

Trinity

A Haydn & Speaker Mystery

Chapter 6



After the activity of the weekend, Connie and Shrug used Monday morning, May 15, for slowing down and dealing with various life-management matters—including, in Shrug’s case, getting his startlingly luxuriant head of hair trimmed. They cleaned their houses, did some grocery shopping, and took care of phone calls and bill paying. At 8:30 a.m. Connie interrupted his activities to call John Jameson and asked him to establish a very clear financial protocol for the use of the funds that Norman Wilkinson had provided. He had hardly hung up the phone when George Fielding called to report that an inquiry with the Herald and Examiner office had determined that the Connie’s Sunday paper had been delivered at about 6:15. The sun had been up by that time, but the delivery woman said that she had seen no one on Palmer Street. Sundays, she had added, are the quietest day of the week. Fielding and Connie could both do the math. Assuming that the delivery woman hadn’t transported

the squirrel herself, the perpetrator had had about two hours to insert the bloody warning in the newspaper. He (or she) had done it in full daylight, but at a time of day when few people would be about.

“How long do you suppose it takes to put a dead squirrel in a folded-up newspaper?” Connie asked.

“I’m not sure. Only a few minutes I’d guess. The more important questions revolve about the squirrel—when was it killed? how was it killed? are there any traces of blood or the missing head near your mail box? I’ll be looking into those questions this morning. And someone from this office will visit your neighbors to ask if they saw anyone walking about early yesterday.

Given the messiness of the warning, this person had to have been carrying a bag or a box, I’d guess.”

Connie thanked Fielding for his efforts and then turned the conversation to the question that had weighed most heavily on his mind as he had lain in bed that morning. “If we assume that the squirrel is someone’s way of saying ‘stop probing into the death of Vince d’Amato,’ then we have to assume that that someone has something to hide. The likeliest thing that someone wants hidden is the truth about that death. And the only kind of truth worth sending warnings about is that someone else is the murderer. So I’m inclined to think that that’s what the warning is: a

clear sign that Jason Bigelow was wrongly convicted.”

Connie waited for Fielding to comment, but the deputy was silent. So the retired philosopher resumed his analysis. “But there’s another possibility, less likely but worth considering. Maybe Shrug and I are stirring up something we don’t know about – something, for example, related to the alibis that people offered, something that has nothing to do with Vince d’Amato’s death but that, if revealed, would bring embarrassment on someone. What do you think?”

George Fielding took a moment before replying. “You’re a complicater. I’m a simplifier. You’re theoretically right, of course. Maybe someone’s dirty laundry is in danger of being aired. But I like the straight-forward approach. If something needs fixed,”—three decades in central Ohio had not yet inoculated Connie against the jolt that locution brought upon him—“I like to fix it, not fret about what might be connected to it. And I prefer to go with the odds. It seems to me that the likeliest explanation for the warning is that you are threatening the safety of the real killer. I don’t know how you’re doing it, and I take it you don’t either. But from the point of view of the person I’ll call the ‘real killer,’ the fact that you may not—and I emphasize may: the real killer doesn’t know how much you do or don’t know—the fact that you may not have identified him yet is irrelevant. All that’s important is that you’re

digging. And that if you keep digging, you may find something. So you and Shrug need to be careful. I'm assuming you'll keep me posted."

Connie acknowledged the force of George Fielding's argument. He was pleased that Fielding agreed that the dead squirrel tilted the balance of probabilities towards Jason Bigelow's innocence. He concluded the call by thanking the deputy for the up-date. But nothing in the conversation allayed his concern that his life had suddenly become more vulnerable.

At mid-morning, looking for a diversion from the mindlessness of vacuuming, Connie placed a call to the Columbus office of the Ohio Hardware Retailers Association to see if he could make an appointment with Andrew Stonehurst for the following day. The woman who took his call seemed modestly amused by the request, but said that Mr. Stonehurst would be at the Association's offices all day on Tuesday and that Connie could come by at his convenience. Only after he had hung up did Connie realize that the woman had not inquired about the purpose of the appointment.

He then called Shrug, both to fill him in on the new information about the time of the delivery of the newspaper and—hoping that Shrug had managed to get an appointment with Thomas Kerwin on Tuesday—to coordinate a trip to Columbus on that day. Shrug related a mildly funny story about how the Irish accent

of Kerwin's secretary had briefly led him to wonder

if Kerwin was engaged in lewd behavior—he had misheard “meeting” as “mating”—but happily confirmed that he had a 3:00 p.m. appointment with the attorney. Since Connie had been assured that he could meet with Andrew Stonehurst whenever he wished, and since both destinations were within five blocks of the state house, the friends agreed to leave together for Columbus at 1:30, thereby allowing themselves ample time to find parking and to walk to their respective appointments. Connie noticed, approvingly, that Shrug had scheduled his conversation with Kerwin so as to allow time to get back to Humboldt for supper and Tuesday evening chess club.



A few minutes after the noon bells rang across the town, Connie strolled over to Angelo's, a popular restaurant located on Humboldt's main business street. The weather was finally showing signs of changing, with a cooling breeze and a greyish sky suggesting that rain might be approaching. It was sweatshirt weather for Connie, and the green one he chose featured the sophomoric slogan “Nietzsche is Peachy” across its back. He sat down at his usual table near the rear, pulled out a copy of *The New Republic*, and awaited the waitress.

“What would you like today, Mr. Haydn?” The question startled him out of a piece assessing the candidacy of Vice-President Gore.

“Hi, Mary.” The young woman was Connie’s usual server, and they were familiar enough with each other’s ways to banter. “Today I think I’ll go with the turkey and bacon club and a light ale. And afterwards a little of that good butterscotch pudding.” For Connie it was a typical order. He didn’t think much about food and, unlike Shrug, was no cook. As long as the fare was wholesome and conventionally tasty, he was happy.

“I hear that you and Mr. Speaker are looking into Mr. d’Amato’s death,” she said. It was more a question than a declaration. And by lingering at the table, Mary showed she wanted to talk about the investigation.

“We are,” Connie replied. Then he suddenly smiled. “And maybe you can help.” This remark too was in part a question rather than a declaration. But Connie was hopeful, for as he suddenly realized, a waitress at a locally popular restaurant was likely to know lots of people. “Mr. Speaker and I are talking with folks who knew Vincent d’Amato and Jason Bigelow. Our assignment—and I guess I can call it that—is to explore the possibility that Jason didn’t kill Vince.” Connie was choosing his words with some care, both because he didn’t want to prejudice anything that Mary might say and because the restaurant was far

from empty and, given human nature, anyone who could overhear the conversation would almost surely be trying to tune in.

He continued. “Two names have come up that we know nothing about, and we’d like to talk with them. One is Maria Tedesco. The other is Billy Esterhazy. I don’t think either lives in Humboldt, but since you meet lots of people, I was wondering if you knew something about them.”

“I’m sorry. I don’t know either of them.”

“Well, I guess it was worth a try.” Connie knew that sounded lame.

Mary confirmed the order and then left the table. Connie looked around to see if he could identify those who might have been trying to eavesdrop, but everyone was assuming poses of total innocence. Smiling to himself, he returned to The New Republic. It was only after he had finished the article on Al Gore and several book reviews that he realized his ale had not been brought to the table. He looked about for Mary and, not seeing her, beckoned to another waitress to ask her to ask Mary to come to his table. This in turn led to some to-ing and fro-ing and to some whispered conversations near the entrance to the kitchen. Finally, the owner of the restaurant, Angelo Crespini himself, arrived at Connie’s table to apologize and to say that Mary had disappeared.

“I am very sorry for this terrible inconvenience. I don’t know where she has gone. And as you surely know, it’s very unlike her. Please let me know your order again and you can have the meal on the house. I’m so sorry.”

Connie was only partly listening to Angelo. Instead, his mind was whirring. He thought it likely that something he had said had upset the waitress. And that meant that he needed to talk with her. She had, after all, seemed unusually interested in the investigation.

“No, don’t worry about the meal. I know this wasn’t your fault and I’ll be returning regularly. But right now I need to talk with Mary. She may have gone home. Do you know where she lives?”

As Mary’s employer, Angelo had that information on a card, and he needed but a minute or two to fetch it. the record. He has this information on a card. “Is he the last person in Humboldt to keep employee information without a computer?” Connie wondered. Angelo set the card before Connie, who adjusted his glasses to read it. As he had expected, it contained her address—a small apartment building near the park. But it was the name that seized his attention. Mary German! In a flash Connie realized that he had now identified Maria Tedesco.

He quickly left the restaurant, almost oblivious to Angelo’s protestations, and walked quickly toward the

park. Once a high school athlete and still a swift if irregular jogger, Connie had always been in good condition. He could safely have run, but he suspected that the sight of a bearded man in his mid-sixties racing through Humboldt would have been unsettling to too many people, and he never liked drawing attention to himself. His slightly slower pace might be costing him a minute or two, but Connie suspected that the loss of time wouldn't matter. Either Maria Tedesco would be waiting in her apartment, regretful that she had fled the restaurant and now willing to talk. Or she would be gone—hiding somewhere and perhaps hard to find. When Connie reached her apartment, there was no answer to his knock, and the manager reported having seen Miss German leave hastily about ten minutes earlier. Connie had his answer. He promptly called the sheriff's office to let George Fielding know that Maria Tedesco had been identified and briefly located.



Even though Sandra Peabody's name had emerged in the investigation as early as the visit to the historical museum, and even though Teresa Espinosa's tale had then given her and her husband a reason to dislike Vince d'Amato (and therefore to underscore the oddness of her presence at d'Amato's on the day of the

fire), she had thus far stayed beyond the range of the friends' casual interrogations. Perhaps this neglect—and Shrug saw it as “neglect”—was no more than happenstance, coupled with the need to talk first with persons whose involvement with the death and conviction was more central. But on Monday afternoon Shrug moved to correct the omission.

When he and Connie had decided at their Saturday night war room session that the task of approaching Sandra Peabody (and, if necessary, her husband) should be his, this was in part because Shrug had no past connections with Bill Peabody and thus carried none of the baggage of a long-time collegueship with her husband. In part too it was because Shrug had so enjoyed using deception in questioning Rita Grabek that he relished the opportunity to practice his skills at duplicity on someone else. And duplicity seemed the wisest course, Connie and Shrug having agreed that they were likelier to get a good reading of Sandra Peabody if they did not let her know that they were aware of how Vince d'Amato had double-crossed her husband and her.

When Shrug called Sandra Peabody shortly after lunch, he instantly became aware of her chilliness. Yes, she had heard what he and Professor Haydn were doing. Yes, she knew of stories that Jason Bigelow had been wrongly convicted. But she had had nothing to

do with Mr. d'Amato's death, and she was unhappy—"at least she didn't say resented" Shrug thought to himself—that anyone might think otherwise. If necessary, she added, she could hire an attorney to prevent Shrug from pestering her. With that remark, she stopped, either confident that she had carried the day or waiting for Shrug's rejoinder.

"I guess the era of easy cooperation is over," Shrug thought to himself. So without hesitation he switched tactics. "I can understand your reluctance to talk with me. But you need to know that Professor Haydn and I are working with the full knowledge of—and much cooperation from—the sheriff's office." How easy it is to stretch the truth, he thought to himself with a pained smile. "And you also need to know that we have reports that you and your husband had reason to be very angry with Mr. d'Amato. I think you might want to talk with me in a setting that is still informal and off the record." Shrug was pleased with that last turn of phrase. He didn't like exercising psychological intimidation, but he had found over his long career that it was sometimes a handy weapon.

After a pause, Sandra Peabody relented. "Please come over at about 2:30 this afternoon." Her tone was still chilly, but entree had been secured.

The Peabodys lived in a development of handsome homes near the campus. Their neighbors were local

doctors and lawyers, and professional people who commuted each day to Columbus. Shrug arrived promptly at 2:30, having placed a bet with himself that Bill Peabody would be present. He was wrong. Sandra Peabody invited him in with a cool nod of her head. (“She’s angry, somewhat scared, and feeling trapped,” Shrug thought.)

“It’s your meeting and your agenda,” she said after they had sat down. “How can I help you?” The stiff posture and frigid tone spoke volumes.

“Okay,” Shrug began, sucking in an audible breath. His thought was crisper: pit coolness against coolness. “You already know about how Connie Haydn and I have been asked to look into the circumstances of the death of Vincent d’Amato. Because the newspaper listed you as one of the people who had visited Mr. d’Amato on the day of his death, I would have wanted to talk with you as part of the general inquiry. But I have been told—and I won’t say by whom—that Mr. d’Amato double-crossed you and your husband in a transaction that was itself rather dodgy. I have good reason to believe the story to be true.” This was a bit of a bluff: Shrug’s best evidence was Sandra Peabody’s sudden change of mind about meeting him. “I’m sure you want to avoid having this information become public. I’m sure you want to remove any doubts I might have about your innocence. Finally—and this is

important—though I’m working with the authorities, I’m not working for them. I’m interested in what happened on June 1, 1996, not in anything else.” Shrug knew that that wasn’t strictly so, and he knew too that he was in no position to offer guarantees that he would keep to himself any information that he learned. So he just kept plowing ahead, hoping to nudge Sandra Peabody into talking. “I’d like to ask you some questions. May I?”

The softening of tone in those last two sentences brought a flicker of relaxation to the face of Sandra Peabody. She offered Shrug some coffee and then volunteered that she’d try to be helpful.

“Why did you visit Vince d’Amato on the day he died?” Shrug began.

“Well, I didn’t know he was going to die later that day of course, so it was just an unlucky coincidence that I went by that very day.” Sandra Peabody was still wary. “I had been trying for months to get Mr. d’Amato to talk with me on the phone, and he wouldn’t. So when I learned that he was laid up with a leg injury and couldn’t get out, I figured I had him pinned down so that he couldn’t avoid seeing with me. And I was right: I phoned him to say I was coming and then I went.”

“But you haven’t answered my question.”

“I was getting to that. Bill and I had given money to

Mr. d'Amato to buy up some of the land near the old Craigmiller Arsenal. The bastard bought the land and then began hedging on giving us our share when he re-sold some of it. I went to his house to try to convince him to be fair to us.”

“That can't be the whole story,” Shrug said calmly, his round face essentially expressionless. “When people have grievances like that, they turn to lawyers. You couldn't, could you.” That was definitely a statement, not a question.

“No. And you know why, damn it. Bill was not supposed to know what he did about the arsenal sale. He got the information from his brother-in-law in Washington We had supposed ...”—here Sandra Peabody hesitated, but stopped short of crying—“we had supposed that we could make a little money from this knowledge and that no one would be hurt. We figured that Bill shouldn't buy the land himself because someone might notice the connection with his brother-in-law. We figured I shouldn't buy the land because I'm a realtor. Vince d'Amato seemed a good partner because—oh, this sounds so stupid now but it seemed to make sense back then—because he was somewhat shady and would be comfortable with pulling it off.”

Having gotten over the hump of confessing her criminal intentions, Sandra Peabody suddenly seemed more relaxed. “Vince D'Amato was good at spinning

stories, and we weren't interested in a quick payoff, and so we had no idea there was a problem until a few years later, when that bastard stopped seeing us and then refused to give us any portion of the profits he was realizing from the sale of some of the properties he had bought. It was our money he was using, at least in part. And it was a sizeable amount—about fifty thousand dollars.”

Shrug was impressed. Although not massive, the sum was large enough to matter to the Peabodys—and large enough, he quickly thought, to make murder a plausible response to betrayal.

Sandra Peabody continued her story. “D’Amato figured there was little we could do. Any effort on our part to use legal authority against him would certainly have revealed that we had been trying to pull a fast one. We weren’t sure what the legal implications would be of trying to profit from government information we shouldn’t have had. But we could be absolutely confident that it would ruin the career and life of Bill’s brother-in-law. In the end, we didn’t want that to happen. But we kept pleading with d’Amato, finally just to give us our money back. He wouldn’t even do that. And that’s why I went to visit him on the day of the fire.”

Shrug thought about the tale for a moment. There were several aspects of it he wanted to explore. He felt he needed to proceed cautiously.

“How was Mr. d’Amato feeling that afternoon?”

“He was kind of jovial—and not just because he was once again telling me that if we thought he’d treated them unfairly, we should get a lawyer. He said he was expecting someone later.”

“Do you know who?”

“No.”

“When did you visit him?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe about 3:00. But don’t hold me to that guess. I really wasn’t thinking well that day.”

“Did you see anyone else? We know that d’Amato had several visitors that afternoon.”

“Yeah, I’d been surprised to read that. No, I didn’t see anybody.”

“Did d’Amato seem, well, ambulatory? Could he get around easily?”

Sandra Peabody thought that question over. “I think he came to the door when I rang the bell, but my clearest memory of my visit is that he was hobbling badly. His leg was taped up. Or maybe he had a cast on it. I don’t recall. I know he was sitting down in his big easy chair as we talked. I walked around a lot and got rather heated at times. He just sat there, pretty contented as far as I could tell, letting me exhaust myself and waiting for the visitor he expected.”

“Do you know anything about why those other visitors were there that day?”

“No, of course not.” She was suddenly irritated again. “I don’t even remember who they were.”

Shrug reminded her of the names.

“I have no idea why those people wanted to see Vince d’Amato. I don’t even know who Maria Tedesco is.”

Shrug decided to change directions again. “What did you do that evening? Rita Grabek—she’s the reporter who wrote about the fire in the Herald and Examiner—said that you had an alibi for the time when the fire started. Would you tell me what it was?”

Sandra Peabody’s eyes narrowed. “Alibi! I don’t need an alibi. I didn’t start any fire.”

“That’s really not an answer, Mrs. Peabody.” I missed my calling, thought Shrug. I should have been a prosecuting attorney.

“My husband and I were home together that night. That’s all I remember. It was an uneventful night at home.” She didn’t exactly appear defeated, but she spoke with less spirit.

Shrug considered that answer. As alibis go, it was of course lame. But when Sandra Peabody had given it to Rita Grabek, Grabek had had no reason to know that Bill Peabody had been double-crossed by Vince d’Amato. That was probably why she had been willing to accept it—that, and the fact that she was already zeroing in on Jason Bigelow.

“As you know,” he said, “Jason Bigelow was con-

victed of murdering Vince d'Amato. Do you have any thoughts about that?" Shrug was couching his question broadly, curious about how Sandra Peabody might interpret it.

"Well, we thought he deserved it—d'Amato, that is. There were no tears for him in this family, and no hypocritical expressions of regret. We weren't going to recover our money, and so we weren't sorry to see him punished. As for Jason Bigelow, I didn't know much about him and saw no reason to think he wasn't guilty—that's what you and Connie are trying to do isn't it? Show that Bigelow was innocent? Well, I can't help you. Especially since he wouldn't use an alibi he said he had. That sounds awfully guilty, don't you think?"

Shrug was tempted to say that there was mounting evidence that Bigelow had not murdered d'Amato, but he confined himself to the assurance—probably not credible, he realized—that Connie and he were just trying to get the facts straight, whether they damaged Bigelow or not.

"Sure," said Sandra Peabody caustically. "And when you see Professor Haydn"—the title dripped with contempt—"please let him know how much Bill and I appreciate being accused of murder by a colleague." Clearly Mrs Peabody was once again angry—even pugnacious. "By the way, why didn't he come to question me? Is he too sensitive? Too fragile?"

Some questions are best left unanswered, and since Shrug had gotten most of the information he wanted and had no stomach for once again trying to manipulate Sandra Peabody's moods, he moved toward the door. But then he stopped.

"I do have one last question, Mrs. Peabody. You say that Vince d'Amato had a reputation for being 'shady'—I think that was your word. Would you tell me what you had in mind?"

"I'd like you to leave now," she replied with energy. "If you want to know more about that little bastard's shenanigans, you should ask Father Gonzalez. Good-bye."

Since Shrug had already moved through the front door, it was easy for her to literally slam the door in his face. He had little sympathy for the Peabodys. They'd clearly been cheated. But only because they'd tried to be cheaters. That's justice, he thought. And he felt a smile come to his lips as he pondered another point: for a second time, the name of Father Diego Gonzalez, priest at Our Lady of the Sorrows Roman Catholic Church, had come into the purview of the investigation. He now merited attention.



At 7:30 that evening Connie Haydn walked down the winding yew-lined path to the “residence”—the college-owned structure that Beatrice Morrison called home. The building was built in the Georgian style and had served as residence for at least three presidents of Humboldt. The broad swath of grass before it—“the green,” as it was called by everyone associated with the college—had a celebrated past, having served as the site for both extravagant pranks (most famously as landing pad for a hijacked helicopter) and memorable ceremonies (most famously the conferring of an honorary degree on Sir Winston Churchill). Connie shielded himself from the rain with a small black umbrella, and he wished he had worn shoes likelier to repel the water. But the weather couldn’t dull his excitement, for he was looking forward to seeing President Morrison’s book collection. And while she herself might have been most interested in showing off her newest acquisitions, especially the Hume, Connie was contemplating the prospect of seeing some of the older works as well. For, as he had realized as he drove over to campus, it had been years since he had been in “the residence” and his visit on this evening was probably only the third time he had ever entered its walls. “That’s sad,”

he thought. “Thirty years at Humboldt and only three invitations to the president’s home.”

Beatrice Morrison met him at the door, beaming as only a successful and respected executive can beam after a day of disciplined and productive work. Having shed his raincoat, Connie accepted her offer of a glass of sherry—he had avoided beer at dinner in anticipation of this offer—and stepped into the entranceway. It was much as he remembered it—well-lighted, spacious, and embracing. If a room can invite a person in, he thought, this is surely that room. The two academics talked briefly of campus matters and particularly of the approaching Commencement. Then President Morrison ushered Connie into the “library”—she spoke the word with a kind of enthusiastic reverence—where she had laid out the Parkman and Hume for him to examine. He approached the table, pulled on the white gloves that lay beside the books, and then picked up the Parkman.

Connie had not read any Parkman in many years, and he imagined that his colleagues in the History department would be disinclined to think highly of him today. But he recalled enjoying Parkman’s spirited accounts of the eighteenth-century struggle for supremacy in North America, and in any case he was here to appreciate a treasured artifact, not an analysis of imperial conflict. Holding the book in his hands

brought back to Connie the sense of awe he had felt when he first used the Widener Library. He was inclined to romanticize about books, and stroking the pages of the Parkman reminded him of an extraordinarily selfish thought that had entered his mind while he used the resources of the Bodleian: thousands of benefactors and thousands of collectors and thousands of scholars have labored for centuries just so I might enjoy this moment.

“It’s lovely,” he said, though he knew that his demeanor was conveying a sense of gratitude and pleasure that his words could not hope to carry.

“I know,” President Morrison replied. “There’s something deeply tactile about books.

It’s even—and I can say this because we’re both in our sixties—something sensual.” She paused, and although Connie was slightly surprised, he also found himself in agreement. “It is possible,” he mused, “to eroticize books.”

Connie set the Parkman down and picked up the Hume. Morrison took a step forward. The frontispiece bore the date of 1754, and as Connie slowly turned the pages he savored again the vigorous yet sober prose of his favorite philosopher. “Back then,” he remarked, “the clean line between the philosopher and historian had not been drawn. David commanded both domains. What a great man!”

“It’s insightful, and yet wonderfully clinical,” Morrison said, and Connie found himself immediately assenting.

After examining the Hume for a while, Connie asked if he might look at books on the shelves. As he expected, Morrison was delighted to give him an opportunity to explore the collection. “I’ve got a meeting in the lounge down the hall with the Chemistry department at 8:00, but you may stay as long as you wish.” Connie understood that that was an invitation meant to be declined, and so he said that evening plans would oblige him to leave before 8:00 anyway. But he had a few minutes left, and so while President Morrison prepared the hors d’oeuvres for the chemists (she was widely admired for tending to many of the smaller hospitality functions herself), he passed slowly in front of cases of books on each wall of the library, appreciating the beauty of many of the volumes even when he didn’t recognize their titles.

At 7:55 he left the library. Morrison was in the hall, straightening a painting of one of Humboldt’s early presidents. Connie thanked her for allowing him to see the books.

“When we talked at the funeral on Saturday,” she replied, “you said that you’d be appreciative of relevant information. One never knows what’s relevant, but here goes. Yesterday I remembered an odd conversation I

had with Jason Bigelow, and thanks to this letter”—she handed him a copy of a letter—“I can date it.”

Connie looked through it quickly. It was short, addressed to Jason Bigelow, signed by the president, and dated April 17, 1996. It declared the president’s gratitude for Mr. Bigelow’s interest, promised him that she would keep him in mind, and expressed her pleasure that he was so eager to assist the college.

President Morrison continued when Connie looked at her again. “This letter was a reply to an odd conversation I had had a day or two earlier with Mr. Bigelow. We sat together at the monthly Rotary meeting, and he asked what it took to become a trustee of Humboldt College. Not being sure of where he was going with that question, I gave a kind of generic description of ‘trustee-dom.’ He then said something to the effect that he would soon come into lots of money. I wish I could remember all of this more clearly, but what he was getting at was that he hoped, once he was much richer, that he could be considered for a position on the board. I was flabbergasted, though I hope I didn’t show it. And this letter was my non-committal reply. Maybe it’s unrelated to your investigation, but I thought you’d want to know.

“This matter just gets weirder and weirder,” Connie said. “I really have no idea what it means, but thanks for sharing it.” Then he corrected himself. “I guess it

means at least that we'll need to dig deeper into Jason Bigelow's activities shortly before the fire."

"It sort of sounded that way to me too," Morrison replied.

"I'm glad you brought the investigation up," Connie suddenly said, even as the first chemist arrived at the door. "Something has turned up that you might be able to help us with. At least we hope so. Vincent d'Amato left some coded cards in his desk drawer and..."

"Coded?" Morrison asked. "Like a spy code?"

"Nothing that tricky, thank goodness. It was actually a musical code, and Shrug puzzled out the meaning of the six coded words. It turns out that all six were names of college towns—Athens, Ohio; Grinnell, Iowa; Manhattan, Kansas; Portland, Oregon; Williamsburg, Virginia; and Williamstown, Massachusetts. And there is a clue as to what links them. According to the card on the top of the pile they are all connected in some way with IBM. We're trying to figure out what links IBM with these colleges—investment, research, recruiting, endowment, publicity are possibilities that come to mind. And while we're planning to do our own homework on this, we thought you might know something through your presidential contacts that might help us. Do you know anything about IBM and these colleges?"

"Do you think it's related to Vince d'Amato's death?" Morrison asked.

“We don’t know. Right now we’re just pursuing leads—and hoping we’re not chasing hares.”

President Morrison paused to think. “No. Offhand I can’t think of a connection. But I can make a phone call or two. Maybe I’ll have an answer in a day or so. I’ll let you know.”

More chemists were beginning to dribble in now—Humboldt had an unusually large department—and so Connie said a quick goodbye. I’ve only been retired a year, he mused to himself, and already a department has faces I don’t recognize. He wasn’t exactly sad at that thought. But it was not one to make him happy. On the other hand, he was oddly pleased that yet another piece of unexpected information had fallen into their laps. Yes, he thought as he set out into the rain, Shrug and he must look more probingly at Jason Bigelow.