**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 Seven

**CHAPTER 14 – A VENIAL VIGNETTE**

 Intrigued by Bess Snowden’s account of the Hemingway finding, I assumed

this single page, the first page of an alleged post WWI Hemingway story, was what Dr.

McCullough had in his possession before someone threw him off the superstructure of

the Trask Arms construction site. We’d never know his expert assessment of this first

manuscript page, but I wondered if Mr. Sandman and Tony had given it to Bess on loan.

Or was her life now in danger, too? They had the rest of the manuscript and wouldn’t

need, to settle for anything less than every precious word—unless, of course, if it had

all been fabricated.

 Then again, why would Tony want me to tell David Trask that the manuscripts

were fakes? Maybe they feared Trask’s financial resources could quickly hunt them

down, in which case, he wouldn’t bother to pursue them if he believed the manuscripts

weren’t worth his effort.

 I asked Bess, “If the old steamer trunk with Hemingway’s initials is worth two

hundred fifty thousand at auction, wouldn’t the typewriter he used to write his first

stories be worth even more?”

 She hesitated, then said with a confessionary sigh, “Tom, I need a partner. This

is spinning into a huge ball of wax that I can’t control or back out of . . . but if I stay in

the game, the stakes are so high that someone might decide to kill me, just to cover their

tracks.”

 “Where’s the vintage typewriter now?” I asked, assessing her tense posture as

true fear for her life.”

 “Will you help me, Tom? See it through with me to the end?”

 “I’m just a fun-loving antiques dealer with a few lucky finds over the past few

years.” I shrugged, continuing my charade, but waiting for her reaction to my response

to determine whose side she was on, if not just her own.

 “I know, Tom,” she said, “and it seems ridiculous for me to ask such a favor of

you. Since the fiasco with my last boyfriend nearly put me in prison, I’ve become much

more cautious in my relationships. There was something about you the first time we met

. . . even though I sense you’re holding back a lot from me about who you are and what

your real business is . . . for some reason I still trust you.”

 “Blind faith in me could lead to stumbling down a dark hole with no return,” I

said as we looked deep into each other’s eyes for the first time.

 “Even your cynicism is honest,” she said, reaching across the table to gently

touch the back of my hand with the tips of her fingers.

 I turned my hand palm-up and took hers in mine. Had Bess reformed? I wondered,

or was I just the next guy in line, another loser to add to her list? What made her think

that I wouldn’t discard her like the previous men in her life? If I were certain about her

non-involvement in a scam, I would’ve told her that I was a private dick and would see

that she went to prison if she veered astray of the law and tried to set me up as her fall

guy.

Once a cop, always a cop, I thought. That’s what had separated my wife, Vera,

from me, my cynical outlook, even at a cocktail party among friends when I couldn’t set

my professional instincts aside, not even for one night. She’d want to dance and drink

until the wee hours and forget about work, but I had no *off-duty* mode to retreat to. I’d be

looking over Vera’s shoulder and assessing our host and hostess, thinking—where did

they get the money to throw such a party? I’d want to see their bank ledger, tap their

phones, set up surveillance on their comings and goings, and know all their connections.

I didn’t want to hurt anyone, but rather protect the innocent, which Vera didn’t

buy because she knew I believed *everyone* was guilty—of something. She resented my

need to know who was doing what to whom—especially when I wasn’t working. She

couldn’t understand that, for cops, there’s no such thing as *being off the clock*. It was

the oxymoron of my life’s work—an *off-duty cop*—no such animal in my jungle.

 “You’re just no fun anymore, Tom,” Vera had said at our last face-to-face,

“Do us both a favor. I want a divorce. Stop smothering me. I’m not interested in your

protection anymore.”

 Her words came back to haunt me when I got the news of her brutal murder in

an Arlington, Virginia real estate office where she’d been working. At the time, I was

burying my sorrows over the divorce papers I hadn’t signed yet. I received them in

Bangkok where I was on a DEA assignment and living in a mud hole of sex, booze,

and mortal danger on the *Klong* delta.

 Had we been together, Vera might have had a chance. Her murder was meant

to appear random, a rape gone bad, but it turned out to be payback from drug dealers

I’d put away when I was undercover with the DEA in Mexico.

Snapping me out of my thoughts, Bess said, “Please, help me, Tom. I’m scared.”

I gently withdrew my hand and said, “OK, but you have to be upfront with me.”

 “I’ll try.”

 “Trying isn’t good enough,” I cocked my head and wrinkled my brow. “The

typewriter is the key. Right?”

 “Yes,” she admitted. “I could start the bidding at more than a million dollars

at auction,.”

 “Sotheby’s”

 “Certainly not!” She balked with a fluster. “I have friends in this business who’ve

supported me for many years. If I have a big payday, I’m going to share with my true

friends, not some highfalutin conglomerate with Big Brother watching. I deal honestly,

Tom, but I don’t want someone staring over my shoulder. I’ve earned my independence.”

 I understood her feelings, having felt Uncle Sam’s penetrating plastic glove as

my supervisor asked me to bend over and smile whenever my DEA tactics were in

question at Headquarters.

 I empathized. “That’s the same reason I gave up my day job. We think alike.”

 “Do you understand why the typewriter is so valuable, Tom?”

 “You can trace the manuscript to the typewriter’s fonts to see if they’re a match?”

 “Yes, of course, but I’m told we might be able to trace possible fingerprints on the

keys as well, assuming Hemingway was the sole user, which seems most probable—even

after so many years. It was carefully wrapped inside the trunk, as were the manuscripts, to

protect them in the event that the ocean liner they were stored on sank.”

 “I understand those old trunks were airtight and meant to float free from a sinking

ship if it went down. So where’s the typewriter?”

 “That’s my only security, Tom. I have it in a safe place.”

 “Please, don’t tell me it’s hidden *in plain sight*—I’ve heard *that* before.”

 “I told you. I’m more cautious in my relationships since my big hurt with my

boy-toy,” she said. “I’m the only one who knew about the typewriter.”

 “That’s good. Now just the two of us.”

 “My boyfriend gave me the lead about where to obtain the trunk and the contact

information for two sources interested in the purchase, which he promised to provide

when I returned with the steamer trunk.”

 “Returned from where?”

 “Paris, where I met with the grandson of John Paul Auran.”

 “What did you promise the grandson in return for bringing the trunk here?” I

asked, intrigued by her deal.

 “No promises from me,” she said. “I had to give Auran one million four hundred

thousand dollars for the trunk, which converts to about a million Euro—*as is*, no ques-

tions asked, no authentication required. For all I knew, the trunk was empty and a fake.

That was a big gamble for me.”

 “If I knew your cash flow was so liquid I’d have asked you to pay for dinner.”

 “Not *my* money, silly, but seven hundred thousand dollars from each source as

a nonrefundable deposit against the actual purchase by either party, each agreeing to

forfeit their deposit if not worth anything more than the possible two hundred fifty

thousand dollars at auction for a genuine steamer trunk owned by Ernest Hemingway

in 1920.”

 “Then these two parties would bid against each other,” I said, “and the low

bidder would lose his seven hundred grand deposit, just like an ante in poker.”

 “I was taught never to play cards for money with strange men,” she said with

a smirk. “But, yes, Tom, winner takes all.”

 “Why hasn’t either of the parties used the typewriter to determine if the

manuscripts in the trunk are genuine?” I asked.

 “The obvious reason . . . they don’t know there is a typewriter.”

 I paused on that note. “And you want me to trust you?”

 “I have every intention of sharing that information with both parties, but not until

I’ve had more serious offers. I’ve given them a deadline for a firm offer to be made by

the end of this week. If neither bidder bites, they’ll forfeit their deposits, and I open the

bidding to all my sources. Of course, when one party’s bid wins, his seven hundred thousand

dollar deposit goes toward his final purchase.”

 “So both parties know the approximate auction value of the trunk, but not the

authenticity of the manuscripts, other than checking the age of the paper and ink and

the fonts from that decade. Then the writing style, though premature, should hold some

weight from an expert as well.”

 “That’s probably the deciding factor, if all else holds true, because someone

else could’ve written the stories in the same era on the same brand typewriter as a scam.”

 “That may’ve been the sting back in 1920, Bess. I heard that someone tried to

get a ransom for them in Paris, but Hemingway laughed it off, thinking the loss was the

best thing that had ever happened to him.”

 She didn’t ask me where I’d heard that, so I kept my contact with Baskins Senior

just before his death to myself.

“Someone, perhaps John Paul Auran, had the trunk and the typewriter and tried

to copy Hemingway’s style on the old typewriter after Hemingway’s bestselling novel

came out in 1926,” I suggested. “If Hemingway wasn’t interested, maybe collectors

would’ve been. The manuscripts would’ve appreciated in value with each new success

of Hemingway’s other novels, and would soar even higher after his death.”

 “That’s why the typewriter makes the difference,” she said. “I’m holding out

until one of my two sources makes a firm offer.”

 “I feel like a defense attorney, Bess—not asking my client if she’s guilty or

innocent, but just for argument’s sake, what’s your gut feeling? Do *you* believe the

manuscripts were written by Hemingway?”

 “I’ve already made enough money for it not to make a difference to me,” she

admitted. “But yes, I think they could be genuine. It would make me feel soiled to

make so much money on a fake, even if my clients don’t care.”

 Bess was quickly becoming precious to me, but I still didn’t know where she’d

hidden the typewriter. I’d been strung too tight between my contract with Sophia and my

subcontract with her husband. For me to join in league with Bess would conflict with my

other agreements. Now that I knew the typewriter existed, I was obligated to tell both

Sophia and David Trask. My assignment was to authenticate the manuscripts, so keeping

the existence of the typewriter from them was equivalent to withholding evidence in a

trial. It was about ethics, but I decided to take the standing-eight-count, knowing I still

might have a knock-out punch in me for the late rounds.

 I gave Bess an out as I held her hand tighter, and told her, “I don’t want to

know anything more about the typewriter. That’s a rumor I won’t pass around, so

consider it safe with me. But I want you to tell your clients about it as soon as

possible. It’s the honest thing to do. Will you promise to do that?”

 Though doubt flashed across her face, she appeared to trust me and my

advice. Though a technicality, I saw no harm in providing the necessary inform-

ation to Sophia and David Trask from a third party. “If you hold out, someone

might get hurt, more seriously than I’ve been. I don’t want that someone to be

you, Bess. OK?”

 She nodded then stood to go to the ladies room and almost stumbled.

 “How’d you get into the city?” I asked.

 “I drove in,” she said with a bit of a slur.

 “Well, you’re not driving home. Did you park in a twenty-four-hour lot?”

 She nodded.

“I’ll put you up in a hotel tonight.”

 “Don’t be silly. I’m fine.”

 How many times had I heard myself say that?

 “First I need to pee, Tom. Then you can do whatever you like with me.”

 I got a look from our waiter with that unabashed announcement, which could

be heard at the surrounding tables.

 “OK, Bess, I’m going to lead you to the ladies room, but I want you to splash

your face with cold water—I don’t care if your make-up runs, it’s just a veneer compared

to your inner beauty.”

 “I’ll bet you say that to all the dealers,” she said as I waved to her, and she waved

back to me unsteadily from the ladies room entrance.

 I went hurriedly to the men’s room to be sure to get back to her before she stumbled

out the front entrance and tried to drive her car. I was tense and needed a moment to relax

so I could pee, too. At the urinal, I took a deep breath and closed my eyes.

 “Fancy meetin’ you here, Larkin,” Tony’s voice alarmed me before I could

pee. Tony stood on my left and Mr. Sandman on my right as I stood compromised

at the urinal.

 I had experience dealing with Tony, so I knew I had to take out the six-foot-eight

pillar fear first.

 “Zip up, shamus,” Tony said, we’re takin’ you and the redhead for a ride.”

 Timing is everything, but so is location, so I turned quickly to my right and

pissed like a horse all over Mr. Sandman’s light gray Armani suit pants. The big boy

let out such a howl it caught Tony by surprise, allowing me to slam his face into the

protruding flusher on the urinal next to me.

 Zipping up, I bolted for the door. Fortunately, Bess was waiting for me, so I

jerked her by the arm and darted into Morton’s kitchen before the other two could see

where we went. I knew there was an exit onto 46th Street where the garbage went out.

After some pushing and shoving then obscenities from the chef, we made it to the

street and jumped into a taxi.

I could see from the back window that neither of our pursuers came through

the kitchen in time to see where we’d gone. I decided to skip going to a hotel and went

straight to my apartment with Bess. The cabby dropped us at Second Avenue and 45th

Street, where I walked briskly with a wobbly Bess to the entrance where the night

doorman was on duty.

 “Good evening, Mr. Larkin,” he greeted me as he gave the once over to Bess

in her glassy-eyed state. “Everything OK, sir?”

 “Witness Protection Program,” I said with a wink at the wide-eyed doorman.

 “Wow! No kiddin’?”

 “If anyone asks if I’m in, what do you say?” I asked, as he held the elevator

door for me so I could manage her dead weight putting a strain on my cracked ribs.

 I motioned the zipped-lips sign.

“A mob witness?” the over curious doorman inquired.

 As the doors were sliding shut, I said. “No. We were celebrating her birthday

and some Jehovah Witnesses broke up the party.” The doors closed on Bambi with

his eyes aglow.

 By the time I got Bess into my apartment and stretched her out on my sofa and

covered her with a blanket, her delicate nose was raised to the ceiling and her mouth

was agape with accelerated snoring that sounded like a baseball card fastened to the

back wheel of a bicycle by a clothespin. I took the opportunity to read the first page

of the would-be Hemingway manuscript. Through the Mylar, I had the uncanny

sensation that I might be trespassing on the sacred ground of a writing talent yet

to be discovered. . . .

 THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS

 I couldn’t resist inching onto a

lake’s early freeze to see how far I

could get before the ice cracked. **M**y

adrenaline pu**m**ped with the first crack

as I watched the white lines cutting

through the dark ice, a few inches thick

and all that kept **m**e fro**m** falling through

into the forty-degree lake. I thought the

challenge of getting back to shore was

well worth any risk of falling in.

 To **m**e, the **M**cAvoy family was as

dangerous as thin ice in late autu**m**n.

Everything about the**m** made the sound

of cracking fissures beneath **m**y feet.

 Though I found the story’s opening interesting, I couldn’t judge the narrative’s

authenticity by its style, even if it did have a crisp character. What intrigued me more

was the faded letter “*e”* throughout, and a smudged letter “*m”* indicating that ink from

the ribbon or dust had clogged that font around its seraphs. If Bess had the typewriter,

this could be material evidence to support that it was used to type this particular story.

Authorship still remained the question for an expert.

 With Bess still carrying the woodwind section of her snoring symphony, I

carefully removed the manuscript page from the Mylar and put the original in a plastic

Zip-loc bag. I made a good copy on off-white paper on my scanner and put the copy

in the Mylar. I went to my safe behind the large black-and-white photo on my office

wall, where I found the plastic baggie containing white fiberglass chips froma boat

that landed behind grandfather Baskins’s home in Upper Nyack.

Great minds think alike, I thought. Thanks Mona.

I put the paint chips and the original manuscript page in the safe then remembered

I’d left the other forensic items in my desk drawer, I took them to the kitchen and separated

them in plastic bags and made notations on each—time, date, and location. I put

them all in the safe.

The twenty-by-twenty-four inch photo that hid my safe was of me and my

DEA partners in Mexico with a few picaresque *federales*. The photo reminded me of

Tim Barnes, who smiled at me from the photo with all the charm of Pancho Villa. I

recalled when Tim smiled for the photo and said, “We don’t need no stinkin’ badges.”

The *federales* hadn’t a clue what Tim was talking about. They were likely

planning to have us killed before we had a chance to return to the States. It took them

and their cohorts three years to track me down in Jamaica where they’d used my

kidnapped niece as bait to draw me out into the open after my wife was murdered.

Good times with a tragic ending.

 There were no messages on my desk from Mona saying she’d heard from Tim

Barnes, so I slipped the Mylar protected copy back into Bess’s purse. I covered her

with another blanket and curled up in my recliner with a blanket and fell asleep.

\* \* \*

 I awoke at 6:00 AM with the sunrise breaking the Long Island City skyline across

the Ed Koch Bridge at 59th Street over the East River. From my window I could see early

commuters from Roosevelt Island taking the tram to Manhattan to get to their city jobs.

Uniformed guards raised the national flags in front of the United Nations complex on

First Avenue below. I put on a pot of coffee for myself and remembered from her tag sale

that Bess had to have her tea, so I scrambled through my kitchen cabinets and found an

old tea pot and heated a kettle on the stove.

I heard Bess stir with a groan. Her eyes squinting in my direction and her red

hair askew like the bright plumage of a macaw, she held up Churchill’s two-fingered

victory sign, the symbol of peace in our youth.

“I’m a two-bagger, Tom.”

 “Well, m’ dear,” I said. “You may be a little ruffled this morning, but you’re no

*two-bagger*—so ugly you need a paper bag over your head, and I need one over mine

in case yours falls off.”

 Her mouth dropped open and she laughed with such unabashed delight that I

thought she’d wet her pants. “Oh, God, Tom, what the hell happened last night? I didn’t

 drink that much, did I?”

 “You had two glasses of wine, but I have the feeling someone knew you were

meeting me and slipped you something between glasses one and two. That’s when

you started to go down for the count.”

 “Then someone does want to hurt me,” she said with a deep breath.

 “It may just be me they’re after,” I said. “Military tactics—they wanted to slow

me down by making me carry my wounded—you.”

 “Who do you think it was?”

 I played dumb. “One guy hit me from behind, but I didn’t get the chance to see

who he was. I just got you out of there as quick as possible to come here at this—maybe

*not-so-safe* house. I think you need to tell me where the typewriter is before we both get

killed.”

 “Tea first,” she said with raised eyebrows. “Then I’ll take you to it.”

 “Deal.”

 “I’ll put my face back together while you shower, Tom.”

 “Easy for you to say,” I said, opening my shirt to show her how tightly I was

taped around my chest from my beating at the Jersey shore.

 “My make-up can wait,” she said. “Let me help you get those old dressings off.

I’ll help you bathe and put some fresh tape around your chest, if you think you’ll need it.”

 “Were you ever a nurse?”

 “Not quite, Tommy-boy, just a Candy-striper.”

 “Bring on the sweets,” I said, but she yanked the first round of tape off my chest

without warning, and I let out a howl.

 “Don’t be such a wuss, Tom.” She pecked me on the check. “Ready?”

 I nodded, but my anticipation of the painful rip made it worse. I just sucked in

my breath, but let out no sound. When Bess saw the purple welt on my side where Tony

had kicked me, her mouth dropped open. The pain made my vision colorless like a 1950s

black-and-white flick. I imagined I saw Aldo Ray offering me my final cigarette before

I succumbed to the Japanese shrapnel imbedded in my side spreading its infectious wave

to put me in a death spasm on some Pacific, no-name atoll of little consequence.

 “Your dear wife is sleeping with your best friend, American boy,” I saw Bess’s

lips moving, but her voice came out of her mouth like a poorly dubbed kung fu movie.

“Are you OK, Tom?” Her voice cut through my imagined dub, but her face

 looked Asian like Tokyo Rose—*Marine, tonight you die!*

 If I ever needed another drink—even if it had to be my last before passing over

to whatever was in store for a dying cop who’d crossed every line he was ordered to

stand back from—this was the moment.

 My true confession lay just behind my quivering lips, *Bess, I’m really a private*

*dick and I’m just stringing your sweet, limey ass along for the ride till I can find out the*

*truth about these manuscripts for my client.*

 Fortunately, I broke out in a cold sweat, which made my pain subside. I turned

to Bess and asked her to repeat what she’d said, “Come again, love?”

 She gave me a sheepish look and pulled her head back. “I don’t recall *coming* the

first time. . . . I know you’re in pain, but are you up for a morning of unbridled passion?”

 I shook my head. “Sounds great, but I thought I’d stay here with you. ”

 “You bloody bugger!” she wailed.

When she tried to slap my unshaven face, I grabbed her thin wrist and jerked

her toward me. Our mouths entwined like a bucket of bait worms, but she tasted like

a smooth Kentucky bourbon to my unquenched thirst.

 I imagined a *ménage a trois* with my AA sponsor for a moment, but as the

goods came out of the wrapper and the seasoned essence of a woman in her ripened

prime wafted toward me, I decided that the subtle nuances of this venial vignette

would be a delight I wouldn’t share with anyone.

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