**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 Four

**CHAPTER 8 - MR. SANDMAN**

For noon on a sunny Sunday in June, traffic on the southbound Garden State

Parkway was light, so I cruised with Mona beside me in her Porsche at 70 mph past

Newark toward Union. It was one of those ten best days of the year with no humidity

at 78 degrees and a UVI of 8. Mona seemed aware of my agitation at the wheel, but

must have thought I was just disturbed by some idiot’s lack of driving skills in front

of us.

“Relax, Tom,” she said, putting a comforting hand on my knee. “If someone

cuts you off, just ignore him. We’ve got a perfect day for the beach, so let’s relax.”

I wasn’t ready to tell her someone was tailing us until I was certain. I’d never

led Mona into danger. She was too valuable to me behind the scene . . . in most cases,

a murder scene. Sharing my on-the-job stress, remained on a need-to-know basis for

Mona’s safety and peace of mind.

Though I was pissed that someone dared to mess with us on our day off, I was

glad I’d created enough interest. A day ago, I had nothing going for me on this case. As

David Trask had warned me, a big fish struggling on a line draws sharks. Like Heming-

way’s old fisherman, Santiago, I hoped to catch the big fish before a swarm of frenzied

sharks left me with nothing to bring home.

“I’m fine, Mona. I guess there’s no traffic because school isn’t out yet for the

summer and people are still in church. Without any accidents, we’ll be on the beach in

less than an hour.”

“Where are you taking me?”

“This place is unique to the Jersey shore, a hangout for wise guys, but it’s about

the only place left where you can smoke and drink booze on the beach in Jersey.”

“You don’t smoke or drink . . . anymore,” she reminded me with a tilt of her pretty

head peering over her Fendi shades. “I haven’t smoked in years, but a cocktail while sitting

in a sand chair with the surf swishing around my ankles sounds like heaven, even if the

Atlantic Ocean isn’t turquoise like the Caribbean at home in Jamaica.”

“I’ll allow myself one beer, just for thirst,” I said. “I promise to sleep it off for a

few hours before I drive us home.”

“OK, Tom,” she huffed. “I’m holding you to that, otherwise, I’m driving back.”

“You have my word,” I said with a hand over my heart. “This is your well-earned

day off, so I want you to enjoy your cocktails and not worry about driving.”

She nodded with trust, knowing my word was good, but I took a long deep breath

when I saw the same BMW exit behind us onto Rte. 37 as we headed east toward Seaside

Heights, finally up and running after Super Storm Sandy followed by a fire had annihilated

the boardwalk for a quarter mile of prime real estate.

When we reached the causeway bridge in Toms River, I checked my watch and

saw it was 12:59 PM. Staying in the right lane, I grinned at myself in the rearview

mirror. Our tail was the second car behind us and following cautiously as the three

lanes of bridge traffic slowed down, then finally came to a dead stop.

“What’s goin’ on, Tom.” Mona shook herself from her doze and stretched her

long neck to see ahead. “Was there an accident?”

“Not yet,” I said, smiling and tilting my shades so she could see me wink.

“What is it then?” She stood up in the convertible to see ahead.

“Drawbridge,” I said. “On the weekends they raise it on the half-hour for tall

boat traffic, usually schooners with high masts.”

“OK.” She glared. “So why do you have that look?”

“I found a way, despite someone else’s plan, to be sure we’ll enjoy a leisurely

day at the beach without interference.”

“I’ve seen that look before.” She leaned back squeamishly.

I checked my watch again and noticed the cars way ahead were slowly starting

to move, so I opened the car door then waited for the car in front of us to move forward

before I got out of the car.

“What are you doing, Tom?” The whites of Mona’s eyes against her dark face

swelled like biscuits in an oven. “Where are you going?”

Silent, I closed the door behind me and walked back toward the cars in back of us.

The guy in the pickup directly behind us was a decent Joe and asked, “What’s

up? Need a jump, pal?”

“Thanks, no, but my buddy behind you needs directions. I’ll just be a sec.”

“OK, bud,” he nodded. “Make it quick. My kids are impatient to go surfing.”

The side windows on the BMW were darkly tinted so I couldn’t see inside and

the driver kept his face concealed behind the visor with a baseball cap pulled down

to his sunglasses.

I knocked on the driver’s window. When the window opened an inch, I saw a

gun barrel pointed at me.

Tony Imperato said,” I told ya there’d be another time, asshole.” I saw his

sneering face through the cracked window. “Sorry to interrupt your hot date with the

mullion. Come around to the passenger side and get in. Someone wants to see ya.

I’m gonna take ya to him.”

The cars behind us bleated their horns and some tried to switch to the middle

lane to get by us as I walked around the front of the BMW to the passenger side. I

opened the wide door of the coupe with my left hand, but kept my right hand behind

me.

Tony put his arm out to point his gun in my face, but I used the jade dragon

concealed behind me to knock the gun from his hand. When Tony tried to grab for

his gun on the car seat, I came down hard on his hand with the heavy figurine. He

howled and grasped his wounded right hand with his left, so I grabbed him by both

wrists and jerked him so hard he slipped out of his seatbelt and out of the car. I used

the momentum to pull Tony to the bridge railing.

“Tell your boss to call for an appointment,” I said and threw him over the railing.

It was only fifteen feet to the water and the bay was ten feet deep with a soft, sandy

bottom. I had no idea if Tony could swim, but there were so many boats around that

there was little chance of his drowning. I reached back into the BMW and pocketed

the registration from the glove compartment.

There was no chance for any cops to get through the traffic from the mainland,

but I knew there’d be a police reception committee waiting on the Seaside strip ahead.

Fortunately, most people were more interested in getting to the beach than filing any

police reports, so they were shrugging to the cops that they hadn’t seen anything.

When it was our turn, an ashen-faced Mona kept her mouth shut and showed

no emotion when I flashed my retired DEA card and said, “Some jerk jumped off the

bridge, but he just made a big splash and someone picked him up in a boat. Nice start

to your summer, fellas.”

“Thanks,” the officers nodded and called Water Rescue Patrol.

As we drove off, Mona turned to me in a huff. “Jesus, Tom. What the hell

was that about?”

“We were tailed from the estate sale by a nasty little critter. He tried to shake

me down for his client who wanted to steal a rare Hemingway note, which he thought

I had. He just pulled a gun on me and wanted to take me to his client, probably to test

my rigging—never got the chance.” I handed her the jade dragon and calmly said,

“Handy little gadget.”

“And you just decided to tell me about this *now*?” she huffed. “Damn! Now I’m

really ready for a frozen margarita.”

“We’re almost there,” I said as I followed the signs for Ortley Beach.

Joey Harrison’s connected to Ortley Beach at the north end of the Seaside Heights

boardwalk, though washed away with The Surf Club by Super Storm Sandy’s tide surge,

it was up and running again by popular demand. We parked across the street and I paid

for our lockers. A live rock band blared golden oldies from behind the long bar that faced

the beach. An open patio with umbrella-shaded tables provided food. The smell of grilled

sausage with peppers and onions in the briny sea breeze wafted toward us as we set up

our sand chairs facing the ocean.

A bikini clad waitress with a twenty grand boob-job and a deep tan took our drink

order. Her tan began indoors when she got her wax-job, I figured, watching the waitress

heading for the bar. Her looks would’ve drawn distain on upscale Long Beach Island,

but her image was just a drop in the bucket among the many piercings and tattoos in

this mob patronized hideaway.

“Dark roots,” Mona commented. “She’s no more of a blonde than I am.”

“Please, Darlin’, keep the peace with the natives,” I advised as a small plane

pulling an advertisement streamer flew northward along the beach. “They’re wasting

their time on you, Mona” I motioned toward the plane buzzing by.

She shaded her eyes with her hand to see the ad:

Call Doctor T for a perfect rack!

“Some people have no shame,” she shuddered.

When we got her margarita and my beer, we watched our waitress depart in the

sand toward the bar as if she were on a stripper’s runway.

“The only thing real on that one is her tattoo,” Mona said, noticing the florid

tattooed phrase in Italian across her lower back just above her butt cleavage. “I wonder

it means?”

I didn’t answer right away as I downed the dregs of my beer before it ever had a

chance to lose its chill. I tipped my Yankee baseball cap down to my nose, folded my

arms, and took a deep breath, recalling my Italian learned on the street from my mob

informants. I wondered why this place never found its way to an episode of *The*

*Sopranos*? Too close to home, I imagined.

The scent of suntan lotion, the sound of the waves rolling in, and the distant music

quickly relaxed me as the Italian phrase came to mind again.

Just before I dozed off, I answered Mona’s question. “Our waitress’s tattoo is an

old Italian saying, which essentially means, *when the snow melts the shit shows*.”

Thinking about Tony Imperato, I slowly drifted into deep slumber, recalling

another Italian phrase, which meant: How’d ya like to become the meat in the spaghetti

sauce?

\* \* \*

The first sound that stirred me from my deep sleep came from shrieking

seagulls. When I finally opened my eyes, everything was dark as if I were still

sleeping. I shuddered with a chill, but when I went to pull my beach towel around

me, I realized my wrists were bound together with duct tape. There was no music,

no crowd, just the steady lapping of water against a dock. My beer had been drugged.

Then my eyes adjusted to the dim light of sunrise and I saw two male figures

silhouetted against the dawn’s red sky. I thought: Red sky in the morning—sailors’

warning.

“Just another day at the beach, Larkin,” the short one said, kicking me in the

ribs. I recognized Tony’s voice, but it echoed in my head. “You’re gonna tell your

client the papers from the trunk are fakes.” He kicked me again before I could see

the face of his much taller, but silent, partner. “Got it, Larkin?”

I grunted a reply.

“If not,” he said, “they’ll be no sunrise for you tomorrow.” He leaned down and

whispered his garlicky breath in my face. “By the way, softy, I don’t have a daughter—

no kids at all. Fuckin’ jokes on you, shamus.”

I supposed Tony couldn’t resist the payback. He unbound my hands then, after

another kick to my ribs, pushed me off the bulkhead into the bay, still about 58 degrees

in early June. I was wearing just my bathing suit without a shirt, so the cold water jolted

my senses.

I wondered why the tall guy didn’t dirty his hands and if this might be my first

glimpse of Tony’s client. Except for his silhouetted stature, I hadn’t even a guess who

he was. Neither of them mentioned the twenty-five thousand dollars I’d snatched from

the locker, so money didn’t seemed to be an issue. They left, leaving me to struggle

back to the dock on my own. If I drowned, I drowned—not their concern.

Despite my pain, the cold water woke me from my hazy perspective. The case

was my least concern. As reality hit me harder than Tony’s kicks in the ribs, I worried

about what had happened to Mona between my last sip of beer and this morning’s dip

in the bay.

I focused on my surroundings and saw the causeway bridge to my right about

five miles away. A narrow, sandy path led through thick scrub pines away from the

bay. Much further, in the opposite direction, I could see a lighthouse flashing in the

dawn’s mauve-colored sky, Barnaget Light. I stumbled about two hundred feet on the

path and came to a paved, deserted road with similar scrub pine foliage on the other side.

On a hunch, I walked to my left down the road in the only direction of light. I

soon passed a sign facing the same way I was walking, which read: PLEASE DON’T

FEED THE FOXES. Not likely, I thought, but my hunch was right as I saw the light from

the gatehouse ahead just inside the entrance to Island Beach State Park.

I woke the guard dozing at the gate. “Mornin’. Did a car pass through here

recently?” I asked as the guard looked me up and down where I stood dripping wet

shivering in my bathing suit.

“About twenty minutes ago,” he said. “Got some trouble?”

“Nah!” I shrugged. “A big one got away. Took my pole and dragged me into the

surf. My buddies went to get some coffee to warm me up.”

As the guard nodded with disbelief in his gaze, I saw headlights flashing high

beams from the parking lot in front of the Berkley Fish Restaurant just outside the gate.

I hesitated at first then made out Mona in the driver’s seat waving to me and

tapping her horn. As I walked slowly toward her, the pain from my throbbing ribs

made the chill from my wet bathing trunks seem incidental.

“Are you sure you’re not working forthe bad guys?” I said sarcastically to

Mona. “Where the hell have *you* been?”

“Me! Jesus, Tom. I go to the ladies room and you’re gone,” she huffed.

“No word, no nothin’. When I gave up and went to get my car, some kid handed

me a note telling me to spend the night at the Windjammer Motor Lodge and pick

you up here at 6:00 AM. I’m just following your instructions, Tom. Only God

knows why.”

“OK. Calm down,” I said. “I’m sorry, but my beer was drugged, and while

you powdered your cute nose, some bad boys kicked my rib cage like a soccer ball

and took me hogtied for a morning swim.” I winced with pain. She handed me a

beach towel to sit on as I took the passenger seat. “I’m sorry, but I’m unable to

drive.”

“That figures.” She rolled her eyes. “I better get you to an ER.”

“No-no,” I said with pain taking my breath away. “When we get to the office

I’ve got tape for you to bind my ribs. I’ll be fine.”

“How do you know you don’t have a punctured lung or a ruptured spleen?”

“I’ve had both before, and this isn’t either,” I assured her, motioning her to

drive. “I they wanted to kill me, they would have.”

“You still owe me a day off,” she grumbled. “Who are these guys?”

“This was my third encounter with one nasty little creep. But the other guy

was the strong, silent type—no face, no voice. I think I’ll call him Mr. Sandman.

He’s the sleeper in that operation.”

I realized my iPhone and wallet were still in the locker at Joey Harrison’s,

but Mona gave me a knowing look.

“Your phone and wallet are in the glove compartment,” she said. “The kid

handed me a plastic bag with them and your clothes inside. I have to stop for gas, so

you need to get into those dry clothes for the drive home.”

“You’ll have to come into the restroom with me. There’s no way I can dress

myself.”

She gave me the usual Mona look that said—*Will I need to change your diaper?*

A half hour later with a full tank of gas and me in dry clothes with a handful of

Advils for breakfast, I looked in my wallet for the registration from Tony’s BMW.

“This is interesting,” I said, seeing the name on the registration.

“What?” Mona asked.

“That BMW is registered to *Trask Enterprises, LLC*.”

“You think David Trask had these guys tail you and beat you up?”

“Doesn’t add up,” I admitted. “Why would Trask pay someone to make me tell

him the manuscripts are fakes? Hmm. Food for thought.”

Mona got on the GSP North before the worst part of the Monday morning rush

toward Newark and New York City. With the car heater blowing on high to quell the

chill in my bones, I tuned the radio to a Golden Oldie station then turned painfully on

my side toward the window. *The Chordettes’* version of a Fifties song faded in my

mind as I fell asleep . . . *Mister Sandman, bring me a dream*. . . .

**CHAPTER 9 - FOR *HUME* THE BELL TOLLS**

I needed a recess from the School of Hard Knocks, so I began with a more

scholarly approach by contacting the real Hume Baskins at Scribner’s as opposed to

thug, Tony Imperato’s cheap impersonation of the publisher’s acquisitions executive.

My phone inquiry led to a pre-recorded voice message saying that Hume Baskins, Jr.

was in Florida for the week and could not be reached without a referral and an appoint-

ment. His schedule wouldn’t have an opening until the fall, and if I wasn’t an author-

ized literary agent, Baskins had an assistant editor I could send a query letter to,

who may or may not wish to forward my query to Mr. Baskins. I was tempted to

show up unannounced and just kick down the door to his office as I’d done work-

ing for the DEA for fifteen years. Bad habits die hard.

I was persistent enough to get one step beyond the recorded responses to ask

a live person, “Is Hume Baskins, Jr. available”

Luck of the draw—the responsive college student was making her way up

in the publishing industry for the summer as an intern. She gave me an honest

response. In pain from my beating, maybe my voice sounded old enough to be her dad.

“Is there a Hume Baskins, Sr. at Scribner’s?”

There was a long silence and the clicking of a keyboard at her end. “Please

hold a moment,” she said.

“Sure.” I had nothing to lose.

When she came back on the line, her news gave me pause.

“Sir, another Hume Baskins retired many years ago,” she said with a proud

tone over her accomplishment. Then she informed me that I’d not only won the

lottery, but the bonus as well. “If you wish to contact him by mail, I have his address,

but no phone number. There’s no email address on file. . . .”

“His snail-mail address will be fine,” I said and jotted it down, figuring

Baskins Senior probably retired before the wheel was invented. For her help, I

would make sure I told no one how I got the address, so she wouldn’t get canned

over Privacy Act issues. My first investment in the Millennial generation.

\* \* \*

I drove a Rent-a-Wreck Chevy across the Tappan Zee Bridge from Westchester

to Upper Nyack. Receiving the information that led me so easily to Hume Baskins, Sr.’s

home on the Hudson River seemed to relieve the pain in my ribs more than the leftover

Vicodin from a concussion on my previous case. You should’ve seen the other guy.

Mona had done a fine job of wrapping me up after sanitizing my bruises and

abrasions, but each inhale cut my breath short with a sharp pain in my side.

Driving through Nyack past antiques stores, boutiques, and quaint restaurants

with sidewalk cafes, I noticed several homeless vagrants on the streets. The scruffy

lot was younger than most I’d seen in Manhattan and reminded me of the hippies I’d

seen in Baños, Ecuador where I was working undercover for the DEA. Most of that lot

had migrated from the States to South America during the Vietnam War and had never

returned. This is the era of crystal meth rather than LSD, but as a former narc, I knew

that the excrement from a poisonous platter, even over time, still reeked of decay.

Baskins, Sr.’s home was north of the Tappan Zee Bridge at the base of the

Palisades. The house had a white picket fence and stood two hundred feet back from

the quiet road with its back to the Hudson’s western shore. The road narrowed to a state

park with a walking path along the water and up to the top of the Palisades cliffs.

I made a U-turn in the park and pulled over to assess the surroundings. I ran

through my mind the approach I’d take to having a conversation with the retired

Scribner’s editor. Nothing eased my mind, so I decided to use the path of last resort

in my profession—the truth.

I rang the doorbell at the screen door to the porch, which extended around the

Edwardian vintage home on the south and eastern sides with a view of the Tappan Zee

Bridge and legendary Sleepy Hollow across the Hudson to the east. A dog barked from

inside the house beyond the porch, but like her master, *Zelda*, as she was called to hush,

appeared older than the senior Mr. Baskins by more than a dozen dog years.

“Don’t mind her,” Baskins rasped, appearing in a motorized wheelchair from

the darkness beyond the inner door. “She might gum you to death, but I knew some gals in

Korea who’d do the same for only a buck. My shrapnel wound from that so-called *police*

*action* didn’t start to raise hell with my right hip till I hit seventy. All downhill from

there. I should’ve gone for the Teflon hip when I had the chance. Hell, should’ve

screwed my secretary while I had the chance, too. Myra Kavendish was her name,

and quite the dish she was—the blue plate special.”

Baskins used a cane from his seated position to unlatch the hook on the screened

door and looked me up and down in my light gray suit, lemon-yellow silk shirt, and navy-

and-canary yellow striped tie. I wore my father’s old fedora just for effect.

Baskins cocked his head and squinted. He had an oxygen tank attached to

the wheelchair with a breathing tube from his ears to his nose. He wheezed when he

spoke with short, forced breaths—the last gasps of emphysema.

The old German shepherd gave a low growl that sounded more like flatulence

from the old man, which may have been a worse threat to my health than a dog bite.

“You served in Korea during the war?” I asked.

“Of course I did, ya idiot,” he said, quickly running out of breath. “How many

times have I told ya. You’ve seen my medals, two Purple Hearts for crap sake.”

Baskins paused and lowered his head, looking back up at me with watery eyes.

“I thought you were my son. Sonny’s going to have a shit fit when he comes home and

finds me dead.” He wiped tears from his ruddy, weathered cheeks with fine threads of

veins that could pass the hundred dollar bill light test. He pushed his thin, white, mussed-

up hair into place, but a breeze off the river blew it askew again like a cockatoo’s ruffled

comb. “He’ll be more upset that you robbed me, and I was damn fool enough to unlock

the door. It won’t matter to him if I’m dead. At ninety, I’m ready for a dirt nap anyway.

At least the pain will stop.”

“I’m not here to rob you, Mr. Baskins,” I tried to assure him, removing my

fedora—a prop I’d decided to use to put the old fella in a more comfortable time

frame, when he still had his strength and youth with a bright future as I’d seen in his

bio on Wikipedia. “I came here to ask your opinion on some important matters. That’s

all. I just need your educated opinion.”

He stared at me blankly. “*My* opinion?” he asked, turning aside to ponder the

logic of my proposal. “Of course . . . my opinion. It’s been some time—but I still have

some opinions So does Zelda.”

“Did you name your dog after Zelda Fitzgerald, Mr. Baskins?” I asked, appealing

to his sense of the past. “Did you admire her?”

“You kiddin’ me?” he smirked, picked his nose, and encouraged the dog to lap

the strand of mucous off his finger. “Empowerment, my boy. This *is* Zelda Fitzgerald

. . . eating out of my hand. I’m old . . . but I still know a bitch when I see one . . . even

from across the room and on my third martini . . .martinis . . .damn, how I miss having

one before dinner.”

Since I had him going on a roll, I fed the spew. “So you knew them all . . .

the *Lost Generation*?”

“I keep Zelda on a leash as a favor to Scotty,” he said, nodding toward his dog.

“At the party when everyone thought Scotty was on the wagon, the water we thought he

had in his glass was gin. He sat back in a chair and stared into space. We all thought he

was doing a Bela Lugosi impression, but he was stone cold dead. Sure, the booze killed

Fitz, but that nut Zelda drove’m to drink. They all thought she was committed to an

asylum and died in the loony bin. Not so. I’ve got’er right here on a leash.”

He tugged at the dog’s collar, making her whelp. I put a sympathetic hand out

for Zelda to lick, then I scratched her behind the ears.

Baskins grimaced. “Now’s she’s gotcha,” he said, twisting his mouth and

shaking his head. “She’s always had that power over men.”

“Even over Hemingway?” I challenged, finding my chance.

“Nah!” He smiled. “He’d have nothing to do with her. He stayed clear of both

of them. Thought Scotty was a poof.”

I pushed. “Had you known him well in the early days?”

“No.” He shook his head. “Wish I had. I didn’t meet Papa till 1952, when most

critics figured he had nothing else to say—bottomed out from booze, women, and pain

from injuries. The master of the simple sentence as the perfect means of expression. I

loved it . . . and loved him.”

“Did you work closely with him as an editor?”

“No-no.” He sighed. “Don’t I wish? I was still in my twenties in 1952, just an

assistant editor of little consequence in the world of literary giants, and just back from

Korea. Some of them were already dead . . . Scotty and Wolfe. Max Perkins was the

ringmaster who handled all those big boys.”

“But you were there for Hemingway’s triumph, when he won the Pulitzer and

Nobel Prizes for *The Old Man and the Sea*, and after everyone thought he was washed

up. That must have been great to witness from the inside?”

The old man’s face glowed as a beam of midday sun came through the screened

door and seemed to bring him to life. I tried to imagine him as a young man, through

his hoary cragginess, but now, he was just a fossil of his former self.

“That was a triumph for all of us,” he said, “the staff, Scribner’s, and twentieth

century American literature. I thought of him as the Cezanne of modern writers and

told him so. Concise with no wasted brush strokes—no wasted words.”

“Were you on close speaking terms?” I asked.

“No. He only confided with his fishing and hunting friends, and his last wife,

Mary.” He sighed with a growl. “To Papa, we were just a bunch of eggheads.”

“Did he ever talk to anyone on the staff about his earlier writing . . . before he’d

made it big?”

“We all heard the story about how he lost a volume of his short stories written

when he went to Paris after World War I,” he said pensively.

“How did he lose them?”

“He kept them in a steamer trunk and was going to meet Gertrude Stein at the

train station in Paris,” he said. “For whatever reason, he became distracted, and the

steamer trunk with all of his work inside vanished from the station’s platform.”

“How did he feel about that?”

“He was devastated at first, then very angry for some time, but he used that

anger to fuel his new writing.”

“He told you that?”

“Yes. You see, he did have more respect for me than some of the others who

used their graduate student status in Ivy League schools to avoid going to Korea,” he

said proudly. “We were both wounded in war, so he would pat me on the back when we

spoke, which was rare, because he spent most of his time in Cuba and Africa back then.

That was before his decline that led to his depression with the damned FBI watching

him every day. Most thought he’d become delusional and paranoid, but he was the

perfect one to tell—you’re not paranoid, Papa. J. Edgar really is following you—you

know the rest.”

“Do you have any theories about the lost steamer trunk?”

“Not a theory, but from Papa’s lips,” he said. “Though he was a braggart and

known for his bar fights and the like, he once said that they had been stolen for a reason.”

“Not just a paranoid delusion of a bitter man in decline?” I challenged.

“Not at all,” he said. “Back from receiving his awards, he was quite focused.

“It was a bitter joke to him. He thought Gertrude Stein had them stolen from him and

destroyed them for his own good, because they were immature and lacked the craft she

thought he was capable of.”

“If he believed that was true, wasn’t he angry with her?”

“He said he was mad for some time, though she vehemently denied stealing

them.” Baskins grinned. “In retrospect, he said if she had stolen them, Gertie had done

him a great favor. She never commented on his hypothesis and she died before he won

the Pulitzer and Nobel prizes. She hadn’t lived long enough to know of his achievements

because they hadn’t spoken to each other for twenty-five years.”

“If someone had stolen the trunk and his writings, did he ever try to find them?”

“There was a joke he made that it was probably General Franco’s spies, hoping

he’d give up writing and never be able to create *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.” He kidded

that many Spaniards, though admiring him as an aficionado of the bullfights, resented

some of his direct criticisms of individuals actually named in *Death in the Afternoon*.”

“He was being facetious, of course.” I nodded. “The missing manuscripts

would’ve been written between 1917 and 1920, before the Spanish Civil War and

before his interest in bullfighting, though that was the background for *The Sun Also*

*Rises* in 1926.”

“Yes.” Baskins nodded and took a deep breath. “Yet, there was the rumor that

someone had found the steamer trunk and later offered to return the manuscripts to him

for a ransom.”

“Really?”

“Yes. I believe a note came to him at *La Coupole Café*, one of those clean,

well-lighted places in Paris he frequented in the 1920s.” Baskins laughed. “Story

goes, that with the publication of his first novel, Hemingway didn’t want to spoil his

reputation with anyone’s knowledge of the drivel he’d written before he felt he’d

become a man.”

“So he didn’t pay any ransom?”

“Certainly not. He joked that he might pay someone to destroy them.”

“Did he?”

Baskins rubbed his chin thoughtfully then cocked his head. “You know . . .

I wouldn’t put that past him.”

“What if the person who stole the stories *didn’t* destroy them? Wouldn’t they be

worth something today?”

My question put the old man into a trance for a few moments before he replied.

“I’d be curious just to look at them . . . but yes, I imagine Scribner’s, or any publisher,

would want those stories. My God, they could be worth millions.”

“What if I told you an old steamer trunk was found with Hemingway’s initials on

it, and it contained unseen short stories and a novel?”

Dumbfounded, he stared at me with apparent amazement.

“I must see them!” he barked, frightening the dog.

Zelda broke from his grasp and cowered behind me.

“How about your son?” I asked. “Wouldn’t he be interested in acquiring them?”

“Sonny?” he said with a frown. “He doesn’t know shit from Shinola. Publishing

isn’t what it used to be. The cost of paper alone killed it. Little chance to find new talent

in this century. Even the movies are mostly remakes of the old stuff. They made

great movies from all of Hemingway’s books because they were original and

showed the conflict of the human condition, none of this digitally computerized

nonsense when you know no one can really get hurt or die, not even a stunt man.”

“Can you arrange a meeting for me with your son?”

“Will you bring the manuscripts?” he asked excitedly.

“You arrange the meeting, and I’ll do my best.”

“Sonny will come here tonight to check up on me and put out the garbage.

“Kid down the street brings the cans back up to the house in the morning. “Come at

seven o’clock tonight after my supper. I’d invite you for dinner, but I mostly just sit

here in my wheelchair and drool in my soup. At ninety, the strongest thing I can drink

is goddamn green tea. You can join us for dessert.”

“Tea’s about my limit these days, too, Mr. Baskins.”

“Who will I say is coming to show us the Hemingway manuscripts? Didn’t

catch your name.”

“Tom Larkin,” I said, handing him the same *dealer in antiquities* card I’d given

Bess Snowden. Baskins strained to read it, but nodded his head. “See you tonight,” I said,

putting on my fedora again and tilting it in Bogie fashion.

“I’m afraid Zelda just lifted her leg on your trousers, Mr. Larkin.”

I saw that he was right, and remarked, “Unusual for a female.”

“Zelda’s really a male shepherd,” he laughed as I turned to go out the screened

door. “I heard once that Zelda liked to pee standing up . . . like squirting the other kids

at the water fountain with her finger .Got drunk at a Hollywood party and peed off a

balcony on the guests below. Called it a *golden* shower.”

TMI . . . I thought trying to erase that image from my mind then wondered what

I could bring to the table later that night to get Junior’s take on the value of a genuine

Hemingway manuscript to a publisher. I decided to ask Sophia Trask if I could borrow

the steamer trunk as a sign of credibility when I meet with sonny-boy. I called her as I

drove south down the Henry Hudson Parkway.

“If you think it will help, you can take the trunk tonight,” Sophia said. “David

won’t be here. Why don’t you stay for a late lunch,” she suggested. “You can bring me

up to date on your progress.”

“Something of sustenance, I hope,” I said, recalling the watercress sandwiches

on my last visit. “I hope you have a non-smoking section.”

“I promise to be good while you’re here this time,” she purred.

“Don’t do anything to throw off your rhythm on my account. I should be there

by four o’clock.”

“Should I pour your scotch on the rocks now, so it’s melted by the time you

arrive?” she asked with a twitter of laughter under her breath.

“I’m sure if you wait till I get there, you’ll melt it with micro-wave speed just

by your natural radiance. *Ciao,*” I said, hanging up without waiting for her reply.

I drove to my apartment and parked in the space reserved for Mona’s Porsche.

The space was vacant because I’d finally given her a well-deserved day off with no

strings attached. I freshened up and changed clothes. My effort to dress was less painful

but still awkward with my ribs tightly bound. Just tying my necktie gave me waves of

nausea. I popped a 4 MG Ondansetron pill left over from my last encounter with havoc

to keep my stomach from curdling.

Mona had left a note saying her attempts to reach Tim Barnes at the DEA were

still fruitless. I shrugged that off, having been overseas for most of my DEA tour when

friends and Vera, my estranged wife at the time, were unable to reach me in the field for

weeks on end because I’d been in deep cover.

I dropped off my suit at the Korean cleaners on the corner and asked Mrs. Han to

give special attention to where Zelda had christened my pants cuffs.

“*Moom jah up ta*,” she said, assuring me—no problem.

“*Kamsamida*,” I thanked her, my Korean still handy from my three-year tour in

Seoul.

“*Cheyman hayo*,” she replied *you’re welcome* bobbing her head respectfully.

Though she spoke English, having been here since 1953, she had spoken only

Korean to her husband, but he’d passed away last Christmas. She appreciated the

opportunity to speak her native language with me since the neighborhood was mostly

foreign with the United Nations down the street. The rest of the neighborhood was

either surviving widows of the ultra-rich, or up-and-coming yuppies. I was glad to

send her the rush business the other night to remove Tony Imperato’s pee stain from

his white trousers—*El Accidente*.

\* \* \*

When I went through the security routine in the lobby at Trasks’ penthouse,

the same guard from my last visit gave me a look of disdain as he watched me heading

for the express elevator. He stopped me at the metal detector, not for Baby Ruth, which

passed the test, but the jade dragon bulging in my suit’s hip pocket.

Taking the statue out and waving it in his face, I lied, “Mrs. Trask hired me to

retrieve this from a suspected thief—mission accomplished.”

“She posted a ten-thousand-dollar reward in the paper,” he said. “Must be your

lucky day.”

As the elevator door closed, I wondered if *getting lucky* with Sophia Trask would

be a bonus or the booby prize.

When I got off at the penthouse foyer, the hologram, greeted me, “Welcome

back, Mr. Larkin. Mrs. Trask left the door open for you.”

“Thanks,” I said, waving the jade dragon in hand for him to see. “I’ve come for

my reward.”

“Fast work, sir,” he said, as I placed the dragon on the same table I’d snatched

it from. The streamer trunk was locked and standing on end ready for me to take.

I nodded to the hologram and pushed open the door, calling out, “Honey, I’m

home!” I saw the scotch on a side table. The tumbler was still frosted with ice.

Sophia came from the kitchen and carried a tray with six colossal, banana-

size shrimp and cocktail sauce. Her expression was scolding, as she motioned for me

to follow her to the balcony patio where she poured herself a frosted glass of chilled

Chardonnay. She sat on a loveseat with her wine and the platter of shrimp on the glass

coffee table in front of her. She patted the cushion beside her and waved for me to

sit next to her.

“Bring your scotch here and take off your jacket,” she said.

I joined her with the cold glass in hand and my jacket draped over my shoulder.

Sarcastically, she asked, “And how was *your* day, Honey?”

I took off my fedora and dropped it between us for protection—from what—I

wasn’t sure. I loosened my tie, unbuttoned my shirt cuffs then rolled them up twice.

“What’s with the hat, Tom?” she asked, wrinkling her nose.

“I’m just going with the flow,” I said, wafting the scotch to my nose. “This

forties nostalgic garb got me what I wanted.”

“What do you want—exactly?” she asked with the tip of her tongue poised

between her perfect teeth.”

“Surely not a billionaire after my ass for screwing around with his wife—

especially while I’m on his payroll.

“*My* payroll, too,” she said, moving closer.

“Hey! I’d like to oblige by giving you the heir you need, but I’m sure hubby

will match the DNA and blood types of the next bambino,” I said, not backing away.

“Besides, my blood’s red, and his is blue—or more likely green.”

“I’m just playing, Tom,” she said, sipping her wine with a huff. “I’m bored.”

“I presume it’s Hey-boy’s day off,” I said, listening for the pitter-patter of her

underling’s feet in the kitchen. “So at least you got to feel useful by boiling some

shrimp.”

“I ordered out from the Ritz,” she said without a blink of shame.

“Speaking of being on your payroll,” I said. “Not only have I seen no moola from

you for my services, but I saw your ad and retrieved your jade dragon for the reward. I

put it back on the table in the foyer.”

“My-my, you must have connections.” She sneered. “With a variety of seamy

characters.”

“My repertoire has expanded recently.” I said, thinking I should’ve worn my pee-

soaked trousers instead of having them cleaned. I wondered if El David’s acute olfactory

senses would’ve pick up that scent through all the filtered tar and nicotine usually sucked

up by Hey-boy.

“I’ll give you that ten thousand—cash,” she said, “but I don’t want to be exchanging

money for your other assignment until you can verify the authenticity of the manuscripts.”

I cocked my head like a kid asking if he could use his parents’ car, so she went to

the bedroom and returned with the cash.

“Sorry to make you part with today’s allowance,” I said sarcastically, but she just

shrugged at that obvious truth.

Hanging out with the Trasks made me feel as if I were playing a summer-long

game of Monopoly, but I figured it was just a matter of time before I’d land on Trask’s

Boardwalk or Park Place and end up in jail without passing GO and broke—if not

broken.

I tucked Sophia’s cash inside my jacket and bid farewell to the tempting glass

of scotch.

“Shall I send some security guards up to help you with the trunk?” she asked

as I paused at the door with hat in hand.

Grimacing, I asked, “Do I look that fragile?”

“Hardly,” she said, putting a hand on my forearm as I started to open the

door. Then she said in a whisper, “Tom . . . you deserve a thank you kiss for bringing

back my jade dragon.”

Her full puckered lips were inviting, but my ribs ached when I tried to take

a deep breath.

“I’ll take a rain-check,” I said. “But only if you’re between hubbies. Don’t

want to muddy the waters while cash is flowing in at high tide.”

“Staying married to David and bearing his son to run his business is my only

objective.”

“I’ve always thought of marriage as *subjective*,” I said with a grin, plopping

the fedora back on my head with a tilt.

“You’re from a lost era,” she said, as I lifted the steamer trunk by one side handle

and put it on the express elevator. It felt heavier than expected, but I figured my strength

had been sapped by a couple of broken ribs.

“Ain’t it the truth, Doll,” I said, relieved to be leaving Sophia like I’d left the

scotch . . . untouched.

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