

The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, and a bright, golden light source is visible on the horizon, creating a strong lens flare and illuminating the clouds. The light reflects on the surface of the water, which is dark and calm. In the distance, a small, dark silhouette of a ship is visible on the water. The overall mood is dramatic and atmospheric.

# THE TESTAMENT

JOHN

GRISHAM

# The Testament

## JOHN GRISHAM

### Introduction

*“Stop!” someone shouts, and they’re moving behind me. I grab the handle and open the door. The air is very cold. I step onto the narrow balcony and, without looking down, I throw myself over the edge.*

Troy Phelan is one of the richest men in the United States. He is eccentric, hates his three ex-wives and his six children, and is ready to die. He takes his own life on December 9, 1996—just before Christmas and New Year’s, that special time for family celebrations.

After his death, his family gathers to collect his money. But Phelan has played one last, cruel trick on them; he has left his fortune to an unknown illegitimate daughter—and nobody knows exactly where she is.

Nate O’Riley is a powerful Washington lawyer who has lived too hard for too long. He is in the hospital, recovering from his addiction to alcohol and drugs. Returning to the outside world will be difficult but he has to do it. He knows there will be temptations. Can he resist? Can he do the job his firm is giving him? Will he be able to find Rachel Lane, Phelan’s illegitimate daughter, who is a missionary somewhere on the Brazil-Bolivia border? And if he does find her, will she accept her father’s money?

Nate sets out to find Rachel in the Pantanal, a 140,000 square kilometer area of swamp, on Christmas Eve, 1996. He knows he is not going to get a warm welcome if he does find her. She will probably not appreciate being found and the Indians she is living among prefer no contact with outsiders. And there are plenty of hungry alligators who would like to see him fall over the side of the boat. But, Nate’s journey from the tense courtrooms of Washington to the wild jungles of Brazil teaches him about another, better way of life.

*The Testament* is a story of the battle between good and evil, and between charity and self-interest.

John Grisham, the author of this book, was born on 8 February 1955 in Jonesboro, Arkansas. His father was a building worker and the family was poor. They moved frequently until 1967 when they settled in Southaven, Mississippi. Grisham’s mother encouraged him to read when he was young, and his love of books began. He graduated in 1977 from Mississippi State University and went from there to the University of Mississippi to study law, graduating in 1981. At first, he studied tax law but then changed to criminal law. After graduating, Grisham started his own law firm in Southaven. In 1983, he was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives, where he served until 1990. While working in politics, he continued his law practice.

In 1984, he started writing while working full-time. He got up at 5 AM each day so he could spend a few hours writing before going to the office. His first book, *A Time to Kill* (1989), did not sell well, but success soon followed. *The Firm* (1991) was a number one best-seller, and the movie rights were sold for \$600,000. Grisham gave up his law practice immediately and concentrated on writing. He has written one novel a year since then; many are best-sellers, and he was named the best-selling novelist of the 1990s.

Novels by Grisham in the Penguin Readers and Penguin Active Reading series are: *A Time to Kill*, *The Firm*, *The Pelican Brief*, *The Client*, *The Rainmaker*, *The Runaway Jury*, *The Partner*, *The Street Lawyer*, and *The Brethren*.

More recent Grisham novels include *The Innocent Man* (2006), about a man who is wrongfully sent to prison in Oklahoma, and *Playing for Pizza* (2007), a comic novel about American football played in Italy.

Grisham and his wife Renee have two children. They own a large farm in Mississippi and another near Charlottesville, Virginia.

Grisham has a special interest in the Pantanal region of Brazil. The Pantanal is the world's largest freshwater wetland. The variety of wildlife makes it one of the world's greatest natural wonders. Grisham and a friend, a missionary in Brazil, went there together before Grisham wrote this novel. In Grisham's words, "we had a wonderful time for four days counting alligators, photographing wildlife... eating black beans and rice, telling stories, all from a boat that somehow grew smaller."

In *The Testament*, Grisham takes his readers to the Pantanal to learn about the native people—and about their suffering at the hands of Europeans. After the Portuguese explorer Pedro Alvares Cabral discovered Brazil in 1500, more and more Europeans, especially from Portugal and Spain, settled there. The native Indians fought the Europeans, but their weapons were less effective. Europeans brought with them another kind of weapon—disease. The Indian population fell from about five million in 1500 to 270,000 in 1999. In fact, their enemies included an agency of their own government, who in the period up to 1967 attempted to destroy them completely.

In Chapter 7, Nate's guide asks him if he has ever heard of Hidrovia and explains that it is a project to link Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay by creating a shipping channel. The original plan was developed in 1997. The future for it is still uncertain. There has been a lot of opposition to this project because it would greatly reduce the size of the wetlands. There are new studies investigating it, but according to the International Rivers Network these studies suggest even greater removal of rock between Corumba and the Apa River in the Pantanal.

# Chapter 1 The last day

It's the last day, even the last hour now. I'm an old man, lonely and unloved, sick and hurting, and tired of living. I am ready for death; it has to be better than this.

I own this tall glass building, the land around it, and the 2,000 people who work here. I own silver in Nevada, coffee in Kenya, and coal in Angola. My company owns businesses that produce electricity, make computers, and print books. I'm worth more than eleven billion dollars.

The money is my greatest problem.

I had three families—three ex-wives, who had seven children. They're gathering here today because I'm dying and it's time to divide the money. I don't care who gets the money. But I do care very much who doesn't get it.

My first wife was Lillian. We married young—I was twenty-four and she was eighteen—and had four children. Her oldest boy is now forty-seven. Troy Junior, or T.J., was thrown out of college when he was nineteen for selling drugs. I gave him, like the others, five million dollars on his twenty-first birthday. It ran like water through his fingers.

T.J.'s brother, Rex, is forty-four. Our oldest daughter is Libbigail, a child I loved desperately until she went to college and forgot about me. She married an African and I took her name out of my will. Our younger daughter, Mary Ross, is married to a doctor. He wants to be super-rich but they're heavily in debt.

All Lillian's children are the same. They're in debt and unemployable, and they want my money.

After Lillian, I married my secretary, Janie, a beautiful young thing, twenty-two years younger than me. She had two children.

The younger one, Rocky, was killed in a car with two of his friends. Her daughter Geena is married to a fool who could lose half a billion dollars in three years.

I married Ttra when I was sixty-four. She was twenty-three and pregnant with Ramble. He's now fourteen and has already been arrested once for theft and once for possession of drugs. He has rings in his ears, eyebrows, and nose. Like the others, he expects to get rich, to get a fortune because I'm his father.

I know these people. I watch them.

◆

Snead appears from another room. He's been my servant for almost thirty years now.

"How are you sir?" he asks.

I say nothing because I'm neither required nor expected to respond to Snead.

"Some coffee, sir?"

"Lunch."

Snead expects to get rich too. He wants me to die because he expects a few million. The trouble with having money is that everybody wants a little of it. Snead's name is not mentioned in my will.

He brings in my lunch. The final meal.

Later, Snead pushes my wheelchair out of the apartment, down the hall, through another door. The room is full of lawyers and psychiatrists who will decide whether I'm sane. There are cameras pointing at me. Every whisper, every move, every breath will be recorded. I'm sitting here to prove to the world that I am sane enough to make a new will.

Each family has hired a psychiatrist. Their names are printed on cards in front of them—Dr. Zadel, Dr. Flowe, Dr. Theishen. I study their eyes and faces. They expect me to be crazy, but I'm going to prove them wrong.

Josh Stafford is speaking. "My name is Josh Stafford and I am the lawyer for Mr. Troy Phelan. The psychiatrists in this room will examine Mr. Phelan. If they believe that he is wholly sane, then he intends to sign a new will."

Stafford taps his pencil on the thick will lying before us. My families haven't seen the will, so they can only guess what it contains. They believe that the money will be divided fairly among the children, with generous gifts to my ex-wives. Stafford prepared the will and, with my permission, this is what he has implied.

The psychiatrists begin their examination. Zadel goes first. "Mr. Phelan, can you tell us the date, time, and place?"

I drop my chin to my chest like a fool and think about the question. "Monday, December 9, 1996. The place is my office." "The time?"

"About two-thirty in the afternoon," I say.

"And where is your office?"

"McLean, Virginia."

They ask many more questions. Then Theishen says, "What is your current physical condition?"

"I'm sick. I have cancer. My doctors say I won't live more than three months."

I can feel their excitement. The rumor has been confirmed. "Are you under the influence of drugs or alcohol?"

“No.”

Back to Zadel: “Mr. Phelan, you have about eleven billion dollars. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“Do you intend to sign a new will today?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Is that the will on the table in front of you?”

“It is.”

“Does that will leave a large part of your estate to your children?”

“It does.”

Zadel places his pen on the table and looks at Stafford. “In my opinion, Mr. Phelan is mentally capable of signing his will.”

“Do you all agree?” Stafford asks the other lawyers.

“Yes. Absolutely.” They nod their heads as fast as they can.

Stafford slides the will to me and gives me a pen. I turn to the back and sign a name that nobody can read, then place my hands on top of it.

“This meeting is over,” Stafford says, and everyone quickly leaves the room. One camera remains on me. I tell Snead to take a seat at the table. Stafford and one of his partners, Durban, are also seated. When we’re alone, I produce an envelope from my pocket. I remove from it three pieces of yellow legal paper.

Stafford, Durban, and Snead look confused.

“This is my real will,” I announce, taking a pen. “I wrote it a few hours ago. Dated today, and now signed today.” I write my name again. “This replaces all previous wills, including the one I signed less than five minutes ago.”

I put the papers back in the envelope and push it across the table to Stafford. At the same time, I rise from my wheelchair. My legs are shaking. Just seconds now. Surely I’ll be dead before I hit the ground.

“Hey!” someone says—Snead, I think. But I’m moving away from them.

I walk, almost run, past a row of chairs to the big sliding doors, which are unlocked.

“Stop!” someone shouts, and they’re moving behind me. I grab the handle and open the door. The air is very cold. I step onto the narrow balcony and, without looking down, I throw myself over the edge.

## Chapter 2 Troy Phelan's Testament

Snead reached the balcony just in time to scream in horror, then he watched helplessly as Mr. Phelan fell silently, growing smaller and smaller until he struck the ground. Snead stared in disbelief, then he began to cry.

Josh Stafford was a step behind him and witnessed most of the fall. It took him a minute or two to recover from the shock and start thinking like a lawyer again. He watched the family down below collect around Phelan's body, then he went back into the room.

The camera was still on. Snead faced it, raised his right hand and swore to tell the truth, then explained what he'd just witnessed. Stafford opened the envelope and held the yellow sheets of paper close enough for the camera to see.

"Yes, I saw him sign that," Snead said. "Just seconds ago."

"Did he say this was his last will and testament?"

"He called it his testament."

Stafford made Durban repeat the same statement, then placed himself in front of the camera and gave his version of events. When he finished, he told Snead to leave the room.

Stafford turned back to the camera, and looked at the sheets of yellow paper. The first sheet was a letter. Stafford spoke to the camera: "This letter is dated today, Monday, December 9, 1996. It is addressed to me from Troy Phelan. I will read it in full.

"Dear Josh: I am dead now. These are my instructions, and I want you to follow them closely. First, I want a quick examination of my body. Second, there will be no funeral. I want to be cremated and my ashes scattered from the air over my ranch in Wyoming. Third, I want you to keep my will secret until January 15, 1997. The law does not require you to produce it immediately. Goodbye. Troy.'"

Stafford carefully picked up the second piece of paper. "This is a one-page document. It is the last testament of Troy L. Phelan. I will read it all:

" 'The last testament of Troy L. Phelan. To each of my children, Troy Phelan Jr.,<sup>1</sup> Rex Phelan, Libbigail Jeter, Mary Ross Jackman, Geena Strong, and Ramble Phelan, I give enough money to pay off any debts they have today. Their future debts will not be covered by this gift. If any of these children attempt to contest this will, then they will receive nothing.

" 'To my ex-wives, Lillian, Janie, and Tira, I give nothing. They were adequately provided for in the divorces.

" 'The rest of my estate I give to my daughter Rachel Lane, born on November 2, 1954, in New Orleans, Louisiana, to a woman named Evelyn Cunningham, who is now dead.' "



Stafford had never heard of these people. He paused, then went on.

““I appoint my trusted lawyer Josh Stafford to carry out this will. Signed, December 9, 1996, three P.M., by Troy Phelan.’ ” Stafford placed it on the table and picked up the third sheet. “This is a note addressed to me again. I will read it: ‘Josh: Rachel Lane is a World Tribes missionary on the Brazil-Bolivia border. She works with an Indian tribe in a region known as the Pantanal. The nearest town is Corumba. I couldn’t find her. I’ve had no contact with her in the last twenty years. Signed, Troy Phelan,’ ”

Stafford put down the last piece of paper and turned to Durban. “He thought of everything.”

“He’s a very cruel man,” Durban said. “Can you imagine the money those fools will spend in the next month?”

“It seems a crime not to tell them.”

“We can’t. We have our orders.”

◆

Outside Lillian’s large house in Falls Church, a group of journalists waited on the street for a family member to come out. Inside, Phelans four eldest children gathered. They tried to be serious and sad. It was difficult. Fine wine was served, lots of it. By midnight T.J. and Rex were drunk, celebrating their fabulous new wealth.

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The following day, Stafford met Tip Durban and together they drove to the medical examiner’s office in McLean.

“The cause of death is obvious. There’s no trace of alcohol or drugs,” the medical examiner said. “And there was no sign of cancer. Troy was in good health at the time of his death.”

“Did he tell you he had cancer?” Durban asked Stafford on the drive back.

“Yes, several times.”

“Why did he lie?”

“Who knows? Everybody thought he was dying.”

“Why did he jump?”

“He was a very lonely old man.”

“It seems like a nasty trick,” Durban said. “He promises money to his family, their psychiatrists say that he isn’t crazy, then at the last minute he signs a different will. Why did he hate them so much?”

“They embarrassed him. They fought with him. They never earned an honest dime, and they spent many of his millions. Troy never planned to leave them anything.”

Back at his office, Stafford talked to members of his team. “You have to find a person who, I suspect, does not want to be found.”

He told them what he knew about Rachel Lane. There wasn’t much. “First, find out about the World Tribes Missions. Who are they? How do they operate? How do they pick their people? Where do they send them? Everything. Find out about her mother, Evelyn Cunningham. She’s dead now. Find out all you can.”

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T.J. nursed a sore head until noon, then drank a beer. He walked around his dirty apartment. He couldn’t find his wife. He and Biff had been through three fights already that day.

He opened another beer and looked at himself in the mirror in the hall. “Troy Phelan, Jr.,” he said. “Son of Troy Phelan, tenth richest man in America, worth eleven billion. Yes!”

He dressed in his best suit, a gray one he’d worn yesterday when Dear Old Dad faced the psychiatrists and performed so wonderfully. “Armani, here I come,” he whistled joyfully.

Life had been soft and luxurious for the first twenty years, and then he received his inheritance. His five million had disappeared before he reached thirty and his father hated him for it.

“What can I do with half a billion dollars?” he asked himself as he drove along the highway. “Five hundred million tax-free.” He began to laugh.

His first stop was the BMW-Porsche garage run by his friend, Dickie.

“Biff would like a Porsche, a red 911.”

“When?”

Troy stared angrily at him. “Now.”

“Sure, T.J. What about money?”

“I’ll pay for it the same time I pay for my black one. Also a 911. How much are they?”

“About ninety thousand each.”

“No problem. When can we have them?”

“In a day or two. When will you have the cash?” Dickie asked. “In a month or two. But I want the cars now.”

Dickie looked away. “Listen, T.J., I can’t hand over two new cars without payment.”

“Fine. I’ll go somewhere else. I could buy this whole garage, you know. I could walk into any bank right now and ask for ten million or twenty million and buy this place. They would happily give me the money. Do you understand?”

Dickie’s eyes narrowed. “How much did he leave you?” “Enough to buy the bank. Are you giving me the cars or shall I go down the street?”

“Let me find the cars.”

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Ramble spent the day in his room, smoking, listening to music, and ignoring everyone. He hadn’t been to school for weeks. His lawyer had told him that the money would go into a trust until he was either eighteen or twenty-one. Until then, he would get a generous amount of money to spend every month.

He would form a band called Ramble. He would play guitar and sing and chase girls.

Two floors up Tira, his mother, spent the day on the phone chatting with friends. Most of them gossiped long enough to ask how much she might get from the estate, but she was afraid to guess. When she divorced Troy she got ten million and the house. She was now down to her last two million dollars. Her needs were so great. Her friends had beach houses in the Bahamas and she had to stay in luxury hotels. They bought their clothes in New York; she picked her clothes up locally. Their children went to the best schools, out of the way; Ramble was in the basement and wouldn’t come out.

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Geena Phelan Strong was thirty and married to Cody, husband number two. He had big dreams, but after six months his businesses had made huge losses. The five million Troy gave Geena on her twenty-first birthday had shrunk to less than a million, and their debts were growing. Then Troy jumped from the window.

They spent the morning looking for homes in Swinks Mill, the place of their grandest dreams. By dusk they were looking at an empty house priced at four and a half million and seriously considering making an offer.

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Rex, age forty-four, brother of T.J., was under criminal investigation. A bank had failed and the FBI was making fierce inquiries. He owed more than seven million dollars. Now Troy was dead, Rex could stop worrying. He could pay his debts and play with his money.

He spent the day with Hark Gettys, his lawyer. He wanted the money quickly, desperately, and he pressured Gettys to call Josh Stafford.

“We have to see that will!” he shouted at Hark throughout the day. Hark calmed him with a long lunch

and good wine. Amber, Rex's wife, dropped by and found them both drunk. She wasn't angry. She loved Rex more than ever now.

Hark Gettys was excited. The old man was dead, and his crazy family was a lawyer's dream. This was his chance to start his own company and to make a lot of money. He wanted a long fight over the will, a fight that would make him famous and rich.



According to the internet, the World Tribes Missions' headquarters was in Houston, Texas. Their goal was to spread Christianity around the world, and they had 4,000 missionaries working with native peoples. Twenty-eight Indian tribes in Brazil were being ministered to by World Tribes missionaries. These missionaries received training in living in the jungle, languages, and medical skills.

So, Rachel lived in a hut and slept on a bed she'd built herself and cooked over a fire. She ate food she'd grown or trapped and killed, and taught Bible stories to the children and the adults. She knew nothing, and certainly cared nothing, for the worries and pressures of the world.

"We may never find her," Durban said. "No phones, no electricity. You have to climb through the mountains to get to these people."

"We have no choice," Josh said. "We called the World Tribes Missions and they won't tell us anything. They wouldn't even confirm that this woman exists. But I have an idea. We have to send someone to find Rachel Lane, right? And we can't just send anyone. It has to be a lawyer, someone who can explain what's happening. And it has to be someone from our company. But it's not going to be a quick trip. Brazil's a big country. We're talking jungles and mountains. These people have never seen a car. It might take at least a week."

"So who do we send?" Durban asked.

"What about Nate?"

Nate O'Riley was a partner who was, at the moment, locked away in a private hospital in the Blue Ridge Mountains. In the past ten years he'd been a frequent visitor to this hospital, each time trying to stop drinking and taking drugs. Now, at the age of forty-eight, he had no money, was twice divorced, and the government was chasing him for nonpayment of taxes.

"He used to be an outdoor type, didn't he?" Durban asked.

"Oh yeah. Rock climbing, diving, all that crazy stuff. Then the slide into alcoholism began and he stopped all that."

The slide had begun in his mid-thirties. He was a star in the legal practice but he began drinking heavily and using drugs. He ignored his family, and then he lost a lawsuit and fell apart. The firm sent him to a hospital to recover. He could stay clean for months, even years, but he always crashed.

Four months earlier, he'd locked himself in a hotel room with a bottle of vodka and a sack of pills. Josh sent him to the hospital for the fourth time in ten years.

“It might be good for him,” Durban said. “You know, to get away for a while.”

## Chapter 3 Nate's Mission

Nate walked to his window and looked at the Shenandoah Valley 1,000 meters below. It was covered with new snow. He remembered that it was almost Christmas and the thought saddened him. The kids were gone now, either grown or taken away by their mothers. The last thing Nate wanted was another Christmas in a bar with other drunks.

Breakfast was black coffee, which he had with his nurse, Sergio. For the last four months, Sergio had also been his best friend. He knew everything about the miserable life of Nate O'Riley.

"You have a guest today. Mr. Stafford," Sergio said. "Wonderful."

Josh had visited once a month. Nate was resting in his room when Josh arrived.

"You look great," Josh said. "How are you doing?"

"I need to get out of here, Josh."

"Your doctor says another week or two."

"Great. Then what? Can I come back to the company?"

"Not so fast, Nate. You have a couple of problems. We can deal

with the bankruptcy but that still leaves the problem of your taxes." From 1992 to 1995, Nate had failed to report about sixty thousand dollars in other income.

"So what am I supposed to do?" Nate asked. "Do you think I'm going to prison?"

"Troy Phelan died," Josh said, and it took Nate a second to understand.

"I didn't know. When did he die?"

"Four days ago. Jumped out of a window. He'd just signed two wills—the first prepared by me; the second, and last, he wrote himself. Then he jumped. He left everything to an illegitimate daughter I'd never heard of. I want you to find her."

"Me?"

"Yes. We don't know where she is."

"How much did he—?"

"About eleven billion, before taxes."

"Does she know it?"

“No. She doesn’t even know he’s dead.”

“Where is she?”

“Brazil, we think. She’s a missionary working with a tribe of Indians.”

“How long will I be gone?” Nate asked.

“It’s a wild guess, but I’d say ten days. There’s no hurry and she might be hard to find.”

“What part of the country?”

“West, near Bolivia. This mission she works for sends its people into the jungles, where they minister to Indians from the Stone Age.”

“You want me to find the right jungle, then walk into it to find the right tribe of Indians. I tell them I’m a friendly lawyer from the States and they should help me find a woman who probably doesn’t want to be found.”

“Something like that. Think of it as an adventure. Someone has to go, Nate. A lawyer from our firm has to meet this woman face to face, show her a copy of the will, explain it to her, and find out what she wants to do next. It can’t be done by a Brazilian lawyer.”

“And if I say no?” Nate asked.

Josh smiled. “We’ll find someone else. Think of it as a vacation. You’re not afraid of the jungle, are you?”

“Of course not.”

“Then go have some fun. You can leave next week.”

“I’ll be there for the holidays. That’s a great idea.”

“You want to miss Christmas? What about your kids?”

There were four of them, two by each wife. One in graduate school and one in college, two in middle school.

“I haven’t heard from them.”

“I’m sorry,” Josh said. He’d certainly heard from the families. Both wives had lawyers who’d called to ask for money. Nate’s oldest child needed money for college fees. He’d called Josh, not to ask about his father’s health but, more important, to ask about his father’s share of the firm’s profits last year.

“Is it in the Amazon?”

“No, the Pantanal, the largest wetlands in the world.”

“What happens when I get back? Do I have my office? Am I still a partner?”

“I don’t know, Nate. This is your fourth time in the hospital in ten years. If you went back now, you’d go back to the office and be the world’s greatest lawyer for six months. You’d ignore the old friends, the old bars, the old neighborhoods. You’d work, work, work. Then there’d be a crack somewhere. An old friend might find you. A girl from another life. You’ll slide again. I don’t want that to happen.”

“A couple of weeks in the Brazilian wetlands is beginning to sound good,” Nate said.

“So you’ll go?”

“Yes.”

Josh left him a thick file on the Phelan estate and its mysterious new heir. And there were two books on the Indians of South America. Nate read for eight hours. He was suddenly anxious to begin his adventure. When Sergio checked on him, he was sitting on the bed, papers around him, lost in another world.

“It’s time for me to leave,” Nate said.

“Yes, it is,” Sergio replied.

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The heirs collected huge debts. They signed contracts for new houses. New cars were delivered. They hired people to find the right private jet and give advice about what horse to buy. Several lawyers were fired, and new ones were brought in to replace them.

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The Phelan case landed on the desk of Judge F. Parr Wycliff. He was thrilled to get such a famous lawsuit and called Josh Stafford to introduce himself.

“Is there a will?” Wycliff asked.

“Yes, there is a will.”

“Where is it? When will the money be released?”

“I have it,” Josh said. “My client asked me to wait until January 15.”

“Why?”

The reason was simple. Troy wanted his greedy children to spend a lot of money before they found out he hadn’t left them anything.



“I have no idea,” Josh said.

“What’s in the will?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“I’m a little sympathetic to the Phelan family,” Wycliff said. “They have a right to know what’s in the will. I think we should read it to them on December 27.”

Josh wanted to laugh. Gather them all together, the Phelans and their lawyers and their new friends. Make sure the newspapers know about it. He could hear the crying and the cursing as the Phelans tried to understand what their father had done to them. Suddenly, Josh couldn’t wait.

“The twenty-seventh’s fine with me,” he said.

“Good,” Wycliff said. “I’ll let everybody know. There are lots of lawyers.”

“It helps if you remember that there are six kids and three ex-wives, so there are nine principal sets of lawyers.”

“I hope my courtroom is big enough.”

“I suggest *you* read the will,” Josh said.

Wycliff intended to. He imagined what would happen. People crowded together, not a sound as the envelope was opened. This would be one of his finest moments, reading a will that gave away eleven billion dollars.

“I assume the will is—interesting,” the Judge said.

“It’s very interesting.”

The Judge actually smiled.

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As usual, Josh had carefully planned Nate’s release. He arrived at the hospital with a bag full of clothes, a passport, tickets, and plenty of cash.

“How do you feel?” Josh asked as they drove south.

“Could you stop at the nearest store?”

“Sure. Why?”

“I’d like to get some beer.”

“Very funny.”

“I’d kill for a tall Coca-Cola.”

Back in the car, Josh said, “Your flight goes to Sao Paulo, then you’ll go on to a city called Campo Grande.”

“Do these people speak English?”

“No. They’re Brazilian. They speak Portuguese.”

“How big is Campo Grande?”

“Half a million, but it’s not your destination. From there you’ll catch a flight to a place called Corumba. There you’ll meet a lawyer named Valdir Ruiz. He speaks English. He’s a very nice man.” “What am I supposed to do with Valdir?”

“He’s looking for a guide to take you into the Pantanal by boat. It’s an area of swamps and rivers.”

“And snakes and alligators.”

“Relax.” Josh pointed to the bag behind the passenger’s seat. “Open that.”

It was made of brown leather. Nate sat it on his knee and opened it.

“Toys,” he said.

“That’s the latest cell phone. That’s the latest computer. Look how small they are.”

“Wow. And I’m supposed to use these in the middle of a swamp with snakes and alligators watching?”

“When you find her, I want to know immediately.”

“What’s this?”

“The best toy in the box. It’s a satellite phone. You can use it anywhere on the face of the earth. Keep the batteries charged and you can always find me.”

“Do the Indians have electricity?”

“Of course not.”

“Then how am I supposed to keep the batteries charged?”

“You’ll think of something.”

In the crowded airport they drank weak coffee and read newspapers. Josh was very conscious of the bar; Nate didn’t seem to be.

“Are you OK?” Josh asked.

“I’m fine. I’m not waiting for you to leave so I can run over to the bar and drink vodka.”

“I’m not worried about you,” Josh lied.

“Then go. I’m a big boy.”

They said goodbye at the gate. At midnight, somewhere over the Caribbean, Nate fell asleep.



The second plane descended and the pilot welcomed them to Canrpo Grande. Nate read his notes. Six hundred thousand people. A center for the cattle trade. Lots of cowboys. Rapid growth.

When he stepped from the plane, the heat hit him. Two days before Christmas and it was over thirty-five degrees.

He slept most of the hour it took to reach Corumba. Set on the Bolivian border, the city had 90,000 people and was the capital of the Pantanal. River traffic and trade had built the city and kept it going. It was a lazy, pleasant little town. Storekeepers sat outside their stores waiting for customers and chatting with each other. Teenagers raced through the traffic on bikes. Children ate ice cream at sidewalk tables.

Nate’s room at the Palace Hotel was on the eighth floor. There was a narrow bed, a desk with a chair, a small refrigerator with bottled water and beer, and a clean bathroom.

Nate stretched his tired body on the bed and went to sleep.

# Chapter 4 Into the Pantanal

Valdir Ruiz was a pleasant man, happy with life in the way most Brazilians tend to be. He worked efficiently in his small office, just him and a secretary. He was proud of his English.

He produced a large air map and pointed to the Pantanal. No roads or highways. More than 100,000 kilometers of swamp. There were four red Xs along the western edge of the map, near Bolivia.

“There are tribes here,” he said to Nate, pointing to the marks. “Guato and Ipicas”

“How large are they?” Nate asked.

“We don’t really know,” Valdir replied, his words very slow and careful. He was trying hard to impress the American with his English. “A hundred years ago, there were many more. But the tribes grow smaller. They have little contact with the outside world. Their culture hasn’t changed for 1,000 years.”

“Do we know where the missionaries are?”

“It is difficult to say.” Valdir pointed at two of the Xs. “These are Guato. There will probably be missionaries around here. You must understand that there are at least twenty different American and Canadian groups with missionaries in Brazil. It’s easy to get into our country, and it’s easy to move around. No one really cares who is out there and what they are doing.”

Nate pointed at Corumba, then to the nearest red X. “How long does it take to get from here to there?”

“By plane, about an hour. By boat, from three to five days.” “Then where’s my plane?”

“It’s not that easy,” Valdir said. He pointed. “These are cattle farms. Only a few can be reached by boat, so they use small airplanes. The airstrips are marked in blue. Even if you flew into the area, you would have to use a boat to get to the Indians.” “How good are the airstrips?”

“They’re all grass. Sometimes they cut the grass, sometimes they don’t. The biggest problem is cows.”

“Cows?”

“Yes, cows like grass. Sometimes it’s hard to land because the cows are eating the airstrip.”

“Could I fly into the Pantanal, then rent a boat to find the Indians?”

“No. The boats are here in Corumba. So are the guides.”

“I’d like to fly over the area,” Nate said.

Valdir rolled up the map. “I can arrange an airplane and a pilot.”