

Chapter 9 *Two men, a truck, and a double bass*

I couldn't find Simon after breakfast. I couldn't find him anywhere in the hotel.

The morning passed very slowly. The orchestra players talked to each other, but not much. A few of us went for a walk, but we didn't go far. We were all waiting.

After lunch we all went back to the hotel dining room. Well, nearly all of us.

Philip Worth, our conductor, walked into the room. Inspector Portillo was with him.

'Good afternoon, everybody,' said our conductor. Everybody stopped talking.

'Now as you know, Inspector Portillo asked you all questions yesterday. Now he has some answers. Jorge.'

Jorge? Inspector Jorge Portillo. That was the inspector's name? I liked it.

'Thank you, *Maestro*,' said Inspector Portillo. 'At this moment we don't know everything. We have to talk to some more people. But I will tell you my idea of the story. I think it is the real story, but . . . ' he looked around the room, 'some things are still not clear.' He looked at me and smiled.

'You all came to Barcelona by air,' he started. 'Because it's quicker than a coach. But the big instruments came in the BSO truck with two drivers. The double basses were in that truck, of course. They drove to Dover and put the

truck on the boat. Then they drove through France towards Spain.

After twelve hours the truck drivers were tired. They stopped at a café by the side of the road. Near Toulouse in France. They went into the café and had a cup of coffee and something to eat. Then a car arrived. A big car, I think. It went up to the truck. Two men got out – well, we think it was two. They went to the truck. They opened it – I'm sure they had the key. Then they saw *it* and they smiled.'

'What? What did they see?' Marilyn asked.

'The double bass of Miss Penny Wade,' said the inspector.

'What? What did they see?' I asked.

'They saw your double bass, Miss Wade.'

'Why my double bass?' I didn't understand what he was talking about. 'They weren't looking for it, were they?'

'Oh yes,' Inspector Portillo said. 'That's what they were looking for.'

'But who? Why? How did they know it was my double bass?' I asked.

'I think somebody wrote your name on the case. The two men saw it and they took it from the truck.'

'I don't understand,' Adriana said. 'Why did they take Penny's double bass?'

'Well, I don't think they wanted Miss Wade's instrument,' the inspector said. 'They wanted the case.'

'The case?' Martin said. 'Why did they want the case?'

'Well, actually,' Inspector Portillo said. 'They didn't want the case. They wanted something in the case.'

'What? What was it?' I couldn't wait any longer.



‘A picture.’

‘A picture? What kind of a picture?’ Adriana asked.

‘It was a painting. By the French artist Cézanne. It’s called “The Gardener”. Somebody took it from the Tate Gallery in London ...’

‘Oh yes,’ I shouted. ‘I read about it in the paper. It’s worth two million pounds. Wow!’

‘Thank you Miss Wade,’ said Inspector Portillo. I wasn’t sure, but I think he was smiling at me again. I smiled back. ‘So somebody took the painting from the Tate Gallery. And then somebody – it wasn’t the same person, of course – put it in Miss Wade’s double bass case.’

‘Why didn’t they take the picture and leave the double bass?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know. Perhaps they didn’t have time. Perhaps some people came out of the café. But they closed the truck and drove away with Miss Wade’s bass in its big white case.’

‘Inspector,’ Martin said. ‘You say “I think”, “perhaps”, “I don’t know”. What do you *know*? Is this story true?’

‘That’s a good question,’ Inspector Portillo replied.

‘Yes, but what’s the answer?’ Martin said.

‘The answer is this. Miss Wade’s double bass was in the truck when it left Barston. It wasn’t in the truck when it got to Barcelona. The truck stopped for a long time only once. And a French driver saw two men with something big and white there. Something like a double bass case.’

‘How do you know that?’ Adriana asked.

‘The French police told us,’ the inspector said.

‘Where’s my double bass now?’ I asked.

‘I’m sorry, Miss Wade,’ said Inspector Portillo.

'But I don't know.' He liked me, I thought. He really was sorry.

'What about the painting?' Martin asked.

'That's safe,' Inspector Portillo said. 'The French police found it this morning in Paris.'

'Excuse me!' Adriana said.

'Yes?' said Inspector Portillo.

'You said Frank died because of the truck. But how? Why? What do you mean? Did he die because of the painting? Did he put the painting in Penny's double bass case, or what?'

'Those are all good questions,' Inspector Portillo replied. 'They were our questions too. At first we didn't understand why Mr Shepherd died. Did he fall out of that window? Did he jump? Did somebody push him? Did he have problems? With a lover? A friend? Was there an argument?'

I looked over at Candida Ashley-Morton. Her head was in her hands. She was crying, I think. Perhaps she really did do it. Inspector Portillo was still speaking.

'But then we talked to the hotel people. We looked at the rooms. And immediately we had a problem.'

'What problem?' Martin asked.

'The window in Mr Shepherd's room was closed,' Inspector Portillo said.

'He didn't like open windows,' Candida said quietly.

'That is correct.' Inspector Portillo looked at Candida when he said this. 'And a man cannot jump out of a closed window.'

'What are you saying?' Martin asked.

‘I am saying that Frank Shepherd didn’t jump out of the window of his room. He fell from a different room.’

There was silence in the hotel dining room now – complete silence.

‘That was difficult for us,’ the inspector said. ‘Whose room was it? We didn’t know. But then one of my men looked at everything on the hotel computer. He looked at the telephone calls. Then he saw it. Somebody telephoned the police in London last night. What was the room number? He looked on the computer. It was Frank Shepherd’s room. Frank Shepherd telephoned London.’

‘Frank called the police in London?’ Marilyn asked. ‘Why?’

‘We asked the police in London the same question. “Why did Frank Shepherd telephone you?” They told us.’

‘Wait a minute,’ Martin said. ‘I thought Frank fell from somebody else’s window. But you said he telephoned from his room.’

‘You are quite correct,’ the inspector said. ‘He telephoned from his room. Then he went to somebody else’s room.’

‘Whose?’ Candida asked. ‘Do you know what happened to Frank. Do you know the name of his killer?’

‘Oh yes, we know. We know.’ And suddenly I knew too.