



SPEARMAN MEETS THE KING

FRIDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 10TH

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.

—JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES

On this particular cold December evening, Henry Spearman was an example of how “clothes make the man”—or in his case how they didn’t. The tails of his morning coat hung just a few inches off the ground. Instead of elongating his silhouette, the garment made him look cherubic. But he was not worried about his clothes. He was worried about protocol. Tonight he would meet the king.

The setting was Blå Hallen, the “Blue Room” of the Stockholm City Hall, and Spearman was about to receive the Nobel Prize in economics. His day had already been memorable: a tour of historic landmarks and Swedish architecture followed that evening by the Nobel banquet. Sixty-five tables had been prepared for the Swedish royal family, the prize winners, the special invitees and

guests. The tables were blanketed with Swedish linen from Ekelund—supplier to the royal family for over three centuries—and set with Rörstrand porcelain china and Orrefors glassware that glinted and sparkled in the muted light. The fare was Scandinavian, salmon, lobster, and wild game; the table conversation eclectic; the entertainment top notch. Now came the time for the presentation and Spearman recounted in his mind the protocol expected of him. While honors and distinctions had come his way before, this was the academy's big kahuna. Even the name—"Nobel"—lent luster to the award. The cachet of the prize would not be the same if it were, say, the "Jones Prize."

It would be idle to contend that the Nobel had come as a complete surprise. Now in his fifties, Spearman was a heavy hitter in the world of books and ideas. His teachers first spotted his brilliance when he was an undergraduate at Columbia. During graduate school the faculty had recognized him as a rising star. An invitation to join the Department of Economics at Harvard signaled that the academic marketplace agreed. He did not disappoint. Spearman quickly brought more prestige to what was already a prestigious department.

When Spearman's Nobel award was first announced, Harvard's public relations department went into high gear. While some universities battled it out on the football field, Harvard battled its Ivy League counterparts by its faculty winning academic prizes. Winning a bowl game landed a school in the sports section of a newspaper. But a Nobel Prize was front-page stuff, and often above the fold. In the field of economics, the University of Chicago was home to more Nobel Prize winners than any other

school. Spearman's prize would help Harvard chip away at Chicago's market share.

At the award ceremony, Henry's wife Pidge was radiant in a pale blue linen gown that accented her buxom figure. Seated next to Pidge was the couple's daughter Patricia. She had left her veterinary practice to be in Stockholm during the awards week. "The animals will have to wait," she laughed.

When the presenter asked the recipient in economics "to step forward to receive his Nobel Prize from the hands of his majesty the king," Spearman rose, walked to the center of the stage, shook hands with royalty, and made the bows that the recipients had been instructed to perform after receiving the prize. For the first time in his life, trumpets from the Royal Orchestra heralded his work as an economist. Also for the first time in his life, Spearman became a million dollars richer in one fell swoop.

On the return flight to Boston's Logan airport, Spearman thought back to his roots. His parents had come to the United States just ahead of the Hitler juggernaut. They were almost penniless. Henry was brought up above his father's tailor shop in Brooklyn. For twenty years, that was his world. Now he had been feted by royalty on the continent from which his parents had escaped with their lives. Moreover, his name had been joined to those of

Akerlof
Arrow
Becker
Buchanan
Coase

Friedman
Hayek
Kahneman
Lucas
Nash
Schultz
Sen
Smith
Solow
Stigler
Stiglitz
Tobin
Vickrey

and other luminaries in the field of economics. He knew his life would never be the same.

It wasn't.



A NOBEL INVITATION

THURSDAY, MAY 5TH

Money . . . is the centre around which economic science clusters; this is so, not because money or material wealth is regarded as the main aim of human effort, nor even as affording the main subject-matter for the study of the economist: but because in this world of ours it is the one convenient means of measuring human motive on the large scale.

—ALFRED MARSHALL

“So how much would it cost?” the trustee asked.

“I think it would be expensive,” the president responded.

Charlotte Quinn was in the first year of her presidency at Monte Vista University. This was only her second meeting with the school’s Board of Trustees. She was still learning what stirred the cocoa of the trustees who had the sole authority to hire and fire her, and who could make her life as president easy or hard.

“Charlotte, that’s not an answer to my question,” Annelle Cabbage replied. “I don’t see why students at Monte Vista University shouldn’t be taught by the best there is. And if Nobel Prize winners are the best, then we should have them on campus for our students to learn from.”

The other members of the board had left President Quinn to fend for herself. Annelle Cabbage was blunt, like most wealthy Texas ranchers. But she did not fit the TV stereotype of the rich Texan. First, she was a woman. Second, she was a patron of the arts. Yet Cabbage could shoot grouse with the best of the Texas hunting fraternity and could distinguish a Browning over-and-under shotgun from a Merkel at ten paces. “And I never shot a politician,” she liked to brag, “tempting as the opportunity might be.” When a certain vice president of the United States from Wyoming accidentally shot his companion while grouse hunting in Texas, Cabbage told a television reporter that “people from Wyoming never could shoot straight. You want a good huntin’ partner, you hunt with a Texan.” Annelle Cabbage definitely fit the don’t-mess-with-Texas mold.

“The problem is that we’re a teaching university,” President Quinn explained. “People who win Nobel Prizes are at major research universities—the Chicagos, the Harvards, the Stanfords. Our focus is on undergraduates, not graduate students. So I’m not sure whether we could make it attractive for a Nobel Prize winner to join the faculty at Monte Vista.”

“Doesn’t that depend upon how much you pay ’em?” Cabbage asked. “Don’t tell me winnin’ a Nobel Prize means you don’t care about money anymore.”

Annelle Cabbage was accustomed to being blunt about money. While the Board of Trustees of Monte Vista University had several wealthy members, Cabbage played in a different league. Most people who thought of themselves as well-to-do measured their net worth in millions.

In her league, the metric was “units.” A unit was a hundred million. Annelle Cabbage had multiple units.

Born in Troup, Texas, which her great-grandfather had settled, Cabbage might have been expected to center her life in Houston or Dallas. But instead she had a ranch in the Hill Country outside San Antonio and an apartment on Central Park in New York. Both cities knew her as a patron of the arts.

Charlotte Quinn knew there was a fine line between a trustee who micromanaged the institution and a trustee who rubber-stamped decisions by the administration. The problem was recognizing where to draw the line. Quinn was not sure where the line came down when adding a Nobel laureate to the faculty. Recruiting individual professors was not a board matter. But funding a new position for a distinguished professor of Nobel Prize stature meant spending a lot of money. Anything that involved a lot of money was a matter for the board.

Recalling the old adage that “he who pays the piper calls the tune,” President Quinn decided it was prudent to keep the discussion going. Accordingly, she sat silently with the rest of the trustees as Cabbage continued to press her conviction that if Monte Vista students were going to be the best, they needed to be exposed to the best.

Herbert Abraham, the lone faculty member seated at the conference table, waited for a pause. “May I make a suggestion?” he asked. Normally, Abraham would have put his hand up to be called upon by the chair of the board before he would speak. But the silent interval emboldened him to interject. “Why not bring a Nobel laureate to campus just for a semester . . . as a distinguished visiting

professor? Offer them a furnished house near campus, have them teach just one course—and make it anything they want to teach. That way they’ll have plenty of time to do research, give talks, and pursue other endeavors.”

Abraham was a professor of economics at Monte Vista University and served as the faculty representative on the board. He was in his early sixties. At board meetings, he was always the best dressed, always sat ramrod straight in his chair, and always showed a mastery of the contents of the board notebook that some trustees had only skimmed the night before. To top it off, Abraham possessed none of the conventional faculty haughtiness toward the well-to-do. When he saw that his idea seemed to catch the board’s attention, he knew he was on a roll.

“If we went ahead with this, I’d suggest we require the Nobel Prize winner to give one, maybe two, public lectures during the semester in residence.” Abraham paused. “And, of course, having a Nobel laureate would be great PR for the school.” He looked down the conference table to Annelle Cabbage.

Cabbage did not wait long. “Well, I’ve already paid for an artist-in-residence. So I’ll come back to my original question to President Quinn. Maybe you can answer it, Professor. How much would it cost to bring in one of these Nobel Prize winners?”

“Depends on the field,” Abraham responded. “A Nobel Prize winner in physics will cost us more than a Nobel Prize winner in literature. In my field of economics, I suspect we would have to pay two hundred to two hundred fifty thousand for the semester, if the school throws in a furnished home.”

“You see, Charlotte, there is an answer to my question,” Annelle Cabbage announced. She paused, looked at Professor Abraham and added, “I think it would be worth every penny.”



And so it came to pass, in late May, in the state of Texas, that Annelle Cabbage parted with one tenth of a unit to endow the “Cabbage Visiting Nobel Professorship.”

Professor Abraham used his influence to recommend a professor in his field of economics. “Why not?” he thought to himself. “I came up with the idea. And I think I know just the right person for Monte Vista.”

In early August, the first recipient of Annelle Cabbage’s largesse was announced as Henry Spearman, professor of economics at Harvard University, and a freshly minted Nobel laureate. Time of the appointment: the following spring semester, January through May.

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NO COASE FOR CONCERN

TUESDAY AFTERNOON, NOVEMBER 15TH

“That is another of your odd notions,” said the Prefect, who had a fashion of calling everything “odd” that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of “oddities.”

—EDGAR ALLAN POE

Blake Bailey scanned the crowd in the hallway and then, spying Professor Henry Spearman down the corridor, made a beeline for him. Bailey’s long red hair stuck out on all sides of his Boston Red Sox cap. Black horn rimmed glasses, if anything, made his hair color more vivid. When Bailey caught up with the famous economist, who was in animated palaver with a colleague, he was breathless. It was noon at Harvard Hall, one of the main classroom buildings. Much of the time the hallways and stairs of this building were unoccupied. But at this time of the day, hungry and noisy students were filing out the classroom doors after being released by their instructors.

“Professor Spearman, I’m sorry to interrupt, but I have to ask you something.”

“Oh?” said Spearman. His frown quickly morphed into an expectant gaze when he recognized that the brash

inquisitor was from the intermediate price theory class he'd just finished teaching. He smiled inwardly. Blake was one of those students, common in every class and on any subject, whose silence before the bell was inversely proportional to the deluge of questions afterward.

Before Blake could pose his question, Spearman held up one hand, and pointed to his colleague with the other, "Mr. Bailey, have you met Dr. Henderson Ross in the psychology department?"

Twenty-five years earlier Spearman and Ross both had begun their academic careers at Harvard. They had become friends even though they were a study in contrast. Ross was tall with bushy black hair. Spearman was short and bald. Ross wore contacts; Spearman preferred glasses. Ross dressed like a hippie: jeans and a collarless shirt were the norm, and he carried a canvas book bag. Save for his age, he might have come straight from a college protest forty years earlier. Spearman on the other hand was only twenty years out of style. Decidedly preppy, he wore khakis, a button-down shirt, a rep tie, and a blazer—with an attaché case to hold his class material. What bound the two professors together was their survival of Harvard's tenure process. The handful of soldiers who endured a death march often became fast friends, regardless of race, color, or creed. The handful of professors who survived the tenure process at elite universities often shared a similar bond.

"Hey, how ya doin'?" Blake responded, glancing at Ross after Spearman's introduction.

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"Uh, okay I guess," as he turned his face in Spearman's direction. Momentarily Bailey wondered what it might

mean when a psychologist asks, “how are you?” *Wouldn’t that be a deep and complex question to answer?* But the young undergraduate realized that to ask Ross what he really meant would divert his inquiry of Spearman.

“Professor Spearman, I’m confused over the lecture you gave last week. You know, the one about real estate developers? I think you ended by saying that even if a person owned all the land in the United States he wouldn’t be able to charge a monopoly price for it. Is that right?”

At this point in the conversation, Ross’s expression became one of sympathy for the inquisitive youth. The eminent psychologist patted the boy on the back and smiled at his colleague. “Henry, put this young man out of his misery and straighten him out on the matter. It’s clear he didn’t hear you right. I’ve always maintained that you let too many students in your courses; this is what happens. One thing we know in psychology is that smaller classes make for better teaching stimuli.”

Spearman smiled broadly. “There is nothing wrong with Mr. Bailey’s hearing, notwithstanding the class size. That is *precisely* what I said. If you owned all the land, you would be rich as Rockefeller. No doubt about that. But you couldn’t charge a monopoly price for any one parcel of it.”

“Come now, Henry. That sounds like sophistry.”

“No, no,” Spearman replied. “Let me put the matter a little differently by asking both of you a question. Assume someone owned all the land in the United States. Would either of you buy any of it as an investment, even a few acres, without a guarantee from the monopolist that additional quantities of the land would not be sold at lower prices?”

“Of course not!” Spearman exclaimed, answering his own question. “How else could you protect the value of your investment? At the very least you would insist that the seller buy it back from you at the price you paid, if more land were going to go on the market at a lower price. Or you would insist that any additional land the monopolist offered would be used for some noncommercial purpose—like a public park—that wouldn’t affect your investment. Otherwise,” he paused, making sure he had the attention of both his listeners, “you, or any other rational economic agent, would never buy any land. So, Mr. Bailey: as I said in class, the market disciplines even someone who owns *all* the land. It was an economist named Coase who first made the point. It’s now called the Coase conjecture.”

Spearman looked expectantly for dawning comprehension on their faces. He was disappointed. Continuing, he put a hand on the young student’s shoulder. “My point in class, Mr. Bailey, was simply this. Assume you sell a durable good, one that’s impervious to change from time or the elements. And you face buyers who can defer their purchases. Then *time itself* becomes a substitute—like an invisible competitor who depresses the price of the durable good. So even if you were the *only* seller of a durable good, if you can’t credibly commit to not lowering prices in the future, you can’t exercise monopoly power.”

Spearman waited for a response from his listeners. None was forthcoming. The psychologist looked in the direction of Blake Bailey. “You see, young man, it’s Professor Spearman’s ability to give answers like the one you just heard that has endeared him to generations of students and made the rest of us on the faculty green with

envy. Some of us even wonder at times if Spearman may be right. Or does he just lean right?”

Spearman smiled at Ross’s good-natured jab. He knew the two of them saw the world through different lens. But Spearman was perpetually optimistic that in the marketplace of ideas, the economic way of thinking would eventually hold the dominant market share. Ross, on the other hand, feared that Spearman might be right, even if his economics was wrong.



Henderson Ross had observed Spearman even more closely after his friend returned from Stockholm with the Nobel medal and prize money in hand. As a psychologist, Ross knew that “colleague envy” had never been analyzed by Sigmund Freud. Freud’s theory of envy was centered elsewhere, somewhere south of the human heart. But Ross, a keen observer of university life, thought that “colleague envy” might be a reliable indicator of scholarly accomplishment. And he also knew that his good friend Henry now lived in its glare.

The two professors and the student ended their confab with pleasantries and went their separate ways. On non-class days, Spearman was known as a stimulating raconteur and table companion at Harvard’s faculty club. But after teaching a midmorning class, he retired to his office in the Littauer Center where he ate lunch alone. He found teaching to be exhausting, and this was especially so if the class had gone well. It took far more energy to teach a good class than a bad one.

There was another reason Spearman did not socialize after teaching a class. Over the years, he had learned that the best time to assess how a class had gone was right after teaching the material. His colleagues who waited months, even a year, before revising a lecture were making a mistake, Spearman thought. What went right and what went wrong would be long forgotten by then.

Ross knew of Spearman's obsession about improving his teaching and had once asked him, "Henry, what would it take for you to file a lecture away, right after you had given it in class, fully satisfied that it could not be improved upon?" Henry laughed at the question and responded with a twinkle in his eye. "A great lecture, one that needs no revision, is when the students carry you out of the building on their shoulders and parade you around the campus." Ross's reply was dry. "Well by that standard, most of us only give a couple great lectures each year."

As he ate a light lunch, Spearman picked up the *Boston Globe* that had been left on his desk. Because he was an economist, his students expected him to be up on the news even if they were not. In the second section, a headline caught his attention:

TEXAS ART CRIME

SAN ANTONIO, TX (AP) State and local police searched the home of prominent San Antonio physician and art collector Dr. Raul Ramos on November 14 as they investigated the break-in and theft of five paintings by acclaimed local artist Tristan Wheeler. Included in the theft was Wheeler's "A Portrait in Blue," which according to the artist signified his "final break from the capitalist confinement of contemporary art"

and was the first of his subsequent paintings to garner national attention.

Authorities responded to a call from the Oakmont Avenue residence just before 3 a.m. CST. The call was reportedly placed by a live-in maid who had been awakened by noises coming from the living room where the paintings were located. Officers who searched the home did not comment to reporters on the details of the case.

Ramos is a well-known patron of the San Antonio art community, and frequently hosts benefits to support the city's art museums. Lewis Martin of the Travis Museum of Art in San Antonio told reporters that a guest at one of these events might have hired professionals to steal them. When informed of this statement Ramos admitted the possibility, saying that he doubted the paintings would be found. "I don't think I'll get them back. They will probably wind up in a private collection where nobody else ever sees them." Dr. Ramos said the impact of his loss was compounded because the works had not been insured. The physician added that the theft did not destroy his desire to rebuild his collection. A one million dollar reward has been offered for the return of his paintings.

Most experts believe that speed in such cases is of paramount importance. "It's vital that cases involving the theft of art be solved quickly. Once the art is gone for awhile, it is usually gone for good," Sidnee Van Pelt, security chief of the Fogg Museum of Art at Harvard University and an authority on art theft, told the *Boston Globe*.



Spearman punched the intercom button on his phone to call for Gloria Winters, his longtime administrative assistant. When she entered his office he handed her the page from the newspaper and pointed to the article he had just read. “Gloria, would you clip this and file it please?”

“And how do you want it filed?” Winters asked.

Spearman placed his hand to his chin, narrowed his eyes, and thought for a moment. “Please put it in the box of material we’re sending to San Antonio. And label it *the barking dog* file.”

4

INVESTIGATION OF A THEFT

TUESDAY AFTERNOON, NOVEMBER 15TH

Look at everything upside down. Take absolutely nothing for granted.

—DICK FRANCIS

“So let me get this straight, you *did* hear or you did *not* hear anyone upstairs? I don’t understand which it is.” Detective Fritz Siegfried was interviewing Rosie Segura at the San Antonio police station. He had wedged himself into his office chair and the effect was an imposing one. When he cocked his arms and put his elbows on the desktop, the burly officer’s biceps bulged like grapefruits.

He looked at the diminutive housekeeper skeptically. His officers had interviewed her at the Ramos home when they first arrived to investigate the theft. Siegfried knew that most Latinos in San Antonio were law-abiding citizens. But there were several inconsistencies in Rosie’s story that he was determined to track down himself.

“I said I did hear, but then I didn’t hear, then I heard again. When I heard again, that’s when I went upstairs—with my scissors—to see what I heard.” Rosie looked pleadingly into Siegfried’s face. She had nothing to fear about deportation. But Rosie depended on having a good job

for the money she sent to family members in Mexico who in turn relied on her income. While politicians debated the immigration issue, for her the debate was not about public policy. It was about economic survival.

“And when you say you went upstairs, did you see anyone—like the person you said you heard?”

“No, I didn’t see no one.”

“What time was it when you went upstairs?” The question had already been asked, but Siegfried wasn’t satisfied. Because criminals lied so often about their conduct, contradictions in their story often told him more than the stories themselves.

“I told you, it was about two thirty a.m. I keep a clock by my bed. I looked at it when I heard the noises and woke up.”

“So you heard a noise, someone was upstairs, but you can’t tell me who it was. Is that what you’re saying?”

“I can’t tell you who it was because I never saw no one. When I got upstairs, nobody was there, at least in the dining room and the living room. And the kitchen—the kitchen is the first room you come to when you come upstairs.”

“Did you look in any of the closets on the main floor? Or just the dining room and living room?”

“No way was I ’bout to look in any closets. After I got upstairs, I got a kitchen knife, but I still didn’t want to find no one hiding in a closet. When I looked in the dining room and the living room, that’s when I called to Dr. Ramos and he called 911.”

“Ms. Segura,” the detective asked, changing his tone from sternness to that of a kindly grandfather, “if you didn’t see anyone, how did you know someone had been there?”

“Because the paintings were gone. *That’s* why.” Rosie looked at the detective as though he were a dull child. “I said that yesterday to the police. I know enough to know that paintings don’t just walk out the house by themselves. *Somebody* had to be upstairs. Whoever it was, that’s who I heard.”

“If paintings don’t walk out by themselves, then someone took ’em. It could be your boss, but you said he was in bed when you called him, is that right?”

“Yes, he was in his bedroom.”

“How long did you say you’ve worked for Dr. Ramos?”

“For almost seven years,” Rosie said, perplexed by the question.

“Then if it wasn’t your boss who took the paintings, I guess it could have been you. You knew they were there. You’ve been working for your boss for plenty of time to know every nook and cranny in the house. You probably know places in the house that Dr. Ramos doesn’t even know about.”

Rosie visibly recoiled when Detective Siegfried suggested that she might be the thief. “No, no, you don’t understand. I care for Dr. Ramos. I work hard for him. I would never steal from Dr. Ramos. All these years, not a penny did I steal. You think I now would steal his paintings?” Rosie’s eyes were again pleading.

“But if you didn’t do it, and Dr. Ramos didn’t steal his own paintings, how could anyone else do it? Your boss said the doors were locked when he got up. My men couldn’t find any evidence of a window being broken or jimmied. Was there anyone else in the house that night? Any family?”

“We were the only ones. My boss, he’s divorced. He’s got two children, but they’re all grown up. The boy, he lives in Austin, the girl she lives somewhere up north—Milwaukee, the last I heard Dr. Ramos say.”

Detective Siegfried leaned back in his chair and thought. If Rosie were going to steal from her boss, why artwork? As a housekeeper, she was unlikely to know how to fence high-valued paintings. And why wake up her boss? Unless this itself was a ploy to throw off the police . . . ?

On the other hand, and in detective work there always was another hand, Siegfried knew that some criminals were successful simply because the crime was so unlikely. Rosie could have bided her time, avoided the more obvious temptations to steal petty cash from her boss, and gone for the big score: the most valuable assets in the house. In addition, Dr. Ramos entertained frequently, and the social events in the Ramos home were connected to the art community. Rosie may have made contacts—or even been contacted—by someone who with her help could get the paintings out of the house and then lucratively dispose of them. Siegfried wondered if a situation requiring a large influx of cash—medical, maybe?—had suddenly arisen in Rosie’s family. If so, the desire to help might outweigh her loyalty to her employer.

Rosie would bear more watching.



The officer first on the scene had interviewed Dr. Ramos and then released him to go to the hospital, where a full docket of surgeries awaited. Siegfried was not thrilled with

this decision. He knew that the more time elapsed before witnesses were questioned, the more they forgot—or the more they could dissemble. But the work of a surgeon could not always be pushed around. To accommodate Ramos, Siegfried had agreed to postpone his questioning until the following afternoon.

“I don’t think Rosie would take anything from me, Detective.” The surgeon smiled. The two men were seated in the small office that Santa Rosa hospital provided surgeons for postop administrative work. “She’s worked for me for years—never complained about her work—seems very devoted to me. I can’t say she liked my wife too much. Both of my children adored Rosie. Of course they should’ve. She picked up after them and cooked anything for them they wanted. She’s a great cook, but then what *ama de casa* isn’t?” Dr. Ramos was still dressed in his green surgical scrubs as he spoke about his housekeeper with the detective.

Siegfried offered no response to any of Ramos’s observations. “Let’s review the statement you gave to Officer McKinney yesterday. McKinney and her partner got to your home at two forty-five. You told her that your housekeeper, that would be Ms. Segura, awakened you at around two thirty on an intercom system that goes to your bedroom from the kitchen, is that correct?”

Ramos nodded.

“And when you came downstairs she showed you that the paintings were gone, correct?”

Again Ramos nodded, impatiently. Like most surgeons, Ramos believed himself to be the smartest guy in the room. “That’s when I called 911. Rosie said she tried, but

the line was dead. But someone had left a phone off the hook upstairs.”

“And you’re sure the paintings were there when you went to bed?” Siegfried asked.

“Absolutely. You see, Detective, yesterday evening I hosted a little fund-raiser for the Travis Museum of Art. I invited Lewis Martin, the curator, to make some remarks that were designed to pick the pockets—and the purses—of my guests. Lewis is always clever in how he does this. He talks about an artist, and before some people even know it, they’ve parted with a few thousand bucks to support the arts.” Ramos chuckled. “He’s always been especially enamored with Wheeler’s work. I think he was envious that I owned more Wheelers than any other private collector. Last night Lewis lingered lovingly on every last detail of every last splash. Oh yes, they were there.”

“Sunday’s event, doctor . . . was that kind of thing a regular occurrence in your home?” Siegfried took notes while Ramos spoke.

“Not every week, mind you, but it wasn’t unusual either. I invite people to my home, I line up someone to make a presentation, and I spend a couple thousand bucks or so to have the event catered. I’m on the board of the Travis, so I take the cost off my taxes. And who knows? Someday when my guests need surgery, they might think of me.” Ramos smiled, as if to congratulate himself on the optimality of it all.

Siegfried found himself wondering if this was why the police department was underfunded. The rich people in town always had a way to get out of paying taxes. But he brought his thoughts back into focus. “Let me ask you a

few questions about who was there that evening. You said about twenty guests. Was Ms. Segura there too?”

“Yes, Rosie was there. She doesn’t do the catering, but she knows the house and provides backup for just about anything that might happen—a server doesn’t show up, a guest calls in who can’t find the house, that kind of thing. It wasn’t a sit-down dinner party, but nobody goes home hungry from a Ramos party.”

“Would you have a guest list?”

“I don’t have one at the hospital. But Rosie would have one, as would Lewis. For an event like this, even though I’m the host, he’s more responsible than I am for assembling the guest list.”

“If you could get me a copy of the list, I’d like to see it. You say every one of these people would have seen the missing paintings. When did the last guest leave?”

“Most of my guests know that I have to get up early. When I try to get them out the door, I often joke with them: ‘Remember, I have to be *sharp* in the morning.’ Some get the pun, others don’t. But I think everyone was out of the house by ten p.m. Lewis was the last to leave. He usually stays until the end to thank me and tell me how he thought it went. ‘How it went,’ to Martin, means how much money he raised for the Travis. People think museums are rich or somehow run themselves. That’s not true. According to Lewis, the Travis is always broke.”

Siegfried did not let the travails of the museum distract him. “When your guests left the house, did they all go out the front door?”

“Oh yes, they always leave that way, because their cars are in front. The house has a large circular driveway with

a small lot to one side. One of the catering staff usually helps everyone park in front.”

“Would you have seen all your guests leave?” Siegfried was trying to learn whether he would need to interview each of the guests who were at the Ramos home. He did not relish the prospect.

Ramos thought before answering. “I stand at the front door and try to say good night and thank everyone for coming and, you know, tell them ‘I hope you had a good time.’ I don’t check them off a guest list when they leave, mind you, but I think I saw everyone out the door. I certainly can’t recall that not being the case last night.”

“Is there any way a guest could have left your house carrying the paintings with them?”

“There’s a kitchen door and a back door. The caterers would come and go through the kitchen. Rosie keeps the back door bolted. The front door—no way. If someone tried to walk by me at the front door carrying five Tristan Wheeler paintings that had been on my living room wall, I think I would have asked them, ‘Did you mistake those for your coat?’ or something more direct.”

“So if the guests can’t get by you with the paintings, what about Mr. Martin, from the museum? Would he have been able to remove the paintings from your home that evening?”

“What would he do with them? Hang them on the wall at the Travis, where I’d spot them at the next board meeting?” Ramos imagined his reaction at going to the special collections wing of the museum and seeing all five of his Wheeler paintings hanging there.

“Among all the others in your house that night, that leaves the caterers. Do you recall how many there were?”

“Sure, I always use The Red Carpet. They do a nice job for events that size. That night, they had three staff there. Three good people can handle a group of twenty nicely.”

“Were the staff members ones that you had used before?”

“Yes, that’s one of the reasons I like The Red Carpet. They know me and how I like to throw a party. Just about always I know the staff they send: Alfredo, Suzanne, and Ruthie—those are the three who were there.”

Siegfried consulted his notes. “Dr. Ramos, I have one other question. You told Officer McKinney that the paintings were not insured. Is that right?”

“That’s correct.”

“Why?”

“In hindsight, that appears to be a mistake, doesn’t it? They used to be. But I was trying to save on that expense. And when I first started collecting Wheeler paintings, I didn’t anticipate they’d go up in value so much. I’m sure you observe this in your line of work as I do in mine, Detective. We all learn from our mistakes, don’t we?”

Siegfried left Dr. Ramos to do whatever surgeons did the rest of the day after they operated. He did not know. What Siegfried did know is that Dr. Ramos once had five priceless Wheeler paintings.

Now someone else did.

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