

much more about each one of the heirs if she hoped to protect the victim of Sam Westing's revenge.

She would have to hire a detective, a very private detective, who had not been associated with her in her practice or in the courts. J. J. Ford flipped through the yellow pages to *Investigators—Private*.

"Good grief!" Her finger stopped near the top of the list. Was it a coincidence or dumb luck? Or was she playing right into Sam Westing's hand? No choice but to chance it. The judge dialed the number and tapped her foot impatiently waiting for an answer.

"Hello. If you're looking for a snowbound private investigator, you've got the right number."

Yes, she had the right number. It may be a trick, but it was no coincidence. The voices were one and the same.

13 ♦ *The Second Bomb*

No one was in the kitchen of Shin Hoo's Restaurant when the bomber set a tall can labeled "Monosodium glutamate" behind similar cans on a shelf. The color-striped candle would burn down to the fuse at six-thirty; whoever was working there would be at the other end of the room. No one would be hurt.

*Due to the unfortunate damage to the coffee shop
SHIN HOO'S RESTAURANT
is prepared to satisfy all dinner accommodations.*

*Order down, or ride up to the fifth floor.
Treat your taste buds to a scrumptious meal
while feasting your eyes on the stunning snowscape
before it melts away. Reasonable prices, too.*

Grace Wexler tacked her sign to the elevator wall as she rode up to her new job. She was going to be the seating hostess.

"Where's the cook?" Mr. Hoo shouted (meaning his wife). He found Madame Hoo in their rear fourth-floor apartment kneeling before her bamboo trunk, fingering mementoes from her childhood in China. He hurried her up to the kitchen, too harried to find the words that would explain what was happening. Now where was that lazy son of his?

Doug jogged in from a tiring workout on the stairs. How was he supposed to know the restaurant would open early? Nobody bothered telling him.

"Some student you are; anyone with the brain of an anteater could have figured that out: people are short of food, the coffee shop is closed for repairs. Stop arguing, go take a shower, and put on your busboy outfit. Get moving!"

"Don't you think you're rather hard on the boy?" Grace commented.

"Somebody's got to give him a shove. If he had his way he'd do nothing but run," Hoo replied between bites of chocolate. "You're not so easy on Angela, either."

"Angela? Angela was born good, the perfect child. As for the other one, well..."

"It's not easy being a parent," Hoo said woefully.

"You can say that again." Grace held her breath. Her husband would have done just that, said it again, but Mr. Hoo only nodded in shared sympathy. What a gentleman.

Only Mr. and Mrs. Theodorakis ordered down. The other tenants of Sunset Towers lined up at the reservations desk, waiting for Grace Windsor Wexler to lead the way. Oversized menus clutched in her arms, Grace felt the first proud stirrings of power rush up from her pedicured toes to the very top curl on her head. If Uncle Sam could pair off people, so could she.

"You see your brother every day, Chris, how about eating with someone else for a change?" She wheeled the boy to a window table without waiting for an answer. It would have been yes.

The two cripples together, Sydelle Pulaski thought. She'd show that high and mighty hostess, she'd show them all. She and Chris could have private jokes, too, and everybody would be sorry they weren't sitting with them.

"Whas moo g-goo g-gipn?" Chris asked, baffled by the strange words on the menu.

"I think it's boiled grasshopper." Sydelle screwed up her face and Chris laughed. "Or chocolate-covered moose."

"Frenssh-fry m-mouse," Chris offered. Now Sydelle laughed. They both laughed heartily, but no one envied them.

"Your brother seems to be enjoying Ms. Pulaski."

Theo nodded, awed by the beautiful Angela, three years older than he, so fair-skinned and blonde, so unattainable. Here he was sitting at the very same table with her, just the two of them, and he couldn't think of a single thing to say that wasn't stupid or childish or childishly stupid.

Usually the quiet one, Angela tried again. "Are you planning to go to college next year?"

Theo nodded, then shook his head. Say something, idiot. "I got a scholarship to Madison, but I'm not going. I'm going to work instead." What big, worried, sky-blue eyes. "The operation for Chris will be very expensive." That was worse, now she's feeling sorry for him. "If Chris had been born that way, maybe it wouldn't be so bad, but he was a perfectly normal kid, a great kid. And he's smart, too. About four years ago he started to get clumsy, just little things at first."

"Perhaps my fiancé can help." Angela bit her lip. Theo was not asking for charity. And fiancé, what an old-fashioned, silly word. "I went to college for a year. I wanted to be a doctor, but, well, we don't have as much money as my mother pretends. Dad said he could manage if that's what I really wanted, but my mother said it was too difficult for a woman to get into medical school." Why was she gabbing like this?

"I want to be a writer," Theo said. That really sounded like kid stuff. "Would you go back to college if you won the inheritance?"

Angela looked down. It was a question she did not want to answer. Or could not answer.

Long before becoming a judge, Josie-Jo Ford had decided to stop smiling. Smiling without good reason was demeaning. A serious face put the smiler on the defensive, a rare smile put a nervous witness at ease. She now bestowed one of her rare smiles on the dressmaker. "I'm so glad we have this chance to become acquainted, Mrs. Baumbach. I had so little time to chat with my guests last night."

"It was a wonderful party."

Flora Baumbach appeared even smaller and rounder than she was as she sat twisting her napkin with hands accustomed to being busy. Was her face permanently creased from years of pleasing customers, or was a tragedy lurking behind that grin? "Have you always specialized in wedding gowns?"

"Mr. Baumbach and I had a shop for many years: Baumbach's for the Bride and Groom. Perhaps you've heard of it?"

"I'm afraid not." The judge would have said no in any case to keep her witness talking.

"Perhaps you've heard of Flora's Bridal Gowns? That's what I called my shop after my husband left. I don't know much about grooms' clothes, they're mostly rentals, anyway." Flora Baumbach lost her timidity; the judge let her chat away. "I'm using heirloom lace on the bodice of Angela's gown; it's been in my family for three generations. I wore it at my wedding, and I dreamed that someday I'd have a daughter who would wear it, too, but Rosalie didn't come along until I was in my forties, and..." The dressmaker stopped. Her lips tightened into an even wider grin. "Angela will make such a beautiful bride. Funny how she reminds me of her."

"Angela reminds you of your daughter?" the judge asked.

"Oh my, no. Angela reminds me of another young girl I made a wedding dress for: Violet Westing."

The heavy charms on Sydelle Pulaski's bracelet clinked and clunked as she raised a full fork and flourished it in a practiced ritual before aiming it at her open mouth. Chris's movements were even jerkier. She's a good person, he thought, but she

thinks too much about herself. Maybe she never had anybody to love.

"Here, let me help you to some of this delicious sweet and sour ostrich."

Their laughter drowned out the loud groan from another table where Turtle sat alone, a transistor radio plugged in her ear. The stock market had dropped another twelve points.

"I'm starved, let's sit down to eat." Head held high, Grace Wexler led her husband across the restaurant. "All I want is a corned beef sandwich, not a guided tour."

"Would you prefer to sit alone or with that young lady over there?"

"I thought I was going to sit with you."

"Please be seated," Grace replied. "Jimmy, I mean Mr. Hoo, will take your order shortly."

Jake snatched the menu from his wife and watched her glide (gracefully, he had to admit) to the reservations desk and whisper in Hoo's ear. (Jimmy, she calls him.) "That's a fine kettle of fish," he exclaimed, then turned to his dinner companion. "Fine kettle of fish. I'm so hungry even that sounds good, and from the looks of this menu that's probably what I'll get."

"I'm okay," Turtle replied, the final prices of actively traded stocks tumbling in her ear.

Mr. Hoo waddled over. "I recommend the striped bass."

"See, what did I tell you, a kettle of fish."

Turtle switched off the radio. She had heard enough bad news for one day.

"How about spareribs done to a crisp," Hoo suggested; then he lowered his voice. "What's the point spread on the Packers game?"

"See me later," Jake muttered.

"Go ahead and tell him, daddy," Turtle said. "I know you're a bookie."

"Can you stand on your legs?" Sydelle Pulaski asked. "Can you walk at all?"

People never asked Chris those questions; they whispered them to his parents behind his back. "N-n-no. Why?"

"What better disguise for a thief or a murderer than a wheelchair, the perfect alibi."

Chris enjoyed being taken for the criminal type. Now they really were friends. "When you see m-m-me nos?"

"What? Oh, read you my notes. Soon, very soon." Sydelle daintily touched the corners of her mouth with the napkin, pushed back her chair and grabbed her polka dot crutch. "That was a superb meal, I must give my compliments to the chef." She rose, knocking the chair to the floor, and clumped toward the kitchen door.

"Where is she going?" Angela, starting up to help her partner, was distracted by shouting in the corridor.

"Hello in there, anybody home?" Through the restaurant door came a bundled and booted figure. He danced an elephantine jig, stomping snow on the carpet, flung a long woolen scarf from his neck and yelled, "Otis Amber is here, the roads are clear!"

That's when the bomb went off.

"Nobody move! Everybody stay where you are," Mr. Hoo shouted as he rushed into the sizzling, crackling kitchen.

"Just a little mishap," Grace Wexler explained, taking her command post in the middle of the restaurant. "Nothing to worry about. Eat up before your food gets cold."

A cluster of red sparks hissed through the swinging kitchen door, kissed the ceiling and rained a shimmering shower down and around the petrified hostess. Fireflies of color faded into her honey-blond hair and scattered into ash at her feet. "Nothing to worry about," she repeated hoarsely.

"Just celebrating the Chinese New Year," Otis Amber shouted, adding one of his he-he-he cackles.

Mr. Hoo leaned through the kitchen doorway, his shiny straight black hair (even shinier and straighter) plastered to his forehead, water dribbling down his moon-shaped face. "Call an ambulance, there's been a slight accident."

Angela dashed past Mr. Hoo into the kitchen. Jake Wexler made the emergency telephone call and sent Theo to the lobby to direct the ambulance attendants.

"Why are you standing there like a statue," Hoo shouted at his son.

"You told everybody to stay where they were," Doug said.

"You're not everybody!"

Madame Hoo tried to make the injured woman as comfortable as possible on the debris-strewn floor. Angela found the sequined spectacles, wiped off the wet, crystalline mess and placed them on her partner's nose.

"Don't look so worried, Angela. I'm all right." Sydelle was in pain, but she wanted attention on her own terms, not as a hapless, foolish victim of fate.

"Looks like a fracture," an ambulance attendant said, feeling her right ankle. "Careful how you lift her."

The secretary suppressed a grunt. It was bad enough being drenched by the overhead sprinkler and draped with noodles; now they were carrying her right past them all.

Grace pulled Angela away from the stretcher. "You can visit your friend in a few days."

"Angela, Angela," Sydelle moaned. Pride or not, she wanted her partner at her side.

Angela stood between her determined mother and her distraught partner, paralyzed by the burden of choice.

"Go with your friend, Angie-pie," Jake Wexler said. Other voices chimed in. "Go with Pulaski."

Grace realized she had lost. "Perhaps you should go to the hospital, Angela, it's been so long since you've seen your Doctor D." She winked mischievously, but only Flora Baumbach smiled back.

The policeman and the fire inspector visiting the scene agreed that it was nothing more than a gas explosion. Good thing the sprinkler system worked or Mr. Hoo might have had a good fire.

"What kind of a fire is a good fire," Hoo wanted to know.

"And what about the burglaries?" Grace Wexler asked.

"I'm with the bomb squad," the policeman explained. "You'll have to call the robbery detail for that."

"And what about the coffee shop accident?" Theo asked.

"Also a gas explosion."

Jake Wexler asked about the odds of having two explosions in two days in the same building.

"Nothing unusual," the fireman replied, "especially in weather like this, no ventilation, snow packed over the ducts." He instructed the tenants to air out their kitchens before lighting ovens.

Mrs. Wexler turned up the heat in her apartment and kept the windows open for the next three days. She did not want anything blowing up during Angela's party.

But the Wexler apartment was exactly where the bomber planned to set the next bomb.

14 ♦ *Pairs Repaired*

The snowplows plowed and a warm sun finished the job of freeing the tenants of Sunset Towers (and the figure in the Westing house) from their wintry prisons.

Angela, disguised in her mother's old beaver coat and hat and in Turtle's red boots, was the first one out. Following Sydelle's instructions she hastily searched under the hood of every car in the parking lot. Nothing was there (nothing, that is, that didn't seem to belong to an automobile engine). So much for *Good gracious from hood space*.

Next came Flora Baumbach. Behind her a bootless Turtle tiptoed through puddles. Miracle of miracles: the rusty and battered Chevy started, but the dressmaker's luck went downhill from there. First, the hood of her car flew up in the middle of traffic. Then, after two hours of watching mysterious symbols move across the lighted panel high on the