



# READING GUIDE

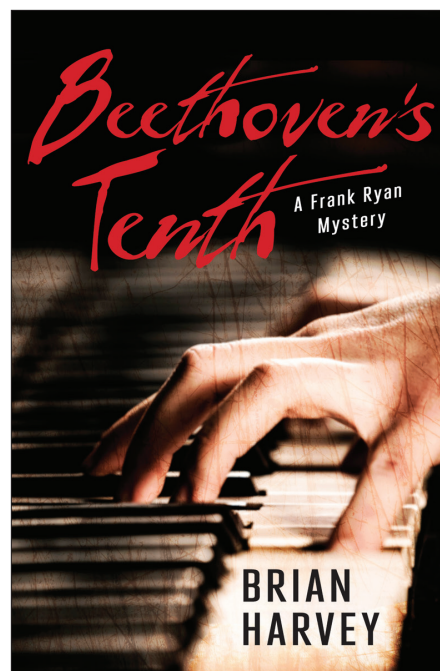
## BEETHOVEN'S TENTH BRIAN HARVEY

Reading level: 4.5

Interest level: Adult

Themes: mystery, murder, male sleuth, accidental sleuth, music, history, piano tuner, Beethoven, symphonies, Japanese underworld, jazz bars, Nazi crimes, stolen artifacts

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### Summary

When piano technician Frank Ryan finds a squashed lapdog inside one of his client's pianos, it offers a hint to the adventure that lies ahead. While he is addressing the problem with the piano, one of the aging Miss Pieczynski's students—a thuggish man named Stefan—is busy rifling through her musical scores. She briskly shows him the door. Later, when it's Frank's turn to leave, Miss P searches the same music cabinet, handing him a score, exclaiming, "Today, I pay you in art."

Frank's evening job is playing jazz piano at The Loft, a bar owned by his friend Kaz Nakamura. When Stefan turns up in a menacing way, telling Frank, "We know you have it," his curiosity—and worry—is piqued. Have *what*? He becomes even more curious when yet another strange man introduces himself as Sergeant Bob Brossard. Brossard asks what Frank knows about the murder of a Miss Olga Pieczynski. Frank is shocked to learn Miss P has been strangled with piano wire.

Unsure who to trust, Frank slips out the back door during a break in his set. At home that evening, he begins to transcribe the manuscript Miss P had given him. Before long, he realizes he has come into the possession of something of enormous significance: the first part of Ludwig van Beethoven's tenth symphony. But where is the rest?

Frank brings the problem to Kaz, also a trained musician. Kaz recognizes the value of the manuscript, and agrees to make some phone calls to try to figure out who might have the rest. Beethoven's birthday is due to be celebrated with a huge festival in Vancouver in a couple days' time; plenty of motivation for people to be agitating to get their hands on the complete tenth symphony. Feeling terribly responsible for the manuscript, Frank keeps the manuscript close, carrying it in an envelope inside his shirt.

Frank enters Miss P's apartment the next day with the key she had given him. He can't find the last movement of the symphony, but he does find photos that show Miss P's brother and father in full Nazi uniform. Suddenly Bob Brossard enters the apartment, asking Frank to hand over the symphony. Unwilling to give it up, Frank is apprehended and taken to Brossard's property on



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nearby Protection Island, where Brossard locks him into a malfunctioning septic shed as a way of forcing Frank to give in. But Frank escapes and turns the tables on Brossard by imprisoning him in his own bathroom.

Back at The Loft, Frank tells Kaz about his misadventure, also sharing the information with a real cop, Tina. Turns out Brossard is nothing to worry about: he isn't a cop, just a laid-off fisheries employee. Stefan isn't a threat either; Kaz says he has been taken into custody on suspicion of killing Miss P. Kaz tells Frank a Japanese collector by the name of Fujimori suspects Miss P's brother, Klaus Pfiffner, of owning the symphony's missing movement. Their father, a Nazi officer, would have had access to all the artworks looted during the war. The story, says Kaz, is that the dad split the tenth symphony between his two children. And Klaus has come back to find it.

Kaz and Frank decide to go to Vancouver for the Beethoven conference. Pfiffner shows up on the ferry and grabs Frank's bag. Frank and Kaz chase the old man, who, panicked, throws the symphony into the ocean. Frank tells Kaz over dinner that he made a copy of the symphony, and Pfiffner only got the copy. Kaz is delighted, and asks Frank for the original. When Frank produces it, Kaz takes off with it.

As it turns out, the manuscript won't be worth anything to Kaz, since the heat and sweat of Frank's exertions over the past few days have wiped out the iron gall ink that Beethoven used. So there is a blank original, and a photocopy of the symphony. Neither particularly worth anything. Nobody won.

In the end, Frank decides he's finished working at The Loft, and is going to apply his piano tuning and playing skills in a different way, perhaps starting with the cruise ship industry.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Why is the first paragraph of *Beethoven's Tenth* so fascinating?
2. At the beginning of the book, how is the narrator's observation about old people true that *they don't waste your time trying to impress you*?
3. The reader is introduced to Stefan in the first chapter of *Beethoven's Tenth*. Discuss how the author has rendered this character so vividly.
4. It could be argued that as a musician, Frank Ryan is living his dream: tending to pianos by day and playing in the jazz bar by night. What would your dream look like?
5. What role does Kaz, the bartender, play in knitting the narrative together?
6. A *simile* is a literary device that adds description by comparing two things, usually using the words *like* or *as*. Here's an example from *Beethoven's Tenth*, where Frank Ryan first realizes he is looking at music for an entire symphony orchestra: "What stared at me from my kitchen table had at least a dozen lines, stacked like Greek pastry" ("A Little Night Music"). How do similes add to the reader's experience of a passage? Find other examples from the book.





7. During “The Last Breakfast”, as Frank sits and talks with Kaz about having been handed the musical score for Beethoven’s tenth symphony, they talk about how valuable such a manuscript might be. While Frank doesn’t need the entire worth of the score, he does imagine that some of the money might buy him a house. What would your first inclination be if you came into the sudden possession of a priceless treasure?
8. What goes through your mind when Frank admits he would jump at the chance to have money? How does this honest window into a character shape your feelings about that person? About the book?
9. What do you think about Frank’s choice of where to hide the manuscript? Explain.
10. One night, Frank reflects that he and Kaz are really in tune with each other’s playing. This is called *flow*, and it can occur in groups or individually. When have you experienced flow? What were you doing?
11. How does Beethoven’s approaching birthday help to propel the story?
12. In the chapter “Easy Come”, what did you think at the moment Pffiffer dumped the manuscript into the wind on the boardwalk?
13. Did you ever suspect Kaz? When? Explain the events that led to your suspicion.
14. As he finishes up in Vancouver, Frank reflects that while he isn’t sure he belongs in Nanaimo anymore, he knows he doesn’t belong in Vancouver. Have you ever sensed that you no longer belong somewhere? What leads us to those places?
15. What is your opinion of the book’s ending?

