**HEMINGWAY’S TRUNK ©**

A Mystery Novel

by

Gerald Arthur Winter

**Spade and Marlowe, Shaken Not Stirred**

Trailer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tt4icxd-gKc&feature=youtube_gdata>

This is a work of fiction. All names and characters

are invented and used fictitiously. Accounts of Ernest

Hemingway’s loss of his early writings are hearsay.

All proposed accounts of what the great American

author’s actual opinions may have been are imagined,

fictitious, and in no way meant to portray his actual

feelings or to declare anything he may have or may

not have said about the alleged loss or anyone who

may have taken part in their loss. The hypothesis

that these manuscripts existed and could be found so

long after they were written is meant to establish the

intrinsic value they might have today.

[www.geraldarthurwinter.com](http://www.geraldarthurwinter.com)

Episode Eleven

**CHAPTER 21: DEATH ROLL**

Before I could get past Davey to try for an exit, three guards took hold of me

and dragged me to an elevator that took us to the roof where a tarmac overlooked Isla

Premio. I saw the distant lights from Marathon and sparkles of traffic along the Keys.

In the darkness around the bright island, *Sea Bitch II* was waiting to rescue me, but

without my flippers, still tied beneath the raft in the lagoon, Theo and Sandy had no

way to find me.

I watched below as two crocodiles swam toward a lure from the lagoon back

into their separate aquarium tanks. I shivered in anticipation and felt a chill when I

saw Mr. Salty below, more than twenty feet long and six feet wide with a head that

made up a quarter of his length.

The pilot started the helicopter. Davey came onto the tarmac then his guards

handcuffed me with my hands in front so he could see I had no weapon. Davey and

one guard got into the chopper with me and the pilot.

“Make sure the guests have anything they want in the Party Room,” Davey told

the other guard as they were leaving. “Make sure everyone is inside so they can’t see the

lagoon. This won’t be a pretty sight.”

“Does your mother know what you’re doing?” I said, just to relieve my tension.

Davey said coldly, “My mom was a drunk and beat the crap out of me while my

dad went off to Nam to play war games. She’s been dead for twenty years. I killed her

myself with an iron skillet after she poured scalding water on me. I popped her in the

back of the head then dumped her over a cliff near our trailer park. Everyone knew she

was a drunk and figured it was an accident. Little did I know I was going from the pan

into the fire when I was placed in foster homes and beaten by men instead of a woman.

My dad knows all this now, so he’s feelin’ real sorry about it and tries to make it up to

me every day—with endless amounts of cash whenever I want it.”

“How nice for you,” I said, recalling how Bess had told me her ex-boyfriend

never ran short of cash to bail him out.

“But now I’ve got one very fine stepmom,” he laughed with a hideous howl.

“The Most Beautiful Woman in the World.”

I wasn’t sure if Mr. Salty or Davey was the worst reptile to fear, but I thought

about ways I might create a safe haven between one and the other.

Davey got the signal that the party had moved to his father’s luxury quarters and

no one partied within sight of the lagoon.

“Party time!” Davey shouted. “Let’s go trolling for Mr. Salty. You’ll make a

good lure, Larkin.”

The guard clipped a light wire cable to the link between my handcuffs as the

chopper lifted off the tarmac and hovered slowly downward toward the lagoon.

“Nothing like a salty snack for Happy Hour, Larkin, and you’re it,” Davey

mocked me. “But sweets are bad for your teeth. Can’t have Mr. Salty rotting his

teeth.” He pulled Baby Ruth from my shirt pocket and threw the concealed gun into

the lagoon. “Did you think Tony forgot to tell me about your little tricks before he

ended his usefulness? Bub-bye!”

He shoved me out of the hovering chopper into the lagoon. I hit the warm

water with a splash and struggled to the surface. The chopper jerked upward and

dragged me along the lagoon as bait. Baby Ruth had been my last hope to have

a shot at the crocodile before it ripped me to shreds. The only glimmer of hope

between a gruesome end and freedom to safety was getting my flippers hanging

under the floating raft. The tracer would allow Theo and Sandy to find me once I

got outside the enclosure of Isla Premio. I tried to concentrate, but it was hard to

think about anything other than Mr. Salty.

I tried to block out the image of those jaws, which might crush me at any

moment. Conceding there was nothing I could do once that happened, I paid

attention to the pattern the chopper was making in its turns above the lagoon and

how close it came to the raft. I started to pull myself up on the cable just a little at

a time, so they wouldn’t notice, and soon I’d gathered some slack.

Coming within reach of the raft, I saw two red lights in the distance moving

rapidly toward me along the surface. I heard Davey’s laugh from above. The red

lights were eyes, Mr. Salty’s, coming in for the kill. A vision of a herd of wildebeests

crossing a river flashed in my mind, but I shook that image from my thoughts.

When I got close enough to the raft to make my move, the chopper jerked me

away from the Mr. Salty’s’ rapid approach. I lost some of the slack I’d gathered in the

cable and the glowing red eyes were out of sight. It wouldn’t matter if Mr. Salty caught

up to me—that would be the end of it. So, I continued gathering slack from my tether

to the chopper.

I looked above and saw the chopper hovering downward closer to me. Sadistic,

Davey wanted to see me die up close. He couldn’t resist the tease, like a nasty little kid

burning ants with a magnifying glass to hear them crackle and pop.

I met enough bad boys in my time to realize you could avoid them only for so

long before you became an ant to them, too. I knew it was pointless to wound a man

bigger than I, because it would only piss him off and give him time and motive to finish

what he’d started. You don’t learn that in the legal system or any training manual—only

from personal experience if you survive the first time.

I saw the guard point toward the distance, where I turned to see those glowing

eyes coming for me again. The raft was thirty feet to my right, the chopper fifty feet

above, and to my left was the huge crocodile coming in for the kill from less than a

hundred feet away.

I wasn’t sure if I had enough slack to reach the far side of the raft with a looping

toss. If I failed, Davey would see what I was up to and quickly put an end to me. Still,

his pleasure in teasing Mr. Salty ruled the moment, so he made the pilot jerk me away

from the predator just ten yards away. The sudden force lifted me high out of the water,

but I heard Mr. Salty’s jaws snap just below my dangling legs with three-quarters of his

scaly length projected up at me from the lagoon. So close I could smell him, like the

stench of a neglected fishbowl.

I heard Davey wail with hideous laughter, so I used the distraction to drop the

slack in the cable around the raft in my descent, landing hard on the top of the raft.

I had no chance to look up and see any reaction to my maneuver by Davey or the pilot.

On my back, I scrambled painfully to my feet. Mr. Salty lunged out of the lagoon onto

the forty-foot raft and slid on his belly toward me with his jaws open. I used some slack

in the cable to toss at him, which he snapped in two, setting me free from the cable, but

with my hands still handcuffed in front of me.

I drop feet first off the raft and held onto it tightly as a half-ton crocodile slid

over me. His soft white belly took a few seconds to pass before he could make a turn to

come at me again. I reached under the raft, grabbed my flippers, and clenched them in

my teeth as I pulled myself back up onto the raft.

The crocodile made his turn faster than I thought, so I had to run to the opposite

side of the raft and do an instant replay of my last maneuver, but hoping Mr. Salty wasn’t

already wise to it. He came at me as before, but with even more speed, so I had to jump

to one side to avoid the snap of his powerful jaws. The smell of his breath curdled my

stomach. I hit the water and wondered how long my strength could hold out against the

these relentless attacks.

I jerked myself back onto the raft and looked for him to come back at me, but

saw nothing. Which direction would he come from? Positioned in the center of the raft

to react quicker when he made his move, I’d also cut the distance of his attack in half

from any direction—not the best strategy.

A moment of calm waved through me taking the end of the cable dangling from

the chopper above and looping it around the ladder used to climb onto the raft. The raft

was metal beneath its carpeted surface and the metal ladder was bolted through two

layers of metal at the top and bottom of the raft. For a change, no laughter came from

the chopper above.

Then Mr. Salty leaped out of the water at me from the right, but I jumped into

the lagoon by the ladder. The snapping jaws were blocked by the ladder’s handles, bent

and twisted by his sharp crushing teeth. Mr. Salty’s confusion gave me a moment to

swim under the raft and wait for the sound of the crocodile hitting the water again.

Waiting beneath the raft between metal oil drums with my head above the water at

chin level, no sound came. Mr. Salty was waiting for me to come out from under

the raft, where I was trapped for his quick kill. I slipped my flippers on, knowing if I

had to get onto the raft again, I could never move fast enough running in flippers to

avoid an attack. Swimming would be my only chance of escape regardless how long

I prolonged the inevitable.

Davey got bored waiting for the Mr. Salty’s next attack, so he stirred the pot

by using the chopper and the cable attached to the raft’s ladder to flip it over, leaving me

out in the open for Mr. Salty. The cable attached to the bolted ladder might’ve presented

a minor problem with the raft’s weight, even though less than the chopper’s weight.

Davey seemed to have counted on the extra weight of Mr. Salty on top of the raft,

assuming the crocodile would slide off with the tilt. What he hadn’t counted on was

the heavy chain and anchor, which kept the raft from floating aimlessly in the lagoon,

especially against the force of a hurricane.

There must have been a moment of great ecstasy for Davey when he ordered the

pilot to flip over the raft with the cable I’d fastened to it. In that moment, I imagined his

cackle as the raft tipped and Mr. Salty slid into the water, but I heard nothing underwater

as I made my break toward the gates leading out of the lagoon into the Gulf. With my

hands manacled, I had to depend on my flippers and a strong kick, breathing only

intermittently when I surfaced. The image of Mr. Salty in my mind, maybe not far

behind, piqued my effort.

Expecting to be cut in two at any moment, I was startled by the loud sound and

burst of light behind me. It wasn’t until I got to the gate and pulled myself out of the

water and onto the reef, where a deserted guard stand gave me shelter, that I realized

what happened behind me.

The grounded anchor against the force of the chopper pulled the aircraft out of

control and spun it down into the lagoon where it shattered onto the raft in flames. The

pilot was killed instantly on impact and the guard, pinned between the chopper and the

raft, had drowned. A flaming Davey, still sizzling, made it into the lagoon, but not before

the barbecue got some added spice from Mr. Salty. I recognized the high pitched shrill,

but now it wasn’t laughter as one crocodilian devoured another in its spinning death roll.

Fifty yards off the reef, a spotlight beamed on me from the Gulf. I waved and

they came as close as possible before I jumped into the water and swam with a weak but

determined kick. Theo maneuvered the boat, and it took all of Sandy’s strength to help

me up the ladder into the skiff.

“I think I like you better this way, Larkin,” Sandy said with a grin and a cigarette

butt dangling from the corner of her mouth as she jiggled my handcuffs and winked.

When she reached to take a last drag from her cigarette, I quickly threw my cuffed

hands over her head and shoulders and jerked her to me nose to nose.

“I just wanted to show my thanks, Sandy,” I said, giving her a kiss.

She froze for a moment before responding in kind, then asked, “Don’t you have

a package waiting for you back at the inn? A neat little parcel all properly wrapped with

red frills?”

“Bess is just passing through,” I said with a shrug. “No strings tied to that parcel.”

“Really? So how was the party at Isla Premio tonight?” she asked with a raised

brow. “You look all partied out.”

“You mean all that hype about tonight’s wild party at Isla Premio,” I shuddered

and grimaced. “Well, that information turned out to be just a *croc*.”

**CHAPTER 22 – COLLATERAL DAMAGE**

Bess looked at me sympathetically on our first-class flight back to Newark on

Saturday morning. My jaw was swollen and purple from my chin to my left ear and I

had to speak out of the right side of my mouth, not that doing so took much effort for

a professional liar.

“Maker’s Mark on the rocks,” my muffled voice hissed to the flight attendant.

“You don’t drink,” Bess said with a scolding frown.

“I don’t use drugs either,” I rattled the bottle of Vicodin, which *Frau Bluecher*

had provided at the safe house, “but bourbon is the lesser of two evils.”

“Am I also the lesser of two evils?”

“Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil,” I said, sipping the bourbon. “Life’s

just a barrel of monkeys when you get right down to it, Bess.”

“That hard-bodied blonde who dropped you off last night kissed you before she

left. I saw you with her from our window at the B&B.”

“Just another cop,” I said. “I kiss Timmy Barnes too, every chance I get, but he

and my other superiors were usually bending over at the time. I was DEA for almost twenty

years, took an early retirement that I couldn’t refuse, and now I’m a private dick. Copper

and gold don’t mix, Bess. Even if you have a heart of gold, I’m still copper through and

through.”

“You mean you thought I might be involved in all this . . . beyond my business,

that Davey and I were a team trying to cheat David Trask?”

“Trask hired me to find out if the manuscripts were authentic.”

“If you’d told me up front that you were a private investigator, I—”

“You would’ve clammed up and been useless to me.”

“And now?”

“We all make mistakes, as for me, more than my share, especially in my romantic

choices. If you knew the half of it, Bess, we wouldn’t even be having this conversation.”

“This is sounding like one of those—it’s not you, it’s me—scenarios.”

“Bess, I think you’re great, but I can’t see myself tied to a woman who aligned

herself with a creep like Davey Trask, even if it’s past history. So don’t start saying how

sweet he could be at times—I’m not even listening. It was a mistake, Bess, and we’re all

entitled to a few, but it’s one I can’t get past.” I said, glad that Davey was dead, and she

didn’t know it yet.

I wasn’t telling Bess anything about last night because she expressed more

interest in the Hemingway papers and her deal with two opposing bidders than with

the condition of her ex-boyfriend, now grist for Mr. Salty. I hoped the giant crocodile

hadn’t been destroyed, but rather was put out to stud, so his offspring might consume

future bad seeds. But when David Trask learns of Junior’s fate, I doubt Mr. Salty will

have a future. Blood’s thicker than salt water.

“I can’t forgive myself for my mistake with Davey, so I’m not about to look for

another guy, but. . . .” She grinned. “If you ever have nothing better to do, just for the

hell of it, you know from the classifieds where I’ll be every weekend.”

“That I do, Bess.”

“It’s a shame we had to come all the way to Florida without obtaining the manuscripts.

Where do you suppose they are?”

“Beats the hell out of me.”

I didn’t tell her that Davey destroyed them. Why spoil her day?

“Anyway,” she said, “at least my loyal help completed my setup for me and

opened this weekend’s sale yesterday. They’ll cover for me until I show up this afternoon

for my final bids. It ought to be a good sale.” she went on as I patted her hand then turned

towards the window with her voice fading as I fell asleep . . .

\* \* \*

Since my first encounter with Sophia Trask, the body count was four: Dr.

McCullough the antiquities expert, Hume Baskins the retired editor, Tony Imperato

the ex-con, and David Trask, Jr. the sociopath. Two good guys and two bad guys

down, which made it a draw. My poker hand was missing a card, so figured I’d keep

playing until I drew a joker out of the deck to give me a full house.

I had a bunch of cash sitting in my safe, which I saw no reason not to keep. I

had the inside story about David Trask’s estranged son from his first marriage, but I

still had no confirmation about the authenticity of the manuscripts allegedly written by

Ernest Hemingway, even if they were shredded and burned. At that moment, I didn’t

care.

Nursing my wounds and waking from a well-deserved afternoon nap featuring

startling jolts from nightmares about crocodiles, I showered and dressed. As I came

from my bedroom into the office, Mona looked up from her laptop with a smirk.

“Good afternoon, Rip Van Larkin,” she said. “You slept three hours since you

got in from Newark. “It’s four o’clock.”

I took a deep breath and poured myself a cup of black coffee from the fresh pot,

which Mona had brewed when she came into the office and heard my shower running.

“Time for Happy Hour,” I said with a wink over the rim of my cup.

“You’ve had all the Happy Hours you’re gonna have for some time,” Mona

scolded. “It took only one redhead to get you off the wagon. You’d better call your

AA sponsor.”

“I’m fine,” I said with a glare then browsed through the classifieds where I saw

*Bessie’s Best Tag Sales* listed with directions. “I had only one bourbon on the plane to

make me sleep—and it worked. I have no craving for more.”

“Physician heal thyself,” Mona said with a huff and returned to her work.

Leave it to Bess to get right back into the swing of things, I thought as I read

the ad for her sale in Ho-ho-kus, New Jersey. Then I saw what items were listed, among

them—a vintage *Corona* typewriter, circa 1920s.

Mona must have looked up from her PC when she heard the door slam behind me,

but I was halfway down the hall before she realized I was gone with the keys to her car.

\* \* \*

Crossing the upper level of the GWB in Mona’s Porsche with the top down

and the warm June breeze whipping around my head was a sobering effect I hadn’t

thought I needed, but Mona’s dig about taking one redhead to knock me off kilter

echoed in my mind as I headed to Bessie’s Best Tag Sale in Jersey.

The traffic started to build as I hit Paramus through the mall complexes on

Rte. 4 West, so I avoided the same bottleneck on Rte. 17 North by taking the Maple

Avenue exit at Nabisco and heading through Glen Rock and Ridgewood towards

Ho-ho-kus.

Bess had told me that she closes promptly at 5:00 PM on Fridays because she’s

usually up late on Thursday nights before with final pricing. On Saturdays, she has to

stay late on final bids then get up early on Sunday mornings for any clearance of large

items for pick-up. My watch said 6:15 PM, so I knew the sale had ended, but I figured

Bess hadn’t left yet, because she’d be finalizing her bids.

When I arrived at the address of the sale, her SUV was gone, but one of her sales

staff was locking up.

“Hi, I’m one of Bessie’s dealers,” I said pulling up beside her as she lifted a

folding table into the back of a van. “Did I miss her?”

“Sorry, she’s already left,” the woman said. “She’ll be back tomorrow morning

for Sunday pick-ups at 10:00 AM.”

“Did she say where she was going tonight?”

The woman looked at me with curiosity and hesitance. “I have no idea.”

“Do you know if the vintage Corona typewriter was sold?”

“I think she said she would finalize those bids tomorrow to determine who gets

it,” she said. “I can take your name, phone number, and your bid then give it to her in the

morning.”

I handed her my card. “Tell Bessie I’ll make my bid in person tomorrow.”

She looked at my card then grinned. “Oh. You’re Tom.”

I hadn’t pegged Bess as the kiss-n-tell type but was thankful at the moment that

she was. I smiled bashfully and said, “Yes. I really need to see her tonight.”

“I’ll call her private cell to see where she is,” she said, then waited several

moments before saying, “She’s not answering, but I can tell her to call you. It’s too

early for her to be at dinner, but I think she and Larry were meeting with someone

tonight about a bid.”

“For the typewriter?”

“I don’t know—” she started to say, but I left her in a cloud of dust as I took

a thousand miles of wear off Mona’s tires when I chirped in reverse and squealed away

in the Porsche toward Oradell at the height of the Saturday frenzy near Paramus Park,

because shoppers knew all the stores would be closed on Sunday for Bergen County’s

antiquated Blue Laws.

Impatiently, I ran several traffic lights toward Kinderkamack Road and crossed

the railroad tracks before making a left turn down the dead end street to Larry McGinty’s

house. I saw her SUV parked in front of Larry’s house on the right. A BMW with New

York plates was parked across the street. The driver wouldn’t need to turn around for a

quick exit. The license plate ID said— *Son I*— someone had gained the spoils from

Davey’s demise.

I figured David Trask, Sr. lied about the car being stolen from his office to cover

for his son, which he’d been doing for so long that it had become his instinct more than

habit.

I couldn’t chance Mona’s red car being spotted, so I turned around before I got to

Larry’s house and parked in front of the BMW. I left the top down and got out of the

car. I stooped down beside the BMW and let a considerable amount of air out of one

front tire before one of Larry’s neighbors came along walking his dog, so I stopped

and made my way cautiously to Larry’s house. I concealed my entrance along the

garage to the backyard and worked my way to the backdoor where Bess and I had

entered before.

I heard a gunshot from inside the house. I burst into the kitchen from the

backdoor and instinctively reached for Baby Ruth, forgetting she was lost at Isla

Premio. My left elbow bumped the bulge at my rib cage still tender from a week

of abuse. I reached inside my jacket and grasped the 9mm Glock with my moist

grip on its cool metal.

My pulse pounded with the gun in two hands as I moved through the

living room toward the basement stairs, but a trail of blood splattered the white

rug from the basement door’s landing to the front door.

“It’s Tom, Bess! Are you OK?”

“Yes!” she shouted from the basement. “He took the typewriter!”

“Who?”

“He said he was my second source other than David Trask, but I’d never

actually seen him before, so I’m not sure who he is. Stop him, Tom!”

“You’re sure you’re OK?”

Larry and Bess looked up the stairwell at me.

Larry said, “I asked him to help me lift the typewriter out of the safe but, when

I bent down, he hit me on the back of the head with my own wrench. Before he got to

the top of the stairs, I shot him in the thigh with my prize Luger. It pays to keep a gun

well-oiled no matter how old it is.”

“Stop him, Tom!” Bess shouted. “We’re OK. I’ll call 911 for Larry.”

When I got to the street, the BMW was skidding erratically toward Oradell

Avenue and had scraped the side of Mona’s Porsche in its path. Without opening the

door, I jumped into the Porsche and took off after the thief. He made it onto the Garden

State Parkway north but, despite his unbalanced front end, he maintained control of the

car with a quarter-mile lead, a gap which I couldn’t close at 75 mph without drawing New

Jersey State Troopers. When I saw that the BMW was taking the New York Thruway

heading to the Tappan Zee Bridge, I realized the perpetrator was heading home.

What I didn’t expect was a sudden stop in the middle of the bridge. A hundred

feet ahead of me, I saw the father, Hume Baskins, Sr., the literary agent, taking the

typewriter from his car and climbing with it awkwardly to the edge as he limped with

his gunshot wound. I screeched to a halt behind him as traffic beeped and swerved

around me.

“Stop!” I shouted, drawing my gun.

He turned around and grinned. “What? You’re going to shoot me? I don’t think

so. I’ve got what you want.”

Before I could respond, he dropped the typewriter off the bridge into the Hudson

River. He looked at me defiantly and said, “Done deal—case closed.”

Before he could say more, or clue me in on his motive for destroying the last

hope of authenticating the manuscripts, he seemed faint from his loss of blood and lost

his balance. Before I could lunge to grab him, he was gone, and my wild card with him.

The problem with any bluff even when you’re holding your cards close to your chest, is

the collateral damage—the other players you inadvertently take down with you.

**CHAPTER 23– SECURITY BREECH**

I had much explaining to do when I finally ended up in Chief Sloan’s office

at Homicide later that Saturday night. He gave me a rough time for several hours, but

when I put together my story connecting the two murders to Tony Imperato and Davey

Jones, and their link to literary agent, Hume Baskins, Sr., Sloan lightened up.

“OK Larkin, let me get this straight.” Sloan put his feet on his desk and folded

his arms behind his head. “Jones was a junky and a drug dealer who met Imperato in

prison.”

I nodded, relishing my knowledge of Davey’s true identity, which my confi-

dentiality with David Trask kept me from spilling, so long as the two killers were

dead and I wasn’t concealing material evidence that could influence the murder case.

“We’ve tied together DNA, fingerprints, a shoe print, paint scrapings, money

handled, and even . . .” he paused and scratched his head. “frigging flora and fauna

from both sides of the Hudson River. Sometimes you kill me with this crap, Larkin.”

With a grin, I explained, “Frank Scardo at CSI was able to prove that Tony

Imperato took the boat from the dock at Croton-On-Hudson to the grandfather’s home

in Upper Nyack where he chloroformed and killed the family dog to get into the house,

where he subsequently chloroformed the grandfather in his wheelchair. He might not

have meant to kill the old man, but with the grandfather’s condition, covering his nose

and mouth, even for a short time, would’ve killed him—second degree murder.”

Sloan twisted his mouth and glared at me. “I know you got Scardo to test a cotton

swab for chloroform so I could get a court order to stop the cremation, but how the hell

did you get the samples from the corpse without breaking the law?”

I shrugged. “All I did was pay my last respects at the wake.”

“Are you some kind of frigging ghoul?” he shuddered. “Never mind. I don’t

wanna know about it. Our killers are dead—so you say. But we have no body for this

Davey Jones, so how can we be certain he’s dead?”

“That’s a matter for Florida law enforcement, Chief. Three victims died in a

helicopter accident within the boundaries of Isla Premio, a private Florida residence.”

“A private residence owned by David Trask,” Sloan said with a shake of his head.

“I told you a while back that there were powers-that-be which you couldn’t

control, Chief.”

“Trask is a *New York* resident,” Sloan said pensively. “If I could find a judge

who’s not in Trask’s pocket to give me ‘just cause’ based on all of this material evidence,

I could get a warrant to search Trask’s property in Manhattan for any DNA that might tie

him to Davey Jones and Tony Imperato.”

I laughed to myself thinking, he could find a trace of Davey’s DNA with just a

prick of *El Daveed’s* finger. Still, Trask was my client and it was my job to protect him.

There are certain fiduciary responsibilities, even for private investigators. Many law

enforcement officers consider us scum, but sometimes ethics protects the guilty as well

as the innocent.

“Are you looking for a promotion, Chief, or just an early retirement—with no

benefits and zero pension?”

“OK, Larkin, I know the man’s your client, and that’s why you were at the Trask

Arms construction site when Dr. McCullough was killed.” He handed me my Glock.

“You’ve helped a lot on this case, even if you did, shall we say, side-step the law, but I’m

asking a favor in return for my letting this drop.”

I held my hands open, eager to hear it, since I was getting off without any license

suspension, fine, or jail time.

“If you’re still workin’ for Trask, anything you find that I can use to tie him to

this case . . . please come to me. Need I beg?” He extended his hand to me. I shook it

and nodded. “You mean to tell me all this mayhem was all about a rare manuscript?”

I shrugged. “Yes. Who knew, when I started on this case, it would be so costly

to life and limb and . . . perhaps the cost to posterity with no way to prove if the

manuscripts were genuine . . . unless.”

“Unless what?” Sloan frowned.

“The typewriter that Baskins threw off the Tappan Zee Bridge into the Hudson

River was the only physical connection of material evidence left.”

“So?” Sloan scratched his chin and grimaced. “Fuhgetabowdit, Larkin!” he

snapped. “We dragged the river for your floater and retrieved Hume Baskins, Sr. for the

sake of his surviving son, but we’re not using New York City’s tax money to drag the

Hudson for your precious typewriter. Case closed—get the hell out a here!”

\* \* \*

It was almost 9:00 PM when I got back to the office and found Mona sleeping

on the sofa. I tried not to wake her right away, but she heard me washing my face at the

bathroom sink. She got up with a flurry.

“Thanks for calling me after darting out of here without a word, and taking my car

too,” she complained.

I went to the safe behind my DEA group photo and counted out ten thousand

dollars, the cash Sophia Trask had given me as the reward for retrieving her husband’s

stolen jade dragon. I handed all but two Franklins to Mona.

“What’s this for?” she asked.

“It’s a long scrape, love, from the rear fender to the front bumper on the driver’s

side. Maybe it can be buffed out, just like new.”

“What?” she gulped down her fury, but her cheeks turned from mahogany to deep

purple.

“I didn’t do it. The perp did, escaping with the typewriter before he fell off the

Tappan Zee Bridge into the Hudson—been a busy day, Love.”

“That was you on the Tappan Zee tonight? I saw that on the news.”

I nodded.

“What’s with you and bridges, Tom? First at the Jersey shore now on the Hudson

River.”

“Must be my Teddy Kennedy complex. There’s nine thousand eight hundred bucks

there. If the repairs cost more, let me know. If not, keep the change.” I pocketed he two

Franklins.

“Why do I always feel that the Porsche isn’t really *my* car?”

“It’s a perspective thing.” I pursed my lips and nodded. “What’s mine is yours

too—you know that. Sorry about the car, really, but it was a life-or-death situation.”

“Isn’t it always—life or death—with you? All or nothing?”

I shrugged. “I guess.”

“Is your hot fling with the redhead over and done?”

I nodded.

“She took it well?”

“She left the door open, but—”

“I hope you slammed it shut, Tom. If you don’t bury your wife, at least in your mind,

you’ll never be free to love again—even if you don’t want to.”

I shrugged.

“It should be by conviction and not obsession for your loss. It’s been less than three years

since Vera’s murder, and you haven’t taken even a moment just for yourself to mourn.”

I taunted, “And I thought you didn’t care.”

“You look beat. Take a rest—a long vacation.”

“I am beat . . . but not beaten—not yet.”

“Now, what?”

“Whoever wanted to prove that the Hemingway manuscripts were fakes has

won, because there’s nothing left to show they ever existed. Trask’s son had Hume

Baskins Junior editing the manuscript to appear that they were written recently by

Davey. The editor’s father, the literary agent, was selling the manuscript to the highest

bidder. Davey’s dead, and so is his agent—no profit in that.”

“What about the surviving grandson, the editor?”

“Young Baskins won’t know what to do with it because he’s become a watered

down version of his father and grandfather through the generations—computer and

editing skills, but no balls.”

“So the money trail ends . . . but does the case?” Mona cocked her head like

like an adorable pup anticipating a thrown ball to fetch.

“Not yet, Mona. It’s time for another close encounter.” I patted my pocket with

the two one hundred dollar bills from the wad of cash Sophia Trask had handed me, one

from the top and one from the bottom of the stack, sure to have her fingerprints on them.

Mona stared at me a moment then got my drift. “May I go home now, or will you

return later tonight with more injuries for me to bind?”

“Blessed be the heart that binds, Love. Have a nice weekend, Mona,” I said,

nodding toward the door. “Tomorrow should be a great Sunday for the beach. Your car

is damaged, but drivable. The guys won’t be looking at you just for your red convertible.

You know what they say about guys with red Corvettes.”

“It’s a Porsche.” She sneered as she went out the door.

I called after her, “See ya Monday!”

\* \* \*

I took a hot shower, tended to my wounds, and put on my suit and tie to go

slumming on Fifth Avenue. I walked west on 45th Street from my condo and turned

up Fifth Avenue and headed north. It was 10:00 PM and a cool June night, about 65

degrees with a breeze. As I passed Barnes & Noble, it was closing, but something

caught my eye in the window and I stopped to observe what employees were doing.

They were opening stacks of cartons and setting up a display for a new book release

promotion. I blinked several times as I peered through the window to be certain what

I was seeing. I couldn’t believe what I saw, so I tapped on the window. A young

man stacking the books shook his head and pointed to his watch to indicate that the

store was closed.

I made the prayer sign with both hands then waved to him to come closer to

the window so he could hear me. I had to repeat that several times before he shrugged

and reluctantly came to the window, probably figuring I was an illiterate homeless person.

“What’s the big deal about this book you’re displaying?” I shouted so he could

hear me through the thick glass.

“New release!” he shouted back.

“What’s the title?”

“*Crossings*!”

“Who wrote it?”

“David Trask, Jr.!”

“The billionaire’s son?”

“Right!”

“So what’s the big deal about the book?”

“The author died just the other day!”

“What a shame!”

He picked up a book and showed me the cover then turn to the back of the dust

jacket where Davey’s black and white photo was supposedly a head shot from his

college yearbook at Yale. I figured it was the missing mug shot from his drug arrests

that his father had expunged.

“Who’s the publisher?” I asked.

“Trask Publishing Enterprises!” he shouted to my amazement as my head spun

with the events of the past week. “Since his son has passed away, David Trask agreed

to come here tomorrow and sign his son’s books and to donate all his profits from sales

to the David Trask, Jr. Memorial Fund to Preserve the Everglades in Florida. It’ll be

mobbed. You can get your book signed tomorrow!”

My gut felt hollow as I continued north on Fifth Avenue toward Central Park.

Apparently the young editor got a testicular transplant from the same limitless cash flow

that Davey Trask, Jr. benefited from before him, but with a new job at a new, up-and-

coming publisher with millions to spare for promotion.

I stood across the street for a while with Central Park at my back and the smell

of carriage horses pungent in the breeze. I stared up at Trask’s building where I could

see the balcony on the 50th floor. I took out my mini-binoculars then saw what I’d

hoped for, a stream of cigarette smoke and a delicate hand flicking ashes over the side.

*El Daveed* wasn’t home. She was alone.

My mind raced and my palette was dry as I thought about the smoky taste of the

bourbon I’d enjoyed on the flight home from Florida. My mind was still whirring in

rewind to the day I’d met Sophia Trask. By the time my thoughts caught up to the present,

I’d made my plea to Chief Sloan by cell phone, and he agreed. My pulse pounded in my

head, and I heard my breath heaving as if I were back underwater at Isla Premio and

surrounded by man-eating creatures. Then I asked for the man-eater in residence.

“Tom Larkin to see Sophia Trask . . . I’m expected . . . sooner or later.”

The night security guard gave me the once over.

“I know the drill,” I said, giving him the required ID.

He called up to her. “There’s a Mr. Larkin here to see you, Mrs. Trask. Sorry

to bother you this late, but he said you would be expecting him tonight.” He rolled his

eyes at her response, no doubt a string of hissy expletives, not of adoration toward

yours truly. “OK,” the guard said. “Good luck, Mr. Larkin.”

When I got off the express elevator at the 50th floor, I was glad to see she

hadn’t time to greet me yet, so I quickly rang the bell and backed into the exit door to

the stairwell. Fortunately, Sophia took her own sweet time to come to the door, almost

ten minutes later. She opened the door slowly and just peaked around the door.

“What do you want at this hour?” she asked, remaining behind the door as if it

were a shield from the truth.

She glared at me standing across the foyer by the elevator door twenty feet away.

“Stay right ther! Where’s my security guard?”

“You won’t be needing him tonight, not to protect you, not where you’re going,”

I said with confidence.

“And where might that be?” she grinned mockingly.

“I know you’re not carrying your husband’s child, but rather his son’s child.

Davey told me about your billion-dollar plan before he died.”

“A mere indiscretion—since when is *that* a crime?” She seemed amused by my

accusation, as if I were naive.

“What will *El Daveed* say when I tell him?”

“Even if he asked to have a DNA test on the baby, it would be too close to be

definitive, but close enough,” she countered. “I’ve got all the loopholes covered.”

“Can you be sure he won’t consider it a breach of your pre-nup? That could cost

you big time with only one million dollars to live on—poor baby.”

“What if I told you I’ve already confessed to David, and he doesn’t care,” she

smiled with assurance. “With his son gone, my baby is all he’s got to continue the Trask

name and legacy. It’s still *his* grandson—a male heir he can control.”

“There are a few other details,” I said, but feeling off kilter from her statement,

which sounded logical and typically Trask. Everything was about his brand.

“Here’s a detail for you, El Tom.” She mocked me. “While you were wreaking

havoc on David’s prize possession in Florida and maybe were responsible for his son’s

death, I was leisurely having a sonogram. David knows he’s having a grandson—son—

whatever he wants him to be. He assured me my deal is still good. I’m set and your

screwed. You lost his rare manuscripts, so you can’t prove they were genuine. He’ll

want his money back from you, all of it. As far as our deal goes, no hard feelings,

nothing at all *hard* between you and me—so keep the change. That’s all I paid you,

my pocket change. You made need it if David sues you for not paying back his money.

I imagine you’ve already spent it on first-class tickets to Miami with the redhead.

Sure, Davey told me all about her.”

I showed no emotion to her babble, but when her spew finally fizzled, I asked,

“Does *El Daveed* know you’re a murderer?”

She froze for a moment as she glared at me from behind the door. “That’s

ridiculous.”

“Not really.” I grinned. “I covered for you because you were my client, but I

have physical evidence to give Homicide whenever I chose.”

“What evidence?” she grinned. “You have nothing.”

“How about a cigarette butt I found on the roof of the Trask Arms the day of

the topping out party?” I lied just to throw her off balance. “It has your DNA, I’m sure,

because it’s the same brand I’ve seen you smoking, and the same as the other two butts

I found—one in the grass near a dead dog, which you figured nobody would care about,

and another by the bulkhead across the river at Croton-On-Hudson.”

I gave her the partial truth, which can be an advantage when the one you’re

grilling has to think fast on her feet to retrace her own trail. The cigarette butt I found

in Upper Nyack and the one at Croton-on-Hudson weren’t Capris, Sophia’s brand, but

she was a smoker and must have grubbed one off her accomplice that day on both ends

of the trip across the Hudson. If anyone thought to test the butts, her DNA would be

present.

“What does that prove?” she challenged. “I might’ve smoked that cigarette a

different day.”

For all I knew, Sophia had never been on that rooftop, but now she admitted that

much.

“What if I was in on Davey’s plan to steal the manuscripts and make them his?

Why not? That was my hedge if I couldn’t bear a child. If I couldn’t have my husband’s

money, I’d have his son’s. What crime is that?”

“Greed isn’t a crime, doll face, but you’ve taken it to the extreme. Tony

Imperato was a slimly thug, and Davey was a sociopath, but to free both of them from

accusations of murder, you pushed Dr. McCullough out of Davey’s helicopter when he

refused to give up his information. You couldn’t just wait for things to fall into place.

Then you chloroformed the dog in Upper Nyack and smothered the old man in his

wheelchair.

“When Tony Imperato wanted too much of a cut, *you* shot him—not Baskins

—and with his gun because he wouldn’t go that far himself. The first shot killed Tony

at close range before I even arrived. When I called out to him, you made Baskins fire

two more shots into the corpse. Baskins wouldn’t kill someone, but Tony was already

dead.

“From a concealed vantage point, Davey saw me and Bess Snowden when we

arrived. You waited for me to sneak around back and go down to the dock while you

escaped through the front, but Davey had already captured Bess and her blindfold kept

her from seeing you or any of your involvement.”

“Quite a theory,” she mocked me again. “David will never allow anyone to obtain

my DNA to match those cigarettes you found. He’s got attorneys who could make O.J.

look like Jesus come back.”

I reached into my pocket and held up a baggie full of cigarette butts.

“Remember these?” I said. “You gave them to me the first time we met. Twenty-

first century women need to put out their own trash.”

“Then you’ll be the trash I depose of.”

“What? Kill me, too?”

“Suppose you’re right about all of it?” she said. “The last thing in the world my

husband will do is allow the mother of this child to go to prison or to be harmed in any-

way. Still, after all the trouble you’ve caused me, I’ll find it a pleasure to be rid of you.

You can be sure that any mess I leave will be quickly cleaned up and forgotten. *Ciou*!”

Sophia fired three shots at me with a gun she’d held concealed behind the door.

She watched me fall to the floor and lie motionless. She calmly closed the door and called

security: “There’s been a security breech,” she said without emotion. I had to shoot an

intruder. He’s dead. Call the police.”

**(To be continued in the next issue)**