

HEMINGWAY'S DAUGHTER

A Novel

by

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To Bo.  
You know why.



# 1

*June 17, 1961*

*A mi hija hermosa, to my beautiful Daughter:*

*Well, Flea! Despite being in prison, also known as a forced hospital stay courtesy of my present wife, I've finished the book, the one for your mother. Finito! I never forgot what you said 13 years ago—that it broke her heart that I never put her in my books; wrote her out of my life, you said. Well, she's in this one, all the way. It's about us and Paris and the way it was then.*

*And if I live that long—ha! at least another couple weeks!—the dedication will read, "To Finley Hemingway, My Daughter and My Muse."*

*You still there, Flea, or have I bored you into oblivion already? You knew it was always you, right? Without you, do you think I could have written a page of the finest book that ever came out of this much-battered Midwestern boy's head? "A Single Drop of Red Wine" never would*

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*exist without you dancing across each page, hija mia. You were the engine. It's that simple. And that's the one that should have won the Noblitzer Prize (Nobel and Pulitzer together!), if it existed. Should we create one? And sure, I might have had some vigor injected at times by some of the "others" who shall remain nameless so as not to bitch the fine mood I have going here (I know you hated them, so let's not talk about that). But the unvarnished truth is, I needed you, only you, to be proud of the old man, that you were Hemingway's Daughter with a capital "D." Not embarrassed or ashamed. Made me try for more each time I sat down to write, one sentence, then another. Sometimes flowing, sometimes drilling.*

*I'm calling the new one "A Moveable Feast." And it will make her immortal. Love can do that.*

*I love you, kid. Forever. No way around it. See you in your dreams.*

*Con todo mi amor siempre, Papa.*

*With all my love always.* That was the last letter I got from him and while a bit garbled, it was him, like he always was. A bit of Spanish thrown in and some of his own odd phrasing. If I didn't know better, I wouldn't have guessed how ill he was.

He was gone two weeks later. The highs and lows of living with him were over and the loss of both was as excruciating as a finger bent to the breaking point, then twisted off to be sure you appreciated the pain the first time

around. Still, without knowing it, he'd thrown me a lifeline. I now knew. Finally, after thirty-six years, I knew.

## 2

*You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another.*

~ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

I had four Finn Hemingway Family Reality Rules, four immutable truths about my family that in one way or another bled into every aspect of my life.

Family Reality Rule #1: My mother always got her way. My father's guilt about leaving my mother shortly after I was born to marry her good friend, Pauline Pfeiffer, meant he always agreed to whatever she wanted as to us kids. He might commiserate with me, but he felt he'd forfeited the right to wrangle with Mother about raising my older brother, Jack, and me. Her decisions were final, based on her occupation of the moral high ground.

Consequently, despite my father being opposed to girls' boarding schools, which stressed smiling pretty to snare an accomplished husband instead of being



accomplished yourself, I was shipped to The Ellsworth School for Girls in Greenwich, Connecticut, when I was fourteen. I'd lived happily in Chicago with my brother, my mother, and her new husband since I was nine, and was horrified at the prospect of leaving. We lived in Paris before the move to Chicago and it was hard enough making that move, but now another move that I had no voice in? It felt unfair.

"It will be grand, Flea," Papa said unconvincingly in our Sunday night phone call the week before my departure. "Your mother said they're letting you skip a grade, and the riding program is first-rate. And they have a debating club. Great for a budding trial lawyer, honey. I'll be up to visit you to see how it's going."

"But I love Chicago," I said, "and it's your hometown! Your roots and family are here, Papa." I hoped to draw on some vestigial sentimental pull with this manipulative comment.

"Nice hustle, Flea," he chuckled, "but I haven't been to Chicago in over twenty years, and they didn't like me all that much when I was there—*especially* my family. But I'll see you in a few weeks in Connecticut, honey."

Family Reality Rule #2: My father was 100 percent reliable 60 percent of the time, and that was when he was sober. I knew he would never visit me in Connecticut. He was too busy. He meant what he said as he was saying it, but between trips to Spain in support of the anti-Franco forces, his social life, and his writing, he seldom came through. When you tossed in his drinking days, his 60 percent reliability rating dove to 25 percent, and his drinking days

were often. In fact, his drinking deserves a stand-alone rule, but I'll wrap it into this one.

Family Reality Rule #3: My father was a maverick force who loomed large, famous for all the right and wrong reasons, all of which got reflected onto me, and I had to live with that. Sometimes I made up a fake name to stroll through life anonymously, without associations being tagged to me, and sometimes I enjoyed being on the periphery of his fame. He was either an acclaimed literary icon or a denounced communist degenerate, depending on the audience. I just never knew what territory I was in as I waited for the guilt by association/gut punch, or the jolly arm around the shoulder with whispers of, "Wow, you've got his dark eyes. You look just like him. Do you write too?" or, "I heard he always wanted a daughter. You must have been his favorite. So what's he *really* like, Flea?" They used his nickname for me like they *really* knew me.

My father was Papa to the world, and every woman he took a liking to even slightly—and they were legion—was called "daughter" by him. I resented the heck out of it. It wasn't that I wondered if he loved me. He did. But I spent much of my life wondering if I would ever be as necessary to him as he was to me. And the only way to be necessary to him was to play a part in his writing, the part of him he believed to be the only thing that justified his existence. It was all that truly mattered to him. If I didn't impact that part of him, I was his pleasant and loved, but not essential, biological, sidekick.

Finally, Finn Hemingway's Family Reality Rule #4, and this is the really important one: Love always ends for us,

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and usually, it ends badly. From my father, I learned well the lesson that love can turn on you like a black mamba, and lasting love is a mirage. Joy and bonhomie with your beloved at 10:00 a.m. could be a mere preface to depression and drunken hostility roaring in at 6:00 p.m. You dote on me today, you dote on me not tomorrow.

We Hemingways did not excel at blissful eternal love. We lacked the skills, and maybe the familial destiny, for forever love. I didn't want to believe this fact, but it was what I saw from the time I was a kid and watched my mother regularly dabbing red eyes and holding *The Sun Also Rises* open to its dedication to her and my brother. She'd swipe a tear, then smile, hoping I wouldn't see, but I saw. I saw that being left behind by someone you adored left a wound that lingered, partially exposed, forever. That was the Hemingway love doom at its most toxic. My mother, Hadley Richardson Hemingway Mowrer, had remarried, but she never got over my father. Tears in the dark years after a divorce and remarriage were hardly the happy-ever-after I dreamed of.

And as to my father and his various women and wives—well, nothing lasted. I would become fond of a new woman only to have her gone the next time I visited. The wives stayed longer, but the decline in each relationship—and each one began with epic passion—was obvious each summer and Christmas when I visited my father. There was a blaze, then a sputter, then an end.

From my observation, it was far better never to have loved at all than to be left crying in the dark. Even Shakespeare got it wrong sometimes.

Dragging all of my Reality Rules with me, I headed to Ellsworth School for Girls hoping it was the start of my route to becoming a female Clarence Darrow as I had no interest in being Mrs. Darrow. And above all, I intended to defy and eradicate Reality Rule # 4, at least as to me. It was too dire to be countenanced.

### 3

*“The bulls are my best friends.”*

*I translated to Brett.*

*“You kill your friends?” she asked.*

*“Always,” he said in English, and laughed. “So they don’t kill me.”*

*~ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises**

*September 1939*

It was ironic that the least-liked and most-feared girl in the sophomore class at the Ellsworth School was also the most popular. Ellsworth had a quasi-feudal system with old money at the top, new money was next, smart girls whose families could pay their way followed (this is where I fell), and at rock-bottom were bright scholarship girls who worked in the kitchens and were identifiable by their gray uniforms as they ran from class to scullery. The top-tier girls came from elite private schools in Manhattan or Boston, and they were the rulers.

I had a single room on the third floor of an old, four-story brick building. My room was just about the same as every other room on the floor: cream walls, wide-board floors, and a small-paned window. I was one of the lucky ones, though, with a working fireplace. Mother and I had arrived in a Pontiac stuffed with things I couldn't live without. As we dragged the seemingly endless boxes up the three flights, I dreamed of all the doors that would open to me over the next few years here.

Mother made up the bed with fresh, white linens as I threw down the two red oriental rugs we'd hauled from Chicago. Then I tacked up photos of my Jack Russell terrier, Harriet, my horse, Sassafra, and two of my father and me. After four hours of folding, stacking, and hanging clothes, Mother said with a break in her voice, "Shall I get on the road, Finn? Will you be all right here, darling?"

I bounced a little on the bed, then stood. I didn't want her to worry. "I'll be fine. Thank you for your help, Mother. I know you have a long drive back to Chicago."

Mother nodded, an uncertain look in her eyes, then she stepped in and wrapped me in a tight, almost desperate hug. I held her hard. Then we both relaxed, a little embarrassed. She straightened and smiled.

"Your horse will arrive tomorrow, Finn. Just remember, when things get rough—if they do—that you're the best of your father and me: strong, and resilient, and so kind. Those things will always get you through." She paused, then held me at arm's length. She was tall, but I was already taller. She shook me a little. "And yes, that fool Zelda Fitzgerald was right. You *do* look like your father, but in a

remarkable way all your own. Ernest Hemingway was always the handsomest man I'd ever met, and those looks translate gorgeously to a young woman. I love you, Finn."

My mother was rarely demonstrative, and I was touched by her unexpected and heartfelt words. Usually, she was more, "Buck up. Life is like that sometimes, so stop feeling sorry for yourself." She smiled, quickly turned, skirt swirling, and was gone. I felt very alone as I glanced around my room and at the photos of home and family.

Still, the next morning I woke with a smile mortared to my face, ready to make the best of it. I flung open my dormitory door only to find a flurry of newspaper clippings tacked to the door detailing my father's exploits. ***BANNED IN BOSTON, IRELAND! THE SUN ALSO RISES (AND SETS!) ON HEMINGWAY; TO HAVE OR HAVE NOT: WE WON'T HAVE IT HERE! BURN THAT BOOK: HEMINGWAY ON FIRE! COMMUNISM, SEX, AND FILTH? NO THANK YOU, MR. HEMINGWAY!***

I gritted my teeth. *Well, isn't this a nice welcome.* I was accustomed to whispers in my wake about the degenerate Hemingway but not to in-my-face insults. I seethed as I scurried to tear down the wreckage before the other girls spied it. Guilt by association: Reality Rule #3.

Gertie, a girl I'd met the day before at the barn, opened her door and stared as I finished the last of the removal. She pulled one of the articles from the trash, scanned it, then crumpled it and threw it back. She shook her head, curly brown hair swinging, and sighed.

Already dressed in the school uniform of a navy skirt, white blouse, and saddle shoes, she said, "Oh, Finn. I'm so

sorry. Most of the girls are nice, but one—Prill Lamont—isn't. She's a sophomore like us, and the prettiest girl in the school. She runs everything, and knows all the cutest boys at the prep schools. You can't miss her: blonde, tiny, stuck-up. She has a pack of three girls, and I saw her moving in yesterday. We all got the school newsletter this summer telling us who the new girls would be. You know, those stupid things." Gertie put on a voice as if reading from a wedding announcement. "*Finley Hemingway, of Chicago and Cuba, daughter of Ernest Hemingway and Hadley Hemingway Mowrer.*"

Then she continued in her normal voice. "We all know who your father is—I mean, we read *TIME* magazine's People section—and Prill said some things." Gertie looked down. "Not nice things. Just ignore her. Last year, she picked on some scholarship girl to the point of her dropping out of school. Don't let it get to you."

"I won't," I said, crossing my arms over my chest, but still chagrined that I'd made an enemy before my first breakfast here.

The remaining slice of my designs for an easy first day flew skyward when the initial thing my English teacher said when I answered her question about Shakespearean tragedies was, "Finley, lose that Midwestern flat twang and French inflection as soon as possible. They do you no favors." She turned away, and the class tittered. I'd lived in Paris for the first nine years of my life and spoke French almost before I spoke English. I did sometimes, when nervous, say words with a French accent or phrasing. I flushed and looked down.



A girl in the front row with white-blond hair and a gorgeous face turned around. “Or maybe you can speak Spanish for us if your English isn’t good enough, Señorita Hemingway! But no Spanish obscenities, please—given your family history and all.”

The teacher cut in, “I don’t recall inviting you to comment, Miss Lamont.”

The girl turned away with a smirk: Prill Lamont. Old-money girl meets pays-her-way girl.

I didn’t complain about the dead mouse in my bed, the short-sheeting, or the peanut butter in my riding boot. I had three brothers and was used to much worse. Prill’s next attack, though, was painful. I was at the barn putting away my horse, Sassafras, when Prill and Joannie Janssen, one of Prill’s group, strolled down the aisle. Joannie’s horse was next to mine, and Prill, as usual, was braying about her weekend.

“God, Joannie! You would love Danny Delano. He’s the president’s nephew, or cousin—or something. Next time, come with us! Nick couldn’t make it, but we had a terrific time.”

Joannie moaned, “I miss everything good! My parents won’t let me go off campus, ever!”

I took a breath. So far, I hadn’t found a good friend at Ellsworth. Although Gertie was lovely, she’d made her friends her first year, and the position of confidante was definitely taken by Helen Vandersen. But Joannie Janssen loved her horse like I loved Sassafras. Maybe Joannie wasn’t that bad.

As both girls leaned against Birthday Boy's stall door, laughing and whispering, I stuck my hands deep into my jacket pockets and decided to take a chance. I stepped into the aisle and smiled broadly.

"Hey, Prill, Joannie," I said. "Great day for riding, right? I wondered if you'd like to listen to some records in my room tonight. I just got Glenn Miller's 'Moonlight Serenade.'"

Prill frowned like a bad smell had wafted by. She then flipped her hair over her shoulder, eyed me up and down, and said in a voice that could be heard in Vermont, "Wow! You really *are* freakishly tall, Finn. Not much chance of getting a boyfriend, being so gigantic." She tilted her head and pointed. "And it seems, unfortunately, you ended up with a boy's nose and brows by mistake. Tragic when that happens." She shook her head three quick shakes as if it were all too incredible before turning away, laughing. "Come on. Let's go, Joannie."

Joannie looked like she might cry, but then spun and followed Prill out of the barn. I reddened and looked around to see how many of the girls heard. Most had resumed their chores, but one girl I didn't know yet said from across the aisle, "She's mean. Ignore her, Finn."

"I will. Thanks," I said more nonchalantly than I felt as I fumbled with Sassafras's halter, then quietly shut his stall door.

4

*I don't know. There isn't always an explanation  
for everything.*

~ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

Prill's words were not a surprise. I'd known since I was eight that I wasn't pretty when no less a beauty than Zelda Fitzgerald, a long-time family friend, told me so. The look of the day was petite, pert nose and, thin, penciled brows, like Claudette Colbert or Jean Arthur. I was far from that ideal.

Mother, my brother Jack, and I, were still living in Paris at the time Zelda made her pronouncement. On that spring afternoon, as I sat cross-legged on the red Heriz rug, dressing a doll, Zelda was perched on the couch behind me in a shiny, green flapper dress, slim legs crossed at the knee. She took a drag of her cigarette, sucking in the air hard. When I held up my doll for her to see, she stared off as the

tip of her cigarette glowed, then faltered. She twisted and blew a perfect smoke ring over her right shoulder.

Suddenly, as quick as a king cobra, her hand shot out. Sharp fingers locked into my bony shoulder hollow and jerked me up. Surprised, I regarded her with my dark eyes and she gazed back with her own hard, blue ones. With my chin in her hand, she said to her husband, Scott, as if I weren't there, "What a shame she takes so strongly after Ernest. Yes, the red hair is Hadley's and it's lovely. But her jaw is too strong, her nose too straight, her brows too heavy, and her gaze too direct with those . . . oh, Hemingway eyes. No fineness. Too tall, not pretty. She'll never inspire poetry." She said it with disgust, dropped her hand from my face, and turned away. "Pity."

My mother's mouth opened, then shut, shocked into speechlessness. I blinked, eyes burning as I still stood facing Zelda, unable to move.

Scott, always kind, reached over and touched my arm. He looked beautiful and golden in his three-piece suit. He said quickly, "Don't mind her, Finn. She's a tease. You're lovely, sweetheart." Then he added in a voice with some menace, "Zelda, you are such a joker. But remember, dear, children don't always see the humor."

She looked at him and sniffed. She was the only person I knew with no verbal filter. She was also the only woman I knew who was not only *not* attracted to my father, but who truly hated him. The feeling was mutual.

After Prill's insult at the barn, I felt the same torrent of despair that swamped me the day Zelda pronounced me fatally lacking. *No fineness; will never inspire poetry.*

When I got back to my room, I stared out the window for a few minutes as the sky darkened. I was bewildered by Prill's clearly intentional cruelty, and wondered how she could so dislike someone she didn't know. I wanted badly to be the girl who didn't care what anyone said, but I also wanted friends to laugh with, like I had in Chicago. I wanted to be a lawyer to find fairness for others, but didn't yet know how to push back at unfairness aimed at me.

I glanced at the calendar and desperately wanted to go home. I wanted to see my wild but loyal little dog, and to sit on the banks of Lake Michigan laughing with my best friend, Susan, and teasing my brother as we all ate Chicago pizza around the kitchen table. Only the thought of being with my father at Christmas in two months made being here feel even close to tolerable. With him, everything was fun, even making a routine breakfast. He'd say, "Flea, you cover the right flank with those three eggs and don't let your brothers get near that slab of bread or the *leche* (milk) over there. Old Cat is going behind enemy lines with lifesaving intelligence for our boys in the trenches." One of his many cats would sit calmly blinking and looking noble.

Then there were all of his friends. On any given evening, Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall might be mixing martinis on the back patio while Gary Cooper, Papa, and Ava Gardner manned the grill as Marlene Dietrich critiqued their technique from the sidelines: *Papa, mein bärchen, zat one is under done. And Ava, mein lieblich, enough flipping.* It was like having the preeminent seat at an improvisational theater of the absurd.

It wasn't their fame that was so alluring—although it was—but their familiarity with my father, the inside jokes. And when I was with him, I was inside the circle. They'd smoke, drink, laugh, name-drop, pound the table, and tell wild stories as I sat on the floor laughing along with them. When I held up Papa's beloved, small, good-natured mongrel, Negrita, and danced around with her to big band music, waving her paw energetically at them, they hooted and clapped like it was hilarious. They laughed not because it was that cute, but because they liked me, and because I was Hemingway's daughter, and because we were all enjoying the thick, Cuban night air and the pleasure of being alive here together. When I had to go back home at the end of each summer, it was like going from Technicolor to gray. He was that good.

I stared at my calendar again. Prill had hit my greatest vulnerabilities in a grand, lucky, exploding bull's-eye. Actually, she'd hit all of the Family Rules that made my situation inescapable. Rule #1: My mother wanted me here and she always won, so I was stuck with no choices. Rule #2: My father couldn't give me a reprieve because he was inconsistent (and see Rule #1). Rule #3: Prill unearthed the baggage that came with being a Hemingway and blew it up as big as she could in this tiny fiefdom. I was the daughter of a libertine whose books were banned routinely and who was declared by some to be a communist writer of deviant themes. And Rule #4: While Prill harped on my looks, what I heard above all else was, "You are cursed, and all of your family is cursed, giant girl. You are the spawn of evil, of someone worshipped as a false god, and who never has had

lasting love himself and you never will either. You're incapable of it." *Love always ends, and usually badly for us Hemingways.*

I despised Prill's viciousness and sense of superiority, preying on those she felt were weaker than she was. But her accusations crawled into the corners of my mind, where they found purchase. Still, I vowed never to be shamed the next time I had a showdown with Prill Lamont.

I knew it would be soon.

*Brett was damned good-looking. She wore a slipover jersey sweater and a tweed skirt, and her hair was brushed back like a boy's. She started all that. She was built with curves like the hull of a racing yacht and you missed none of it with that wool jersey.*

~ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

*October 10, 1939*

*Hola Flea:*

*Sorry I couldn't get up to Connecticut. I know I promised, but I just got back from Spain and things went badly for our side. Taking stock of our options is taking more time than I thought it would. And then, at home with Pauline and the boys, well, if I hired someone to run my life badly, he couldn't have done a more complete job of it than I have. Pauline is hanging in. Gig and*



*Mouse are ok. Can't wait for Christmas to see you, hija mia!*

*Your mother mentioned a girl is picking on you at the school. I wish I could make it all go away, querida, but I can't. The first and final thing you have to do in this world is last it, and not be smashed by it or by small people like this Prill. I'm sorry, Flea. There are idiots everywhere, and you have to endure them until they tire of their petty games or when all else is exhausted, knock them out—figuratively I mean, or your mother will kill me. Let them know you're a fighter and won't ever be broken. Not ever. Se fuerte! Be strong.*

*Working hard on "Bell Tolls." Should come out next year. Max thinks it's swell and could be something fine. Jaysus! You never know where your personas are going to end up! Pilar started out as a minor character, and then she just grabbed the plot by the horns and took off with it. Not much I could do about it, since she couldn't be argued out of it.*

*I'm heading back to Spain soon. Worried about a few friends left there. I'll be up in a couple months to see you ride. Seguro! For sure!*

*Con amor (or is it chile con carne?) And don't change ever, Flea. Don't forget our talk way back when re: Zeldommage! Papa*

I smiled, pleased that Max Perkins, Papa's editor at Scribner's, liked the book, and I laughed at the comment about Pilar, the secondary heroine in his book. I could see Papa shrugging as he paced in his study as if his literary

creations sprang forth determining their own plot points. I frowned too. He would be in Connecticut in a couple of months to see me ride? *Seguro* my foot! I knew he wouldn't be, but I couldn't help hoping. I pictured me taking scary jumps higher than he expected of me, and him being bowled over by my courage, proud of me.

He never did see me ride until I rode in Madison Square Garden when I was seventeen, some three years later. See Finn Hemingway Family Rule #2: 100 percent reliable 25–60 percent of the time.

Still, he took with one hand but gave with the other. I told him about Zelda's "you'll never inspire poetry" speech the summer after it happened. I spied the photo of him and Marlene Dietrich on the bookshelf as we read in his study as we did every afternoon, and I slumped in my chair. "I'm never going to be pretty, like Mrs. Dietrich, am I, Papa?"

Papa was in his khakis and a rumpled, blue shirt, sleeves rolled up, his back to me as he hunted through the bookshelves for his battered copy of *Anna Karenina*. He twisted around and peered at me over his shoulder. Then he stared out the window, hand rubbing his forehead with a blank expression on his face as if to say, "A mere world-famous writer can't be expected to deal with this question from his eight-year-old daughter." Then he gamely suspended his search, walked slowly over to his favorite chair, and lowered himself into it. "Flea, take a seat, would you, please?"

He gestured to the straight-backed chair across from him and I shuffled over to it. I was a little nervous to hear his

next words, and was painfully aware of a big ketchup stain on my lavender t-shirt from lunch.

Papa gazed out the window for so long I thought he'd forgotten me. Then he fixed his chestnut-colored eyes onto my own, took a deep breath, and blew it out slowly.

“Where in the *hell* did that come from, Flea?”

I looked at my hands, then blurted, “Mrs. Fitzgerald said my jaw is too strong. And my nose is too straight, and that I have your eyes—and that’s bad. And I’m not pretty. And I’ll never inspire poetry.” I was out of breath when I finished.

Papa colored, a high crimson on his cheekbones, a sure sign of anger. His fists flexed and I heard him mutter, “That goddamned infernal lunatic!”

He took a sip of his drink, slapped it down, and leaned closer. “Okay, Flea, listen up. Zelda wouldn’t know true beauty from a vaudeville clown. *Zeldommage!*”

I’d lived in France my whole life up to then and I knew he was playing on the phrase “*Quel dommage*”—meaning “What a shame.” I smiled a little.

He leaned forward again. “For starters, you *are* in fact going to be a beauty. And, honestly, in some ways, I wish you weren’t, because it’s a lazy way some women have of making their splash in the world without really knowing what they’re capable of. However, second, and more importantly, you are more than pretty because you are unique, not cookie-cutter, where everything is even. It’s the unusual that’s beautiful, Flea. Remember that. Pretty, pff . . .” He waved his hand dismissively. “Pretty isn’t something that lasts or has value, Flea. It’s what you add to

it, the work, the discipline to skip easy things to accomplish the harder ones. Like you being a lawyer. That's not for the ordinary. It's going to be hard, at times impossible, and you'll want to quit, but you won't, because you're made of stronger stuff. Pretty? That's nothing."

I was not convinced. "But Mrs. Mason and Mrs. Dietrich are so pretty that even you want to be around them all the time. All the men do." Jane Mason was a gorgeous socialite who lived in Cuba but was in Key West often. She was a favorite of my father's.

Papa threw back his head and laughed so loudly that Pauline poked her head into the room. She said, "What's so funny?"

"Flea. She's amusing me beyond reason."

Pauline smiled and held up a hand as if to say, "Fine you two! Whatever it is!" She backed out and closed the door. Papa walked over to me and stooped to my level, balanced on his haunches.

"Here's the thing, Flea—and this is a little grown-up. Yes, both of those women are easy on the eyes, but I wouldn't have either of them around here for more than a minute if they didn't have the rest. Jane is an expert sailor, a great storyteller, and a swell artist. The Kraut is brilliant. She's worked hard, and no one gave her a free ride even though she is beautiful. She has substance and honor, and the pretty face is way beside the point. Way beside the point. Do you understand?"

I kind of did. Papa touched my face gently.

"Flea, you'll have the beauty, and dammit to Hell, you *will* inspire poetry. But don't put any stock in it. It's

quicksilver, and nothing to count on. Develop the rest, and you'll be a winner no matter what life throws at you. Never forget that.”

I'd nodded, but Zelda's words still felt like a death sentence that even my father's comments couldn't commute. I was his daughter, after all, and Zelda was an uncensored albeit crazy truth teller.

Still, I needed to find a reason to stay here at Ellsworth or invent a reason to get out—one or the other—and soon.

## 6

*You'll lose it if you talk about it.*

~ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

All grim things seemed to attach to me at Ellsworth. While my grades were fine and the riding was superb, all else was bleak. No friends, family distant, my disobedient but loyal Jack Russell terrier was home in Chicago, and me, an object of ridicule here, a Mongrel out of my depth in Greenwich, Connecticut. Now, on top of all else, I was sick.

I'd had an aching throat for a week. It felt like I was consuming knives with each swallow—never once had this sort of pain in Paris or Chicago—and I'd delayed going to the infirmary because it looked like the picture of despair: a low cement building at the edge of campus with no grace or charm. But when I could barely croak out a few words in my weekly call with my father, he bellowed, "Flea! Get the hell to a doctor, or I'll come up there on the next plane."

The infirmary was as expected, a sad, pea-green little place with tiny, square rooms spoking off a central nursing station. A frowning nurse pointed, and within two minutes, I was in a room with two cots, a cabinet between the beds, and one window looking out at treetops and sky. Venetian blinds were drawn up and the place smelled like Comet cleanser.

Another second-year student was in the bed next to me. I didn't know her, but I knew who she was. She'd starred in the fall concert and was now hospitalized for a broken arm she'd earned acting on a dare to jump off a second-floor balcony while drunk. The school was about to expel her, but a hefty donation from her father encouraged the school to give her a second chance. When she told me that part she wore an apologetic, crooked smile, half making fun of the school and half making fun of herself.

"That's kind of neat, though," I said. "Maybe they'll use the donation for one of those mattresses for the next girl who jumps."

I was secretly thrilled by her boldness in breaking the school rules, as well as her arm in one grand gesture, but I'd hate incurring Papa's wrath and possible appearance here. The last time I got in trouble was in Chicago a year ago, when I'd been caught smoking under the bleachers with my best friend as we loudly sang "God Bless America" until the girls' softball coach stuck her head under the planks and yelled, "To the principal's office. Now!"

I was confined to my room except for classes for two weeks. Papa got me on the phone and simply said, "Don't smoke, Flea. I did during the war, but don't even smoke the

Cuban cigars as much as I used to. Just stog on special occasions. Bad for you, and it stinks.” Papa made up words sometimes. *Stog*? Somehow, you always knew what he meant. He also threw in Spanish if he thought it fit. Even though he didn’t yell at me that day, I was embarrassed that he was seeing me in a bad light.

The girl in the other cot now smiled a sweet smile. “You’re funny.” She held out her unbroken arm, the left one, and we shook across the space between our cots.

She said, “I’m Jeddrah James.”

“And I’m Finn Hemingway.”

“Hemingway’s daughter, right? I read the newsletter about your enrollment. And Finn, like Huck?”

“Yes and yes. And your name’s Jeddrah? I’ve never heard that before.”

“I know,” she said, miserably. “No one has. I sound like an outlaw. I wish I were named Sally.”

“Oh no. I love Jeddrah. It sounds like the wind blowing across the desert.” I was thinking we all want what we don’t have.

Jeddrah’s face lit up. I looked at her more closely. She was tiny, only five foot one or so, and not more than a hundred pounds. She had straight, yellow-blond hair halfway down her back, blueberry eyes and a large, full mouth that smiled without looking happy. And she had those Greta Garbo eyes, lots of upper lid even when her eyes were open. A Gatsby Girl: new money and lovely.

“I’ll tell you my story, and then you tell me yours,” she said.



Jeddrah lived in New York City. Her parents were divorced and unfriendly. One lived on the East Side and the other on the West Side. Jeddrah's father was a banker and her mother, a famous socialite. A car came for her on vacations, and she never knew if she'd be seeing her mother or her father until she saw on which side of Central Park the car ended up. They never visited here.

"If I want to know what my father is up to, I read the financial pages. If I want to see my mother, I look on the society page," Jeddrah said. "That's how I know who her new lover is and if she's in London or Buenos Aires. I'm happy they stay away. More time for me to party, not that they'd notice."

I didn't say anything, but I wondered if that's why Jeddrah drank. She looked away, her blonde hair swinging, then she spoke brightly. "How do you like The Ellsworth School for Girls so far, or as I like to think of it, The Ellsworth School for Effete Girls?"

I laughed, then thought about that for a moment. "I miss my mother, my dog, and some of my friends, but I like the riding here and the classes. I don't like Prill Lamont."

Jeddrah laughed. "Join the group. She's a bully, but runs the social life here, so there's that. And she did that mean thing to you, right? Took your clothes in gym or something?"

I winced, just remembering it. "Yeah, she did."

Jeddrah paused. "So, what's it like having the great Ernest Hemingway as your father?"

I thought about that. What *was* it like? I took in a breath, then blew out the air. "It's kind of like having this

big spotlight all around, but it's never on you. We have the same birthday, but he gets three thousand cards from around the world, and I get five from my family. And people are interested in you only because of him. They'll ask, do you like to go fishing *with your father*? Are you spending Christmas *with your father*? Sometimes, they'll call me 'Flea'—his nickname for me—like they actually know me. They've read about our family, you know, from the articles written about him. They all want to know what he's *really* like. And I can't answer that. He's so many things and he's different at home than in public, so I never can answer." I shrugged. "But it's OK. I'm not the star. No one really sees me."

Jeddrah was silent, then said, "But does he? See you, I mean."

I picked at my blanket. "Sometimes." I lifted my head to see Jeddrah nodding. Just thinking about him made me feel excited, but then I thought about the rest. "But then he has meetings, and his friends, and his interviews, and his writing. He's on his second marriage. Pauline's nice, but he's losing interest in her, and I sometimes wonder if he'll lose interest in me, kind of like he did with my mother and some of his friends, and now in Pauline . . . and then he may never visit me at all, or maybe replace me." I was kneading the blanket now like a nervous cat.

Jeddrah was shaking her head. What I'd wanted to say was: *Yes, he sees clear to my soul when he makes the time to look.*

Then Jeddrah, hands clasped hard, said, “No, he won’t do that. You have the same birthday. You are bound by love and destiny for life.”

I laughed, wanting to believe her.

Jeddrah laughed too. “Yeah. Well, at least it’s interesting, right? I mean, he’s always doing stuff, fishing, traveling, movie stars hanging around, by the looks of the magazines.”

I paused, recalling that just a week ago, Dean Byrne had asked me if my father would consider being the Guest of Honor at our Art Week in April at the school. I’d been caught off guard. I knew my father was famous in his writing world. A movie had been made of *A Farewell to Arms*; his African safari resulted in *Green Hills of Africa* and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, both of which were well-received and created more publicity.

Still, to me he was just Papa: a man who hated to wear ties and almost never did, who loved his cats and dogs like family members, who flipped trout on our grill like a short-order chef, who read *Anna Karenina* at least once a year, who made all of us laugh with his funny jokes and mimicking of voices, and who made being in his shadow feel better than sharing the limelight with anyone else.

I shook my head, then looked back at Jeddrah, who looked expectant. “I’m not usually doing any of it with him.” I took a sip of water. “I get my hopes up, and sometimes it happens, but mostly, it doesn’t. But you know what’s weird? When it *does* happen, I forgive him for all the times he missed.”

“It’s not weird. Love is forgiving, and then when he does include you, it’s like you matter.”

I nodded. “I feel bad though, because my mother’s the one who makes time, but he’s the one I want. Is that terrible to say?” I stared at my hands, a little embarrassed. Jeddrah was so honest about her family flaws and disappointments that I felt able to talk about my own.

Jeddrah shook her head. “No, it’s just real. It’s your heart.” She took her good hand and patted her heart. “Do you write too? In the blood, so to speak?”

I hesitated, not wanting to seem too ambitious or just too weird. Then I plunged in. “No. I’m going to be a trial lawyer. It’s all I’ve ever wanted.”

Jeddrah’s blue eyes went wide. “Really? When did you know that was what you wanted to do?”

“I knew when I saw men dying after the hurricane a few years ago on Key West. I was helping my father get aid and food to them. They were vets who had no help, no money for their families, no one rescuing them even though they were working for the government and fought in the war for this country. I want to do something to try to make things better. Help people.” I shrugged, feeling a little grandiose, but she bobbed her head.

I changed the subject and pointed at her cast. “So, is that thing itchy?”

Jeddrah stuck her finger into the cast as far as she could, then sighed in frustration. “Yeah. I need a chopstick or a pipe cleaner or something. Hey, when we get out of here, and I get this thing off, we can do stuff together. You ride, right?”

“Yeah. Do you?” My riding attire gave me away.

“No, but I’m trainable. I love animals of any kind.” Jeddrah looked eager as she pushed herself upright, not an easy task with one arm totally useless. “You can show me what to do and I’ll do it. Deal?”

She held out her good hand again, this time vertical in the air, and we gently touched palms.

“Deal,” I said.

“And I think you being a lawyer is wonderful. You’ll be a humdinger!”

I felt understood in that moment. I lowered my head and looked at my hands. “Thank you, Jeddrah. I’ll try my best.”

Jeddrah nodded, and it felt like the first line of a long, exquisite poem had just been written in the air between us. I had a friend, and I felt braver.

*Everyone behaves badly—given the chance.*

~ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

By Christmas, Jeddrah and I were inseparable. Together, we plotted against Prillie and how I would beat Joannie Janssen in the Southampton Classic. After that, look out Madison Square Garden. I wasn't sure I could beat the reigning champion, Jacqueline Bouvier, who was bogarting all the ribbons on the East Coast, but I'd try.

I called Papa to ask if I could bring Jeddrah home with me for Christmas.

“Sure, Flea. Love to meet your friends. The more the merrier.”

When he and Pauline separated, he apparently decided that Key West was not a big enough island for both of them so he found a fresh island: Cuba. He had a “fresh” lady too. I felt terrible for Pauline, even when Jack reported

that in addition to being beautiful, this new one, Martha, was a real peach.

“What is she like?” I reluctantly asked when Jack told me about it over the phone. I wanted to know, and I didn’t. It was odd and not particularly comfortable to have a father who was dating.

“She’s gorgeous, with legs that go on forever and wavy, blonde hair. Can’t believe someone like that is with Papa. And young!” Jack gushed.

I sighed at the unsatisfying description, realizing it was the best that could be expected from an eighteen-year-old boy. Jack was in his last year at The Storm King School, a boarding school north of New York City, and he recently met up with Papa in Manhattan, and Martha was there.

“Get a grip, Jack. I didn’t ask what she looked like. I asked what she’s like.”

“Oh.” He paused, as if stumped. “Well, she’s friendly and nice, just came right up to me and said, ‘You must be Bumby. I’m Marty.’”

That made me pause, thinking about Pauline and her kindness to Jack and me, of the sadness Patrick and Gregory must feel. I’d never really lived with my father, but they had, so were bound to miss his daily presence as I never had.

As it turned out, my father was already divorced and had married Martha shortly thereafter. None of us kids were at the wedding or even knew about it until after. By the time Christmas came, Papa had been married for a month.

I felt hurt that Papa hadn’t included us or at least told me about it before I read it in the newspaper. When I asked him why he hadn’t told us, he rubbed his head. “Geez, Flea,

didn't think of it. I just wanted to pin it all down. Got married in Cheyenne, Wyoming. A wedding is nothing. Just a formality. Don't worry. You'll have lots of time to get to know Marty."

Papa missed my point. I knew I would meet Martha. What I wanted was to be *part* of it. I wanted to know before the world knew. I wanted to put on a yellow, flowered dress that floated around my ankles, and to carry a nosegay down the aisle as a bridesmaid while Pachelbel's *Canon* played, and to help Martha with her hair, and to stand up as Papa's family when he vowed to love and stay with this woman forever—again—whoever she was. Instead, Jack and I congregated that Christmas in Cuba after he was already married and met the new Mrs. Hemingway.

Jeddrah was thrilled to be in Cuba with me and enjoyed the lively chats we all had with Papa around the dinner table. Jedd bloomed like one of the sunflowers in the garden, always tilting her head toward the sun and smiling.

"You mean he stops working when you're here?" Jeddrah asked.

"Well, not completely, but he writes in the morning and takes the afternoon off to be with us."

"That's really nice."

The farm was outside Havana, and very run-down when Marty and Papa took it over. However, it boasted ten acres of restorable gardens, cow fields, a ramshackle tennis court, and a pool. The house was limestone, long and low, and enjoyed a stunning view of Havana, which shone like a twinkling jewel at night.



When I arrived, I took in its well-worn, deep leather sofas, simple, polished wooden tables, unadorned beds, and African tribal rugs on tiled floors. The Key West house was sophisticated and stylish, but in Cuba, everything was soft, squishy, and comfortable. Most of the time, we all were in bathing suits with bare feet tucked up on sofas and chairs and a cat or dog in our laps. Or for a change, I'd sit on the front limestone steps, pillow cushioning my back, book in hand, and breathe in the thick air and feel the hot breezes on bare arms and legs. I loved it.

Papa was at his best on that visit, teasing us, taking us fishing, swimming with us, and entertaining us at the best little seafood dive in Havana. He drank, but it was controlled, and he was always relaxed on his boat, *Pilar*, where we all enjoyed the afternoon sunsets.

Martha actually was lovely. She was tall, blonde, and easygoing. She had her own work, and often ducked into her bedroom to write or edit. Initially, I had mixed feelings about her. On the one hand, my father seemed happy whenever she joined us on the boat or at a jai alai game and she was solicitous of Jack, Jedd, and me. On the other hand, I felt disloyal to Pauline. Martha was, after all, the temptress who'd pulled Papa away from Pauline, according to Patrick. I felt that way about most of Papa's lady friends: drawn to them and repelled by them.

As I sat by the pool sunning, Martha's presence brought back memories of Jane Mason, one of Papa's other women to whom I became quite attached when Papa lived in Key West. Jane was a strawberry blonde with violet eyes—and a husband. I studied her like an exotic species of

butterfly. She was funny and breath-catchingly beautiful, and didn't make trite comments about my height or red hair as so many of my father's other women did. Instead, the day I met her, she said, "So, Finn, do you want to get on the back of my motorcycle and feel the wind in your hair?"

She called over to my father, who was holding court around a bocce game. "Papa, can Finn come with me for an hour or so?"

My father looked up. "Ask Flea. She can speak for herself."

I nodded vigorously, and he gave Jane a thumbs-up, then said, "Take good care of my girl."

Jane saluted like the first mate. My father saluted back, then winked at me. I blushed, then I trotted off with Jane.

We careened around beach paths on her motorbike, skinny-dipped in secluded coves, and danced on hot, soft sand that squished between our toes while she held my hand and I went under her arm in a turn. We ducked into bars, too, where Jane knew everyone.

"Hey, this is Papa's girl! Isn't she something? See you around midnight!" She waved, held my hand, and lifted it in the air like I'd just won the welterweight championship, and we headed back to the house.

As a kid, I didn't know anything about sex, but I knew that there was some chemistry between Jane and my father, and I knew that Pauline knew. When Jane was around, Pauline's face hardened and her smile was forced. I felt sorry for her. I sure wouldn't want to compete with Jane when it came to winning my father's attention.

I don't know what happened to Jane. After a few summers, she was not around anymore, and I missed her. Still, I felt I should have resented her for Pauline's sake, but instead I loved being with her. Then, because my connection to her was piggybacked onto my father's own, when he snapped it off, I too lost Jane, with no say in the matter.

I sighed recalling it all. And here I was, older, but still back in that loyalty bind, feeling drawn to Martha's accomplishments, beauty, and charm, but sad for Pauline and the boys. Papa never made me feel that he'd forget about Jack and me with each new marriage, but my insecurities were such that I wondered if he had enough room for all of us to share his inner sanctum. I shook away the cobwebs and snapped back to the present.

While Jeddrah and I enjoyed the beaches most mornings, in the late afternoons, we would sneak into the liquor cabinet and take little sips from the many bottles. While I'd take a slurp, she really drank the stuff. By bedtime, she would be pretty tipsy. Still, we thought we were urbane, and I felt full of myself until the day before we were to leave. Papa tapped me on the shoulder as I sunbathed around the pool.

"Flea, come into my study, please," he said. "I need to talk to you."

From the way he said it, I knew it wasn't good. I walked slowly down the hall, leaving Jeddrah at the pool with a few of the cats. Once in the study, I perched on the edge of a chair, apprehensive and ready to run.

Papa was already in his swivel desk chair, wielding a nail file, looking down and cleaning his nails. He finished

the nail effort, closed the file with a crack, and slapped it on his desk with a thud. He pivoted back to me. “Flea, how old are you?”

“You know how old I am, Papa. I’ll turn fifteen in July.”

“Exactly. July twenty-first. And I’ll turn forty-one. Did you think I wouldn’t notice?”

I tried to look innocent. “Notice what?”

“Don’t,” he snapped, looking right at me. “The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shock-proof shit detector. And I have it in spades.”

I had the grace to blush. “We were just having some fun.”

Papa looked out the window for a few seconds, then turned back to me. “Fun? Drinking at your age is not fun. It’s a detour down a road to hell. You stop. You stop now. And if you ever touch my liquor again before you’re twenty-one, you’ll wish you’d never been born to me.”

I swallowed. Papa was the fun parent, not the enforcer.

“I . . . but you drink. You drink a lot.” I trembled, fearing his wrath at criticism from me.

Papa slammed his fist down on his desk, mouth set in a grim, straight line, eyes narrowed and glaring. He leaned forward so his face was two inches from mine.

“Don’t you *ever* use me as an excuse or an example. I’m forty years old, and you’re fourteen. We are not equals. You are too young to drink, and too young to think you can get away with it. You are my job, and I take it as seriously as death.”

Papa's temples were throbbing and his face was red. I swallowed hard and asked, "Do you take it as seriously as your writing?" I trembled a little. It was the crux of the matter—how much I mattered compared to his work—and I had never had the nerve to give it voice before.

Papa sat back, cocked his head, and to my surprise, laughed. "Some days. Some days I do. Now git, and I don't ever want to discuss this again. Are we clear, and can I trust you?"

I squirmed in the chair, but the answer was easy. It would kill me to lose Papa's confidence. "You can trust me, and we are clear."

Papa swiveled in his chair. His face relaxed, and he looked out the window, quiet. "Flea, you're responsible for anyone you bring into this house. You decide if they're someone you'll stand up for, and if not, don't bring them here, because I hold you accountable."

He got up and looked at me with softness in his eyes. My own eyes were moist, and I was ashamed that I'd tried to pull one over on him. I wanted to be sophisticated and cool like Jedd, and thought this small act of rebellion would go unnoticed.

He continued, his voice lower now, and kind. "I like your friend Jeddrah very much. I really do. But she is in a world of pain, and you're too young to know how to help her. Just be as good a friend as you can to help her survive it. The job of living is surviving."

I was still stricken, and the tears started to roll down.

"Don't cry, Flea. I love you and always will. But you have to decide who you're going to be. Are you going to run

down your own road or follow someone else's path whether it's a good route or off a cliff? You have to decide what you stand for, what you'll fight for, and who you are. Either way, I love you, Flea, but you don't get a free pass."

