

Trinity

A Haydn & Speaker Mystery

Chapter 10



Although a visit with Bianca d'Amato lay just hours ahead, Connie went through his comfortable morning routine on Friday, May 19—showering and dressing, breakfasting while reading the paper, checking the television news in case some calamity had torn the world apart after the paper had been put to bed. As he was stacking his few dishes by the kitchen sink, the phone rang. Caller ID identified the caller as George Fielding, and since the hour was well before 9:00, Connie picked up the phone with curiosity.

Fielding's voice was taut. "You won't believe this, Connie. Beatrice Morrison is dead."

Connie hated sounding like a television script, but all he could think of asking after a few seconds of astonished silence was, "How? What happened?"

"We don't know the full story yet. She was killed in a car accident. Her car was spotted just after dawn this morning, lying on its side off the old Delacourt Road. It looks like a one-vehicle accident. Like she took the

sharp downhill turn near Majors Fruit Stand too fast and didn't make it. We'll know more later today. Like maybe the time of death. And we'll know still more when the autopsy results are in. I'd say she died quickly, maybe instantly. She wasn't wearing a seat belt. Do you think this could have anything to do with your investigation?"

Connie was wondering the same thing. "I don't see how," he replied. "But I've been surprised so often recently that who knows... maybe she's even the murderer." Hearing a gasp at the other end of the line, Connie quickly added, "That's a joke, George." Pause. "And yes, I know, it's in bad taste for me to be wisecracking about the dead."

Fielding's silence suggested that he was waiting for Connie to take the lead. If so, it's the blind leading the blind, mused Connie. But even if he had no answers, he had questions, and so Connie moved ahead. "Was she driving into town or away from town, George?"

"It looks like she was driving out of town."

"In the small hours of the morning? Sounds odd."

"Well, we actually don't know yet when the accident occurred. I suppose it might have happened anytime after dark last night. If no one had seen the accident happen, it could have gone unnoticed until daylight."

"Any sign that she'd been drinking?"

"None that I could see or smell. But a blood alcohol

screen is one of the standard tests that will be performed.”

“What’s going on over at the College now?” Connie still identified himself closely with Humboldt College. “They—we—have a Commencement coming up soon. God, this is awful.”

“I’m going over there as soon as I hang up. I’ll be talking with the vice-presidents and deans, and with President Morrison’s secretary. But I wanted you to know about all of this before your day and mine get cluttered—and because I can’t help thinking that coincidences don’t usually happen.” Fielding didn’t need to complete that line of reasoning, for it was troubling Connie too.

Not long after this conversation ended, Connie set out to pick up Shrug for the visit to Bianca d’Amato. But his ability to focus—a trait he prided himself on—was clouded by the realization that an acquaintance of many years had unexpectedly died. Beatrice Morrison had not been a close friend but she had been—and this meant a lot in academe—a supportive colleague. And while during the conversation with Fielding no term but “accident” had been used to refer to the incident out on the old Delacourt Road, Connie realized that other possibilities existed, such as “suicide” and “homicide.” After all, President Morrison had died in circumstances that invited questions, and with a tim-

ing that invited speculation about connections to other deaths.



Connie had arranged this Friday morning interview with Bianca d'Amato the previous evening. Even before he phoned her he had been noting that one modest benefit of being engaged in what people were now calling a "murder investigation" was that these people were willing to re-order their presumably busy lives to allow time for Shrug and him to talk with them: this happy fact assured that there was no delay in making follow-up inquiries. He hadn't been confident that such a free spirit as Bianca d'Amato would conform to that book, but human nature has a way of triumphing, and since, like almost everyone else, she was curious about the investigation, hoping to pull as much from a conversation as she shared, Bianca was amenable.

She met them at the door at 9:30 a.m., wearing overalls and a sweatshirt. "When this is over," she explained, "I'm going to work on my garden."

Connie and Shrug had not noticed a garden in front of the house when they had come in, but they supposed there was one in back.

After d'Amato inquired about Shrug's health—he

stood before her with his face visibly bruised and stitched—and after the ensuing conventional exchanges of good wishes and thanks, the trio moved into a sunny breakfast room. President Morrison didn't enter the conversation, and so the friends assumed that Bianca d'Amato had not heard of it. This suited their interest, and allowed Connie to move promptly to the central subject. "We are now convinced, Mrs. d'Amato, that Jason Bigelow didn't set fire to your house and therefore didn't kill your husband. In fact, he wasn't even in Humboldt on the afternoon and evening of the fire."

"You boys are good," she replied, in a faintly flirtatious manner that suggested that even though the day was young, Bianca d'Amato might have been drinking.

"You will understand, then," said Connie, who had no intention of being side-tracked, "that that conclusion obliges us to look at some of the events of the time of your husband's death in a new light."

"I don't quite understand," she replied. "Am I a suspect?"

Connie's first thought was, "this women sure is dumb," but he knew that wasn't true, and so his reply was far more measured. "No, Mrs. d'Amato. You were out of town on the day of your husband's death. You couldn't have killed him. What I mean is that some matters which we thought had been resolved now

need to be looked at again.”

“Oh.” Connie could read neither the remark nor the eyes that lay behind it.

“Here’s part of what we’re getting at,” said Shrug, jumping into the conversation because he wanted to steer the subject to the suicide theory—a hypothesis he thought implausible but one that needed to be disposed of before full attention could be given to likelier scenarios. “Did you know that Mr. d’Amato was seriously ill when he died? That he was going to die soon in any case?”

Bianca’s startled reaction suggested that she had not been privy to her husband’s secret. “He was going to die? That’s absurd. He would have told me.”

“Perhaps not,” said Shrug. “You two were living apart then. Maybe he was shutting you out of parts of his life.”

“Not very likely,” she spat out indignantly. Connie and Shrug were startled by the vehemence of her reaction. “Even though I was in California, we spoke weekly on the phone. The poor baby missed me and needed me. And he really was a big baby. If he’d been seriously sick, he’d have told me.”

“I’m afraid Shrug is right,” said Connie, coming to the aid of his friend. “Vince’s prostate cancer had metastasized.”

“I’m sorry,” she replied, still proudly, but now more

defensively. “You have been misinformed.” Her voice was chilling.

The chill did not stop Connie, who had more to say. “This is awkward, but we now know who Mr. D’Amato’s girl friend was. She...”

Bianca interrupted with a sharp laugh. “You’re referring, I assume, to the little German tart—‘Tedesco,’ he called her. I knew about her. His pseudo-Italian whore. She meant no more to him than any of the other women who have strolled through his life. He sampled”—here Bianca made a coarse gesture—“but he came back to me... always.”

“You denied knowing who she was when I spoke to you a week ago,” said Connie impassively.

“I lied,” replied d’Amato, almost disdainfully.

Shrug did not want to lose the initiative, and so he plunged ahead. “That doesn’t matter to our broader point. We know he knew he was dying. What do you think he might have done, knowing that?”

“He’d have come crying to me, like I said. And that’s why I know you’re wrong. He wasn’t dying.”

The answer was depressing. It suggested to both friends that Bianca hadn’t known Vince as well as they had hoped and that her response to the ‘suicide’ question, whenever they stuck it into the conversation, might not be notably reliable. Still, there was no point in giving up.

“Let’s try a hypothetical,” said Connie, suddenly sounding very professorial. Bianca smiled, watching with the townie’s wry eye as a gownie got pompous. “Do you think your husband could have committed suicide?”

“So that’s where you’re going with this!” She grinned and then became serious. “Vince would not have committed suicide. He was a good Catholic. He feared for his immortal soul.”

Although the line of reply was unexpected, neither friend thought it outlandish. The casual observer might have thought such commitment to a teaching of the church to be improbable in a man famous for his deficiencies in financial integrity, marital fidelity, and sheer honesty. But Shrug, a life-long Christian, had known many people who were selective believers, picking some tenets they would authentically live by and rejecting others they found unacceptable—all for reasons an outsider could only regard as inscrutable. And Connie, a long-time reader of Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Dostoevsky, found it easy to recognize the same truth. Humans were complicated and inconsistent creatures, adopting belief systems in light of idiosyncratic understandings of their own unique needs. The point was, as both men realized, that such people need not be hypocrites.

Bianca’s smile returned, for she read their minds

and perhaps their faces. “Yes, Vince didn’t exactly behave like a good Catholic. But he took the Church’s teachings about heaven and hell and salvation very seriously—much more seriously than I ever could, by the way. He wouldn’t have committed suicide. If you don’t believe me, ask Father Gonzalez.”

“That’s probably not necessary, because we’re inclined to agree with what you’re implying—that this wasn’t a suicide.” Shrug decided to bring Bianca more fully into the story. “But we have a puzzling note, actually a reference to a citation from Herodotus—found among Vince’s papers—that seems as if it might be meant to be a suicide note.”

“Herodotus?” snorted Bianca. “I doubt that Vince ever read him. Hell, I doubt that he ever even heard of him. Ancient history wasn’t exactly his bag.” This woman is better educated than I expected, thought Connie. “That’s just preposterous. And you know it. You’re talking about Vince d’Amato and not some artsy-fartsy liberal arts undergraduate.”

“Okay,” said Shrug. “That’s the way we were thinking too. But then we’re stuck with the problem of trying to figure out how this note... and these musical notations...”—he pulled the various documents from his pocket and placed them before Bianca—“got into Vince’s possessions.”

“You say these are Vince’s?” Bianca d’Amato exam-

ined them closely. “The writing on the Herod sheet could be his, I guess.” She sounded doubtful. “This music stuff can’t be his. He didn’t read music.”

“But you do,” noted Shrug.

“So what? I didn’t write these stupid little tunes.” She hummed two of the five-note phrases and handed the sheets back to Shrug. “What do they mean?”

“We don’t know,” Connie replied, half-truthfully.

Sensing her growing irritation with the conversation, Shrug jumped in. “How about one more question, Mrs. d’Amato? “Do you know how your late husband”—d’Amato smiled, and Shrug wondered whether it was the ‘late’ or the ‘husband’ that amused her—“was able to repay \$10,000 to Father Gonzalez about fifteen or twenty years ago?”

Bianca d’Amato looked puzzled. “I’ve no idea. I didn’t know he owed the priest money like that. But I never understood Vince’s finances. It was always ‘easy come easy go’ with him. Is it important?”

“We don’t know,” said Shrug.

Bianca stared the two men in the eye, was briefly silent, and then—with a heavy garnish of sarcasm—dismissed them. “You don’t know.” Pause. “This has sure been fun. You came not knowing anything. You leave knowing no more. At first I thought you boys were smart. Now I’m inclined to think you’d better not give up your day jobs. My day job today, by the way, is

gardening. Good-bye.”

Connie and Shrug, however, did not completely agree with Bianca d’Amato’s assessment of the meeting. They had not been surprised by the information she chose to share (except by the probably unimportant fact that she knew of Maria Tedesco), but they had been confirmed in certain emerging convictions: that Vince d’Amato had been murdered, that Vince d’Amato was not the author of the musical notations, and that Vince d’Amato had kept the secret of his illness to himself. “It might have been worse,” Shrug noted, as they drove back to his house. His arm ached, and he wanted an aspirin and some Beethoven. But instead his early afternoon schedule obliged him to deal with his insurance agent about temporarily renting a car.



On Friday afternoons Connie’s mother expected him (or so Connie hoped) at Tuscan Court, and so after a slow lunch and a leisurely reading of the mail, he drove north of town for his weekly visit with Veronica Haydn.

“Your mother was restless last night, Mr. Haydn,” Annabelle Emerson said, and Connie found that information faintly alarming, since it varied from the pat-

tern of reports that the nurse had established over the months. “She’s comfortable now, however, and looking forward to seeing you.”

Connie never knew whether that remark was accurate, but he liked hearing it.

Veronica Haydn was seated in her easy chair when Connie entered. “Oh Donald, how nice it is to see you.” The monologue that followed was standard fare. Connie listened to his mother talk about an incident involving the minister, the difficulties the poor Callison family was facing, the pernicious impact of gambling on young bread-winners, the pleasures of listening to “Can You Top This?” and the hair-dos of Norma Shearer. She was more lively than ordinary, but neither more nor less cognitively impaired. She showed Connie her new slippers, a gift from the staff at Tuscan Court (are they suggesting I should be doing more for my mother? he wondered), and her new curtains. He left her as he always did—she happy that he had come, he depressed at the way of all flesh.

His next stop was Teresa Espinosa’s room. He knew that Teresa would be deeply upset if he passed her by on the day of Beatrice Morrison’s death, and he realized, as he walked over to her wing, that he himself wanted an opportunity to discuss the person who for so long had directed the institution they had both worked for. The principle of *de mortuis* prevailed, and

the two old friends satisfied themselves with the sharing of happy tales. Connie passed on the story of how Morrison had persuaded the trustees to give him a semester of paid leave in the 1980s so that he could study Sartre and Camus in Paris. Espinosa matched this tale with an account of how Morrison had intervened in language department quarrels at about the same time to save the Spanish program from a potentially devastating loss of two positions. Beatrice Morrison had been, they both agreed, about as useful a college president as they could imagine. Their talk then turned to arrangements for a memorial service—Espinosa had heard that the service was to be held on Sunday afternoon, and perhaps not in a church at all!—and to possible successors. “I can imagine the board asking Dean Goodwin to serve on an interim basis,” said Connie, “but I hope we can do better than that for the permanent appointment.”

Only after much college shop-talk did Teresa Espinosa ask about Connie’s mother and the investigation. On the latter subject Connie saw no reason to be reticent, both because so much had happened since he had last talked with Teresa and because he was one of those people who found his thoughts gaining in clarity when he tried to verbalize them. Espinosa listened quietly as Connie spun out the complicated tale. When he got to Andy Stonehurst—whose name he

readily revealed—he added that “I’m glad you told me of Jason’s homosexuality. It prepared me for the Columbus conversation.” When he got to the attack on Shrug, his voice rose in intensity, and he added that nothing had made him more determined to identify the real murderer. “The bastard must be getting desperate,” he added, “risking something as reckless as that.” Connie’s tale came to its close with a description of the morning’s lively conversation with Bianca d’Amato.

“Did you know,” asked Espinosa at the mention of the widow d’Amato, “that Annabelle Emerson is a good friend of Bianca’s? There are even photos of the two of them in Nurse Emerson’s room.”

Connie’s eyes registered interest. “I have trouble making sense of Mrs. d’Amato,” he said. “She’s like quicksilver.” Only an academic talking to an academic could get away with that simile, he smiled to himself. “Do you suppose Ms Emerson would allow me to ask her some questions?”

“I suspect she’d be delighted,” Espinosa replied. “For most of us folk not in the know, your investigation is the great Humboldt adventure of our day, fodder for conversation at every meal here at Tuscan Court. I don’t know whether she could be helpful. But I’m sure she’d love to be asked to give an opinion or two.”

Teresa Espinosa and Connie Haydn walked the passages of Tuscan Court in search of Annabelle Emerson. Teresa's lameness is getting much worse, Connie thought, noting how slowly they made their way along wide hallways and tree-lined paths. They found the nurse tending an elderly man who had experienced an incident of disorientation, and they waited until the man had been returned to his room and reassured. When Connie asked Emerson if he might talk to her about her friend Bianca d'Amato, she accepted the opportunity to become part of the investigation with all the speed that Espinosa had predicted, and the three of them made their slow way to Emerson's quarters for their conversation.

Connie explained that Shrug and he had found Bianca d'Amato to be a volatile and unpredictable person. This had raised in their mind the question of her reliability. Connie was phrasing his remarks in such a way, he hoped, as to give away as little as possible while still inviting Emerson to jump in at almost any point. She took the bait.

"Gee, Bianca and I have been friends for a long time. Did you know she plays the trumpet? I'm a trombonist myself, and we both play in the Columbus Women's Band. She's a bit better than me, but that doesn't matter, and we drive to Columbus every week, except in summer, for a rehearsal. It's like the girls'

night out. You should come hear us sometime. The band, I mean.”

Annabelle Emerson went on like this for a while, and Connie let his eyes drift around the room. Sure enough, there on the dresser were two photos of Annabelle and Bianca. In one, they were posing with their musical instruments. In the other, they were posing with a man... with a familiar man... with Tom Watson!

Connie’s mind snapped to attention. When Emerson paused, Connie asked with as much diffidence and casualness as he could muster if Annabelle Emerson was a golfer.

“Oh yes,” she replied. This woman gushes like a teenager, Connie thought, even though she’s about Bianca’s age. “Bianca and I just love the game. I was coming to that. Oh, you’ve seen the photo.” She’s actually blushing, thought Connie. “That was taken the day before Tom Watson won the Memorial Tournament. He already had the lead.” Connie noticed that Teresa Espinosa had suddenly caught on to what was happening and was listening intently. “We had to work real hard on him to get him to pose with us, but he’s such a nice man. Bianca and me told him how much we were pulling for him to win, and he decided to let us have the photo taken. It’s one of my prizes. Do you play golf, Mr. Haydn?”

“No, I don’t, Ms. Emerson,” he replied. “But I know that Humboldt is full of fans. I wish I played.” He lied, but he was trying to sound friendly. “So this photo was taken on the Saturday of Tom Watson’s Memorial victory, is that right?” He didn’t want to sound too curious, but he needed to be sure that he was hearing Emerson’s story correctly.

“That’s right. It was a last get-together for us two gals. I flew out that night to Minnesota to take care of my poor mother. I was the nurse in the family, you see, and her health needs had got so bad that it was either me or a nursing home. When Bianca heard that I’d be leaving Humboldt for awhile, she flew in from California so we could get to one last golf tournament together. And wouldn’t you know, it was wonderful, because Tom Watson was our favorite player! We were so happy. It was the biggest day of my life. Bianca had to return to California that night and so, like me, she missed the final day of the tournament. Oh... but she was back soon after that, because that’s when Vince died. I was so sorry when I heard about it. I wanted to come back to town to be with her, but I just couldn’t.”

Connie meanwhile sat back in his chair, stunned. So Bianca d’Amato had been in Ohio on the day that Vince d’Amato died. Wow! And this poor woman rambling on in front of me doesn’t even seem to know what she’s done by telling me this story. He was

incredulous.

Recovering his composure, Connie asked Annabelle Emerson a few more questions about Bianca. He scarcely cared what the answers were, for he was preparing the way for a quick leave-taking. He did not neglect to thank the nurse for the good care she gave his mother. But when he reached the hallway, he felt himself suck in a big breath of air.

“Nice going, Sherlock,” was Teresa Espinosa’s smiling remark.

“Please keep this to yourself for the time being,” he replied. “Shrug and I need to decide what to do with the information. But this news sure obliges us to launch probabilities in a different light.”

“I’m not sure you launch probabilities,” Espinosa remarked. But Connie wasn’t listening.

And soon he was gone.



Although in general Shrug’s upper body felt better than he had expected after the activity of the morning and early afternoon—and at least I have a car again, he thought with great relief—his neck and left shoulder ached with an intensity that exceeded, he feared, the capacity of mere distraction to mitigate. But he did his best. First, he took an Advil. Then he placed a call to

Billy Esterhazy, the appliance dealer who was, as far as Shrug could recall, the only still-not-contacted person on their list. Esterhazy was not at the store, and so Shrug left a message. Then he put Beethoven's *Fidelio* on the CD player. Finally he turned to his weekly scrutiny of the small investment portfolio he'd kept to play with. Shrug had never more than dabbled in day-trading, and he'd given up the practice years ago. Even though he was basically out of the market, living well on the cashed-in successes of the Clinton years, he managed his "toy portfolio" in exactly the manner that the financial advice columns suggested—patiently, prudently, and knowledgeably. Whether from force of habit or the promptings of a financially-inclined *Superego*, he could not rest easy unless he gave his portfolio the regular check-up it required.

The phone rang and Shrug started. The jolt of the ring proved that his combined strategies for dealing with his aching had been successful. He picked up the receiver but could not identify the woman's voice until it identified itself. "Hello, Mr. Speaker. This is Eleanor Trout. I couldn't reach you this morning, and so I'm glad I caught you now."

"Hello, Mrs. Trout," Shrug replied. He had no idea why she was calling and could only wait.

"May I come by your house to talk with you today?"

It was an odd question, and several thoughts

flashed through Shrug's mind—concern over her inheritance, the discovery of something of interest, insatiable curiosity—even before she provided an explanation.

“I heard about your car accident, and since I baked some cookies this morning, I thought I'd bring some by for you... if you'd like.”

Shrug didn't know Marilyn Trout personally, and the impression he had drawn of her from Connie's story of the visit to “the Castle” had not been favorable. The notion that she baked cookies as a pastime struck him as ludicrous. But all these thoughts only piqued his curiosity, and so he invited her to come by about 3:30 that afternoon. Tidying up the house wasn't very difficult for Shrug—first, because he never got it very dirty, and second, because he never insisted that it be very clean. So he was ready for the gift-bearing visitor well before the appointed hour, and that gave him enough time to return to his portfolio scrutiny and reassure himself that he could maintain his current equity position for another week.

Eleanor Trout arrived promptly at 3:30, bearing a foil-covered basket that nested two dozen cookies. “I hope you like macadamia nuts,” she said, and Shrug, quite truthfully, told her he did.

While straightening up his house, Shrug had concluded that the primary motive for the visit was most

likely Mrs. Trout's continuing worry that the investigation, which was now becoming quite complicated, was going to be a heavy draw on funds which she regarded as hers. Perhaps too, he thought, she wants to size me up, just as she sized Connie up. So Shrug took the initiative, remarking as he carried the basket to the kitchen that "while you're here, I want to take the opportunity to let you know that so far Connie and I have not drawn a single cent from the fund your father set up to pay for our investigation."

Mrs. Trout laughed, said that she knew Connie and he were good stewards of the fund, and added—not quite consistently—that she wasn't giving the matter a thought. Since she made no move to go, Shrug invited her into his living room.

"I knew your daughter, Marilyn," she said, after sinking into a deep indigo chair. "She was a few years behind me in high school, but our paths sometimes crossed. I think we had a French class together."

Shrug listened with a mixture of bemusement and puzzlement as Eleanor Trout talked about the "happy days" at Humboldt High in the early 1980s. What is this all about? he wondered. She must have something on her mind. I guess I'll just have to wait until she gets to it. She rambled on about teachers, basketball games, cheerleading, even dances. Then she suddenly moved onto territory that Shrug recognized as mined.

“All of us older girls always thought Marilyn and her friends were so fortunate. They had stable home lives, parents who were interested in their school activities, churches that meant something to them.”

Shrug felt the tremor of tensing. A private man, he was uneasy when the personal lives of other people were broached in his presence. Moreover, because he sensed that this long monologue had been designed to culminate in this moment—that disclosure of the real reason for Eleanor Trout’s visit was at hand—he was apprehensive.

Mrs. Trout was continuing. “...we were far wilder than they and yet, as it seemed to us, far less happy.”

So all that talk about ‘happy days’ was just persiflage, Shrug thought. But he said nothing.

Abruptly, Mrs Trout said, “I don’t believe in God and I wish I did. Can you help me?”

Shrug looked at her hard. This was an astonishing question. He considered his words very carefully and then said, as sympathetically as he could, “I doubt it, Mrs Trout, but I’m listening.”

“I grew up without a church-going experience,” she said, by way of explanation. “Daddy didn’t believe in churches. He always said that the world was made up of atoms which bounced around like pool balls. That everything was determined. That life was pointless.”

“He said it was pointless?” Shrug thought that that

was a rather astringent lesson to preach to a teen-age daughter.

“Yes, and I don’t want to believe that.” She paused for almost fifteen seconds. Shrug wondered if she was trying to decide how much to say. Then she abruptly resumed her story. “The summer after high school graduation my spirits got so low that daddy sent me to a... a camp.” Pause. “It was a special kind of camp, a camp for... troubled... teenagers.” She drew in a deep breath. “I want to believe that life has meaning,” she continued, not obviously on subject—“that such words as True and Good stand for principles we can and should follow. That’s what they taught at Riding Rock. I didn’t accept it then, but I want to accept it now.”

Riding Rock, thought Shrug. So that’s what that obscure remark to Connie was referring to.

Meanwhile, Eleanor Trout hesitated, gathering herself for the final remark. “I am desperately unhappy and alone. Can you help?”

Shrug was silent for awhile. Fragmented though her words had been, he thought he understood them. This experience was not completely new for him, since, in his business days he had sometimes been approached by unhappy colleagues who envied him his settled sense of faith. He said, “I can listen. That can be helpful. And I can make suggestions... and maybe some will work. But surely you aren’t really alone. I know

you miss your father; we all do. But—and pardon me for being nosey—isn't there a Mr. Trout?"

"No there isn't," she said, barely audibly. No explanation followed. "And I can't have children." Shrug already knew that, but he said nothing as she lapsed into silence. Then she spoke again, more firmly. "My high school friends are scattered and involved in their new lives, with husbands and lovers and children. I never had college friends. I'm truly alone."

"I've got two quick suggestions—and a thought." Shrug was finally thinking constructively. "First, why don't you try out a church service? I'm going to Trinity Episcopal on Sunday morning in my new car. If you'd like, I could pick you up at 9:15 for the 9:30 service."

Eleanor Trout said she would like that. "Second, I could introduce you at that time to Allen Clark. He's the rector at Trinity and probably far better than I at dealing with questions of belief and unbelief." Trout said she would like that too.

"Now here's my thought. It's unformed"—a bit of a lie there, he thought, since he'd been informally working over this line of analysis for some time—"but it might be useful. Your father's vision of the world began with the assumption of materialism, with the image of pool balls knocking into one another. If you begin with that assumption, you probably end with it. But you might try starting the other way around. Why

not begin by affirming freedom and consciousness? These—and conscience too, I could add—are immaterial entities immediately present to us. Their existence cannot, I believe, be denied. If you start with them and understand your task to be to try to find some way to make the sheer physicality of the world we live in consistent with them, then I think you'll find God-including solutions come more readily to mind." Pause. "But this is just a thought."

Shrug believed everything he had just said, but he also believed—and did not, under the circumstances, want to say—that faith came through grace, not intellectual activity. St. Augustine was his paradigm, not Norman Vincent Peale. And that was not exactly a cheering thought on this occasion.

Eleanor Trout brightened up, thanking him profusely. But then, rather than taking her leave as Shrug had expected, she explained that it had been the death of Beatrice Morrison that had made her realize how exposed she was and how meaningless her life was.

"I hadn't realized you and she had been friends," Shrug said, quite truthfully.

"'Friends' isn't the right word," Trout explained. "She was a generation older than I, and since I've been away from Humboldt so frequently, our paths rarely crossed. But she was very kind to me at a difficult moment in my life. I've always appreciated that."

Eleanor Trout reached into her purse and pulled out an old sheet of paper. “Here,” she said, while unfolding the paper. “Look at this.”

It was a long, hand-written letter, almost twenty years old, dated April 3, 1982. Shrug scanned it quickly, seeing that it was from President Morrison to Eleanor Wilkinson, and that its burden was that even though Eleanor’s high school grades had made it impossible for Humboldt College to admit her, she (President Morrison) had been much impressed by Eleanor’s intelligence and leadership in high school activities and she hoped that Eleanor would consider re-applying to Humboldt if her experience at whatever college she now chose to attend failed to meet her expectations.

“I was very unhappy that I didn’t get into Humboldt. Daddy was very unhappy. But this letter softened the blow. She didn’t have to write it. And I’ll bet that college presidents very rarely write letters of this sort.” The final remark bore hints of pride.

Shrug’s eyes returned to the letter. Then they stopped! His brain came alive. The signature: Look at the signature, Shrug! Inez Beatrice Morrison. IBM!

Shrug commanded his face and voice to be calm. “I hadn’t realized that President Morrison’s first name was Inez.”

“Oh yes,” Trout replied. “Back then she was ‘Inez

Morrison.’ I’m not sure when she changed to “Beatrice,” and I certainly don’t know why. But the shift had occurred by the late 1980s, for I recall being made aware of it during a short visit to town in 1989. Maybe Inez was too... well, common.”

Shrug was barely listening. Whatever Eleanor Trout might still want from him (nothing, I hope, he grimaced slightly), he had to steer her out of the house and get on the phone with Connie. And so, after promising to pass along a ‘hello’ to Marilyn and reminding her that he would pick her up at 9:15 a.m. on Sunday, Shrug closed the door behind her. All he could think of was the fact that the revelation about Beatrice Morrison’s first name had pulled the late president from the periphery of their investigation to its very core: for it sure now looked as if she had had some relevant secret (is that why she was killed? he thought), and that it was incumbent on the friends to ferret it out.

Shrug called Connie immediately and was astonished and even faintly irritated to learn that, interesting though the revelation about IBM was, Connie had trumped it with the stunning revelation about Bianca d’Amato’s being in Ohio—and maybe in Humboldt—on the day of Vince d’Amato’s death. Connie felt his own twitch of irritation with the reflection that he should have recalled President Morrison’s first name.

A long conversation ensued during which the friends made two decisions: first, they would visit Bianca the next morning to confront her with the evidence of her lie; and second, they would invite Abe Steinberg, who had both time and the facilities of the Historical Museum to rely on, to try to find some “implicating”—the term was Connie’s—link between Beatrice Morrison and the six institutions of higher learning hidden in the code of the tunes. “I finally am beginning to think,” said Connie as they wrapped up the phone call, “that the Second-Bests are about to score a major victory.”