

George V. Higgins

OUTLAWS

'A hell of a story from a hell of a storyteller' DAILY MAIL



ABACUS

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AUGUST 4, 1970

I

At about 9:50 in the morning the Brinks armored truck carrying its driver and two guards, all in uniform and armed with Smith and Wesson .38 caliber revolvers, arrived at the Danvers Mall branch office of the Essex Bank and Trust Co. The cargo consisted of forty thousand dollars in small bills and coins. A light mist was falling. The driver parked the truck in front of the free-standing brick building that housed the bank on the westerly side of Route 128, apart from the stores in the mall. The guard in the passenger seat of the cab was Harold McMenamy, 48, of Brighton. He emerged and locked the door. He unsnapped the protective strap on his holster and scanned the parking lot. He walked quickly to the glass door of the bank. He rang the night bell on its frame. A woman in her early fifties parted beige curtains on the inside door and peered out at him. He nodded. She grinned and unlocked the inner door.

McMenamy returned to the truck. He knocked twice, then once, on the rear door. Inside the truck Donald Fish, 39, of Bridgewater, unlocked the door and opened it. He gave McMenamy a red two-wheeled handcart and unsnapped the protective strap on his holster. McMenamy put the cart on the ground. Fish handed him two grey bags of currency and four grey bags of coins. McMenamy stacked the bags on the cart. Fish emerged from the truck and locked the door behind him. As McMenamy pushed the cart to the outside door of the bank, Fish followed, scanning the parking lot. The woman inside opened the door with a key and admitted McMenamy. Fish stood outside the door watching the parking lot, while she locked it behind McMenamy.

At approximately 9:55, the woman unlocked the inner door and then the outer door of the bank. McMenamy followed her with the cart, his body bent to exert the force he needed to push a cargo of twelve grey bags. The woman locked the doors behind him. Fish walked beside him as he grunted against the load. "Hell is this?" Fish said.

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“Goddamned sale,” McMenamy said. “Asked her the same question. Some bright-eyed bastard inna mall had this great idea: Have the back-to-school sale two weeks before everybody else does, and get all the people’s money. Run a goddamned raffle, so that everyone, gets lucky when they ring up fifty bucks, gets everything he bought free, plus a brand-new fifty, too. And damned if it didn’t work. Four hundred thirty-three large.”

The green Chevrolet Impala sedan entered the parking lot from Route 128 at moderate speed; it veered toward the front of the truck when the Ford Country Squire station wagon came from the northwest back corner of the lot, appeared at the southwest corner of the bank and stopped behind the truck.

The passenger from the front seat of the Squire had an M3 .30 caliber grease gun. He spattered a six-shot burst off the back of the truck. “It’s loaded,” he said.

The female passenger from the left rear seat of the Country Squire had an M16. “So’s hers,” the man said.

The male passenger from the right rear seat of the Country Squire had a sawed-off shotgun. The male passenger from the right front seat of the Impala pointed an M79 grenade launcher at the windshield of the truck.

Fish and McMenamy clasped their hands on their heads.

The male with the sawed-off shotgun stuck it through his belt and went to the cart. He took it from McMenamy and wheeled it to the back of the Country Squire. He threw each of the twelve bags through the open back window. He returned to the car. “Set,” he said.

The man with the grenade launcher hung on the door of the Impala until the Country Squire pulled out fast from the back of the Brinks truck and headed out of the parking lot, south on 128. Then he lurched back into the Impala, slamming the door, and it spun away fast, burning rubber, going north on 128.

Harold McMenamy expressed his resentment in the same terms to police and reporters. “They were kids,” he said. “They were nothing but damned kids. The guy with the grease gun — Christ, I had a goddamned grease gun once, and it wasn’t anywhere near as good’s a damned M-Three carbine. He was nothing but a damned kid. Got those crummy little granny glasses, and the hair all over the place, and naturally he looked like shit. You wanna know something? Even

at my age, damnit, if he didn't have that gun, I could take that little punk. I could take him myself. Looked like a goddamned hippie. Army jacket, jeans, the boots, all that friggin' crap. And I'll bet the little bastard didn't weigh a hundred fifty, even with the gun.

"And the other one," McMenemy said, "the one with the sawed-off. Now he was a little bigger. He was *big*, in fact. Prolly twenny-five years old, maybe twenny-six, and I think he was a black guy. Looked like one to me. Got the Afro and the same clothes. And the broad. Same age. Looked like a filthy pig. I mean, what the hell is going on? What's the story here? These people, they're not robbers. They're not dangerous. What're they doing this stuff for? What the hell is going on?"

On the evening of September 13, 1970, the Ipswich Ensemble presented an all-Mozart program in the main auditorium on the Anchorage campus of the University of Alaska. The event was reported in the Anchorage *Times* for the 14th.

"The most striking thing for many in the large and attentive audience was not the complete professionalism of the musicians, but the realization that this internationally-known orchestra is made up entirely of amateurs. Students, teachers, their husbands and wives, only a very few of whom stay with the group for more than one or two years.

" 'We do have a small nucleus, a few people who've been with us since we began,' Mrs. Claire Naisbitt said. With her husband, the Ensemble's famed musical director, Prof. Neville Naisbitt of the mathematics department of Ipswich University, and co-founder of the group, she has been one of them. 'But apart from providing continuity, you know, perhaps a sort of ballast for the younger people, that's about all we do.' Hard for the listener to believe, perhaps, after her thrilling soloist performance last night of the 17th piano concerto, but the gracious Mrs. Naisbitt does insist: 'When Neville and I began this, twenty-five years ago next January, we did it to bring together students and teachers from Ipswich, interested in music, of course, with people like them from all around the world. That was our ambition, and any pride we feel, well, it is pride in them. For a year or two, three at the most, they're able to indulge themselves almost entirely in their music, before setting out in their

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careers in science, or the arts. How many do you think,' she said, 'how many of our students otherwise would see Alaska? Ever see its beauty? How many would see California, Santa Fé, New Orleans? Very few, I think. But because of the Ensemble, they make their way to Ipswich, and we take them to the world, and bring the world to them.'

"And, she might have added: How many young Alaskans like talented Fiona Campbell, formerly of Wasilla, would have had the opportunity to travel the world playing their music in Rome and Tel Aviv, and revisiting her home?

" 'We lived here when I was growing up,' Campbell said. 'My father,' Maj. Andrew D. Campbell, USAFR, 'was in the Judge Advocate General's office at Elmendorf. When he retired, and we moved back to New York for him to practice law,' the lovely young Wellesley junior said, 'I really didn't know if I'd ever see Alaska again. But now, here I am.

" 'It's something I'll remember all my life,' Fiona said. 'I hate to see it end. It's good to come home again, nice to come back, and in some ways, I'd like never to leave again. But all of us, the ones from England, my friends from Florida and Kansas, all of us know that getting chosen for an Ensemble Year was the most exciting thing that's ever happened to us. It's really been wonderful.'

"The Ensemble will play an all-Bach program tonight at the Anchorage campus before moving on to Seattle, first stop on its eleven-city itinerary through the Lower 48."

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Late in the morning, Det. Lt. Insp. John D. Richards, Massachusetts State Police, conducted an emergency meeting in the Brockton office of Ward Keane, the District Attorney of Plymouth County. Richards was forty-six years old. He weighed a hundred and sixty-five pounds, which he described as "the same numbers but a lot softer" than the weight he had carried as a sixteen-year-old misrepresenting his age in 1942 to join the Marines fighting in the Pacific. "But of course," he would say, "back then I didn't have any brains or judgment to speak of. I like to think that's changed." Heavy rain from a low grey sky blackened the dark grey roof of the old orange brick building, and the other five men in the conference room sat at the oval table like medieval monks praying through an eclipse, their shoulders hunched as though they had been exposed to the rain.

"This time," Richards said, "this time at least the victims weren't completely hysterical, so now there's not as much question whether we're dealing with things they actually saw, or things they might've dreamed. And, I'm happy to say, what the guards and the people in the bank told us this time pretty much squares with what we were able to get out of the Danvers people two years ago. Which is nice. Maybe we haven't been able to *find* the bastards, but at least now we're sure it's the *right* bastards that we're looking for. And pretty sure this is a gang that's pretty cohesive, is following some kind of program — since so far's we know yesterday's was just the second one, two hold-ups in two years — and probably doesn't have any connection at all with the individuals we'd ordinarily suspect."

"Can I ask a question here, John," the District Attorney said. He was a short, thin man in his late forties. He had a small, sharp face that preserved the scars of adolescent acne, and his grey hair was crewcut.

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"Shoot, Ward," Richards said, "ask anything you want. Don't say I'll have the answer here, but you just fire away."

"Have we got the exact take yet, what they got at Westgate yesterday?"

"The best we can do," Richards said, "since all of these transporters do the same thing and have their customers enclose the original tallies in the money bags themselves, and we're only working from the pick-up sheets that they give to the guards, the best we can do is work on the assumption that what was in the bags matches what was on the sheets. Now if Wells Fargo goes to the trouble of recounting those deposits against the tally sheets in the bags, and you can bet your ass they do, the best we can assume is that if we could recover the loot intact, which I doubt we're going to do, the total would match what the various customers told the men in the truck they were giving them.

"Now," Richards said, "if we assume also that none of those customers actually knew the truck was going to be knocked off yesterday, had advance knowledge so they could fill up a couple sacks with newspapers and then claim insured losses that they didn't actually incur — and we don't have any indication of that — then the total was five-sixty-five, seven-fifty."

"Wow," the District Attorney said. The other four men at the table exchanged glances and small coughs.

"Well," Richards said, "yeah. It is a lot, and you combine it with the four-thirty-three plus they got in Danvers two years ago, same MO and some IDs, you can see why they don't have to do it very often. These folks've scooped almost a million bucks. They aren't doing this for thrills, and they're not the kind of people like your usual robbers that go out and blow the loot in Vegas or someplace like that two weeks after they get it. These people are doing this as an occupation, and like everybody else, they don't work any more often'n they absolutely have to."

"How many of them, John?" the DA said.

"We think," Richards said, "we think probably a total of eight. Which, if we're right, is down one from two years ago. *If* what we got out of the witnesses then, if that was correct: that there were four people in the car that came up behind the truck there. This time there seems to've been three. You've got the two men and the woman in the car that takes the money. This time it was a Pontiac

wagon they used, stolen in Middleboro Tuesday night. We've got a partial on the plates, four of six digits we're sure of, and if they're the ones we think they are then they were stolen on Newbury Street in Boston sometime between ten and eleven last night. So anyway, that's three in the car behind the truck.

"You've got two more in the car that blocks the truck from the front," he said. "This time they used a Buick Electra, stolen off a dealer's lot in Maynard. Didn't get a reading on the plates. Should have one by this afternoon. We're assuming they were stolen too. Probably from some car at the airport or something, where the owner's not back yet so he doesn't know.

"So," he said, "we've got the three people in the Pontiac, and the woman and the guy riding shotgun with the woman in the Electra."

Capt. Ralph Fraley of the Brockton Police Department raised his left hand. "We are sure of that now, John?" he said. "We're satisfied now that the second driver's definitely a woman?"

"Yup," Richards said. "This truck driver's certain. The guy in the Danvers job was so impressed with the grenade launcher it never really occurred to him to study the face of the driver. And of course there's no guarantee that this was the same individual behind the wheel at Danvers. But this time, yeah, we're sure. This is definitely a woman." He paused. "An ugly woman," he said, grinning. "'Face like a potato,' was what the trucker said, but definitely a woman.

"So," he said, "that gives you five at the scene. They leave, the two cars follow the same escape plan they used at Danvers. Go barrel-assing out onto Twenty-four, one goes north and one goes south, and all of us go apeshit, stepping on our own dicks and falling down a lot. So they get away. We found the Pontiac in Bridgewater, parked on a nice quiet lane and just as empty as could be."

"Prints?" Ward Keane said.

"Nope," Richards said. "We don't think so, anyway. Oh, we'll probably find latents of the rightful owners, mechanics, that kind of thing, if we look hard enough. But everything you could reasonably've expected the bastards to touch in the couple days since they've had it — rear bumper where they attached the plates, steering wheel, door handles, window cranks, all that kind of thing — is cleaner'n a nun's imagination.

"So," Richards said "either the Pontiac was dumped next to an empty car, or else the Pontiac and the switch car arrived at the most

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a few minutes apart. Which we think is probably how they did that. Because if they left another car there unattended, somebody might come along and spot it for a hot one, and have it towed away. And this group's methodical. They time everything, and they execute it according to plan, and they don't take any unnecessary chances. Unless you count threatening people with machineguns and shotguns and grenade launchers is taking chances, which I happen to, myself, but that's another story. But anyway, now we're up to six perpetrators, and we've still got to account for the man and the woman in the Buick.

"The Buick we found in Randolph this morning. Same kind of thing: secluded lane. No apparently useful prints. No witnesses to the switch. Therefore, same conclusion: at least one more driver who meets them there with the next car. We're assuming, by the way, that the switch cars are both legal. That if you stopped them, all the papers are in order. We're now up to seven participants."

"So why do you say 'eight'?" Fraley said.

"Because of the precision, Ralph," Richards said. "For robbers, these are very careful people. What's that line about genius? 'An infinite capacity for taking pains'? That's what these people show. There's at least one genius involved, and the bastard's not only giving us pains but he's taking them himself. And he's got his people drilled so that they don't screw things up after he maps them out. Very good discipline. Which means, not so incidentally, that the rest of this bunch are no slouches either, when it comes to thinking and doing. We're not dealing here with a group of retards, my friends. These are sharp minds we've got on our hands, making these withdrawals. We're not going to catch them in the process of pulling their next job, two years or so from now, unless we happen to get awfully lucky. Which means we'd better catch them before, if that is possible. I'm not sure that it is." He made eye contact with each of the other men before continuing.

"Anyway," he said, "people like that're not going to take a chance that someone might have their safe-house staked out by the time they get back. So that they walk into our fond embrace when they get back to it. They're going to have somebody babysitting that place, listening to a scanner, and probably ready with a CB radio to warn them off if it sounds like we've got a tail as well. So there's your eighth member.

"I'm not saying here," Richards said, "I'm not saying here that eight's the most that it could be. Could very possibly be more. But almost certainly it's at least eight, at least two of whom are females. The rest we do not know.

"Which of course is also unusual," Richards said. "I know we've all heard about Bonnie and Clyde, and all that stuff. Ma Barker, broads like that. But just the same, it's not very often these days that we see women robbing armored trucks. They've got easier ways to get lots of money."

"Unless," Fraley said, "the one that's the driver is as ugly as you say. Then she wouldn't have." The other five men laughed.

"Well, I didn't see her myself, Ralph," Richards said. "I'm just going on the driver's, the truck driver's word. But yeah, that could be, I suppose.

"Next thing that sort of sticks out in this one," Richards said, "is that while we don't know yet what denominations of bills they got this time, and we may never know, we were able at the time to reconstruct the deposits they swiped in the Danvers job. And that was a peculiar job from that point of view, because it included an unusually large number of fifty-dollar bills. About ten thousand dollars' worth of brand-new fifties that the stores handed out in raffles to promote this early sale. Your cash receipt came out with a red star on it, and you'd spent at least fifty bucks, the purchases were free and you got a crisp new fifty, too. Which naturally the lucky customers spent just as fast as they could, before they left the mall. So they were in the bank's deposits when the thieves showed up.

"Those fifties hadn't been circulated," Richards said. "The Federal Reserve had records of consecutive serial numbers. So naturally we said: 'Aha,' and put the usual guys who buy hot money under more surveillance'n the President gets. And we circulated the list to racetracks and casinos and other joints like that, where the big spenders go.

"Got nothing," he said. "Came up as empty as a pail. Which means that the people who took the money either didn't have or didn't choose to use anybody's cut-rate laundry service, and did have the self-control either to hold onto those fifties until they cooled off and the lists came down, dumped them in some country abroad, or maybe never parted with them at all. Or destroyed them. Which is also possible. Like I said, they don't take risks."

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"So what?" Fraley said.

"So this," Richards said. He began ticking off points on his fingers. "This gang does not include anybody with a record. If they've done this before, except for Danvers, using a different MO, they haven't been caught doing it.

"Therefore," he said, "we're not going to get anyplace boiling informers and torturing the usual ham-and-egggers 'till they talk, because the usual ham-and-egggers don't know these people either. Tendency we have — and I include myself in this — the tendency we have is to look at cops and robbers like it was a monopoly. Like the cops know all the robbers, and the robbers know the cops, and all you have to do when a robbery's committed is figure out which robbers are the ones did it this time. We work like the linebackers in football: when the ball's snapped, charge right in and start picking up bodies until you find the one that's got the ball. Throw that one on the ground, and then your job is done until the next play begins. No trick to it at all.

"Usually we're right," he said. "Which is why we are complacent, and why a bunch of amateurs — in our terms, that is — why a bunch of amateurs can pull off one of these raids every couple or so years, and then sit back and laugh. We may say we're looking for the robbers, but we're not. What we're doing, what we generally do, is inspecting the selection of robbers we know to see if any of them look like the particular robbers that we want. And these characters don't. If we saw them on the street, walking right outside this building, we'd ignore them unless they carried signs confessing."

"If they're not robbers," the District Attorney said, "just what are they, John?"

"Longhairs," Richards said. "They're a bunch of goddamn longhairs that got bored with protesting the war and branched out. That's the only way you can account for all of it. The descriptions: fatigue jackets, hiking boots, beards, the granny glasses, the presence of females — no self-respecting chap from Charlestown'd get himself up like that, even to confuse us. And if he did, he'd give it away. Wear a couple gold chains around his neck. And he wouldn't show his face, either. He'd wear some sort of mask. And he would fence the money, and he'd blow it on a horse and a couple high-priced whoors. And furthermore, it has to be, this has to be the explanation, because it's also the only way you can account for the planning,

the precision. These are novices. They're at most in their middle twenties or so, and so far as we know, yesterday's job was only their second. But they pulled it off just like they did the first one. Split-second execution. Got to have brains for that, gentlemen. Got to be intelligent. And where do bright young minds go these days to learn about fascist dictatorships and capitalist dogs? To colleges is where they go, and that's where ours came from."

"So what do we do, John?" the District Attorney said. "Plug the NCIC computers into the College Board records and pick out the brightest ones?"

Richards laughed. "Yeah," he said, "we could do that. See if they've started testing for aptitude in military tactics. Those will be our friends. But, no, Ward, that won't work. What we have got to do is sit down and do something that we don't enjoy that much, which is think very hard about how they manage to schedule these jobs to the second. How long before the cars roll up and the guns come out do they start collecting information? How do they go about it? Are they staking out these banks, timing the deliveries? That's what we've got to do."

"That isn't going to be easy, John," Fraley said. "You're not saying what I came here to hear you say, that we will catch these bastards, no matter how long that may take. What you're saying is that they'll not only probably, but certainly, commit the third one before we figure out the second."

"Oh," Richards said, "if I gave you a different impression, I certainly didn't mean to. That's exactly what I'm saying. But look at it this way, all right? We've got two years to think."

Late in the afternoon of October 19, 1972, Florence Amberson Walker in a seminar room at Marble Preparatory School in Manhattan addressed nineteen young men and women responding to an invitation to discuss "International Vistas in Music."

"All of you were invited," she said, "because each of you has shown not only special ability in one or another of your academic fields, but because each of you has also shown that you have talent in music as well. One or two of you, in fact — and I think this is ironic — have so much musical talent that, your teachers tell me, now and then it's interfered a little with your regular studies.

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"I am not here to tell you that you should forget about your plans — you, for example, Rodney, to attend Caltech; you, Jane, to go to Vassar — or in any way relinquish the great opportunities you have before you in your fields. In fact I will be the first to say that unless you have musical talents bordering on genius, it would be folly for you or anyone else to follow them exclusively.

"What I am here to tell you, to make you aware of, is that there are programs available that can enable you to enjoy and make use of your talents in music while interfering only slightly, if at all, with your studies and career plans. Programs that will let you use your abilities to enrich your intellectual lives, expand your knowledge of the world, make friends you'd never have. And I'm not speaking here just about the various university choral groups and orchestras, the bands and the other organizations that will certainly be recruiting you when you matriculate next fall. I am talking about an organization that probably few of you have heard of, that can and will provide to some, perhaps to some of you, a year of travel, cultural refreshment and excitement you'll remember a long time.

"This is not," she said, "this is *not* a program primarily intended for people who expect to make their careers in music. How many of you know who Tom Oates is?" Nine hands were raised. "Of course," she said. "Probably one of the most provocative young personalities in television today. Tom makes all of us think, every night that he comes on. But we who support the Ipswich Ensemble, well, we like to think perhaps some of his awareness, whatever you may think of his position on Vietnam, that some of his fire and conviction come from the year he spent with the orchestra, while he was at Dartmouth. Music, well, I'm sure Tom would be the first to admit that music was not his *métier*. But he was good enough, and bright enough, to qualify for the Ensemble, and it broadened his outlook. And that's what I'm talking about. If my daughter does end up teaching music, her life will have been enhanced by her year. And that's what we're offering to you.

"Now I know," she said, "I know that many of your parents have made sacrifices, big sacrifices, to get you to this point. And I know that no matter how many scholarships you may have, how many loans there are, you have to think, they have to think, about the cost of things. And some of you might say: 'Well, Mrs. Walker, that's all

well and good for you, to talk about a year off and go around the world, but there are other things, you know, we have to think about.' And I want to answer that.

"The organization I'm referring to is called the Ipswich Ensemble. It exists to find, attract, *and support*, young people like yourselves. Young people who have more to offer themselves and the world than just the intelligence they can bring to engineering, or chemistry, or medicine, or physics, or literature — whatever you'd care to name. It's under the auspices of the University of Ipswich, in England. If you're lucky, and are chosen, it provides you with a year of study there — with credits you can transfer to virtually any American college or university, so you won't lose any time — and, without any expense to you, travel throughout the world, for one simply glorious year. Next year's tour, starting in March, has visits scheduled to Vienna, Milan, Madrid, Bermuda, Miami, California, Mexico City, Caracas, Melbourne, and then a stop in Hong Kong before returning home." The students exchanged grins. "When Christina toured," Walker said, "well, if you're excited, hearing about it, you can imagine how she felt, appearing as a soloist in Toronto, Chicago, Mexico City, all along the West Coast, Manila, Canberra and then Cairo.

"But I'm sorry to say you're all too late for next year's trip," she said, smiling. "And you're probably, unless you're taking early admission in the second semester this year, probably too late for the tour we're already planning for Nineteen-seventy-four." They looked crestfallen. "But don't be discouraged," she said. "We've, well, the Ensemble's been doing this now for twenty-seven years, and the only comment I've ever heard *any* of the musicians make, when they visit New York or the East, is that whatever trip they've happened to be on, it was 'the best one yet.' If you're chosen, well, you may not get to Tehran, in your particular year, but that will be only because Frankfurt, or Brussels, or Oslo or Kyoto, or maybe even Rio, made that impossible."

The students looked happy again. One young man with dark curly hair raised his hand. "Question?" she said. He stood up. "Darren Jefferson," he said. "Mrs. Walker, I have two questions. First, I wondered whether Tom Oates, well, if his being Carl Oates's son had anything to do with him being selected."

She smiled. "Do you mean, Darren: 'If your father's Carl Oates,

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and you're a famous broadcaster, does that give you an advantage?" "

He shrugged. "If you like," he said.

"No," she said, "it did not. Tom applied, and auditioned, and he was chosen. As I've tried to suggest, while some musical ability is necessary, it's not the paramount concern. Nor is your family tree."

Jefferson nodded. "Okay," he said. "And the second thing is: I just wondered: Is there any chance this orchestra would go to Peking or Moscow? Because I'm thinking of specializing in Russian and Chinese studies, and something like that would help."

"Where?" she said.

"I'm not sure," he said. "U of Chicago, most likely."

"We've had several Chicago students in the Ensemble," she said. "One of them, from Boston — Alton Badger is his name — one of them's a private investigator. Another of them's a member of the Society of Jesus, and two have gone on to work with the Department of Defense. In various capacities. So it certainly wouldn't do you any harm, a year with the Ensemble."

"That isn't what I meant," Jefferson said. "I meant: I want to see those places. Visit them. And I'd like to know whether the Ensemble's ever gone there. To Russia or China."

"I don't believe so," she said.

"Why?" he said. "Do you think it ever might?"

She didn't answer for a moment. Then she shook her head slightly. "There's no," she said, "there's no policy I know of that would rule that out. But neither, so far as I know, has such a visit ever been made. Whether it's because of visa problems, or language barriers, or what the reason is — I really don't know."

"So the orchestra just doesn't travel to the Iron Curtain countries?" he said.

"It has not," she said.

"And," he said, "do you think it will?"

She sighed. "No," she said, "I don't."