

8

THE PAIRED HEIRS

DURING THE NIGHT Flora Baumbach's itsy-bitsy snowflings raged into a blizzard. The tenants of Sunset Towers awoke from clue-chasing, blood-dripping dreams, bound in twisted sheets and imprisoned by fifteen-foot snowdrifts.

No telephones. No electricity.

Snowbound with a murderer!

The slow procession looked like some ancient, mysterious rite as partner sought out partner on the windowless stairs, and silent pairs threaded through the corridors in the flickering light of crooked, color-striped candles (the product of Turtle's stint at summer camp).

"These handmade candles are both practical and romantic," she said, peddling her wares from apartment door to apartment door to frightened tenants at seven in the morning. (Oh, it's only Turtle.) "And the colored stripes tell time, which is very handy if your electric clock stopped. Each stripe burns exactly one-half hour, more or less. Twelve stripes, six hours."

"How much?"

"Not wishing to take advantage of this emergency, I've reduced the price to only five dollars each."

Outrageous. Even more so when the electricity came on two hours after her last sale. "Sorry, no refunds," Turtle said.

No matter. What was five dollars to heirs of an estate worth two hundred million? Clues, they had to work on those clues. Behind closed doors. Whisper, someone may be listening.

Not all the heirs were huddled in plotting, puzzle-solving pairs. Jake Wexler had retreated to his office after a long and loud argument with his wife. He sure could have used half of that ten thousand dollars, but he wouldn't admit it, not to her. The forfeited money upset her more than the murder of her uncle, if he was her uncle.

Five floors above, Jake's partner stood before the restaurant's front window staring at the froth on the angry lake, and beyond. No one had bothered to tell Madame Hoo about the Westing game.

Other players were snowbound elsewhere: Denton Deere in the hospital, Sandy at home. No one gave a thought to where Otis Amber or Crow might be.

But Sydelle Pulaski was there, thumping her crutch against the baseboards as she limped through the carpeted halls on the arm of her pretty partner. Not one, but seven tenants had invited her to morning coffee or afternoon tea (murderer or not, they had to see Pulaski's copy of that will).

"Three lumps, please. Angela drinks it black." Your health? "Thank the lord I'm still able to hobble about." Your job? "I was private secretary to the president of Schultz Sausages. Poor Mr. Schultz, I don't know how he'll manage without me." Your shorthand notes? "Thank you for the refreshments. I must hurry back for my medication. Come, Angela."

One heir had not invited them in, but that didn't stop Sydelle Pulaski from barging into apartment 2D. "Hi, Chris. Just thought we'd pop in to see how you're doing. Don't be scared. I'm not the murderer, Angela is not the murderer, and we don't think you are the murderer. Mind if I sit down?" The secretary toppled into a chair next to the invalid before he could reply. "Here, I stole a macaroon for you. It's so sticky you'll be tasting it all day; I must have six strands of coconut between my upper molars." Chris took the cookie. "Just look at that smile, it could break your heart."

Angela wished her partner had not said that; it seemed so insensitive, so crude. But at least Sydelle was talking to him, which was more than she was able to do. Angela, the fortunate one, standing like a dummy. "Um, I know Denton wants to work on the clues with you. He's snowbound, too."

"You ver-r pred-dy." How did "pretty" come out? He meant to say "nice." Chris bent his curly head over the geography book in his lap. She wasn't laughing at him. It was all right to ask her because she was going to marry his partner. "Wha ar-r g-gra-annz?"

Angela did not understand.

Chris fanned the pages of the book to a picture of a wheat field. "G-gra-annz."

"Oh, grains. You want to know the names of some grains. Let's see, there's wheat, rye, corn, barley, oats."

"O-ohss!" Angela thought the boy was going into a fit, but he was only repeating her last word: oats.

Sydelle was puffing her warm breath on the window and wiping a frosted area clean with her sleeve. "There, now you'll be able to watch the birds again. Anything else we can do for you, young man?"

Chris nodded. "Read m-me short-han n-noos."

The pretty lady and the funny lady moved quickly out the door. One limped, but it was a pretended limp (he could tell), not like the limper on the Westing house lawn.

Oats. Chris closed his eyes to picture the clues:

FOR PLAIN GRAIN SHED

Grain = oats = Otis Amber. For + d (from shed) = Ford. But neither the delivery boy nor the judge limped, and he still hadn't figured out she or plain. He'd have to wait for Denton Deere; Denton Deere was smart; he was a doctor.

Chris raised his binoculars to the cliff. Windblown drifts buttressed the house—something moved on the second floor—a hand holding back the edge of a drape. Slowly the heavy drape fell back against the window. The Westing house was snowbound, too, and somebody was snowbound in it.

Only one of the players thought the clues told how the ten-thousand-dollar check was to be spent. Take stock in America, the will said. Go for broke, the will said.

"In the stock market," Turtle said. "And whoever makes the most money wins it all, the whole two hundred million dollars." Their clues:

SEA MOUNTAIN AM O

stood for symbols of three corporations listed on the stock exchange: SEA, MT (the abbreviation for mountain), AMO.

"But am and o are separate clues," Flora Baumbach said.

"To confuse us."

"But what about the murderer? I thought we were supposed to find the name of the murderer?"

"To put us off the track." If the police suspected murder, she'd be in jail by now. Her fingerprints were over everything in the Westing house, including the corpse. "You don't really think one of us could have killed a living, breathing human being in cold blood, do you Mrs. Baumbach? Do you?" Turtle did, but the dressmaker was a cream puff.

"Don't you look at me like that, Turtle Wexler! You know very well I could never think such a thing. I must have misunderstood. Oh my, I just wish Miss Pulaski had shown us her copy of the will."

Turtle returned to her calculations, multiplying numbers of shares times price, adding a broker's commission, trying to total the sums to the ten thousand dollars they had to spend.

Flora Baumbach may have been wrong about the murder, but she was not convinced of Turtle's plan. "What about Buy Westing Paper Products! I'm sure that was in the will."

"Great!" Turtle exclaimed. "We'll do just that, we'll add WPP to the list of stocks we're going to buy."

Flora Baumbach had watched enough television commercials to know that Buy Westing Paper Products meant that as soon as she could get to market, she'd buy all the Westing products on the shelf. Still, it felt good having a child around again. She'd play along, gladly. "You know, Turtle, you may be right about putting our money in the stock market. I remember the will said May God thy gold refine. That must be from the Bible."

"Shakespeare," Turtle replied. All quotations were either from the Bible or Shakespeare.

Mr. Hoo moved aside a full ashtray with a show of distaste and rearranged the clues. "Purple fruited makes more sense."

Grace Wexler looked across the restaurant to the lone figure at the window. "Are you sure your wife doesn't understand English, I mean, after living here so long?"

"That's my second wife. She came over from Hong Kong two years ago."

"She does look young, but it's so hard to tell ages of people of the Oriental persuasion," Grace said. Why was he glaring at her like that? "Your wife is quite lovely, you know, so doll-like and inscrutable."

Hoo bit off half a chocolate bar. He had enough problems with the empty restaurant, a lazy son, and his nagging ulcer; now he has to put up with this bigot.

Grace lit another cigarette and rearranged the clues to read: purple waves. "You heard that doorman say 'purple waves'; it must mean something. And that ghastly secretary was wearing a dress with purple waves last night, not to mention her crutch."

"You should not speak unkindly of those less fortunate than you," Hoo said.

"You're quite right," Grace replied. "I thought the poor thing handled her infirmity with great courage—traveling mimosa, my future son-in-law says; he's a doctor, you know. Anyhow, Pulaski couldn't possibly be the murderer, not the way she gimps around. Besides, how could my Uncle Sam know she'd wear purple waves to his funeral?"

Hoo waved the cigarette smoke from his face. "The murderer had to have a motive. How about this: A niece murders her rich uncle to inherit his money?"

Good sport that she was, Grace tossed back her head and uttered an amused "Ha-ha-ha."

"Not that I care," Hoo said. "That cheating moneybags got what he deserved. What's the matter?"

"Look!" Grace pointed to the clues.

FRUITED PURPLE WAVES FOR SEA

"For sea! The murderer lives in apartment 4C!"

"I live in 4C," Hoo barked. "If Sam Westing wanted to say 4C he would have written number 4, letter C. S-e-a means sea, like what a turtle swims in."

"Come now, Mr. Hoo, we are both being silly. Have you spoken to your son about his clues?"

"Some son. If you can catch him, you can ask him." Hoo stuffed the rest of the candy bar in his mouth. "And some business I've got here. Everybody orders up, nobody orders down. That coffee shop is sending me to the poorhouse. And your Angela and that Pulaski woman, they didn't show us the will, they didn't give us their clues, they didn't pay for three cups of jasmine tea and six almond cookies, and you smoke too much."

"And you eat too much." Grace threw her coin purse on the table and stormed out of the restaurant. Change, that's all he'll get from her; he'd have to beg on his knees before she'd sign Grace Windsor Wexler on the ten-thousand-dollar check, that madman. Some pair they made: Attila the Hun and Gracie the useless. Gracie Windkloppel Wexler, heir pretender, pretentious heir.

First, the money. They signed their names to the check; half would go into Doug Hoo's savings account; half would go to Theo's parents. Next, the clues:

HIS N ON TO THEE FOR

"Maybe they're numbers: one, two, three, four," Theo guessed.

"I still say on is no," the bored track star said. He clasped his hands behind his head, leaned back in the coffee shop booth and stretched his long legs under the opposite bench. "And no is what we got: no real clues, no leads, no will."

After three cups of coffee, two pastries and a bowl of rice pudding with cream, Sydelle Pulaski had offered nothing in return.

Theo refused to give up. "Are you sure you didn't see anything unusual at the Westing house that night?"

"I didn't kill Westing, if that's what you mean, and the only unusual thing I saw was Turtle Wexler. I think the pest is madly in love with me; how's that for luck?"

"Get serious, Doug. One of the heirs is a murderer; we could all get killed."

"Just because somebody zapped the old man doesn't mean he's going to kill again. Dad says. . ." Doug paused. His father's comment about awarding a medal to the murderer might be incriminating.

Theo tried another tack. "I was playing chess with somebody in the game room last night."

"Who?"

"That's what's strange; I don't know who. We'll have to find out which one of the heirs plays chess."

"Since when is chess-playing evidence for murder?"

"Well, it's something to go on," Theo replied. "And another thing: The will said no two sets of clues are alike. Maybe all the clues put together make one message, a message that points to the murderer. Somehow or other we'll have to get the heirs to pool the clues."

"Oh, sure. The killer can't wait to hand over the clues that will hang him." Doug rose. Snowbound or not, he had to stay in shape for the track meet. For the rest of the day he jogged through the hallways and up and down stairs, scaring the nervous tenants half out of their wits.

Judge J. J. Ford had no doubt that the clues she shared with the doorman were meant for her, but Sam Westing could toss off sharper insults than:

SKIES AM SHINING BROTHER

His choice of words must have been limited; therefore, these clues were part of a longer statement. A statement that named a name. The name of the murderer.

No. Westing could not have been murdered. If his life had been threatened, if he had been in danger of any kind, he would have insisted on police protection. He owned the police; he owned the whole town. Sam Westing was not the type to let himself get killed. Not unless he was insane.

The judge opened the envelope given her by the incompetent Plum. A certificate of sanity, dated last week: "Having thoroughly examined. . . keen mind and memory. . . excellent physical condition. . . (signed) Sidney Sikes, M.D."

Sikes. That sounded familiar. The judge scanned the obituary she had cut from Saturday's newspaper.

. . . 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.

Sikes was Westing's friend (and, she remembered, a witness to the will), but he was also a physician in good standing. She would accept his opinion on Westing's sanity, for the time being at least.

Back to the clues. Look at her, the big-time judge, fussing over scraps of Westing Superstrength Paper Towels. "Forget the clues," she said aloud, rising from her desk to putter about the room.

Nibbling on a macaroon, she stacked the used coffee cups on a tray. If only that Pulaski person had let her study the will. That's where the real clues were buried, among the veiled threats and pompous promises, the slogans and silliness in that hodgepodge of a will.

In his will Sam Westing implied (he did not state, he implied) that (1) he was murdered, (2) the murderer was one of the heirs, (3) he alone knew the name of the murderer, and (4) the name of the murderer was the answer to the game.

The game: a tricky, divisive Westing game. No matter how much fear and suspicion he instilled in the players, Sam Westing knew that greed would keep them playing the game. Until the "murderer" was captured. And punished.

Sam Westing was not murdered, but one of his heirs was guilty—guilty of some offense against a relentless man. And that heir was in danger. From his grave Westing would stalk his enemy, and through his heirs he would wreak his revenge.

Which one? Which heir was the target of Westing's vindictiveness? In the name of justice she would have to find Westing's victim before the others did. She would have to learn everything she could about each one of the heirs. Who are they, and how did their lives touch Westing's, these sixteen strangers whose only connection with one another was Sunset Towers? Sunset Towers—she'd start from there.

Good, the telephones are working again. The number she dialed was answered on the first ring. "Hi there, this is a recording of yours truly, Barney Northrup. I'm at your service —soon as I get back in my office, that is. Just sing out your problem to old Barney here when you hear the beep." Beep.

J. J. Ford hung up without singing out her problem to old Barney. He, too, could be involved in Westing's plot.

The newspaper, she would try the newspaper; surely someone was snowbound there. After eight rings, a live voice answered. "We usually don't supply that kind of information over the phone, but since it's you, Judge Ford, I'll be happy to oblige. Just spell out the names and I'll call back if I find anything."

"Thank you, I'd appreciate that." It was a beginning. Sam Westing was dead, but maybe, just once, she could beat him at his own game. His last game.

Having found what she wanted in Turtle's desk, Angela returned to her frilly bedroom where Sydelle Pulaski, glasses low on her nose, was perched on a ruffled stool at the vanity table, smearing blue shadow on her eyelids.

"First we tackle our own clues," the secretary said, frowning at the result in the threefold mirror. Unlucky from the day she was born, she now had a beautiful and well-loved partner. There was always the chance that they alone had been given the answer. She unsealed the envelope and held it out to Angela. "Take one."

Angela removed the first clue: good.

Now it was Sydelle's turn. "Glory be!" she exclaimed, thinking she had the name of the murderer. Her thumb was covering the letter d. The word was hood.

Angela's turn. The third clue was from.

Sydelle's turn. The fourth clue was spacious.

The fifth and last clue was—Angela uttered a low moan. Her hand shook as she passed the paper to her partner. The fifth and last clue was grace.

"Grace, that's your mother's name, isn't it?" Sydelle said. "Well, don't worry, that clue doesn't mean your mother is the murderer. The will says: It is not what you have, it's what you don't have that counts." The secretary had not yet transcribed the shorthand, but she had read it through several times before hiding the notebook in a safe place. "By the way, are you really related to Mr. Westing?"

Angela shrugged. Sydelle assumed that meant no and turned to the clues.

GOOD GRACE FROM HOOD SPACIOUS

"The only thing I can figure from these clues is: Good gracious from hood space. As soon as the parking lot is shoveled out, we'll peek under the hoods of all the cars. A map or more clues may be hidden there. Maybe even the murder weapon. Now, let's hear about the other clues."

Angela reported on the clues gathered in the game room and during the day's comings and goings:

"King, queen. Otis Amber said, 'King Otis and Queen Crow.'

"Purple waves. Mother switched two clues around when Sandy mentioned those words.

"On (or no). Doug and Theo could not decide whether that clue was right side up or upside down.

"Grains. Chris Theodorakis thinks that clue refers to Otis Amber. You know, grains—oats.

"MT." Angela showed her partner the crumpled scrap of paper she had picked up along with Sydelle's dropped crutch during Flora Baumbach's tea party.

The Westing Game
Chapters 8-12

500 shares MT at \$6 = \$3000
broker's commission = +90
\$3090

"I checked Turtle's diary. She is not following any stock with a symbol like MT, so it must be one of her clues. MT could stand for either mountain or empty."

"Excellent," Sydelle Pulaski remarked. Her partner was beautiful, but not dumb. "Read all the clues together now."

GOOD HOOD FROM SPACIOUS GRACE

KING QUEEN PURPLE WAVES

ON(NO) GRAINS MOUNTAIN(EMPTY)

Sydelle was disappointed. "It is not what you have, it's what you don't have that counts. And what we don't have is a verb. Nothing makes sense without a verb. What about the judge?"

"Judge Ford thought her clues were an insult, and she said something about playing a pawn in Westing's game. And she had a clipping of the obituary on her desk. This obituary." Angela handed Sydelle the newspaper taken from Turtle's drawer.

"What's that?"

It was a knock on the front door.

It was footsteps in the living room.

It was Theo. "Anyone for a game of chess?" he asked, leaning through the bedroom doorway.

"No, thank you," Sydelle replied, looking very busy.

Theo smiled shyly at Angela and left.

Sydelle read the obituary in Turtle's newspaper. The words two hundred million dollars were underlined, but she found a more interesting item. "Sam Westing was a master at chess; no wonder Theo's so interested. Do you know anything about the game, Angela?"

"A little," she replied slowly, putting the pieces in order. "The judge says she's a pawn and Otis Amber says he's the king, Crow's the queen— Oh well, it's probably just a coincidence."

"We can't leave any stone unturned," Sydelle insisted. "As the will says, Object of the game: to win."

"What did you say?"

"Object of the game: to win."

"How about: object of the game: twin. Maybe the murderer is a twin."

"Twin!" Sydelle liked that. The only problem would be getting the murderer to admit that he (or she) is a twin. "Let's get back to my apartment. It's time I transcribed those notes."

Angela helped the invalid to her feet and nervously peered in both directions before stepping into the hallway.

Sydelle chuckled at her timidity. "There's nothing to be scared of, Angela. Westing was murdered for his money, and we're not rich yet. We won't be rich enough to be murdered until we find the name, and by the time we get the money from the estate, the murderer will be locked up in jail."

In spite of the impeccable logic, Angela looked back over her shoulder several times on the way to 3D.

"Strange." Sydelle stood before her open apartment door. She had slammed it shut on leaving, but had not locked the dead bolt; after all, not even a burglar could get into a snowbound building. Unless . . ."

Angela, too frightened to notice that Sydelle ran through the apartment with her crutch in the air, found her partner in the bathroom frantically tossing soiled towels from the hamper.

Sydelle Pulaski stared at the bare wicker bottom, then sank to the rim of the bathtub, shaking her head in disbelief. Someone in Sunset Towers had stolen the shorthand notebook.

9 LOST AND FOUND

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING a typed index card was tacked to the elevator's back wall:

LOST: Important business papers of no value to anyone but the owner. Please return to Sydelle Pulaski, 3D. No questions asked.

The shorthand notebook was not returned, but the idea of a bulletin board was an instant success. By late afternoon the elevator was papered with notices and filled with tenants facing sideways and backwards, reading as they rode up and down.

Lost: Silver cross on filigree chain, topaz pin and earrings, gold-filled cuff links. Return to Grace Windsor Wexler, 3D. REWARD!

All players willing to discuss sharing their clues come to the coffee shop tomorrow 10 A.M.

WHOEVER STOLE MY MICKEY MOUSE CLOCK BETTER GIVE IT BACK. JUST LEAVE IT IN THE HALL IN FRONT OF APARTMENT 3D WHEN NO ONE'S LOOKING.

TURTLE WEXLER

ORDER DOWN, NOT UP ! Or come on up to the fifth floor and dine in elegance at SHIN HOO'S RESTAURANT Specializing in exquisite Chinese cuisine.

LOST: STRING OF PEARLS. SENTIMENTAL VALUE. IF FOUND, PLEASE BRING THEM TO APARTMENT 2C. THANK YOU. FLORA BAUMBACH (DRESSMAKING AND ALTERATIONS, REASONABLY PRICED)

FOUND: SIX CLUES The following clues, printed on squares of Westing Toilet Tissue, were found in the third floor hallway:

BRAIDED KICKING TORTOISE 'SI A BRAT

I am having an informal party this evening from eight o' clock on, You are all invited. Please come. J. J. Ford, apartment 4D

Turtle, wherever you are-Be home at seven-thirty SHARP!!! Your loving mother

"Mom, I'm home." No one else was.

On reading Mrs. Wexler's note in the elevator, Flora Baumbach had insisted, "You must do what your mother says." When Turtle replied, "Like showing her our clues?" Flora Baumbach's answer was "Perhaps so. After all, she is your mother."

Flora Baumbach was sappy. Always smiling that dumb smile, always so polite to everybody. And so timid. When they had finally reached a snowbound broker, Flora Baumbach was so nervous she dropped the telephone. Turtle had to admit to some nervousness herself, but it was the first real order she had ever placed. For a minute there, she thought she might choke on the thumping heart that had jumped into her throat, but she had pulled off the transaction like a pro. Now if only the stock market would go up, she'd show Mr. Westing about refining gold. The next part of the will would read: "Whichsoever pair made the most money with the ten thousand dollars inherits the whole estate." She was sure of it.

"Oh, there you are." Grace Wexler acted as if Turtle was the tardy one, but she quickly sweetened. "Come, dear, let's go to your room and I'll fix your hair."

Her mother sat behind her on the edge of the narrow bed, loosed the dark brown hair and brushed it to a gloss. She had not done that with such care in a long, long time.

"Have you eaten?"

"Mrs. Baumbach made me a dinner." Turtle felt the fingers dividing the hair into strands. Her mother was so warm, so close.

"Your poor father's probably starving; he's been so busy on the phone, changing appointments and all."

"Daddy's eating in the coffee shop; I just saw him there." Turtle had dashed in shouting: "The braided tortoise strikes again!" and kicked a surprised Theo in the shin. (It was Doug Hoo, not Theo, who had made the sign.)

Her mother twisted the three strands into a braid. "I think you should wear your party dress tonight; you look so pretty in pink."

Pretty? She had never used that word before, not about her. What's going on?

"You know, sweetheart, I'm rather hurt that you won't tell your own mother about your clues."

So that was it. She should have known. "My lips are sealed," Turtle said defiantly.

"Just one eensy-beensy clue?" Grace wheedled, winding a rubber band around the end of the braid.

"N-n-n," Turtle replied through sealed lips.

Angela came into the small room and tugged Turtle's braid (only her sister could get away with that).

Beaming on her favorite, Grace took her hand, then gasped. "Angela, where's your engagement ring?"

"I have a rash on my finger."

Thump, thump. Sydelle Pulaski appeared in the doorway. "Hi, what's everybody doing in the closet?"

"See, I told you this is a closet," Turtle said.

Grace ignored the complaint. It did no good being nice to that ungrateful child, never satisfied, always whining about something or other. "Oh, hello, Miss Pulaski."

"I've been feeling a bit weakly, thank you, but nothing can keep me from a party." Sydelle's crutch was painted in black and white squares to match her black and white checkered dress. Her large hoop earrings were also black and white: the white one dangled from her left ear, the black from her right.

"The party is such a lovely idea," Grace said, warming up to the owner of the shorthand notes. "When I saw the invitation in the elevator I suggested to Mr. Hoo that he call the judge to see if she needed hors d'oeuvres; and sure enough, he got an order for six dozen." She turned to Angela. "Hadn't you better get dressed, dear? It's getting late. It's too bad Doctor D. can't escort you to the party, but your father and I will take you."

"Angela and I are going together; we're partners, you know." Sydelle had it all planned. They were to appear in identical costumes; tonight was the night they would discover if one of the heirs was a twin.

"I'm going to the party with Mrs. Baumbach," Turtle remarked. "The sign said everyone's invited."

Again Grace ignored her. "By the way, Miss Pulaski, I do hope you've changed your mind about showing me your notes."

It was the secretary's turn to seal her lips. She wouldn't put it past that uppity Grace Windsor Wexler to steal the notebook from an unfortunate cripple and then rub it in.

Grace tried again, her voice dripping with honey. "You know, of course, that if I do win the inheritance, everything I own goes to Angela."

Turtle bounded up. "Let me out of here: a person can't breathe in this closet." She kicked the bed, kicked the chair, kicked the desk, and elbowed past the disapproving secretary.

"What in the world is wrong with that child?" her mother said.

Judge Ford was instructing Theo in the art of bartending when the telephone rang. The snowbound newspaperman had found several items in the files.

"First, the engagement announcement of Angela Wexler to D. Denton Deere. Next, several clippings on a lawsuit brought against Sam Westing by an inventor named. . ."

"Hold on, please." Mr. Hoo waddled in with a large tray of appetizers. The judge pointed him to the serving buffet and apologized to her caller. "I'm sorry, would you repeat that name."

"James Hoo. He claimed Westing stole his idea of the disposable paper diaper."

"One minute, please." The judge cupped her hand over the mouthpiece. "Please don't leave, Mr. Hoo. I was hoping you'd stay for the party, as a guest, of course. Your wife and son, too."

Hoo grunted. He hated parties. He had seen his fill of people eating and drinking and acting like clowns, jabbering like. . . so that's it: jabbering, dropping clues. "I'll be right back."

The receiver hissed with an impatient sigh, then the researcher went on. "I've got a thick file of sports items on another Hoo, a Doug Hoo. Seems he runs a pretty fast mile for a high-school kid. That's all I could find on the names you gave me, but I still have stacks of Westing clippings to go through."

"Thank you so much."

The doorbell rang.

The party was about to begin.

10

THE LONG PARTY

"I HOPE WE'RE not too early." Grace Windsor Wexler always arrived at parties fashionably late, but not tonight. She didn't want to miss a thing, or a clue, or wait around in her apartment with a murderer on the loose. "I don't think you've met my husband, Doctor Wexler."

"Call me Jake."

"Hello, Jake," Judge Ford said. A firm handshake, laugh lines around his eyes. He needed a sense of humor with that social-climbing wife.

"What a lovely living room, so practically furnished," Grace commented. "Our apartments are identical in layout, but mine looks so different. You must come see what I've done with it. I'm a decorator, you know. Three bedrooms do seem rather spacious for a single woman."

What does she mean, three bedrooms? This is a one-bedroom apartment. "Would you care for an appetizer, Mrs. Wexler? I'm curious to know exactly how you are related to the Westing family."

The judge had hoped to take the "heiress" by surprise, but Grace gained time by coughing. "Goodness, that ginger is spicy—it's the Szechuan cooking style, you know. How am I related? Let me see, Uncle Sam was my father's oldest brother, or was he the youngest brother of my father's father?"

"Excuse me, I have to greet my other guests." The judge left the prattling pretender. Father's brother or father's father's brother, if the relationship was on the paternal side her maiden name would be Westing.

The party went on and on. No one dared be first to leave. (Safety in numbers, especially with a judge there.) So the guests ate and drank and jabbered; and they watched the other guests eat and drink and jabber. No one laughed.

"I guess murder isn't very funny," Jake Wexler said.

"Neither is money," Mr. Hoo replied glumly.

Deciding that his wife had found the perfect partner, the podiatrist moved on to the two women standing in silence at the front window. "Cheer up, Angie-pie, you'll see your Den-ton soon enough." His daughter twisted out of his embrace. "Are you all right, Angela?"

"I'm fine." She was not fine. Why did they ask about Denton all the time, as though she was nobody without him? Oh, it wasn't just that. It wasn't even the humiliation of her mother chiding her about the "twin" costume (in front of everybody) and sending her back to their apartment to change clothes. It was more than that, it was everything.

Jake turned to Madame Hoo. "Hi there, partner."

"She doesn't speak English, dad," Angela said flatly.

"And she never will, Angela, if no one talks to her."

"Snow," said Madame Hoo.

Jake followed her pointing finger. "That's right, snow. Lots and lots of snow. Snow. Trees. Road. Lake Michigan."

"China," said Madame Hoo.

"China? Sure, why not," Jake replied. "China."

Angela left the chatting couple. Why couldn't she have made some sort of friendly gesture? Because she might do the wrong thing and annoy her mother. Angela-the-obedient-daughter did only what her mother told her to do.

"Hello, Angela. One of these tidbits might cheer you up." Judge Ford held the tray before her. "I hear you'll be getting married soon."

"Some people have all the luck," Sydelle Pulaski said, appearing from nowhere to lean over the tray to spear a cube of pork. "Of course, not all us women have opted for marriage, right, Judge Ford? Some of us prefer the professional life, though I must say, if a handsome young doctor like Denton Deere proposed to me, I might just change my mind. Too bad he doesn't happen to be twins."

•59'

"Excuse me." The judge moved away.

"I'm not having any luck at all, Angela," Sydelle whined. "If only your mother hadn't made you change clothes someone surely would have mentioned 'twin.' It's much harder to judge reactions when I have to bring up the subject myself. You shouldn't let your mother boss you like that; you're a grown woman, about to be married."

"Excuse me." Angela moved away.

"Yes, thank you, I would like a refill," Sydelle said to nobody and hobbled to the bar. "Something nonalcoholic, please, doctor's orders. Make it a double—twins."

Twins? What's she talking about, Theo wondered, staring at the black and white checkered costume. "Two ginger ales for the chessboard coming right up."

Hidden among her guests, the judge studied the two people standing off in the corner, the only pair in Sunset Towers who were not Westing heirs.

George Theodorakis placed his hand on the shoulder of his invalid son. A large, bronze, hard-working hand. Like Theo's. Theo resembled him in many ways: tall, wide shoulders, slim-waisted, the same thick, straight black hair; but age had chiseled the father's face into sharper planes. His troubled eyes stared across the room at Angela.

Catherine Theodorakis, a slight, careworn woman, gazed down on her younger son with tired, dark-circled eyes.

From his wheelchair Chris watched legs. Other than the funny lady with the shorthand notes, the only limpers were his brother Theo (Turtle had kicked him again) and Mrs. Wexler, who stood on one leg rubbing her stockinged foot against her calf. A high-heeled shoe stood alone on the carpet beneath her. Judge Ford didn't limp; besides, she couldn't be a murderer, in spite of his clues. Nobody here looks like a murderer, they're all nice people, even this fat Chinese man who grumbles all the time.

George Theodorakis greeted Mr. Hoo with "How's business?" Hoo spun around and stomped off from his fellow restaurant owner in a huff of anger.

James Hoo, inventor, that's who the judge wanted to talk to, but there was a problem at the bar. A long line had formed and it wasn't moving.

"There are sixteen white pieces and sixteen black pieces in chess," Theo was explaining to Sydelle Pulaski. "Do you play chess, Judge Ford?"

"A bit, but I haven't played in years." The judge led the secretary away from the crowded bar. Theo must think the Westing game has something to do with chess. He may be right, it certainly is as complicated as a chess game.

"But I did study," Doug was arguing.

The judge interrupted. "I haven't had a chance to thank you for the delicious food, Mr. Hoo. How long have you been in the restaurant business?"

"Running up and down stairs is not studying," Hoo said.

Sydelle Pulaski butted in. "Father and son? You look more like twins."

"You're equal partners with that Theodorakis kid," Hoo continued. "Why didn't you insist on holding the meeting in our restaurant instead of that greasy coffee shop?"

"Because some people don't like chow mein for breakfast," Sydelle Pulaski replied.

"There you are, dear." Grace patted a stray wisp of Angela's hair into place. "We must do something about your coiffure. I'll make an appointment for you with my hairdresser once the snow is cleared; long hair is too youthful for a woman about to be married. I can't understand what got into you, Angela, coming to this party in that old checkered dress and those awful accessories. Just because your partner dresses like a freak. . ."

"She's not a freak, mother."

"I was just speaking to Mr. Hoo about catering the wedding shower on Saturday; I arranged for little Madame Hoo to serve in one of those slinky Chinese gowns. Where are you going? Angela!"

Angela rushed into Judge Ford's kitchen. She had to get away, she had to be alone, by herself, or she'd burst out crying.

She was not alone. Crow was there. The two women stared at each other in surprise, then turned away.

Poor baby. Crow wanted to reach out to the pretty child; she wanted to take her in her arms and say: "Poor, poor baby, go ahead and cry." But she couldn't. All she could say was "Here."

Angela took the dish towel from the cleaning woman and bunched it against her face to muffle the wrenching sobs.

The guests jabbered on and on about the weather, about food, about football, about chess, about twins. Turtle was slumped on the couch, scornful of dumb grown-up parties. You'd think one of them would know something about the stock market. She missed Sandy. Sandy was the only one in this dumb building she could talk to.

"Remember that quotation: May God thy gold refine?" Flora Baumbach asked. "Let's take a poll. I'll bet ten cents it's from the Bible."

"Shakespeare," Turtle argued, "and make it ten dollars."

"Oh my! Well, all right, ten dollars." Together they made the rounds. Four votes for the Bible, three for Shakespeare and one abstention (Madame Hoo did not understand the question).

Sydelle Pulaski voted for the Bobbsey twins. "And how do you know those words were in the will?" she asked suspiciously. Too suspiciously.

So that's what "Lost: Important business papers" meant. Somebody stole the shorthand notes. Turtle smiled at the delicious nastiness of it all. "I remember, that's all."

"If you remember so well, tell me what comes before that," Sydelle challenged.

"I don't know, what?"

The secretary had an audience now. "I don't mind telling you, but not if you ask like that."

Theo said, "Please?" not Turtle.

Sydelle turned toward him with what should have been a gracious manner, but she grimaced when the top of the crutch poked her in the chest. "The exact quotation," she announced loudly, hoping she was right, "is Spend it wisely and may God thy gold refine."

Right or wrong, her guess was received with groans of disappointment. The heirs had expected more: a hint, a clue, something. It was time to go home.

11 THE MEETING

A PALE SUN ROSE on the third snowbound morning. Lake Michigan lay calm, violet, now blue, but the tenants of Sunset Towers on waking turned to a different view. Lured by the Westing house they stood at their side windows scoffing at the danger, daring to dream. Should they or shouldn't they share their clues? Well, they'd go to the meeting in the coffee shop just to see what the others intended to do.

Waiting in her closet of a room Turtle stared at the white-weighted branches of the maple on the hill. A twig snapped in silence, a flurry speckled the crusted snow. Sometimes when her mother was too busy to do her hair she sent Angela in, but today no one came. They had forgotten about her.

Brush and comb clutched in her fists like weapons, she stormed into apartment 2C. "Do you know how to braid hair?"

Flora Baumbach's pudgy fingers, swift with a needle, were clumsy with a comb, but after several tangled attempts she ended up with three equal strands. "My, what thick hair you have. I tried braiding my daughter's hair once, but it was too fine, soft and wispy like a baby's, even in her teens."

That was the last thing Turtle wanted to hear. "Was she pretty, your daughter?"

"All mothers think their children are beautiful. Rosalie was an exceptional child, they said, but she was the loveliest person that ever was."

"My mother doesn't think I'm beautiful."

"Of course, she does."

"My mother says I looked just like a turtle when I was a baby, sticking my head out of the blanket. I still look like a turtle, I guess, but I don't care. Where's your daughter now?"

"Gone." Flora Baumbach cleared the catch in her throat. "There, that braid should hold for the rest of the day. By the way, you've never told me your real name."

"Alice," Turtle replied, swinging her head before the mirror. Not one single hair escaped its tight bind. Mrs. Baumbach would make a good braider if only she'd stop yakking about her exceptional child. Rosalie, what a dumb name. "You'd better get to the meeting now. Remember, don't say a word to anyone about anything. Just listen."

"All right, Alice. I promise."

Theo wheeled his brother into the elevator and read the new message on the wall:

\$25 REWARD for the return of a gold railroad watch inscribed: To Ezra Ford in appreciation of thirty years' service to the Milwaukee Road.

J. J. Ford, apartment 4D

"Fod-d-d, fo—de," Chris said.

"That's right, Judge Ford. Must be her father's watch. Probably lost it. I don't think it could have been stolen by anyone at the party last night."

Chris smiled. His brother had not understood him. Good. This might be an important discovery—Judge Ford's name was the same as her apartment number: Ford, 4D.

Theo led the waiting tenants through the kitchen where Mr. and Mrs. Theodorakis handed out cups of tea and coffee. "Sorry, we've run out of cream and lemons. Please help yourself to some homemade pastries."

Walking into the coffee shop was like entering a cave. A wall of snow pressed against the plate-glass window, sealing the door that once opened to the parking lot.

"I've got a car buried out there," Grace Wexler said, slipping into a booth opposite her partner. "Hope I find it before the snowplows do."

"If they ever get here," Mr. Hoo replied. "Good thing this meeting wasn't held in my restaurant, I'd go broke passing out free tea, if you call this tea." He held up a tea bag with contempt, then groaned on seeing his sweat-suited son jog in with a sweet roll between his teeth and vault over his hands onto a stool. "Where's your daughter the turtle?"

Grace Wexler looked around. "I don't know, maybe she's helping her father with his bookkeeping."

"Bookkeeping!" Mr. Hoo let out a whoop. Grace had no idea what was so funny, but she joined him in loud laughter. Nothing stirred people's envy more than a private joke.

Thinking she was being laughed at, Sydelle Pulaski dropped her polka dot crutch and spilled her coffee on Angela's tapestry bag before managing a solid perch on the counter stool.

Clink, clink. Theo tapped a spoon against a glass for attention. "Thank you for coming. When the meeting is over you are all welcome to stay for a chess tournament. Meanwhile, I'd like to explain why my partner and me. . . my partner and I. . . called this meeting. I don't know about your clues, but our clues don't make any sense." The heirs stared at him with blank faces, no one nodded, no one even blinked. "Now then, if no two sets of clues are alike, as the will says, that could mean that each set of clues is only part of one message. The

more clues we put together, the better chance we have of finding the murderer and winning the game. Of course, the inheritance will be divided into equal shares."

Sydelle Pulaski raised her hand like a schoolgirl. "What about the clues that are in the will itself?"

"Yes, we'd appreciate having a copy of the will, Ms. Pulaski," Theo replied.

"Well, equal shares doesn't seem quite fair, since I'm the only one here who thought of taking notes." Sydelle turned to the group, one penciled eyebrow arched high over her red sequined spectacles.

Her self-congratulatory pose was too much for Mr. Hoo. Grunting loudly, he squeezed out of the booth and slapped the shorthand pad on the counter.

"Thief!" the secretary shrieked, nearly toppling off the stool as she grabbed her notebook. "Thief!"

"I did not steal your notebook," the indignant Hoo explained. "I found it on a table in my restaurant this morning. You can believe me or not, I really don't care, because those notes you so selfishly dangled under our noses are completely worthless. My partner knows shorthand and she says your shorthand is nothing but senseless scrawls. Jibberish."

"Pure jibberish," Grace Wexler added. "Those are standard shorthand symbols all right, but they don't translate into words."

"Thief!" Sydelle cried, now accusing Mrs. Wexler. "Thief! Larcenist! Felon!"

"Don't, Sydelle," Angela said softly, her eyes set on the D she was embroidering.

"You wouldn't understand, Angela, you don't know what it's like to be . . ." Her voice broke. She paused then lashed out at her enemies, all of them. "Who cares a fig about Sydelle Pulaski? Nobody, that's who. I'm no fool, you know. I knew I couldn't trust any one of you. You can't read my shorthand because I wrote in Polish."

Polish?!?!

When the meeting was again called to order Mr. Hoo suggested they offer Ms. Pulaski a slightly larger share of the inheritance in exchange for a transcript of the will—in English. "However, I repeat, neither my partner nor I stole the notes. And if anyone here suspects us of murder, forget it, we both have airtight alibis."

Doug choked on his sweet roll. If it got around to alibis, they'd find out where he was the night of the murder. On the Westing house lawn.

Mr. Hoo went on. "And to prove our innocence, my partner and I agree to share our clues."

"One minute, Mr. Hoo." Judge Ford stood. It was time for her to speak before matters got out of hand. "Let me remind you, all of you, that a person is innocent until proven guilty. We are free to choose whether or not to share our clues without any implication of guilt. I suggest we postpone any decision until we have given the matter careful thought, and until the time all of the heirs can attend. However, since we are assembled, I have a question to ask of the group; perhaps others do, too."

They all did. Wary of giving away game plans, the heirs decided the questions would be written out, but no names were to be signed. Doug collected the scraps of paper and handed them to Theo.

"Is anyone here a twin?" he read.

No one answered.

"What is Turtle's real name?" Doug Hoo was planning another nasty sign.

"Tabitha-Ruth," replied Mrs. Wexler with a bewildered look at Flora Baumbach, who said "Alice."

"Well, which is it?"

"Tabitha-Ruth Wexler. I should know, I'm her mother."

Doug changed his mind about the sign. He couldn't spell Tabitha-Ruth.

Theo unfolded the next question. "How many here have actually met Sam Westing?"

Grace Wexler raised her hand, lowered it, raised it halfway, then lowered it again, torn between her claim as Sam Westing's relative and being accused of murder. Mr. Hoo (an honest man) held up his hand and kept it up. His was the only one. Judge Ford did not think it necessary to respond to her own question.

Theo recognized the sprawling handwriting of the next question: "Who got kicked last week?" Chris did not receive an answer. The meeting was adjourned due to panic.