

# **The Hemingway Valise**

**Bibliomysteries**

**by Robert Olen Butler, 1945–**

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Hemingway came and got me in the night. With apologies to my wife. A cold week-night in early December. He was supposed to be in Lausanne covering the treaty conference. He took me to a small Left Bank café near the Seine. New to me. Brightly lit, full of incandescent electricity. “For clarity,” he said.

It was good, the place. Clean. Just the two of us at this hour, except for an old drunk hunched at a far table and a woman in a dark coat sitting at the zinc bar.

It was only later that the glance registered on me, between Hem and the woman, exchanged when he and I first came in. I recognized it for what it was after I later noticed her watching him in the mirror that hung behind the bar.

Her face was pretty and it was hardened. She was probably young, technically speaking.

Hemingway was young. Not far into his twenties, with a soldier's body and a boy's face. I was a decade older but it felt like far more.

He sat me down and ordered Calvados. I followed his lead. More clarity, I assumed. The ardent clarity of brandyfried apples.

We took a first sip and put our glasses on the table. The Calvados was fiery and tart and something else, like the apples had been lying around for a while in a winter sun.

Then Hemingway said, "Hadley has done a terrible thing. A killing thing."

Hadley, his wife.

I was surprised at his having trouble with his wife. They were clingingly, cloyingly—but convincingly—tender with each other, even when they clearly didn't think they were being noticed.

Though Hem and I had buddied up pretty well and even had a couple of weeks covering the same war, at first I was surprised, as well, that he'd come to me with this.

I'd met Ernest Hemingway only a few months earlier, in the middle of August.

In a bookshop.

I'd come back to the city that was so important to the two Christopher Marlowe Cobbs who'd been kicking around in my head for almost a decade. One Cobb was a war correspondent, one was a spy. Both of them were Americans, and I guess that was what held me together.

The year was 1922. The Great War was over. The news assignments were intermittent. Silent Cal was President and apparently interested only in the secrets he kept to himself. The dollar was strong and the franc was weak. So there was time for me and Louise, the American nurse I'd started up with here in Paris in 1915, when she was the boss of all the nurses at the American Ambulance Hospital. She was now a fund-raiser for the hospital's reincarnation in a too-small space to serve the torrent of American tourists and expatriates. We'd gotten married last fall at the *Chapelle Américaine* off the Champs-Élysée, and we had a little place on the Left Bank. A third-floor walk-up on the Rue Madame.

I was trying to write a novel.

Hemingway was too.

It was a hell of a bookshop. Shakespeare & Company. You stepped in and it felt more like the personal library across from the billiard room in the mansion of some American business tycoon. If such a mug happened to have serious taste in literature. The center of the place was as wide open as a sitting-room, with overstuffed chairs and black-and-white Serbian rugs, but surrounding you, the walls were made up entirely of books, their shelves shoe-top low to ceiling-high, insisting that you browse them. Mostly they were the books of the modern gang, from James and Hardy and Yeats to Stein and Woolf and Fitzgerald and even the

boys you had to read one step ahead of the morality police, D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce. Pyramided on a little shrine of a table in the midst of the sitting space were the few copies remaining of the most dangerous of the modernly immoral books, Joyce's *Ulysses*, thick as a randy man would hope his book would be and deceptively serene-seeming in its Aegean blue cover. The one stretch of wall stuck with the room's fireplace was, in place of books, bespangled with the images, photographic and lithographic, of all these same literary stars, watching us riffle their pages.

The shop was owned and run by a small, handsome woman who seemed both as tough and as sweet as my own Louise, though my wife was still partial to dresses and wore her hair bunned up beneath her wide-brimmed hats. Sylvia Beach, however, kept her hair full as a boxwood but bobbed jawline-short, and the day I met her she was wearing a man's-cut velvet jacket and an over-sized parody of a boy's first bow tie. She and my wife hit it off right away.

I know they did because after the three of us introduced ourselves and shared a little of our feature-section backstories—including my substantial history as a newsman and insubstantial history as a nascent novelist—Sylvia made a move to take me into the center of the sitting area and introduce me to some regulars. But as soon as she sighted our prey, she abruptly held up. She tucked her hand inside my arm and said, low, "Sorry. The boys are presently occupied."

She nodded at two men leaning at each other from facing chairs within easy nose-punching distance, talking volubly. "Ezra," she said, "is once again telling Ernest how to write. Ex cathedra. Give them a few moments while I resume with your beautiful wife."

So I listened to both conversations in fragments.

The gentlemen before me: "To cut, dear boy. Ravenously to cut."

"Your beard, old man?" The latter speaker, bare-chinned but mustachioed, would turn out to be Hemingway. The other man, who would be Ezra Pound, had a diabolic point to his beard. "Your every unnecessary word," Pound replied.

The ladies behind me: "Happy August 18th, Miss Beach." "Ah, my dear. I somehow knew you would be aware."

My wife had already made *me* aware, immediately upon our arising this morning. Today was the second anniversary of the enactment of the Nineteenth Amendment, though my wife had yet to be home during an election.

Shortly, Pound flopped backwards in his chair, slid his butt abruptly forward till he was sitting on his spine, grasped the knob on the ebony cane leaning against his chair, and thumped the stick, once, sharply on the floor. Hemingway laughed.

It must have been a characteristic conversation-pausing gesture from Pound, for almost at once, after a hasty "Pardon me, dear" to Louise, Sylvia was again grasping my arm and now leading me forward.

As we moved toward the two men, Hemingway said to Pound, "You know I'm grateful. I'll even supply the blue pencil." Sylvia slowed us down but kept us going. With a rising twirl of his right hand Pound replied, "Make it half a dozen."

Sylvia and I came into the periphery of their vision.

Both men turned to us.

Thus I met Ernest Hemingway. And his poet-editor to boot. Hemingway and I picked up the cues from Sylvia's introduction and we began to talk of newspapers and of war.

Shortly Pound, whose connection to Hemingway seemed pretty rarified, flourished his way from the chair—he was wearing a cape—and went off to graze Sylvia's shelves.

I sat down with my new writer friend. We spoke on, of Paris and fiction writing and our wives. Hem nearly leaped from his chair in admiration at the mention of Louise being a nurse.

"Did she treat you for a wound?" he asked.

The answer was complicated. It was tangled up with some nasty wartime secret-service business in this very town. I said, "No."

He bounced his head in reply and looked away, his eyes seeing something in his mind.

In spite of his having said nothing as yet about such a woman, I said, "Did your nurse treat you?"

He looked back at me and shot me the smile men smile when you realize you know things about each other without having said them.

But before he shaped a reply, there was a woman's voice entering the store.

As it turned out, it was Hadley, a plain-faced, plushly huggable woman with bobbed hair.

Hemingway looked in her direction. How did his face show a keen pleasure at seeing her and, in the same look, a keen reluctance to let go of the nurse who was bending near him in his head? Somehow. Or maybe this wasn't visible on his face at all. Maybe nurses were just another thing a couple of guys could understand about each other after finding newspapers and war and Paris and writing in common.

Hemingway and his wife exchanged faint, dreamy head-rolls with covertly puckering lips.

But in the Left Bank café that December, over our Calvados, Hem reworked the harshest of his words about her. "Truly, Kit," he said, and he tapped his heart with his index and middle fingers. "Right here. A kill shot."

He paused.

Not for effect. To ponder his own death, it seemed to me in that knowing part of my buddy-brain. But the surface of my mind was assuming it was about Hadley and some other man.

It wasn't another man. It was worse. Hem said, "She put every word I've ever written into a valise and allowed them all to be stolen."

Ernest Hemingway could—how to say it?—exaggerate. About his boxing prowess—he'd said he sparred with Jack Dempsey, and the champ had his hands full. About his war wounds as an ambulance driver—he'd claimed to have been given a Carcano rifle and been asked to help out in a trench raid. I knew some things about boxing and about battle and about wartime ambulance drivers. So I hesitated over this new declaration. "Man, oh man," I said. "Every word?"

"Originals and copies," he said. His voice broke with this. His eyes glistened in the incandescent light. "Three years of work. Poems. Stories. Longer stuff. The novel set at the war, the one I began in Chicago. A long story about fishing. That

was a fly cast into a teeming stream, Kit. It was going to be a novel. And the Paris sketches. One of them has haunted me through this long night. Six true sentences. Finally true. Just that. Six of them. But because they were true they came harder and deeper than a novel.”

His voice gave out over his six sentences.

He fell silent.

I offered, gently, “The stream is roiled. But things will settle. In a week or two, with your cahier and pencil at a corner table in a bistro. you’ll catch them again.”

He shook his head. “No. That’s just it. The true thing happens in the moment you write. Like the first touch of a new woman. I’ve been trying hard to remember. All the way back from Switzerland. But I can’t truly shape even one phrase from one of those six sentences. It’s not about memory.”

I sat back in my chair.

Maybe so.

“Where’d this happen?” I asked.

“The Gare de Lyon,” he said. “She was taking the express train to join me in Lausanne.”

“Stolen, not just lost around the station?”

“I’m convinced of it. I was all over the place this afternoon. Lost and found. Trash bins. But I knew from the moment she told me that it was the Turks.”

I sat forward again in my chair.

This was our shared war.

The Greeks and the Turks. The latter throwing out the former from Anatolia to establish a post-war independent Turkey.

Though Hem and I were to be a couple of journalistic lone wolves separately on the prowl at the Greco-Turk War—I for the Chicago Post-Express and its syndicate, Hem for the Toronto *Star*—we’d been happy to share the hundred-hour run from Paris to Constantinople on the Simplon Orient Express and then a few nights of drinking mastika and eating green olives on the roof terrace of the Grand Hôtel des Londres while looking out on Galata and the Golden Horn.

Not that either of us found it all terribly golden. Hemingway saw the grimy banks and boat-litter of the Chicago River along the banks of the Bosphorous. I saw Pittsburg’s smokestacks in the profusion of minarets in Constantinople, similarly emblematic of the big business of the place.

Hem thinking the Turks were after him made sense of his coming to me. A few things he’d told me on that roof terrace gave it possible credence. Following too much mastika followed by too much local Bomonti beer, he talked about a source he’d developed in Constantinople who fed him choice gossip about the Turkish strongman, hero-of-independence, and demigod-in-the-making, Mustafa Kemal Pasha. Hem said he knew the inside dope on Kemal, who was exterminating Armenians and loving young boys. Dangerous things to write about. Dangerous even to know.

“The Kemal stuff?” I said.

“I told you about that,” he said, his tone somewhere between an affirming statement and a faintly incredulous question. He’d had way too much Turkish liquor on that particular night.

“You did,” I said.

"I haven't written about it," he said.

"But they have reason to think you're about to?"

"It's the only reason they'd have a tail on me."

"In Paris?"

"In Paris. I tried to follow up on the rumors a little more openly than was smart. Look. Kemal is a Muslim Mussolini, what *il Duce* wants to be in his own country a year or two down the road."

"You sure they have a man on you?"

"He's not wearing a fucking fez, but yes. Swarthy. Well put together. A middleweight. About five-eight. Tight dark beard. One shoulder a touch higher than the other. The left one. Seen him at least three times since we got back. At Lipp's. And Le Select. Once on the street, following at a distance." Hem paused, leaned a little toward me. "You know real well how spies work. Right?"

He paused again.

This last was an elbow nudging me in the ribs. Like something already understood between us. I wondered if I'd had too much mastik and beer one night at the Londres myself. I did not recall letting him in on my work for the government. I didn't do that with anyone. But Hemingway was a real writer, by all accounts. Sylvia certainly thought so. And I knew him to be at least a swell reporter. He could read a man.

Still, I didn't take the bait. Didn't say anything. Let the silence go on.

He did too, for a few moments, and then he said, low, "There may come a time I'll do what I'm pretty sure you're already doing. But for now I bring this up because I think you're the man who might help me."

His eyes had taken on that glisten again. It hurt me to see it.

"If you're right about the Turks," I said, "I might be in a better position to be helpful than most mugs."

"Thanks," he said, the word rasping at the back of his throat.

But I had instant doubts that I could do anything. I said, "My first thought is how big a leap it would be for the Turks to target that valise."

His mouth pinched tight. He knew that. The likely alternative thief—a sneak making a quick snatch—would be impossible to track at this point. A bunch of papers would have been an immediate disappointment to a sneak, but the bag apparently hadn't been discarded around the station. Without believing it was the Turks, Hem had to face the likelihood that his manuscripts were floating in the Seine, halfway to the English Channel by now.

He and Hadley were dirt poor. This he'd often made perfectly clear. I said, "I take it the valise didn't look ripe."

"Hell no. It was shabby alligator-embossed leatherette. Hadley left it in a compartment and went back out to the platform, but it was up on a luggage-rack with other peoples' bags, better bags that didn't get snatched."

He'd clearly interrogated Hadley closely.

"Somebody was after it," he said.

"Were they right?" I asked. "Was there a Kemal story in the bag?"

"No. But they wouldn't be wise to that. The only writing they know me for is journalism."

“True enough,” I said. “But their ignorance ran far deeper. That’s the big leap of logic for us to think they did this. The content of the valise was based on a private decision made by your wife. How would they ever know to steal the thing?”

Hemingway puffed and sat back in his chair.

I sat back too.

I said, “Why’d she make that decision? What moved her to put all your manuscripts into that valise to bring them to Lausanne?”

“Lincoln Steffens.” He paused for a moment to let the name sink in.

I nodded. “I’ve met him,” I said. He was a muckraking American journalist I ran into in Mexico when I went down there for the *Post-Express* in April of 1914 to cover Woody Wilson’s invasion, at Vera Cruz. He and my photographer, Bunky Millerman, became drinking buddies.

Hem said, “Steff’s been a cheerleader since the Genoa Conference in April. He’s up in Lausanne this week and anxious to see more of my work. I wrote that to Hadley and now she’s put me in this scrape with a lunatic overreaction.”

His rhetoric had once again heated up over Hadley, and we fell silent for a moment.

Then he said, “Say. If they’re watching me in Paris, they’ve been watching me in Lausanne. The conference is full of Turks. The hotel bar included. Steff can get voluble in his praise. Maybe between the two of us we said enough to give the thugs a lead.”

“Maybe,” I said. “At least enough to get them watching Hadley. The valise didn’t have to be a target. If your Paris Turk followed her to the station and found her bags left alone, he might have slipped in just to take a look. Even without any specific expectations. So he sees stories and thinks he’s caught a break. They don’t know literature from journalism.”

“That makes sense.”

I thought a moment. Then, “You have to get back to Lausanne?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Are there notes about Kemal?”

“In the notebooks I carry with me.”

“How many pages?”

“A dozen or so.”

“Do up a Kemal story. Before you go back to Switzerland. Just quick and dirty. Seal it in an envelope and leave it with Sylvia at the bookstore.”

Hem’s brow had furrowed deeply. “Look. At this point I don’t care about the pervert. I figure they’re tailing me to find out my sources. If I publish it, they’ll be tailing me to put a dagger in my ribs.”

“It’s not for publication,” I said. “In fact, make the story skeptical. Make it sound like you don’t believe these rumors. The news is fake. You sympathize with the great man. Even take one of those blue pencils of yours and write *No story here* and your initials on the top of the first page. Include all the original notes you can that don’t give away sources.”

Hemingway brightened. “A trade.”

“Tris Speaker for Sad Sam Jones,” I said.

He laughed out loud. We'd talked baseball. The Indians had robbed the Red Sox in that deal.

"Who's who?" Hem said.

"You're Cleveland."

"Damn right." He laughed again.

Through this I'd been aware of the woman at the bar. At Hem's first laugh, her head turned sharply to him. With the second one, as Hemingway lifted his face and took his eyes off me, I glanced at her in the mirror. Her brow was as deeply furrowed as his had been a few moments ago. Her mouth was crimped in distress. I thought: *She thinks the laughter's about her, that he's talking about her. She's here to meet him, by arrangement, but she's not a prostitute.*

When he finished laughing, Hem said, "I'll leave the envelope with Sylvia in the morning. You think you can find this guy?"

"I'd shadow you myself and waylay him," I said. "But when they don't find what they're looking for in the bag and don't understand the stuff that's there, they're likely to dispose of it. We can't wait."

"And they don't even know I'm back in Paris," he said.

"Right. So he won't know to show up behind you."

"Damn."

"But I have some contacts. And his description."

He smiled at me. "I knew I came to the right man."

"I hope."

"Do you think we have a chance?"

"They have to translate. That will take them some time."

"Not so much for me as some others."

I knew what he meant. From what he'd showed me of his work he was more Western Union than Henry James.

"I'll do everything I can," I said.

And that was that. It was time to end this. I felt sorry for Hem. I felt sorry for his wife. I was keenly aware of the woman in the mirror, still turned our way. He was going to punish Hadley.

I leaned toward Hem. Lowered my voice. But it was a tricky thing. And it was a buddy thing. I found a way to say it without saying it. "I'll see if I can help. But we all have to be very careful about what we do now."

"Yes," he said. "Of course."

I meant the woman at the bar. But as soon as I said it, I recognized a corollary fear. If the Turks didn't find the story and the notes, they might decide to dispose of more than the irrelevant manuscripts. There would be the matter of Hemingway himself. The dagger in the ribs would be even more effective if it preempted his story rather than punished him for it.

"I've got to go," I said.

"Thank you, my friend."

"I've got Louise waiting for me," I said. Still trying to remind him of Hadley in Lausanne.

He took in a small quick breath. "A nurse," he said.



I knew, from previous conversations, that the woman in the black coat at the bar could not possibly be his nurse. His nurse had dumped him three years ago for an Italian officer.

“My *wife*,” I said.

He paused. He heard me. “Right,” he said.

I went out into the night.

And I found myself thinking not of my wife, my nurse, but of a film actress. A film star I’d met and fallen more than a little in love with the year before I met Louise. At the time, she was a famous name on the screen. Selene Bourgani. We met on a doomed British ship in May of 1915. We would both end up in Constantinople. We each had business there. If Mustafa Kemal had by then already become who he now was, he would have wanted each of us dead, for our separate missions. Instead, at the time, he was simply off embarrassing the Brits at Gallipoli.

I looked back into the bar. Hemingway was standing before the woman in the dark coat. Explaining away his laughter, no doubt. Commencing a night he would likely never reveal to anyone. I walked away.

On the Rue Madame, at our door at the rear of the third floor, in the dark, I found the keyhole with my finger tip and put the key inside very gently. Louise would be sleeping. I opened the door into what we called our “everything room.” Everything but our bedroom. It was our sitting room, our kitchen, even our bath room, with a steel bathtub hunkered beside the sink. And it was my writing office. Louise had left the secondary gas jet burning low within its mantle. Beneath it was my desk.

My time tonight with Hemingway was unsettling in more than one way, not the least of which was that his dilemma tapped a fear I did not know was in me until it began to flow. I’d been working on my own novel for months. It sat beside my Corona Portable Number 3. All that I had written—the only form and place and way it existed in the world—was stacked there in original and carbon copy, all the corners neatly squared, as was my custom at the end of each writing day.

I stepped to the desk.

I sat down.

I laid my hand on the twenty thousand or so words. I thought to pick up the first page and begin to read. But I did not. I sensed the writing was not going well. In a way not unlike what I’d seen of Ernie’s work. Mine had similar flaws. A certain voice, mine coming by way of the Chicago *Post-Express* copydesk instead of the Toronto *Star*’s. The voice of a guy who’s got his eye on the big picture and knows it all already. And he wants to fill a thirty-inch news-hole that will start as the front page lead.

I leaned forward, over my typewriter, and took up the photograph that I propped each day against my coffee cup. Bunky took it of me just after the invasion. He had it printed up on postcard stock for me. He’d caught me from behind. I was walking on the street. Dead Mexican snipers lay on the sidewalk. I was passing them without a glance.

I looked now at the top page of my manuscript.

The first few sentences spoke of how President Woodrow Wilson, on April 21, 1914, dispatched a thousand American marines and blue-jackets to capture Vera

Cruz. I had not consulted my own news coverage from that day in order to begin my novel, but I was only too keenly aware, beneath the pale gas light in our rooms on the Left Bank of Paris, that these first sentences—and the rest of my sentences, as well—were essentially interchangeable, in voice, with my journalism.

I stood up.

I extinguished the light.

I moved to our bedroom and put my hand to the knob and began to open the door. Again slowly, quietly. I expected darkness but there was light.

Louise was awake. She was shouldered back against the headboard. Her bedside reading lamp was lit. Of her face I only saw her forehead and that her dark hair was let down. Held up before her was a magazine in plain tan covers, its name in red: *The Criterion*.

Having snuck in so quietly, I was afraid to startle her. I hesitated. But she said, without lowering the magazine, “I know you’re there, darling Kit. Just a moment.”

I waited, filled with the awed and vaguely intimidated tenderness I often felt for my wife. She knew I was there. But she did not let on for a few long moments as she was reading and would not yet be disturbed. Reading something heady, I was certain. She had waited up for me though she needed her sleep and though I’d left her bed for the company of a man whose otherwise widely recognized charm was, to her, superficial and self-serving. And I was her darling, declared in a tone both tender and utterly convincing.

Now the magazine came down.

Her dark eyes were vast in the shadows of the lamp light and I wished only to come to her and ask her to close them so that I could kiss their lids. But there was always something about her that made me happy to wait for her agenda. A thing the French called, with a shrug, *je ne sais quoi*.

She said, “Sylvia gave me this new magazine. She is so dear and so smart. It has the most wonderful long poem in it by a Mr. Thomas Stearns Eliot.”

She paused and patted the bed beside her. “Do divest yourself of shoes and most of your clothes and come lie here now.”

This I did.

She kept hold of the magazine with Mr. Eliot’s poem the whole time, though in her lap.

When I was settled beside her, she lifted the magazine a little and resumed, “He is a clerk in a bank, of all things. But perhaps such a job can breed this dark view. He says that April is the cruelest month and I know what he must mean. When the external world of rebirthing nature and the inner world of a depressed spirit are so at odds.”

She paused to let me consider that, and I asked, “Such as the inner life of a fund-raiser for a hospital trying to trade war wounds for the traveler trots?”

At this, she laid her magazine on her lap, letting it go. She took my nose between her middle and forefingers and not quite gently twisted, saying, “I read more deeply than that, my darling.”

I rubbed my nose.

“Did I hurt you?” she asked, not quite concernedly.

“No.”

“Good. So what’s Mr. Hemingway’s ailment?”

I told her the story.

I omitted the woman in the dark coat.

Nevertheless, her first words were, "He will make poor Hadley pay."

"I suppose," I said.

"One way or another," she said.

"It will be undeserved," I said.

She lifted her hand to my face. This time she touched my cheek with her palm. Very gently. "I would not be so foolish with *your* words," she said.

"I know," I said and suggested she close her eyes for a moment.

The next morning I stepped into a telephone booth at the post office and confirmed what I'd heard, that the State Department's secret service man at our Paris embassy was now James Metcalf. He was working out of the London embassy when I'd had need of him in the spring of 1915. He dispatched me to Constantinople for my first little adventure with the Turks. His voice boomed at me over the telephone wire as soon as his assistant put me on. "Kit Cobb. Let me take you for food."

"Gentleman Jim," I said, an old nickname he'd confided in me at our first meeting, in Queenstown on the Irish Coast, after they'd fished me out of the North Atlantic. "As long as the final course is some information," I said. "I've got Turk trouble."

"Again?" he said. "Food first."

The last time I saw him, he'd treated me to a seventeen-course dinner at the Carlton Hotel, whose chef was French. Monsieur Escoffier. Metcalf had his own family money and liked to eat. Now, in Paris, we arranged to meet for lunch in front of the Lapérouse, a restaurant in an eighteenth-century mansion looking from the Left Bank onto the Seine near the Pont Neuf.

I waited, pondering the neighborhood. The hotel where I'd stayed during the mission that resulted in my meeting Louise was not much more than a brisk five-minute walk away. Sylvia's bookstore was ten. Before me, in the river, was the Place Dauphine on the western tip of the Île de la Cité, where the head of the French secret service had his low-profile headquarters during the War.

Then Metcalf appeared. A great, bulging airship of a man. In these seven years he'd gained a hundred pounds upon his gourmand's body. He was indeed reminiscent of a craft that seemed impossibly lighter than air, for, in spite of his size, he strode quickly toward me and then moored himself upon my extended right hand with both of his, briefly shaking but then holding fast for a few moments more, as if to resist lifting up into the air.

We soon sat in one of the small parlor dining rooms up a staircase that Metcalf could barely fit through. We ordered, and as we waited, I told him about Hemingway and his Turks. Every detail except the woman in the black coat. Metcalf humphed and turned thoughtful but our food came before he replied, and when it did, he acted as if he hadn't heard me. Instead, he mixed reminiscences of the Turks' offenses and Escoffier's triumphs, with particular emphasis, among the latter, on the ortolan bunting, a mouth-sized bird plucked and legless but otherwise baked entirely whole, then put in the mouth, also entirely whole, and eaten organs, blood, brain, and all.

I knew to let him set the conversational agenda. He had his own ways. But I was never sure with Metcalf whether the food we shared and he discoursed upon was intended as a metaphor for whatever secret service business was at hand. At this lunch, after he'd waxed rhapsodic upon the cream and cognac and tarragon of the Lapérouse's langoustines we were then eating, he made clear that you had to kill these small-fry lobsters from Norway just before you ate them or the bacteria under their shells would go after *you*.

He closed his eyes to savor the last morsel, and when he opened them again he instantly said, "It sounds as if your friend's problem needs a quick solution."

"Do you know the Turk I described?"

"Do you want some coffee?"

I wasn't in the mood for more indirection.

He picked up on my hesitation and smiled. "Any help my office can provide will come along with the brew. Just not from me. I send you now to a bistro in the Rue Blondel. They have good Turkish coffee, I understand, though I myself don't have a taste for it. The Turks, in their barbarism, would have you ingest as much grinds as liquid coffee. But our agent will meet you there. An agent new to us but deep in knowledge of the Turks."

Metcalf extracted his watch from a vest pocket, which took some serious effort and great strain on the gold chain. He looked at the time. "You're due at the bistro within the hour," he said. "I took the liberty of arranging the meeting as soon as you mentioned your Turk troubles on the phone."

"How will I know him?" I asked.

He smiled. "You'll be recognized."

Metcalf would say no more on the matter, but gave me the Rue Blondel address, near the Porte Saint-Denis in the 10th Arrondissement.

The street was narrow, the bistro was small, with only two tables outside, unoccupied in the chill of the cloudy December day. Just inside the door I stopped and did a quick scan of the place. It was low-ceilinged and smelled of garlic and onion. Immigrant smells. About half the two-dozen or so small tables still held end-of-lunch patrons. I focused on the three that held solitary men. Two of them were clear working-class types, in overalls. Not likely our agent.

The third was a man in a brown serge suit. He was sitting at a free-standing table near the center of the place, facing this way, focused on a tightly folded newspaper a little to the side of his coffee cup. He seemed to be the one.

I waited for him to notice me.

He wasn't moving.

I took a step toward him, and another.

He looked up. Saw me. Looked back down at once. Not even a flicker of recognition.

I stopped.

I scanned the room again.

The little groups were all engaged with each other.

My eyes moved toward the back of the place, along the left-hand side, which was lined with a dingy mirror.

There was one other person, alone there. I'd ignored her the first time around as she sat with her back to the others and she was dressed in widow's black with a cloche hat and a thick mourning veil.

Now I realized that her head was lifted a little and the veiled face was reflected in the mirror. From the angle, she was clearly looking at me. But the veil was down. There was no discernible face.

And now the head nodded at me, once, and waited.

I looked around the room. Quickly. Nothing had changed. I was still unanimously ignored. Except by the widow.

I stepped to her, stopped beside her table, still not sure.

She inclined her head at the bench seat across from her.

I sat beneath the mirror.

I could only dimly make out her eyes. They were large. And suddenly familiar.

She lifted her hands and slowly raised her veil.

Part of me had begun to realize already, and then the conscious drama of the gesture made me certain, and yet when I saw that this was indeed Selene Bourgani, I took a reflexive deep breath. A breath the like of which could have been induced if Paris had been secretly sitting on a fault line and the earth had just opened up beneath my feet.

"Kit," she said, quite low.

"Lucine," I said, also low, using her real name, the one I had finally learned.

Did I see a flicker of something in her vast dark eyes at this name? Did I feel a flicker of something in myself at how similar were Louise's eyes? My wife's. My wife whom I'd first met barely six months after I'd parted, as if forever, from this woman before me.

The flicker in her faded but was replaced by a faint, one-sided smile that renewed the complex something that had just left her eyes.

If her real name was not her name now, neither was it Selene Bourgani, for she had not made a film since I last knew her, and that screen name had itself, in those seven years, finally faded from the movie magazines that had puzzled over and then romanticized and then grown bored with her unexplained disappearance, not just from the cinema but from the world.

I laid both my hands on the table to lean a little toward her. "So then," I said, almost whispering. "What is your name?"

Her half-smile gently widened to fullness, though it did not lose its complexity. She too leaned forward, and then I felt her hand cover mine. She said, "You always could see through me, Kit."

Whenever I myself had that thought, through our time of professional and personal affairs, she would always find a way to surprise me.

I did not move my hand, neither to turn its palm upward and take hers nor to withdraw it. "Not this time," I replied. And then, "So who are you now?"

She took a moment to draw out a smile, a faint one, and she said, "Who was I when we first made love?"

Not the answer I expected. Not what I wanted. Whoever she was when we first made love on the LUSITANIA, or even whoever she was when we made love again not long after, on a steamship in the night in the English Channel—with our separate paths toward Constantinople about to converge—whoever she was before

we got to Turkey, I was now a different Kit Cobb. Different and the same. "You were Selene," I said.

"Then that's who I am this afternoon," she said.

"We apparently work for the same company these days," I said.

"Yes. And I am any number of people for them. I learned my craft well as Selene Bourgani."

We looked at each other in silence for a few moments more. I would not let myself remember that earlier Selene. I knew the danger.

But I turned my hand upward. Our palms touched. I clasped her there for the length of one reflexive breath, as if the fault line that had ripped open in the middle of Paris had just, miraculously, fallen together again and sealed itself shut. And then I took my hand away.

She understood.

"How can I help you?" she said.

I told her Ernest Hemingway's story. In the midst, Selene waved a hand at a hovering waiter, and near the end of the story the Turkish coffee arrived. She drank thoughtfully while I spoke, and I did not drink at all.

When I was done, she said, "Your coffee is growing cold."

"Yes," I said.

She waited. I made no move to it.

She nodded.

And she said, "If you find this man, would you expect to deal with him physically?"

"That would not be my first plan."

"I recognize his description."

"Are you recommending physical?"

"Not as a first plan. I know only a very small handful of Kemal's men in Paris and I'd rather not lose one, as odd as that sounds. We can keep an eye on the ones we know."

"I understand."

"Alternatively," she said, "I'd rather not lose you."

I let the ambiguity of that pass. I said, "I'm trying not to lose my friend Hemingway."

"His name is Devrim Koprulu," she said. She told me the bar he frequented.

She hesitated.

I waited.

She told me his personal address.

"Be careful," she said.

"Is he primarily muscle?"

"He can do things of that sort. But he's also a handler. Runs some agents."

"Can he make a decision to lay off of Hemingway if I can make it attractive to him?"

"From what I know."

"Thank you," I said. "For all of it."

I needed no more from Selene. I let the silence begin to sit between us. For the moment, I found myself reluctant to leave her.

She understood. Then she surprised me. "You're married," she said.

“Yes.”

“I’m glad for you.”

“The work you gave yourself over to in Turkey,” I said. “It’s still incomplete.”

“Sadly.”

“I’m sorry.”

She nodded.

I said, “And are you simply disguised today? Or are you mourning?”

“Only for the world,” she said. “For the things in people’s hearts and what they might do about them. The Great War is over but the battles go on. There are still victims everywhere.”

I nodded, and our shared gaze grew still, abided for a long moment.

But time was short.

“I have to go,” I said.

“As do I,” she said. “I didn’t expect to play this scene again.”

“Nor did I.”

She lowered her veil.

“I’ll wear the mourning clothes an extra day,” she said.

I stood.

She turned her head away.

When I emerged from the bistro I paused before its door to decide which way to go, but Selene prompted a last reflexive breath, though this one was slow going in and just as slow coming back out.

Selene had led me to make a decision I’d been deferring. Part of me expected simply to confront the Turk as a tough guy. I’d offer a trade in his boss’ best interests, but if he didn’t want to make it, I’d propose that he end up face-down in the Seine floating toward England. Something like that. A clear, violent alternative to accepting my bargain. Said strongly enough to get him to make the first move, if that was going to be his choice. Him first. To salve my conscience for another killing. I was temperamentally ready for this eventuality. The success I’d had over the years often relied on having to enact just such a solution.

I was fine with that.

I may even have enjoyed that.

Yes, something in me enjoyed that.

And I despised that.

But I had another skill. Not unlike Selene’s. For this boy Hemingway, I’d play out the other rope first. Which involved my assuming another identity. A familiar one.

Koprulu’s apartment and the bar he frequented were a short walk up Boulevard de Strasbourg. But first I had to get the goods for the trade proposal. So I headed to Shakespeare & Company. It was past noon. Hemingway’s phantom story on Kemal and his reporter’s notes should be waiting for me.

I stepped into the shop and Sylvia was away from the front desk. Then I spotted a familiar figure mid-shop, drinking something from a teacup in the chair where Pound had been sitting when I first met Hem.

Familiar indeed, this guy, with his gray goatee and owlish-round wire-rimmed glasses, his London tweeds and his silk shirt with a floppy, turned-down, Byronic collar. And he still combed his hair forward into ancient-Roman bangs.

Lincoln Steffens.

I strode in, approaching him. He looked up. He stood up.

"Kit Cobb," he proclaimed and we shook hands.

A good man with a muckraker's soul, but also with a sweet-tooth for totalitarians. Mugs like Lenin and Mussolini. A good journalist if you liked your news done up with political bias in a big sloppy bow, like that tie around his neck.

Steffens said, "How's your man Bunky Millerman?"

"Good. Good."

"He in Paris with you? Shooting the place?"

"Wish he was."

"He'd get some swell photos."

"I thought you were in Lausanne with Hemingway."

Steffens wagged his head slowly. "Poor bastard. I came down to help him search the train station. I felt bad. Responsible even."

"He tell you his theory?"

"Yes. I felt bad enough I'd made Hadley act crazy. But if my being drunkenly public about his talent gets him killed on top of it, I'll just go off and be a monk somewhere. I swear."

"Maybe it won't come to that," I said.

Steffens wagged his head again, this time in the direction of his shoes. "It's hard to think his stuff will turn up now. The little I'd seen of the stories was extraordinary. Such an original voice. They were perfect to my ear, these stories. What a loss."

He was starting to ramble. His sense of guilt seemed real. But I didn't say anything about my plan. He was apparently prone to shooting off his mouth.

Sylvia saved me from him, emerging from the back room.

I excused myself from Steffens and followed Sylvia to the front of the store.

"I have something for you," she said.

She pulled two Number 9 manila envelopes from her desk drawer. "From Ernest," she said. One was marked "Story." One was marked "Notes."

The two of them fit nicely together in an inner coat pocket.

Sylvia leaned near to me and lowered her voice. "How is he?"

The word that came to mind was *vengeful*. But I didn't say it. I thought of *hopeful*. I supposed he was, thinking me capable in this task. I didn't say that either, as I didn't know how long that mood had lasted. I said, "Holding up."

"It's difficult," she said in that sweetly sympathetic, almost-child's voice of hers.

I reached out and squeezed her elbow. "I may be able to help."

"I do so hope you can," she said.

"How's Hadley?"

"I haven't seen her. But I can imagine."

I leaned to Sylvia and kissed her on both cheeks, like a Frenchman.

And I went out of the shop.

Then it was time for the actor to prepare.

I returned to our apartment in Rue Madame. Louise was out.

I stood at the kitchen basin with my badger-hair shaving brush and my Solingen razor. And my mugs. The ceramic one whipped full of lather. And the one in the mirror before me.



I studied my close-cropped beard. It was just as well Louise was not here. Her feelings were unresolutely ambiguous about the scar on my cheek that I was about to expose. It was acquired long ago, before Louise and I had known each other, and at first it became an object of tenderness for her nurse's soul. But eventually she learned that the sudden exposure of this secret part of my body meant I needed to play the role of a German with a revered dueling-society scar, and that meant things were about to become dangerous for me.

The real origin of the long, crescent scar on my left cheek was, in one respect, not unlike a classic *Schmiss*, its having been administered by a German wielding a saber. But it was done under a markedly unclassic circumstance, in Mexico, by a German agent.

I was sorry Louise would have to live with this thing for a few weeks. But I needed to show it now. The Turk secret service still had a soft spot in its heart for the Germans. I figured that would be useful in the plan I had for presenting my trade offer.

After the shaving was done, I stepped away from the mirror with only a brief glance. At least for the moment. This was always a bit of a rough transformation for me.

Working tools first.

My Mauser .32-caliber pocket pistol, which I secured, as was my custom, in a holster positioned at the small of my back.

My leather-pouch of lock-picking tools tucked into a side pocket of my coat.

A passport for one Josef Wilhelm Jäger, an operative for the German secret service. Sometimes, as well, when my studied excellence in their language might have a faint taint of an English-speaker in it, Jäger was a German-American journalist for a German-language newspaper in the U.S. But today, with a Turk, Jäger would simply be a German spy. For that I also had a nicely done-up document identifying me as an embassy cultural attaché, an American lie of a document that would be taken by anyone in the espionage game as a German lie of a document. I slipped the document and my passport into an inner pocket of my coat.

I patted the other inner pocket to feel Hem's story and notes.

Then I squared up before the mirror to confront Herr Jäger. The man with the scimitar of a scar running from just below the cheekbone to just above the jawbone.

"You again," I said to him. To myself portraying him.

"As always, it's for a good cause," I said.

He did not disagree.

It was time to find Devrim Koprulu.

As my fuller plan shaped up in my head, I chose to work his apartment first, one way or another. His building was just off Strasbourg on Rue du Château d'Eau, accessed through a pair of iron doors fronting the sidewalk. I preferred not to pick a big ward lock just off a busy street in the middle of the afternoon. So I stepped to the opposite doorway and leaned against it and lit a cigarette.

It wasn't long before the door latch began to clank from the inside. I strode quickly back across the street, and by the time the occupant of the building was opening the door I was ready to come in. Ready even for it to be Koprulu.

It was a woman with a baby in her arms. I tipped my Trilby and held the door for her, and she fully pulled her baby against her with the help of her freed arm. She thanked me and went her way.

I went in. And up. To the top floor, the fifth. I slowed to a soft creep as I approached Koprulu's door. I leaned to it, listened. Nothing. I pulled back. The simplest version of my plan was the most direct. Knock on his door and confront him. I wasn't sure which version I was hoping for. But this one was first.

So I knocked.

No answer.

I knocked again. Still nothing.

All right. Now the complications.

First the lock. A Yale type. I'd gotten very good at opening these over the years. I withdrew a pick and a torque wrench from my pouch, inserted them in the keyway, and then I worked the pick along, lifting the tumblers as I went. The last one yielded, I rotated the wrench, and I was in.

The place was one room. Fastidious. The bed in the corner was made with tight quilt corners. Military perhaps. But almost prissy. An excessive three pillows, arranged in a tier rising against the wall. A clean sink, clean pots hanging on hooks, though they showed wear, and there was a faint scent of mint about the place, and oregano. Yes, fastidious. Quite a few very good agents had that personality quirk, I'd found. We all had to be good at detail work, after all.

That trait in Koprulu also made it easy for me to look for what I wanted. There were very few places where Hem's work could be tucked away out of sight, either in or out of the valise.

I searched fruitlessly beneath the bed. In a canvas trunk at its foot. In, and under, a small chest of drawers. In a wardrobe. There, however, within a false bottom hidden beneath Koprulu's folded prayer rug, I found his small arsenal.

I pulled the centerpiece from its shoulder holster: a Belgian-made version of the Browning 1903, the standard issue pistol in the recently deceased Ottoman Empire. Beneath it was a military issue Jambiya dagger with a chased brass handle and scabbard. He was out and about unarmed. Unless he had a specific task to perform, that was wise for a Turk in Paris in 1922.

I replaced his weaponry, closed his wardrobe door, and faced a reality. Things did not look good for Ernie's manuscripts. Not if Koprulu had done the snatching as well as the shadowing. Which was likely.

But the papers might simply be off with a translator. And there was still the matter of Hemingway's life to negotiate.

So I took a cane-back chair from beside the small dining table, set it in the center of the floor, facing the door, drew my Mauser, and I sat down to wait.

The time passed without my awareness as I settled spontaneously into a fugue on the theme of dark-eyed women, prompted by one who guided me to this chair and one to whom I hoped safely to return.

Then the apartment lock began to chitter with a key and I rose and stepped swiftly, silently to a place at the wall beside the door.

The door opened and paused. He was on the other side of it, no doubt looking at the chair before him, wondering how it got there. Then his fingers appeared,

curling around the door, giving it a push toward closure as he stepped to the chair.

As he came into my view—this familiarly swarthy, well-put-together middleweight with his left shoulder higher than his right—I gave the closing door a hard kick shut and instantly placed the muzzle of my Mauser against the back of Koprulu's skull.

He stopped at once.

I reached and tapped beneath his left elbow and he promptly raised his two hands.

"*Buyurun,*" I said, the welcome of a Turk shopkeeper hoping to make a sale.

Koprulu was behaving. Standing very still.

I said, in French, assuming that was our lingua franca, "I have just used up most of my Turkish vocabulary. Are you good with French? Or perhaps you know German? I am a German. Our two countries have long been friends. Perhaps you have learned my language, as an operative of your country's secret service."

My tone was friendly. My words invoked a national friendship. I let him know that I knew exactly what he was, which implied I was a German counterpart. But I kept the pistol against his skull. All this prompted him to turn his head just a little, as if he wanted to look me in the eyes. Turkish men liked to talk to other men with strong eye contact.

I nudged him just a little with the pistol so he didn't get any ideas about spinning around.

He looked fully forward again.

"So will it be French?" I said.

"French," he said.

I patted him enough to confirm the Browning and dagger in the wardrobe were his only weapons, and I backed off a couple of steps. "Turn around slowly," I said.

He did.

He didn't have to be asked to keep his hands up.

His eyes went from mine to the scar on my cheek and back to my eyes.

I'd turned my head very subtly to the right so he would do just that. "From my university days," I said.

He nodded once.

He knew the Germans.

"Please sit down in the chair," I said.

He did, slowly.

I said, "You can put your hands on your knees. Just keep them there for the time being."

He did what he was told.

"I'm very sorry about the pistol," I said. "And about breaking into your apartment. It smells like you are a good cook."

His eyes had trouble holding steady in his gaze on mine. My tone was confusing the hell out of him.

I said, "I let myself in because I needed to approach you in secret. I am in your same line of work."

He nodded once again. His shoulders loosened just a little. He was settling down.

I withdrew the German Embassy document and my passport from my inner pocket. I reached them forward.

“By way of introduction,” I said. “You may take these and examine them.”

He lifted his hands, grasped the papers, pulled them toward him—all this slowly, one discrete movement at a time, as if they were fragile, though it was his own present fragility he had in mind—and then he began to look the papers over.

While he did, without my removing my eyes or my aim from him, I took a step to the side and secured the other chair from the table and placed it before him.

I sat down. A sign of respect. We would speak now on the same level.

With a couple of glances he noticed the gesture as I executed it, but he continued to examine the documents.

He finished. Looked up.

I reached out for the papers’ return.

He offered them gingerly.

No funny business.

He immediately returned his hands to his knees.

I put the documents into an inner pocket.

And I lifted the Mauser, turned it sideways to stress to him that it was no longer pointed in his direction. I slipped the pistol into an outside coat pocket.

I was ready for a lunge by Koprulu. If one was coming, it would be now.

But the moments were passing. He did not move.

Then he said, in German, “What do you want, Herr Jäger?” It was awkward German, but his making the effort was a good sign.

I pulled him back to French, which he preferred. I said, “We have an awkward situation that you’ve been drawn into, unawares. As you might expect, we Germans are deeply sympathetic with your country. We still have common enemies. And now you must deal with the British and French whores in Lausanne. We admire your Mustafa Kemal Pasha, his strength and his vision of Turkey’s destiny. I hope my country will someday find a man like him.”

I paused to let all that sink in.

Koprulu managed a small smile for me and a slow, affirming nod.

I said, “We share your fate. So we are very interested in the conference. From which we have been excluded. We have even placed a secret agent there. And this is the awkward thing I’ve come to you about.”

Koprulu straightened a little in his chair, though he assiduously kept his hands on his knees.

I said, “Do you follow me so far?”

“Yes, of course,” he said.

“Please relax your hands now, Devrim bey.” I addressed him respectfully.

He lifted them in acknowledgement and then put them right back down on his knees. We were doing okay.

I said, “Our agent is a recent recruit. He is known in Paris and in Lausanne as an American by the name of Ernest Hemingway.”

Koprulu’s brow knit very briefly and released. He knew who I meant.

I said, “He has lived in America. But he is, in fact, of German origin. Hemingstein is his family name. Ernst von Hemingstein. Your people are unaware that he is an agent of the German secret service. Your own assignment with

regards to him is perfectly understandable, given the secrecy of our relationship with Hemingstein. And given some other, easily misunderstood circumstances.”

I paused.

Koprulu was saying nothing. I did not expect an overt confirmation. But the absence of a denial was its equivalent.

I said, “As for the misunderstanding, I mentioned Hemingstein was a recent agent. I recruited him myself in Constantinople. Four months ago. He was a journalist at the time, working for a Canadian newspaper, and he’d heard some scurrilous rumors about Kemal Pasha. His newspaper required that he follow up on these rumors. But the more Hemingstein inquired, the more he rejected the rumors. Indeed, his growing regard for your great leader was instrumental in my recruiting him to our similar cause.”

I paused. That was the basic lie I had to sell to make this deal. I let it sit inside Koprulu. His gaze had intensified. I felt his mind working behind it.

I gave him a few moments more, and then I said, “Devrim bey, I understand this is difficult for you. That I should show up suddenly and intrusively and ask you to adjust your thinking in such a drastic way. But this American journalist Ernest Hemingway. He would mean nothing to you except for one thing. For one reason alone is he of interest to your people. Am I not right?”

This time there was no Turkish mono-nod of assent. He said at once, “Slander.”

“Slander,” I said. “Just so. Of your country’s savior.”

“Slander,” Koprulu said.

I said, “Hemingstein has no interest in slandering the leader of the Turkish people. As proof of that I am here to offer you the sole copy of the story he was forced to write. You will see his attitude within it. And I will offer you all the original notes he took in his inquiries.”

I pulled the two envelopes from inside my coat.

I held them aloft for Koprulu.

His eyes followed them, fixed on them.

“They are written in English. But your people will translate them and understand.”

His eyes returned to mine.

“They will be pleased with you for so clear a resolution,” I said.

I drew the envelopes down.

His eyes returned to them, followed them.

He and I were of one mind on this.

“But I require two things of you, Devrim bey.”

I waited for his attention to return to me.

Then I said, “You will stop following our man. You will no longer have need, of course. He represents no threat of slander, so you must no longer threaten him. Do you understand this first stipulation?”

The nod of assent. Koprulu even added, “Naturally.”

I said, “The second stipulation is every bit as important. It is the return of his manuscripts. The contents of the valise you took from his wife’s train compartment in the Gare de Lyon. Those papers have absolutely nothing to do with his journalism. In exchange for those, I will give you these.”

Devrim Koprulu had been quite attentive to my Josef Wilhelm Jäger through this little scene. Attentive, but within a narrow range of emotion appropriate to Koprulu's encounter with a fellow spy over the recognizable details of a mission under his command. The unfolding of my second stipulation, however, provoked a change in him that traveled outside that range. As I detailed it, his brow knitted tight, his head began to list to starboard, his eyes narrowed and then widened then narrowed again as if he'd lost his eyeglasses and was trying to read some crucial fine print.

This emotion that evolved in Devrim Koprulu would best be described as *What the hell are you talking about?*

His hands rose from his knees, showing their palms. "I know nothing of a valise," he said.

I mostly believed what his body had been telling me. But I had to be sure. I had to clarify. I had to call any possible bluff.

"You stole it," I said.

"I did not."

"You know who did," I said, and I began to return the two envelopes to my coat pocket.

"I do not," he said, but his eyes flashed very briefly in the direction of the wardrobe. Toward his pistol. Too far. Buried. More a reflex glance of regret, but enough of a give-away that I knew he was ready to fight. Any moment now.

He wanted these envelopes.

I didn't want the scene to get physical. I'd win that battle, but at what cost to the deal.

I popped the envelopes back out of my coat.

But I withheld them, saying, "Somebody else may have stolen them."

His eyes fixed now on Hemingway's story and notes as if I'd just pulled off a music hall magic trick to make them reappear. I could sense his body skidding to a stop inside. Holding back from any rough stuff.

I pressed on, "Somebody from the *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*." I used their own name for their secret service.

He looked at me, rolled his shoulders ever so slightly. Collected himself. And he said, "I am working alone concerning your Herr Hemingstein. If a valise was to be stolen, I would have stolen it. If I had the valise or knew where it was, I would tell you now. I am happy to take these papers you offer and spare your man's life and close this case. I am happy for both our countries to rise once more in this world of whores. But I have no valise. Not I and not anyone else from *Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*. I have no reason to lie about this."

His gaze was steady. His logic was plausible. I believed him.

And so the deal was struck. The exchange was made. But only for young Ernest Hemingway's life. Not his manuscripts.

What drew me at once back to Sylvia Beach's bookshop? I was sad about Hem's manuscripts but reminded of my own. I was struggling with my novel but at least the manuscript was safe. I was keenly conscious of that, after what I'd just gone through, and I was reminded that I should return to its creation.

But I just wasn't a novelist at the moment. Even a would-be one. I was too recently Kit Cobb the spy. Not just him. Kit Cobb the American spy drawing on Kit

Cobb the actor playing Josef Wilhelm Jäger the German spy. Far far from the man I wanted to be, Christopher Marlowe Cobb the novelist. Sylvia's bookshop was my pathway to that man. Books. Writers. Literary conversation.

When I stepped in, Steffens was still there. Mid-shop, he was in Hemingway's chair talking heatedly with a heavy-set man with a major mustache and a minor chin sitting across from him.

I paused at Sylvia's front desk.

"Hello, dear," she said.

"Hello, Sylvia."

"Any luck finding Ernest's stories?"

"I'm afraid not." I decided not to add that I'd at least saved him from a Turkish dagger in the ribs. Instead, I asked, "Who's that with Lincoln?"

"Ford Madox Ford. Have I introduced you?"

"Should I know him?"

"You should know his novel *The Good Soldier*." Then she rose. "Come," she said. "I'll take you to a copy. We can circumvent the conversation. They're arguing Mussolini, not literature."

As we passed by the two men, I thought: *Steffens shooting off his mouth again. Too bad. Hem's stories are gone. Too bad.*

At a far corner of the back wall, Sylvia put Ford's novel in my hand and explained why his surname was different on the title page—Hueffer, his real name, changed for its German taint during the war. And she explained how the narrator of the novel was unreliable, how Ford led us to see through him. It sounded like just the book for me tonight.

A customer entered the shop and Sylvia left me. I drifted past Hueffer and Steffens, whose back was to me and did not realize I was there. The conversation had softened, had moved on from *il Duce* to James Joyce.

I lingered. Leaned against the fireplace, backdropped by writer photographs.

The literary boys' conversation slid away from writing and into Irish politics, and I thumbed Ford's book for a few moments, unseeing. The place wasn't quite yet showing me a path to my writing desk. I closed the book and turned to face all the writers on the wall.

A young Walt Whitman, pre-Civil War, stared me in the eyes. Admiringly, it seemed to me. And next to him, the next frame over, was Lincoln Steffens himself. Steffens and Ezra Pound. The two men were sitting on a café bench, side by side, shoulder to shoulder, coffee cups before them. Pound's face was turned to look out of frame. Lincoln's gaze was turned to Ezra. Admiringly.

And Pound came to mind from my first sight of him in this bookshop. He was savaging Hemingway's stories. Ready to blue-pencil them mercilessly. He clearly figured he knew what was best for Ernie. *Ex cathedra*, Sylvia had said. With cape and cane his cassock and crosier, Ezra was the Paris Pope of Literature. And apparently a pal of Steffens. Big-mouthed Steffens, who, however, considered Hemingway's stories already perfect to his ear and who was eager to read them all and advocate them as is. Who had wanted to read them in Lausanne.

I had a thought.

I went to the front of the shop where Sylvia had just sent her customer on his way to the shelves.

She turned to me. "Sylvia," I said. "I noticed the photo. Are Steffens and Pound buddies?"

"Not quite that," she said. "Ezra does not take on buddies. Lincoln's more of an acolyte."

"And Hadley," I said. "Does Pound acknowledge her?"

"Oh yes. As an appropriate appendage to Ernest. Ezra and his wife Dorothy are close to the Hemingways. They all do things together."

There were clearly ways for Steffens' attitudes and intentions and Hadley's plan for Lausanne to end up in Ezra's brain. This bookshop, with its social heart, was no doubt involved.

I said, "Sylvia dear, please tell me where Ezra lives."

Her eyes widened. "Do you think?"

"I wonder," I said.

Pound's address was on the Rue Notre Dame des Champs just on the other side of the Luxembourg Gardens. The iron doors on the street, which I found unlocked, opened into an outer courtyard. His apartment was at the rear, and I had unimpeded access into a passageway that led through the *pavillon* to a rear courtyard. He lived in a duplex. The downstairs room had an oaken door. And up an outside staircase was the bedroom above. Between them stood a weathered, one-armed statue of a naked goddess Diana and her hound.

I knocked at the door. And again.

No one answered.

I was ready to pick my way in, but this door too was unlocked.

I stepped inside.

The light through the courtyard windows was muted but adequate for what I wanted. The place made me admire my neat Turk. I had to clear my head of the profusion of objects. The walls were full of art, from a large canvas of gray forms swirling about a peevish Asian prince to paintings of abstract shapes, but restless ones, leaning and colliding and tumbling around. And the other objects of the room cluttered into similar-seeming stacks and sprawls and arrangements. Fencing foils and tennis rackets, a crowded setting of wood and canvas chairs, a clavichord against a wall with a pair of boxing gloves hanging over it. An odd triangular typing table with a massive Underwood. And of course books and manuscripts, a profusion of them.

The first chaotic impression of the place washed over me and I came up for air. I began to circle the room, focused, in this first pass, on finding the valise itself, my eyes doing their work on their own while my mind tumbled around outside of the bag. If Hemingway's stories were here, they could already have been separated and were lurking amidst all the other papers. That thought made me wonder if Pound was simply blue-penciling them, as he'd arranged. But if that was his intention, why would he follow Hadley and steal them when they'd already been freely offered by Ernie?

And my eyes stopped me.

They were looking at a shabby, alligator-embossed, leatherette valise.

It sat on the floor beside the room's cast-iron coal stove.

Sat there empty? The contents burnt?

I feared it.



I stepped to the bag, crouched beside it, fumbled it open.

It was full of manuscripts.

Then a voice behind me. "Come to borrow a lump of coal, have you?"

I rose and spun to find Ezra Pound standing in the doorway in shirt sleeves and a green waistcoat that looked as if it was made of billiard cloth.

He said, "I thought I heard your knock. If you will excuse my dishabille, I was having a rest up the steps. But as for me, I'm afraid I will *not* excuse your breaking into *la mia amata casa*." He paused and lifted his chin at this, severely inverting a smile.

I said, "As I'm sure Hadley Hemingway did not excuse your breaking into her beloved train compartment to steal her bag."

Pound's face descended and the frown collapsed into a scowl. "Wait just a moment. Wait. You look familiar. That newspaper scribbler lurking in the corner of my favorite bookstore."

I reached down and picked up the valise by its handles. "More to the point, I'm a friend of my fellow newspaper scribbler, Ernest Hemingway."

Pound looked at the valise and then at me. "You are no friend to Ernest Hemingway if you plan to return him to his infantile stage as a writer."

"That's for him to decide," I said.

"Ah, but a good father must one day forcibly rip the pacifier from his son's mouth."

"You'll need to stand aside, Mr. Pound," I said.

He wagged his head in exaggerated regret.

And then he lifted his fists and struck a pose from somewhere back in the bare-knuckle days. He said, "Your friend Hemingway has taught me to box. Sufficiently, I have no doubt, to chastise a nondescript scribbler."

With that he advanced.

I bent and placed the valise on the floor beside me, and by the time I was upright, Ezra Pound was in front of me, his arm was back and poised and loading up to throw a straight right-hand punch. When it came I slipped it with ease, resquared before him, and I used my left hand to pop him a stiff jab in the nose.

He stepped back, bumped one of his wood and canvas chairs, and he sat down, a trickle of blood commencing from his right nostril.

I picked up the valise, pulled my handkerchief from my pocket, and handed it to him.

He dabbed at his nose for a moment. Then he lifted his eyes to me. "I am moved, scribbler," he said. "I recommend you write your sentences in just such a way."

He offered the handkerchief back to me.

"You can keep the handkerchief. But I'll take Hadley's valise. Along with the pugilistic pacifier from your mouth."

Pound patted his nose again. "You are a good father," he said.

I said, "If you want to throw a straight right, young Ezra, don't meditate on it beforehand. Just throw it."

He smiled at me. "That's excellent advice."

I cabled Hemingway in Lausanne, only telling him that I'd recovered the valise and its contents. That night he cabled back to me: *YOU THE CHAMP I ARRIVE ON*

*LAUSANNE PARIS EXPRESS TOMORROW SEE YOU CAFÉ 74 QUAI DES ORFÈVRES  
1630 HOURS KEEP ALL THIS BETWEEN US FOR NOW HEM*

The light in Paris was growing dim at 1630. The café was in the middle of the Seine, just off the Place du Pont Neuf on the western end of the Île de la Cité. The valise and I went to a small table at the rear of the joint and I put my back to the wall to wait.

I'd spent the night reading Ernest Hemingway.

I was pleased to find him struggling in his manuscripts just as I was, with his voice. Sounding too much like the news reporter he mostly still was. Too much the authority who already knows what's what. Explaining the big things when it's the details that carry a story.

Almost at once he appeared in the café, recognizable even in silhouette in the doorway. He spotted me and came and sat before me.

"Deux Calvados," he told the waiter.

He looked beside the table, at the valise on the floor. "I am eternally grateful, Kit," he said, and he leaned down and dragged the bag over beside his chair. "Ezra confessed in a series of cables to me."

I was glad not to have to explain.

He said, "We've decided never to speak of this, the two of us. Will you go along with that?"

"I will."

I noticed that it was just the three of us he singled out. I said, "I'm sure Hadley is relieved."

"I haven't told her."

He read the surprise in my face. He said, "Her mistake is the same, no matter who the thief. And there's a complication."

Our drinks arrived and Hemingway waved off any further conversation.

We drank and he savored, while I drank and wondered and waited. But when he spoke again, it was about Lausanne and what a bluff and blowhard Mussolini was and what a mess the Allies were continuing to make of the peace.

Finally, when our drinks were finished, I said, "And the complication?"

"Come with me," Hemingway said.

He paid for the drinks, picked up his valise, and led me out of the café, into the twilight, and onto the Pont Neuf, heading in the direction of the Left Bank. As we walked above the Seine, he said, "Ezra also made his case in those cables. I've been learning how to punch but I still can't fight. I'm too conscious of what I've been doing. I see that now. If you want to throw a straight right, don't meditate on it beforehand. Just throw it. You know what I mean?"

I looked at him. "I do," I said. Ezra the thief.

He said, "Things are already as they should be between Hadley and me."

I had no standing to question that.

He said, "Every writer needs a myth."

Hemingway stopped now.

We were halfway across the bridge. The light was just about gone. "There's just one thing left to do," he said.

And he turned, held aloft the valise that contained every copy of his novel and all his stories, and he threw it over the balustrade and into the River Seine.

That night I made love to Louise, vowing silently never to treat her the way Hemingway was treating his wife, and when she was sleeping, I rose and lit the gas jet above my writing desk. I placed my novel manuscript on my desktop, removed the title page—*The Hot Country* by Christopher Marlowe Cobb—and laid all the rest of it on the floor beside me. I would place it in the trash in the morning. I looked at the postcard leaning against this morning's coffee cup. Me from behind, walking on the street in Vera Cruz, with dead Mexican snipers lying nearby and I'm passing them without a glance. I rolled paper into my Corona Portable Number 3, and I began my novel once again.

