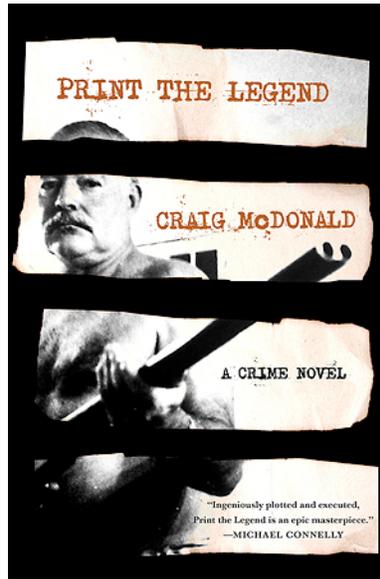


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***CREEDY:***  
***NANCY, FRANCE, 1944***

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*“Any information which you have relating to the unreliability of Ernest Hemingway as an informant may be discreetly brought to the attention of Ambassador Braden...I desire that you furnish me at an early date results of your conversation with Ambassador Braden concerning Ernest Hemingway and his aides and their activities.”*

— J. Edgar Hoover  
Confidential Memo

The young military attorney, a guy named William Evans, Jr., said, “I want to assure you up front, Mr. Lassiter, I’m here as *your* advocate and I will do my level best to get you out from under all this. I also want you to know, Mr. Lassiter, on a personal level,

that I'm a tremendous fan of yours — of your writing, of course. But I also admire what you did in theater, even if officially I have to lament it.”

Hector looked the young man over — crisply uniformed, fresh-faced and quick-eyed. Seemed like a bright kid. And Hector had to count on Billy, as Hector chose to call him, to pull his ass out of this latest fire of his own reckless, feckless making...one of the few that really had Hector sweating.

“Nearly as I can tell, Mr. Lassiter—”

“Call me, Hector, please.”

A smile. “Okay, Hector. Nearly as I can tell, the general sense is you were more armed combatant and guerilla leader than war correspondent. Some of your fellow journalists — the ones who weren't so, well, let's say patriotic, or at least *intrepid* as you — blew the whistle. You're going to be accused of serving as a forward observer, of having functioned as a liaison between the OSS and French Resistance...of acquiring and storing arms for the Maquis. There are reports you held a key town on the road to Paris with a band of irregulars until our boys could get there and officially secure it. You also made it into Paris a good bit ahead of our own forces. Reputedly arbitrated local disputes, established a field command and accepted German surrenders. There's also a report of you having personally killed a sniper at the request of a Miss Beach...”

All true.

And not nearly close to touching on the scope of everything else he'd done in zealous disregard of rules of conduct for correspondents. Hector had been in it up to his eyebrows...and he'd relished every minute of it.

“It’s not true,” Hector said. “Some of it is stuff presented in false light, without context. Some of it is just vicious whispers and tongue wagging from jealous sons of bitches I scooped. Journalists are a low and catty breed, Billy. Take it from one who knows.”

“*Good*,” he said. “We hew to that tack. I’m sorry for all this Hector — you did good, brave and important work. I have that from several officers who wanted to come here and defend your actions. But since we can’t acknowledge those actions, we can’t use those men to help us here today. I know that’s going to be the hard thing for you, Hector. You’re going to have to deny everything you did for the war effort when we go before that board. You’re going to have to settle it in your mind now that you can never talk about this, and never write about any of it. Ever. There’s no clock to run out on this, do you understand?”

“Completely.” Hector didn’t care about the rest; he knew well enough what he’d done...what he had contributed. All he wanted was to walk away with his freedom from this damned drumhead trial by the Inspector General.

“If it’s any consolation, Hector, you’re not the only one facing this threat of court martial. Just on the other side of that wall is the great man himself. Almost identical allegations have been lodged against him.”

Hector frowned. “The ‘great man’? Who is that?”

“Hemingway. His hearing is just before yours.” Billy smiled. “Now that I think on it, aren’t you two friends? I could take you over for a brief chat. Might take both your minds off this other stuff to commiserate.”

Hector looked at the wall as though he could maybe see through it if he stared long enough. “No thanks, Billy,” he said softly. “Hem and me were friends — best of friends. Until 1937. Haven’t talked to Hem since. Put us in the same room together, you might have a whole new batch of things to defend me against.”

“Sorry to hear that. Well, I think you’re both going to walk away clean so long as you deny everything. You’re both too famous, too important as men and writers, for command to risk dressing down for fighting the Nazis. Nobody would be served by punishing you two.”

“I get it Billy. The secrets die with me. Tell you what, son: next war, I’m going to get the Geneva Convention tattooed on my ass in reverse so I can read it in the mirror.”

A door opened and a man walked out, looked confused. Hector thought he looked vaguely familiar, then finally placed him. The man had black, slicked-back hair, graying at the temples, and that profile: *Creedy*. He looked at Hector, then Billy, then closed the door.

Hector nodded at the closing door, said, “One of the sons of bitches who’ll be deciding my fate?”

“No,” Billy said. “Witness for the prosecution. But not against you — against Hemingway. Must have taken the wrong door.”

Hector nodded, reaching for a cigarette and his Zippo. “What do you know about him?”

“He’s FBI. Man named Creedy. As it happens, he’s a writer, too. Had a couple of crime novels published back home, they say. From my brief brushes with the man, I have to say I think his heart was really with the Nazi cause. I mean, at least in terms of the

‘Final Solution’. Could be a wild time in there for your ex-friend Hemingway. Creedy is a very vengeful man.”

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