**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.

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 Episode Eight

**CHAPTER 15 – LIVE BAIT**

It was after 1:00 PM the next day when a freshly showered Bess dressed my

wounds and taped my ribs with less constriction. She scrambled some eggs with bacon

before we dressed to head for directions as yet unknown to me, but she promised to take

me to the typewriter which could tie the manuscripts to Ernest Hemingway.

 She drove her SUV up the Henry Hudson Parkway toward the GWB with me

as her passenger. There were long silences and perhaps some feelings of remorse on

both sides after turning our professional relationship into something that seemed like

more, but was probably less. Neither was the type to start any codependence.

We gave each other the same glances as if to say—that was great, but let’s be

real. She saw me grinning pensively and wrinkled her nose.

 “What?” she asked.

 “Three’s a charm.”

 “Three *what*? You’re miscounting if you mean me. I wasn’t faking. It was

definitely three, Tom.”

 “Not *that*, Bess. When I was an undergraduate at Rutgers, the guys said

Douglass College women were proper only if they waited at least until the third

date before . . . y’ know.”

 “Before what?”

 “Dropping their knickers.”

 “What does that make *me* then?” she huffed.

 “The Saturday tag sale makes one, the Sunday pick-up was two, then last night

into this morning—three’s a charm.”

 She twisted her mouth in protest, but we exchanged looks that added some

wonder if this encounter could be different, but there was a mutual silent agreement

that we would just enjoy it for what it was, a flare and sparkle until it fizzled out.

 “I’ve become used to having a boy-toy, Tom,” she sighed. “I haven’t been

*that* way with someone my own age since college. I don’t want to be some guy’s

trophy, but you sure know how to take a filly three times around the track.” She

smirked. “What’s you’re secret—the blue pill?”

“Sure,” I said with a grin. “But it’s called *Niagara*—during sex, it makes

both parties feel like they’re going over the falls in a barrel.”

 Trying not to wet her pants, Bess laughed all the way across the GWB

to Jersey. We took Rte. 4 West to Rte. 17 North, but instead of heading west

toward Ridgewood, we headed east into Oradell. She turned onto a dead-end

side street and took it to the end where a house backed onto a reservoir. My

curiosity burgeoned.

 “Your place?” I asked. “I thought you lived in Ridgewood.”

 “I do, but this is where I’m safely storing the typewriter.”

 I saw the name McGinty on the mailbox and heard a power mower

in the backyard. We got out of her SUV and walked to the front door. She rang

the bell several times, but no one came to the door.

 “Maybe they can’t hear the doorbell with the mower going, Bessie.”

 “That’ll be Larry,” she said, referring to her security man I’d met at the

door of her last tag sale. “Let’s walk around back.”

 “Does Larry know what he’s got?” I asked, recalling the brawny NYPD

retiree chatting with me and giving Mona the optical once over.

 “Larry asks no questions,” she said. “He simply adores me and will do anything

I ask of him.”

 Riding his John Deere, Larry saw us and waved. He held up one open hand to

indicate he’d be five minutes then waved his hand to have us go into the house. It was

a humid afternoon near 90 degrees, so the air-conditioned house was welcomed by both

of us Bess was already starting to drip even more than during our morning Olympic

trials in gymnastics.

 Making herself at home, she found a pitcher of iced tea in the fridge and poured

each of us a tall glass over ice. She shuffled through the fridge in a huff as I sipped my

drink. The mower’s engine stopped. Larry came into the kitchen and wiped his perspiring

red face with a white handkerchief.

 “You two slumming this afternoon, or what?” he asked, letting out a deep breath.

 “Where are you hiding your lemons, Larry?”

 He nodded to me and said sarcastically, “She—who must be obeyed. They’re

in the basement refrigerator with my beer, Your Highness. If I’d known you were

coming, I’d have brought one up.”

 “I’ll just take a sharp knife with me to the basement,” she said, grabbing a knife

from a drawer and a plastic baggie from a box on the counter.

 Following them through the living room, I saw a display of color photos of two

grown daughters with their husband’s and children and other older shots of Larry and his

wife. I saw by the Rosary cards on the mantel that Larry’s wife had died five years ago. I

noticed the plush oriental rugs and the furniture were of high quality, probably obtained

from several high-end estate liquidations he’d worked at the door for Bessie’s Best Tag

Sales—perks from a steady cash-flow off the books.

In the cool basement was a workbench you could eat off of and expensive tools

he’d also obtained for a song working for Bess in his NYPD retirement. His collection

of firearms in locked cases had to be worth a small fortune. I recognized a few that had

to be worth thousands to an avid collector.

 As Bess sliced a lemon for her iced tea and put the rest of the lemon in a plastic

bag, Larry popped open a beer for himself and said aside to me, “I saw her yesterday

evening before she was heading into Manhattan . . . same outfit. ” He winked. “I

could go for some of that redhead stuff myself, but she’d just end up as a wet stain on

the sheet.” I grimaced and shrugged. He winked, apparently relieved I wasn’t gay.

“Nice score, bud,” he said with a wink. “If your gal Friday gets bored with you, send

her my way.”

 “What’s that, Larry?” Bess turned to us.

 “Man talk,” he said. “So what can I do for you, Bessie?”

 “Where’s the typewriter?”

 “In my safe.”

 “I want to show it to Tom.”

 He gave me a look as if to ask me, *does she know you were a cop?*

 I gave him my exaggerated poker face. He was torn between loyalty to his

employer, which awarded him unreported cash and inside dibs on fine goods, and

the greater loyalty of one cop to another. More times than not, the shield transcended

any immediate gratification in civilian life. Larry knew her past history, but he had a

pained expression, hoping our secret wouldn’t hurt his friend Bess. A twinkle in

my eye gave him confidence that we were all on the same side.

 Larry opened a closet door beside the workbench and got down on one knee

with a groan. He rolled up a carpet and tossed it aside then lifted a hinged thirty-by-

forty-inch floor panel. The safe filled the hole with no space around it and lay on its

back so the combination wheel faced upward and the door could lift up to the right to

obtain its contents.

 Standing behind Larry and peering down over his shoulder, I saw a few collectors’

knives sheathed in leather and two classic firearms in wooden boxes with glass covers.

Beside the old typewriter with a leather cover and a baseball with DiMaggio’s signature

dated 1951, were five bars of gold bullion.

 Either Larry McGinty was a goldbricker or there was much more to the retired

cop than met the eye.

 “Do you mind, young man,” Larry grunted and huffed at me over his shoulder.

“Gimme a hand with this typewriter. It’s not your Royal plastic version from the sixties,

but a very heavy, vintage Corona.”

 I knelt beside him then we carefully lifted the typewriter from the safe. Bess

gave us a hand to steady the Corona as we set it on the workbench. She waved us aside

so she could carefully remove the leather cover without the danger of two clumsy men

tainting her prize. To my surprise, there was a sheet of paper still rolled in the typewriter.

The short prose contained the same pattern I’d noted on the page that I’d switched on

Bess at my condo last night. Reading the rolled page, it showed a blurred capital *M* and

a worn letter *e*:

  **M**any days have passed since I’ve been

 able to put to paper what I know to be

 true. I’ve written so **m**uch, but I don’t

 know where to begin. I hope I live long

 enough to **m**ake so**m**ething of the ju**m**ble

 in **m**y **m**ind since the war. I think there

 is a novel here, but now they are just

 stories, though I believe there are so**m**e

 good ones.

 “What do you think, Tom?” Bess asked.

 “May I lift off the top to see the metal fonts?” I asked, taking a jeweler’s loupe

from Larry’s workbench.

 “Let me do it,” she said, waving me aside and delicately lifting the cover without

touching the paper. “Try not to breathe on the paper.”

 I nodded, holding my breath as I leaned forward and turned my head with the

loupe to observe the keys. The fluorescent light above the workbench showed several

fingerprints on the keys from my side angle.

 “I’ll be careful, Bessie.”

She gave me a concerned look, but with a nod as she bit her bottom lip.

 I took a small screwdriver from Larry’s workbench and pressed the shift key

down and, with another screwdriver, pressed the letter *m*. The long metal rod with the

*M* font rose slowly and came into view.

 “Bess, hold the loupe to my right eye,” I said, trying not to breathe. When she

did, I saw something she wasn’t aware of, a fingerprint on the paper from handling the

ribbon. It looked like most of a thumb print. I slowly lifted the screwdriver off the *m*

key and took a deep breath aside.

 Bess gave me a questioning look, but I waved it off. With the small screwdriver,

I repeated the same procedure with the letter *e*, but I didn’t need to touch the shift key,

so I used my right hand to hold the loupe to my eye.

 “What did you see?” Bess asked as I completed my examination.

 “Nothing conclusive,” I said, keeping my observation of the thumb print to

myself.

 “Why not?”

 “I’m certain that page was used on this typewriter, which seems obvious

anyway. I’m also convinced that the first page of the manuscript you showed me

last night was also typed on *this* Corona typewriter. If we know that this typewriter

is about a hundred years old, and that piece of paper was typed on it, as well as the

first page, we have no assurance about the rest of the manuscript, which would

have to be examined page by page. Then it would still take an authority to claim

Hemingway wrote any of this, whether it could be his style or not, even at the

early stage of his writing career.”

 “I can still sell it *as is* and make a small fortune, Tom.”

 “That’s not what you’re about, Bess. Like me, you want to know if it’s genuine.”

 Larry’s eyes glazed and he cleared his throat. “What if it is the real thing?”

 “So far, maybe two people have been killed over the manuscripts, Dr. McCullough,

retired director of the Smithsonian’s archives department, and Hume Baskins from Scribner’s,

who knew Hemingway back in the Fifties. Baskins corroborated your story, Bess, about

the Paris connection and an attempted ransom to return the manuscripts to Hemingway

in 1926, because *The Sun Also Rises* became a big success and this unpublished work

could draw a high advance for the fledgling author.”

 “Bess, I had no idea what you’d been hiding in my basement,” Larry said with

concern. “I’ve always got your back. You can count on that, but I deserve to know

what the stakes are . . . and the danger as well. This typewriter is more than just an

antique. You should’ve come clean with me on this, Bess.”

 “I’m sorry, Larry,” she said with regret. “I figured the less you knew, the less

grief it could cause you.”

 “Your problems are my problems,” Larry said with genuine loyalty despite his

demeaning asides about her for my benefit. “I’ll keep it here, but make your deal soon

and get this UXB out of my life before it explodes in all our faces.”

 I nodded with agreement. “Bess, if you want my help, I have to know your

sources. I’ll be your silent partner on the truth issues regarding the authenticity of the

manuscripts, but I want no cut. I’m taking a big chance on you, so don’t let it come

back to bite me in the butt.”

 “If you want no cut, what’s your angle other than the truth?” she asked, figuring

there was something missing from the equation.

 “You first. . . .” I said.

 “My first source is David Trask, whom you’ve undoubtedly heard of,” she said.

Larry raised his eyebrows, impressed by the company Bess had been keeping. “The second

source came a day later. I don’t know what his connection is for certain, but he got a tip,

maybe from my ex-boyfriend, who got me into this deal in the first place.”

 “isHisHis His name, Bess?”

 “I only realized the connection, now, when you told me about those who might

have been killed in connection with the manuscripts,” she said as Larry made an uvular

cough in anticipation of her answer. “His name is also Hume Baskins, and he’s a literary

agent, who wants to shop the manuscripts to the highest bidder in the publishing world

for greater reward.”

 “Did he refer to himself as Hume Baskins, Jr.?”

 She paused to think, but shook her head. “No. He referred to himself as Hume

Baskins with no other tag.”

 “How old is he?” I asked.

 “I don’t know. I’ve never actually met him,” she said. “But his voice and manner

sounded middle-aged on the phone—maybe fifty.”

 I felt as if my thoughts might be coming out of my ears like a tickertape by the

way Bess and Larry stared at me, wondering what I’d learned from her revelation.

 “Whew! I may have been out-bluffed,” I said. “Larry, let’s put this relic back

in the ground for safe keeping for now. Bess, I hate to do this to you, but I need to

use you in a potentially dangerous way.”

 She flinched. “Dangerous? How so?”

 “You’ve got the goods that can potentially prove that the manuscripts are genuine

Hemingway writings,” I said. “But because you’ve got a reputation in your business

. . . I’ll need you to hang out there . . . turning slowly in the wind.”

 She huffed, “Whatever do you mean, Tom?”

 Despite her objection, Larry lit a cigarette. As he exhaled he told his beloved

boss, “You’re a mouthpiece, Bess, so they’ll want you gone, no matter what the out-

come. I don’t know what my opinion means to you at the end of the day, but my gut

tells me you need to trust Tom.” The retired, not so off-duty, cop shrugged. “To trap

this killer, Tom needs to use you as *live bait* to catch a big fish.”

**CHAPTER 16 - DEATH IN THE AFTERNOON**

 It was 3:00 PM when Bess drove me from Oradell to the Garden State

Parkway north to the New York Thruway and across the Tappan Zee Bridge into

Westchester where we planned to catch Hume *Stults* Baskins, Sr. off guard. It

pissed me off that he’d bluffed me so cleverly at his father’s funeral, but I

wondered if that was for his own benefit or for his son’s. There were a lot of

moving parts to this operation, but the question remained—who was manipulating

the controls and to what end?

“How do you know he’ll be home?” Bess asked.

“He’ll be home,” I assured her. “He gave me this card at his father’s funeral

yesterday morning because he’d been tipped off that I’d show up. I’ll be expected,

and there might be a reception committee waiting for me.”

 Bess glanced at the grandson’s card as she drove. She was about to say something

when my phone rang as we crossed the bridge. It was Mona with the lab results from

Frank Scardo on the swabs I’d taken from the grandfather’s nose at the funeral.

 “Traces of chlorine, possibly derived from chloroform, were found,” Mona told

 me. “Frank said that Chief Detective Sloan inquired from the mortician if any chlorine

derivatives were used for the embalming. The answer was no. Based on the physical

evidence, Sloan obtained a court order to stop the cremation of the grandfather until

more forensic samples are gathered from the body.”

 “Thanks, Mona. Take down this address,” I gave her the home address from the

grandson’s card that his father had given to me at the funeral. “If you don’t hear from

me within the hour, have Sloan go to that address in connection with Dr. McCullough’s

suspicious death.”

“Are you OK, Tom?” Mona asked.

 “I’m fine.”

 “How are your ribs feeling?”

 “On the mend . . . Call Sloan.”

 “Are you alone?”

 “No,” I said, glancing toward Bess as she drove through the EZ-pass toll.

 “Can you trust her, Tom?”

 “From here to the Tappan Zee,” I said, and Bess turned to me with a smirk.

 “Be careful, Tom,” Mona said.

 “Always. Call Sloan. . . .”

 “Done,” Mona said, hanging up.

 “Is she your wet nurse?” Bess asked with sarcasm.

 “Whatever.” I shrugged, but she saw my disturbed expression. “I’ve noticed no

reaction from you whenever I’ve mentioned Dr. McCullough, not now or in the past.”

 “Who is he?”

“Dr. Sean McCullough, an expert on letters of antiquity. I thought in your business

you might’ve crossed paths.”

 “Sorry. Never heard of him,” she said with a blank expression.

 “Not even in the papers or on the TV news?”

 She looked pensive. “No. When I have a big tag sale, I have no time for TV.

My eyes are glued to my website and bids on items I’ve posted that week. The only

news I look at in the papers is my own classified ads to be sure they have the correct

information, especially the address and directions.”

 “Someone hired Dr. McCullough to evaluate the same first page of the manu-

script you now have,” I said. “Then he was pushed off the top of the construction site

of Trask Arms in Manhattan. “I’m not certain he had that page on him when I met him,

but he didn’t have it a little while later when he was doing his impression of a pizza

on the pavement fifty stories below. I had his blood on my goddamn shoes!”

 “If this Dr. McCullough had the first page to evaluate, it had to be before you

met him, but he couldn’t have had it with him last Friday because I’ve had it since

the Monday before. I left a message with David Trask that I needed the first page in

my negotiations with another interested party—you—after our first meeting. The first

page arrived at my home by FedEx on Monday morning and I’ve had it ever since.

What’s bothering you, Tom?”

 “First, Dr. McCullough, but that seemed like it was just business—deadly

business. Then the grandfather—an eccentric old coot, I enjoyed talking to. Some

bastard jumped the gun and put ’m out of his misery, but before he got to see the

manuscripts to make an assessment about whether or not they were genuine. If they

are Hemingway’s writings, the old guy might’ve died with a sense of peace. I’m not

sure how yet, but I feel a need to make that up to him, because my showing up at his

door, may have caused his death. The same for Dr. McCullough, just because someone

saw me talking to him. Murder for passion is one thing—for greed—another. I suppose

there are some who are passionately greedy.”

 Bess turned to me with her wrinkled brow. “And here I thought you were just

a cold-hearted antique dealer.”

 *A cold-hearted shamus*, I thought, but I’d let her deal with that later.

 We followed the street address numbers on mailboxes, which were several

hundreds of feet apart along Rte. 9 heading north through Croton-On-Hudson. Tall

hedges blocked our view of the Hudson River and provided privacy for the wealthy

homes. We came to the number on the card that matched a large mailbox, which was

a miniature replica of Van Cortland Manor. I told Bess to pull over on the opposite

side then park on a side street where she couldn’t be seen.

 “What now, Tom?”

 I put my index finger to my lips to shush her, then dialed the home phone

number from the business card. It rang several times before someone answered then

I heard, “Hello?”

 I recognized the voice as the same man I spoke to at the funeral.

“This is Tom Larkin, I was given this number to reach Hume Baskins Jr.

I have a rare Hemingway manuscript, which might interest him. If he’s at home now,

I’m in the area and would like to stop by within the hour to obtain his assessment of

Its value to his publishing company.”

 After a long pause, the father said, “Hello, Mr. Larkin. We met at my father’s

funeral yesterday. My son isn’t here at the moment, but he might be back by the time

you get here. Do you need directions?”

He seemed to be feeling me out to see if I was already at his doorstep.

“There’s a mailbox with our number clearly visible on the west side of Rte. 9

along the Hudson, Mr. Larkin.”

 “I’m still on the thruway across the river from you,” I lied. “But I have a GPS,

so I figure about forty-five minutes with no traffic before rush hour.”

 “About three-forty-five then.” he said.

 “That’s good for me,” I said with a wink at Bess.

She gave me a curious expression.

 “You can’t miss the mailbox, a miniature of the Van Cortland Manor, our

historical landmark,” Baskins Sr. said.

I wondered if a replica of Sing Sing, which we’d passed heading north through

Ossining, would’ve been more appropriate for a family member soon to be incarcerated.

“If my son hasn’t returned by the time you arrive, will you have time to wait?”

 “I’m alone, so sure. No problem,” I said. “See you later.” I hung up and turned

to Bess. “I want you to wait here. Put my phone number into yours now, in case you

need to call me in a hurry.”

 “I already have you on speed-dial— number two—after my attorney, but he

gets no fringe benefits.”

 “This is deadly serious, Bess. Play time comes only *after* the killer is caught.”

 “OK,” she huffed.

“After I go in, I’ll need to know if you see anyone turn into the driveway. If a

car comes in flashing, it’ll be my NYPD back-up from Homicide. If anyone other than

the son turns into the driveway, there could be trouble.”

 “Be careful,” she said with what seemed sincerity, but after seeing her work

her bids, I couldn’t be sure.

 I got out of her SUV and waited for several cars to pass before crossing. I

opened the mailbox and shuffled through the junk mail before I found an envelope

from a well-known publisher addressed to *Hume S.* *Baskins, Sr. Hudson Manor*

 *Literary Agency, LLC*. I pocketed the envelope inside my suit jacket and waved to

Bess.

She shook her head with disapproval of my federal offense, but I just shrugged

and headed up the driveway, which wound up to the house a hundred yards away. Set

on a hill with a grand view of the Hudson River north and south, the vintage Tudor home

had a steep slate roof, many gables, and was surrounded by rhododendrons in full bloom

from white, to pink, to deep crimson.

 I had to wonder about the owner’s balance sheet. With a home worth millions

In such a prime location near Manhattan, why would Baskins need to play deadly games

of chance over an old manuscript of questionable authenticity and value?

*He has too much time on his hands*, I thought, seeing someone pulling the

curtains shut at a second-story window. I decided to take a short-cut off the winding

driveway across the lawn spotted yellow with dandelions and a week past a much

needing mowing. I reached a row of hedges that concealed my approach toward the

house for the last thirty yards.

I maneuvered to the left side of the house then worked my way toward the

back where an open patio stretched beyond a screened porch that took up most of the

width of the home. The patio had several dozens of natural stone steps leading down

to the river where a gazebo looked out on a small peninsula with a dock and a white,

fiberglass whaler about fifteen feet long with an inboard Evinrude outboard motor.

 It was cooler along the river than it had been in New Jersey earlier at Larry’s

house. Rather than air-conditioning, the windows were open to catch the breeze on a

humid June afternoon. I listened for any activity or conversation coming from inside

the house. Hearing nothing, I strolled across the patio and down the stone steps to the

gazebo and the dock beside it.

There was still no activity coming from behind me at the house, so I took

a closer look at the boat. I pulled the whaler by its mooring rope until it floated

alongside the dock. I went down on my left knee and steadied myself with my

left arm against the bulkhead’s piling as I pulled the boat with my right hand. It

was nearly low tide, so the blackened barnacles of the dock’s pilings were

exposed above the water. The whaler’s fiberglass bottom tapped lightly against

several large, round stones, mossy and visible in the two-feet depth along the

shore of the receded Hudson River.

 I imagined the whaler leaving from here and heading across the river and

down to Upper Nyack. It would’ve been the same type of day, hot and breezy, and

not the easiest conditions to navigate the rocky shore behind Grandpa’s house. The

fiberglass might show some scars from a shallow, jagged bottom on the Jersey side.

I saw something else, which I focused on and picked up between my thumb

and forefinger with my handkerchief. Just as I was about to examine my find more

closely, a loud *pop* came from inside the house, followed by two more quick ones.

At first, I took cover and put my hand to my chest to be sure Baby Ruth was at hand

with all her sweetness. I put my handkerchief back in my jacket pocket then waited

almost two minutes before I worked my way toward the back of the house. I hid

among a variety of tall flowers in the English garden arrangements overgrown with

weeds throughout the yard. I worked my way around the house to the front door,

left open with just a screened door.

I called out, “Mr. Baskins! It’s Tom Larkin! Are you OK?”

 In the several moments of silence, I wondered if Baskins had killed himself

rather than face prison time for theft or even murder, but there had been three shots.

 “Come in, Mr. Larkin,” I heard the same voice I’d heard on the phone and

at the funeral, but now quivering and weak.

 I entered the house, rather bare except for a few odd pieces of furniture.

My steps echoed across the hardwood floor, void of carpets, not even a throw rug.

The walls were bare, too, but the hooks where paintings had hung remained, and

the rectangular shapes of the paintings, which had hung there before, weren’t faded

from the sun like the walls around them. The smell of cinders in the disused fireplace

permeated the living room where Hume Stults Baskins, Sr. sat in the only chair, a

maroon, wing-backed model, facing the fireplace.

 His complexion was grey and his hollow eyes stared at me.

 “What happened, Mr. Baskins?” I asked as I slowly approached him. I saw

from an antique grandfather clock in the corner that I’d lost track of time. It chimed

four o’clock. My hour was up.

 “An intruder,” Baskins said without emotion, probably in shock.

I noticed the gun still held tightly in his grasp. I stood before him and saw that

it was a 9mm Glock he held, then I heard a police siren from a distance coming up the

winding driveway.

 “Did he harm you?” I asked, seeing from the literary agent’s glassy-eyed state

that he didn’t seem aware of the wailing sirens and slamming car doors in the driveway

just outside the front screened door. He pointed toward the hallway to his left.

 “Put down your weapon!” I heard Chief Sloan say to Baskins as I stepped aside.

“You too, Larkin!”

 “Still daylight, Chief,” I said with arms spread.

 “I know, wise-ass,” Sloan grumbled. “You only carry after dark—but what

if you’re out, like this afternoon, without a ride back home to pick up your piece?

Where’s your car? How did you get here?”

 “I got a lift. She’s waiting on a side street across from the driveway entrance,”

I said with confidence.

 “Is that so?” he grinned. “Ain’t no car, and there ain’t no woman either.”

 I thought I had Bess pegged right, but it seemed not.

 “Mona called me like ya asked her to,” Sloan said, “but on my way, I heard a

police bulletin that shots had been fired in this area, so I stepped on it. Anyone shot?”

 “Dead,” Baskins said solemnly.

 “Who’s dead?” Sloan asked.

 “Him . . .” Baskins pointed to the hallway again.

 I followed Sloan and expected to see a young man with dark hair and a beard, the

hard-to-find son wrapped up in the mysterious background of the alleged Hemingway

manuscripts. If not the son, perhaps it was Mr. Sandman. My mind raced when I saw

the body in a pool of blood on the hardwood floor at the base of the open staircase.

 “Who’s *this* joker?” Sloan asked, looking at me.

 I took a deep breath to gather my thoughts then answered, “A two-bit thug. You

probably have a rap sheet on ’m. Go’s by Tony . . . try Anthony Imperato.”

 I turned to Baskins.

 “He came here to rob something from my son. He seemed to know that Mr.

Larkin was coming. He planned to kill all of us, but I had my pistol under the cushion

of this chair. I often fall asleep here in front of the fireplace in the winter. We’ve had

break-ins in the area. With my son often out late, I have the gun for safety. It’s licensed.”

His story was too tight for my liking, but if Baskins Senior was lying about any

of it, nothing was floating to the surface today, or any time soon.

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