

THE HEMINGWAY HOAX

JOE HALDEMAN

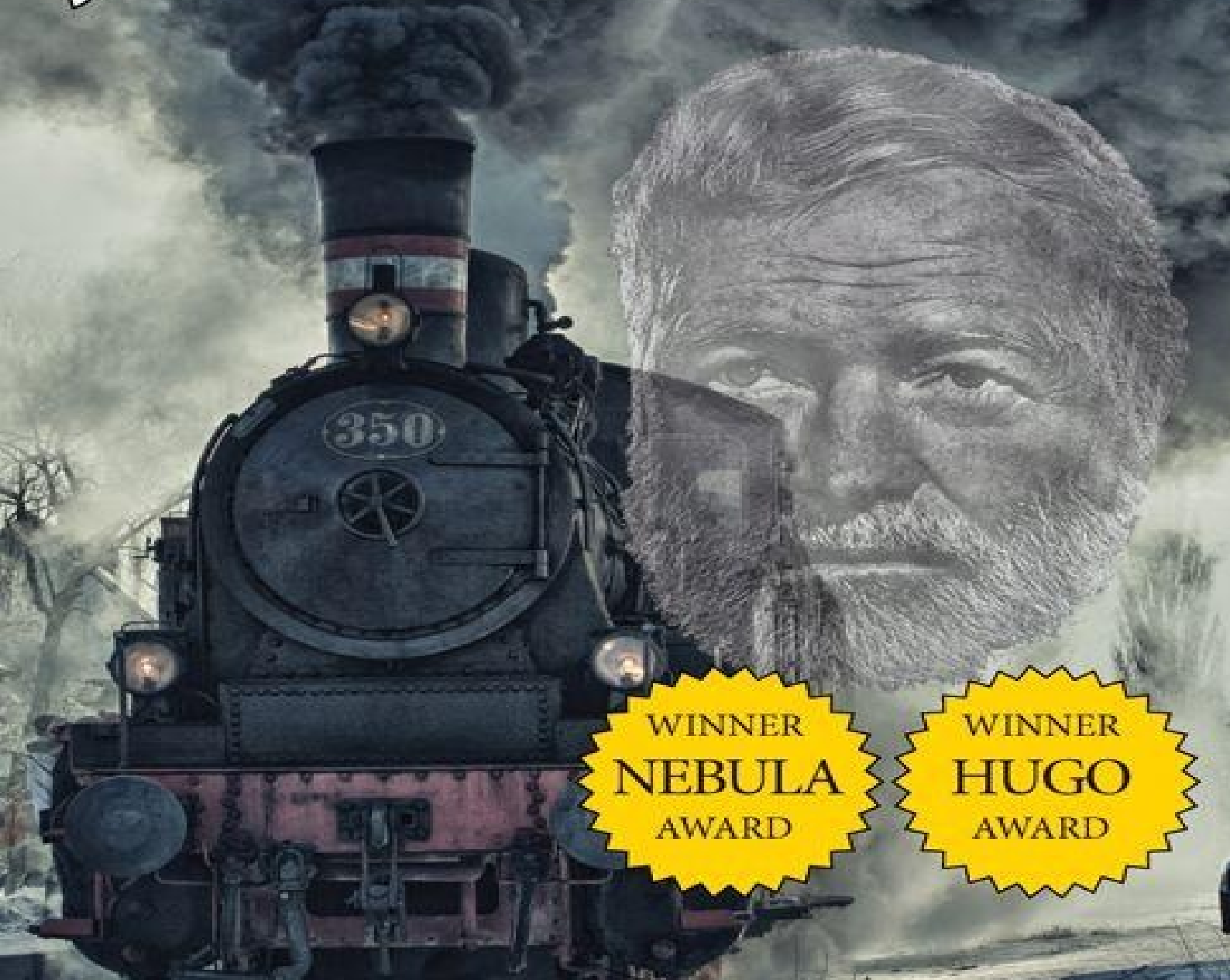


Table of Contents

THE HEMINGWAY HOAX

1. The Torrents of Spring
2. In Our Time
3. A Way You'll Never Be
4. Romance Is Dead subtitle The Hell It Is
5. The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife
6. In Our Time
7. A Clean, Well-Lighted Place
8. The Coming Man
9. Wanderings
11. A Divine Gesture
12. Marriage Is a Dangerous Game
13. In Another Country
14. The Dangerous Summer
16. Fiesta
17. On Being Shot Again
18. The Sun Also Rises
19. In Our Time
20. Of Wounds and Other Causes
21. Dying, Well or Badly
22. Death in the Afternoon
23. The Time Exchanged
24. Islands in the Stream
25. A Moveable Feast

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JOE HALDEMAN

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Our story begins in a run-down bar in Key West, not so many years from now. The bar is not the one Hemingway drank at, nor yet the one that claims to be the one he drank at, because they are both too expensive and full of tourists. This bar, in a more interesting part of town, is a Cuban place. It is neither clean nor well-lighted, but has cold beer and good strong Cuban coffee. Its cheap prices and rascally charm are what bring together the scholar and the rogue.

Their first meeting would be of little significance to either at the time, though the scholar, John Baird, would never forget it. John Baird was not capable of forgetting anything.

Key West is lousy with writers, mostly poor writers, in one sense of that word or the other. Poor people did not interest our rogue, Sylvester Castlemaine, so at first he didn't take any special note of the man sitting in the corner scribbling on a yellow pad. Just another would-be writer, come down to see whether some of Papa's magic would rub off. Not worth the energy of a con.

But Castle's professional powers of observation caught at a detail or two and focused his attention. The man was wearing jeans and a faded flannel shirt, but his shoes were expensive Italian loafers. His beard had been trimmed by a barber. He was drinking Heineken. The pen he was scribbling with was a fat Mont Blanc Diplomat, two hundred bucks on the hoof, discounted. Castle grabbed his cup of coffee and sat at a table two away from the writer.

He waited until the man paused, set the pen down, took a drink. "Writing a story?" Castle said.

The man blinked at him. "No...just an article." He put the cap on the pen with a crisp snap. "An article about stories. I'm a college professor."

"Publish or perish," Castle said.

The man relaxed a bit. "Too true." He riffled through the yellow pad. "This won't help much. It's not going anywhere."

"Tell you what...bet you a beer it's Hemingway or Tennessee Williams."

"Too easy." He signaled the bartender. "Dos cervezas. Hemingway, the early stories. You know his work?"

"Just a little. We had to read him in school—*The Old Man and the Fish*? And then I read a couple after I got down here." He moved over to the man's table. "Name's Castle."

"John Baird." Open, honest expression; not too promising. You can't con somebody unless he thinks he's conning you. "Teach up at Boston."

"I'm mostly fishing. Shrimp nowadays." Of course Castle didn't normally fish, not for things in the sea, but the shrimp part was true. He'd been reduced to heading shrimp on the Catalina for fifty dollars a bucket. "So what about these early stories?"

The bartender set down the two beers and gave Castle a weary look.

"Well...they don't exist." John Baird carefully poured the beer down the side of his glass. "They were stolen. Never published."

"So what can you write about them?"

"Indeed. That's what I've been asking myself." He took a sip of the beer and settled back. "Seventy-four years ago they were stolen. December 1922. That's really what got me working on them; thought I would do a paper, a monograph, for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the occasion."

It sounded less and less promising, but this was the first imported beer Castle had had in months. He slowly savored the bite of it.

"He and his first wife, Hadley, were living in Paris. You know about Hemingway's early life?"

"Huh uh. Paris?"

“He grew up in Oak Park, Illinois. That was kind of a prissy, self-satisfied suburb of Chicago.”

“Yeah, I been there.”

“He didn’t like it. In his teens he sort of ran away from home, went down to Kansas City to work on a newspaper.

“World War I started, and like a lot of kids, Hemingway couldn’t get into the army because of bad eyesight, so he joined the Red Cross and went off to drive ambulances in Italy. Take cigarettes and chocolate to the troops.

“That almost killed him. He was just doing his cigarettes-and-chocolate routine and an artillery round came in, killed the guy next to him, tore up another, riddled Hemingway with shrapnel. He claims then that he picked up the wounded guy and carried him back to the trench, in spite of being hit in the knee by a machine gun bullet.”

“What do you mean, ‘claims’?”

“You’re too young to have been in Vietnam.”

“Yeah.”

“Good for you. I was hit in the knee by a machine gun bullet myself, and went down on my ass and didn’t get up for five weeks. He didn’t carry anybody one step.”

“That’s interesting.”

“Well, he was always rewriting his life. We all do it. But it seemed to be a compulsion with him. That’s one thing that makes Hemingway scholarship challenging.”

Baird poured the rest of the beer into his glass. “Anyhow, he actually was the first American wounded in Italy, and they made a big deal over him. He went back to Oak Park a war hero. He had a certain amount of success with women.”

“Or so he says?”

“Right, God knows. Anyhow, he met Hadley Richardson, an older woman but quite a number, and they had a steamy courtship and got married and said the hell with it, moved to Paris to live a sort of Bohemian life while Hemingway worked on perfecting his art. That part isn’t bullshit. He worked diligently and he did become one of the best writers of his era. Which brings us to the lost manuscripts.”

“Do tell.”

“Hemingway was picking up a little extra money doing journalism. He’d gone to Switzerland to cover a peace conference for a news service. When it was over, he wired Hadley to come join him for some skiing.

“This is where it gets odd. On her own initiative, Hadley packed up all of Ernest’s work. All of it. Not just the typescripts, but the handwritten first drafts and the carbons.”

“That’s like a Xerox?”

“Right. She packed them in an overnight bag, then packed her own suitcase. A porter at the train station, the Gare de Lyon, put them aboard for her. She left the train for a minute to find something to read—and when she came back, they were gone.”

“Suitcase and all?”

“No, just the manuscripts. She and the porter searched up and down the train. But that was it. Somebody had seen the overnight bag sitting there and snatched it. Lost forever.”

That did hold a glimmer of professional interest. “That’s funny. You’d think they’d get a note from her then, like ‘If you ever want to see your stories again, bring a million bucks to the Eiffel Tower’ sort of thing.”

“A few years later, that might have happened. It didn’t take long for Hemingway to become famous. But at the time, only a few of the literary intelligentsia knew about him.”

Castle shook his head in commiseration with the long-dead thief. “Guy who stole ’em probably

didn't even read English. Dumped 'em in the river."

~~John Baird shivered visibly. "Undoubtedly. But people have never stopped looking for them. Maybe they'll show up in some attic someday."~~

"Could happen." Wheels turning.

"It's happened before in literature. Some of Boswell's diaries were recovered because a scholar recognized his handwriting on an old piece of paper a merchant used to wrap a fish. Hemingway's own last book, he put together from notes that had been lost for thirty years. They were in a couple trunks in the basement of the Ritz, in Paris." He leaned forward, excited. "Then after he died, they found another batch of papers down here, in a back room in Sloppy Joe's. It could still happen."

Castle took a deep breath. "It could be made to happen, too."

"Made to happen?"

"Just speakin', you know, in theory. Like some guy who really knows Hemingway, suppose he makes up some stories that're like those old ones, finds some seventy-five-year-old paper and an old what do you call them, not a word processor—"

"Typewriter."

"Whatever. Think he could pass 'em off for the real thing?"

"I don't know if he could fool me," Baird said, and tapped the side of his head. "I have a free memory: eidetic, photographic. I have just about every word Hemingway ever wrote committed to memory." He looked slightly embarrassed. "Of course that doesn't make me an expert in the sense of being able to spot a phony. I just wouldn't have to refer to any texts."

"So take yourself, you know, or somebody else who spent all his life studyin' Hemingway. He puts all he's got into writin' these stories—he knows the people who are gonna be readin' 'em; knows what they're gonna look for. And he hires like an expert forger to make the pages look like they came out of Hemingway's machine. So could it work?"

Baird pursed his lips and for a moment looked professorial. Then he sort of laughed, one syllable through his nose. "Maybe it could. A man did a similar thing when I was a boy, counterfeiting the memoirs of Howard Hughes. He made millions."

"Millions?"

"Back when that was real money. Went to jail when they found out, of course."

"And the money was still there when he got out."

"Never read anything about it. I guess so."

"So the next question is, how much stuff are we talkin' about? How much was in that overnight bag?"

"That depends on who you believe. There was half a novel and some poetry. The short stories there might have been as few as eleven or as many as thirty."

"That'd take a long time to write."

"It would take forever. You couldn't just 'do' Hemingway; you'd have to figure out what the stories were about, then reconstruct his early style—do you know how many Hemingway scholars there are in the world?"

"Huh uh. Quite a few."

"Thousands. Maybe ten thousand academics who know enough to spot a careless fake."

Castle nodded, cogitating. "You'd have to be real careful. But then you wouldn't have to do all the short stories and poems, would you? You could say all you found was the part of the novel. Hell, you could sell that as a book."

The odd laugh again. "Sure you could. Be a fortune in it."

"How much? A million bucks?"

"A million...maybe. Well, sure. The last new Hemingway made at least that much, allowing for

inflation. And he's more popular now."

~~Castle took a big gulp of beer and set his glass down decisively. "So what the hell are we waiting for?"~~

Baird's bland smile faded. "You're serious?"

Got a ripple in the Hemingway channel.

Twenties again?

No, funny, this one's in the 1990s. See if you can track it down?

Sure. Go down to the armory first and—

Look—no bloodbaths this time. You solve one problem and start ten more.

Couldn't be helped. It's no tea party, twentieth century America.

Just use good judgment. That Ransom guy...

Manson. Right. That was a mistake.

You can't cheat an honest man, as Sylvester Castlemaine well knew, but then again, it never hurt to find out just how honest a man is. John Baird refused his scheme, with good humor at first, but when Castle persisted, his refusal took on a sarcastic edge, maybe a tinge of outrage. He backed off and changed the subject, talking for a half hour about commercial fishing around Key West and then said he had to run. He slipped his business card into John's shirt pocket on the way out (Sylvester Castlemaine, Consultant, it claimed.)

John left the place soon, walking slowly through the afternoon heat. He was glad he hadn't brought the bicycle; it was pleasant to walk in the shade of the big aromatic trees, a slight breeze cooling his face from the Gulf side.

One could do it. One could. The problem divided itself into three parts: writing the novel fragment, forging the manuscript, and devising a suitable story about how one had uncovered the manuscript.

The writing part would be the hardest. Hemingway is easy enough to parody—one-fourth of the take-home final he gave in English 733 was to write a page of Hemingway pastiche, and some of his graduate students did a credible job—but parody was exactly what one would not want to do.

It had been a crucial period in Hemingway's development those three years of apprenticeship that the lost manuscripts represented. Two stories survived, and they were maddeningly dissimilar. "My Old Man," which had slipped down behind a drawer, was itself a pastiche, reading like pretty good Sherwood Anderson, but with an O. Henry twist at the end—very unlike the bleak understated quality that would distinguish the stories that were to make Hemingway's reputation. The other, "Up in Michigan," had been out in the mail at the time of the loss. It was a lot closer to Hemingway's ultimate style, a spare and, by the standards of the time, pornographic description of a woman's first sexual experience.

John riffled through the notes on the yellow pad, a talismanic gesture, since he could hardly remember any page with little effort. But the sight of the words and the feel of the paper sometimes helped him think.

One would not do it, of course. Except perhaps as a mental exercise. Not to show to anybody. Certainly not to profit from.

You wouldn't want to use "My Old Man" as the model, certainly; no one would care to publish a pastiche of a pastiche of Anderson, now undeservedly obscure. So "Up in Michigan." And the first story he wrote after the loss, "Out of Season," would also be handy. That had a lot of the Hemingway strength.

You wouldn't want to tackle the novel fragment, of course, not just as an exercise, over a hundred pages....

Without thinking about it, John dropped into a familiar fugue state as he walked through the run-down neighborhood, his freak memory taking over while his body ambled along on autopilot. This was the way he usually remembered pages. He transported himself back to the Hemingway collection at the JFK Library in Boston, last November, snow swirling outside the big picture windows overlooking the harbor, the room so cold he was wearing coat and gloves and could see his breath. They didn't normally let you wear a coat up there, afraid you might squirrel away a page out of the manuscript collection, but they had to make an exception because the heat pump was down.

He was flipping through the much-thumbed Xerox of Carlos Baker's interview with Hadley, page 52: "Stolen suitcase," Baker asked; "lost novel?"

The typescript of her reply appeared in front of him, more clear than the cracked sidewalk he'd just negotiated: "This novel was a knockout, about Nick, up north in Michigan—hunting, fishing, and

sorts of experiences—stuff on the order of ‘Big Two-Hearted River,’ with more action. Gi experiences well done, too.” With an enigmatic addition, evidently in Hadley’s handwriting, “Gi experiences too well done.”

That was interesting. John hadn’t thought about that, since he’d been concentrating on the sho stories. Too well done? There had been a lot of talk in the eighties about Hemingway’s sexu ambiguity—*gender* ambiguity, actually—could Hadley have been upset, sixty years after the fac remembering some confidence that Hemingway had revealed to the world in that novel; something girls knew that boys were not supposed to know? Playful pillow talk that was filed away for eventu literary exploitation?

He used his life that way. A good writer remembered everything and then forgot it when he s down to write, and reinvented it so the writing would be more real than the memory. Experience w important but imagination was more important.

Maybe I would be a better writer, John thought, if I could learn how to forget. For about the ten time today, like any day, he regretted not having tried to succeed as a writer, while he still had th independent income. Teaching and research had fascinated him when he was younger, a rich boy’s al consuming hobbies, but the end of this fiscal year would be the end of the monthly checks from th trust fund. So the salary from Boston University wouldn’t be mad money any more, but rent an groceries in a city suddenly expensive.

Yes, the writing would be the hard part. Then forging the manuscript, that wouldn’t be easy. An scholar would have access to copies of thousands of pages that Hemingway typed before and after th loss. Could one find the typewriter Hemingway had used? Then duplicate his idiosyncratic typin style—a moment’s reflection put a sample in front of him, spaces before and after periods an commas....

He snapped out of the reverie as his right foot hit the first step on the back staircase up to the rented flat. He automatically stepped over the fifth step, the rotted one, and was thinking about a ni tall glass of iced tea as he opened the screen door.

“Scorpions!” his wife screamed, two feet from his face.

“What?”

“We have scorpions!” Lena grabbed his arm and hauled him to the kitchen.

“Look!” She pointed at the opaque plastic skylight. Three scorpions, each about six inches lon cast sharp silhouettes on the milky plastic. One was moving.

“My word.”

“Your *word!*” She struck a familiar pose, hands on hips, and glared up at the creatures. “What a we going to do about it?”

“We could name them.”

“John.”

“I don’t know.” He opened the refrigerator. “Call the bug man.”

“The bug man was just here yesterday. He probably flushed them out.”

He poured a glass of cold tea and dumped two envelopes of artificial sweetener into it. “I’ll ta to Julio about it. But you know they’ve been there all along. They’re not bothering anybody.”

“They’re bothering the hell out of me!”

He smiled. “Okay. I’ll talk to Julio.” He looked into the oven. “Thought about dinner?”

“Anything you want to cook, sweetheart. I’ll be damned if I’m going to stand there with three poisonous...arthropods staring down at me.”

“Poised to jump,” John said, and looked up again. There were only two visible now, which ma his skin crawl.

“Julio wasn’t home when I first saw them. About an hour ago.”

"I'll go check." John went downstairs and Julio, the landlord, was indeed home, but was not impressed by the problem. He agreed that it was probably the bug man, and they would probably go back to where they came from in a while, and gave John a flyswatter.

John left the flyswatter with Lena, admonishing her to take no prisoners, and walked a couple blocks to a Chinese restaurant. He brought back a few boxes of takeout, and they sat in the living room and wielded chopsticks in silence, listening for the pitter-patter of tiny feet.

"Met a real live con man today." He put the business card on the coffee table between them.

"Consultant?" she read.

"He had a loony scheme about counterfeiting the missing stories." Lena knew more about the missing stories than ninety-eight percent of the people who Hemingway'ed for a living. John liked to think out loud.

"Ah, the stories," she said, preparing herself.

"Not a bad idea, actually, if one had a larcenous nature." He concentrated for a moment on the slippery Moo Goo Gai Pan. "Be millions of bucks in it."

He was bent over the box. She stared hard at his bald spot. "What exactly did he have in mind?"

"We didn't bother to think it through in any detail, actually. You go and find..." He got the slightly walleyed look that she knew meant he was reading a page of a book a thousand miles away. "Yes. A 1921 Corona portable, like the one Hadley gave him before they were married. Find some old paper. Type up the stories. Take them to Sotheby's. Spend money for the rest of your life. That's all there is to it."

"You left out jail."

"A mere detail. Also the writing of the stories. That could take weeks. Maybe you could get arrested first, write the stories in jail, and then sell them when you got out."

"You're weird, John."

"Well. I didn't give him any encouragement."

"Maybe you should've. A few million would come in handy next year."

"We'll get by."

"'We'll get by.' You keep saying that. How do you know? You've never had to 'get by.'"

"Okay, then. We won't get by." He scraped up the last of the fried rice. "We won't be able to make the rent and they'll throw us out on the street. We'll live in a cardboard box over a heating grate. You'll have to sell your body to keep me in cheap wine. But we'll be happy, dear." He looked up at her, mooning. "Poor but happy."

"Slap-happy." She looked at the card again. "How do you know he's a con man?"

"I don't know. Salesman type. Says he's in commercial fishing now, but he doesn't seem to like it much."

"He didn't say anything about any, you know, criminal stuff he'd done in the past?"

"Huh uh. I just got the impression that he didn't waste a lot of time mulling over ethics and morals." John held up the Mont Blanc pen. "He was staring at this, before he came over and introduced himself. I think he smelled money."

Lena stuck both chopsticks into the half-finished carton of boiled rice and set it down decisively. "Let's ask him over."

"He's a sleaze, Lena. You wouldn't like him."

"I've never met a real con man. It would be fun."

He looked into the darkened kitchen. "Will you cook something?"

She followed his gaze, expecting monsters. "If you stand guard."

“Be a job an’ a half,” Castle said, mopping up residual spaghetti sauce with a piece of garlic bread. “It’s not like your Howard Hughes guy, or Hitler’s notebooks.”

“You’ve been doing some research.” John’s voice was a little slurred. He’d bought a half gallon of Portuguese wine, the bottle wrapped in straw like cheap Chianti, the wine not quite that good. If you could get past the first couple of glasses, it was okay. It had been okay to John for some time now.

“Yeah, down to the library. The guys who did the Hitler notebooks, hell, nobody’d ever seen a real Hitler notebook; they just studied his handwriting in letters and such, then read up on what he did day after day. Same with the Howard Hughes, but that was even easier, because most of the time nobody knew what the hell Howard Hughes was doing anyhow. Just stayed locked up in that room.”

“The Hughes forgery nearly worked, as I recall,” John said. “If Hughes himself hadn’t broken the silence...”

“Ya gotta know that took balls. ’Scuse me, Lena.” She waved a hand and laughed. “Try to get away with that while Hughes was still alive.”

“How did the Hitler people screw up?” she asked.

“Funny thing about that one was how many people they fooled. Afterwards everybody said it was a really lousy fake. But you can bet that before the newspapers bid millions of dollars on it, they showed it to the best Hitlerologists they could find, and they all said it was real.”

“Because they wanted it to be real,” Lena said.

“Yeah. But one of the pages had some chemical in it that wouldn’t be in paper before 1945. That was kinda dumb.”

“People would want the Hemingway stories to be real,” Lena said quietly, to John.

John’s gaze stayed fixed on the center of the table, where a few strands of spaghetti lay cold and drying in a plastic bowl. “Wouldn’t be honest.”

“That’s for sure,” Castle said cheerily. “But it ain’t exactly armed robbery, either.”

“A gross misuse of intellectual...intellectual...”

“It’s past your bedtime, John,” Lena said. “We’ll clean up.” John nodded and pushed himself away from the table and walked heavily into the bedroom.

Lena didn’t say anything until she heard the bedsprings creak. “He isn’t always like this,” she said quietly.

“Yeah. He don’t act like no alky.”

“It’s been a hard year for him.” She refilled her glass. “Me, too. Money.”

“That’s bad.”

“Well, we knew it was coming. He tell you about the inheritance?” Castle leaned forward. “Huh, uh.”

“He was born pretty well off. Family had textile mills up in New Hampshire. John’s grandparents died in an auto accident in the forties and the family sold off the mills—good timing, too. That wouldn’t be worth much today.

“Then John’s father and mother died in the sixties, while he was in college. The executors set up a trust fund that looked like it would keep him in pretty good shape forever. But he wasn’t interested in money. He even joined the army, to see what it was like.”

“Jesus.”

“Afterwards, he carried a picket sign and marched against the war—you know, Vietnam.

“Then he finished his Ph.D. and started teaching. The trust fund must have been fifty times as much as his salary, when he started out. It was still ten times as much, a couple of years ago.”

“Boy...howdy.” Castle was doing mental arithmetic and algebra with variables like Porsches and fast boats.

“But he let his sisters take care of it. He let them reinvest the capital.”

“They weren’t too swift?”

“They were idiots! They took good solid blue-chip stocks and tax-free municipals, too ‘borin for them, and threw it all away gambling on commodities.” She grimaced. “*Pork bellies?* I finally had John go to Chicago and come back with what was left of his money. There wasn’t much.”

“You ain’t broke, though.”

“Damned near. There’s enough income to pay for insurance and eventually we’ll be able to draw on an IRA. But the cash payments stop in two months. We’ll have to live on John’s salary. I suppose I’ll get a job, too.”

“What you ought to get is a typewriter.”

Lena laughed and slouched back in her chair. “That would be something.”

“You think he could do it? I mean if he would, do you think he could?”

“He’s a good writer.” She looked thoughtful. “He’s had some stories published, you know, in the literary magazines. The ones that pay four or five free copies.”

“Big deal.”

She shrugged. “Pays off in the long run. Tenure. But I don’t know whether being able to write a good literary story means that John could write a good Hemingway imitation.”

“He knows enough, right?”

“Maybe he knows too much. He might be paralyzed by his own standards.” She shook her head. “In some ways he’s an absolute nut about Hemingway. Obsessed, I mean. It’s not good for him.”

“Maybe writing this stuff would get it out of his system.”

She smiled at him. “You’ve got more angles than a protractor.”

“Sorry; I didn’t mean to—”

“No.” She raised both hands. “Don’t be sorry; I like it. I like you, Castle. John’s a good man, but sometimes he’s too good.”

He poured them both more wine. “Nobody ever accused me of that.”

“I suspect not.” She paused. “Have you ever been in trouble with the police? Just curious.”

“Why?”

“Just curious.”

He laughed. “Nickel-and-dime stuff, when I was a kid. You know, jus’ to see what you can get away with.” He turned serious. “Then I pulled two months’ hard time for somethin’ I didn’t do. Wasn’t even in town when it happened.”

“What was it?”

“Armed robbery. Then the guy came back an’ hit the same goddamned store! I mean, he was on a sharp cookie. He confessed to the first one and they let me go.”

“Why did they accuse you in the first place?”

“Used to think it was somebody had it in for me. Like the clerk who fingered me.” He took a sip of wine. “But hell. It was just dumb luck. And dumb cops. The guy was about my height, same color hair, we both lived in the neighborhood. Cops didn’t want to waste a lot of time on it. Jus’ chuck me in jail.”

“So you do have a police record?”

“Huh uh. Girl from the ACLU made sure they wiped it clean. She wanted me to go after ‘em for what? False arrest an’ wrongful imprisonment. I just wanted to get out of town.”

“It wasn’t here?”

“Nah. Dayton, Ohio. Been here eight, nine years.”

“That’s good.”

~~“Why the third degree?”~~

She leaned forward and patted the back of his hand. “Call it a job interview, Castle. I have feeling we may be working together.”

“Okay.” He gave her a slow smile. “Anything else you want to know?”

John trudged into the kitchen the next morning, ignored the coffeepot and pulled a green bottle of beer out of the fridge. He looked up at the skylight. Four scorpions, none of them moving. Have to call the bug man today.

Red wine hangover, the worst kind. He was too old for this. Cheap red wine hangover. He eased himself into a soft chair and carefully poured the beer down the side of the glass. Not too much noise, please.

When you drink too much, you ought to take a couple of aspirin, and some vitamins, and all the water you can hold, before retiring. If you drink too much, of course, you don't remember to do that.

The shower turned off with a bass clunk of plumbing. John winced and took a long drink, which helped a little. When he heard the bathroom door open he called for Lena to bring the aspirin when she came out.

After a few minutes she brought it out and handed it to him. "And how is Dr. Baird today?"

"Dr. Baird needs a doctor. Or an undertaker." He shook out two aspirin and washed them down with the last of the beer. "Like your outfit."

She was wearing only a towel around her head. She simpered and struck a dancer's pose and spun daintily around. "Think it'll catch on?"

"Oh my yes." At thirty-five, she still had the trim model's figure that had caught his eye in the classroom, fifteen years before. A safe, light tan was uniform all over her body, thanks to liberal sunblock and the private sunbathing area on top of the house—private except for the helicopter that came low overhead every weekday at 1:15. She always tried to be there in time to wave at it. The pilot had such white teeth. She wondered how many sunbathers were on his route.

She undid the towel and rubbed her long blond hair vigorously. "Thought I'd cool off for a few minutes before I got dressed. Too much wine, eh?"

"Couldn't you tell from my sparkling repartee last night?" He leaned back, eyes closed, and rolled the cool glass back and forth on his forehead.

"Want another beer?"

"Yeah. Coffee'd be smarter, though."

"It's been sitting all night."

"Pay for my sins." He watched her swivel tightly into the kitchen and, more than ever before, felt the difference in their ages. Seventeen years; he was half again as old as she. A young man would save the hell with the hangover, go grab that luscious thing and carry her back to bed. The organ that responded to this meditation was his stomach, though, and it responded very audibly.

"Some toast, too. Or do you want something fancier?"

"Toast would be fine." Why was she being so nice? Usually if he drank too much, he reaped the whirlwind in the morning.

"Ugh." She saw the scorpions. "Five of them now."

"I wonder how many it will hold before it comes crashing down. Scorpions everywhere, stunned. Then angry."

"I'm sure the bug man knows how to get rid of them."

"In Africa they claimed that if you light a ring of fire around them with gasoline or lighter fluid they go crazy, run amok, stinging themselves to death in their frenzies. Maybe the bug man could do that."

"Castle and I came up with a plan last night. It's kinda screwy, but it might just work."

"Read that in a book called *Jungle Ways*. I was eight years old and believed every word of it."

"We figured out a way that it would be legal. Are you listening?"

“Uh huh. Let me have real sugar and some milk.”

~~She poured some milk in a cup and put it in the microwave to warm. “Maybe we should talk about it later.”~~

“Oh no. Hemingway forgery. You figured out a way to make it legal. Go ahead. I’m all ears.”

“See, you tell the publisher first off what it is, that you wrote it and then had it typed up to look authentic.”

“Sure, be a big market for that.”

“In fact, there could be. You’d have to generate it, but it could happen.” The toast sprang up and she brought it and two cups of coffee into the living room on a tray. “See, the bogus manuscript is only one part of a book.”

“I don’t get it.” He tore the toast into strips, to dunk in the strong Cuban coffee.

“The rest of the book is in the nature of an exegesis of your own text.”

“If that con man knows what exegesis is, then I can crack a safe.”

“That part’s my idea. You’re really writing a book *about* Hemingway. You use your own text to illustrate various points—‘I wrote it this way instead of that way because. ...’”

“It would be different,” he conceded. “Perhaps the second most egotistical piece of Hemingway scholarship in history. A dubious distinction.”

“You could write it tongue-in-cheek, though. It could be really amusing, as well as scholarly.”

“God, we’d have to get an unlisted number, publishers calling us night and day. Movie producer might sell ten copies, if I bought nine.”

“You really aren’t getting it, John. You don’t have a particle of larceny in your heart.”

He put a hand on his heart and looked down. “Ventricles, auricles. My undying love for you, little heartburn. No particles.”

“See, you tell the publisher the truth...but the publisher doesn’t have to tell the truth. Not until publication day.”

“Okay. I still don’t get it.”

She took a delicate nibble of toast. “It goes like this. They print the bogus Hemingway up into a few copies of bogus bound galleys. Top secret.”

“My exegesis carefully left off.”

“That’s the ticket. They send it out to a few selected scholars, along with Xeroxes of a few sample manuscript pages. All they say, in effect, is ‘Does this seem authentic to you? Please keep it under your hat, for obvious reasons.’ Then they sit back and collect blurbs.”

“I can see the kind of blurbs they’d get from Scott or Mike or Jack, for instance. Some variation of ‘What kind of idiot do you think I am?’”

“Those aren’t the kind of people you send it to, dope! You send it to people who think they’re experts, but aren’t. Castle says this is how the Hitler thing almost worked—they knew better than to show it to historians in general. They showed it to a few people and didn’t quote the ones who thought it was a fake. Surely you can come up with a list of people who would be easy to fool.”

“Any scholar could. Be a different list for each one; I’d be on some of them.”

“So they bring it out on April Fool’s Day. You get the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*. *Publishers Weekly* does a story. Everybody wants to be in on the joke. Best-seller list, here we come.”

“Yeah, sure, but you haven’t thought it through.” He leaned back, balancing the coffee cup on his slight potbelly. “What about the guys who give us the blurbs, those second-rate scholars? They’re going to look pretty bad.”

“We did think of that. No way they could sue, not if the letter accompanying the galleys is carefully written. It doesn’t have to say—”

“I don’t mean getting sued. I mean I don’t want to be responsible for hurting other people’s careers—~~maybe wrecking a career, if the person was too extravagant in his endorsement, and having~~ people looking for things to use against him. You know departmental politics. People go down the chute for less serious crimes than making an ass of yourself and your institution in print.”

She put her cup down with a clatter. “You’re always thinking about other people. Why don’t you think about yourself for a change?” She was on the verge of tears. “Think about *us*.”

“All right, let’s do that. What do you think would happen to my career at BU if I pissed off the wrong people with this exercise? How long do you think it would take me to make full professor? Do you think BU would make a full professor out of a man who uses his specialty to pull vicious practical jokes?”

“Just do me the favor of thinking about it. Cool down and weigh the pluses and minuses. If you did it with the right touch, your department would love it—and God, Harry wants to get rid of the chairmanship so bad he’d give it to an axe murderer. You know you’ll make full professor about thirty seconds before Harry hands you the keys to the office and runs.”

“True enough.” He finished the coffee and stood up in a slow creak. “I’ll give it some thought. Horizontally.” He turned toward the bedroom.

“Want some company?”

He looked at her for a moment. “Indeed I do.”

Back already?

Need to find a meta-causal. One guy seems to be generating the danger flag in various timelines. John Baird, who's a scholar in some of them, a soldier in some, and a rich playboy in a few. He's always a Hemingway nut, though. He does something that starts off the ripples in '95, '96, '99, depending on which time line you're in—but I can't seem to get close to it. There's something odd about him, and it doesn't have to do with Hemingway specifically.

But he's definitely causing the eddy?

Has to be him.

All right. Find a meta-causal that all the doom lines have in common, and forget about the other ones. Then go talk to him.

There'll be resonance—

But who cares? Moot after A.D. 2006.

That's true. I'll hit all the doom lines at once, then: neutralize the meta-causal, then jump ahead to 2006 and do some spot checks.

Good. And no killing this time.

I understand. But—

You're too close to 2006. Kill the wrong person, and the whole thing could unravel.

Well, there are differences of opinion. We would certainly feel it if the world failed to come to a clean end in those lines.

As you say, differences of opinion. My opinion is that you better not kill anybody or I'll send you back to patrol the fourteenth century again.

Understood. But I can't guarantee that I can neutralize the meta-causal without eliminating John Baird.

Fourteenth century. Some people love it. Others think it was nasty, brutish, and long.

Most of the sleuthing that makes up literary scholarship takes place in settings either neutral or unpleasant. Libraries' old stacks, attics metaphorical and actual; dust and silverfish, yellowed paper and fading ink. Books and letters that appear in card files but not on shelves.

Hemingway researchers have a haven outside of Boston, the Hemingway Collection at the University of Massachusetts' John F. Kennedy Library. It's a triangular room with one wall dominated by a picture window that looks over Boston Harbor to the sea. Comfortable easy chairs surround a coffee table, but John had never seen them in use; worktables under the picture window provided a realistic room for computer and clutter. Skins from animals the Hemingways had dispatched in Africa snarled up from the floor, and one wall was dominated by Hemingway memorabilia and photographs. What made the room Nirvana, though, was row upon row of boxes containing tens of thousands of Xerox pages of Hemingway correspondence, manuscripts, clippings—everything from a boyhood shopping list to all extant versions of every short story and poem and novel.

John liked to get there early so he could claim one of the three computers. He snapped it on, inserted a CD, and typed in his code number. Then he keyed in the database index and started searching.

The more commonly requested items would appear on screen if you asked for them—whenever someone requested a physical copy of an item, an electronic copy automatically was sent into the database—but most of the things John needed were obscure, and he had to haul down the letter boxes and physically flip through them, just like some poor scholar inhabiting the first nine-tenths of the twentieth century.

Time disappeared for him as he abandoned his notes and followed lines of instinct leaping from letter to manuscript to note to interview, doing what was in essence the opposite of the scholar's job: a scholar would normally be trying to find out what these stories had been about. John instead was trying to track down every reference that might restrict what he himself could write about, simulating the stories.

The most confining restriction was the one he'd first remembered, walking away from the bar where he'd met Castle. The one-paragraph answer that Hadley had given to Carlos Baker about the unfinished novel; that it was a Nick Adams story about hunting and fishing up in Michigan. John didn't know anything about hunting, and most of his fishing experience was limited to watching a bobber and hoping it wouldn't go down and break his train of thought.

There was the one story that Hemingway had left unpublished, "Boys and Girls Together," mostly a clumsy self-parody. It covered the right period and the right activities, but using it as a source would be sensitive business, tiptoeing through a minefield. Anyone looking for a fake would go straight there. Of course John could go up to the Michigan woods and camp out, see things for himself and try to recreate them in the Hemingway style. Later, though. First order of business was to make sure there was nothing in this huge collection that would torpedo the whole project—some postcard where Hemingway said "You're going to like this novel because it has a big scene about cleaning fish."

The short stories would be less restricted in subject matter. According to Hemingway, they'd been about growing up in Oak Park and Michigan and the battlefields of Italy.

That made him stop and think. The one dramatic experience he shared with Hemingway was combat—fifty years later, to be sure, in Vietnam, but the basic situations couldn't have changed that much. Terror, heroism, cowardice. The guns and grenades were a little more streamlined, but they did the same things to people. Maybe do a World War I story as a finger exercise, see whether it would be realistic to try a longer growing-up-in-Michigan pastiche.

He made a note to himself about that on the computer, oblique enough not to be damning, and

continued the eye-straining job of searching through Hadley's correspondence, trying to find some further reference to the lost novel—damn!

Writing to Ernest's mother, Hadley noted that "the taxi driver broke his typewriter" on the way to the Constantinople conference—did he get it fixed, or just chuck it? A quick check showed that the typeface of his manuscripts did indeed change after July 1924. So they'd never be able to find it. There were typewriters in Hemingway shrines in Key West, Billings, Schruns; the initial plan had been to find which was the old Corona, then locate an identical one and have Castle arrange a swap.

So they would fall back on Plan B. Castle had claimed to be good with mechanical things, and thought if they could find a 1921 Corona, he could tweak the keys around so they would produce a convincing manuscript—lowercase "s" a hair low, "e" a hair high, and so forth.

How he could be so sure of success without ever having seen the inside of a manual typewriter John did not know. Nor did he have much confidence.

But it wouldn't have to be a perfect simulation, since they weren't out to fool the whole world but just a few reviewers who would only see two or three Xeroxed pages. He could probably do a close enough job. John put it out of his mind and moved on to the next letter.

But it was an odd coincidence for him to think about Castle at that instant, since Castle was thinking about him. Or at least asking.

“How was he when he was younger?”

“He never was younger.” She laughed and rolled around inside the compass of his arms to face him. “Than you, I mean. He was in his mid-thirties when we met. You can’t be much over twenty-five.”

He kissed the end of her nose. “Thirty this year. But I still get carded sometimes.”

“I’m a year older than you are. So you have to do anything I say.”

“So far so good.” He’d checked her wallet when she’d gone into the bathroom to insert the diaphragm, and knew she was thirty-five. “Break out the whips and chains now?”

“Not till next week. Work up to it slowly.” She pulled away from him and mopped her front with the sheet. “You’re good at being slow.”

“I like being asked to come back.”

“How ’bout tonight and tomorrow morning?”

“If you feed me lots of vitamins. How long you think he’ll be up in Boston?”

“He’s got a train ticket for Wednesday. But he said he might stay longer if he got onto something.”

Castle laughed. “Or into something. Think he might have a girl up there? Some student like you used to be?”

“That would be funny. I guess it’s not impossible.” She covered her eyes with the back of her hand. “The wife is always the last to know.”

They both laughed. “But I don’t think so. He’s a sweet guy but he’s just not real sexy. I think his students see him as kind of a favorite uncle.”

“You fell for him once.”

“Uh huh. He had all of his current virtues plus a full head of hair, no potbelly—and, hm, what am I forgetting?”

“He was hung like an elephant?”

“No, I guess it was the millions of dollars. That can be pretty sexy.”

It was a good thing John liked to nose around obscure neighborhoods shopping; you couldn't walk into any old K mart and pick up a 1921 Corona portable. In fact, you couldn't walk into any typewriter shop in Boston and find one, not any. Nowadays they all sold self-contained word processors, with a few dusty electrics in the back room. A few had fancy manual typewriters from Italy or Switzerland; it had been almost thirty years since the American manufacturers had made a machine that wrote without electronic help.

He had a little better luck with pawnshops. Lots of Smith-Coronas, a few L.C. Smiths, and two actual Coronas that might have been old enough. One had too large a typeface and the other, although the typeface was the same as Hemingway's, was missing a couple of letters: Th quick b own fox jum d ov th lazy dog. The challenge of writing a convincing Hemingway novel without using the letters "c" and "r" seemed daunting. He bought the machine anyhow, thinking they might ultimately have two or several broken ones that could be concatenated into one reliable machine.

The old pawnbroker rang up his purchase and made change and slammed the cash drawer shut. "Now you don't look to me like the kind of man who would hold it against a man who..." He shrugged. "Well, who sold you something and then suddenly remembered that there was a place with lots of those somethings?"

"Of course not. Business is business."

"I don't know the name of the guy or his shop; I think he calls it a museum. Up in Brunswick Maine. He's got a thousand old typewriters. He buys, sells, trades. That's the only place I know of you might find one with the missing whatever-you-call-ems."

"Fonts." He put the antique typewriter under his arm—the handle was missing—and shook the old man's hand. "Thanks a lot. This might save me weeks."

With some difficulty John got together packing materials and shipped the machine to Key West along with Xeroxes of a few dozen pages of Hemingway's typed copy and a note suggesting Castle so what he could do. Then he went to the library and found a Brunswick telephone directory. Under "Office Machines & Supplies" was listed Crazy Tom's Typewriter Museum and Sales Emporium. John rented a car and headed north.

The small town had rolled up its sidewalks by the time he got there. He drove past Crazy Tom's and pulled into the first motel. It had a neon VACANCY sign but the innkeeper had to be roused from a deep sleep. He took John's credit card number and directed him to Room 14 and pointedly turned off the NO sign. There were only two other cars in the motel lot.

John slept late and treated himself to a full "trucker's" breakfast at the local diner: two po chops and eggs and hash browns. Then he worked off ten calories by walking to the shop.

Crazy Tom was younger than John had expected, thirtyish with an unruly shock of black hair. A manual typewriter lay upside down on an immaculate worktable, but most of the place was definitely maculate. Thousands of peanut shells littered the floor. Crazy Tom was eating them compulsively from a large wooden bowl. When he saw John standing in the doorway, he offered some. "Unsalted," he said. "Good for you."

John crunched his way over the peanut-shell carpet. The only light in the place was the bare bulb suspended over the worktable, though two unlit high-intensity lamps were clamped on either side of it. The walls were floor-to-ceiling gloomy shelves holding hundreds of typewriters, mostly black.

"Let me guess," the man said as John scooped up a handful of peanuts. "You're here about a typewriter."

"A specific one. A 1921 Corona portable."

"Ah." He closed his eyes in thought. "Hemingway. His first. Or I guess the first after he started

writing. A '27 Corona, now, that'd be Faulkner."

"You get a lot of calls for them?"

"Couple times a year. People hear about this place and see if they can find one like the master used, whoever the master is to them. Sympathetic magic and all that. But you aren't a writer."

"I've had some stories published."

"Yeah, but you look too comfortable. You do something else. Teach school." He looked around in the gloom. "Corona Corona." Then he sang the six syllables to the tune of "Corina, Corina." He walked a few steps into the darkness and returned with a small machine and set it on the table. "Newer than 1920 because of the way it says 'Corona' here. Older than 1927 because of the tab setup." He found a piece of paper and a chair. "Go on, try it."

John typed out a few quick foxes and aids to one's party. The typeface was identical to the one on the machine Hadley had given Hemingway before they'd been married. The up-and-down displacements of the letters were different, of course, but Castle should be able to fix that once he practiced with the backup machine.

John cracked a peanut. "How much?"

"What you need it for?"

"Why is that important?"

"It's the only one I got. Rather rent it than sell it." He didn't look like he was lying, trying to push the price up. "A thousand to buy, a hundred a month to rent."

"Tell you what, then. I buy it and if it doesn't bring me luck, you agree to buy it back at a profit. My one thousand dollars minus ten percent per month."

Crazy Tom stuck out his hand. "Let's have a beer on it."

"Isn't it a little early for that?"

"Not if you eat peanuts all morning." He took two long-necked Budweisers from a cooler and set them on paper towels on the table. "So what kind of stuff you write?"

"Short stories and some poetry." The beer was good after the heavy greasy breakfast. "Nothing you would've seen unless you read magazines like *Iowa Review* and *Triquarterly*."

"Oh yeah. Foldouts of Gertrude Stein and H.D. I might've read your stuff."

"John Baird."

He shook his head. "Maybe. I'm no good with names."

"If you recognized my name from *The Iowa Review* you'd be the first person who ever had."

"I was right about the Hemingway connection?"

"Of course."

"But you don't write like Hemingway for no *Iowa Review*. Short declarative sentences, truly that truly that."

"No, you were right about the teaching, too. I teach Hemingway up at Boston University."

"So that's why the typewriter? Play show-and-tell with your students?"

"That, too. Mainly I want to write some on it and see how it feels."

From the back of the shop, a third person listened to the conversation with great interest. He, wasn't really a "person," though he could look like one: he had never been born and he would never die. But then he didn't really exist, not in the down-home pinch-yourself-ouch! way that you and I do.

In another way, he did *more* than exist, since he could slip back and forth between places you and I don't even have words for.

He was carrying a wand that could be calibrated for heart attack, stroke, or metastasized cancer on one end; the other end induced a kind of aphasia. He couldn't use it unless he materialized. He walked toward the two men, making no crunching sounds on the peanut shells because he weighed less than a thought. He studied John Baird's face from about a foot away.

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