

Chapter Seventeen

The Phi grounds were becoming a welcome, peaceful oasis for WPC Thatcher. Nobody was ever running here. Instead one only encountered wandering staff lost in puzzled cogitation. She had begun the week in her office re-gathering her notes and thoughts from the previous investigations. She still wanted to conclude her report with a brief statement of what Andreas had been working on, so mid morning she had made her way up to the Institute. The secretary, Alison, was not in her office in the foyer. Presumably she was preparing to attend the service and reception for Andreas at the Cathedral later in the morning. The WPC was grateful that her superiors would be attending and she wouldn't have to.

Before passing into the building proper though, the WPC paused. Two young men were talking in the foyer out of her sight. For some reason, perhaps a nosiness born of police work, she paused to listen to them.

"You look very smart," one of them was saying, "I didn't know him so I can't face the ceremony myself."

"Beyond the call of duty for a visitor anyway, Pete," responded the other. "Actually I wasn't greatly connected either – he did strings, I'm lattice," apparently a sufficient explanation of separated worlds, "but you have to go don't you? Besides perhaps there will be some fireworks – if Geoffrey over hypes string theory Morris may feel the urge to get hot under the collar or storm out like he did in Andreas' last seminar! One wouldn't want to miss Phi history being made."

Morris would be Morris Trant deduced the WPC. When they had spoken there had been a reluctance to comment on Andreas' work but no suggestion of a public argument. Even the simplest of cases seemed to be dogged by half truths she reflected. The conversation she was listening to had finished and with a wry wish of good luck the two separated. One, a blond-haired young man in a suit and black tie crossed in front of the doorway, the other in shorts and t-shirt was disappearing the other way. Another interview with Prof Trant was called for, then.

First, though, she would stick to her plan of climbing to the second floor to see who she could find to explain Andreas' work. The computer whizzes might have come up with something new too, she thought. As she crossed the carpeted museum area she saw that for the first time since she had been here Prof Sinclair's office door was open. His room was strangely positioned out here away from the core areas of the main research groups. She had been intending to ask what he did and now was her chance, so she allowed herself to again be deflected from her main goal.

She knocked gently on the office door and it swung into the room. The sight that greeted her was a surprise. The desk and floor were covered in half filled cardboard boxes. A man, presumably Prof Sinclair, was practically hurling books from the room's shelves into the boxes. He was well groomed in a sharp grey suit and with short trimmed hair.

His features were symmetric and attractive. He was in his early fifties she estimated but could have filled the role for a shaving advert in his youth. The first impression was marred by the fact he was clearly in a massive fury. He turned with a look suggesting he would bite her head off but it turned to a little surprise when he saw her uniform. Then he turned away with a scowl of irritation and snapped,

“Yes?”

“Prof Sinclair?” she queried in as controlled a voice as she could manage. He turned to her and nodded, his expression adding that she should get on with it. “I’m investigating the death of Andreas Born.... And I’d like to have a word about your relationship with him, please.”

“He was a nasty piece of malicious work and I can’t say I can find much sympathy for him, whatever happened. I was in London on Tuesday in any case at a conference - all day. I have a watertight alibi so there’s no point speculating on my having played a part.”

“You’re leaving the Phi I take it?”

“I most certainly am! I just handed Geoffrey my resignation. Not that it’s his fault.” The levels of venom were quite shockingly at odds with the environment. The WPC was intrigued as to what could have been the origin and probed in spite of her doubts that it was really relevant to the case.

“I think you had better calm down Professor and fill me in, given the circumstances.” Sinclair paused in exasperation and dropped the latest pile of books into a box apparently at random. He appeared to give in to the situation though and indicated her to have a seat while he retreated behind his desk. She closed the door and sat looking expectant.

“Geoffrey brought me here from Cambridge. He said that he and the Institute staff were all very keen to forge links with philosophers and historians of science. That’s what I study. It seemed like a super opportunity to participate in frontier science as it happens. What Geoffrey actually meant though, was that he was interested but nobody else gives a damn. Prof Clark lectures me on how philosophy is a dead subject. He says the only active parts of the field should be in social science, economics, and science departments. The rest should be considered part of history.” Sinclair clearly considered this view point such patent rubbish that there was no need to refute it. “Fields quotes Feynman at me every time I see him – working physicists need the philosophy of science like birds need ornithology,” this last he repeated in a sing song voice. He paused and regarded the WPC as if to discover whether she was one of these degenerates too. She kept her face entirely level. It wasn’t her place to express an opinion.

“And this is why you’re leaving?” she asked

“Yes, well that and the last bloody month.” He paused this time as if he was about to tread on thin ice, then picking his words carefully continued. “Andreas has spent the last

month playing a nasty prank on me. He came to me with some documents he said his grandfather had just discovered in the loft in his house in Lubeck, north Germany. They looked very authentic and contained a discourse on a book on alchemy by Newton. The quoted pieces, alleged to be Newton's words, were extremely convincing. The alleged first author was talking drivel, but that was possible. I was wary, but chemical checks on the paper showed it was contemporary and embedded with mercury fumes and so forth as if it had been in a laboratory. I became quite excited and even began to tell my colleagues. That it turns out was premature and I shall be living this down for years to come. The ink contains synthetic compounds of modern manufacture. He was winding me up and could have destroyed my reputation. This isn't without precedent I should add. There was a case, much revelled in by the physics community, of a spoof article being published by a philosophy journal only a few years ago. I was aware of the possibility you see. It's unacceptable though, as I'm sure you understand. I have found myself a position in Paris and, if you will allow me, intend to be gone by mid-afternoon."

Another piece of the jigsaw had fallen into place. Sinclair was S. Andreas had died over a practical joke on a colleague.

The Epiphany chapel, situated in the North transept, was one of the more utilitarian sections of Winchester cathedral, normally set aside for quiet prayer away from the tourist crowds. The walls, bare stone which glowed a golden yellow in the morning sunlight, still boasted towering columns up to the vaulted ceiling far above. The chapel's decorations were otherwise minimal apart from the famed pre-Raphaelite stain glass windows. The altar was a simple table draped in a modern red cloth adorned with golden tapestry work of the city. A discreet, dark wooden cross sat in the middle of the altar flanked by two tall, white candles.

The congregation, a black-clad mix of Phi staff and friends and family of Andreas, were perched in rows on bare wooden chairs with wicker lattice seats. Carl was sat towards the back of the Phi group, his seat against one wall with Kay beside him looking earnestly forward at the proceedings. He was feeling strangely alienated by the service. The vicar, or priest (what would he be in a cathedral?) was speaking, gently giving thanks for Andreas' life and affirming their horror at his death.

The setting and the assumed belief in God being expressed here were almost surreally medieval to Carl. He realized that he hadn't been to a church for its true purpose since he was a child. The depiction of the crucified Jesus on the cross seemed simply distasteful to him – it was an effigy of man's inhumanity to man with none of the connotations of divine soul saving sacrifice. The stained glass window he could see showed Eve in the luxuriant Garden of Eden, a children's story that for him might as well have been of Robin Hood or even Goldilocks and the three bears. Strangely he began to feel guilt for his thoughts. He imagined all the people around him believed in this truth and he feared exposing his difference.

Kay, next to him, reached up to wipe a tear from her eye with a small handkerchief she had clasped there. Carl was brought back to the truth that he was supposed to be mourning for Andreas, not being self indulgent. He should concentrate on the sentiment, however it was expressed. They were being asked to pray so he bowed his head forward and stared at the back of the chair in front. The words of the prayer, which placed trust and at least shared responsibility for people's actions with the priest's mythical being, only distanced Carl more, though. The clergy in the church that Carl had met always seemed the most gentle and caring men and he always wanted to be open to their desire to help. The unbridgeable barrier, though, was that these men had, in Carl's eyes, made utterly the wrong decision on the first and simplest of questions about life. As you grow up you come to realize that Father Christmas and the tooth fairy are stories, that there aren't monsters under your bed and surely, finally, that there is no beneficent God watching out for you. How could you learn anything from a man who had hidden from that truth? So then, Carl decided, this was not the time for him to mourn Andreas. Perhaps though, his presence would support Andreas' family.

He felt a bit more comfortable now viewing proceedings as an interested observer. He began to survey the backs of people in front of him at the service. There was a small group of young men and women that were not connected to the Phi. He supposed these were friends from Andreas' social life. They all seemed very well presented, most middle class. He'd imagined a more Bohemian group with pony tails and tattoos. The thought of tattoos made him wonder which of the women was the infamous, sexy SukieG. As the service came to an end he realized how inappropriate it was to be undressing the mourners in his mind; Andreas would, no doubt, have been much amused!

The reception after the ceremony was held not in the Cathedral proper but in a nearby cream coloured, stone house, once part of the Bishops' palatial abode, on the Cathedral close. An array of light snacks and drinks were laid on a table at one end of a large open room. A few dining chairs were placed against the walls but most of the group were expected to stand.

Carl had become separated from the other postdocs in his search for a glass of orange juice. He tried to avoid alcohol when the senior staff were around. After seizing a glass, he looked about to see where he should position himself in the room. He wondered if he should go and express his sympathies to Andreas' parents but they were surrounded by a group of the great and good both from the Phi and the Cathedral. Mr Montford would no doubt have everything carefully planned and wouldn't appreciate a postdoc barging in; a case for being seen but not heard.

He located his friends across the room. It looked as if Paolo was milking the others' interest in the job interview for all he could. Carl started to head over but suddenly found himself face to face with Georgina Montford. She was clearly in her element at such a social gathering. She wore a stylish black dress which somehow both accentuated her figure and yet was appropriately subdued for the occasion. Her make up and jewellery

were stylish but not flashy. She was intimidatingly beautiful. She appeared to have spotted Carl before he had her and blessed him with a Californian smile. With a slight glint in her eye she greeted him,

“Carl, isn’t it?” then with a hint of sauciness she added, “I haven’t seen you in ages.” Carl deduced that the offer was still open and began to flush. He searched for some quick words to excuse himself but she had an alternative plan. “Carl, let me introduce you to Mr Hayhurst,” she turned to a small man beside her whose hair was greying and thin and who wore circular wire framed glasses. He had a very triangular face that ended in the point of his chin.. “He’s the treasurer of the city’s Historical Society.” Did Carl pick up a slight tone of mocking boredom from her there?

“Cyril, this is Carl Vespers our most exciting young researcher at the Phi.” Carl flushed again. She was clearly enjoying embarrassing him. The man, Cyril, presented a pudgy hand and Carl had little choice but to be drawn further into their group. Cyril did though seem eager to meet him, smiling a little obsequiously.

“You must be the Carl who Geoffrey has told me about,” he started to Carl’s surprise, “You’re working with the police on..,” he paused as if not wishing to speak Andreas’ name here, “this case.”

Carl nodded a little warily. Georgina leapt into the slight pause and extracted herself with a fluttered motion of her hand in the direction of her husband. He was being used to help her abandon a dull guest Carl realized. As she left them she added, “I do hope to see you again soon, Carl.” Apparently oblivious to the snub, Cyril continued,

“Geoffrey has been telling me that there is the possibility of an important historic book being found. There was an old bookmark with a crest?” So that was where the crest of Trinity College had come from. If Montford knew that though why hadn’t he told Carl? Antique books and the secretary of the Historical Society was a clear enough link but Carl didn’t like being pumped in this way. The oozing nature of the man put his back up too.

“I’m not aware that any original book has been found – there are lots of reprints of alchemy texts and so forth though,” presumably Montford had already told him as much. Cyril Hayhurst considered this and then rather secretively whispered,

“If there was a book and the police haven’t found it then it must still be hidden in the apartment mustn’t it?” He paused eyebrows raised then added, “Interesting thought, heh? Interesting thought.” This appeared to be the message he wanted to get across because with a brief tap on Carl’s shoulder to further reinforce their conspiracy he headed off towards the drinks table. Carl watched him go somewhat non-plussed before, with a shrug, heading over to the gaggle of postdocs.