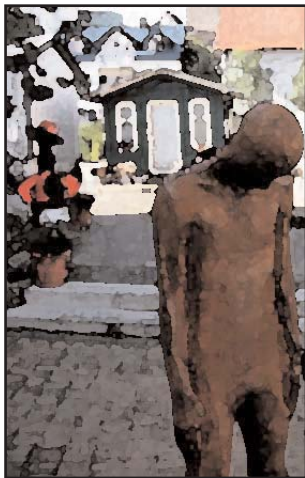


Trinity

A
Haydn & Speaker
Mystery



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Trinity

A Haydn & Speaker Mystery

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Trinity

A Haydn & Speaker Mystery

Chapter 1



“Never regret a benevolent impulse.”

His mother’s words lingered in his mind as Connie Haydn approached the revolving door at the main entrance to Trinity Hospital. He had been musing over them as he drove from his home on the north side of Humboldt to the hospital that sat on a hill just south of town. His mother had raised Connie to heed the promptings of his heart and to treasure the innate sense of pity that she believed resided in all human hearts. A professional (albeit retired) philosopher, Connie had often smiled at the thought that his profoundly unintellectual mother and the great Jean-Jacques Rousseau had come to the same conclusion about human nature. Of course, Connie’s mother had never had any extensive opportunity to test the practicality of her advice in the midst of true wickedness, for her life as wife and mother in the Pacific Northwest had offered few occasions for encountering the hidden veins of depravity that Jean-Jacques had plumbed.

But still the lesson had stuck. And obedient to the nudge of kindness, Connie pushed his way through the door.

The scents that jolted his nose reminded him of why he disliked hospitals. It was true that the smells were no longer as redolent of antiseptics as they had been in his youth. But Connie still dreaded the places. To his mind they represented some forbidding combination of pain, secretiveness, loss of control, and being pitied. "There it is again, that frightening notion of pity," he thought. His own experiences with hospitals had been rare and, he had to admit, not notably disagreeable. He had always ended his hospital stays restored to good health, able to rejoin the multitude who walked in the world of sunshine and fresh air and who, by common consent, chose to ignore these monuments to human mortality. But irrational as his discomfort might be, it was intense, and he realized that it was only by a conscious act of will that he was proceeding to the information desk, then to the elevator, and finally to room 512, where Norman Wilkinson, sixty-six years old and dying of liver cancer, lay on his bed.

Connie Haydn had come to Trinity Hospital late in the afternoon on this brisk day of Monday, May 8, 2000, because Norman Wilkinson had asked him to. That in itself was a surprise. Though Connie and Wilkinson had been acquaintances for many years,

ever since they had discovered that they enjoyed reading about the history of baseball, they moved in different social circles. Norman Wilkinson was a retired farmer, owner of the largest agricultural operation in the vicinity of Humboldt, Ohio. A well-known advocate of physical fitness, he was also very wealthy, for he had been sole heir to the considerable fortune of his parents, beneficiary of his wife's personal estate after her death in a plane crash many years earlier, and an astute manager of his farm holdings. His wealth allowed him to support many worthy projects in Humboldt and had made him an honored—and in some quarters, revered—citizen of the community. After the death of his wife, he had raised his daughter Eleanor alone, not without occasional public bumpiness but, the community agreed, with results he could be proud of. In short, his had been an active and constructive life—until the recent diagnosis of swift and terminal cancer.

Connie, on the other hand, had only recently retired from the faculty of Humboldt College, where he had served for many years as chairman of the small Department of Philosophy. He lived in the modest comfort of a retired academician and was happy with a life that gave him opportunities to read about Kant or Cobb at his leisure. He had never married. Students at Humboldt believed that he was gay, but his friends

knew the real story: that he still carried a torch for a woman who had died some forty years earlier. Her slightly faded photograph sat above the television set in his den, and odd as it might seem, no one in Humboldt had ever asked him her name nor had he ever volunteered it.

“Thank you for coming,” Norman Wilkinson said. His voice was soft but not feeble. His head was propped against several pillows, and his pallor bespoke the seriousness of his illness. A young nurse quickly left the room, obviously under orders to depart when Connie Haydn arrived.

“I was happy that you invited me,” Connie replied with a harmless lie. But a lifetime of dealing with competent adults prevented him from following one untruth with another, and so he immediately added, “you don’t look well.”

Wilkinson appeared to appreciate the candor. His time on earth was short, and he would have little patience for those who wasted it with false comforts. “I know. In fact, as I’m sure you’re aware, I’m dying.” He paused, but Connie chose not to speak. He had been summoned, and the agenda was Wilkinson’s.

“I’m hopeful you can do a big favor for me.” Another pause, though it seemed more as if Wilkinson needed to summon his thoughts than summon his strength. “Do you read the Bible?”

This question caught Connie by surprise. He was not a religious person. He didn't attend church. It had, in fact, been many years since he had read the Scriptures. A solid Sunday School upbringing had assured that he was familiar with certain passages—the Twenty-third Psalm, the Christmas story in *Luke*, the Passion story in *John*. But he hadn't the faintest idea of where Wilkinson was going with his question, and he was about to register his general unfitness for biblical exegesis when Wilkinson posed a second question. “Do you know the Old Testament book *Amos*?”

Connie's perplexity increased. *Amos*? Well, yes, he did recall something about the prophet's writings—severe, weren't they? and maybe even fierce. But he said nothing.

“Chapter 5, verse 24 has long seemed to me a principle worth honoring,” Wilkinson continued. And for the first time he coughed. A soft, uneasy cough. “I'm sure you've heard it many times. ‘Let justice roll down like waters.’ I think *Amos* got it right.”

Connie was familiar with the verse and noted that Wilkinson had left out the part about the “ever-flowing stream.” But he remained silent.

“I'm hopeful that you'll act on behalf of justice, Connie. I'm asking you to be a rod of righteousness.” Even when Connie had tried to guess the previous evening why Wilkinson might be summoning him, the

possibility that he would be asked to act as an agent of rectitude—even perhaps of divine rectitude—had never crossed his mind. He remained silent.

“Do you remember Vincent d’Amato?” This question brought Connie back to the world of concrete reality. D’Amato, a computer engineer, had died several years earlier when his Humboldt residence had caught fire. Unable to read Connie’s thoughts, Wilkinson continued. “He was killed four years ago in a house fire. I’m sure you remember.” Connie nodded.

“You’ll also remember that Jason Bigelow was convicted of setting the fire that killed him.” Again Connie’s memory was joggled. Bigelow, the owner of Humboldt’s largest hardware store, had not only been found guilty of the arson that caused Vincent d’Amato’s death but had soon thereafter died in prison. “I remember,” he said.

“I don’t think Bigelow did it.” With that simple statement, Wilkinson paused. And a light came on in Connie’s head. In some way, he realized, this dying man wanted him—Connie Haydn—to bring posthumous justice to Jason Bigelow. But all he could muster was a barely audible clearing of his throat.

“One of the nice things about being rich is that I can buy things,” Wilkinson said, more forcefully. “Obviously I can’t buy health. But I’m hoping I *can* buy justice.” Another pause. “That sounds wrong, as if

I wanted to corrupt a judge or a jury. That's not it at all. What I really want to do is buy your time—to supply you with enough money so that *you* can prove that Jason Bigelow was not a murderer.” The coughing returned, more corrosive than before, and Norman Wilkinson needed thirty seconds or so to regain his self-control.

To Connie Haydn, the scene was both pathetic and grotesque. Was this a desperate and dying man stretched before him, losing his once-solid grip on reality? Or was it a once-powerful man, accustomed to obedience, believing that even from his death bed he could purchase the skills of a retired college teacher? And as for skills, *what* skills? Connie didn't know anything about investigating murders. Dostoevsky and Poe and Sayers were the closest he had come to the criminal mind. Traffic violations were the extent of his experience with courtrooms.

Connie collected his thoughts and used a break in the sick man's coughing to say, “I don't know whether I'm flattered or not, but the whole proposal is nonsense, Norman.” Silence in response. “Look, I'm not an investigator. I'm not a cop. I'm not even” —he paused, groping for an appropriate comparison— “I'm not even a good chess player.”

The last remark brought a wan smile to the sick man's face. Connie grimaced in return, recognizing

the statement for the non sequitur it was.

“I know all that,” Wilkinson replied. “But don’t sell yourself short. You’re bright. You’re curious. You’re retired and so you have the freedom to work away full time at any project you choose. And you’re familiar with both inductive and deductive reasoning.” At that point he smiled again, no doubt because Connie briefly looked startled.

“Yes,” he said, by way of explanation. “Even though I’m a farmer, I’m not completely ignorant of the things you philosophy teachers worry about. I like puzzles, mental gymnastics, and games that stretch the mind. Besides, I’ll make it worth your while. Or, more accurately—since I doubt that you’d choose to humor me or not to humor me on the basis of an offer of money—I’ll assure you that, even after I die, there’ll be enough money for you to conduct a serious investigation.” Wilkinson looked into Connie’s face and pushed on.

“Investigation doesn’t require arcane skills. If the TV shows are right, it requires, above all else, thoughtful perseverance. Just keep plodding ahead, asking questions and questioning the answers you get. Even the hardest of puzzles—and I love puzzles—can be solved.” He paused, but Connie said nothing, and so Wilkinson pressed what he sensed was his slowly emerging advantage. “You’re probably wondering why I’m taking an interest in Jason Bigelow’s fate. There’s

no easy answer. Like everyone, I prefer justice to injustice. I was a friend of Vince d'Amato's. I knew Jason and Patricia, his wife. From the very beginning I thought the law had made a mistake in targeting him. I've had a conversation or two with Patricia—she's remarried, you probably know—and she can't believe he killed Vince d'Amato. I suppose it all goes back to *Amos*. I can't bring justice to the world, but maybe I can bring justice to Humboldt—or at least to this little bit of Humboldt history. I know I might be wrong. But I have the means to underwrite an investigation. My daughter is the center of my life, the only person who means anything to me. I'm crazy about her, and I'd do anything for her." He coughed. "But I can't stop this damn illness from taking me away from her, and so I've seen to it that she will be well provided for. Virtually all my money goes to her, for—and this is the great sadness in my life—I have no grandchildren to leave money to." ("He's rambling," Connie thought.) "And my instinct tells me that something is amiss with the accepted resolution of this Bigelow matter. All I'm asking—I won't pretend it's a small request, but I don't think it's a big one either—all I'm asking is that you look into it, Connie. If, after you've done some probing, you decide that I'm wrong, feel free to give it up. I won't be around to know of your decision anyway, but knowing you'll be re-examining

Vince d'Amato's death will give me a small measure of satisfaction." Connie was glad that Wilkinson had avoided lapsing into some absurd usage about being able to die happy. "So what do you say?"

Connie already knew he was inclined to accept. The solemnity of the setting, the brazenness of the flattery, the intrinsic lure of the problem, the promise of a brief change in his daily life—all had quickly conspired to tip him toward an affirmative reply. But sensing that it would seem immature for him simply to accede, he broke his silence with a guarded promise. "Okay, Norman. You're a persuasive speaker, and I admit it's not easy to deny the request of a dying man. But I'm not going to leap in without doing some preliminary exploring of my own. What I propose is this. I'll go talk to Patricia Bigelow whatever-her-name-is-now and find out whether she thinks her late husband is guilty—*was* guilty. I'll find out how she looks at the case. Then I'll come back to let you know my decision. No promises. Understood?"

Norman Wilkinson sank back into his pillow, a soft smile on his ashen face. "I understand." In fact, of course, as Connie realized, he understood that he had probably won. Connie Haydn would have his talk with Patricia Bigelow, but barring some very unlikely turn in that conversation, he would accept the proposal.

The two men talked for a few more minutes, and

Norman explained that if Connie accepted, John Jameson, an attorney in Humboldt, would establish the fund that Connie could freely tap as he proceeded with the investigation. They shook hands—Norman’s grip was weak, but the handshake was decisive. Then, with Norman visibly tiring, Connie left Room 512. As he walked down the hallways of the hospital toward the exit, he alternated between scolding himself for being a wimp and exulting in the prospect of playing at being a detective. Now the odors of the hospital made no impression on him at all.



Although Connie Haydn had worried while driving home about whether Patricia Bigelow Simons—her new name had come suddenly to him as he walked to his car—would be easy to track down and willing to talk, it actually proved very easy to set up an appointment for a conversation with her. A simple phone call, a brief explanation—and Patricia Simons agreed. When Connie appeared at the Simons’ house the next morning at 10:00, however, both Patricia and her husband Gene were there to welcome him, coffee at the ready. Connie hadn’t expected Gene Simons to be part of the interview. Gene managed Humboldt’s only health food store, and Connie had deliberately sug-

gested a meeting time when it might be supposed that Patricia's new husband would be away from the house. His presence indicated perhaps that he was more interested in the death of his wife's first husband than might ordinarily be expected of a second husband. But then maybe not. After all, Connie knew neither of them well, nor had he ever played the role of second husband—"or *first*, for that matter," he thought. More immediately relevant was the question of whether Gene's presence should alter the tone and line that Connie had planned to bring to the conversation. Unable to think of any adjustment that seemed preferable, Connie decided to stick with the script he had worked out the night before and, after a friendly but brief exchange of greetings, he plunged right in.

"Norman Wilkinson has asked me to look into Jason's conviction. He thinks the court made a mistake. The request struck me as an odd one, and so I told Norman that I'd talk with you before giving him an answer. He...." Connie was going to continue with filling in background, but Patricia interrupted him.

"Mr. Wilkinson has long been a friend of the family and visited me soon after Jason was sent away," she said quietly. "He has stayed in touch, occasionally but regularly. He knew I loved Jason very much." Tears appeared in her eyes. "He knew I felt, well, helpless and hopeless after the trial. He told me he was uneasy

about the conviction himself. Several weeks ago he sent me a letter asking if it would be okay if he invited you to look into the whole matter. I said it would.” The words had been trailing away, and she now fell silent, softly sobbing.

So Patricia Bigelow Simons already knew the full story! Connie was a bit surprised that Norman Wilkinson hadn’t filled him in on the frequency of his contacts with Jason’s widow. But then he recalled that Wilkinson had been weak, and growing weaker, when they had talked. A healthy man might have had the energy to say much more. Wilkinson had been conserving his energy. Moreover, Connie promptly found himself puzzling over something else—the inscrutable silence of Gene Simons. Was Gene comfortable when his wife talked about the depth of her love for her first husband? How long ago had Gene and Patricia gotten married? When had Gene started courting her? Had he been a player in the events of four years ago? As these thoughts were popping up in Connie’s head, Gene moved from the chair he had been sitting in to put his arm around his wife’s shoulders.

“I know the police got it wrong,” Patricia finally continued, still barely audible. “My Jason”—the possessive grated on Connie’s ears: whether an habitual class usage or a reflection of abject dependency, it connoted a proprietary sense that Connie thought inap-

propriate in marriage—“my Jason was too frightened to kill anyone.”

“Frightened? Frightened of what?”

“You don’t understand. I don’t mean he was frightened of *somebody* or some *thing*. He was just, well, scared. He lived his life scared. Scared of disapproval. Scared of doing something wrong. Scared of breaking little rules. Scared almost of being a free man. That’s one reason I loved him so. He was twelve years older than me and yet he needed me ... he needed me. And then when he went to prison, I discovered how much I needed him.” These words had stumbled out haltingly, and now the sobs overwhelmed Patricia Simons’s ability to speak.

Connie had known many weepy students in his day. For as long as he had been teaching, college girls had broken down in his office when confronted with low grades, and in the final years of his teaching he had discovered that college boys were beginning to resort to the same weapon. He had learned to let such episodes pass. But never before had he been confronted with an adult woman immersed in quiet yet uncontrollable crying. He could only wait until she felt ready to resume her tale.

“I guess what I really mean is that Jason was weak.” For the first time a flicker of a smile altered Gene Simon’s impenetrable expression. “He needed some-

one to bring strength into his life. That was me. And since we didn't have any children"—Connie had been wondering; now he had his answer— "he couldn't find strength in raising and protecting his kids. I never got people to understand all of this, but Jason just couldn't have done what they said he'd done. He didn't have the guts even to set a woodpile on fire, much less set a fire to kill someone."

Patricia Simons was calmer now, and so Connie resumed asking questions, returning to his initial interest. "This is an awkward question, Mrs. Simons, but I need to ask it. Why do you suppose Mr. Wilkinson" (he used the "Mr." that Patricia Simons had used, the conventional title for prominent men in a respectful town) "singled Jason out for his attention? I mean, and I'm not quite sure how to put this gently, but the central fact is that Jason is dead now. I don't see how anyone gains from clearing his name posthumously."

"Oh, but I *will!*" she quickly replied. Connie's eyes narrowed slightly. "Jason had a life insurance policy, but when I tried to collect on it after he died in prison, the company wouldn't give me any money, saying it wasn't obliged to pay out if a person's death was brought on by his own foolish behavior."

Connie thought such terms in a life insurance policy very improbable, but said nothing.

“Jason died as a result of a fight in prison, and the company says it has evidence that Jason started it. That’s why they say he brought on his own death.” She paused. “There’s not a huge amount at stake—just \$25,000. But it sure would help to have it as I try to move on with my new life.” Here, for the first time, she cast her gentle smile on her new husband. “Gene and I figure that if we could show that Jason had been unfairly imprisoned, we could persuade the company to pay me the money I’m owed.”

Connie Haydn found this tale almost bizarre. Such clauses didn’t exist in the insurance policies he knew about. And even if they did exist, surely there were lawyers who could advise presumptive beneficiaries who felt they were being unfairly treated. But he maintained the cloak of silence that he always used to disguise his thoughts.

Gene Simons broke the silence with his first words. “It’s the Crossroads Insurance Company that Jason had his policy with.”

“What an odd thing to add,” Connie thought. Uncertain what he should do with this piece of information, Connie chose the easy course and announced that he had taken up enough of their time. “Thank you for the information, Mrs. Simons,” he said while standing up. “And for the coffee, too” though he had drunk very little. “I’m still not sure what I’m going to

do, but as soon as I've made up my mind, I'll let you know." Then he turned to the inscrutable Gene. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Simons." Gene nodded amiably, offering his hand. And with that, Connie left. Small talk was not his strength, and besides, he had much to mull over.



Shrug Speaker sat before the computer screen at the desk in his home office. He typed in a few words, leaned back to review them in his mind, typed in a few more, and then started deleting them. He was writing a piece on the arguments for the existence of God for *The Christian Declaration*, a small monthly journal to which he regularly contributed articles, and he was unhappy with his inability to find the words to capture his thoughts. His CD machine was playing the second movement of Schubert's late piano sonata in A Major, but Shrug was oblivious to its power. "I promised myself I'd get another three pages written before going out tonight," he thought ruefully to himself, "and I'm not going to make it." Shrug hated failing to meet his self-established writing targets.

The phone rang, and Shrug—happy to have a distraction from his frustration—quickly picked it up.

"Hi Shrug. It's Connie. Sorry to call just before din-

ner time. Would you be able to get to the Community Center about half an hour early tonight? I'd like to run some ideas and confusions by you."

Shrug smiled. He knew that Connie was rarely confused, but he also knew that his old friend would not be making such an odd request—and so late too—if the matter were not important. The Humboldt Chess Club met every Tuesday night, and if Connie wanted to talk with him before the matches began, Shrug would of course be pleased to oblige. Besides, though he said nothing—these were, after all, two very self-contained and private men—Shrug thought he detected an uncustomary tightness in Connie's voice. "I'll be there at 7:00," he said, curious but patient.

Shrug Speaker was a recently retired investment analyst. On reaching his sixty-third birthday in 1999—he was two years younger than Connie Haydn—he had cashed out almost all of his large stock portfolio, converting much of it into annuities, some into trust funds for his grandchildren, and keeping a small pot of investment capital for "playing" with equities. His colleagues in the investment business were disbelieving. Some had actually laughed aloud. The market, after all, was going to keep going up forever—or at least for as long as it mattered. Why should anyone voluntarily jump off the escalator? Shrug, however, had thought otherwise. Maybe it was his lively sense of the idiocy of

forgetting God's power to bring the self-satisfied down. Maybe it was the tendency toward caution that lay at the core of his character. Maybe it was his determination to do nothing that might imperil his ability to leave money for his grandchildren. Lord knows, he hadn't quit the market because he was confident that it would soon crack. On the contrary, he had been telling people it would keep rising for years. But he was certain that, for *him*, getting out in 1999 had been the right thing to do. This way, he could be sure he'd never be a burden to his daughter, never be compelled to leave his home before poor health forced his hand, and never again have to worry secretly that calamity could undo an estate that consisted almost entirely of equities.

Shrug centered his life upon his daughter Marilyn, whom he had raised from childhood as a single parent, and his grandchildren Brandon and Gretchen. They lived in Des Moines, where Marilyn Speaker—she had retained her maiden name—was a successful attorney, specializing in real estate law. Her husband, Guy Andrews, was a pediatrician. Shrug liked Guy, though he rarely saw him. He adored Marilyn and her children, and they visited him several times a year. As for Marilyn's mother Julia, he no longer found his mind haunted by thoughts of her. After a perambulatory life, she now lived in France, with a fourth husband, and

while Shrug sometimes told people she was working her way through her eighth husband, he always promptly regretted this tawdry effort at belittling her, since their divorce had been reasonably amicable, and since the fault had been partly his. In fact, if truth be known—but he had never told this to anyone—the fault had been *largely* his, since Julia had left his bed in search of a sexual variety and excitement he had been unable to supply.

Shrug “saved” his incomplete article about the existence of God, ate an evening meal of soup, bananas, and fruit cup, and drove over to the Community Center. Connie was already there.

“How can I be of assistance?,” Shrug said, ambling in with a big smile lighting his round face. Connie’s demeanor was serious but not troubled.

“I think I’m going to ask you to join me in a little local adventure. But first I want to talk my way through this in front of you, just to see what you make of it.” With that, Connie told Shrug of his conversations with the dying Norman Wilkinson and the tearful Patricia Bigelow Simons. He also identified three aspects of the matter that vexed him. First, his puzzlement over the disjunction in magnitude between Norman Wilkinson’s rather conventional preference for justice and his readiness to tap his considerable wealth to prove Jason Bigelow innocent. Was there

something Norman wasn't telling him? Second, his puzzlement over Gene Simons's odd behavior during the conversation with his wife. The tale about the insurance policy showed that Gene stood to gain access to a useful sum of money if Jason were shown to be innocent. But the story of that policy continued to strike him as odd, and it also seemed to Connie—maybe just from reading body language—that something more might be at stake. Finally, his puzzlement over what steps should be taken to get at the question of Jason's guilt or innocence, assuming that Shrug and he (for he would not embark on this adventure without Shrug's participation) accepted the assignment.

Shrug didn't speak during the entire recitation. Connie expected him to pose some questions. But instead he merely said, "It sounds like fun. Why don't we do it?"

"Just like that? I thought you'd raise some objections, make me see things I've missed."

"Oh, it seems to me that there are lots of difficulties and challenges, and frankly I doubt that we'll be able to do anything useful. But if we're up front about all that with Norman Wilkinson—and surely he knows it anyway—and then if he still wants to support an investigation, where's the harm? At worst, we'll make fools of ourselves. And at our age—I know you agree with me on this—we're no longer much concerned about

looking silly in the eyes of the world.”

And so, with a twinkle and a laugh, they decided to accept, on the condition that Norman Wilkinson was comfortable with their doubts about the likelihood of their discovering anything useful. Then they devoted themselves to an evening of disappointments in chess. When the two friends went to their homes three hours later, Connie was still astonished that the matter had been so easily resolved and Shrug was delighted that he'd have something interesting to talk with Marilyn about during their next phone call.



On Wednesday morning Connie returned to Trinity Hospital, this time with Shrug in tow. The two men were startled to learn that Norman Wilkinson had been shifted to intensive care on Tuesday, and when they saw him in his darkened room, they immediately realized that, in all likelihood, he was near death. Though disquieted by the sight of this incurably sick man, Connie forced himself to report that he and Shrug were willing to take on the assignment. “But this is important, Norman. Listen. We don’t want to get your hopes up” (“some irony there,” Connie thought to himself, considering Wilkinson’s plight). “We really don’t think we’ll be able to do much. Still, if

you want us to try—to look into Jason’s conviction—we’re willing.”

Wilkinson smiled wanly, raised his right hand a bit, and pointed to the corner of the room. Only then did Connie and Shrug realize that John Jameson, the attorney mentioned on Monday, was present. He got up from his chair, shook hands with both men, and explained in a voice deliberately raised and slowed so that Norman would miss nothing that Mr. Wilkinson was very happy with the decision and that he, John Jameson, would promptly establish a fund of money that the two men could tap as they wished to cover *all*—and John Jameson was particular in emphasizing that word—*all* costs associated with the investigation. He would, of course, ask for an accounting of expenses, but Mr. Wilkinson had specifically asked Connie Haydn to undertake the task because he knew Connie to be an honest man. And Mr. Wilkinson had also assumed that Mr. Haydn would invite his friend Mr. Speaker to join him. “This is scary,” Connie thought. “This old guy can read my mind.” Jameson brought his hands together and concluded, “I’ll have the papers prepared in a day or two.” Then Jameson stepped out of the room to fetch a young female nurse who, like the nurse on Monday, had discreetly absented herself at Norman Wilkinson’s nod.

“Thank you,” Norman Wilkinson whispered before

Connie and Shrug left. “The change is incredible,” Connie said as the room door closed behind them. “He looked bad on Monday, but today he looks, well, just about dead.”

“I think he is,” Jameson declared. “I don’t understand these things, but he knew on Monday evening when I visited him here in the hospital that you were very likely to accept, and it’s as if that realization allowed him to finally yield to the inevitable. I don’t know why this matter is so important to him, but I don’t think it’s some sort of dementia. It’s his body that has failed him, not his mind.” They walked quietly down the hallway. Then Jameson continued. “The terms of the fund I’ll set up allow for the possibility that your investigation will lead to a reopening of the case. You can be confident that if it does, the fund will also pay for all those expenses.” Another pause, and then a final remark from the attorney. “Mr. Wilkinson is a very wealthy man, and he has, in effect, put a treasure at your disposal.”



Connie spent Wednesday evening the way he usually did, catching up on a week’s worth of e-mail messages from fellow members of SABR, the Society for American Baseball Research. It was a wonderful

organization, a buffer against all the pressures and frustrations of the real world. Connie knew that his fondness for baseball history was inexplicable to a non-believer, just as oenology and lepidoptery were pastimes whose attractions lay beyond his own ken. *Chacun à son goût* had always struck him as a good precept, except of course when it led to immorality. So, wallowing in the pleasures of the pointless, Connie spent the evening reading exchanges about hidden ball tricks, the dimensions of long-since-razed ball parks, the attire of umpires in ancient World Series, and Joe McCarthy's judgment of Stan Musial.

Shrug Speaker spent Wednesday evening at the mid-week service at Trinity Episcopal Church. Shrug attended these services as often as he could. He took strength from prayer and meditation. And even when he wasn't in a particularly reverential mood, he savored the austere beauty of the church interior—an enclosure that in its whitened simplicity seemed likelier to house the sectarian heirs of Cotton Mather than the episcopal descendants of William Laud. But on this Wednesday he had a task. Connie had told him of Wilkinson's citing of *Amos*, and Shrug had turned to his Bible to remind himself of the prophet's message. Yes, it was a bleak book. But the lines that had resonated were not the generalized invocation of justice that Norman had referred to but rather the chilling

warning from God against the people of Israel: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Shrug prayed for God’s help in making sense of Norman Wilkinson’s unexpected recourse to Scripture.

As for Norman Wilkinson himself, he spent Wednesday evening dying. And early on Thursday morning, May 11, he completed his final task.