natural causes. My life was taken from me—by one of you!*

"O-o-o-uggg." Chris's arm flailed the air, his accusing finger pointed here, no, there; it pointed everywhere. His exaggerated motions acted out the confusion shared by all but one of the heirs as they looked around at the stunned faces of their neighbors to confirm what they heard. Rereading her notes, Sydelle Pulaski now uttered a small shriek. "Eek!"

"Murder? Does that mean Westing was murdered?" Sandy asked the heir on his left.

Crow turned away in silence.

"Does that mean murder?" he asked the heir on his right.

"Murder? Of course it means murder. Sam Westing was murdered," Mr. Hoo replied. "Either that or he ate once too often in that greasy-spoon coffee shop."

Theo resented Hoo's slur on the family business. "It was murder, all right. And the will says the murderer is one of us." He glared at the restaurant owner.

"Have the police been notified of the charge?" Judge Ford asked the lawyer.

Plum shrugged. "I presume they will perform an autopsy."

The judge shook her head in dismay. Autopsy? Westing was already embalmed; tomorrow he would be cremated.

*The police are helpless. The culprit is far too cunning to be apprehended for this dastardly deed.*

"Oh my!" Flora Baumbach clapped a hand to her mouth on hearing "dastardly." First murder, now a swear word.

*I, alone, know the name. Now it is up to you. Cast out the sinner, let the guilty rise and confess.*

"Amen," said Crow.

THIRD • *Who among you is worthy to be the Westing heir? Help me. My soul shall roam restlessly until that one is found.*

*The estate is at the crossroads. The heir who wins the windfall will be the one who finds the . . .*

"Ashes!" the doorman shouted. Some tittered to relieve the unbearable tension, some cast him a reproachful glance, Grace Wexler clicked her tongue, and Sydelle Pulaski shhh-ed. "It was just a joke," Sandy tried to explain. "You know, ashes scattered to the winds, so the one who wins the windfall gets— Oh, never mind."

FOURTH • *Hail to thee, O land of opportunity! You have made me, the son of poor immigrants, rich, powerful, and respected.*

*So take stock in America, my heirs, and sing in praise of this generous land. You, too, may strike it rich who dares to play the Westing game.*

"Game? What game?" Turtle wanted to know.

"No matter," Judge Ford said, rising to leave. "This is either a cruel trick or the man was insane."

FIFTH • *Sit down, your honor, and read the letter this brilliant young attorney will now hand over to you.*

It was uncanny. Several heads turned toward the coffin, but Westing's eyes were shut forever.

The brilliant young attorney fumbled through a stack of papers, felt his pockets, and finally found the letter in his briefcase.

"Aren't you going to open it?" Theo asked as the judge resumed her seat and put the sealed envelope in her purse.

"No need. Sam Westing could afford to buy a dozen certificates of sanity."

"The poor are crazy, the rich just eccentric," Mr. Hoo said bitterly.

"Are you implying, sir, that the medical profession is corrupt?" Denton Deere challenged.

"Shhh!"

SIXTH • *Before you proceed to the game room there will be one minute of silent prayer for your good old Uncle Sam.*

Flora Baumbach was the only heir to cry. Crow was the only one to pray. By the time Sydelle Pulaski could assume a pose of reverence, the minute was up.

## 7 THE WESTING GAME

EIGHT CARD TABLES, each with two chairs, were arranged in the center of the game room. Sports equipment lined the walls. Hunting rifles, Ping-Pong paddles, billiard cues (a full rack, Turtle noticed), bows and arrows, darts, bats, racquets—all looked like possible murder weapons to the jittery heirs who were waiting to be told where to sit.

Theo wandered over to the chess table to admire the finely carved pieces. Someone had moved a white pawn. Okay, he'll play along. Theo defended the opening with a black knight.

On hearing Plum's throat-clearing signal, Sydelle Pulaski switched the painted crutch to her left armpit and flipped to a fresh page in her notebook. "Shhh!"

SEVENTH • *And now, dear friends, relatives, and enemies, the Westing game begins.*

*The rules are simple:*

- *Number of players: 16, divided into 8 pairs.*
- *Each pair will receive \$10,000.*
- *Each pair will receive one set of clues.*
- *Forfeits: If any player drops out, the partner must leave the game. The pair must return the money. Absent pairs forfeit the \$10,000; their clues will be held until the next session.*
- *Players will be given two days' notice of the next session. Each pair may then give one answer.*
- *Object of the game: to win.*

"Did you hear that, Crow?" Otis Amber said excitedly. "Ten thousand dollars! Now aren't you glad I made you come, huh?"

"Shhh!" That was Turtle. The object of the game was to win, and she wanted to win.

EIGHTH • *The heirs will now be paired. When called, go to the assigned table. Your name and position will be read as signed on the receipt.*

*It will be up to the other players to discover who you really are.*

1 • MADAME SUN LIN HOO, *Cook*

JAKE WEXLER, *standing or sitting when not lying down* Grace Wexler did not understand her husband's joke about position. Mr. Hoo did, but he was in no mood for humor; ten thousand dollars was at stake. Both pleaded for their absent spouses—"Emergency operation," "My wife doesn't even speak English"—to no avail. Table one remained empty and moneyless.

2 • TURTLE WEXLER, *Witch*

FLORA BAUMBACH, *dressmaker*

Sighs of relief greeted the naming of Turtle's partner, but Flora Baumbach seemed pleased to be paired with the kicking witch. At least, her face was still puckered in that elfin grin. Turtle had hoped for one of the high-school seniors, especially Doug Hoo.

3 • CHRISTOS THEODORAKIS, *birdwatcher*

D. DENTON DEERE, *intern, St. Joseph's Hospital,  
Department of Plastic Surgery*

Theo protested: He and his brother should be paired together; Chris was his responsibility. Mrs. Wexler protested: Doctor D. should be paired with his bride-to-be. D. Denton Deere protested, but silently: If this had been arranged for free medical advice, they (whoever they are) were mistaken. He was a busy man. He was a doctor, not a nursemaid.

But Chris was delighted to be part of the outside world. He would tell the intern about the person who limped into the Westing house; maybe that was the murderer—unless his partner was the murderer! This was really exciting, even better than television.

4 • ALEXANDER MCSOUTHERS, *doorman*

J. J. FORD, *judge, Appellate Division of the State  
Supreme Court*

The heirs watched the jaunty doorman pull out a chair for the judge. It had never occurred to them that Sandy was a nickname for Alexander, but that couldn't be what Sam Westing meant by *It will be up to the other players to discover who you really are*. Or could it?

The judge did not return the chip-toothed smile. *Doorman*, he calls himself, and the others had signed simple things, too: *cook, dressmaker*. The podiatrist had even made fun of his "position." She must seem as pompous as that intern, putting on airs with that title. Well, she had worked hard to get where she was, why shouldn't she

be proud of it? She was no token; her record was faultless. . . . Watch it, Josie-Jo. Westing's getting to you already and the game has barely begun.

5 • GRACE WINDSOR WEXLER, *heiress*

JAMES SHIN HOO, *restaurateur*

Grace Windsor Wexler ignored the snickers. If she was not the heiress now, she would be soon, what with her clues, Angela's clues, Turtle's clues, Demon's clues, and the clues of Mr. Hoo's obedient son. Five thousand dollars lost! Oh well, who needs Jake anyway? She'd win on her own. "You'll be happy to know that Mr. Westing was really my Uncle Sam," she whispered to her partner.

So what, thought Mr. Hoo. Five thousand dollars lost! He should have told his wife about this meeting, dragged her along. Sam Westing, the louse, has cheated him again. Whoever killed him deserves a medal.

6 • BERTHE ERICA CROW, *Good Salvation Soup Kitchen*

OTIS AMBER, *deliverer*

The delivery boy danced a merry jig; but Crow, her sore foot squeezed back into her tight shoe, headed for table six with a grim face. Why were they watching her? Did they think she killed Windy? Could the guilty know her guilt? Repent! Crow limps, Chris Theodorakis noted.

7 • THEO THEODORAKIS, *brother*

DOUG HOO, *first in all-state high-school mile run*

They slapped hands, and Doug jogged to table seven. Theo moved more slowly. Passing the chessboard he saw that white had made a second move. He countered with a black pawn. Maybe he should not have written *brother*, but like it or not, that was his position in life. Chris was smiling at him in pure sweetness, which made Theo feel even guiltier about his resentment.

"I guess that makes us partners, Ms. Pulaski," Angela said.

"Pardon me, did you say something?"

8 • SYDELLE PULASKI, *secretary to the president*

ANGELA WEXLER, *none*

Angela stepped tentatively behind the secretary, not knowing whether to ignore her disability or to take her arm. At least her crippled partner could not be the murderer, but it was embarrassing being paired with such a . . . no, she shouldn't feel that way. It was her mother who was upset (she could feel the indignant anger without having to look at Grace); her perfect daughter was paired with a freak.

What good luck, the hobbling Sydelle Pulaski thought. Now she would really be noticed with such a pretty young thing for a partner. They might even invite her to the wedding. She'd paint a crutch white with little pink nose-gays.

Denton Deere was troubled. What in the world did Angela mean by "nun"?

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Once again Edgar Jennings Plum cleared his throat.

"Nasal drip," Denton Deere whispered, confiding the latest diagnosis to his partner. Chris giggled. What's the crippled kid so happy about, the intern wondered.

*NINTH • Money! Each pair in attendance will now receive a check for the sum of \$10,000. The check cannot be cashed without the signatures of both partners. Spend it wisely or go for broke. May God thy gold refine.*

A piercing shriek suddenly reminded the Westing heirs of murder. While passing out the checks, the lawyer had stepped on Crow's sore foot.

"Is this legal, judge?" Sandy asked.

"It is not only legal, Mr. McSouthers," Judge Ford replied, signing her name to the check and handing it to the doorman, "it is a shrewd way to keep everyone playing the game."

*TENTH • Each pair in attendance will now receive an envelope containing a set of clues. No two sets of clues are alike. It is not what you have, it's what you don't have that counts.*

Placing the last of the envelopes on table eight, the young lawyer smiled at Angela. Sydelle Pulaski smiled back.

"This makes no sense," Denton Deere complained. Four clues typed on cut squares of Westing Superstrength Paper Towels lay on the table before him.

Arms and elbows at odds, with fingers fanned, Chris tried to rearrange the words in some grammatical, if not logical, order.

"Hey, watch it!" the intern shouted, as one clue wafted to the floor.

Flora Baumbach leaped from her chair at the next table, picked up the square of paper and set it face down before the trembling youngster. "I didn't see it," she announced loudly. "I really didn't see it," she repeated under the questioning gaze of her partner, Turtle Wexler, *witch*.

The word she had seen was *plain*.

The players protected their clues more carefully now. Hunched over the tables, they moved the paper squares this way and that way, mumbling and grumbling. The murderer's name must be there, somewhere.

Only one pair had not yet seen their clues. At table eight Sydelle Pulaski placed one hand on the envelope, raised a finger to her lips and tilted her head toward the other heirs. Just watch and listen, she meant.

She may be odd, but she's smart, Angela thought. Since each pair had a different set of clues, they would watch and listen for clues to their clues.

"He-he-he." The delivery boy slapped his partner on the back. "That's us, old pal: Queen Crow and King Amber."

"What's this: *on* or no?" Doug Hoo turned a clue upside down, then right side up again.

Theo jabbed an elbow in his ribs and turned to see if anyone had heard. Angela lowered her eyes in time.

J. J. Ford crumpled the clues in her fist and rose in anger. "I'm sorry, Mr. McSouthers. Playing a pawn in this foolish game is one thing, but to be insulted with minstrel show dialect . . ."

"Please, judge, please don't quit on me," Sandy pleaded. "I'd have to give back all that money; it would break my wife's heart. And my poor kids. . . ."

Judge Ford regarded the desperate doorman without pity. So many had begged before her bench.

"Please, judge. I lost my job, my pension. I can't fight no more. Don't quit just because of some nonsensical words."

Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me, she had chanted as a child. Words did hurt, but she was no longer a child. Nor a hanging judge. And there was always the chance . . . "All right, Mr. McSouthers, I'll stay." J. J. Ford sat down, her eyes sparking with wickedness. "And we'll play the game just as Sam Westing would have played it. Mean!"

Flora Baumbach squeezed her eyes together and screwed up her face. She was concentrating.

"Haven't you memorized them yet?" Turtle didn't like the way Otis Amber's scrawny neck was swiveling high out of his collar. And what was Angela staring at?

"Yes, I think so," the dressmaker replied, "but I can't make heads or tails of them."

"They make perfect sense to me," Turtle said. One by one she put the clues in her mouth, chewed and swallowed them.

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"Jibberish," Mr. Hoo muttered.

Grace Windsor Wexler agreed. "Excuse me, Mr. Plum, but what are these clues clues to? I mean, exactly what are we supposed to find?"

"Purple waves," Sandy joked with a wink at Turtle.

Mrs. Wexler uttered a cry of recognition and changed the order of two of her clues.

"It's still jibberish," Mr. Hoo complained.

Other players pressed the lawyer for more information. Ed Plum only shrugged.

"Then could you please give us copies of the will?"

"A copy will be on file . . ." Judge Ford began.

"I'm afraid not, your honor," the lawyer said. "The will not, I mean the will will will . . ." He paused and tried again. "The will will not be filed until the first of the year. My instructions specifically state that no heir is allowed to see any of the documents until the game is over."

No copy? That's not fair. But wait, they did have a copy. A shorthand copy!

Sydelle Pulaski had plenty of attention now. She smiled back at the friendly faces, revealing a lipstick stain on her front teeth.

"Isn't there some sort of a last statement?" Sandy asked Plum. "I mean, like the intern says, nothing makes any sense."

*ELEVENTH • Senseless, you say? Death is senseless yet makes way for the living. Life, too, is senseless unless you know who you are, what you want, and which way the wind blows.*

*So on with the game. The solution is simple if you know whom you are looking for. But heirs, beware! Be aware!*

*Some are not who they say they are, and some are not who they seem to be. Whoever you are, it's time to go home.*

*God bless you all and remember this:*

*Buy Westing Paper Products!*