

Phyllis the bright, when frankly she desired

Thyrsis, her sweet heart, to have expired ;

Sweet, thus fell she a-crying,

Die, for I am a-dying.

# Die, For I Am A-Dying

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## Chapter 1

Boston boasts the greatest number of colleges and universities per capita of any city in the United States. It also has the country's oldest subway system. Both facts pertain to the story I am about to relate.

In the late 1950's the M.T.A. or Metropolitan Transit Authority (an institution immortalized in the song of that title by the Kingston Trio) decided to expand the so-called Green Line out toward the suburbs. Two main alternatives came under consideration: southwest to Waban or northwest to Riverside. Proponents of the Riverside option pointed out that several dozen trains ran daily between Boston and Waban whereas Riverside remained unconnected by public transit to the city described by Oliver Wendell Holmes as the hub of the universe. This argument carried the day and the Green Line pushed its way northwest.

Then the Boston and Albany Railroad, citing declining revenues as America's postwar love affair with the automobile made itself felt in Massachusetts, cut off rail service between Boston and Waban, leaving only one

commuter run in the morning and afternoon. Waban became like an inland port, left high and dry when the river changes its course.

These decisions had an emphatic impact on The Cloister, an exclusive women's college located in Waban. The great social issues of the 60's and 70's—the student movement, the civil rights movement, the anti-war effort, women's liberation—brought together students from institutions both august and humble: Harvard, M.I.T., Boston University, Boston College, Tufts, Emerson, Huntington. But throughout these tumultuous times the young women of The Cloister remained, well, cloistered.

One could, in fact, travel from Boston to Waban, as I did twice a week during the 1973-1974 academic year. I would walk from my apartment near the Boston Public Garden to Copley Station, where I took the Green Line to Woodland and then waited for a municipal bus that would drop me a half mile from the campus of The Cloister. Occasionally I would see one or two students during my journey, but for the most part the population of The Cloister remained quietly sequestered, far from the fray.

I worked at The Cloister as an untitled replacement for a member of the music department on maternity leave, teaching a mandatory, non-credit course for music majors. Essentially my job was to detect any short-

comings in their overall musicianship and to correct these deficiencies in individual tutorials through whatever means I saw fit.

For the most part these young women came well prepared with keyboard and sight-reading skills. In order to challenge a fine pianist named Abby Fox, for example, I had her read Brahms symphonies with me four-hands at the keyboard. Another student, Penny Lapworth, proved remarkably adept at sight singing. When I asked where she'd developed this skill she described the daily regimen at the British choir school she'd attended for a year.

All the young women shared a virtual ignorance of music of the twentieth century, a deficiency I eventually attributed to the influence of Newton Falgarwood, the department chairman, who detested twentieth-century music yet insisted on teaching the course in that area as a mark of his broadmindedness. (Privately he held the opinion that western culture, especially music, had reached both its pinnacle and the beginning of its decline in the Renaissance.)

In exasperation I would complain to my students, "The twentieth century is nearly over, and you've missed it!" I assigned the music majors in my charge to play examples from Bartok's *Mikrokosmos* (they had never heard of it), to sight-read Stravinsky's modest dodecaphonic song, "The

Owl and the Pussycat,” (ditto) and then, having observed how it was put together, to compose a similar work of their own, often with charming results.

In order to obtain this position I was examined by the former department chairman and *eminence gris* Hubert Lamb, who required me to realize a figured bass at sight, read music written in the C clefs, and transpose a chorale—exercises that in the eighteenth-century would have been performed as a matter of course by virtually any keyboard performer but which now could be considered academic tasks seldom encountered outside advanced musicianship courses in a conservatory.

Early in the autumn of 1973 came the installation of Marjorie Clearwater as the tenth president of The Cloister. Ms. Clearwater, a robust, energetic woman who promised in her inaugural address to shake The Cloister out of its dreamy torpor (she didn’t put it quite like that), had been particularly impressed by Jewitt Tower, the most prominent architectural feature of the campus. Upon learning that the tower housed a complete carillon, President Clearwater requested that the bells ring out following her investiture. The request made its way to the music department where it caused considerable consternation since no one there knew how to play the bells which, in any event, had not sounded in recent memory. Pleased to

oblige, I mentioned my college bell ringing experience and offered to take on the task.

In order to play the bells one had to climb six flights of stone stairs arranged in a kind of square spiral around a vertical shaft, in the fashion of the mission tower in Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo." (Just before the film's release, Hitchcock warned the sisters of the mission abbey where the climax of the film had been shot to expect a fair number of tourists looking for a non-existent tower. For while the mission itself was genuine, the vertiginous tower was strictly a studio fabrication.)

The top of the Jewitt Tower stairs opened onto a small chamber housing a practice keyboard, identical to that of the actual carillon but connected to tuned metal bars, somewhat like a xylophone, so that one could in principle perfect a piece of music in private before inflicting it upon the entire campus community. A locked door, to which I had been given a key, gave access to a smaller spiral staircase leading to the actual carillon keyboard, situated at the bottom of the belfry itself. Pianists sit before their instruments, sousaphone players wrap themselves in their instruments, but only the carillonneur sits directly beneath an instrument weighing hundreds of tons.

On the afternoon of the installation, immediately following the investiture, I mounted the six flights of stairs, unlocked the door to the belfry, climbed the spiral staircase, took a seat at the bench, about the same size and shape as an organ bench, and performed a program of more or less appropriate music, occasionally slipping in improvised variations on one of my old college songs.

In contrast to the hefty cylindrical rods—roughly the shape of row-boat oars—with which I had had to contend at Amherst College, the Cloister carillon offered a regular keyboard on which, after getting used to the somewhat stubby keys, one could play as if at a piano or organ. And in contrast to the nine bells whose narrow compass had severely limited my repertoire in college, the Cloister carillon had thirty-two bells (ranging in weight from 80 to 1,600 pounds) allowing one to perform a relatively wide range of pieces.

I guess I shouldn't have expected the carillon, that most public of musical instruments, to remain a secret. At our next tutorial Abby Fox told me she wanted to play the bells. Why not? Certainly her technical competence at the keyboard was beyond question. So at the end of the afternoon, following my last tutorial, we walked to Jewitt Tower and began the long ascent. A lithe, athletic young woman, Abby moved with the ease of a New

England aristocrat, her blonde hair cropped short, her mind darting easily from one subject to another, completely at ease in the refined world of The Cloister.

Along the way I learned a bit about Abby's background. An only child, Abigail Adams Fox had been named by her mother, an ardent feminist who had died in an automobile accident when Abby was only five. Since that time she had been raised by her father, a retired military officer.

"I think he really wanted a son," Abby told me, recalling the endless series of camping trips, mountain hikes and other Outward Bound-like adventures of her youth. "Eventually he came to see that being a tomboy just wasn't my thing."

"But he appreciated your musical talent," I said.

"Yes, I'm grateful for that. I guess you could say that my parents endorsed freedom in the sense that a child of theirs could excel in the field of her choice."

"I didn't see your father at Parents Day," I said as we passed the half-way mark in our climb. Abby didn't reply but when she next turned toward me I saw tears in her eyes.

"Daddy's dying," she said simply. "Cancer."

“I’m sorry,” I said, aware of the inadequacy of these words in the situation. From her earlier remarks I understood that Abby adored her father, and the prospect of life without her only parent must have looked bleak indeed.

Abby brightened as we mounted the final spiral staircase to the carillon console. I had brought along an album of Bach organ preludes and fugues for us to attempt four-hands at the keyboard, with Abby playing the soprano and alto lines and me taking the tenor and pedal parts. Actually these “Eight Little Preludes and Fugues” weren’t by Bach at all (*Echtheit sehr angezweifelt* [authenticity highly doubtful], read the editorial notes), but they provided useful exercises without any unexpected technical challenges.

Together we produced quite a sound—I could not have performed these works at the carillon unassisted—and when we finished Abby’s eyes shone with enthusiasm, a spirit she must have communicated to her fellow music majors for at the end of my next teaching day a delegation of a dozen students declared their desire to “learn the bells,” as one student put it. In the days that followed I led several groups of young women to the top of Jewitt Tower and eventually surrendered my key to Abby, the self-

appointed director of the Guild of Carillonneurs, who began performing every evening according to a schedule that Abby organized and maintained.

On our descent from that initial collaboration I had told Abby about some of my bell-ringing adventures at Amherst. The great prank in those days was to break into the bell tower at night and play the “Mickey Mouse Club Song” on the bells. The campus cops would dutifully roll up in a squad car and wait for the miscreant to emerge, after which they would administer some minor penalty. One Sunday afternoon, the time I regularly performed, some freshmen living in the dorm beside the bell tower—whose afternoon studies I regularly interrupted—persuaded me to end my recital with the “Mickey Mouse Club Song.” In an effort to mend fences I acceded to the request, never suspecting that they had tape recorded the piece. Come midnight, the sound of the familiar Disney melody chimed out over the campus. The patrol car eventually rolled up and the campus cops waited, but to no avail. The exterior of the tower enhanced the verisimilitude of sounds broadcast from loudspeakers of a third-floor dorm room against the stone surface. In these acoustical circumstances there was really no way to distinguish the original from the copy.

Evidently determined that no such shenanigans would occur on her watch, Abby refused to make copies of the carillon key, preferring to make

the nightly ascent herself to insure that the door to the tower console remained locked when not in use. One could still mount the stairs to the practice keyboard, but nobody could activate the actual bells without Abby's consent.

One Tuesday in mid-October, just before mid-term exams, I learned of Abby's death. She had apparently committed suicide by jumping from the top of the stairs into the central shaft of Jewitt Tower. Abby's father had finally succumbed to cancer a week earlier, and Abby's distraught state at our tutorial on the day of his death—an appointment that she had refused to cancel—gave me no reason to doubt the assessment. Members of the Guild of Carillonneurs invited me to join them as we performed a series of Bach chorale preludes on the bells, the eloquence of Bach giving expression to our grief in a way that mere words could not.

## Chapter 2

On the Tuesday after mid-term exams in October I discovered a flyer posted on the front entrance of the music building: “First Annual Autumn Appreciation Day. All classes are cancelled and the library is locked. Go out and enjoy the splendor of New England in the fall.”

“What’s this all about?” I asked a passing student.

“President Clearwater has decided to start a new tradition,” she said. “Isn’t it great? It means I don’t have to take my counterpoint test.”

“So there was no advance warning?” I asked.

“No. That’s the whole idea. Nobody is supposed to know when it’s going to happen.”

“But presumably it has to be while the foliage is near its height. Otherwise you couldn’t very well appreciate the autumn.”

Another student joined the conversation. “I like the idea of a day off, but it’s a good thing it didn’t come during mid-terms. It would have messed up the whole schedule.”

I couldn't help thinking of The Unexpected Hanging paradox. In a particular kingdom a man has been condemned to hang by the end of the week but the king assures him that the hanging will come as a surprise. The man, a competent logician, as people always seem to be in this kind of story, reasons that he cannot be killed. For if Saturday night arrived and he was still alive, he would necessarily have to be hanged on Sunday in order for the king's command to be fulfilled. But the king had also promised that the event would be a surprise, and if the prisoner knew he would have to hang on Sunday, the element of surprise would have been effectively removed. By the same reasoning, he reckons that he cannot not be hanged on Saturday, because if Friday night rolled around and he was still alive, the element of surprise would again have been removed. Continuing to reason backwards, the man decides he cannot not be killed at all, and consequently is completely surprised when the hangman appears for him on Wednesday. I didn't know whether President Clearwater was acquainted with the extensive body of literature dealing with this paradox, but I imagined that if she really intended this to be an annual affair, someone would eventually make the connection.

"Doesn't The Cloister already have an awful lot of traditions?" I asked the first student.

“Well the year begins with Flower Sunday, where each big sister gives her first-year little sister a bouquet of flowers.”

“And don’t forget Hoop-Rolling on May Day,” said the second student.

“They really roll hoops?” I asked.

“Oh, yes,” she assured me. “And the winner gets tossed into the pond.”

“And she’s supposed to be the first one in her class to get married,” said the first girl.

As I entered the music building I recalled other traditions I’d heard about at women’s colleges. Vassar had a 150-foot long daisy chain carried to commencement by the comeliest members of the sophomore class. Barnard had Midnight Breakfast on the night before final exams, where the faculty would prepare a repast for the students in the gymnasium. On May Day at Bryn Mawr members of the senior class would go to wake the president of the college. Smith College had Illumination Night, where the campus was lit only by colored paper lanterns. Mount Holyoke, where President Clearwater had served before coming to The Cloister, had held Mountain Day for more than a century. In the absence of local mountains, Autumn Appreciation Day would have to do as a substitute. But everybody at

Mount Holyoke knew about Mountain Day. I had a feeling that the conservative music department faculty might be less enthusiastic about the unexpected interruption than the young women I had encountered.

Sure enough, grumbling about the unanticipated “tradition” filled the department meeting room. A sign on the faculty bulletin board announced a faculty meeting, made possible by the sudden suspension of classes. Unlike most music departments I had known, which generally held weekly, or at least bi-weekly meetings, the music faculty at The Cloister entrusted administration of the department to its chairman, Newton Falgarwood.

Without a regular meeting time built into everyone’s schedule, each meeting was essentially *ad hoc*, and therefore exceedingly difficult to arrange, a situation which seemed to please everyone.

Professor Falgarwood called the meeting to order with a request that the agenda be approved and that the minutes of the previous meeting, which went all the way back to the preceding spring, be read aloud, a stultifying process that gave me ample opportunity to regard the head of the department.

Newton Falgarwood was the only chairman, nay the only musicologist, of my acquaintance to affect a goatee. *Affect* seemed to be the appropriate term, for combined with elaborately waved silver hair, the pointed

goatee, along with thick eyebrows pointed up at the ends, contributed to the impression, presumably cultivated, of the scarcely-concealed sexuality of a cloven-footed satyr.

As for my own rather scruffier beard, Sheri had taken matters in hand shortly after our arrival in Boston by the simple expedient of observing men on the street until she found one whose beard pleased her and then asking him for the name of his hair stylist. This turned out to be Joseph (accent on the second syllable, *s'il vous plaît*), who worked at Continental East, a *haute couture* salon catering to girls who wanted to look like Yvette Mimieux, men who wanted to look like Mark Spitz, and peculiar women of indeterminate age who melted under Joseph's ministrations. During my visits I saw teeny-boppers hold pictures from Screen Gems magazine next to their heads and implore Joseph and his colleagues to make them into women; horse-faced farmer girls who came in looking like slatterns and went out with absolutely stunning coiffures resting somewhat uncomfortably on their horsey faces; and once in awhile, a truly beautiful woman coming in to become a goddess.

During one visit the woman in the next chair (not a goddess but definitely peculiar) hollered over, "How long does that beard last?" No answer. (How can you answer a question like that, anyway?) Then Joseph turned

and inquired in a punctilious tone, "Were you addressing us, Madame?" "Isn't that awfully expensive?" she rasped. "The beard maintains its well-groomed appearance for about eight weeks, Madame." Once I had tried trimming the beard myself. Joseph did not approve. "You really butchered it on the side," he commented. "I can cut it off, but I can't put it back on. Don't do that again, you hear?" Joseph took a proprietary interest in my foliage.

The minutes having been read and approved, the chairman disposed of a few lesser matters before coming to the actual reason for the meeting. The Flemish organist, Ton de Klerck, would be coming to the campus to perform an all-Sweelinck recital in December. Satisfied murmurs around the table greeted this announcement, for which I had difficulty feigning enthusiasm. I had sat through enough of these recondite presentations, including an all-Obrecht concert at an American Musicological Society meeting.

Next Professor Falgarwood announced that things were moving along nicely in the preparation of a Festschrift for Hubert Lamb, publication having been secured and a number of scholarly articles received.

"And what will you contribute?" asked Olive Earle, the only woman on the faculty. Her bright red hair might have led the conventional-minded

to expect vivacity, even sexual openness. Her stark white blouse, buttoned to the neck, and further fastened with a silver bar brooch just below the chin, seemed designed to squelch any such expectations before they had an opportunity to get dangerously out of hand. Miss Earle (no Ms. for her), although probably no older than forty, seemed determined to wear the old-fashioned designation of spinster as a badge of honor.

Falgarwood, evidently pleased by Miss Earle's effort to curry favor, smiled and said that he planned to offer a modest paper on "The Renaissance in Music: The Beginning or The End?" I had little doubt where his sympathies would lie.

Finally, the chairman asked us to consider a petition from the music majors asking whether the music library could remain open in the evenings during exam weeks. "Isn't the music library open every evening?" I asked.

"Of course not," said Miss Earle. "Miss Dunfuddle needs to get home to feed her aged aunt."

"Wouldn't it be possible to have someone else man the library during these periods, so that students could consult the books and listen to the records?"

“Miss Dunfuddle has a degree in librarianship,” said Miss Earle in a tone clearly indicating that this should be the final word on the subject. I noticed that she didn’t say “library science.”

“Wouldn’t such a measure require expenditures from the departmental budget?” another faculty member asked.

“I don’t think we could expect volunteers to handle a position of this degree of responsibility,” said the chairman. “Shall we put it to a vote?”

In the event, everyone in the department opposed the petition except for me. I had some learning to do. “The music department has a long-standing tradition of unanimity,” Miss Earle instructed me in a correct but icy tone. I obediently changed my vote, allowing us to proceed to the principal business of the day.

“President Clearwater has requested every department in the college to consider long-range ideas,” Professor Falgarwood said. “She will visit us later in the fall to listen to the results of our deliberations. I consider this a forward-thinking move on the president’s part and I invite your participation.”

A substantial silence followed this invitation, the department having been administered under a form of enlightened despotism for so long that its members were unaccustomed to having their opinions consulted for an-

anything beyond the most minor details. The counterpoint teacher finally weighed in. “I for one would hate to see us meddle with a curriculum that has served us well for as long as I can remember. I believe that my own courses form an integral part of that curriculum and I would frankly oppose any measure that might interfere with their continued success.”

This speech set the tone for those that followed, as each member of the music faculty defended his, or in the unique case of Miss Earle her, domain, pointing proudly to long-standing tradition and their essential role in maintaining it. Miss Earle defended the traditional music survey course on the grounds that young women “find security in having everything in its place.” (And here I thought that sexism was confined to porcine chauvinism of the masculine gender.) As Professor Falgarwood gazed about the table with a satisfied smile I felt impelled to speak.

“I do not wish to take issue with any of you,” I said politely, “but I believe there are two areas in which the music department could serve its students better.” Looks of incredulity about the table ought to have warned me to abandon this reckless line but I continued undaunted. “My experience with the music majors suggests that we should strengthen our offerings in twentieth-century music, particularly developments after the Second World War which seem entirely outside their ken. I also think that

while we have strong offerings in Western music, our curriculum takes no notice of music of other cultures.”

“I think you’re talking about ethnomusicology,” said the counterpoint teacher. “Surely this is a subject that properly belongs in graduate school, not in an undergraduate curriculum.”

After the rest of the department had had a chance to voice their reservations and objections, Professor Falgarwood looked over to me with an air of sympathy and said, “While I admire your youthful enthusiasm, Axel, as an experienced administrator I need to point out that your ideas, compelling as they may seem to you, would require cutting out other portions of the curriculum, a measure I would be very hesitant to endorse. And of course in the interests of fiscal responsibility, I must point out that any such changes would involve concomitant expenses, and as the departmental budget has been fully allocated in carrying out our current mandate, I fail to see where any additional funding would come from.”

Falgarwood would have adjourned the meeting then and there had I not called his attention to the last item on the agenda, “Other business arising.” “I suppose you have a piece of business to introduce,” he said, somewhat less sympathetically than before.

“I’m wondering whether the department plans any kind of memorial service for Abby Fox,” I said. I could not have produced a more profound attitude of discomfort and embarrassment if I had openly broken wind.

“The young woman committed suicide, I believe,” said that counterpoint teacher, as if this fact in itself sufficed to stifle all further comment.

“Surely this is not a departmental matter,” said Miss Earle, looking to the chairman for confirmation.

“I believe you had Miss Fox as a student,” said Professor Falgarwood, who knew perfectly well that I saw all the music majors in tutorial. “I can understand your personal feelings in the loss of a student, but as department chairman I have the responsibility of putting the interests of our beloved institution above personal feelings. The Cloister would not welcome any measure that might reflect adversely upon the college. Meeting adjourned.”

### Chapter 3

January saw me watching the mail each day for news of either a permanent position as a musicologist or announcements of opportunities to apply for same. I had left Chihuahua State College in California without a job but with a partner, Sheri Kimball, and on balance felt that I had done well by the exchange. Sheri's sense of adventure—she had crossed the continent to be with me—and her easy sensuality, occasionally bordering on wantonness, had helped me overcome my feelings of insecurity at this interruption in my career path.

One evening after dinner we sat in the living room of our apartment and opened the day's mail. Sheri, as was her habit after a day at the editorial office where she worked, wore one of my marathon T-shirts and nothing else, a pleasant sight that compensated for the negative news she shared with me.

Every week I received form letters from universities exclaiming how proud they were to have hired someone other than myself. Perhaps the most offensive such letter came from Washington University. In 1974, with

Affirmative Action Plans and Equal Opportunity Employment in place, it seemed almost incredible that a major university would not only resort to the Old Boy Network to fill a position but publicly proclaim the policy.

Nonetheless, there it was in mimeographed black and white:

*The search process which led to the appointments in music history was not public; i.e., we did not advertise our openings. Nevertheless, we assembled a pool of about forty candidates, mostly through recommendations by individuals known to us in seventeen widely scattered universities with strong doctoral programs in musicology. Most of these candidates impressed our search committee as being indeed very highly qualified young music historians.*

The letter went on for another paragraph without even the traditional ironic benediction (“We are confident that someone of your demonstrated talent will have no difficulty finding a position suited to your qualifications”) and closed with the name, but not the signature, of the music department chairman.

One of my favorite movies, “A Thousand Clowns,” stars Jason Robards, Jr. as a man incapable of fitting into the supposed norms associated with the grey flannel suit. Instead of working, he spends his days watching cruise ships depart from New York harbor, shouting to strangers

on deck, “So long, Charlie, have a wonderful time!” His young nephew, who ended up sharing his apartment when his sister departed under suspicious circumstances, pleads with the Robards character to look for a job.

Evoking his response, I encouraged Sheri to “read me from the want ads,” in this case the monthly job list published by the College Music Society.

“There’s nothing listed for musicologists,” she reported after looking through the listings, but there are a few openings for pianists.”

“Then let’s hear those,” I said.

“University of Utica at Utica,” she read, “Instructor, teach individual and class piano, perform in University Trio, tune department pianos and chairman’s home piano. Terminal degree required. \$7800. Address Mrs. Luella Simpson, Chairperson, Piano Committee, U of U at U, Utica, New York.”

“I don’t know how to tune pianos,” I said. “What else have you got?”

“East Lansing Community College. Assistant Lecturer in Piano, two courses in history of piano literature, master classes for music majors and faculty wives; \$4400 and membership in the Faculty Club; opportunity for private teaching to supplement income. Apply to the Chairman, Professor Harold Hill, ELCC, East Lansing, Michigan.”

“‘Supplement income’ is right. Is there anything else?”

“There’s one right here in Boston. BelCanto School of Voice, Number One, The Fenway, Boston, Massachusetts. Pianist to coach young singers, assist in voice classes, and accompany Miss Portlavois BelCanto (Sr.) in recitals. (“The voice may have faded but the lack of musicianship remains intact.”—*The Boston Globe*), salary negotiable, apply by telephone.”

Even one of these unenviable posts would be an improvement over my experience during the fall, where I attempted to augment my income from The Cloister by accepting a call from Vocational Technical University to grade papers. The university paid \$3 an hour to have a partially-employed college professor correct the several hundred papers that their fully-employed college professor was too busy to read. So I graded papers. The first few hours were amusing: one could take a certain perverse pleasure in learning that someone else’s students were writing silly things in blue books.

*Cesar Franck wrote 25% of the organ repertoire.* (Two papers said this)

*Ravel wrote masculine music, Debussy feminine.*

*There existed a Vicious Triangle (also a Triangle of Hatred) among Verdi, Wagner, and Brahms.*

*Debussy's orchestral prelude depicts a fawn chewing leaves beside a river bed. (Other papers had the fawn coming down the hill on its slender graceful legs. Never mind that Debussy's music was meant to evoke not a fawn, but a *faun*, or horny satyr).*

*The chromatic scale was developed by Wagner because no scale was good enough for him.*

*Berg later opened a school for twelve-tone music.*

*The whole-tone scale comprises the white notes on the piano. (There was almost universal agreement on this.)*

*The scherzo is when you play the piano by sitting on it. (Oddly enough, I really didn't think this was meant to be funny.)*

*Mahler had a thing about death and died shortly after the work was completed.*

As I read on (and on and on), I discovered too much unanimity for this to be simply random errors on the part of the students. They were being fed lies disguised as half-truths by a professor who simply didn't know any better. When I got around to reading the essay questions it became a very discouraging assignment to separate obvious misconceptions from well-worded statements when it was clear that the students had not the

slightest idea what they were saying. (*“The opening of the classical symphony is marked by a deep philosophical content.”*)

Surely there must be a better way to keep a roof over one’s head. If I couldn’t land a permanent position, I hoped to locate temporary part-time work. After all, January was the season when department chairmen looked for nickels to fill vacant slots in their faculties. You stuck a nickel in the slot and out came a semester’s course offerings, neatly wrapped in plastic and conveniently divided into fifty-minute segments—just tear along the perforated tenure line. Of course, everyone pretended that not just any old nickel would do, insisting on seeking out the one perfect nickel to fill their slot. So search committees were formed and job announcements published, with pious gestures toward the Affirmative Action Plan and avowed preference for Indian-head nickels. Naturally standards had to be maintained; no pennies need apply.

But in the end, any old nickel would do; nickels were a dime a dozen. After all was said and done, music departments would grab whatever spare change lay at hand. The University of Wisconsin, for example, nominally an “Equal Opportunity Employer,” after conducting a half-year search and interviewing dozens of women, blacks, Chicanos, and Canadian nickels,

proudly announced that it had hired as dean the man who had been serving as acting dean during the six-month search.

Just before Christmas, Professor Fioratura of Huntington University decided that I was probably worth about five cents and suggested I fill his slot during his eleven-week sabbatical starting April Fool's Day. With an eleven-week sabbatical, you either work very fast or, as in the case of Professor Fioratura, entertain very low ambitions. But a Search Committee still had to be formed and women and blacks and Chicanos and French centimes interviewed, so it wasn't until January that Huntington University was able to announce that any old nickel—to wit, Axel Crochet, bearded musicologist—would do.

After Sheri finished reading the official letter from Huntington University announcing my eleven-week appointment she asked, “How are you going to make that fit with your job at The Cloister?”

“Huntington needs me Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. I've been meeting all my students at The Cloister on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so there won't be any conflict.”

“What do they want you to do?”

“Professor Fioratura has two courses to be covered, Romantic Music and Twentieth-Century Opera.”

“How much can you expect to accomplish in just eleven weeks?”

“Ah, you’ve hit upon the sweet mystery of the trimester system. At Amherst our semesters were eighteen weeks long and even then you felt as if you were racing through the material. Eleven weeks is a joke. Happily I have no long-term accountability. Like a hired gunslinger, I just give it my best shot and then move on.”

Outside the apartment horns honked and brakes squealed as drivers evidently succeeded in avoiding a collision. Probably just as well, although that combination of sounds always made me think of the half year I spent in Paris, where the prelude of horns and brakes was almost invariably followed by the satisfying crunch of metal and the tinkle of broken glass. Who cared? The automobiles, literally called lemons (*citrons*) seemed no more than fragile tin contraptions.

“So I take it you’re going to put off working on your Debussy book while you prepare for teaching these courses?” Sheri said.

“No, I need to keep that going, too. The University of California Press has given me a deadline and I intend to meet it.”

“But isn’t this just your doctoral dissertation?”

“Mostly yes, but there are two chapters I didn’t have a chance to write then that I’d like to include in the book.”

“I don’t know, Axel,” Sheri said. “You seem to have changed since California.”

“How so?”

“Well, it feels as if you work all the time.”

“I certainly didn’t get much work done in California. My last year in graduate school, even while writing my dissertation, I managed to read seventy-five books. The first year in California I read forty-five and my second year, only fifteen.”

“That’s amazing,” Sheri said.

“Yeah, I know. I felt as if my mind was going to seed.”

“No. I meant that you actually count the number of books you read.”

“It seemed like a revealing statistic.”

“So does that mean that the pile of books you keep by the bed is just like another assignment? You have to hurry through each one in order to get to the next?”

“I hadn’t really thought of it like that.”

“I think you were more fun in Chihuahua.”

“I don’t know. I looked at all those guys from Yale and Princeton—really productive scholars—who took jobs in California, discovered the joy

of becoming one with the all, and for all intents and purposes stopped being scholars.”

“Maybe they just found that there were more important things in live than publishing.”

“You mean like hugging trees?”

“You’re not planning to work any more tonight, I hope.”

“No.”

“So you’ll come and play with me?”

“Yes.”

And so we did.

## Chapter 4

February brought the Junior Show and the long-anticipated meeting with President Clearwater. Natalie Porter explained the Junior Show to me after one of her lessons.

“Students work on it all though their sophomore years and the first five months of junior year. I wrote a bunch of the songs for our show last year, but I know the girls who are creating this year’s show and it should be a good one.”

“What’s it about?”

“Oh, they’re always about the same thing. There’s a typical student, called Clara Cloister, and the show traces her life through a school year.”

“Beginning with Flower Sunday?” I asked, recalling the description I had heard in the fall.

“That’s right, and going all the way through until Hoop-Rolling on May Day. But there’s lots in between. Do you know about the Step-Singing.”

“Can’t say that I do.”

“That takes place twice a year. Each class dresses in its own colors and performs on the steps of the chapel, trying to out-sing the other classes. In between songs the girls who aren’t on the steps shout out cheers making fun of the other classes.”

“What else does Clara Cloister experience?”

“Well there’s Marathon Monday.”

“That would be Patriot’s Day?”

“That’s right. The Boston Marathon goes right through the campus—The Cloister marks the half-way point--so we set up the Cloister Scream Machine to encourage the runners. In our show we had Clara rush out of the crowd to kiss her boyfriend, who was running the race, only to have him disqualified because someone had touched him.”

“Are the rules really that strict?”

“I don’t know, but it brought a lot of laughs during the show. You know, a ‘fatal kiss’ and that sort of thing.”

“What else?”

“I’m not sure if they’ll include it this year, but we had a scene about the Class Tree. You know, each sophomore class plants its own tree in the fall. We made up our own words to the Johnny Appleseed song.”

“Did Abby participate in the show?”

“Didn’t I tell you? Yes, she was our pianist: a regular one-person orchestra. You really should come.”

“I wouldn’t miss it,” I said, although as it turned out the event fell on the same night as Sheri’s birthday and I didn’t want a work-related event, no matter how inviting, to interfere with that.

President Clearwater’s luncheon with the music department was, of course, a command performance. We gathered in one of the smaller function rooms of the Cloister Faculty Club, whose floor to ceiling windows looked out on a great rolling lawn which led eventually to the college pond. A fountain in the middle of the pond sent a jet of water skyward, each falling drop having the potential of becoming a tiny prism to catch the sun’s rays.

President Clearwater arrived wearing a blue suit whose careful tailoring, along with her regal demeanor, conveyed the authority of a benevolent monarch. A neutrally-dressed underling accompanied her to take notes.

After we had filled a sufficient interval with small talk, the president invited the chairman to share the product of our departmental deliberations. “This is the last luncheon in the series,” she announced, “and I have no doubt that your ideas will have been well worth waiting for,” employing a verb tense I had never encountered outside of French classes.

Professor Falgarwood rose to his feet, adopted the demeanor of a favored courtier toward his liege, and began his prepared remarks. “Your Excellency ...” No, he didn’t really say that, but everything preceding this moment led one to expect such a form of address. Falgarwood contented himself with “Madame President and esteemed colleagues.” He extended a beatific smile in our direction. “The music department at The Cloister has a long and honorable tradition.” I’ll spare you the details of that long tradition, as Falgarwood did not. He wrapped up the speech with his vision of generations of music majors to come--their preparation identical to that of their predecessors—an unbroken line of halcyon harmony. (Yes, he even permitted himself that bit of high-flown, if indecipherable, alliteration.)

Ms. Clearwater seemed stunned by the utter lack of substance in the chairman’s verbiage, essentially summarizing the department’s decision to maintain our current program without the slightest alteration. An uneasy silence ensued while the president gathered her thoughts.

“This is really quite extraordinary,” she finally brought herself to say. “Every other department in the college, without exception, has come to me with requests for additional funding for ideas ranging from the modest to the outlandishly ambitious. And yet you, in your quiet way, have managed

to achieve perfection.” (I didn’t know the president well enough to assess the level of irony in her final sentence, but I earnestly hoped for it.)

Professor Falgarwood maintained the smug expression of a cat who has swallowed the canary, basking in the president’s words of praise (ironic or not), secure in the knowledge that while other departments might engage in budget-busting pipe dreams, he (by which he meant the music department) remained loyal to the principles of fiscal propriety. Other members of the department looked upon their leader admiringly or even, in the case of Miss Earle, fawningly.

Finally I felt compelled to break the extended silence by pointing out that we had considered expanding our treatment of twentieth-century and non-Western music. The president had scarcely a chance to register interest in this breach of staunch unanimity before Professor Earle breathlessly interrupted me to say, “But we all felt these changes would be impractical at the present time.” And that was the end of curriculum reform in the music department at The Cloister.

## Chapter 5

On April 1<sup>st</sup> I took the Arborway branch of the Green Line to Huntington University and found my way to the chemistry lab where I'd been assigned to meet the 120 students in Professor Fioratura's Romantic Music course. I perched on the edge of the desk, next to the retorts and Bunsen burners, and made a quip about maintaining good chemistry between students and teacher. The class laughed. I made a crack about hoping to avoid any explosions. The class laughed again. Funny—it wasn't really that much of a joke.

Having broken the ice I decided to get down to business. I explained that each week we would explore a different genre—character piece for piano, song cycle, symphonic poem, etc. I would play and discuss a number of examples in class. Each week the students would complete a listening assignment—never more than sixty minutes—and then submit a one-page paper comparing the works they'd listened to.

At first my words met with giggles. The new professor really had a bizarre sense of humor. Professor Fioratura limited himself to puns whereas this guy could concoct full-blown fantasy. But when it finally dawned on the students that I wasn't joking, the mood began to turn ugly. Notebooks snapped angrily shut, pencil cases zipped fiercely closed, and backpacks scraped sullenly along the floor. Forty students packed up their things and stalked out of the lecture hall. I continued to sit on the edge of the lab desk and calmly asked if there were any other deserters before I began the day's lesson. Students looked at each other, murmured, and pondered their options.

Eventually I discovered that Professor Fioratura's Romantic Music course enjoyed a university-wide reputation as a roaring gut (Mickey Mouse course, easy A, snap course, whatever terminology you prefer). Why did I imagine that 120 students had enrolled in the course? Certainly the stolid, gray architecture of Huntington University did not inspire a sudden passion for Romantic Music. The standing agreement—one might almost call it a covenant—required only that students attend the lectures and laugh appreciatively at Professor Fioratura's execrable puns, for which they were rewarded with automatic A's, there being no papers, tests or exams for the

good professor to mark. I had not simply departed from tradition—I had broken a covenant.

I mistakenly assumed that the students who remained actually had an interest in Romantic Music. I should have known better. The departing students figured that they could take the course again when this imposter had left and the order of the world had been restored. The other students needed this credit in order to graduate, and were already calculating the disastrous effect of my supposedly modest assignments on their social lives.

Eventually the class got underway and the students dutifully turned in their one-page papers. What else were they going to do? I played some music, talked about it a little, and invited questions. No one raised a hand. It went on like this for eleven dreadful weeks. Every once in awhile I would throw out a question, some student's eyes would brighten and a hand would quiver a little. Then other class members would turn a hairy eyeball in that direction and the response would die. Still, the papers came in week by week, and got better and better. The students were learning, despite their absolute determination to stonewall the teacher.

Every Monday afternoon the music faculty would convene. The chairman maintained control by “raising the question to a higher philosophical level” (his phrase) whenever someone raised an objection. He

liked to seek agreement “in principle” for ideas which could not withstand scrutiny “on a lower practical level” (my phrase).

One week the chairman was upstaged when Professor Fioratura himself came back for a visit. (When a sabbatical lasts as long as eleven weeks you can imagine that a fellow gets lonely for his old buddies and the rough-and-tumble hurly-burly of a music department meeting.) What a great performance: he ranted and raved, declared the meeting illegal, threatened to report all of us to the dean, and finally claimed that he was going to persuade X, an old friend of his, not to accept the position of “Artist-in-Residence” that the music department had planned to extend to him. (I never did figure out what was eating him, and could only conclude that the prospect of actually producing something that could reasonably be construed as a “sabbatical project” had left him unhinged.)

The following week the music department granted me full voting privileges at faculty meetings and said I should consider it an honor. I blushed, stammered and scraped my shoe on the floor, which seemed to please them. The chairman liked to operate a democratic monarchy: everybody would discuss the issue and then he would announce a decision. Except when he felt threatened. Then he would argue people into the ground and

place his foot triumphantly on their necks to be sure that they remembered who was chairman.

About two weeks into the course one of the students, Jessica Lansdowne, approached me after class. A round-faced, slightly freckled young woman, wearing blue jeans and a Huntington University sweatshirt, she asked if we could talk. The terms of my contract hadn't included an office—though I had difficulty picturing Professor Fioratura slaving away there—so we walked to the Student Union, a massive fortress of a building, where we were able to find a table in a quiet corner.

“Are you sure you want to be seen with me?” I joked. “I seem to be something of a pariah on campus.”

Jessica looked embarrassed. “Actually, I'm enjoying the course,” she said in a small voice, as if concerned that her words might reach the wrong ears. In fact, the students milling around the cafeteria seemed to be concerned only with filling their stomachs.

“Your first two papers have been quite good,” I said.

Jessica blushed and looked down. Now her discomfort was making me uncomfortable. I tried changing the subject.

“Perhaps you have something else on your mind,” I said.

She looked up, smiled hesitantly and nodded. I leaned back in my chair and tried to look open and sympathetic. We sat in silence for a few moments while Jessica apparently got up the nerve to speak. “They say that you teach at The Cloister,” she said at last.

“That’s right. I teach here on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and there on Tuesday and Thursday.”

“And you see all the music majors,” Jessica said.

“You’re well informed,” I said, and smiled at her.

“So you have ... or had ... Abby Fox as a student.”

“Yes. I know teachers aren’t supposed to have favorites, but she was one of mine. It’s not just that she was an excellent pianist. She communicated a sense of being, I don’t know, fearless. With some people self-confidence is off-putting, but her self-confidence made you feel comfortable to be around her.”

Jessica smiled and nodded. “That’s it exactly!” She paused for a moment and then continued. “Abby was my best friend in high school.”

“Then I’m sorry for your loss. You must miss her.”

“I do.” Jessica began to tear up, but she brought herself under control by blinking rapidly, and then hurried on with what had evidently been a prepared speech. “They say she committed suicide but that doesn’t make

any sense. Abby would never do anything so dishonorable. It wasn't just her father, it's the way she was and I don't care what anyone says I just don't believe it, and I didn't have anyone else to tell so I wanted to tell you."

I hate it when every instinct in your body makes you want to put your arm around someone and every ounce of good sense says you mustn't do that, so instead I gave her a sympathetic smile and said, "You're going a bit too fast for me, but I don't have any place I have to go, so suppose you tell me the whole story. Take your time."

Jessica looked at me with a combination of relief and incredulity. Then she took a deep breath, frowned and said, "You really mean it?"

"I'm all yours," I said.

She relaxed visibly and began to talk in a more even tone. "I spoke of honor. Let me tell you what I mean."

I nodded encouragingly.

"In senior year Abby learned that the president of the National Honor Society got together with a friend every morning before classes to copy his math homework. We're not talking once in a while when he may not have had time to do it, but every morning."

"I imagine Abby verified this for herself." I was beginning to get a sense of another side of this young woman.

“Oh yes. The guys would sit in the basketball bleachers, so one morning Abby arranged to amble past so she could see what they were doing.”

“Did she confront them?”

“No. She figured they would just deny it or tell her to buzz off. No, she went to the principal and demanded that he call a special meeting of the National Honor Society to discuss the meaning of honor.”

“And did he?”

“Yes. Afterwards I’m sure he kicked himself, but Abby was going to be class valedictorian, after all, and she’d already won a National Merit Scholarship that had brought a lot of publicity to the school, so he didn’t see how it could do any harm.”

“I’m beginning to get an idea of how this must have played itself out. I suppose that at this special meeting Abby asked some abstract question like whether the members of the National Honor Society ought to display some sense of honor.”

“That’s it exactly. And of course nobody could very well dispute that.”

“And then she publicly challenged the NHS president to deny that he copied homework every morning?”

“Yes. Everybody knew about it, and the guy knew that everybody knew, so he was pretty well cornered.”

“I’ll bet the principal was even more uncomfortable than he was.”

“That’s the way Abby described it to me. He had called the meeting, after all, but he found himself in a pickle.”

“He couldn’t very well condone cheating, but he didn’t especially want to punish the NHS president.”

“Right. So he sort of surrendered the discussion to Abby.”

“Did she let him off the hook?”

“No way,” Jessica said. “I think she just sat there with a look that said, ‘So what are you going to do about this?’”

“And what did he do?”

“I have to hand it to him for thinking on his feet. Maybe that’s a qualification for being a principal. Anyway, according to Abby, he looked very sternly at the NHS president and said, ‘I’m assuming that we can count on this behavior to cease immediately.’ The president looked him in the eye and said, ‘Yes, sir.’ Then the principal looked straight at Abby, said ‘I think we’ve brought this matter to a satisfactory conclusion. Thank you for bringing it to my attention. Meeting adjourned.’ And that was the end of it.”

“And was that really the end?”

“Oh yes. Abby wasn’t interested in getting the guy in trouble. It’s just that she was personally offended by the state of affairs.”

“By the incongruity between principle and action.”

“I guess you could say that. Abby took questions of honor very personally.”

“So you have doubts about her suicide.”

“It’s just not possible.”

“Even though she was distraught over her father’s death?”

“Especially that! Don’t you see? It wasn’t just Abby’s sense of honor—it was her father’s. She wouldn’t do that to him, even if he were already dead. I know that doesn’t make a lot of sense, but that’s really the way Abby thought.”

I stopped and tried to look at the situation from this altered perspective. “If Abby didn’t commit suicide, have you thought about any alternatives?”

Jessica looked down again and shook her head. “I don’t like to think about that,” she said in a scarcely audible voice.

A large contingent of students began moving toward the exits and I imagined that afternoon classes were about to begin, but I didn’t want to interrupt Jessica’s story by consulting my watch. “Would you be willing to discuss it with me?” I asked.

She nodded reluctantly.

“I talked with Abby not long after her father’s death. She took it pretty hard. After all, she really loved her father.”

“It was more than that,” Jessica said. “You might almost say she idolized him.” The strange glow in Jessica’s eyes made me wonder whether she didn’t have a similar attitude toward Abby. “When she gave her junior recital—that was before her father got cancer—the hall was nearly full but it seemed as if she were performing for an audience of one.”

“Well, if we rule out suicide, the only apparent alternatives are accident and murder. Have you ever visited The Cloister?”

“Just for Abby’s recital. It was at night and I didn’t get a chance to see much of the campus.”

“Abby never invited you to visit her there?”

“No, except for the recital. After we went to college, we seemed to drift apart. I suspected that her father may have had something to do with my being invited to hear her play. He and I always got along really well.”

I wondered about Jessica’s relationship with her own father, but decided it wasn’t my place to pursue the question. “Let me tell you a little about the place where Abby died,” I said. “In order to get to the top of Jewitt Tower you have to walk up six flights of steps with a handrail and wire mesh always protecting you from falling into the central well. Even so,

there were people who felt too uncomfortable to make the climb. Once you finally reach the top, you can look down into the open space, but the railing comes chest high and there's more wire mesh beneath the guard rail."

Jessica seemed to be following my description intently, so I continued. "Now I can understand that someone might have accidentally slipped and fallen down a flight of stairs, but that isn't what happened to Abby. Her body was found on the stone floor at the base of the tower. It's really hard to imagine how someone could die by accident in that way."

Jessica looked as if she had been visualizing the scene in her mind. She didn't speak when I finished but simply nodded. "Are you sure you want me to go on?" I asked.

Jessica bit her lip and nodded.

"I haven't even thought about the possibility of murder until this moment. So far as I know, there was no mention of drugging, of concussion before the fall, or anything that would have rendered Abby unconscious. So a murderer would have to have lifted Abby—presumably unwillingly—over a four-foot barrier. I'm not saying it's impossible, but it would be physically demanding."

"But that's what you think happened?"

“I don’t know. I understand your reluctance to accept suicide, but I have to say that murder doesn’t sound any more convincing.”

“So you don’t believe me.” Jessica’s look suggested that she had suspected this would be the result all along, and now I was just proving her worst fears to be correct.

“I’m not saying that, Jessica. You’ve certainly raised strong doubts. I’m going to have to give this some more thought and perhaps ask some questions. Is that okay?”

“Thanks, Professor Crochet. At least you’ve listened to me.”

“I’m not going to let this drop, Jessica. I’d like to know what happened to Abby, too.”

Jessica leaned over and kissed me on the cheek. Then she scooted out of the room. I guess I was glad that one student out that class had given expression to her feelings, but this certainly wasn’t what I would have expected.

## Chapter 6

The following day, a Tuesday, found me back at The Cloister. To learn more about Abby, I thought, what better place to begin than with her roommate, Wendy Atwater? As chance would have it, Wendy was my last pupil on Tuesdays and she had no objections to talking with me. A rather slender young woman with a long thin face and straight blonde hair that some might have described as stringy, Wendy wore the tall boots then in fashion and the long trench coat made popular by Katherine Ross in “The Graduate.”

The Cloister dormitory complex seemed to have been modeled on Hampton Court, or one of the other great British manor houses. The U-shaped structure had four-story brick gabled wings extending from a central six-story tower topped with a stone facade. Additional turrets rested atop alternate gables, giving the whole affair an aura of ornate impregnability.

At the front desk Wendy introduced me to the house mother, who smiled and asked me to sign out when I left. As we walked up the stairs Wendy said, “Mrs. Merriweather is really nice. Not like some of the others. One of my classmates says her housemother is a real gorgol.”

“I think that’s meant to be ‘gorgon.’”

“Whatever.”

Wendy led me up to the room she had shared with Abby. The original symmetry of identical beds, desks, dressers and closets was set jarringly askew by the decor. Above Wendy’s desk hung a bulletin board fairly bursting with photos, announcements, ticket stubs, a college calendar and a *Peanuts* cartoon. The wall over her bed bore posters of Rod Stewart and Michael Jackson as well as the famous Beatles Abbey Road photo. By contrast, Abby’s side of the room was virtually bare save for a travel poster from British Railways over the bed.

Noting my glance Wendy said, “The College didn’t have anyone else to share the room so I’ve been here alone. With no next of kin to claim Abby’s belongings, the RA told me to just store the stuff in her closet until they figured out what to do with it. I guess the administration has more important things to worry about, because nobody’s given me any further instructions.”

“But you left the travel poster.”

“I liked it, and if you take that away the room looks too weird.”

I sat on the edge of what had been Abby’s bed, bare except for a simple patterned bedspread. Wendy tried, without much success, to disguise the fact that she hadn’t bothered to make her own bed. She turned her desk chair to face me and sat down.

“I appreciate your taking the time to talk with me,” I began.

“I don’t mind,” Wendy said. “I really don’t like to study much, if you know what I mean.”

“I’m curious about Abby,” I said. “I accepted the police verdict of suicide, as I guess pretty much everyone else has, but recently one of Abby’s old friends has made me question that account.”

Wendy looked at me quizzically. I got the impression that she was unaccustomed to thinking rapidly. She picked up an eraser from her desk and twiddled it idly in her fingers. “No, I’m sure it was suicide,” she said at last.

“You mean the shock of her father’s death?”

“That was no shock. He had cancer, for God’s sake. She’d had months to prepare herself for his death, you know what I mean?”

“But still.”

“No. Abby just had a thing about death.”

“A thing?”

“Yeah. With her boyfriend.”

“Her boyfriend?” I became aware that I was beginning to sound a little like the village idiot, and tried to recover. “I wasn’t aware that Abby had a boyfriend.”

“She never saw him. They met when she spent her junior year in England—she was a double major in music and English.”

“I suppose that explains the poster.”

“Right. Anyway, they wrote letters back and forth all the time. Abby spent more time typing letters than she did writing English essays, and she wrote an awful lot of English essays.”

“You mentioned a special interest in death.”

“Oh yeah. They used to write poems about death to each other. It seemed pretty sick to me, but whatever turns you on, you know what I mean?”

“I don’t suppose I could take a look at the poems,” I said.

“Nah. The police took all that stuff away. One of the officers glanced at the poetry and muttered something about a death wish.”

“That’s too bad,” I said.

“Well,” Wendy hesitated, as if uncertain whether to trust me.

“I’m not representing anyone, Wendy. I’m just curious about what happened to one of my students.”

“I guess it won’t hurt anything to tell you. One weekend when Abby was home visiting her father, I sort of snooped through her things and found the folder where she kept all her poems.”

“And?”

“Well, there was one I thought was sort of pretty—weird, but still pretty, you know what I mean?”

“So you copied it?”

“Yeah. You’re not going to tell anybody?”

“I wouldn’t think of it. Do you think I could borrow it?”

“You can have it. I don’t even know why I kept it. I mean, she’s dead now, you know what I mean?” Wendy opened the bottom drawer of her desk and after rummaging around through various papers came up with a photocopied sheet.

“You may change your mind. I promise to return this to you,” I said as she passed me the poem. “*Death, I await thy sweet release,*” read the first line. It occurred to me that there was more I might learn from Wendy so I asked, “What was Abby like as a roommate?”

Wendy fiddled some more with her eraser then said, “Abby wasn’t my first roommate. I had a good roommate for two years before she transferred to Boston University. I had a different roommate last year but at the end of the year I had to request a change. She kept repeating the same phrases over and over and it drove me nuts, you know what I mean?”

I smiled and said, “So what about Abby?”

“Abby wasn’t really a bad roommate,” Wendy said. “She just gave you the impression that she’d memorized a manual called Roommate 101.”

“How so?”

“Well, she’d asked if I wanted to order a pizza—I mean, who says no to a pizza? But I noticed that she never ate very much. And she never wanted to stay up late and talk, or confide in me about her boyfriend. I only knew his name because of the return address on the envelopes. She’d ask how I did on a test she knew I had coming up, but I don’t think she really cared. It was just what she thought you did to be a good roommate.”

I wondered whether Abby was more interested in causes than in people. I thanked Wendy for her help, promised again to return the poem, and took my leave.

## Chapter 7

That evening, when I showed the poem to Sheri, she said, “You know, this sounds a lot like the lyrics we sang in ‘An Evening of Amatory Madrigals,’” referring to a concert I had conducted with the Madrigal Singers at Chihuahua State. “You remember,” she continued. “I thought it was so funny that you couldn’t bring yourself to utter the word ‘orgasm’ in front of college students. I mean, did you really think we didn’t know about sex? Hold on, I’ll get the program.”

As Sheri disappeared into the bedroom I thought about the concert. Elizabethan poets used the conceit associating death with sexual climax to put together a virtual Renaissance ‘Joy of Sex.’ Sheri returned with a copy of the Chihuahua State College program in which I had included the text of each madrigal we performed.

As we looked over the lyrics together I recalled the giggles that had ensued when we began rehearsing these piece, whose titles included “Susanna Fair Sometime Assaulted Was” (William Byrd), “Cruel, You Pull

Away Too Soon” (John Morley), and “I Fall and Then I Rise Again” (Michael East).

“Here the young woman proposes masturbation instead of intercourse, in order to protect her virginity,” Sheri said and intoned the lines in a fake British accent.

*And if I grant to that which you request,  
My chastity shall then deflowered be,  
Which is do dear to me that I detest  
My life, if it berefted be from me.  
And rather would I die of mine accord  
Ten thousand times, than once offend our Lord.*

“And here’s a request for simultaneous orgasm,” I said, and imitated her intonation.

*Phyllis the bright, when frankly she desired  
Thyrsis, her sweet heart, to have expired;  
Sweet, thus fell she a-crying,  
Die, for I am a-dying.*

“Is this a plea for fellatio?” Sheri asked.

*If this you do to kill me,  
Say, cruel nymph, why kiss not you then still me?*

*So shall you ease my crying,*

*And I could never wish a sweeter dying.*

“It doesn’t always work out as planned,” I said. “Here’s a reference to impotence, although I guess to be politically correct you’d have to say ‘male erectile dysfunction.’”

*I swore I would yet still she said I should not*

*Do what I would, and yet for all I could not.*

“Here’s one where the girl is driving the guy nuts with slow masturbation,” Sheri said.

*Alas, right out come slay me,*

*Do not thus still from time to time delay me.*

“One of John Dowland’s loveliest madrigals, ‘Come Against, Sweet Love,’ if you understand the word ‘die’ properly, is another plea for simultaneous orgasm.

*To see, to hear, to touch, to kiss, to die*

*With thee in sweetest sympathy.*

“Here’s another request for fellatio to assist a second effort,” Sheri said.

*Dear love, be not unkind to thy beloved,*

*Who lies a-dying,*

*In mournful crying,  
With a kiss revive me, O be thou moved.*

“That seems to have been a popular theme,” I said. “Here’s another on the same topic.”

*She with a cruel frown  
Oppressed my trembling heart with deadly swoon,  
Yet pitying my pain  
Restored with a kiss my life again.  
Thus let me daily be of life deprived,  
So I be daily thus revived.*

“And yet, without knowing the key metaphor,” Sheri said, “you’d think that all these poets were obsessed with death.”

“Whereas actually they were just obsessed with sex.”

“Much healthier obsession, if you ask me,” Sheri said, and gave me a kiss. “So let’s look more closely at the dead girl’s lyrics.”

I lay Abby’s poem on the table and we read it together.

*Death, I await thy sweet release,  
This joyful agony’s swift surcease,  
Too long have I delayed this dying,  
Now for thy relief I’m crying.*

*Will thy mighty sword suffice  
To bring about my quick demise,  
Or will my joyous end demand  
Thy firm inexorable hand?*

*Whether by sword or hand thou take me,  
Death, I pray, do not forsake me.*

“Shouldn’t that be ‘takest’ in the penultimate line?” Sheri asked.

“The verb has to be subjunctive after ‘whether.’”

“Can’t say I remember the second person familiar present subjunctive.”

“Ring it up to poetic license for the sake of the rhyme,” I said.

“One way or another, I can imagine what this dude in England must have made of it.”

“But if you read it without the metaphor, you can see why the police might have attributed a death wish to young Abby.”

“I read it with the metaphor, and I confess that all this steamy poetry is turning me on. Will you consent to slay me?”

“With my mighty sword?”

“Else I must die by my own hand,” Sheri said as she led me into the bedroom.

## Chapter 8

Two days later I was back at The Cloister. Natalie Porter, my last student before lunch, hung around after her lesson and asked whether she could talk with me. I asked if she wanted to have lunch together at her dorm but she said she'd rather find a place where we could talk more privately than at an eight-person table. I offered to buy her lunch at The Buttery, the campus snack shop, and she looked pleased.

In her bell bottoms, striped blouse and loafers, Natalie looked pretty much like any of the other students. Some might have described her as a bit chubby, but she seemed at ease in her body and I had no right to judge.

Springtime at The Cloister brought memories of my annual visits to this most beautiful of all college campuses when the Amherst College Glee Club joined forces with the Cloister Chorale for the Doberman Memorial Concert. A wealthy alumna had endowed the college with a fund permitting the choral director to engage a pick-up orchestra each year to perform major choral works by Haydn, Mozart and, my sophomore year, the Bruckner

E Minor Mass. The combination of great music, an excellent choir, and the verdant campus—one year we came out of a rehearsal to see a rainbow arching over the college pond—proved completely seductive to an impressionable nineteen-year-old. Now, at least for one year, I could come here every week.

Though I would never again sing in the Doberman Memorial Concert, Boston offered other vocal opportunities. Just after Christmas a friend had asked whether I would sing tenor in a solo quartet performance of the Brahms Liebeslieder Waltzes, and in an access of conceit I agreed. The evening of the first rehearsal found us in the music room of an archetypal college professor's house, replete with chamber organ, harpsichord, clavichord, treble viol, par-dessus (descant) viol, viola da gamba, dulcimer, Rauschpfeife, Celtic harp, glockenspiel, crumhorn, and a Zeitter & Winkelmann (Dutch) grand piano. The owner of all these instruments performed on them with varying degrees of skill, ranging from the viols, on which he was said to be rather accomplished, to the grand piano, on which he was not. On this occasion our host functioned as one duo-pianist upon the grand piano, with results discomfiting to all. The other duo-pianist tried to keep him on the beat (he tended to lose it) but with limited success. It might have been more practical to transpose his part for viols. In the event,

the piano made an interesting sparring partner for the text, turning gentle brooks into treacherous rapids. Cider and cookies after rehearsal were never more welcome.

The Buttery formed an annex to the administration building, with bright yellow drapes, old-fashioned ceiling fans, Formica-topped square tables and heart-backed metal chairs. Natalie and I got our plates from the short-order cook—no waitress service here—and found a table next to a window overlooking the pond.

“I hear you’ve been asking about Abby,” Natalie said after taking a few bites of her club sandwich and evidently finding it satisfactory.

“Do you music majors maintain a permanent grapevine?” I asked.

Natalie grinned at me and said, “Pretty much.”

“You knew her well?” I asked.

“We weren’t all that close in high school,” Natalie said, “but she became my best friend here.”

I wondered whether Abby would have said the same about Natalie. I didn’t know that much about Abby yet, but she seemed to have something in common with Claude Debussy, who tended to keep his friends quite separated from one another. On one occasion, disheartened by some

breach in his protective web, Debussy begged one of his friends not to tell another that they had dined together.

“So what can you tell me about Abby?” I asked.

“Abby always seemed to be waging one campaign after another.”

I thought about Jessica’s National Honor Society story and asked, “What was her latest target?”

Natalie reddened a bit, as if not having foreseen how this conversation might go. “I know you’re a professor and all,” she said, “but you seem sort of disconnected from the permanent faculty.”

“I guess that describes it pretty well.”

“So you’re not going to feel compelled to repeat what I tell you?”

“Not if it doesn’t pose a threat to anyone’s physical well-being,” I said.

Natalie looked relieved. “All right. I might as well level with you. I’m not exactly here by choice.”

“No?”

“I wanted to go to Huntington with Jessica—she mentioned talking with you.” I nodded. “But Daddy wouldn’t hear of it. He has pretty high expectations.” I nodded again. “So he pulled a few strings and here I am.”

“You’re doing fine in my tutorial,” I said, “but can I infer that The Cloister may present challenges in other areas?”

“You ‘infer’ correctly,” Natalie said and smiled, as if pleased with the use of an unaccustomed locution.

“That’s too bad,” I said. “Among other things, college is supposed to be fun.”

Natalie gave a sigh and said, “It’s not much fun when you have three papers due the same day, and even though you gave yourself plenty of time you could still finish only two of them.”

“So what did you do?”

“There’s this company that will supply essays for a fee. You’re sure you’re not going to report me?”

“Cross my heart,” I said.

“I had to do a paper on Virginia Woolf and I just couldn’t write it in time so I bought one of theirs. Got an A- on the paper, too.”

“Don’t the professors spot purchased essays?”

“That’s the beauty of it,” Natalie said with some enthusiasm. “You supply the company with a sample of your writing and they give you a paper that sounds as if you’d written it.”

“Pretty ingenious,” I said, “but what does this have to do with Abby?”

“When I told Abby about it she was appalled. She didn’t blame me, really, except to say that she would have been happy to help me if I’d only

come to her. Mostly she just thought it was wrong that such a situation should exist. She said that the college should provide a tutorial service so that students who get stuck in a bind wouldn't have to fall victim to such people."

"That sounds like Abby," I said. "So did she launch a campaign to start an assistance program?"

"No. She decided to go after SIP itself."

"SIP?"

"Sisterhood Is Powerful. I think even the name offended her. She talked about their having perverted the language of feminism."

"What did she do?"

"The outfit lists only a post office box, in order to protect itself, but Abby somehow managed to follow a student from the post office to the company's office in town where she confronted the owners."

"Really!"

"Yeah. She said they were two former members of The Cloister crew team—great big women that she nicknamed Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee."

"What happened?"

“She told them to cease and desist or she was going to write an exposé and publish it in the student paper.”

“How did they take that?”

“They just laughed at her and threw her out of the office. As I said, they were pretty big and it was two against one.”

“And all this took place in the fall?”

“Right. I don’t know whether Abby had a chance to finish the article before she died.”

“You mentioned that you’d known Abby in high school,” I said.

“What was she like then?”

Natalie hesitated a moment and then asked, “Do you think we could have some dessert?”

“A woman after my own heart,” I said. “I saw some inviting blueberry pie on the way in. Would that do?”

“You read my mind,” Natalie said.

I walked to the counter and came back with two servings of pie.

“Yums,” Natalie said after tasting the first bite. After a few more bites she looked at me and said, “I’m not sure I should be telling you this. Say only good about the dead, my grandmother used to say.”

“Abby did something bad? I asked.

“No, just the opposite. In a way Abby was too good.”

“How do you mean?”

“Abby’s father used to be big in Moral Re-Armament.”

“Isn’t that some kind of right-wing organization?”

“Not the way Abby described it. Evidently they played an important part in re-establishing normal diplomatic relations between France and Germany after the Second World War.”

“I see.”

“Abby once gave a speech about MRA at an assembly. They believe in correcting wrong throughout the world by acting on the four absolutes: honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.”

“So what was the problem?” I asked.

“Abby would go around asking people, ‘do you believe in absolute love?’ I mean, what are you going to say? It got a little creepy.”

“Might have been even worse if she’d asked about absolute purity!  
Was Abby involved in Mora Re-Armament?”

“Not as such, but when we were in junior high MRA spun off another group called Up With People.”

“I think I’ve heard of that. Didn’t they give concerts or something?”

“That’s right.”

“Did Abby perform with them?”

“Not while we were in high school, but when she went to England last year she sang with a group there.”

“Do you think that’s where she met her boyfriend?”

“Abby doesn’t have a boyfriend.” Natalie looked confused and maybe a bit crestfallen to have been left out of the loop.

“Perhaps I’m mistaken,” I said. Natalie’s earlier phrase about making things right in the world fit in with what I understood of Abby’s involvement with Sisterhood Is Powerful.

We chatted a bit longer and then I headed back to the music building to meet my afternoon contingent of music majors.

## Chapter 9

“Let me get this straight,” Sheri said as we talked after dinner. “This essay service would take samples of a student’s writing and then tailor an essay to match her style.”

“That’s my understanding.”

“But where did the essays come from in the first place?”

“That’s the inspired part of the operation. Evidently the people who set it up realized that while the Seven Sister schools—Radcliffe, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Vassar, The Cloister, and the rest—each claim to be distinctive, in actuality they all offer pretty much the same curriculum and draw from a common pool of authors.”

“I’m with you so far.”

“According to Natalie, they employ what she called ‘bounty hunters’ in each of the schools to seek out any paper receiving a grade of A. You can see how it might work—a student would express admiration over another

student's paper, ask to read it, copy the thing, and forward it on to the central office."

"Which is right there in Waban?"

"Yes. The bounty hunters get a generous fee for their labors so there's lots of incentive to locate A-level essays."

"Then what?"

"The central office gradually accumulates quite a repertory of essays on all the topics likely to be required at sister schools. For example, Natalie needed a paper on Virginia Woolf. That's bound to be a pretty popular topic at women's colleges."

"Every college wouldn't have every topic, but among them you could probably find what you were looking for."

"That's the idea. Evidently the only rule was that a paper could never go back to its place of origin, or be used more than once at any other college, since that might give the game away."

"But even so, wouldn't it require a lot of labor to re-edit and re-type the essays? I should think that would make the service pretty expensive."

"True. It costs a lot more than companies that just provide canned essays. But students at the Seven Sisters tend to be pretty well off, and

from the students' perspective, the style-fitting feature makes the scheme pretty much fool-proof."

"I've got just two questions."

"Shoot."

"Why are you getting mixed up in this?"

The sudden change of subject took me aback and I fumbled for an explanation. "I suppose because nobody else is."

"You were perfectly willing to accept Abby's suicide."

"Yes."

"But now that you think it may not be suicide, you feel compelled to turn detective."

"The more I learn about Abby, the more it seems we have in common. There's a part of me that objects when things aren't right."

"I think I understand that. You don't take personal offense at the existence of poverty in Boston, for example, because there's not a lot you personally can do about it, but if one of your students is murdered—and I'm assuming that's the conclusion you've come to—it offends you that no one else seems to care."

"I think that sums it up pretty well."

“But if the essays and checks are sent to a post office box, and the outfit hides in some undisclosed office space, how are you going to find them?”

“I thought I’d retrace Abby’s steps. Somebody has to pick up the mail every day. It shouldn’t require professional training to watch the post office box and follow whoever opens it.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“What’s the second question?”

“Would you like to go to a movie?”

“Oh Sheri, I’d love to, but I really have to finish the chapter I’m working on.”

Sheri had seemed actively engaged in our conversation but now she turned her body away from me and said, “You’re no fun anymore.”

“Well, the way the academic world is set up, you have to write to succeed.”

“I know the phrase: ‘publish or perish.’ If you ask me, it bears a sinister resemblance to another phrase: ‘He who dies with the most toys wins.’ Life is more than just amassing an impressive *curriculum vitae*, Axel.”

“That’s what the Latin means—how you run your life.”

“But why run? What’s wrong with enjoying life? Relationships are more important than accomplishments.”

“Try telling that to a tenure committee. And where would culture be without accomplishments?”

“Axel, I hate to be negative, but who’s really going to read these books you spend so much time writing?”

“I don’t have any delusions of grandeur, but I like to think that I’m making a modest contribution.”

“Do what you want. I’m going out.”

And she did.

## Chapter 10

“I’ve solved Abby’s murder, Professor Crochet,” announced Penny Lapworth when she arrived for her tutorial the following Tuesday. Penny had black hair pulled back in a ponytail, exposing a high forehead. She wore rimless glasses and had a slightly upturned nose that she seemed to push unabashedly into everyone else’s affairs, a distinction she probably would reject: everybody else’s affairs were simply hers.

“What’s this about murder?” I asked.

“Oh don’t be coy, Professor Crochet,” she said. “Everybody knows you’re trying to find out who murdered Abby Fox.”

“Really?”

“You can’t expect to keep secrets around here.” Not from Penny, at any rate.

“Let’s say for the sake of argument that you were right. Why would anyone want to murder Abby?”

“Because of the mid-terms. She died just before mid-term exams.”

“I’m really not following this, Penny. Now either you present your ideas in an orderly fashion or I’m going to ask you to walk in the door again and pretend this conversation never happened.”

Penny didn’t look as if she believed me for a minute, but she did pause to gather her thoughts. “All right. You know about the 80% rule.”

“No, you’ve lost me already.”

“The Cloister has a rule that if a student has an 80% average or better in a course, she doesn’t have to take the exams. The rule applies both to mid-terms and finals.”

“I understand that part, but I don’t see what it has to do with Abby.”

“There are two girls in her English course that have to get A’s in order to get into med school.”

“You’re talking about their final marks?”

“No,” Penny said impatiently. “Their mid-term marks. The med schools send out acceptances before Christmas and The Cloister holds its final exams after Christmas, so they have to rely on mid-terms.”

“Okay. Keep going.”

“Now the professor in this course marks strictly on the curve. You understand the curve?”

“Don’t patronize me, Penny.”

“Sorry, but I never know what you’re going to misunderstand.”

“He gives an A to the top 10% of students.”

“20%. And it’s a she.”

“Okay. 20%. So where is this all leading?”

“Well Abby has the highest mark in the class.”

That didn’t surprise me, so I simply nodded for Penny to go on.

“But she didn’t believe in the 80% rule. She thought that everybody should be treated alike.”

That also sounded like Abby. “This is all very interesting, well, maybe not all that interesting, but what does it have to do with your rather dramatic announcement?”

“You can understand that getting into med school is a very big deal for some students.”

“I suppose so.”

“So do the math. If Abby doesn’t take the mid-term, and of course the way things turned out she couldn’t, these students, who have a B+ average at best, get an A on the exam and that can make the difference in their whole future.”

“Is that what happened?”

“Almost. One girl got into her first choice of med school and the other had to settle for her back-up.”

“Whereas if Abby had taken the exam ...”

“She gets an A, the other students get B’s, and good-bye med school.”

“So you’re saying that these students killed Abby?”

“Seems pretty obvious now that I’ve laid it all out, doesn’t it?”

“And I suppose you’ve investigated their alibis for the night of Abby’s death?”

“No, you’re the detective. I’m just telling you how it had to have happened.”

“Penny, I am not a detective. I think you’re letting your imagination run away with you. To begin with, university admissions depend on more than just grade point averages.”

Penny looked crestfallen. “I suppose you could say I’m living proof,” she said.

“How do you mean?”

“I’m a legacy. I mean, we can’t all be as smart as Abby Fox.”

“A legacy?”

“My mother and grandmother both went to The Cloister and mom’s the head of the Cambridge branch of The Cloister Alumnae Association. That’s how I got in.”

“Be that as it may, I think you see the point. I hope you haven’t gone about accusing these young women.”

“No, I saved the news for you. I thought you’d be excited.”

Sounds emerged faintly from piano practice rooms. Beginner scales, novice exercises, and the occasional accomplished sonata brought to mind Debussy’s “Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum,” reputedly an evocation of students practicing in the Paris Conservatoire.

My conversation with Penny didn’t seem to be getting anywhere so I tried leading the discussion in a different direction. “I get the impression that you kind of wish Abby could have been your sister.”

Penny looked at the floor. “I just wanted her to be my friend.”

“And that didn’t work?”

“No. For instance, last spring Professor Falgarwood held an afternoon gathering at his house for all the music majors.”

“Did he let you listen to a recording of him performing on the Sweelinck organ?”

“How did you know?”

“Just a wild guess.”

“Anyway, he asked us to pair off for a game of musical chairs.”

“Isn’t that a bit quaint?”

“Well, I guess you could call Professor Falgarwood a bit quaint. Anyway, I was really hoping Abby would choose me.”

“But she didn’t.”

“No. She calculated that with an odd number of people one person wouldn’t be needed to partner, so she helped refill the punch bowl instead.”

“Perhaps Abby just didn’t care for parlor games.”

“No. I think she just liked to be helpful.”

“What else can you tell me about your relationship with Abby?”

“Well, for my twenty-first birthday I organized a big party, and when I told Abby about it she sounded really enthusiastic. Of course, she didn’t actually promise to come.”

“But you hoped she would.”

From the look of disappointment on Penny’s face, the event might just as well have occurred the day before. “She probably had something important that prevented her from coming.”

“No doubt,” I said. It didn’t seem as if Abby had much patience for the Penny’s of the world. “Why don’t we put the sleuthing aside for the time being and see if you can sing the twelve-tone row you wrote?”

Penny shrugged her shoulders. I don’t think she accepted my reservations for a minute, but I was still the teacher.

## Chapter 11

I remained at The Cloister after classes at the behest of the chairman, who had extended an invitation to dine at his house. In the absence of a real office to call my own, I went to the music library to do some work. On the way I heard some students chattering excitedly about a recital to be given that evening by a visiting violinist. We'd had our share of musical stars during my graduate school days at Cornell. One season, Van Cliburn had to postpone a concert due to illness. The rescheduled concert came just ten days after a recital by Artur Schnabel, an unusual juxtaposition that permitted a direct comparison of the two performers. Schnabel had included Chopin's Polonaise Héroïque within his program and gave it an exalted, almost reverential, rendition. Van Cliburn played the same piece as an encore, striking the opening octaves almost before being fully seated on the piano bench and then tossing the piece off as simply a vehicle for displaying his formidable technique.

I guess musical performance stirs the soul of an aficionado the same way that a brilliant athletic accomplishment inspires cheers in a crowd of followers. One time in Boston I ran into a musician friend and we compared notes on concerts we had attended. A peculiar woman of indeterminate age, dressed all in black with a fur around her neck, interrupted us and went on for fifteen minutes to describe, in a heavy Austrian accent, how much it meant to her to hear people talking about music in the midst of this dunghill (a term that came up half a dozen times in the course of her monologue) and what an absolute passion she had for music, which provided the sustenance of her life, the only thing that enabled her to continue, day after day, living, as she did, in a dunghill.

Newton Falgarwood exerted sufficient influence among the rich and the powerful at The Cloister to raise several hundred thousand dollars to build a Sweelinck organ, named for the Dutch composer who died in 1621. Of course to be truly authentic the instrument had to be tuned in mean-tone temperament which rendered it inappropriate to later works. Only Falgarwood could have conceived—and then actually realized—a gigantic pipe organ on which you couldn't play the works of J.S. Bach!

Professor Falgarwood, for whom music worth studying ended in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, made an exception for Mozart, whose piano concertos he

taught according to a meticulous classification system whereby students would mark the scores with abbreviations. To satisfy the professor's requirements students were expected to write PTT (pre-tutti trill), PRA (playful rondo anticipation) and FIR (filled-in rest) in appropriate spots, and in case they missed any, the chairman had created rubber stamps to fill in omitted labels such as CKSR (change of key in sonata recapitulation) or EOMF (embellishment of the original melodic figure).

I arrived at Professor Falgarwood's residence at the appointed hour and was admitted by his partner Jean. We entered a living room decorated with dark drapes and heavy furniture centering on two grand pianos arranged in the *soixante-neuf* position. (Were they expected to propagate baby grands?) By contrast the kitchen, where we ate supper, was all white, with windows on two walls looking out at a grove of trees.

Trees, as it turned out, formed the principal topic of conversation, both Jean and Newton so devoted to the welfare of The Cloister's arboreal population that after a particularly heavy snowfall they had gone out to release each branch of its burden, lest it succumb beneath the weight. Over dinner they expressed indignation over the college's announced intention of cutting down half a dozen trees in order to expand a parking lot. I had never before witnessed such volatility in a conversation whose participants

*agreed* with each other. Passions rose to such a point that Jean said, “I think it’s time for an M.I.”

“An M.I. Just the thing,” said Falgarwood, who led us into the living room.

An M.I., as I soon learned, meant a musical interlude, and my presence permitted a performance that the two had clearly been anticipating, as they pulled out two copies of Bach’s Trio Sonatas for organ. Jean sat at one grand piano to play the alto line, in octaves. Falgarwood, seated on the left at the other grand piano, performed the pedal part while I was expected to play the soprano line, always in octaves. I have never heard a more grotesque performance of Bach.

At the end of the evening, as Jean withdrew to the kitchen and Falgarwood led me to the door, the chairman put his hand on my arm and said, “You understand that the terms of your engagement call on you to enhance the musicianship of our music majors, not to meddle in affairs that, strictly speaking, are none of your concern. The Cloister abhors negative publicity.” Before I had a chance to reply, he graciously bade me good evening and shut the door.

## Chapter 12

The next day, after another hour endeavoring to engage my stone-faced students at Huntington University, I took the trolley to Harvard Square for a meeting with representatives from G. K. Hall. In the course of transforming my dissertation into book form I had noticed that this Boston publisher had issued monographs not only on Poe, Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé, who fell within my purview of literary figures who had influenced Debussy, but on virtually every writer you could name. Why not a comparable series on composers, I wondered? And who better to write the volume on Debussy than Axel Crochet, bearded musicologist? A telephone call led to a letter which led to this meeting at the Pewter Pot.

One might argue that with so many authentic early colonial buildings in the Boston area it would be superfluous to add an ersatz replica. And it was easy to make fun of the fake beams in the ceiling, the wooden window shutters and the waitresses outfitted in long skirts and mob caps. But the restaurant's muffins proved to be a popular alternative to the prevailing

doughnuts and the Cambridge community had embraced the enterprise as its own.

The carpeted floor muffled the sounds of conversation and reduced the normal restaurant noises of clattering plates and jangling silverware. Even the cloth napkins contributed to the peaceful acoustical setting.

The two representatives sent by the publisher, an earnest young man and an effusive young woman, were waiting at a table when I arrived. After we had exchanged pleasantries and placed our orders I began to speak about my vision of Claude Debussy as the true father of twentieth-century music and my desire to explicate this thesis with detailed musical analyses and carefully-presented technical arguments. The earnest young man and the effusive young woman exchanged glances.

“While we respect your lofty academic ambitions,” he said, “we hope you will be able to balance these goals with the practical concerns of a commercial venture.”

“More sex?” I asked. The effusive young woman looked slightly flustered. “Concentrate on the historical warp and let the analysis woof for itself?” I asked. The earnest young man looked slightly confused.

“Debussy’s best friend, Pierre Louÿs, once described spending an afternoon in the company of naked ladies, referring to the contemporary craze for *tableaux vivants*,” I said.

“Naked is good,” said the earnest young man.

“In 1903 Debussy abandoned his wife and fled with his mistress to the Isle of Jersey, an escapade he commemorated in a piano piece in which his usual reticence gave way to outright rapture,” I said.

“Rapture is good,” said the effusive young woman.

“In 1908 Debussy married the mother of his three-year-old daughter Chouchou (“little bastard”), for whom Debussy composed his Kitchen Cupboard Suite, with titles based on familiar children’s songs: Dr. Blossom Ate a Possum; Rimbaud’s Lullaby; The Smog Is Lifting; Serenade of the Street-walker; The Little Absinthe Drinker; and the familiar Let ‘Em Eat Cake-walk.”

“What about chapter titles?” asked the effusive young woman.

“I was thinking along the lines of ‘One Cadence Is Not Enough,’ ‘Valley of the Subdominants,’ and ‘Bitonality and Bisexuality,’” I said.

“I think we understand each other,” the earnest young man said as he pushed a contract across the table for me to sign. We finished our muffins amid smiles of mutual satisfaction.

When I returned to the apartment that evening I found Sheri's response to this triumph a trifle disappointing. "Two books at the same time!" she said. "You've got to be kidding."

"One of them is nearly finished," I said in my defense.

"You know, I'm really concerned for you, Axel," Sheri said. "You and your endless to-do lists. You go through each activity as fast as you can in order to check it off and get to the next."

"Lists have always been my defense against Parkinson's Law."

"What's that?"

"'Work expands to fill the time allotted to it.' If you have all morning to dust the piano, piano-dusting will take all morning."

"So you figure that by cramming in as much stuff as you possibly can you can hold this Parkinson person at bay?"

"Something like that."

"What about valuing process more than product so you can actually enjoy your life?"

"Well ..."

"The course you're on—always hurrying to get the next thing done—could be seen as a race to the grave. Surely you don't believe that the person who dies first wins?"

I had to admit that Sheri had a point. Then I thought of American Musicological Society meetings I'd attended where scholars who had failed to land the Ivy League positions they coveted tried to justify their existence before colleagues who had actually made it. "I submitted an article," they would begin pathetically, as it finally dawned on them that the academic world cared not a whit that they might be good fathers or husbands or soccer coaches or church deacons, or that they might have advanced a few more steps in the direction of inner peace. But I had trouble explaining all this to Sheri. We did not make love that evening.

## Chapter 13

Penny Lapworth was waiting for me when I arrived at The Cloister the next morning. “You’ve got to listen to this, Professor Crochet. This time I really know why Abby was murdered.”

I sighed and let her into the room I used for tutorials. “Penny, I have only few minutes before I see my first student.”

“This won’t take long, but it’s sort of complicated.”

“I suppose you’ll continue pestering me until I listen, so I might as well hear it now.”

My show of reluctance seemed to have been wasted because Penny plunged ahead as if I had been breathless with anticipation. “It’s because of racism.”

“This sounds even more far-fetched than the mid-term theory.”

“No, really. Listen. Last spring Abby waged a campaign against racism at The Cloister. She pointed out that we have scarcely any students of African-American persuasion.”

“Surely she didn’t put it like that, but I do see your point. The Cloister isn’t completely lily-white, but comes pretty close.”

“So she was pushing the admissions office to change its policy.”

“You don’t think they really had an anti-black policy?”

“It’s more subtle than that. Can you follow some more math?”

I stifled a groan and said, “I suppose so.”

“Okay. Now any girl with top grades, glowing recommendations, and a decent community service record is going to get accepted into The Cloister regardless of race, right?”

“That makes sense.”

“But all the Seven Sisters schools are competing for the same students. So if you want any particular quality—a viola player, a field hockey star, or, in this case, a black student—you’re going to have to lower your academic requirements.”

“It sounds kind of cynical, but I see your point.”

“But you can’t draft all the viola players, field hockey stars or black students you’d like, because that would lower the overall academic standard.”

“I’m not sure I agree with you, but let’s say you’re right.”

“Then put it this way—you can only admit so many academically second-tier students before the whole college becomes second tier.”

“And this means that ...”

“There’s intense competition among interest groups for second-tier students.”

“I guess that makes sense.”

“And what’s the largest, most vocal interest group of second-tier students?”

“I can’t guess.”

“Me!”

“You?”

“Legacy students. You know. Girls whose mothers and grandmothers attended The Cloister. You try to reduce that quota and all hell is going to break loose.”

“So this is where Abby comes in?”

“You bet. She hadn’t gotten anywhere with the former administration but the new president was touched by Abby’s idealism and agreed to let her speak to the Admissions Committee when they met in the fall to determine quotas for the coming year.”

This fit with what I knew of President Clearwater, whose announced intention of bringing a breath of change to this tradition-bound institution probably included a rebalancing of its racial composition. “And let me guess—Abby died just before this meeting was to take place.”

“You got it.”

“And you think that the head of The Cloister Legacy Association, or whatever it’s called, murdered Abby?”

“She wouldn’t do it herself—she’d get someone else to do it. Someone like my mother, for example.”

“Your mother?”

“I don’t know where she was that night. Do you?”

“Penny, this is ridiculous.”

“It would only be ridiculous if Abby were still alive. But someone killed her, and this makes more sense than any other explanation. I mean, do you have a better solution?”

“No, but ...”

“So this one will have to do until you find one. Do you plan to ask my mother for an alibi?”

“Penny, you keep forgetting that I have nothing to do with the police.”

“Of course not; the police think it was a suicide. It’s up to you to prove them wrong.”

“That may or not be true, but I can assure you that asking your mother for an alibi is not going to improve the situation.”

“Whoops. Here’s your first student. I’d better leave.” And off she went, full of misplaced self-assurance.

Despite annoyances like Penny Lapworth or the stubbornly unresponsive Huntington students, I found this year infinitely preferable to last. In the fall I found that I’d been drafted for the army of the unemployed. Now the Massachusetts bureaucracy cannot hope to compete with, say, the Paris bureaucracy. The French have developed the art of delay to the point that you almost believe the endless shuttling from one office to the next is actually getting you closer to your destination. This, of course, is sheer deception. The French term is *leger-de-main*, lightness of hand, in other words the clerk can shuffle papers faster than you eye can follow. But the Massachusetts made up in sheer inertia what it lacked in elegance.

A clerk would walk twenty feet to a bin, pull out an 8 x 11 sheet, walk twenty feet back to the counter, adjust his stool, pull out a pencil, sharpen it, line it up next to the card, and finally read the name on the sheet in a high-pitched voice. Receiving no response (after awhile people would get

impatient and leave), he would climb down off the stool, walk twenty feet to the bin, withdraw another sheet, return to the counter, climb back up on the stool and light a cigarette. Halfway through the cigarette he would motion to a security guard who would amble over to the counter. (The place crawled with security guards.) The two would chat for awhile. The clerk would finish his cigarette than call the name on the second sheet. It was my name. I would scuttle up to the desk, answer a few questions, carry the card to the end of a very long line, and when I finally reached the front, I would be given a time and told to reappear a week later.

Eventually I was granted an interview, after which a secretary presented me with a magic card, filled with pin holes, covered with rainbows and mushrooms decorating a mandala, which emitted a soft purple glow. “Give this card to the Tooth Fairy who lives under the Yum-Yum Tree at the end of Counter 3,” she told me. I was strongly tempted to take a bite from the side marked “Eat Me,” but was deterred by the boldfaced instructions: “Do Not Hold, Rape, Fondle or Masticate.”

The Tooth Fairy smiled as she rolled my card into a cylinder, covered it with Vaseline and pushed it gently into the folds of the waiting cashbox. Then the heavens parted and a golden light encircled me. “It’s coming down on you,” she murmured. Nine seconds later the cashbox clicked,

blinked, moaned softly, and delivered three checks, drawn on the Left Bank of the Charles. “Come back with your card next week and we’ll do it again,” the Fairy winked. Actually, unemployment wasn’t nearly this much fun.

One day I received a call asking if there were a musicologist in the house. Yes, I replied. Good, said the voice, which belonged to the chairman of the music department at what I will call Open Admissions University.

“One of our teachers has had a nervous breakdown and we need someone to take her classes for the rest of the term, teaching first year theory, ear training, keyboard technique, and field hockey. Are you interested?”

“Well, I don’t know,” I answered. “I have this thing going with a Tooth Fairy downtown but I’ll think it over.”

A few days later I appeared in coat and tie for my interview. “Say something for us in music theory,” one of them demanded.

*“The purpose of an analysis (or a composition) is to reconstruct (or construct) a musical structure. We bother to reify “analysis” (and “composition”) and “analytical methods” (“compositional methods” or “techniques”) because of the conviction, reinforced by confirming practice, that, beginning from the simplest levels of intersubjective auditory experience, pieces are constructible most favorably up to a certain point though hierarchical functional paths that point through increasingly divergent, co-*

*herently subdivided paths, up, finally, to the singular stem: the individual piece,”* I said, quoting from *Perspectives of New Music*, my favorite cure for insomnia.

“What did he say?” whispered the voice teacher (voice teachers don’t speak music theory). “I’m not sure, but I think it had something to do with I-IV-V-I,” answered a multilingual musicologist.

“I think Mr. Crochet’s qualifications are in order,” said the chairman. “Let’s go right to the Ultimate Questions. Do you prefer peanut butter smooth or crunchy?”

“Crunchy.”

“Do you eat ice cream cones with jimmies or without?”

“With.”

“Do you believe in the Infinite Perfectibility of Fifths, the Unredeemable Sinfulness of the Tritone, the Resolution of all Dissonances, and the Light at the End of the Tunnel?”

“I do.”

“Do you promise to Observe all Rests, Raise all Leading Tones, Renounce Cross Relations, Avoid Deceptive Cadences, and forbear to use the first note in the row until all the other eleven have been exhausted, now and forever, Mass Transit Gloria Mundi?”

“I do.”

“Then I proclaim you a member of the Glorious Company of True Deceivers, and entitle you to perform the miracle of transsubdomination, whereby the ignorance which spills from your lips will become truth in the notebooks of generations of students to come.”

“Huzzah!” cried the multitude, as they shook my hand with the secret grip and the last rays of the sun cast freckled hexachords on the wall.

Or so I imagined it. The reality was much less colorful. Before long I settled into the routine of teaching four courses. In “Second Year Elements” students came in for individual half-hour piano lessons once a week starting at 8:00 a.m. The first students seldom showed up so I had a chance to read at least the front page of the New York Times. The others had ingenious explanations of why they hadn’t practiced since their last lesson. I wish I could say I made this up, but I have neither the audacity nor the imagination for it.

- The piano broke when she was moving it from one room of the house to another, and the piano technician couldn’t come before the middle of next month, but she had been thinking about all the things I said last time. (Shades of Professor Harold Hill’s “think system” in *The Music Man*.)

- Everything you learn helps everything else, right, so that hours I spent on my new jazz composition are helping me even though it took all my practice time this week.
- This has been an emotionally disturbing week. (Amen)
- I forgot. (I think I liked this one best of all.)

The First Year Theory class suffered under the disadvantage of a succession of temporary substitutes preceding me, the more or less permanent substitute. My first act in office was to give a diagnostic test to see what they knew. Out of a possible twenty musical skills (writing key signatures, identifying intervals, hearing triads, etc.), each worth one point on the test, the class of two dozen students scored a *total* of 36 points. In the three weeks that followed, the class's aggregate score rose 200%, but unevenly, so that some students could demonstrate fifteen skills while others still had none. Once a week some student I had never seen before would turn up to announce that he had just gotten out of the hospital, or detox, or whatever, and demand to know what he needed to do to get an A in the course.

The First Year Elements class consisted of five regulars and a bunch of people who never came at all. The class protested vigorously when I told them that they had to practice. "We all work," they said, "and we don't have pianos at home and the school closes at five." We arranged a compromise

whereby I would holler at them for not practicing and they would ignore me.

The Sightsinging and Eartraining class was theoretically an adjunct to First Year Theory, but in practice the two classes were mutually exclusive. Half the class just looked at me, smiled, and shook its collective head when I asked it to sightsing; the other half never showed up at all.

One of the students asked me the purpose of the music department. I had to confess that I didn't know, but would try to find out. "Are they trying to turn out performers?" she asked.

"Not likely, since no one practices," I said.

"Well, if they can't play an instrument," she persisted, "they must be scholars."

"But they don't know anything, so they can't be scholars."

"Then they must be teachers," she said, and I had to agree.

## Chapter 14

The Waban Post Office was a fifties-modern structure with waist-high red brick followed by white-painted wood and glass. Plate glass windows on the front wall afforded a complete view of the interior: a counter on the left, an array of mailboxes on the right, arranged to offer postal workers easy access from behind. The left wall contained bulletin boards with public announcements, forthcoming stamps and wanted criminals; the right wall held a large framed quilt above a plaque describing it as the product of a community-wide project celebrating the town's centennial. A chest-high table in the middle of the room offered space for addressing envelopes and a small calendar (assisted by a large clock over the mailboxes) for the benefit of those who had difficulty keeping track of the time. Not a chair in the room: evidently post office policy discouraged loitering.

The first time I visited the post office, thinking I could simply keep an eye on the mailbox whose number Natalie Porter had provided, I went through the motions of addressing and stamping a letter, reading the crim-

inal announcements and admiring the centennial quilt for fifteen minutes without spotting any SIP personnel, although I was surprised to see a large number of students from The Cloister. When I noticed Wendy Atwater among their number, I approached her.

“What’s everyone doing at the post office?” I asked. “Don’t students receive mail at their dorms?”

“Yeah, they deliver mail there, but all the stuff goes into a big basket on the table in the front hall.”

“I would think that was more convenient than coming over here.”

“But less private. A lot of the girls don’t want their dorm-mates seeing where their personal mail is coming from, if you know what I mean.”

That may have explained the exclamations of delight and occasional high-pitched giggles I heard as young women opened the contents of their cubbyholes, more likely to be *billets doux* than bills. Of course the presence of all those undergraduates also made my job more difficult. I hadn’t spent more than fifteen minutes in the post office lobby before a clerk asked me to state my business, although he didn’t express himself quite that way.

“Hey, Mac!” he barked.

“Are you addressing me?”

“What are you doing here?”

“This is a public building.”

“That may be, but it’s intended for post office business, not a place to pick up girls.”

“Sir, many of these young women are my students.”

“Yeah, Mac. I saw you talking with one of them. What, are you trying to expand the field?”

“I resent your implication.”

“Be that as it may, the United States government isn’t running a dating service here.”

“But I ...”

“Beat it, Mac.”

I briefly considered obtaining a pair of binoculars to watch the mailbox from outside the building but decided it would make me even more conspicuous. How did private eyes get away with surreptitious surveillance?

On my second visit I hit upon the clever stratagem of actually renting a post office box, a process I succeeded in extending to considerable length by posing the kinds of questions more appropriate to someone twice my age confused by early dementia. The clerk probably thought I was a nut, but the exercise gave me a legitimate excuse for being in the building. Still no one from SIP.

On my third visit I spotted several pieces of mail through the clear plastic door of the SIP box, and by means of an elaborate charade—checking and rechecking my own mailbox, looking at the time, searching for coins in my change purse, going outside pretending to feed the parking meter, returning to check the mailbox again—succeeded in observing a young woman open the SIP mailbox, remove its contents, and leave the post office.

At this point I made a critical error. In retrospect I ought to have remained in my reluctant role as amateur sleuth and allowed the young woman to lead me unawares to her destination. Instead, overeager at discovering a clue, I accosted her on the street, identified myself as a member of the college faculty and demanded she take me to the office on pain of being reported to the college administration. In the short run, at least, the plan succeeded and she took me down a side street to a building of office suites and up one flight of stairs to an unmarked door, where she gave a series of knocks in a pre-arranged pattern and was admitted.

The room, designed for utility rather than hospitality, had no comfortable chairs for waiting customers, no artwork on the wall, no plush rugs or attractive window treatments, no side tables covered with magazines. One entire wall was lined with filing cabinets in a forbidding gun-metal

gray. Tables on an adjoining wall held half a dozen typewriters, a number of apparently college-age young women making the balls of the IBM Selectrics whirr. The opposite wall had windows and a door evidently leading to an inner office. Young women at other tables were marking up typed manuscripts and comparing them with other documents. At my entrance all activity ceased and my unwilling guide announced, "It wasn't my fault; he made me let him in."

Before long the door of the inner office opened and out strode two large women: Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee, both in blue jeans, one wearing a blue Cloister Crew sweatshirt, the other a crimson Harvard sweatshirt, one with light brown hair cropped quite short, the other with darker brown hair tied back in a pony tail. "This office is not open to the public," one said in a voice evidently accustomed to giving orders.

"Perhaps we could talk privately," I suggested.

"Do you have a banana in your ear?" asked the other. "She said get out."

"I thought we might discuss a certain red, bushy-tailed carnivore," I said.

The first woman kept coming forward but her companion understood the reference to Abby Fox and grudgingly directed me to the back office.

We entered the small space. No one offered me a seat so I delivered my message standing. “The two of you were seen entering Jewitt Tower on the night of Abby’s death,” I began. This wasn’t true, at least not to my knowledge, but they had no way of knowing that.

The woman in the Cloister Crew sweatshirt threatened to call the police if I didn’t leave at once.

“That’s not a bad suggestion,” I said. “I imagine the police will probably be interested in the operation you’re running here as well as reopening the case of Abby’s death.”

Certain that this would stop the pair dead in their tracks, I was surprised to see the woman in the Harvard sweatshirt reach over to tap on the window to the main office. Several young women appeared and escorted me out the front entrance. This hadn’t gone quite as I’d planned.

Two days later, when I returned to The Cloister, I discovered a message from the music department chairman requesting that I meet with him at the conclusion of the day. What was this about? After seeing my students—happily Penny Lapworth wasn’t among them—I proceeded to the chairman’s office.

Newton Falgarwood’s office displayed the seemingly obligatory framed parchment of Gregorian chant but no filing cabinets and no work

table covered with photocopied manuscripts. Falgarwood actually studied and thought about music, but wrote strangely about it. The same labeling technique that he insisted on in student “analyses” pervaded his academic studies, but he had a tendency to seize on details in widely separated works and then link them with the same dogged determination, insane cleverness and ultimate futility with which a paranoiac knits together a bizarre picture of the world. The hospitality of the evening we had spent together had entirely disappeared and the absence of a smile made the his strange hair style appear downright threatening.

“Sit down, Crochet,” he began. No Axel this time. He began to pace back and forth as if uncertain how to begin. “Sexual harassment is a serious charge in any context,” he said at last, “but nowhere more so than in a women’s college.” I began to protest but he silenced me with a hand gesture. “I have to say that I opposed your engagement from the start. It seems to me that employing young unmarried male professors to teach nubile undergraduate women is just asking for trouble. I was overruled by those bedazzled by your credentials. Now, however, it appears that I was correct in my misgivings. I understand that a young man like yourself might not be immune to feminine charm, but I would have thought that by

this point in your career you would have learned to exercise a certain measure of self-control. What do you have to say for yourself?”

“Can you at least give me the name of the complainant?” I asked. Falgarwood did. I’d never heard of her. “That’s not even one of my students,” I said.

“It’s not enough to become enamored of one of the young ladies in your charge,” Falgarwood said, “but to harass a general member of the student body strikes me as the behavior of someone utterly lacking in discretion.”

“I never even talk to students other than music majors,” I protested.

“Then it seems all the more unlikely that the complaint would be frivolous,” he said. “I took the precaution of making a few telephone calls, and discovered that a similar complaint had been made against you in California.”

“That was completely fraudulent,” I said.

“I can see why a young man might be motivated to cross the continent in an effort to put such shameful circumstances behind him, but unfortunately technology bridges the gap.”

“I never ...”

“I’m sure you understand the venerable Latin phrase *in loco parentis*. I may be old-fashioned but I believe that the parents who entrust their daughters to our care at The Cloister assume ‘in the place of a parent’ to mean a good parent and not an incestuous one.”

“Now really ...”

“When I offered you a word to the wise the other evening, I assumed that that would be the end of it. I never dreamt that your perverted interest in that poor Fox child, one might even use the word ‘necrophilia’ ...”

“May I say something?”

“I assumed that my advice would have set you back on the right track, but you persisted in your folly.”

“That’s not fair.”

“I believe I’ve done the best I could, and I will be able to look back at my handling of this situation with a clear conscience.”

“But ...”

“No, don’t thank me. I was only carrying out my responsibilities to the best of my abilities with my conscience as my guide.”

“Thank you?”

“Needless to say, if you had entertained any hopes of obtaining a permanent position here at The Cloister you must abandon them.”

“Is this an official reprimand, going into my record?” I asked.

“I’m afraid it is. You will, of course, be permitted to finish out the remaining few weeks of your appointment.”

Falgarwood clearly had no interest in listening to my protestations but I waited to see whether he had anything else to say. Only a curt nod indicated that the chairman wished to terminate the interview.

As I left the music building I caught sight of Natalie Porter headed in the direction of the dormitory. I caught up with her and asked whether I might take a look at her copy of the pictorial directory of students (referred to in men’s colleges as the ‘pig book’). As we walked I described my misadventure at the SIP headquarters, omitting all reference to my uncomfortable interview with the chairman.

“So you actually found the place,” she said. “I’m impressed.”

“But it didn’t get me anywhere,” I said. “They seemed immune to threats.”

“That’s what Abby said.”

When we reached Natalie’s room she produced the student directory and I had no difficulty locating the name of the student I had allegedly harassed. I guess I should not have been surprised to see the face of the young

woman whom I had accosted at the post office. Sexual harassment charges are easy to lay but difficult to refute.

On the long ride from Woodland to Boston I reflected on Sheri's words and decided she had a point. My insistence on investigating Abby's death, without training or official standing, had led only to disappointment. I didn't think Newton Falgarwood would broadcast a groundless sexual harassment charge, but one could never be sure. I found Sheri's arguments for relationship vs. accomplishment troubling. Ultimately I didn't think one had to choose between one and the other, but it struck me that if you gave your partner only the time left over after you'd met all your responsibilities, you weren't likely to have much of a relationship. The key probably lay in scheduling couple time like anything else, and I planned to tell her this, but when I got to the apartment there was no Sheri, no suitcases, and no note.

## Chapter 15

Two days later, with nothing to draw me homeward after my lessons at The Cloister, I had a milkshake at The Buttery and tried to retrace Abby's steps on her last evening of life. Abby climbed to the top of Jewitt Tower every evening to lock the door to the carillon, so I did the same, noting that this part of the tower, being open to the public, offered no impediments to her murderers. (Somehow the idea of raising an unwilling conscious victim over an elevated railing made the notion of a single assassin seem unlikely.) Would the two heavy-set women I had encountered in the SIP office have readily made this climb, I wondered? Then I reflected that the Cloister crew team quite likely trained on these very stairs.

Having reached the top of the public area, I tried to imagine a place of concealment. The practice keyboard lay in an open gallery just to the side of the tower's central shaft and didn't afford much cover. The only place I could think of to hide was in the narrow space behind the practice carillon.

From that vantage point one couldn't be seen by anyone heading toward the door leading to the final spiral staircase.

I eased behind the practice keyboard. In the dust I could make out footprints. Whoever swept the tower floors hadn't penetrated to this obscure corner. And spider webs. I really hated spider webs. I took a deep breath and crept on. The footprints bore an unusual design: an Escher-like pattern of fish swimming in opposite directions. Must have been some kind of running shoe, I imagined. I'd noticed a sports shop in the village. Perhaps I could learn more there. I walked down the six flights of stairs and across the campus to the village.

"GOOD SPORT, W.H. Good, Proprietor," read the sign of the small sports boutique on Waban's main street. A bell tinkled as I opened the door. Racks of clothes extended on both sides of a passageway to the sales counter. In Boston this counter would have been placed nearer the entrance to discourage thieves from grabbing garments and running out of the store.

Past the clothing one could see wall shelves with a wide variety of sporting equipment ranging from skis and poles, apparently left over from winter, to fishing gear and hiking boots. An area of open wall displayed posters and photos of various sporting figures.

Behind the counter stood a sandy-haired figure whom I took to be W. H. Good himself, a supposition confirmed by the thin brass label pinned to his shirt pocket. I wondered how anyone could actually sell sports equipment while wearing a bow tie, but maybe it worked for him; who knew?

Noticing the blown-up photograph of spring skiing at Tuckerman Ravine on Mt. Washington, I asked the proprietor whether he had ever skied there. “Yes,” he said, “but that was many years ago.”

“I’ve climbed the Tuckerman Trail in summer,” I said, “but I’ve never gotten up the nerve to hike up there in winter.”

“Every year some damn fool injures or kills himself skiing over the headwall,” he said, “but you can have a good time if you take proper safety precautions.”

“Still, I think I’ll stick to regular ski areas,” I said.

“So what brings you here? You don’t seem to be too interested in the merchandise.”

“I was hoping that you could tell me something about a sports shoe.” I described the design of the footprint I’d seen in Jewitt Tower.

“Oh, yes. Nike made that shoe a few years ago. Didn’t sell many. They’ve been doing a lot better with what they call the “waffle trainer” that

Bill Bowerman designed for them last year. You'll see the latest models over there on the shelf."

"So the fish design didn't catch on?"

"Can't say it did. Of course the college bought up quite a few of them for the crew team. I guess they thought it would give them a better grip on wet surfaces."

"Did it work?"

"I never received any complaints so maybe they did."

Having seen a photograph of Roger Bannister celebrating his achievement, two decades earlier, running the first sub-four-minute mile, I asked Mr. Good whether he had run track.

"That was a long time ago. I used to run the 800. Set a high school record that lasted for a couple of years." A smile took years off his face and he seemed to disappear briefly into the glory days of a bygone era. Then the tinkle of the bell indicating another customer brought him abruptly back to the present and he excused himself.

## Chapter 16

According to the large clock mounted on a pole outside the sports boutique I just had time to get to the Step Sing at Memorial Chapel. Natalie Porter had urged me to attend, and since I'd missed the Junior Show I figured I owed her one.

The campus glowed with the comforting light of dozens of artfully placed lamps, which illuminated the leaves above them and cast beams on the pathways below. No student at The Cloister need fear the dark.

I'd forgotten the sheer size of Memorial Chapel, with its Tiffany glass at the north and south entrances, the tower rising from the middle of the building, and the broad main entrance with its wrought iron gates. On the steps leading up to the doorway stood what must have been more than a hundred undergraduates, all dressed in purple, each holding a songbook. Natalie had told me that in the old days the students knew all the college songs by heart. Now the students needed an *aide-mémoire* as they followed the direction of the song-mistress standing on a wooden platform at

the base of the steps. I recognized some of my music major students among their number.

When the purple-clad group had finished their program and begun to file off the steps, to be replaced by a similar cohort arrayed in red, organized cheers arose from the multitude of students in front of the steps. I had difficulty understanding the words but I gathered from the tone that the cheers formed a kind of affectionate heckling of those who had just performed.

I cast my eyes around the crowd, noticing in particular the few spectators not dressed in one of the four official colors. Recognizing Jessica Lansdowne, one of my students from Huntington, I edged my way over to her side. She glanced up and said, “Hi, Professor Crochet. I wondered whether you might be here.”

“Hi, Jessica. What brings you to The Cloister?”

“Natalie invited me. She said I might find the event amusing but I think she’s also happy with the results of the work they’ve put into preparing this program.”

“Has she sung yet?”

“No—they’re yellow. That’s the last group to sing.”

“Could I talk with you for a few minutes?”

“Sure thing.” Others around us were already showing signs of annoyance with our conversation so we moved a bit apart from the crowd where we could still hear the singing but enjoy a bit of privacy.

“I’ve read and marked your papers but haven’t talked with you since our conversation two weeks ago.”

Jessica looked down thoughtfully. “I hope I haven’t gotten you involved in a hornet’s nest.”

“You’ve been talking with Natalie,” I said. Jessica nodded. “Well, I think you were right. Abby didn’t commit suicide.” I told her what I’d discovered and the conclusions I had drawn. “Abby seems to have led a more complicated life than I had appreciated. The National Honor Society story you told me was evidently just the tip of the iceberg.”

“Mmh.” Jessica seemed to be a bit uncomfortable with what I was saying but I didn’t understand why and so kept on going.

“I know that her late father was an army officer and all, but that doesn’t fully explain her involvement with all these moralistic campaigns. I keep wondering why such an attractive young woman seemed to avoid personal relationships, or at least the kind of relationships I see among other students here.”

Jessica looked at me hard and I could see that she wanted to say something. I waited. “I like you, Professor Crochet, and the way you’ve treated a difficult situation at Huntington makes me think you’re a pretty straight shooter.”

“I do my best.”

“If I tell you something in confidence can you promise not to share it with anyone at all?”

“Yes.”

Jessica took a long breath and let it out again. “Okay, here goes. Abby was sexually abused as a child.”

“You mean recently?”

“No, I mean just after her mother died.”

“But she would have been around five.”

“People think that sexual abuse begins only at puberty but that’s not necessarily true.”

I didn’t know whether Jessica was speaking from personal experience now but it was her story to tell, so I let her tell it, and simply nodded.

“She didn’t tell me all the details, and it’s been a few years since we had this conversation, but as I recall, after Abby’s mother died, her father sold their large house and he and Abby moved into someplace easier for a

single parent to maintain. There was something about a gap in closing dates and for awhile the two of them lived with Abby's uncle and his wife."

"And that's when it happened?"

"Yes. Her father hadn't yet retired at that point, her aunt worked, her uncle was either retired or unemployed, I don't remember which, but he had plenty of opportunities."

Cheers from the sidelines marked the end of the red group's performance. We looked up and saw a company of students dressed in green take their places on the steps.

"How long did this go on?"

"Several months, I believe."

"And Abby never told anyone?"

"Not until she and her father had moved into their new house."

"Then what?"

"She told her father everything that had happened."

"And he believed her?"

"Happily, yes. That's the worst thing for an abused child—to get up the courage to tell an adult and then not be believed."

Again I suspected that Jessica had had first-hand experience in what she was telling me, but it was not for me to pry so I simply asked, “What happened?”

“Abby’s father was very close to his brother. I suppose he was tempted to simply break relations, but instead he confronted him, and he confessed, and he told him if this ever happened again he would be sure that he went to jail, and if he survived jail—evidently pedophiles don’t do well among prison populations—he would personally kill him.”

I managed to sort out the rapidly changing pronouns. “As you look back at this story, what do you think happened to Abby?”

Jessica paused for a moment and I could see her trying to separate the larger picture from the details of narrative. “I think she drew closer to her father—she knew that she could trust him to protect her in the future, even if he hadn’t done so while they were at the uncle’s house.”

“But further from everybody else?”

Jessica nodded. I could sense that that “everybody else” probably included her. “You know how girls sometimes exchange charm bracelets or bits of jewellery marked BFF?”

“Best Friends Forever?”

“Right. I don’t think Abby ever did that with anyone. She made friends, sure, but never with the complete openness of a BFF.”

I thought about Wendy’s remarks on Roommate 101 and nodded. “You asked me to learn about the details of Abby’s death, but you’ve helped me better understand the details of her life. Unfortunately, it seems to be just those details that helped contribute to her death.”

Jessica didn’t say anything but just put her arms around me and gave me a hug. At that moment I looked across the crowd and saw Newton Falgarwood glancing in my direction and frowning.

Jessica and I remained to hear the yellow group, which included Natalie, Wendy, and Penny, the seniors among my music major tutees. When the Step-Sing ended, Jessica went to join her friend and I took the long trip home to my solitary apartment.

## Chapter 17

I arrived at The Cloister on the first Thursday in May, my last day at the college. The students would have a week of preparation time before exams, some of which would be spent in their dorm rooms or the library, but certainly some time sunbathing on the lawns as warm weather interfered with the best of intentions. Then came two weeks of exams, but since my tutorials involved no testing, my responsibilities ended here.

Penny Lapworth's face glowed with excitement when she greeted me. "It's because of secrets," she announced. "Abby knew things she wasn't supposed to know."

"Penny," I said, "I've already figured it out," but there was no hope of stopping this juggernaut. How had this young woman become so confident in getting her own way? Did others invariably melt before her ebullience or the cuteness of her slightly upturned nose? Or had she inherited this way of talking from a similarly-inclined mother? In my musing I nearly lost track of her argument.

“You probably know that The Cloister has a strict policy against students being married to professors.”

I didn't know, but it sounded like just the kind of policy that The Cloister would have in place, and goodness knows The Cloister liked to enforce its policies strictly. Or was my thinking being distorted by my chagrin at being called on the carpet by Falgarwood? Penny merrily chattered on.

“If a secret marriage ever came to light, the girl would get expelled, which might not be all that bad because once she'd been accepted at The Cloister she could probably get in pretty much anywhere, but her husband might have a hard time finding another job.”

Tell me about it, I thought to myself. During my second and, as it turned out, final year at Chihuahua State I'd written letters to every college and university in the country that had a music department, excepting only fanatical religious schools, in my search for employment beyond the stinking desert of southern California. All in vain, though occasionally I'd get a letter from some department chairman expressing enthusiasm over my credentials followed by regret at his inability to offer me a job

I had moved to Boston on a whim, as a city that “gave off good vibes,” the very phrase indicating the extent to which I had “gone native” during

my California sojourn. Safely back on the East Coast I had managed to obtain several temporary positions but nothing in the tenure track.

Penny, oblivious to my meandering thoughts, rushed ahead with her explanation. “I’ve heard rumors of just such a marriage going on right now. Of course, they’re extremely secretive about it. Can you imagine what it must be like for her, sneaking off to a house when all of her classmates are going back to their dorms? It might not be so bad for him—after all, professors are supposed to live in houses, but imagine that whenever they met in public he’d have to pretend not to know her—his own wife!”

“Penny ...” Once more I tried unsuccessfully to interrupt this torrent of fantasy.

“Suppose Abby threatened to expose them. That would certainly give the man sufficient motive to get her out of the way to protect his job.”

“Penny, murder is serious business. You don’t just kill someone because you think she might be a threat.”

“In the ghetto people get killed just for looking at someone the wrong way, or showing disrespect.”

“The Cloister is hardly a ghetto.”

“You’d be surprised,” Penny said. “You have no idea how cliquey it can get in the dorms.”

“There’s never been a murder on campus,” I said.

“There has now,” Penny said. “Or suppose Abby had a crush on a professor. You, for instance. He might be afraid for the consequences and get her out of the way to protect his career.”

I decided this had gone far enough. Too far, in fact. “Penny, I already know who killed Abby. I found their footprints. She was threatening to expose an essay service.”

Penny gave me an astonished look. “And you didn’t tell me!”

What had this young woman been imagining? That we were some kind of latter-day Nick and Nora Charles? I had a fleeting image of that immortal screen couple mounting the many flights of Jewitt Tower, he in a tuxedo, she in a long gown, with their dog Asta scampering ahead of them. Or worse, had her harebrained idea of Abby having a crush on me just been a projection of her own feelings?

“I’m really disappointed,” Penny said, and rushed from the room without giving a second thought to her scheduled final tutorial.

My morning classes ended with Natalie Porter. I’d enjoyed her reliably cheerful disposition through the year, and told her so as we concluded our last lesson. I thanked her for supplying the information that allowed

me to learn how Abby had died, although I couldn't see any way that the culprits would ever be brought to justice.

"Who have you told about this?" Natalie asked, with a note of concern in her voice.

I explained how, in exasperation, I had tried to halt the flow of Penny's endless theorizing by letting her know that the search had been concluded.

"Didn't you know?" Natalie asked. "Penny's a bounty hunter!"

"I can't see how that makes a lot of difference at this point," I said. "As things have worked out, I will probably never return to this campus again, much to my regret."

Natalie seemed unmollified. "Watch your back, Professor Crochet," she warned as she took her leave.

During my afternoon tutorials a piece of unfinished business continued to call for attention at the back of my mind. At the end of my last lesson with Wendy Atwater, I asked whether we might take one more look at Abby's belongings, stashed at the back of her closet.

"Suits me," Wendy said. "I don't have anything else to do, if you know what I mean."

As we crossed the campus I marveled that familiarity had in no way diminished my delight at being able to live my life, however briefly, in such beautiful surroundings. Just as my daily walk through the Boston Public Garden never failed to produce some new detail for my delectation, so each traverse across the campus produced some tiny reminder of the privilege I felt to be a temporary part of this lovely, albeit peculiar, community.

Wendy hauled out the few boxes that remained of Abby's belongings. "Did you want to look at her clothes, too?" she asked.

"No," I said. "I think I'll find what I'm looking for here." I emptied one of the cartons onto Abby's bed: ribbon-bound letters, probably from the British boyfriend; make-up containers; pens, pencils, erasers, and bottles of White-Out; emery boards, bracelets. Evidently whoever had gathered Abby's belongings for storage—most likely Wendy—hadn't made any attempt to separate the transient from the treasured. They weren't her things after all. (An unspoken "if you know what I mean" entered my mind unbidden.)

Then I spotted it, an object that had escaped my attention on my first inspection because I hadn't known what to look for. Now I recognized it: a post office box key like the one I had in my pocket. I thanked Wendy for

her indulgence, getting a “Whatever” in response, and hurried across the campus to the Waban Post Office.

“I won’t be needing this any longer,” I said to the clerk as I turned in my key and waited for the return of my deposit.

“You didn’t get an awful lot of mail, young man,” the clerk observed as he crossed my name off a file card.

Fortunately the post office, more concerned with its own convenience than with the privacy of its patrons, still maintained the old system whereby the number of each mailbox appeared stamped into the flat surface of the metal key. I located Abby’s box, opened the door of the compartment, and withdrew its contents, a single manila envelope.

I took the envelope over to the work counter in the middle of the room, opened it, and pulled out half a dozen typewritten sheets. Abby really had completed her exposé of Sisterhood Is Powerful. How that title must have rankled! Everything Natalie had told me, everything I had discovered for myself, and more: Abby would have made a fine investigative reporter had she lived.

I hesitated for only a moment before asking the clerk for a fresh envelope, filling it with the product of Abby’s labors, addressing it to the editor-in-chief of the student newspaper, and presenting it to the clerk for proper

postage. I toyed briefly with the idea of making another copy to send to President Clearwater. Then I recalled Newton Falgarwood's words, "The Cloister abhors negative publicity."

No wonder the administration had been content to let Abby's death remain a suicide. A student taking her own life is naturally regrettable, but she must have been unbalanced to begin with—mark it down to a momentary lapse by the admissions department. Send a tasteful bouquet and a note of regret to the next of kin, if any, and be done with it.

A murder investigation, on the other hand, would constitute a public relations catastrophe: police detectives snooping around the campus, the unsavory stench of violent death hovering over it. Even if the local police department could be browbeaten into maintaining silence, nothing would prevent newspaper, and worse, television reporters from making lurid speculations. There must be many readers and viewers in the Boston area who would take pleasure in the predicament of a negative pall falling upon this enclave of privilege. Let *Schadenfreude* reign supreme.

No, it really was suicide. It had to be suicide, and nothing that an untitled bearded musicologist could say or do would alter that convenient truth.

## Chapter 18

On the bus from Waban village to the Woodland T station I thought about Sheri. It had been a week since her departure from the apartment. I wasn't concerned for her safety--she had, after all, packed her suitcases—but I felt uneasy that I had so badly misjudged the state of things between us. Sheri had expressed her dissatisfaction with my involvement with Abby's death and my misplaced priorities, from her perspective, regarding work and leisure, or accomplishment and relationship, as she put it. But I hadn't looked upon our disagreements as fights or her arguments in support of her position as ultimatums. Had I completely misread the situation?

I esteemed Sheri's sense of adventure and independence. In order to be with me she had left her home and friends, several of whom had counseled her against her involvement not just with a man several years older than she but an Easterner to boot. I admired her determination to start a career in an unfamiliar city and celebrated her success at landing an edito-

rial position with a Boston publishing house. To be sure, for the moment she was only an assistant editor but that rank seemed appropriate for someone with only a B.A. in English and no previous experience.

In valuing Sheri's independence had I perhaps underestimated her need for interaction with me? I found Sheri to be a great companion but we had never really discussed what she sought in our relationship.

The bus arrived at the station and I made my way downstairs to the subway platform. Some of the M.T.A. rail vehicles stood well above the tracks, and you mounted a set of stairs to enter them. So they were trolleys, right? Much of the time they ran underground. So that made them subways, right? The Riverside branch of the Green Line ran both underground and above ground and sometimes you mounted stairs, as in Boston, and sometimes the train arrived at platform level, as here at the Woodland station. Rather than waste time debating nomenclature, Bostonians simply referred to the entire rail system as "the T."

I leaned out over the tracks looking for the train. Nothing in sight. In the middle of the platform the crowd became denser as passengers arrived from the parking lot or from one of the several buses whose lines emanated from this station. Some kid with a transistor radio held to his ear created a

mild din at the opposite end of the platform. Alone at my end I had no complaints about the sound.

I leaned over the tracks again and saw the familiar square-fronted train approach, its small dual headlights glowing and its pantograph drawing power from the overhead electric lines. At this end of the platform the train was still travelling at a pretty fair clip, but it would slow to a stop by the time the lead car reached the far end.

With my attention focused on the arriving train I don't know what provoked me to turn around; perhaps my peripheral vision extended farther than I realized. Approaching me I saw two large figures: Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee. As they neared they raised their hands to shoulder height in front of them, the universal "back off" gesture. Well, they wouldn't have to worry about me any further. I didn't expect to see either the Cloister or the SIP offices again. Much as I regretted Abby's death, I was glad to put the whole sorry business behind me. Newton Falgarwood, with his distrust of unmarried young men; Olive Earle, with her supposed knowledge of young women and their need for stability; Penny Lapworth, with her harebrained theories: I would be relieved never to have to deal with any of them again.

As the two women grew closer I realized my mistake. They weren't trying to signal their displeasure with me; they intended to push me off the platform into the path of the oncoming train. If I continued to reflect on the situation I would soon be dead. Had there been only one of them I might have been able to dodge to one side or the other, but they had effectively closed any avenue for escape. As they increased their pace to a run I instinctively fell to the ground, pressed my arms against my head and prepared to be rolled off the platform.

This appeared to be the single action for which the two assailants had not prepared. Expecting some kind of response on my part, they had evidently calculated that their considerable momentum would easily overcome any defense that I might mount. Lacking the anticipated resistance of my puny but stationary body, and tripping over the prone object at their feet, the pair had flown over me and off the platform on a fatal collision course with the arriving train. Turning my head, as I desperately resisted being swept after them, I thought I caught a glimpse of a swimming-fish pattern on the bottom of one sole.

## Chapter 19

“I think we may want to rethink this whole thing,” I said.

Sheri looked dismayed. “You mean you want me to go away again?”

“No—just the opposite. I want to change things so that you won’t want to.”

After spending several hours with transit personnel, paramedics, Woodland police officers and eventually even a state trooper, I was deemed medically fit and legally free to go on my way. Arriving home I found that Sheri had prepared dinner, arranged flowers on the table, and generally settled in again.

Sheri had wanted to hear about everything that had taken place while she had been away, and I told her.

“So both of the SIP women died at the scene?” Sheri asked.

“The one closer to the train was killed immediately. The other one died en route to the hospital.”

“I don’t think anyone ever really *deserves* to die,” Sheri said. “Certainly Abby didn’t deserve to die. And you don’t deserve to die. But it always hurts me to see people getting their values so mixed up that they value material profit over human life.”

“I’m sorry they died,” I said. “But I’m not sorry to have proven that Abby never committed suicide. It may not mean much, after the fact, but I like to imagine that I gave her back a small measure of honor.”

“You’re being ironic,” Sheri said.

“No, I’m serious.”

“After all this, you can still use the word ‘honor’ without seeing the irony?”

“I guess I’m missing it.”

“You idealized this Abby girl, Axel. The person whose honor you’ve saved isn’t real.”

“That doesn’t seem fair.”

“No? Okay, let’s take it from the top. First that Huntington student ...”

“Jessica.”

“That’s right, Jessica. She tells you how back in high school Abby embarrassed the principal, and really herself, by insisting on putting an abstract principle above any concern for people.”

“Well ...”

“Then Natalie tells you how Abby falls in love with the four absolutes of Moral Re-Armament—what a name to attract the daughter of a military officer. Probably one way she could make up to her father for not being a boy—but she uses them to browbeat her fellow students.”

“I don’t think she saw it that way.”

“Then instead of having a real sexual relationship she engages in a long-distance literary-sexual relationship with some guy in England. The poets meant the conceit linking orgasm and death to be fun, Axel, not a substitute for actual intimacy.”

“But ...”

“Then comes her fatal attraction to the Sisterhood. Now I’m not for a minute trying to justify that high-priced cheating syndicate, but look at the naïveté of this student waltzing into a business office and insisting that they stop what they’re doing because it offends her principles. Abby seems colossal out of touch with reality. And I haven’t even mentioned that pa-

thetic Penny creature who had such an obvious crush on Abby and was snubbed.”

“I’ve never looked at it that way.”

“Of course not. In a sense you’re as bad as she was, falling in love with an abstract vision of a damsel in distress—a dead damsel, I have to point out—then recklessly following her footsteps until you nearly got killed yourself. Don’t misunderstand, Axel, I’m not angry. In a way your innocent heroics are almost touching, but I am upset. I nearly lost you!”

“I guess when you put it that way there is a certain quixotic quality to all this.”

“But don’t you see? Don Quixote was a literary creation. Cervantes himself never faced death beneath the wheels of a subway train.”

I had to laugh.

“Okay, I know—a glaring anachronism—but you know what I mean. Now I don’t want you to think I’m unsympathetic to Abby Fox. I can imagine that if the most important person in my life were taken away when I was very young, I might well conclude that people are unreliable and I could only trust principles. It doesn’t sound as if her father, with his devotion to Moral Re-Armament, ever set her straight from that error. If Abby had

been better connected to people instead of principles, she might still be alive.”

“I sense there’s a connection to us behind all this.”

“Go ahead; I’ve talked enough.”

“It goes back to accomplishment (an abstraction) versus relationship (a personal reality).”

“That’s a nice way to put it.”

“I don’t dispute anything you’ve said, Sheri, but I sense that you feel as if you’re competing with a dead undergraduate for my affections.”

“Don’t forget, I was an undergraduate when you met me.”

“Well, you need have no fears. If I’d ever had any illusions about Abby Fox, you’ve managed quite handily to dispel them. I really am all yours—no fantasy.”

“That’s good to hear. And despite everything, I do hope the student paper publishes Abby’s exposé,” Sheri said.

“I think there’s a very strong chance. Natalie Porter described the editor as someone who would like nothing better than to take on The Cloister over the issue of freedom of expression.”

“So will people eventually figure out that Abby was murdered?”

“As long as Penny Lapworth is around, I don’t think you have to worry about that.”

“Do you think they’ll listen to her?”

“They will now. I’d be surprised if she hasn’t already gone up to the tower to examine the footprints.”

“But you’re done with the story?”

“I’m done. And I’m glad you’re back.”

“I couldn’t just leave you and not give us a chance to try to work things out,” Sheri had said when I arrived home. Now we were working things out.

“I came to some conclusions while you were away,” I said as we sat together on the sofa after dinner.

“Tell me,” Sheri said, and snuggled against my shoulder.

“Work never ends.”

“Boy, I’ll say,” Sheri said. “What else?”

“What I mean is that you could work twenty-four hours a day and never finish. But that’s not necessarily a bad thing.”

“Working twenty-four hours a day?”

“No—treating work as a process, the way you suggested. You put in the hours every day—maybe a lot fewer than I’ve been doing, but enough—and accomplishments come along as a matter of course.”

“What about deadlines?”

“That’s where I need to be more realistic. I’m thinking that it might be a good idea to seek your advice before I set a deadline. But I’m getting this all backwards.”

“How do you mean?”

“Love and friendship, as abstract concepts, exist outside of time. But as practical realities, love and friendship require time to sustain them.”

“You mean the way that you either put the effort into relationships with old friends—letters, telephone calls, Christmas cards, visits, whatever—or else they fade away and die.”

“And if that’s true for friendship it must be doubly true for partnership. I confess I’ve taken you for granted, but I love you and I want to spend more time with you.”

“I did some shopping while I was away,” Sheri said.

“Clothes?”

“No, a book.”

“Let me guess: *Stress Less*.”

“Guess again.”

“*How to Cope With Your Type A Partner.*”

“Not even close.” Sheri pulled out a thin volume entitled *The Kama Sutra for Modern Adults.*”

“I’ve heard of the Kama Sutra, but what’s ‘modern’?”

“It’s translated into language that anyone can understand. And if you still have trouble with the words there are illustration—graphic illustrations.”

“And ‘adult’?”

“It means you won’t have to bend your body into positions you’ll regret the next morning.”

“Where did you turn this up?”

“Every large bookstore has a section devoted to books like this, even though you don’t usually see too many women there.”

“But that didn’t stop you.”

“Oh no. I like asking uptight male clerks to help me find a hardbound edition.”

“And then I suppose you pretend not to understand what the book is really about?” I said.

Sheri just looked up at me with a blank innocent expression and battered her eyelashes.

“Brother,” I said.

“Aw come on,” Sheri said. “It’s fun.”

“So when do we get to assert ourselves as modern adults?” I asked.

“I was thinking now might be a good time,” Sheri said, and led me into the bedroom.

Things took a little longer than usual to get going, what with stopping every so often to compare our positions with those shown in the book, but after a time both of us approached the state that the French call *jouissance* and Sheri whispered in my ear, “Die, for I am a-dying.”