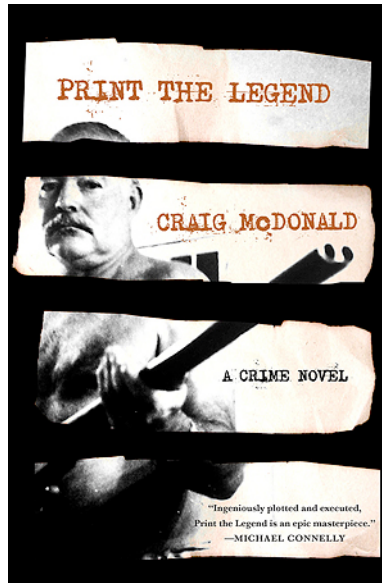

***PAULSON:
IDAHO, 1965***



“An eye for an eye would make the whole world blind.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

THE UNQUIET GRAVE

Hannah stood with her hands in her pockets, feeling the sun on her back through her Polo shirt and savoring the scent of freshly mown grass.

Arcing sprinklers slashed and splashed the headstones and made pools of the engraved letters in the flat and massive marker at their feet.

A backhoe growled near the gated entrance where the custodians were breaking ground for a new grave.

Richard crouched at Hannah's feet, his hand pressed to the cool marble.

The Ketchum Cemetery was shaded by Baldy Mountain and situated catty-corner across 75 from the Topping House. The house where Hemingway died was almost in line of sight of Papa's grave. Hannah thought it had to have been one of the world's briefest funeral cortèges that morning of July 5, 1961.

Flanked by twin pine trees, Papa's marker was a big drab marble slab carved to say it all plainly: his name and dates of birth and death. Dried brown pine needles nestled in the niches of the letters and numerals and chunky pinecones lay strewn across the face of the imposing gray slab. Papa's plot had cost \$25 in 1960. Six plots had been bought. Laconic explanation for the extra turf: "We Hemingways like a lot of room."

Hannah scanned the cemetery. Just one mourner in sight — a tall, mannish woman with short, salt-and-pepper hair. A few black crows...all the dead...and, a few yards off, a young man with longish hair, working at an easel. Curious, Hannah strode toward him.

"Whatcha working on?"

He was slender and tall — a little over six-feet and tanned. He had careless auburn hair and five-day stubble, ratty T-shirt and denim pants, looking every inch the artist.

The stranger smiled back at Hannah and said, "Just getting some roughs done to incorporate in the bigger piece."

Raising her eyebrows and smiling, her hands clasped behind her back, she leaned around to his side of the canvas. He was painting Papa's grave.

"It's good," Hannah said. "What is the 'bigger piece,' if I may ask?"

“It’s a triptych. Huge...too big to tote around much, even in pieces.” He smiled and shifted his brushes to his left hand, held out the right. “Tom Adams.”

Hannah shook his hand and smiled. “Hannah.” She gestured at his painting of Papa’s grave. “Hemingway’s the subject of your piece?”

“That’s right. It’s a picture of a wide boulevard. Each of the buildings on either side of the street are some structure associated with Hemingway. I’m finishing here. Started in Cuba, with the Finca, ’cause if I couldn’t get access to that, well, why bother, right?”

Hannah tipped her head on side. “I love the concept. You’ve done the house in Key West?”

“Yeah. And the house where he was born in Oak Park, the cabin in Michigan. The apartments in Paris...others. The street will dead-end at the house over there,” he said, gesturing in the direction of the Topping house. “I call it ‘Rue de Papa.’ I’m going to put his grave in the front yard of the house where he shot himself. I’ll start on the house in a couple of days.”

“How long have you been at this?”

“Three years, between the other jobs — stuff to match people’s couches. Gotta make the crust, huh?”

“Sure, absolutely.” Hannah smiled. “Hope to see the finished piece someday.”

He fished a wrinkled business card from the back pocket of his jeans, the card bowed to the contour of his ass. “Here, send me your address and I’ll send you a photo of it when it’s done.”

“Aye.” She smiled and slipped the card in her shirt pocket, sideways to hug the curve of her swollen breast. “It was nice to meet you, Tom.”

“You too.” He gestured at her belly. “Hoping for a girl or a boy?”

Richard was increasingly adamant their child would be a girl: “Hem couldn’t do it — all those boys he had — but *I* will.”

Increasingly, Hannah found herself wondering how Richard would take it if their baby was a boy.

“Whichever,” Hannah told the painter. She smiled and nodded, backing toward her husband.

Richard brushed a few pine needles from the H, E and M and then picked up a couple of pinecones and stuffed them in this shirt pocket for souvenirs. “We’ll get the drunken little bitch for what she did,” he vowed aloud, rising and wincing as his knees cracked. As he said it, Hannah linked her arm through his. “My back hurts. I need to nap, Richard.”

Her husband smiled crookedly.

“No, Richard — truly nap.”

As they walked from the grave, Hannah twice caught herself looking back at the painter.

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