**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 Six

**CHAPTER 12- JUNIOR**

 When David Trask spoke, he looked you in the eye without a blink to let you

know, that until he blinked, he wasn’t done speaking, so you should remain silent.

“Call me after you get checked out at the hospital for that concussion,” Trask

said to me as we stood at the entrance to his apartment building on Fifth Avenue.

“Tim Barnes said you were the best—but unconventional. I don’t know what your

next lead could be, but that’s what I’m paying you for. Get it done quickly. I need to

know the value of the manuscripts before I make my final bid to Bess Snowden.”

 Trask blinked. He also breathed, seeming to hold his breath then letting out his

words like air released slowly from a balloon.

“Have you spoken to Tim Barnes recently?” I asked. “I haven’t been able to

reach him this week.”

 “I saw him at a D.C. function last month when he gave me your card.” Trask

shrugged. “Haven’t spoken to him since.”

 “Just wondered,” I said. “Thanks for the medical card. I’m on my way to the

hospital now. Did Bess Snowden tell you her client’s name?”

 “She said she agreed to keep that confidential according to her client’s request.

I respect that. I have many silent partners in my real estate projects.”

 *Mostly the mob and Russian oligarchs*, I thought.

 “Maybe so,” I said. “But are you aware of charges of misrepresentation against

her in the past? She has quite a rap sheet.”

 “Charged—but not convicted. Innocent until proven guilty—that’s what America

was built on. Disrespect that and what’ve we got? Chaos. I loathe anarchy and love law

and order. Property is the backbone of capitalism. I’m all in on ownership.”

 I nodded agreeably, but thought, *How could Tim be friends with this ass?*

“I’ve never sought to win any popularity contests,” Trask said, inflating his

balloon again. “That could had hurt my attempt to become President in the future,

or so I’ve been advised.. I’ve been convicted in the media many times for things

I’ve never done. I’m not embittered by fake news about my business dealings. I

thrive on it, knowing I’ll get even when the time is right.”

 “Just the same, I’m going to shake Ms. Snowden’s tree this evening to find

out who her client is.”

 Trask raised an eyebrow. “I’m a happily married man, but I envy your prospect.

Bess is an attractive, intelligent woman. Don’t hold back on my account. Shake away.”

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 I took out Bessie Snowden’s card and started to dial her.

 “Who are you calling?” Mona asked as she drove.

 “I’m making a dinner date with Bessie Snowden,” I said, but before I could dial,

she grabbed my iPhone from my hand.

 “Not until you see a doctor!” she demanded. “If you’re OK—fine.”

 “Yes, Ma’am,” I said, slumping in the passenger seat. “Just stop at a newsstand

on the way.”

 Picking up *The* *New York* *Times*, I read in the obituaries that a memorial service

would be held in Manhattan for Hume Baskins at the Marble Collegiate Cathedral on

Park and 29th Street at 11:00 AM. I had a couple of hours to get checked out at Bellevue

before I could see if the reptilian Hume Baskins, Jr. would spare the time to honor his

father’s memory at the service.

 The nurses and interns at Bellevue were a welcome sight after the physical

torment I’d endured over the past few days. The X-rays showed hairline fractures

on two of my left ribs, and I had a mild concussion, which didn’t surprise me.

 “Are you sure he’s going to be OK?” Mona asked the ER intern.

 “It’s mostly the blood and swelling on the upper vertebrae that’s causing the

pain and nausea,” the intern assured us. “Your skull wasn’t hit. This looks more like

a blow with the heel of someone’s fist. Y’ know . . . kung fu . . . karate, or the like.

I’d take it easy for a few days and apply ice for fifteen minutes with thirty minutes

between applications. See your physician for a follow-up. May I have his name and

phone number?”

 “*Dr. Strangelove*,” I said with a wink, knowing the young man wouldn’t get

it as he wrote it down. Mona rolled her eyes as I gave him a fake number. Probably

some of my pain relievers were kicking in to make me so cavalier about my health.

“Thanks, Doc,” I said, and we were off to the funeral service.

 I directed Mona to take us to the church. We were fifteen minutes late, but

with a small crowd of about fifty to honor the old man, we were able to slip inside

the church and sit in the back pew without drawing much attention.

“What’re you looking for?” Mona asked.

 “A man about forty, six-foot-eight, and shedding crocodile tears,” I said,

not seeing Junior anywhere in the church. I asked Mona to play her part, so I

wouldn’t expose myself to Junior—or to Tony, in case he was covering Junior’s

back.

 I watched as Mona went up front to talk to a man about fifty years old

standing in front of the open casket. The man was speaking to the deceased’s

neighbors, the woman from across the street and her teenage son who mowed

the old man’s lawn. Mona was supposed to say that she worked in the research

department at Scribner’s and wished to show her respect when she’d heard

about Baskins Sr.’s passing.

 After a five-minute conversation, Mona headed back down the side aisle

toward me in the rear.

The man up front was sobbing, so I wondered what his relationship was

to Baskins Sr.—perhaps an assistant of his at Scribner’s thirty years ago before

the old editor retired, or a relative of the deceased—maybe another son.

 Mona sat beside me and turned with a frown to face me.

 “Did he tell you where Junior is today?” I asked.

 “He didn’t have to,” she said with a sigh. “You’ve been hoodwinked.”

 “How so?”

 “*His* son is Hume Baskins, Jr.,” she said with raised eyebrows. “It’s a

detail you let slip past you.”

 “What do you mean?”

 “The old man who passed away was Hume Charles Baskins. His son

is the man I just spoke to, Hume Stults Baskins, Sr., who doesn’t work for

Scribner’s. He’s a literary agent. His son, Hume Stults Baskins, Jr. works for

Scribner’s in acquisitions, but he couldn’t make it today. His son paid his

respects last night at a private wake.

“I told him I hadn’t actually met his son, but as a secretary at Scribner’s

I still wanted to offer my condolences to the family because of his grandfather’s

many years at Scribner’s. Apparently the dog was the grandson’s—Junior’s dog.”

Stymied by Mona’s revelation, I took a deep breath.

Simultaneously, we both mouthed silently, “Then who’s Mr. Sandman?”

“He looked about forty,” I offered.

 “The grandson is not the Junior you’ve previously encountered, Tom.”

“How can you be sure?”

“Up front on the easel there’s a photo of the grandson with the dog. He’s

not that tall and he has a beard and dark hair. Go see for yourself if you don’t

believe me.”

 “I’ve got to make contact with the *real* Junior.”

 “No problem. I flashed the son some chocolate cleavage and he gave me the

grandson’s business card. I told him I wanted to send a personal note of sympathy.

The card has Junior’s home number and address on it.”

 “Chocolate *cleavage?* That’s my Mona. I’ll try to hook up with Junior

tomorrow. Meantime, do I have your permission to make my dinner date with

Bessie Snowden?”

 “Go for it, but please, watch your back with the other two thugs lurking

around. This Tony and Mr. Sandman might be working for *her*.”

 “I’ve considered that, but if they gave the manuscripts back to Bessie to

scam Trask, hurting me now would serve no purpose.”

 Mona rolled her eyes as only she could. “Tom, from what I’ve seen so far,

those guys are cold-blooded, enough to hurt you again just for the fun of it.”

“Worrying about what someone *might* do is just a waste of time and energy.

I’ll deal with that, if and when it happens.”

 “Be careful.”

 “Always.”

 “Apparently, you haven’t looked in a mirror recently—you’re a wreck, Tom.”

“I’m fine, but I don’t understand why Mr. Sandman sent Tony to my office, had

him tail us to the Jersey shore, then rough me up, and dump me in the bay. Then they

show up at the old editor’s house to steal the manuscripts? I wonder if the deceased

Baskins was euthanized just like the dog—either because he already knew, or had

just learned, that the manuscripts were genuine . . . or that they were fake—a conundrum.”

 “Are you going to speak to the deceased’s son now, Tom?”

 “I’d better, just to see if his father mentioned anything about me or Hemingway’s

manuscripts to him, or to the grandson on the phone before he died.”

 As I walked up the aisle to pay my respects, I noticed an easel with some old

photos of the grandfather, even one with Hemingway from the 1950s. There was also

a photo of Zelda when she was a spry pup with the grandson kneeling. Mona was right,

never saw him before. Another photo had been taken more recently in Zelda’s waning

years sitting beside the old man in his wheelchair.

I presented my bogus antique dealer card to the old man’s son. Up close, I

noticed that he resembled his father around the eyes.

 “Did your father tell you that I came to see him earlier on the day he died?” I

asked, agreeing with Mona’s assessment that he was in his early fifties with graying

temples and his father’s hairline.

 “His neighbor and her son told me that someone came to the house and spoke

to the local police when the ambulance came,” he said in a tone that reminded me of

his father. “What business did you have with Dad?”

 “I have a rare manuscript, possibly written by Ernest Hemingway, and I’d

planned to show it to your father that evening, and to your son when he came to have

dinner with him that night.”

 “How exciting for Dad,” he said sadly. “I hope his anticipation about seeing

the manuscript didn’t trigger his stroke . . . I’m joking, Mr. Larkin,” he said, putting

his hand on my arm when he saw I was disturbed that my visit might in anyway have

harmed his father. “If you had the pleasure of speaking with Dad, you’d know he

might’ve cracked a similar dark joke, even about himself. He was one of a kind.”

 His good humor lightened my heart and gave me appreciation for the deceased,

who, despite his craggy crassness, had been an enjoyable part of my investigation.

 “So, did your father mention my visit and plan to return in the evening to show

the manuscript to your son?” I asked.

 “No. My son didn’t mention anything about it to me last night.” He shrugged.

“I’m certain he would’ve if Dad got to speak to him before he died—perhaps on the

phone. We both made a habit of periodically calling him during the day to be sure he

was OK. Junior got the call from our neighbor when her son found him, and then Zelda

was missing. They said poor Zelda was found in the backyard. He was fifteen, rare for

a German shepherd. Usually their hips go by age twelve.”

 “Like losing a family member, I’m sure, Mr. Baskins. Your son must’ve been

very upset about his dog as well as his grandfather’s passing.”

 “Yes, but I’m sad to say that my son and my father fought bitterly.”

 “That’s a shame,” I said. “I would’ve thought your son’s working for his

grandfather’s renowned publishing house would’ve made them close.”

 He shook his head. “That became an air of contention between them.”

 “Why?”

 “The publishing business has changed drastically since the fifties and sixties

when my father was in his prime and the discovery of new literary talent was always

high on his agenda,” he said. “Maintaining the already established authors in a highly

competitive market was a priority, too. Writers in later decades were compelled to jump

ship for a better contract elsewhere, something that even Hemingway wouldn’t have

considered during his career. Scribner’s was his home, like Yankee Stadium was to

Mickey Mantle. Those were different times, and I’m afraid my father harped about

that to my son as Director of Acquisitions at Scribner’s.”

 “I respect loyalty, too,” I said. “But your son let his grandfather have his dog

for company, so were they still angry with each other at the end?”

 “Unfortunately, yes,” he said, shaking his head. “Though I’m sure my son

regrets that he didn’t make peace with my father before his passing. Zelda’s death

at the same time may give my son some degree of satisfaction that Zelda had kept his

grandfather company until the end. Had my father survived Zelda, we couldn’t have

replaced her with another dog. The two them had become an inseparable pair.”

 With a grin, I asked, “When he was in high school, was it your son’s idea to

name a male shepherd after Zelda Fitzgerald?”

 “That was a common joke they shared in happier times. They enjoyed watching

old movies together. My father gave my son the idea when he’d heard that Tennessee

Williams had named his male cat, ‘*Mister* Ava Gardner’when the film *Night of the*

*Iguana* was released in 1964.”

 I smiled in appreciation. “Will your son be attending this morning?”

“No. He was here last night.”

 “Will he go to the cemetery?”

 “No cemetery. My father’s being cremated, and his ashes—” he looked around

to be sure no one heard, “will be scattered on Zelda Fitzgerald’s grave. Shush . . . it’s

illegal, but I agreed to do it. ”

 “Your father had quite a thing for Zelda,” I said. “Will your son be at work

tomorrow?”

 “Yes. Though he seems very excited about a new writing talent he’s acquiring

for Scribner’s, he’s also disappointed because that would’ve made his grandfather proud

—his signing a new writer and taking the big risk as publishers used to in the old days.”

 “Is it that difficult for a new writer to get a contract if an author has talent?”

 “In my father’s day, though it could take years, anything that came in unsolicited

still got a cursory read from an underling, which is where he started at Scribner’s, going

through the heap in the mailroom and reporting back to an editor at the next level. He

never made it to the top level because, when the business changed, he wanted to keep

looking through the slush pile just in case there was a diamond in the rough to be

discovered. Dad was about the writing, not the money. Publishing is a business so

without profits it can’t survive.”

 “Do you mean, because of that, they didn’t promote him?”

 “They kept him around, mostly as a conversation piece, then forced him out

with a retirement package. That removed him as an impediment to the cash flow.

After my father was out, new talent had to jump through hoops. Strict boundaries

were firmly established. Anything that came into the mailroom without an acceptable

literary agent’s return address got shredded, including query letters. All of the big

publishing houses did the same.”

 “Then a new writer would need to go through an agent?”

 “Yes. Which was OK for a while, until many agents accepted only works

referred from established writers or newsworthy personalities for an expected return

on the publisher’s investment for going into print for distribution. Agents have become

the editors’ filters in the publishing process. I’m part of that system now as an agent,

but my father and I had come to terms on that. He had higher hopes for my son inside

the publishing house.”

 “What’s an aspiring writer supposed to do?”

 “There are some small publishers and aggressive agents who’ll have an assistant

bring a query letter to the attention of a senior agent or editor. Mailing a manuscript has

been replaced by online submissions, but only if requested in response to a query letter.

Shredding a five-pound manuscript has been neatly replaced with one click—on *delete*

or *trash*. My father referred to this age as the—*PEP*— *perish* era of publishing.”

 “Sounds cold.”

 “It is. That’s what made my father so cynical, especially when my son went into

the publishing business and worked his way to the top at a relatively young age. He’s

Director of Acquisitions at a publisher that *trashed* his grandfather and now accepts

only manuscripts from agents or by established writers’ referrals.”

 “You said he’s excited about a new talent he just signed. Who’s the agent? ”

 “My son was excited because it came the old fashioned way, actually by word

of mouth from a friend, who’s not in the business or an agent. My son was getting ready

to share the story with my father in the next few weeks when the contract was official

and first galley’s would be available. He wanted to read them to my father for his

enjoyment—more so for his grandfather’s approval, which my son wanted even

more than mine.”

 “I’d be interested to talk to your son about that new acquisition.”

 “I’ll share what you’ve told me about your rare Hemingway manuscripts.” He

waved my card. “I’ll give him your card tonight.”

 “Thanks, Mr. Baskins,” I said shaking his hand. “Beautiful flower arrangements.

Which funeral home did you use? I have a sickly aunt in her late nineties who’s in a

 nursing home in your area . . . could be any day now for dear Aunt Bessie.”

 “I feel like a three-card-Monty street player with all these cards in my pocket,”

he said. “When people know you’re a literary agent they’ll walk up to you and start to

make a pitch for a book.”

 He gave me a card for the funeral parlor handling his father’s remains.

 “Thank you for indulging me on your day of grief,” I said. “I’m so sorry for

your loss. I’ll give my last respects now, but I’ll be thinking of your father’s animated

conversation with me for years to come.”

 “Thank you for coming,” he said with a smile and a tear as I turned to the back

of the church and nodded for Mona to come up front.

 Puzzled, Mona joined me in the line going up to the casket.

 “Do you have a Q-tip in your bag of beauty tricks?” I asked.

 “What for?” she whispered.

 “You’ll see,” I said as she fumbled self-consciously through her Gucci bag.

 She held up a Q-tip.

 “Is it sterile?” I asked

 “It came out of an unopened travel pack of a dozen,” she said with a frown.

“Should I already be starting the car for a quick getaway?”

 “No. I need you to shield me when we go up to the casket.”

 “Shield you?” she hissed. “What on earth are you going to do?”

 “It’ll take an instant. Do you have a fresh plastic bag in your purse of treasures?”

 “You know I always carry a few, in case I don’t finish my sandwich for lunch

and want to take it home.”

 “My question was a mere formality. I knew I could depend on you. Come. It’s

our turn. Stay to my left and kneel first. I need you to stand up as slowly as possible.

When I whisper—*now*, I want you to faint. I’ll be kneeling at the moment, but I’ll turn

and catch you. Then I’ll escort you out the door to get fresh air. Got it?”

 “Got it, but I don’t like it,” she whispered as we approached the casket with the

next mourners in line five yards behind us.

 Mona kneeled, actually praying, probably for a clean getaway after my unholy

 act. She sighed and slowly stood blocking anyone’s view from behind. As she did,

I quickly inserted each end of the Q-tip into the corpse’s left then right nostril as deeply

as the moment and rigor mortis allowed. I preferred his mouth, but it was sewn shut.

 Mona swooned genuinely as I put the Q-tip into the plastic bag and slipped it

into my jacket before turning to catch her. Good thing I was quick and my ribs were

firmly taped or she’d have fallen with her dead weight cracking her lovely head on

the marble floor.

The other mourners sighed with an echo throughout the church as I held Mona

steadily and walked her to a pew with her knees wobbling. Baskins came over to see

if she was alright.

 “What a devoted employee,” he said to me as I fanned her with a funeral

program. “She just started to work for Scribner’s and didn’t know my son, but she

read the article about my father’s career and wanted to give her respects. I’ll have

to put in a good word for her to my son. You must know her name, Mr. Larkin. . . .”

 “*Agreeva*,” I said deadpan, but peripherally I saw Mona’s one eye open and

glare at me. “*Agreeva Lott* from the mailroom.” I got her to her feet and walked her

up the center aisle toward the front doors and said over my shoulder, “Not much to

do in the mailroom these days, but she’s a speed reader if your son could see his

way to promote her.”

 Mona elbowed me in the ribs, which, through the thick tape, still felt like

twisting a double-edged sword in my side.

 “Easy, Babe, anywhere but the ribs.”

 “Sorry, Tom, I forgot.”

 “Easy for you. Listen. I want you to take my handkerchief.” I handed it to her

wrapped in a ball. “Bring it to my office and shake the paint flakes out into a plastic

bag then put it in a safe place.”

 She looked at me as if I were mad.

“But first, I need you to take this Q-tip to Frank Scardo at CSI. Tell’m I need to

see if there are any traces of chlorine. If the old man was chloroformed like his dog,

ninety years old or not, he might’ve been sent to an early grave. If the result is positive,

I need Scardo to contact Chief Detective Sloan to stop the cremation, because the old

man’s death is tied to his homicide investigation of Dr. McCullough’s murder. I’ll need

forty-eight hours to hold up that cremation to make the tie-in. Give Sloan this funeral

director’s card to stop the cremation.”

 “What is the connection to Dr. McCullough’s death?” Mona asked with confusion.

 “A fine steak dinner and a parley with a redhead.”

**CHAPTER 13 - THE LIQUIDATOR**

 Bessie Snowden seemed glad to hear from me, so I wasn’t surprised when

she said she’d have a rare Hemingway item to show me? She agreed to drive into

Manhattan and meet me at Morton’s Steakhouse on 45th Street just three blocks

from my apartment.

 I sat staring out the window onto 45th Street and sucking through a straw

a tall sparkling water with a lime twist. I saw Bessie coming toward the entrance

to Morton’s. She saw me, too, and waved.

I slid off the stool at a tall, round cocktail table and greeted her as she came

toward me with her arms spread like a Venus flytrap poised for prey. Her breezy

essence wafted at me like a gentle Bahamian wave and just as warm. I imagined

that a night with Bessie, like an ocean swim, would require a shower afterward

to remove the salt, hopefully, not from wounds she’d inflicted on me.

 Her mint-flavored kiss briefly swirled with my lime-tainted water giving my

alcoholic’s mind a *mojito* reminiscence. Visions of my AA sponsor with his nose

pressed against Morton’s window from the street gave me pause to merely imagine

the rum. Licking my lips, redolent of her natural sugar, completed my mental DUI-

proof cocktail.

 Her smile was bright and her green eyes shimmered as she withdrew from me.

Her red hair had fresh highlights for the occasion. She slid up on an adjoining stool

and ordered a chardonnay from the animated waiter at the bar. Aside from her Fendi

knock-off bag, there was little evidence that she was carrying any of the rare manu-

scripts stolen from me the other night.

 “If you show me yours, I’ll show you mine . . . and maybe then some,” she

said, leaning over to take a sip through my straw.

 “We are having dinner, right?” I asked, my mind set for some oysters and a

medium rare T-bone.

 “When did you last eat?” she asked, toying with me. “You look a bit peaked,

Tom. Having a bad day, are we?”

 Her uxorial tone combined with her red hair, brought my deceased wife to

mind. Our volatile marriage from mixing a redhead with a drunk for fifteen years had

led to similar exchanges with the explosive potential of dropping an ice cube into a

bucket of sulfuric acid. I’d never had the chance to sign the divorce papers that Vera

had sent to me in Bangkok, because she was brutally murdered in D.C. when I was

estranged from her on an overseas DEA assignment a couple of years ago.

At the time, I was told by my supervisor, Tim Barnes, that I was lucky to have

an air-tight alibi. Otherwise, I would’ve been the FBI’s prime suspect. But I didn’t feel

lucky because I loved Vera despite our constant fighting. Our make-up sex hadn’t been

rivaled by any encounter since. It appeared Bess had come to meet that challenge.

 “If having the crap kicked out of me for sport qualifies,” I said. “Yes. I’ve

had better days.”

 “Were you mugged?” she asked, still seeming genuinely concerned and

Ignorant about why anyone would harm me other than for the random theft of my

wallet.

 “Yes, Bess, but not for anything as meager as cash in my pocket. The item

I was going to bring tonight was stolen from me.”

 “That’s awful,” she said, putting a hand on my forearm. “Who’d do such a

thing?”

 “Only someone who knew I’d have it in my possession when they got to me.”

 I gave her a double daggers glare.

 “They?” she responded. “How many people attacked you?”

 “One’s a voyeur and the other enjoys getting his hands bloodied,” I said.

“Not a comedy act . . . not even a chortle from the gruesome twosome. But one

funny thing about it—one of them tailed me from your tag sale’s Sunday pickup

and followed me for a hundred miles to the Jersey shore before I confronted him.”

 Sensing my accusative tone, she took offense. “You can’t think I had some-

one follow you?” My silence and raised eyebrows put her on the defensive. She

huffed, “What kind of business woman do you think I am?”

 “That’s just it, pet. You let your business define you. I know what that’s

about from my past. But if you said—what kind of *person* do you think I am, I

could keep an open mind about your motive behind handling the bids on the

manuscripts.”

 “Motive? she said with a ruffle. “My only motive is profit from my work!”

 Patrons at the bar turned with the rise of her tone and the bartender gave us

a stare as a warning to keep our conversation quiet.”

 “What about *these* fine shots, love?”

 I spread copies of her mug shots face down on the table in front of her. Then

I flipped them over, one-by-one, as if she were playing Black Jack and I had just dealt

her a losing hand.

 She gagged on her chardonnay.

 “Where did you get *those?*” she asked, her body language in surrender rather

than attack mode.

 “From friends in high places.”

 “Low places—if you ask me—lowest of the low,” she said, not looking me in

the eye but draining her wine glass and nodding to the waiter for another. The waiter

looked to the bartender for approval. He got the nod, but gave me a shake of his head

to say, no more noise or you’re out. I’d been thrown out of much finer joints than this.

 “Think what you want about me for researching all of your extra-curricular

activities, Bess, but how about some explanation so we can do some business without

any skeletons rattling inside one of your armoires ?”

 “If your Hemingway letter was stolen, what business do we have? Unless

you want to purchase the Hemingway manuscripts I have?”

 Now it comes, I thought, the bait and switch. She has the manuscripts,

most likely fakes, and I’m her patsy—the rich collector with the Porsche and Ivy

League flare.

 “Let me see what you’ve got, and we’ll discuss it,” I said. “I’m too hungry

to think straight. Let’s have some dinner.”

 She nodded and subtly wiped a tear from her eye as she stood. I wondered

if they were crocodile tears like her alleged partner’s, Mr. Sandman. If they were

partners, she had the manuscripts stolen from my car. If not, what had she brought

to show me?

 Her second glass of wine and the stifled tears put Bess in a more receptive

mood as she ate her dozen oysters with the same voracity as I did. In my past life,

she could’ve stood toe-to-toe with me in saloons from Guadalajara to Bangkok.

When she followed suit with a rare steak, not the lady’s cut but the full 20 oz. fare,

I came to appreciate Bess even more, my kind of woman, an equal like Vera had

been.

 I wondered about the romantic history of an intelligent looker like Bess in

her early forties, and what her current romantic status was?

 When it came time for the classic chocolate dessert choices, Bess passed

because she said the sugar clashed with her wine and would give her a headache. I

passed to keep my youthful physique, but my steak pushed at my belt buckle like a

live capybara in an anaconda’s belly. We settled with tea for her and for black

coffee for me.

 “I want to clear the air about those photos,” she said, not referring to them

as what they were—mug shots from her arrests.

 I shrugged as if to indicate it didn’t matter.

“You have to understand, Tom. I was involved . . . OK? I was sleeping with

a guy who swept me off my feet. He was ten years younger and I was flattered.”

 She saw me smirk.

“So he was my boy-toy, big deal. Part of his charm was his interest in inter-

national rarities, which is how we met. He came to one of my sales and paid full

asking price for a few big items. He came to all of my big estate sales and, for many

months, spent a lot of money—fifty thousand, all cash.”

 “What’s not to like? Good business,” I said.

 “He asked me to dinner a few times to great places—we’ve been here a dozen

times.”

 “This makes unlucky number thirteen,” I kidded her.

 “I turned forty, and he was under thirty. I guess I have a thing for tall guys,”

she said, as the six-feet-eight image of Mr. Sandman came to mind. “We didn’t

become lovers until he took me on my first trip to Hong Kong. For the next year we

traveled all over the world.”

 “Still a couple?”

 “He had a cocaine habit and got desperate for cash,” she said, making my DEA

sensors flare. “He blew most of his money, but needed to pay for his addiction, so he

 made some very shady connections using his knowledge of antiques and dealt in

stolen goods and fakes to maintain his lifestyle and keep his habit going.”

 Fakes echoed in my mind as I asked, “And you stuck with him through all

that crap?”

 “Sure, I’m a savvy business woman. I’ve occasionally smoked pot, which

I’ve never bought or would know how to buy. He always provided it. I was naïve

about cocaine and how to even tell if someone was using.”

 “Don’t feel bad, Bess. A DEA transcript from 1980 proclaimed that cocaine

was not an addictive substance at the same time that the War on Drugs strategy was

formed.”

 “He involved me with the sale of a fake statue which made it through U.S.

Customs. I had no idea that the statue contained heroin,” she said. “He’d been doing

this for some time before he’d met me. Then he became a dealer, fell short of his quota

with some dark characters and, for the first time, he put me in jeopardy without my

knowledge. I was blinded by his charm and thought I loved him. He screwed me—

royally.”

 “Were you charged on the drugs?” I asked.

 “I had no knowledge concerning the drugs until after this was all behind me

and we were no longer together,” she said. “My lawyer told me about it later. “My

boyfriend had the decency in our parting to absolve me of any connection to his

smuggling. I was arrested, actually handcuffed and taken away at one of my tag

sales in front of all my clients. I spent one night in jail because of the drug charge

against my boyfriend, but he testified that I had no knowledge of the drugs or the

misrepresentation of the statue’s authenticity. They tried to hold me up as an

authority, who should’ve known the statue’s value, but my lawyer fought it, and

won.”

 “Is your boyfriend in prison?”

 “No,” she sighed. “He’s never done time.”

 In disbelief, I asked, “Why the hell not?”

 She shrugged. “I imagine someone bought a judge. There always seemed

to be a limitless source of cash that he could depend on in a pinch.”

 “Where is he now?”

 “He’s out there still wheeling and dealing as before, but I think his cash

resources put him through rehab. Supposedly, he’s clean now.”

 “So the bad-boy put a serious dent in your reputation,” I said, “but you were

cleared, and he’s still looking for international rarities?”

 “I had vowed never to see him or talk to him again, but he gave me a referral

to a reputable source,” she said. “He showed up at one of my sales—out of the blue.

He was hovering over me at the cashier’s desk as my sale was closing for the day. He

seemed different . . . mellow. He said he had a source with a rare manuscript and all

he wanted to do, to make things up to me for the past, was introduce me to his source.”

 “And that’s how you acquired the Hemingway papers?”

 “Not so easy as it sounds,” she said. “Before meeting my potential client and

agreeing to represent the old steamer trunk to my American sources, I had to travel to

France to obtain it.”

 “You found the manuscripts in a steamer trunk in France?”

 “Yes, and we paid a million Euro for it,” she said.

 “Then you were sure they were genuine?”

 “Well, the paper is over one hundred years old,” she said. “The man we bought

them from was my age, but the trunk belonged to his grandfather, who’d retired to the

French Riviera in the late 1940s after World War II.”

 “Who was his grandfather?”

 “His name was John Paul Auran. He’d been a waiter at *La Coupole Café*, one

of Hemingway’s haunts in the early 1920s, but no longer in business.” she explained.

“The grandson works at *Le Select*, another café in Paris, which Hemingway frequented

and which is still in business. Before the grandson’s father died earlier this year, he told

his son about the grandfather’s treasure kept in an old steamer trunk for almost a century,

a legacy left to the grandson, who’d been assured these were Hemingway’s earliest stories

stolen from the railroad station in Paris in 1920s.”

 “You certainly have me interested,” I said with enthusiasm. “Please, show me

a sample.”

 She reached into her bag and removed a single page protected by Mylar as if it

were the first issue of a *Superman* comic book. I was too surprised to read it at first

because I was expecting to see words scrawled on parchment yellowed with age.

 “Is it just a copy?” I asked.

 “No it’s the original, well preserved by the grandfather for about sixty years

and another forty years by his son before the grandson inherited it last year. You look

surprised, Tom. Why?”

 “I thought it would be handwritten,” I said. “How can we authenticate it without

a handwriting expert to match samples of Hemingway’s penmanship, such as his

signing a Scribner’s royalty check or old letters?”

 “Hemingway began as a journalist and typed everything,” she said.

 “Then how can we authenticate it?”

 Bessie grinned and ordered another chardonnay. “I have Hemingway’s

typewriter. It was in the steamer trunk with the manuscripts. . . .”

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