Sonata for a Spy
The Ultimate Challenge in Mystery Jigsaw Puzzle Thrillers

Story by Alan Robbins
I have bad news, Mr. Steele,” the man in the doorway said somberly.
Steele had never seen him before. He was a greasy little fellow with one odd eye. The perfect choice to play the lead in Peter Lorre’s film bio. He even had a strange accent. A set of ribbons on his lapel made his suit look like a uniform.
“Yes?” John Steele said innocently.
He assumed it was the assistant manager of the hotel apologizing for the missing towel.
“I’m afraid Mr. August Sonnefeld has been murdered.”
“Oh, that’s terrible,” Steele said.
There was no trace of grief in his voice. The key word – murder – had not even registered. At that moment, Steele was mostly upset about the tickets he and his wife had to Sonnefeld’s recital that night. They were obviously useless now.
“You do not seem troubled by this,” the man observed. “That is good.”
Before he could respond, Steele’s wife Emma appeared behind him in the hotel suite. She was wearing a long robe.
“Did he bring the extra towel?” she asked a bit too brightly, considering the news.
“No,” Steele said. “He’s not with the hotel.”
“Oh,” Emma said sadly.
The towel was rather critical at that point. But she smiled at the man in the doorway anyway.
He did not smile back.
“He’s from the Plonsk Theatre,” Steele explained. “It’s about the concert. No recital tonight. It seems that Sonnefeld died. Had a heart attack or something.”
“How awful,” Emma said. “Will he refund the tickets?”
“I don’t know,” Steele said, turning back to the little man, whose expression had darkened considerably. “Can we get a refund?”
“Enough of this nonsense if you please,” the man shot back. “Allow me to come in. We have much to discuss.”
“About the tickets?” Steele and Emma asked in perfect unison.
“Do not try to dupe me!” the man exclaimed in a harsh whisper. “Sonnefeld has been murdered! We must talk.”
“Murdered?” Emma said. She turned to Steele, who simply mirrored her perplexed look.
“Did he say murdered?”
“Did you say murdered?” Steele echoed.
But the little man had already lost all patience.
“Rest assured,” he said ominously, “that unless you cooperate with me, the police will be forced to arrest Sonnefeld’s killer.”
“Well, I certainly hope they do,” Emma interjected.
“Do they already know who did it?” Steele asked.
“They will quickly find out that it was you!” the man said.
“Me?” Steele jumped.
He followed the point of the man’s finger all the way to himself.
“John, how could you?” Emma said flatly. “You know how I feel about this cold-blooded murder thing.”
But a glance back at the grim man in the doorway told them both that he was not joking.

"Why would they suspect me?" Steele said. "All I did was buy two tickets to his concert. I never even met Sonnefeld."

The answer to his question came in the form of a black barrel sticking out of the little man's jacket. It was a gun that had been concealed in an inside pocket. And it was now pointing directly at John Steele's heart.

"Ah," Steele said, suddenly getting the point. "In that case, please do come in. Make yourself comfortable."

It was supposed to have been a pleasant vacation. John and Emma Steele had planned it for months. No kids, no dogs, no chores. Just a nice hotel with room service. And a concert, a museum or two, dinner in an expensive restaurant. Four days in a romantic foreign capital. And it was all going according to plan.

Until the murder.

The man at the door entered cautiously, never taking his eyes off either of them. Emma shrugged as he came in. He didn't seem particularly dangerous. But the gun suggested otherwise. Either way, both she and Steele had a feeling that their vacation was over. They watched silently as the little man took a seat and put the gun back in his inside pocket.

"Forgive me for this rudeness," he said tapping the gun, "but please do not try to - how do you Americans say? - pull the wool? I know all about your connection with the late August Sonnefeld."

"You do?" Steele said.

"Everything."

"Then you know a lot more than we do."

Steele was studying the way the man was sitting in the chair. His feet barely touched the floor. It seemed possible to catch him off-guard, grab his legs, and tip him over backwards in the chair. But before he could act on the impulse, Emma jumped in with a more direct approach.

"Do you mind if I ask you something?" she said.

"May I?" the man interrupted. He had taken out a gold cigarette case and without waiting for an answer, he placed one of the cigarettes between his lips and was searching for his lighter.

"Make yourself right at home," Steele said.

He was trying for high sarcasm. But it was lost on the visitor, who simply nodded and lit up.

"Thank you," he said. "It is a habit I cannot seem to conquer. Quite a pain in the butts, as they say. Now then, you had a question?"

"Yes," Emma said. "I wanted to ask you who you think you are, who you think we are, what all this has to do with Sonnefeld and, above all, what in God's name you're talking about?"

The man was gripping the cigarette in a reverse pinch, like a parody of a Prussian aristocrat. He took two dramatic puffs before responding.

"Perhaps an introduction is in order," he finally said.

"There's an idea!" Steele said. "Sort of break the ice."
Steele took a seat on the couch across from where the man was sitting. Then he tapped the cushion for Emma to join him. But she preferred to stand her ground.

“I am Tomas Franck,” the man said. “I am a native of this country. But I work for the international police.”

He tapped the ribbons on his jacket. And he paused. As though that fact alone would settle the matter once and for all. But when his hosts merely returned blank stares, he saw that he had to continue.

“I see you insist on this silly charade,” he said. “All right then. Why don’t you start by telling me what you know of August Sonnefeld?”

“He was a fiddler,” John Steele answered bluntly.

And he sawed a phantom violin in the air to make the point. The whole think seemed ludicrous to him. Especially the man’s attitude. It was exactly midway between mystery and lunacy. But Emma saw that her husband’s answer wasn’t quite enough.

“He was a concert violinist,” she explained. “He was supposed to give a recital tonight, April 12, at 8:00 at the Płonsk Theatre.”

“Come now, Mrs. Steele,” Franck said. “It isn’t quite that simple. What, for example, took place this evening?”

“This evening we bought two tickets to the concert through the hotel clerk downstairs,” she added. “I planned to take a shower first. But there was no towel. We called the front desk. You showed up. Still no towel. You barged in. You sat down. And you insisted that there’s no music recital because my husband killed the musician. That’s about it, I think. Did I forget anything?”

She looked at her husband, feeling proud of her summation. He, on the other hand, was irked by the utter simplicity of it.

“And that is all?” Franck asked.

“Isn’t it?”

“I fear you have left something out.”

There was a pause while the Steele’s tried to guess what that something was.

“Oh,” Emma said to Steele with drama, “he must be talking about when you ran over to the rehearsal studio and pumped those bullets into him. Why’d you do it, John?”

“Can’t stand fiddlers,” he said gaily. “I’m a cello man myself.”

The whole thing was absurd. Without the gun, Franck looked as menacing as a waiter in a foreign-language farce. It was no longer a matter of overpowering him. It was a question of not cracking up.

“That is enough!” he shouted. It had taken him a few moments to realize that they were teasing him. “And what have you to tell me about the military secrets?”

John and Emma looked at each other twice. They tried not to laugh. But they failed.

“You will not think it so funny,” Franck said, his accent suddenly getting worse, “from the inside of a prison. I assure you. Now I suggest that you stop playing me the fool. We know all about your little smuggling ring.”

“That’s it,” Steele said. “You’re nuts. I’m calling the police.” He reached for the phone. But the gun was out again. This time it was aimed right at Steele’s head.

“In this matter,” Franck said, “I am the police, Mr. Steele. And I promise you that we will get to the bottom of this without outside help.”
He waved the pistol at Emma. She followed the gesture to the couch where she took a seat next to her husband. They waited for Franck to make the next move.

"Since you are reluctant to — as you people say — spill your beans, I shall prove to you how much we already know."

Franck took the cigarette out of his mouth and placed it in an ashtray with precision. The clink as it hit the glass sounded a sour note.

"We know about the latest series of thefts from the military research facility. And we know that many governments would like to get their hands on that information."

"Wait a minute," Emma broke in. "Are you saying that August Sonnefeld was some sort of spy?"

"Please, Mrs. Steele, do not insult me. We know that someone high up in the army has been stealing the secrets. And that these secrets were passed on to Sonnefeld. Sonnefeld, in turn, handed them over to a foreign buyer. He was — what is the proper word? — the middleman?"

"Fiddling with more than fiddles," Steele observed. "So Sonnefeld was part of a spy ring. What's that got to do with us?"

"We know that Sonnefeld was going to pass the secrets off tonight."

"So?"

"He was planning to come to your room this very evening. Yet you still insist this meeting had nothing to do with the spy operation?"

"Sonnefeld? Here? That’s ridiculous. I tell you we didn’t know him."

"Then why is your room — number 83 — written down in the last page of his notebook?"

Franck said.

It was an accusation, not a question. And he leaned forward smugly as he said it. But their shocked reactions didn’t fool him. He knew they knew. And he knew that eventually they would have to admit it.

"Now do you still insist," he continued, "that you were not expecting the delivery, let us say, of a little package of stolen military secrets?"

"Oh sure," Emma said. "We’ve been sitting here all day waiting for it. What was that signal, John? Three knocks on the door?"

Right on cue there were three knocks on the door.

Without lowering his pistol, Franck got up and went to answer it. His slight limp added to the theatricality of the scene. When he opened the door, there was a thin young man standing in the hall. He had a wispy mustache, meant to imply maturity. But it had the opposite effect. He was carrying a white towel. There was a red rose on top of it.

He started to speak but saw the gun and gasped instead. Franck waved him into the room. And as he slid by the gun, he turned paler than he already was.

"Oh, don’t mind him," Emma said to the young man. "He’s just a paranoid psychopath hunting for spies. You’ll get used to him."

"Please," the young man said in a thick accent. "I was told to make delivery."

Franck slammed the door and spoke to the new arrival rapidly in their own language. At the end of his speech, he grabbed the towel from the young man and tossed it onto the table. Then, without taking his eyes off anyone, he shook it open, but was dismayed not to find the military secrets inside.
“And what is the meaning of this?” he shouted to the delivery boy. “Who sent you?”
“I am Yannis,” the young man said. “From towel service. It is not good? I take back.”
“Perhaps you’d prefer a washcloth,” Steele said to Franck.
Steele was enjoying the confusion immensely. But Franck was not. The possibility that he
was wrong about the whole affair was beginning to dawn on him. He was not a man who
tolerated mistakes. Even his own. And he sat back down in the chair with disgust.
“What exactly did you expect to find?” Emma asked.
“Tell me,” he said cautiously, “what you know of fiber optics.”
“What do you know of the World Series?” Steele countered.
“Nothing,” Franck said, somewhat puzzled.
“That’s how much I know about fiber optics.”
“I see,” Franck said, his tone still wary. “Then allow me to enlighten you. A fiber optic is a
form of cable. Like an electrical wire. But it is made of plastic. And it conducts light from one
end to the other rather than electricity. It is used in telecommunications.”
Still holding the pistol, he drew his fingers apart in the air as though spinning a thread.
Yannis, the delivery boy, mimicked his actions as he tried to follow what was going on. Emma,
for her part, tried to imagine what this cable had to do with a four-day holiday in Europe. But she
couldn’t quite see the connection.
“Scientists in this country,” Franck went on, “recently developed a new high-density form of
fiber optic cable. It carries a hundred times the amount of information. Quite important for
military uses. That was the secret stolen last week.”
“And given to Sonnefeld?” Steele asked.
“Precisely,” Franck said. “But of course, you know this. As you also know that Sonnefeld
was planning to pass it on this evening. I came here to his hotel room to confront him. But when I
arrived there, I found him murdered.”
“And found our hotel room in his notebook,” Emma added.
“As you say.”
“I didn’t even know he was staying here at the hotel,” Steele said.
“He murder?” Yannis asked, nervously.
“It happens all the time, my dear,” Emma said, trying to soothe him.
“Did you search the room?” Steele asked.
“Oh course,” Franck said. “But I found nothing.”
“What exactly were you looking for?” Emma asked. “A piece of this fiber optic cable?”
“Perhaps. Or documents about it. Also information about his contact.”
“What kind of information?”
Franck grinned. He knew they were simply leading him on. But he played along, hoping that
some answers might emerge anyway.
“The name of his contact and the place they were to meet. This changed each time, as you
know. And also the password. We know this has always been a woman’s name. Now I must insist
that you return to his room with me and help me find this information.”
“Why us?”
“In a short time, the police will arrive there. They will find the body. They will also find your room number in the notebook. Perhaps you have had a hand in his murder and perhaps not. But the implication will be obvious.”

“You want me to go back to the room where the body is?” Emma asked. “I think I’ll pass.”

“We shall all return there,” Franck said. “Even this alleged towel boy. I am not yet sure what to believe.”

“One thing you can believe is this,” Emma said. “I am not going to his room. I’m no good around dead people. I get ill. Tell him, John. I don’t even get invited to funerals.”

But Franck made his case by cocking the gun.

“Maybe we all should go,” Steele suggested to her. Then he added in a whisper, “Maybe we can get rid of that room number.”

“Oh God,” she said, giving in to the logic. “I hope he isn’t too dead.”

They waited while Emma got dressed. Then Franck, trying to keep them all under guard, herded them up the stairs. The door to Sonnfeld’s room was still unlocked. Franck shoved it open and ushered his reluctant guests inside. Emma still had her eyes closed as Franck turned on the light. But there was nothing to see. No body. Only a bed filled with Sonnfeld’s belongings.

“It’s all right,” Steele said to Emma. “He’s not here.”

She opened one eye and looked around like a bird.

“In the bathroom,” Franck explained.

While the others searched the room, Emma concentrated on the items on the bed. Sonnfeld’s two violins were there. His bow tie was tossed nearby. There was an invitation to the recital, sheets of music, and some personal items. But what attracted her attention was the notebook. It was open to the last page. As Franck said, number 83 was written there along with some sketchy notes.

“Look at this,” she said, calling the others over. “That’s not our room number. He was working on a musical piece. It’s the number of a sonata. Number 83. It’s just a coincidence.”

“She’s right,” Steele said. “That’s what the number means. I guess you don’t need us anymore.”

But Franck darted over and blocked the door.

“I must insist on your help,” Franck said. “You know a bit too much at this point. And besides – as you people like to say – four heads are better. Yes?”

With that they turned their attention back to the objects on the bed and the secrets hidden within them.

Assemble the puzzle and see if you can solve the mystery. Can you find the stolen secret given to Sonnfeld, the password he was to use, and the name and location of his contact?
The Solution:

"This is wrong. Emma said, examining the invitation. "It's today's gate all right. But the location and start time are wrong.

"You've got it. Shees said promptly. "That's the information on the contract. You'll find it there."

An invitation. He was supposed to meet someone named Claire Hall at the address at 7:30.

"Well done," Franz said. "And now, if you please, the password. A woman's name?"

"What's her name?" said the towel boy. He was sitting on the dresser a few feet from the bed.

"Rosanna," Franz said.

"Rosanna?" the towel boy said, as though the stress had grinned him mad.

"That's right," Franz said. "The name Rosanna."

If we're correct, stepping back from the sheet music, the letters of the name Rosanna could clearly be seen, correlated in the notes.

"That leaves only one item," Franz said.

"What do you mean?" the towel boy said.

"Hidden in plain sight," Franz said. He plucked the strings of the violin one by one. The last string sounded a g chord. He was plucking the black dot on the violin.

"I saw that right away," Franz said.

Franck quickly removed it from the violin, showed it into his pocket, and headed for the door.

"How did you do that?" Shees asked. "What sound does the second form of the number two make?"

"I'm sure you and the police can reach us at a second room and run. They won't get close enough."

"Did you not think the police. Emma said, surprisingly, she gave him because clear. "You killed Angus Sorrecan?! But why? Why are you?"

The boy shuddered, the observer on the bed as his eyes made huge association. One item in particular stood out. If helped the turn to the ability of Tomass Franz.

Can you find the clue and figure out who Tomass Franz really is?
The Solution, Part 2:

Major Frank. "That's my cue." Major Frank, standing by the brick accent for extra effect.

"I saw the phrase 'Major' twice. That's my cue." Major Frank, standing by the brick accent for extra effect.

"I must have seen the last thing connected to the "Major". It was the phrase 'Major' twice that drew my attention. That's my cue." Major Frank, standing by the brick accent for extra effect.

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