

2015

# Call it Eden: a novel

Stefanie Brook Trout  
*Iowa State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd>

 Part of the [American Literature Commons](#), [Environmental Sciences Commons](#), [History Commons](#), and the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Trout, Stefanie Brook, "Call it Eden: a novel" (2015). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 14421.  
<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/14421>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [digirep@iastate.edu](mailto:digirep@iastate.edu).

**Call it Eden:**

**A novel**

by

**Stefanie Brook Trout**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major: Creative Writing and Environment

Program of Study Committee:  
Debra Marquart, Major Professor  
Amy Bix  
Brianna Burke  
K. L. Cook  
Matthew Sivils  
David Zimmerman

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2015

Copyright © Stefanie Brook Trout, 2015. All rights reserved.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
EDEN: A GENESIS – A HISTORY OF THE CARSON FAMILY .....	1
FOREWORD .....	4
CHAPTER 1 BORN IN BLOOD AND FIRE .....	10
CHAPTER 2 FROM THE ASHES .....	50
CHAPTER 3 THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF LAWRENCE ALPHONSE CARSON .....	78
CHAPTER 4 ADAM’S EDEN (1) .....	109
CHAPTER 5 SHE OF BAY CITY .....	121
CHAPTER 6 EVE’S EDEN .....	132
CHAPTER 7 REMEMBRANCE .....	149
CHAPTER 8 ADAM’S EDEN (2) .....	164
CHAPTER 9 HOW DIFFERENT IT WAS WHEN YOU WERE THERE .....	179
AFTERWORD .....	199

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Debra Marquart, and my committee members, Amy Bix, Brianna Burke, K. L. Cook, Matthew Sivils, and David Zimmerman, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this project. I would also like to thank Dean Bakopoulos, Rick Bass, Lance Sacknoff, Benjamin Percy, and all of my colleagues from Iowa State University's Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing and Environment for their invaluable feedback on earlier versions of this story. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the incredible support I received from the rest of the Iowa State English Department—faculty, staff, and students—and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture. I want to also offer my appreciation to Steve Semken of Ice Cube Press and every other mentor that helped me get to where I am today. And as always, thanks to my family and friends for their love and encouragement.

## ABSTRACT

This historical novel is a book-within-a-book. *Eden: A Genesis—A History of the Carson Family* is framed as a work of nonfiction by the fictional character Lee Rickels. The collection of artifacts assembled by Rickels includes interviews, journal entries, and news clippings covering a fifty-year period following the family line of Frank and Ada Carson, who met in 1920s Chicago and escaped to Eden, an unsettled island in Lake Huron where they built their own community. The false documents are bookended by a foreword and afterword by Rickels and footnoted throughout, creating a double narrative on the subjectivity of history. The book is about home and the way family and place—the two primary aspects of home—change over time. It blurs fact and fiction to suggest that each is critical to understanding truth.

Eden: A Genesis  
A History of the Carson Family  
by Lee Rickels

TO ADA CARSON,  
without whom this book would not exist,  
nor would I have found my own place in its story.

And to the rest of my co-authors—  
Lawrence and Elizabeth Carson, Caroline Orton, and both of the Frank Carsons—  
whose contributions were critical pieces of the Carson Family story.

I have tried to write by the old rule that how good a book is should be judged, by the man who writes it, by the excellence of the material that he eliminates.

So much that was interesting and instructive is gone and this book is an attempt to distill rather than to amplify.

—Ernest Hemingway<sup>1</sup>

All things to be truly wicked must start from an innocence.

—Ernest Hemingway<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ironically, Hemingway's distillation process resulted in this quotation being eliminated from the ending of *A Moveable Feast*. Access to his handwritten papers courtesy of the Hemingway Collection at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston. This fragment is from item 124 in the collection.

<sup>2</sup> By contrast, this line did make it into the memoir's ending (though it is worth noting that the great author took his own life before ever truly settling on an ending; that task, and the titling of the book, was left to his survivors).

## FOREWORD

When Ada Carson asked me to come to Eden and document her family's history, I wasn't sure I wanted the job. I knew that leaving mainland Michigan would effectively cut me off from everything that mattered to me—my friends, the little family I had left, all of the places I'd ever known. In a word: my home. But she convinced me to visit the island, knowing that it was the only convincing she would ever need to do.

Ada arranged special transportation, a boat waiting just for me in Port Huron, and she gave the captain very specific instructions. Ada liked to use the image of a clock to describe locations on the island, and I have found it useful to follow suit. By way of Port Huron, one comes up on the island, Eden, at six o'clock. The Carson family's private dock is at four o'clock. Rather than take me the shortest route, directly from six to four, the captain detoured around the island clockwise, giving me a grand preview of Eden's sloping sand dunes, sculptured cliffs, and towering pines that gave a man neck pains to admire. There was even a waterfall, a thin white ribbon of bridal veil emptying out into Huron. At 12 o'clock, I caught a glimpse behind the façade: a long dock jutting out from the land like an overheated dog's lolling tongue and the flurry of self-important human activity around it like a pile of ants descending upon a dropped breadcrumb. But before I had time to process any disdain, we had rounded the lighthouse, and it was more emerald-encrusted cliffs for me, and I marveled at their diverse shapes. Sometimes the sandstone nosed out into Lake Huron; other times it fell back into itself, creating delicate arches and dark hollows. I saw so much that I wanted to see the rest, to see it all, but it was part of Ada's ploy that I should not, so the boat sidled up to the Carson's private dock and let me stew in my own imaginings of what lie between four and six o'clock.

Ada didn't know what time I would arrive, so there was no one at the dock to greet me. The captain simply gave me instructions to climb the 108 wooden steps leading up the face of a sand dune not unlike those I recognize from Lake Michigan's shores. They were strewn with the very same grasses, long and arching from the ground like delicate fingers.

It was assumed that I would know what to do from there, and I did, for though the boardwalk forked into three paths at the crest of the dune, the paths to my right and left led to destinations obscured by shadows and foliage, while the one before me led directly to the Main House of the Carson Estate, a mansion that overwhelmed me with its scale. I didn't expect such large things from an island, especially things of artifice, which could never compete with Eden's natural wonders. Compared to the landscape features that rivaled it in magnitude, the house looked grotesque and self-conscious. But I knew that it was where I was meant to go.

I rang the doorbell and expected a servant or a woman dripping in jewels, so that when Ada opened the door herself, I was underwhelmed into taking a few steps back. She was not at all what I had pictured. Her ruddy face, free of makeup, and soft body made her look, for lack of a better word, common. Her clothing was clean but loose and practical. She wore slippers on her feet to keep them warm on the black and white checkerboard tile of the foyer. Her hair was cut short and occasionally made its way into her eyes. I don't know that I realized it yet, but reflecting upon her appearance a week later, I understood that she reminded me of my grandmother. It was odd to see her move about in such an inappropriately large and adorned space, but she seemed utterly comfortable there—really, she seemed like she would be utterly comfortably anywhere. It was the house that seemed uncomfortable with her. She seemed to defy its expectations as much as she defied my own.

I decided then, within moments of meeting Ada, that I would agree to write her family's history. It sounded like a straightforward enough assignment. I am a historian by training, so it seemed to be a simple matter of asking the right people the right questions, compiling primary source documents, and organizing my research in a rational, chronological fashion. I never would have thought that almost ten years later, I would be publishing a manuscript that introduces more questions than it answers.

\*

The story of the Carsons has no true beginning and no true end. Such is the nature of family. If I felt it important, I could dig farther back into the family's origins: the lives of Frank Senior and Ada before they met, their parents, and their parents' parents, on and on without end until there was nothing left to find. Even then it wouldn't be a true beginning—not unless I worked my way back to the first humans, an impossible task, and back even further to the creatures from which those first humans evolved, until I reached the first living organism, a microscopic thing whose biogenesis might always be a mystery.

And regarding this history's end point, I could, if I wanted to, continue well beyond the present moment. The family line is far from ended, and should I not care about producing a document that people can actually read within my own lifetime, I could have continued tracking the Carson family's progress until the day I take my last breath, capturing as much of a family's story as is possible by one mortal man.

But I did none of these things. By necessity, I chose a beginning, and I chose an end—an end to this story, though it is certainly the beginning of another. This is all to say that should Ada Carson have commissioned someone else to embark on this project, they might have—probably

would have—chosen a different place to start and a different place to stop. But Ada asked me, and this is how I chose to tell the story.

While collecting the history that would become *Eden: A Genesis*, I found my role more akin to that of a photographer than a historian. Both professionals work in the world of fact—this object exists; that event happened—but while the historian is considered a scholar, the photographer is considered an artist. Photography is subjective, requiring the artist to choose not only what to point the camera at but also how to frame it. Whether a photograph was taken close up or far away alters our perception of the photographed, as does everything that is left out of the frame. It is the same with this history. I alone decided what to include and what to leave out, how deeply I should explore something or how little, and these decisions of mine fundamentally altered the content of the story you are about to read.

And though I tried my best to keep myself out of the story—I am not, after all, a Carson—through the very process of working with the Carsons, I ultimately became a part of their story. To completely excise myself would be the conscious presentation of a lie, something that I, as a historian and humanist, am unwilling to do.

I will admit that I initially struggled to choose an approach. Straight history seemed far too dull for the common reader, and to completely novelize the story would turn fact into fiction and render all of my work meaningless. So I compromised with a middle road, a historical document with narrative elements not unlike a novel, which was easy because all the ingredients were there: compelling characters, intrigue, significant themes. I have told the story—framed the story—as truly and accurately as I knew how by letting its characters speak for themselves. This history is an artifact made of artifacts—journal entries, interview transcripts, letters. I have refrained from filling in the gaps between each fragment in hopes that the reader will find these

lacunae are not merely holes but negative spaces of meanings in and of themselves, like a sea cave that is no less interesting than the cliff it used to be.

\*

Ada's goal in commissioning me to write the history of her family was to preserve the Carson legacy—not in the sense that she wanted future generations to look back and remark how wonderful they were but simply to ensure that time did not erase the very fact that she and Frank and their children existed. She believed that every person who lived in Eden had the right to an origin story, deserved to know where they came from.

Over time, I developed my own objective. It did not replace Ada's in my mind but grew within her goal like the deep, wide-reaching roots of beachgrass, which keeps the sand from blowing away in the wind. It is a maxim of history that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."<sup>3</sup> Thus, while it might be said that I often focused my lens upon some of the least flattering aspects of the Carson family's history, I only did so out of kindness and in service of truth. It is my hope that the readers of this volume—regardless of whether or not they are direct descendants of Frank and Ada or whether or not they ever step foot on this beautiful island called Eden—not only know that Frank and Ada existed but also learn from their mistakes so as not to repeat them.

Lee Rickels

December 5, 1972

---

<sup>3</sup> Jorge Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana y Borrás (known more commonly as George Santayana) in *Reason in Common Sense*, volume one of *The Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress* (1905).

In the spring, we never worried ourselves about the weather. The clouds that darkened our days, the rains that threatened to wash our beaches away, and the chill of the morning were not simply tolerated but appreciated. Because the clouds would eventually clear, the rains would eventually stop, and the afternoons were always warmer than the mornings that preceded them. In spring, we felt we could never die.

—Frank Carson, Senior

## CHAPTER 1

## BORN IN BLOOD AND FIRE

*Editor's Note: What follows are excerpts from Frank Senior's journal, which he began keeping after he and his family left Chicago.<sup>4</sup>*

**Act I**

I'm the happiest man alive, and I owe everything to Al Capone. If you'd asked me exactly ten years ago where I expected to be at age thirty, I never would have imagined this turn of events. Truth is, I never thought very highly of myself before I met Ada. Our life together hasn't been easy, but she's changed me for the better. She gave me hope. She made me feel like I could do anything, and I could as long as it was for her. She put her faith in me long before

---

<sup>4</sup> Frank began keeping a journal because he wanted to document and eventually publish the early history of his family. Unfortunately, life got in the way of this dream. Fortunately, his wife was inspired by his journals and decided to continue the work Frank Senior began, and she enlisted my help with the project.

Frank did not date his journal entries, which makes it difficult to track the chronology of his inner life, but Ada Carson estimates that the primary narrative included here and broken up into more digestible chunks was written over the course of the summer of 1929, when the family was still enjoying the rustic wilderness of the island and Frank Senior was not too preoccupied with the building of a town but rather had the time to simply reflect on his life and put his thoughts to the page. All of the "intermissions," including "False Starts," were written later as Frank tried—and failed—to return to his project. His frequent use of the list form contrasts strikingly with his earlier approach, certainly illustrating the lack of time Frank had to write long-winded prose after the serious work of leadership had begun. Whether or not we should read anything else into it is left for the reader to decide.

"Born in Blood and Fire" was one of many potential titles Frank Senior considered for his book, and though he never officially decided on a title, this one seemed the most appropriate. The subtitles used to divide this narrative are of my own invention, though I used Frank's own notes as a basis for them. Lightly edited for readability and published with the permission of Frank Senior's estate executor, Ada Carson.

anyone else was willing to take the gamble. Even when she turned down my first marriage proposal, I knew I would find a way to make her change her mind.

She gave me two reasons why she had to say no. First, her father knew my father—there had been some row about an outstanding euchre debt—and though Mr. Roy wasn't keen on her marrying in general, he had explicitly forbidden her from marrying me.<sup>5</sup> Mr. Roy forbade her from a lot of things, like going to Michigan State College where she'd been accepted without having first gotten his permission to apply. It's my opinion that she ought to have just left and gone anyway. She didn't owe him anything after all the terrible things he'd done to her, but I guess after he lost his hand at the slaughterhouse, she felt sorry for him and couldn't bear to leave him on his own. She felt obligated to do right by people, even bad people, and that's just one of the many things I didn't understand about Ada but admired nonetheless.

Her second reason was that I was “unfit to father children in my present condition,” which was a completely fair concern for her to have. I was ready to become a better man, but I still had a long ways to go until anyone would call me marriage material. My drinking was out of control, and I couldn't keep a steady job. I was still living at home with Bill, and with him being a drunk too, we got into fights about once each week.<sup>6</sup> If I let him win by not going at him with all I had, he'd kick me out of the house. Those nights I slept under the moon at the park or, when

---

<sup>5</sup> “Mr. Roy” refers to Henry Roy, Ada's father.

<sup>6</sup> “Bill” refers to William Carson, Frank's paternal uncle and stepfather. Frank's biological father, Thomas Carson, died of cholera when his mother, Fay, was six months pregnant with their second child, and Frank was just a boy. Frank and Fay were lucky to have not contracted cholera themselves. Bill married Fay shortly after Thomas's death. Tragically, Fay and the baby both died during childbirth. Bill raised Frank on his own after that and never remarried. Details on the family history filled in by Ada Carson and confirmed, where possible, with State of Illinois death and marriage records.

it was too cold or too wet to lie on the bare ground, at a homeless shelter. In short, my life was in chaos.

Both Ada and I had grown up victims, mere shadows of the people we were meant to be, and though I would never lay a hand on my own kid, I certainly understood her reservations about starting a family with a guy like me. I couldn't even afford to buy her an engagement ring.

I went on a weeklong bender to recover from her rejection, but then I came up with a plan: money would solve everything. If I could hire a girl to look after Mr. Roy, and if I could buy us a home of our very own, an automobile, and nice clothes so I could interview for better jobs, then there would be no reason for Ada and me to be apart. With money, I wouldn't need the drink. With money, I could be the man Ada needed, a man fit to father children. She wanted a daughter most of all. Her own childhood had been robbed, and she thought a daughter of her own would make her whole again.

I borrowed one of Bill's suits, at least one size too big for me, without asking permission and set off for the bank to apply for a loan. I figured ten grand would be enough to get me started. But when I got to the bank and opened the door, a couple of guys with Tommy Guns came running out. I held the door open for them—I wasn't trying to die a hero—and recognized one of them as Anthony Russo. We'd gone to school together. He looked different now, cleaned up, but I knew it was him, and I saw that surprised look of recognition in his eyes when he took note of me, the man who could make or break his escape.

"Thanks, Frankie," he said. He pulled a fistful of cash out of a cloth sack and pressed it into my hand. "Stop by the house sometime."

A few bills caught wind and blew away. Benjamin Franklin's face fluttered before my eyes and disappeared down the street. I thought to myself that I'd have to chase those down later,

but for a moment, I just stood there watching Anthony and the other guy hop into a black Milburn Electric waiting at the curb. It pulled away in a fit of burned rubber.

Right there, I counted the money clenched tight in my fist, and I couldn't help but laugh. I wouldn't need to chase a few hundred down the street after all. I wouldn't need that loan either. I was grinning like an idiot, just thinking about Ada—her olive skin and that bright, unselfconscious smile that made the skin around her eyes crinkle. But then a fleet of sirens wailed in the distance, and I got out of there before I got caught holding the bag for something I didn't do. I didn't feel guilty about keeping the cash. I figured that after a lifetime of bad luck, the tide had finally changed.

Maybe it was selfish, but the first thing I did was head to a club and spend time with a bottle of their best whiskey. It's a crime to make such a wonderful pleasure a crime. I ate a big steak, got a shave at the barber, and stopped in at Marshall Field's. The salesclerk raised his eyebrows at me when I first walked in—I suppose my ill-fitting clothes didn't match his typical clientele—but he stretched his lips into a straight line that was supposed to pass for a smile and helped me anyway. When I pulled out a wad of cash to pay for a new shirt and collar and a three-piece suit with a matching hat, the clerk's smile turned genuine, or at least rose to a higher caliber of fake.

I had the tailor cuff my trousers to show off my new oxfords. They told me it was the latest fashion. I spun around in the mirror and hardly recognized the spiffy fellow winking back at me. My hazel eyes looked greener and darker than usual. I posed with a fancy cane—black with an ivory handle—but settled on an umbrella. No matter how fashionable, dress should always be practical.

Properly soaked, fed, groomed, and attired, I bought a bouquet of calla lilies from a street vendor and called on Anthony at his mother's house on Racine.

"Good evening, Mrs. Russo," I said when she opened the door. "Remember me, Frankie Carson? I went to school with Ant."

"Frankie, darling, of course I remember you." She grabbed my face and pulled me in. Her soft breasts pressed up against me as she kissed both of my cheeks, leaving lipstick stains that I wouldn't find until I got home that evening. She led me inside, where I was greeted by the sweet and sour smell of freshly baked bread. The house had looked the same as ever on the outside but was entirely new on the inside, as if it had been gutted and then stuffed with the highest end furniture and appliances Chicago had to offer. Even the walls seemed to have moved since the last time I'd visited, but that was probably some illusion of interior decorating.

"You look simply marvelous, Mrs. Russo," I said, presenting her with the bouquet. "I bought the prettiest flowers I could find, but I can see now that they look like rot next to your radiant beauty. Say, where do you keep your garbage pile these days? That's where these wretched flowers belong." It was shameless flattery, yes, but it wasn't untrue. I hadn't seen Mrs. Russo in nearly a decade—since Anthony's tenth birthday party—but somehow she seemed younger. More alive, at least. It's a wonder, the things money can do.

She took the flowers from me and filled a crystal vase with water. "Thank you, Frankie. That was very thoughtful of you," she said. "You're here to see Anthony, I suppose?"

"Yes, ma'am." I straightened my tie, though it hadn't come loose.

She whispered into a speaking tube, too quietly for me to hear, and then turned to face me. "Frankie, you're a man now. My name is Pia," she said, leaning over the counter. A ruby

pendant swung forth from somewhere in her cleavage and thudded expensively onto the marble countertop. “I just baked bread,” she said with a conspiratorial smile. “May I cut you a slice?”

“No, thank you.” I said. I cleared my throat and checked my tie again. “Water would be lovely though.”

She fixed up a tray with some bread, oil, and a tall glass of water and carried it up the stairs. I followed close behind rehearsing my pitch. It seemed Anthony had converted the old bedroom he used to share with his two younger brothers into an office. A large oak desk and a roomy leather chair sat on the far wall where we used to make forts out of the twin bunk beds. It wasn’t clear where exactly he slept now. Pia left us to our business, and he motioned for me to sit.

“I can’t thank you enough for being such a gentleman earlier at the bank,” he said.

“It’s nothing,” I said. “Anything for an old friend.”

As boys, we had been the best of friends, but we hadn’t spoken since middle school, when he put a brick through my window. Not only had I gotten the belt for it, but I’d had to fix the window myself, depleting all of the cash I’d saved up from selling papers. Bygones now.

“New suit?” he asked and handed me a flask. I gave it a sniff and emptied it into my water.

“Listen,” I said. “I’m going to be straight with you: I want in. Not banks.” I didn’t want anything to do with robbing anything. I didn’t want to have to hurt anyone or anything like that. But I knew I could make a lot of dough running hooch. I waved the empty flask in the air. “I’m a people person.”

“Whoa, Frankie,” he said. He put both of his hands up like I’d pulled a gun on him. “I’m no bootlegger.”

“No, probably not.” I adopted the thin smile of the salesclerk. “But I bet you know someone who is. Or I bet your boss knows someone who is. Come on, Ant. Introduce me to some people. For old time’s sake.”

“Shut the door,” he said.

I looked behind me. “It is shut.”

“On your way out.”

I thought I’d blown my opportunity, but as I pulled the door closed he hollered after me to wait.

“Come back next week,” he said. “Same time.”

I did, and that’s how I made a few critical associations and, eventually, a boatload of cash.

\*

I began showering Ada with expensive gifts—flowers and first editions of her favorite books, new shoes, new dresses, and a string of freshwater pearls. She didn’t require it, had grown up not to expect nice things, but I wanted to show her what she meant to me. The money didn’t matter to me unless I shared it with Ada. I promised her that she’d always be able to do and have whatever she wanted, that she could be free, as long as she was with me. She didn’t ask who I was working for, which was all for the best because I didn’t want to lie or to put her in any danger. All she cared about was that I made a living without having to “stink like murder” at the end of the day.

On the one-year anniversary of my first proposal, I did things the right way. I took her back out to Navy Pier and gave a ring this time—and it was a show-stopper of a ring at that with

a fat, one-carat diamond, bezel-set in yellow gold and haloed in twelve accent diamonds all set in white gold in the shape of a flower. I asked her to marry me, again, and that time she said yes.

After the wedding, Ada and me were finally happy—at least it seemed that way for a little while. I paid for a girl to look after Mr. Roy, and bought a new house in Lake View where we could start our own family. Ada was hesitant, at first, in the bedroom, but I taught her, patiently, that touch doesn't have to be—isn't supposed to be—abuse. We both wanted children, and soon Ada was pregnant. She desperately hoped for a daughter, but as it happened, we had our first son. Ada let me name the boy, so I called him Franklin Carson Junior—Junior for short.

As new parents, we spared no expense in giving Junior the life we felt he deserved. I was never ashamed of spending money, and I won't ever apologize for it. We worked hard to earn everything we had then—and all that we have now. We both suffered enough to last a lifetime and deserved some happiness.

Ada approached her job in the home just as seriously as any job that pays. She took responsibility for the cultivation of healthy bodies and enlightened minds in her boys. No matter how long my hours were, Ada insisted that we make time to spend together as a family. Every morning, we rose with the sun, ate breakfast, and went for a walk around the neighborhood before I left for work with a packed lunch. In truth, I generally ate whatever plant-based meal she'd prepared for me on the side of a deli sandwich stacked so high with cold cuts that I could hardly fit the damn thing in my mouth, but at home, we abstained from meat.

“Eating animal flesh is filthy, unnatural, and bad for you,” she'd say. “Carnivorism is beastly.”

At the end of the day, I'd come home to a righteous feast of dishes I'd never seen before, and after dinner, we took another walk, taking the same path as before but finding everything completely transformed by dusk.

She read all the time. Not for pleasure, she would say, but for intellectual and moral exercise. She read to Junior and taught him lessons from the books well before he was old enough to understand them, and whenever the boy slept, she'd lose herself in the private world of whatever book she was reading, whether it was fiction or science or history.

At the dinner table, after naming and describing the contents and health benefits of each vegetable-based dish, Ada would tell me all about her current book and whether or not it might suit my tastes. She always tried to get me to read her favorites so we could talk about them together. I never got around to it. I liked to read, but I didn't have the time to yield to that patient kind of pleasure. Besides, I had to keep most of what happened at work to myself, so it was just as well that she have stories that were all her own too.

### **False Starts: An Intermission**

There are two spiritual dangers of not living on a Great Lake. One: assuming that your drinking water comes from the tap. Two: assuming that you are larger, more important, wiser than you actually are.

On the shores of Eden, you can look in every direction and see only blue. Blue skies, blue water, blue, blue, blue. You know that the rest of the world is out there and really not that far off, but still it's a disorienting and altogether humbling experience.

In retrospect, naming this place Eden was an indicator of my incredible hubris and profound stupidity. I should have paid better attention in Sunday school. If I had, I would have known that a place called Eden didn't stand a chance.

This is all true. All of it happened exactly this way, or at least that's how I remember it seemed to happen.

This is all true. And yet it's all fiction because it's only how I remember it, and memory is faulty. But I promise that even when it's false, it's true, as true as I can make it. As true as any man can make it.

This is all fiction.

I am a fraud.

**Act II**

I worked under Capone for almost five years before I ever had the occasion to meet him. I always dealt with a middleman instead, and I liked it that way. I got protection for my family without having to associate closely with the men who were doing the protecting. But then some vigilantes lit up my guy Mikey's favorite whorehouse with him in it. Shortly after he got burned, Johnny "The Fox" Torrio retired, and Al Capone emerged as the new head boss in Chicago.<sup>7</sup>

Capone sent a car to pick me up at my house. It was a gray Sunday, drizzled all day and all night, but Ada never minded being out in bad weather. We had just gotten back from our evening stroll when the car pulled up. I had my umbrella with me, the same one I bought the day

---

<sup>7</sup> It is unclear who this "Mikey" character was, as Frank only references the man in passing and there is no record of a man named Mikey perishing in a brothel fire around this time.

Johnny Torrio, however, was a well-known American gangster, having controlled the Chicago Outfit from the time of James "Big Jim" Colosimo's murder on May 11, 1920, until late 1925, when he moved to Italy following an assassination attempt that nearly killed him and then a year spent in jail for Prohibition violations. As Frank states, when Torrio retired, he gave Capone complete control of the Chicago Outfit, reportedly telling him, "It's all yours, Al. Me? I'm quitting. It's Europe for me."

Incidentally, many allege that Colosimo's murder was by the hand of Al Capone, who was at the time only a Torrio henchman still working his way up to protégé status. (It should also be noted that many dispute Capone's role, attributing the killing to Frankie Yale instead. Torrio had mentored Yale in Brooklyn's Five Points Gang, and Capone had worked under Yale before moving to Chicago. But regardless of who pulled the trigger, no one disputes that it was on Torrio's order.) Torrio had pushed Colosimo to get into bootlegging when Prohibition went into effect in 1920, but Colosimo was really only interested in prostitution, gambling, and racketeering and refused. This was unacceptable to Torrio, who recognized the enormous profits that could be made from bootlegging. No one was ever prosecuted for Colosimo's murder.

Those interested in learning more about Torrio's time as head of the Chicago Outfit should consult Chapter XX, "The Rule of the Underworld: Torrio as Overlord," of the *Illinois Crime Survey*, a report that details the history of organized crime in Chicago and exposed the corruption of Chicago police and other government officials and their collusion with the Chicago Outfit. The report was published in 1929 by the Illinois Association for Criminal Justice in cooperation with the Chicago Crime Commission. For more on the murder of Colosimo, consult section four of Chapter XVIII, "The Exploitation of Prostitution," in the same report.

I ran into Anthony at the bank. The driver said the new boss needed to see me, and I got in the back. I told Ada not to worry, but I didn't know where I was going, who I was meeting, or why I'd been called in.

The driver took me to a twenty-four hour diner, led me through the kitchen and down a flight of stairs to a heavy door.

"What's this all about?" I asked him.

"You're about to meet your employer," he said. He knocked eleven times and then slapped the door with the palm of his hand. It opened to reveal a private club that wasn't on any of our books—not the books I had access to anyway. When the door closed behind us, it seemed to suck all of the oxygen out of the room. The air was hot and muggy, dark and so thick with smoke I couldn't see more than a couple feet in any direction. The driver nudged me forward.

"Frankie Carson, right?" Al Capone said when I almost walked right past him.

He was sitting in a booth, and I slid into the seat across from him. Two glasses of whiskey stood on the table between us, and he pushed one over to me. I looked over my shoulder, but the driver had already disappeared.

"Yes, that's right, sir," I said, and I could already feel the sweat beading on my forehead. We were never formally introduced, and I didn't know what to call him.

I tried not to stare at his scar. I looked, instead, at what must have been his two bodyguards, dark shadows looming in the haze just a few feet away. The smoke clouds seemed to dissipate somewhat around them. They stood solid like skyscrapers, clearly silhouetted even in the thickness of a lake effect fog.

"I got a brother named Frank," Capone said. He sucked on a fat cigar.

“Frank is a good name, sir.” A trumpet wailed in some hidden area of the club. It sounded like a woman screaming. “I gave it to my son.”

“You’ve got a son,” he said. It wasn’t a question so much as a statement of fact, one that I’d be surprised if he hadn’t already known.

“Yes, sir.”

Capone raised his glass to his lips, so I raised mine, and we drained our whiskies together. He put two fingers in the air, and our empty glasses were refilled by a woman, not much more than a girl, wearing too much makeup and cheap costume jewelry.

“Just the one?” he asked.

“Excuse me, sir?” It was hard to hear him over the trumpet.

Capone leaned forward and blew a large smoke ring across the table at me. I stifled a cough. I never really liked smoking myself. I thought it smelled dirty. Even so, it didn’t matter if I smoked or not because everyone else did, especially in my line of work, and my clothes were always stained with the stink of smoke anyway.

“Just the one son?”

“Just one right now, sir,” I said. I looked for an exit, but anything outside of our dark corner of the world was shrouded in white clouds.

Capone sat back and pulled on his cigar. “Plan on having another one some day?”

“I would like that very much, sir.” I picked at my fingernails under the table. I was going to mention my hopes for a daughter, but I missed the opportunity.

Capone smiled at me over his glass of whiskey. “Have a name picked out for him yet?” he asked.

“No, sir.” Ada and I hadn’t picked a name out together yet, but if we had another boy, I

was going to suggest that we name him George. After my grandfather.

Capone's smile melted, and he jammed the cigar back in his mouth. With his left hand, he stroked the deep furrow carved across the side of his face. "Name him Alphonse," he growled.

"Yes, sir," I said, surprised and more than a little nervous about how I was going to explain this to Ada. We could call him Alfie, I guess. That's not so bad.

"You'd really do that for me, Frankie." Again, he asked his question like a statement. He leaned forward again and looked hard into my eyes. Searching for signs of deception, I supposed. There were none this time.

"Yes, sir," I said. I hadn't said anything so sincerely since the day I promised Ada and the whole world "I do."

"Don't do that," he said with a wave of his hand. My eyes flashed to his bodyguards, but they hadn't budged. "Alphonse is a terrible name." He smiled big again, and I tried to unclench every muscle in my body. I tried to look relaxed. Unalarmed.

"Okay, sir." Trumpets wailed, and I sipped my whiskey. As always, it helped. "Do you have any suggestions then?"

"I've always like the name Lawrence," he said. "You should name your son Lawrence."

"That's a good name, sir," I said, though at this point I didn't care what we called the kid as long as Capone was happy. "I'm sure my wife will love it."

"It's settled then." He enjoyed his cigar wordlessly for a while, and I waited in silence for him to continue. After a time, he did. "I bet you're wondering why I called you here," he said.

"Yes, sir." I didn't put much stock in superstition, but I crossed my fingers under the table anyway hoping for good luck.

“I wanted to say congratulations, Frankie,” he said, raising his glass to me. “You’ve been promoted.”

“Thank you very much, sir,” I said, and we drained our glasses again.

“You think you’re up for taking Mikey’s place?” he asked, crushing the stub of his cigar into the ashtray.

“I could never take Mikey’s place,” I said, “but I can certainly perform his job, sir, if that’s what you want.” For the first time since Capone’s car showed up outside my house, I smiled.

I forgot the umbrella in the car. The next morning, Ada found it hanging on the knob of our front door.

\*

I took over Mikey’s job—bootlegging still but farther from harm’s way, mostly for exclusive parties and the high-class brothels and gambling halls. I started pulling in double the cash, and things went pretty well at first, but I began to recognize a change in Ada and in our relationship.

One Saturday while she was bathing, I rummaged through her purse looking for the checkbook. I accidentally happened upon a stack of letters from Mr. Roy. I not-so-accidentally read each one and was not pleased with what I found. The first letter was kind, even sweet. But with each subsequent letter, Mr. Roy grew more offended, angrier, at her apparent lack of response. In the last letter, dated earlier that week, he called her a witch and accused her of putting a hex on him that made him do all those terrible things he’d done to her. He threatened to burn her at the stake for seducing him into committing a mortal sin.

She'd spoken to me, vaguely, about what he had done but was always too embarrassed to really make the acts real to me. His putting it in writing finally did. The next day, I loaded a handgun with blanks, tucked it into my belt where it was visible, and paid a visit to Mr. Roy. I told him to leave Ada alone, that he had no right to continue to destroy her happiness. He didn't seem intimidated by the gun. He called her a succubus and told me lies about how, the night she became a woman and every night for four years after that, Ada had snuck into his room and made him defile her. He said he would burn in hell for it and that she ought to burn first.

After leaving Mr. Roy, I went straight to the nearest pay phone and called Capone at his house.

"What exactly is it that you want me to do, Frankie?" he asked once I'd finished telling him everything. I could tell by his voice that he was smiling.

I set my teeth. "I want you to fix it," I said.

"It sounds like you want to fix it yourself," he said.

There was a length of silence. "No," I said.

"Are you sure about that, Frankie?"

A part of me did want to take care of Mr. Roy personally. A part of me wanted to watch the light fade from his eyes, for my toothy smile to be the last thing he ever saw in this world. If there was any man I would be willing to kill, it'd be Henry Roy. But I didn't know what indulging in that kind of darkness would do to my relationship with Ada. I hoped to have a good enough alibi that she wouldn't have to suspect my involvement at all.

"I'm sure," I said at last. "But will you?"

"We'll handle it," he said. "Any special brand of poetry?"

"Fire," I said. "Thank you."

So it was that, on my orders, Mr. Roy burned before he could hurt Ada anymore. But having the guy taken out didn't have as powerful of an effect on her as I'd hoped. It didn't seem to make her feel any safer. And somehow, she knew I was behind it, even though I made sure I was at the house, with her and Junior, when it happened.

The investigation into the fire was brief and ruled an accident. Mr. Roy's remains were never recovered, but he was presumed dead.<sup>8</sup> I felt justice had been served. But Ada wasn't satisfied. She wasn't saddened by her father's death or anything—just completely indifferent.

I would tell Ada the whole truth eventually—after denying any involvement at all for too long. Whether or not she believed me by the time I finally came clean was another story entirely. Not that I blamed her. Since we married, I'd spent more time cultivating my boss's trust than my wife's. I fudged the truth with both of them, when it was necessary, but I was much more careful about hiding my deception around the man whose friendship was a matter of life and death.

---

<sup>8</sup> In 1920s Chicago, it was not uncommon for investigations like this to be rushed—and rushed so much so that human remains that might have been present went unrecovered. From the perspective of our present time, it can be difficult to imagine the extent of the corruption, which reached all levels and sectors of the government. Even those officials not in the pockets of the mob were under serious pressure to close cases as fast as possible. There was just so much to do anyway, and taking an investigation too far would be equivalent to painting a target on one's back. One could not trust his superiors to protect him. Indeed, it might be his own supervisor that recommends his early demise.

As of the time of writing, Henry Roy's remains have yet to be recovered, but there is no evidence to suggest that he survived the hit. Almost immediately after the fire brought Ada's childhood home to the ground, a bookstore called Roy's Reading Room was built in its place. Presumably, it was initially intended to be a front for another speakeasy, but a 1926 police raid revealed that it was, in fact, a bookstore and nothing more.

### How to Reconcile Wicked Means to a Good End: An Intermission

1. Repent and ask for forgiveness.
2. Earn forgiveness through good works.
3. Accept that forgiveness must come from within.
4. Recognize that you're full of shit.
5. Recognize that even if you can't ever reconcile anything, that doesn't mean you get to stop trying.
6. Do the best you can.
7. Do better.
8. Don't stop trying.
9. Teach your children to be better than you ever were.
10. Animal magnetism.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Animal magnetism is an old theory concerning an invisible natural force animals exert upon all animated and inanimate objects. First proposed by German physician Franz Anton Mesmer in 1775, the theory gained traction and became a widely popular form of healing called mesmerism, which involved the laying on of hands to channel magnetic fluid within the sick.

Those curious about animal magnetism can choose from any number of books that have been written about the theory and its legacy. Mesmer's own thoughts on animal magnetism are outlined in *De planetarum influxu in corpus humanum* ("The Influence of the Planets on the Human Body," 1766), *Sendschreiben an einen auswärtigen Arzt über die Magnetkur* ("Circulatory letter to an external physician about the magnetic cure," 1775), *Mémoire sur la découverte du magnétisme animal* ("Report on the discovery of animal magnetism," 1779), and *Mesmerismus oder System der Wechsel-beziehungen. Theorie und Anwendungen des tierischen Magnetismus* ("Mesmerism or the system of inter-relations. Theory and applications of animal magnetism," 1814).

### Act III

Shortly after Mr. Roy was taken care of, Chicago started getting too hot for Capone but for an entirely different reason. The Outfit accidentally eliminated some guy who just happened to be the prosecutor who had tried to pin a murder on Capone just two years ago.<sup>10</sup> People were asking serious questions, and he came to me saying he had to lay low for a bit. I was surprised that he asked me to leave with him, but I guess I was both a nobody and somebody he could trust well enough with the business he needed to take care of from afar. I was sure he had some kind of insurance linking me the Mr. Roy hit.

---

<sup>10</sup> Here, it seems that Frank is referencing the murder of William H. McSwiggin, a popular and well-respected Assistant State's Attorney. Though he was only 26 years old at the time of his death, McSwiggin was something of a wunderkind and had been nicknamed the "hangman prosecutor" for obtaining seven death penalties in eight months.

Though Al Capone was most likely connected to McSwiggin's assassination, it appears that Frank was not disingenuous—or misled—in characterizing it as an accident. On the night in question—April 27, 1926—McSwiggin was out on the town with some gangsters who may have fallen out of favor with Capone. A special grand jury was formed to investigate McSwiggin's death and found that he was most likely an "innocent bystander who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time" and not, in fact, the target of the hit. Though Capone was fingered by some to have been one of the hit men and was arrested for the murder, he was released on insufficient evidence. And while I do not have any authority to say one way or the other, I find it unlikely that Capone had done the job himself.

By this time, Capone had plenty of underlings eager to take care of such an assignment and would only do the dirty work himself if it meant sending a strong message to someone bearing witness to his ruthlessness. Besides, only rank and file men would make the mistake of killing a man as high-profile and as admired as Bill McSwiggin. When interviewed by a local newspaper, Capone said, "Of course, I didn't kill him. Why should I? I liked the kid. Only the day before he got killed he was up to my place and when he went home I gave him a bottle of 'scotch' for his old man. I paid McSwiggin and I paid him plenty, and I got what I was paying for." While one would not expect Al Capone to admit guilt to any murder, there's no reason to believe that Capone had anything to gain from McSwiggin's death. Still, public outcry in the wake of the murder of the "hangman prosecutor" led to a series of raids on Capone's haunts, one of which led to the discovery of a ledger that would eventually be used to convict Capone of income-tax evasion.

Those interested in learning more on the McSwiggin assassination should consult Chapter XVII, "The McSwiggin Assassination as a Typical Event," of the *Illinois Crime Survey* (1929).

I accompanied Capone and his two bodyguards to Michigan for a two-month retreat. I rented a cabin for us on Round Lake. It was a beautiful place. Quiet and sunny. The air smelled fresh, like a special kind of freedom. It was a big change from Chicago.

After getting the boss set up, I planned to return to Chicago for Ada and Junior. It was time that I quit living a double life and introduced the most important people in my life to one another. Plus, I thought a change of scenery might be good for Ada. Capone decided he wanted his family with him too, so when I got back to Chicago, I picked up both of our wives and sons. I'd never met Mae and Sonny before. Ada and Junior got along with them well.

I always had a hard time imagining "Scarface" doing husband and father duties. On the way back to Round Lake, I tried to picture him taking out the trash, cleaning the gutters, playing catch in the backyard. But when he held Mae's hand as she stepped into the rowboat and when he taught Sonny how to tie a fly, it didn't look as strange as I'd expected. Capone was a different man away from the city. At Round Lake, we got to know each other better than was strictly required by our business relationship. That was when he gave me permission to call him Snorky.

Ada loved Round Lake. She loved Michigan in general and said it would be a perfect place to raise a family. Our relationship became amorous once more. Each night, after the Capones had gone to bed, we'd sneak out and make love under the stars. But unfortunately, the magic didn't last. Shortly after we returned to Chicago, it became clear that Ada was pregnant again and miserable about it.

This time around, she was less optimistic about the chances of having a girl—and for good reason, as it turned out. When she was carrying Junior, she had radiated light, but her second pregnancy exhausted her, and her skin became paper thin and ashen. Ada lost a lot of blood in the delivery. The doctor had to perform an emergency hysterectomy. She pleaded with

them to let her keep her womb. She begged me to stop them from taking it. She told the doctor that she needed it for her baby girl, but he thought she was hysterical. He had the nurse sedate her and removed her uterus against her wishes while I did nothing, said nothing to try to stop them. I wanted Ada to be able to have her daughter someday, but I couldn't risk losing her. Maybe I was selfish, I don't know.

When she awoke from the surgery, Ada wouldn't look at me. She asked Junior to feed her ice chips, she asked Junior to water the plants at home, and she asked Junior to hold her hand while she got out of bed to walk to the bathroom. Like everything I had done for our family, everything I had sacrificed just so Ada and I could be together, was all for nothing. I understood what this loss meant to her, but she never tried to understand what it meant to me. I had lost any chance of making her whole. I started questioning whether she, whether we, could ever be happy now.

After returning from the hospital, Ada started making hot dogs and pot roast and something called slop-in-the-pot—the contents of which forever remained a mystery to me—for dinner. She usually only took a couple of bites of food at each quiet meal. If she had to say something to me, she said it through Junior. After dinner, she would retreat to the guest room, where she had slept since she got home from the hospital. She seemed to hate Lawrence or else would act entirely indifferent toward him. She ignored the baby's cries until I fed him or changed his diaper. The kid never got a drop of mother's milk.

It wasn't Lawrence's fault that his passage into this world was so fraught with complication. It wasn't anyone's fault, the doctor said. Things like this happen all the time for no reason.

“You have a son, you know,” I made the mistake of saying once, the first week Ada and Lawrence came home from the hospital. I didn’t mind doing the extra work to take care of the baby when I was home—after all, she had done everything for Junior—but Lawrence was born with a minor breathing problem, and I worried that she wasn’t looking after him while I was at work.

“I have two sons, Frank. Two.” Her green eyes were cast gray and seemed to look straight through me. “Do you know how many daughters I have? How many daughters I’m ever going to have? None, Frank.”

And then later, full of remorse: “I’m not saying it’s your fault. I just never expected things to turn out this way.”

I didn’t ask anything of her after that, and she hardly spoke anymore, just occasionally muttered comments under her breath about being married to a criminal. Mutual resentment grew like a moat between us. When she finally told me what had been on her mind all this time, almost six months later on a train just past Kansas City, she asked me to take her away from Chicago. I didn’t hesitate before promising her I would.

\*

After Ada took off and I had to chase her halfway across the country and talk her into coming back home, I knew I needed to find some way to safely retire from the Chicago Outfit. I was afraid that Snorky would question my loyalty if I ever came right out and asked for his permission to leave. You can’t ever come right out and ask for anything. If you’re smart, you’ll continue to be the humblest guy in the Outfit, keep showing up for work early, and hope it all works out. It always had for me.

“Ada’s fairly anxious for a change of scenery,” I hinted to Snorky one Monday morning. I stood slightly behind him, at his right hand, as he looked over my Rum Report, Chicago Edition.

The monthly reports were my idea. When you’re managing that kind of cash, it’s fairly easy to lose track of a thousand of dollars here and there—and soon enough it adds up to a hefty sum worth chasing after. My good recordkeeping helped Snorky uncover a ring of treachery on the South Side, guys pinching at every level of distribution and then pocketing the sales of whatever they don’t keep for themselves. He had me writing an instruction manual to train new bookkeepers in the other major distribution centers throughout the country. I hoped it would also be used to train my replacement. On the first Monday of each month, I gave him the report and, as needed, walked him through our earnings and losses from the previous month. I’d become such a trusted advisor that Snorky had given me a desk directly outside his office.

The room ached with quiet. I cleared my throat. “Stir crazy, is what she says.”

He ignored me. “What’s going on in this region here?”

His chubby, gold-ringed finger pointed to the only area where sales were in decline. The sunlight streaming through the window reflected off the inset diamond cluster—at least two carats worth of ice—temporarily blinding me.

“I think that’s Northwestern,” I said.

My mind was elsewhere. I was frustrated with myself for such a weak attempt at asking for my own freedom, the freedom of my family, and I was worried about Ada. I was worried that if I didn’t get her away from Chicago soon, she might run again. And I was worried that the next time she ran, I might not be able to bring her back. Ever since she left me, I’d been distracted at work. I kept picturing her there on the train, sleeping, gloriously illuminated by a pink and purple

sky. I kept hearing her voice, “Leave with me,” a refrain that followed me everywhere I went like a stray dog. I knew that in my line of work, thoughts of anything else were a dangerous preoccupation, but it’s hard to care about college punks distilling their own bootleg when your life is crumbling around you.

“You *think* that’s Northwestern, eh?” Snorky fingered the groove in his left cheek.

I never did figure out if it was an unconscious habit or a subtle warning, but either way, the gesture’s meaning was the same and all too clear to me at that moment. I imagined my own execution, the cold metal on my forehead, my last thought as the bullet entered my brain. I’d be lucky to get a bullet. Since entering Snorky’s inner circle, I’d watched him beat a man to death with a baseball bat, a man who used to be a trusted advisor but had stepped out of line. I imagined how devastated Ada would be if I never came home from work again, if I abandoned her just like her mother had when she was a little girl. I imagined the boys growing up without a father. Worse, I imagined Ada remarrying a man like Bill and all three of them getting knocked about all the time.

“That *is* Northwestern University, sir.” I was pretty sure it was, anyway, but pretty sure is never good enough for Al Capone. Feigned confidence was the method of least resistance, and a moment of ignorance was one of those times when it was necessary to stretch the truth a little.

“Why aren’t those kids buying our booze anymore?” he asked.

“They are, sir, just not as much.”

“Why not?” Snorky cut a new cigar, and I reached over to light it for him.

“It’s hard to guess without having conducted a complete investigation, sir, but perhaps they’ve learned to make their own?”

“You think those kids are undercutting me, Frankie?” He sucked on the stogie until he was obscured in a cloud of smoke.

“It’s just a theory, sir, but whatever it is, I’ll take care of it,” I said.

“No, Frankie, you don’t worry. I got this. Let me be the boss for once, eh?” He laughed and clapped me on the shoulder. “You take care of the supply side, keep keeping your books. I’ll make sure the demand is there.”

Within two months, our sales had more than recovered and the Rum Report was only good news. I decided to broach the subject of leaving again.

“Junior had so much fun that one summer at Round Lake,” I said, “he keeps trying to get me to pick up the whole family and move us all to Michigan.”

“Yeah, Sonny always has a nice time when we go up there too,” he said.

I took it as enough permission to continue with my less than subtle but definitely not assertive hinting.

“Even at two, Lawrence is already showing an uncommon fondness for nature,” I said. “The kid wants to go to the Conservatory nearly every day. It’s too bad that that’s as much wild as he’s going to get to see here in Chicago.”

“Oh it can get pretty wild here, Frankie. You ought to know that by now,” he said.

I didn’t know what to say next, and the silence stretched on for far too long. He cut himself a cigar, and I lit it for him. He offered me one, but I declined.

“When are you going to have a draft of that manual ready for me to look at?”

I told him three months and worked like a machine so I could have it ready sooner.

It was at this rate, brief mentions once every two months, that I kept the possibility of my leaving in the front of Snorky's mind, gradually warming him up to the idea. All the while I kept immaculate records and wrote a damn good instruction manual.

Since Lawrence was born, I'd been doing less work on the streets and spending more time in the office—more desk time than the boss himself. I was offended at first, thinking I'd been demoted, but I soon realized that it was, in fact, another promotion. The only guys who stayed on the streets their entire careers were the ones who really enjoyed getting their hands dirty. Violent types, thrill seekers.

Snorky knew I was loyal enough to do pretty much anything he asked me to, but he also knew that I'd rather stay above the dirtiest work if possible. He liked to call me “a family man, one of the good ones,” but I thought I heard a hint of envy in the joke. Snorky would never be satisfied with the simple kind of life I aspired toward, but he was attracted to the idea of it nonetheless.

Over the next few months, Ada only got worse. There was no getting around it: she was haunted in Chicago. We'd drive past St. Ursula's, and I'd be reminded of the time we first met, falling in love. Meanwhile, she'd be reminded of her father, the man who tried to ruin her for any other man—and who knows, maybe he succeeded. For Ada, Chicago was the place where her mother abandoned her and her father abused her, a container for all of her misery.

I managed my own suffering much more efficiently. I'd come to expect little from this world, and just having my family was enough. Even when I worked long hours and barely had time to spend with them, knowing that everything I did was for them gave me purpose. It also confirmed that I was a better father than Bill ever was to me. It wasn't that high of a standard, but that and being a good husband were the only personal goals that ever really mattered to me.

Ada's happiness was much more difficult to achieve—and once found, to hold on to. It was like there was a great emptiness inside of her that constantly threatened to devour her whole—and it was poised to consume me as well. The emptiness waxed and waned like the phases of the moon. It was fullest and brightest after Lawrence was born, but even when we first married it was still there, looming invisibly in the darkness and threatening to appear again soon. The last time it peaked, I almost lost her. The whole exercise was exhausting.

\*

I was surprised as anyone when Snorky stuck his head into the kitchen at Mae's annual Labor Day party. I was helping the women prepare dinner.

"There you are, Frankie. Come on, let's go for a walk," he said.

The heat of the midday sun was suffocating, but he kept his jacket on, so I did too, sweating through my shirt in a matter of minutes. We walked in silence until he was ready to speak.

"To be perfectly honest with you, Frankie, I'm starting to get tired of this city myself," he said. We'd reached a safe enough distance from the house to have a private discussion. Laughter pealed out of the windows, but we couldn't make out the conversations anymore. "Just bought up a place to holiday in Florida, in fact."

"I'm fine anywhere," I said, "but Ada..."

"If you're going to go, Frankie, you ought to take your family now while things are still going good. In a year, it might be too late."

I stopped walking. "You mean it?" People say a lot of terrible things about Al Capone, and most of the rumors are true, but he was a surprisingly generous man when he wanted to be and treated those close to him well—unless they fell out of favor, that is.

He stroked the scar on the side of his face. “Do I ever say anything I don’t mean?”

“Never,” I said. “I can’t thank you enough.” I offered my hand, and he used it to pull me in for a half sort of hug, clapping me solidly on the back.

“Me and my family are so grateful for the opportunity you’ve given us, Snork. But I have to admit that Chicago just doesn’t feel like home anymore.” Ada was going to be thrilled. I couldn’t wait to get back to the house to tell her.

“I know what you mean, Frankie, I really do. New York was starting to feel that way for me before I left Brooklyn,” he said. “You’re like family to me. And I got you a little something to show my appreciation for your years of service.”

He handed me an unsealed, unmarked envelope. I expected cash, but the package wasn’t thick enough to be very much. Inside were several typed pages—legal documents—and some kind of map. Snorky pulled two cigars out of his jacket and lit one for himself while I tried to fit the pieces together.

“What is this, a deed?” I asked. “It’s in my name.”

“Yeah, I borrowed your signature. I hope you don’t mind,” he said. He winked at me and handed me the second cigar.

What I really wanted was a highball, but I accepted the stogie.

“You won’t need to vacation at Round Lake anymore, Frankie. You’ve got your own island in Lake Huron now. Pine’s Island, it’s called. But you can name it anything you want. It’s all yours.”

I felt dizzy. Happy but indebted. Hot. Thirsty. “I don’t know if I can accept this, Snork.” My tie felt tight around my neck. I loosened it a fraction of an inch.

His finger returned to his cheek and traced the arc of the furrow. He started walking back toward the house, and I stumbled stupidly after him.

“It’s too generous,” I called after him.

Al Capone stopped and turned back to face me.

“You’ll accept it because I’m still your boss, and I’m telling you to accept it.” He poked me hard in the chest. “I got a good deal on the land. Consider it a well-earned severance package.”

Severance. Freedom—with benefits.

“There’s just one more job I need you to do for me, Frankie.”

**Pros and Cons: An Intermission**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Arguments IN FAVOR OF accepting a generous gift from Al Capone:</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Arguments AGAINST accepting a generous gift from Al Capone:</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's incredibly generous.</li> <li>• It's everything we've ever wanted: a fresh start.</li> <li>• Snorky is my friend.</li> <li>• He is loyal to those who remain loyal to him and is only dangerous to those who betray him. Rejecting his offer would likely be perceived as an act of betrayal.</li> <li>• No one says no to Snorky and lives to tell about it.</li> <li>• If I really piss him off, he'll hit me where it hurts most: he'll come after me through my family.</li> <li>• I have to protect my family.</li> <li>• End of discussion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's from Al Capone.</li> <li>• There are strings attached, the kind of strings you hang yourself on.</li> <li>• He is a dangerous friend to have.</li> <li>• Getting this involved could implicate my family in whatever business led him to possess—and want to get rid of—this property. What kind of a fresh start is that?</li> </ul>

**Act IV**

It was a big annual charity event. Snorky had his men collect donations of warm clothing that he distributed to the underprivileged each winter. It was one of many generous practices that endeared him to the public and had earned him the unlikely nickname of Robin Hood.

This year, however, Snorky had partnered with the Chicago Police Department for a special twist that he called Christmas on Thanksgiving. More than two dozen officers volunteered to dress up like Santa Claus and hand out the gift-wrapped clothing on Snorky's behalf. My final assignment was to steal a few of the officers' uniforms while they were in costume. He needed them for some other job he was pulling in a few months.<sup>11</sup> He wouldn't give me any details, and truth be told, I didn't really want any.

There were six Christmas on Thanksgiving locations, and I chose to hit St. Ursula's, my old stomping grounds. I thought knowing the place well enough would give me the best chance of getting in and out without incident. There were going to be kids at these events, and I didn't need anyone getting hurt. St. Ursula's seemed like a harmless choice, but it may have been the worst decision I'll ever make in my life.

---

<sup>11</sup> One can assume that here, Frank is referencing the infamous Saint Valentine's Day Massacre. On February 14, 1929, seven men associated with the rival North Side Gang led by George "Bugs" Moran were lined up against a wall and executed. Eyewitnesses reported that at least two of the men were dressed as uniformed police officers. Though no one was ever convicted for the murders for a lack of sufficient evidence, the public universally accepted that Capone had orchestrated them. The brutality of the killings—each of the victims was hit with at least fifteen bullets—made national news, not only making Capone a coast-to-coast celebrity but also attracting the attention of the federal government.

The event occurred before the Carsons left Chicago, and as such, there is no conceivable way that Frank did not learn, after the fact, how the police uniforms were used. Why Frank omits this fact can only be a matter of speculation, though his willingness to admit to his complicity in other murders suggests that it is not simply a matter of keeping his nose clean.

Bill was there, and he made me as I slipped into the church office, where the five officers had stowed their clothes after changing into the Santa suits. Two had come in plain clothes, but three looked to have just gotten off duty and were still in uniform when they arrived. I'd turned the heat up to ensure that they wouldn't just wear the red suit over their other clothes.

"Long time no see, son." My uncle's hair was long, matted and gray, and his beard grew in patches. His shifty eyes told me he was on a bender. He glanced down at the police uniforms in my hands and looked back up to my face with a smile curled into a snarl. "Looks like you're up to no good, as always."

"Listen, Bill, I don't want any trouble," I said. "Here, you look like you could use some cash." I pulled out a wad, peeled a couple of twenties off for myself, and held the rest out to him.

"Come to think of it, I sure could." He swayed a bit on his feet.

Problem was, I didn't trust him to take the money and shut up. I was in a situation, and I knew there were only two ways it was going to turn out. Either he would take the bribe and continue to blackmail me as long as I live an honest life by the name of Franklin Carson Senior or he wouldn't even have the opportunity to take from me this new life that was just over the horizon.

He walked across the room, his lips still twisted in jealousy, and snatched the cash out of my hands. He was distracted by greed and started counting his new fortune. Behind his back, I picked up a police baton and raised it above my head. I held it there for a moment, thinking about the day Bill took me to Wrigley Field to see the Chicago Cubs win the World Series. It may have been the only kind thing he'd ever done for me, but it wasn't nothing. But then I thought of him as a houseguest on Pine's Island. I imagined him hitting my boys like all those

times he'd hit me, and it gave me the resolve to bring the club down hard on his head. He collapsed onto the floor with a thump. I didn't see any other way.

I managed to sneak all three uniforms and Uncle Bill out of the church without being seen, which was remarkable given that the place was crawling with cops. I didn't know what to do with him though, so I brought him back to the speakeasy and called Snorky at home.

"What an unexpected turn of events," he said after I told him what had happened.

Something about the way he said it made me question how coincidental Bill's presence at St. Ursula's really was. He was a failure of a man and certainly needed help, but unless he'd changed significantly, he wasn't the type to accept charity. Or to walk into a Catholic church by choice, for that matter.

"I trust that you'll take care of this problem personally," Snorky said. "Please call Anthony for assistance after you're done."

I rarely saw Anthony, but I'd heard that he graduated from hitting banks to the lower profile job of waste management.

I took Bill around back to the warehouse where we made the bootleg, tied him to a chair, and sat across from him. I drank a glass of whiskey to calm my nerves. I tried to think of a way out of the situation, but there was only one, and it was murder. I was trying to think of the least violent way to kill him when he came to.

"The least you could do is offer your old man a drink," he said.

"You're not my old man," I said, and I poured myself another glass. I wanted to hurt him, I did, but I didn't want to kill him. Yet, anyway.

"Well I'm the man your momma opened her legs to every night after your pops kicked it, so that ought to mean something."

“Fuck you,” I said. He made it easier for me to find my resolve. I pulled out the pack of marijuana cigarettes I’d found on him, lit one up, and smoked it slowly. With each exhale, I blew a thick cloud of smoke in his face. I had an idea.

I stood up, walked around him, and grabbed the back of his chair. I pulled him down the long hallway filled with oak barrels and dropped him on his back below a cask of our foulest swill. High alcohol content, but it tasted like poison.

I left him there, shouting terrible things about my mother after me. When I returned, I carried a hammer, a tap, and a funnel.

“That’s some boss you have,” he said. He looked old and vulnerable lying on the floor tied to a chair, but I was well past sympathy for the man.

“You’re right about one thing, you know. The least I could do is offer you a drink,” I said. I pounded the tap into the barrel and opened it up. The draught was so strong it burned my eyes just being close to it. I jammed the funnel into his mouth and adjusted the chair so the bootleg poured directly into the funnel. It was surprisingly easy. All I had to do was hold his head so he couldn’t twist his face from side to side. He tried to shout, but it came out as grunts and gargles. He jerked around and choked and vomited, and choked some more.

I remembered something I had forgotten from when I was a boy. I had tried to convince my mother not to let Uncle Bill stay with us. “You should respect him,” she said. I whined that he was not my father. She said, “Who knows, maybe he is, maybe he isn’t. What’s the difference anyway?”

I looked down at my hands. I was still holding him, but Bill’s head had gone slack. It was astoundingly heavy. I let it go and stood, my clothes completely soaked through with booze. I

considered leaving the tap running but thought the better of it and turned it off. No need to waste. I went to call Anthony.

“The garbage is waiting for you in the main warehouse,” I said.

On the drive home, I smoked another cigarette to calm my nerves. The house was dark when I pulled in the drive. I hadn’t realized how late it was. I was relieved that I wouldn’t have to explain where I’d been to Ada, but as soon as I entered the bedroom she sat up straight.

“You smell like you’ve been swimming in gasoline, Frank.”

“Sorry, dear. Some of the barrels exploded at the distillery. It was a huge mess. I’ll take a shower.”

By the time I cleaned up and got ready for bed, she had fallen back asleep, but when I climbed into bed with her, she stirred, turning over onto her back.

“I thought you retired from all that,” she said.

“I have now,” I said. I kissed her hard on the lips. “I love you, Ada.” I pressed myself into her leg.

“It’s late,” she said. She turned out the lights and turned away from me. “But I love you too.”

**Reasons for Writing This Book: An Intermission**

1. To prove that I'm not a bad man.
2. To prove that I'm not a good man.
3. To prove there is no such thing as bad men or good men.
4. To give my children something by which they can remember me.
5. To give my grandchildren and their children and so on and so forth a means by which they can know me and decide for themselves if I am a good or bad man or if such a thing even exists.
6. To prevent my inheritors from making the same mistakes I did.
7. To tell the story of Eden.
8. To tell one story of my friend, Al Capone, who may not have been a good man, if such a thing exists, but was kinder to me than any other man I've ever known.
9. To leave behind something that I know is as honest and true as I am able to make it.
- 10.

**Act V**

Me and Ada and the boys each packed one bag's worth of clothing to carry on the train plus one steamer trunk full of other household needs—lanterns and linens and the like. Everything else, we sold off, and then we ordered new from Sears. It will all start arriving by ship within a week. The only livable structure on the island is a six hundred square foot cabin, so we are starting our new lives in a simple sort of way. We only ordered the bare minimum. We'll start building the place up, of course, found our own town, do things however we want to do them. It's the Carson Family's chance to make the world in our own image.

In Detroit, we bought a boat and enough groceries to last us a couple weeks—things that keep, like blocks of cheese, smoked fish, and canned vegetables. I paid a fisherman to be our guide. The guy looked like he hadn't showered in weeks, but he had an easy smile and bright blue eyes that matched the Great Lakes sky. I could tell by the looks of him that he could be trusted well enough to follow the chart Snorky had given me. He had to go up the Saint Clair River and out into the vastness of Lake Huron anyway, so for him to pass by Pine's Island and for us to follow wasn't a big deal, he said.

I promised him a free drink any time he wanted to swing by the island for a visit, but I doubted we would see him again after he saw us to our new home. He asked us very few questions about ourselves, only enough to know that we weren't asking him to do anything illegal. I couldn't tell if the legitimacy of our claim to Pine's Island was a reassurance to him or a disappointment, but either way, he let us pay him for his services.

Jones gave me somewhat of a boating lesson. I'd driven a little two-seater out on Lake Michigan before, but this was a much bigger boat and needed more space to maneuver. Jones's

boat was half the size of mine, but he was the kind of captain who could drive any boat. He belonged on the water. He even taught the boys—Junior, really—some on-board etiquette.

The lesson had gotten the boys excited for the journey—Junior was already asking us to call him Captain Franklin before we had even left the dock—but fifteen minutes after we started cutting through the mostly calm Lake Huron, both of them were lulled to sleep by the reliable if sometimes jerky rhythm of the boat’s rocking, the monotony of the engine’s hum, and the bright blue expanse that went on and on like we were all caught in some eternal dream loop.

Ada didn’t want the boys getting too much sun, so she carried Junior below deck and then Lawrence, and when she came back up, she started singing. Church hymns and Christmas songs—she’d long ago stopped going to mass, but those were the only songs she knew. Ada didn’t have the greatest singing voice and was normally self-conscious about it, but she sang then to alleviate my boredom. I was too keyed up from thinking about what we were going to find on Pine’s Island to be bored, but she didn’t know that, and I had never loved her more than that moment.

Ada gasped when the flaxen sand dunes of Pine’s Island’s southern shore came into view. She grabbed my arm above the elbow. “Is that it?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” I said. The packet Snorky gave me hadn’t included any photos. So far, Ada and me had been cautious in our optimism. It really could have been a tiny speck of rock sticking out of the endless water, and all of this could be a practical joke, or a clever trap. For a second, I panicked about having possibly misread Jones.

But then he blew his horn for us. “It is it, Frank,” Ada said, her breath hot in my ear. The hair on my neck tingled. “That’s our new home.” She squeezed my arm, and when I looked over, she smiled so brightly, so genuinely that I had to laugh. I couldn’t help it. I felt like a boy again,

except a boy with a boat and an island and a beautiful wife and the kind of freedom from fear that I never knew as a child. The kind of freedom we could now give to our two sons. I knew in that moment that Ada and I had a great responsibility. Together, Ada and I were going to build the world we wish we'd had as children, and we were going to do it for Junior and Lawrence.

According to the map, the only dock was on the northernmost point of the island, so as planned, Jones guided us around the west coast, the curve edged in cliff faces. It was like seeing the earth in cross-section, all the ingredients layered on top of one another as neatly as a sandwich at a delicatessen. A curtain of trees blocked our view of anything else, but the island was clearly large, and it was beautiful, and it was ours.

When the dock came into view, it was much longer than I had expected, long enough to accommodate a shipping freighter. It stretched out so far I wondered how many boats had narrowly avoided crashing themselves on it. Jones cut his engine and hollered over the wind to us, asking if we needed any help tying up, but I waved him off. Nice enough guy, I thought, but this was a family moment.

Jones got the motor going again and hollered good luck to us as he headed back out into the horizon, that fuzzy area where two panels of blue became indistinguishable from one another. The sun was still low in the east, and there was plenty of day left for him to make a good haul.

Ada and me stepped off the boat. I half-expected a welcome party though I knew Pine's Island was all ours and there was no one here to greet us. I wanted to give Ada the chance to think of a name for our new place since she hadn't really had much of a say in naming either of our two sons.

The boys were still sleeping below deck. "Should we—?" Ada began to ask, but I shook my head. I wasn't ready to wake them. Not yet, anyway. Jones gave us a honk in the distance

and then faded out into the blue. I took Ada's hand and led her down the long dock. I pulled her forward, closer to our new home, our fresh start.

Ada stopped allowing me to pull her, and for a moment I was afraid. What if she hates it? I wondered. What if, when I tell her what I had to do to get us here, she hates me for it? I was worried that she might leave again. If she did, I wouldn't follow her, probably couldn't even if I wanted to. But then she lifted her gaze to the towering pines and breathed deeply through her nose.

"This is Paradise," she said. Happy at last, my wife leaned against me and smiled that big pre-Lawrence smile. And for the first time since her surgery, we seemed to fit together again.

"Then we'll call it Eden," I said. We kissed—not deep but hard, like we meant it.

It is a perfect moment, and I know that it is all worth it. I know that when I am in my last hours, this is what I will think of, the day the Carson Family was reborn: Saturday, May 11, 1929.

"We ought to go back to the boat to get the boys," she says. "They won't want to have missed this."

"You're right," I tell her. "We won't go any farther without them." I kiss her again, deeper, and press myself against her leg. She doesn't turn away this time. Together, we sink down to the dock. We are completely out in the open, but there's no one around to see us. And even if there was, I wouldn't care.

## CHAPTER 2

## FROM THE ASHES

*Editor's Note: This oral history interview with Ada Carson [AC] was conducted by me, Lee Rickels [LR], on Tuesday, November 26, 1963, in her home (Main House) on the Carson Estate.<sup>12</sup>*

[AC] Did you watch the funeral yesterday?<sup>13</sup>

[LR] Of course. I couldn't call myself a historian if I hadn't. I'm sorry. This must be a very difficult time for you.

[AC] They closed the school?

[LR] Yes, it only seemed appropriate given the circumstances. We reopened today, though. One can't mourn forever.

[AC] Did you watch at home?

---

<sup>12</sup> As with all of the interviews I conducted for this project, I recorded our conversation on tape. I have transcribed the interview here in such a way that preserves the back-and-forth nature of our conversation, which I believe can offer extra insight into Ada's story. I have, however, employed compression where I believed it would benefit readability. Edits proofed and approved by Ada Carson.

<sup>13</sup> Those of you who were alive in 1963—and old enough to remember—or those with a mind for important dates in history will realize that Ada is referring to the funeral of President John F. Kennedy, which was three days after his assassination.

[LR] No, I actually don't have a television.

[AC] I can get you a television.

[LR] Oh, no, that won't be necessary. The only things I find I'd like to watch are always going to be on at the pub.<sup>14</sup>

[AC] Were there a lot of people there?

[LR] Oh, yes. Standing room only.

[AC] That's nice.

[LR] I suppose so. Shall we get started? We can always reschedule if this isn't a good time.

[AC] No, no. As you said, "One can't mourn forever."

[LR] I'm sorry. That was insensitive.

[AC] Not at all. It's true. Please, let us begin. Where should I start?

[LR] Wherever you like Mrs. Carson—

---

<sup>14</sup> Franklin's Pub, which Frank Senior opened at the end of Prohibition in 1933.

[AC] Please, Lee. Call me Ada. Or I'll have to start calling you Mr. Rickels, and neither of us wants that.

[LR] Certainly not. You can start wherever you like, Ada. Maybe you can tell me about one of your earliest memories here? What were your first impressions of the island?

[AC] Sure. When my eyes fell upon our new home for the first time, I said it was a paradise. From the outside, it was, though I should have known better than to make assumptions about the way things seem. After Frank died, I started keeping a journal of my own, and I've tried my best to put my memories of our time together on the page. Do you mind if I read it to you?

[LR] Not in the slightest. Please do.

[AC] It's just easier this way. I don't have to think about my words so much. [*Ada reads from her journal.*]

Passing through the grove of giant white pines felt like entering an old church: the trees' branches and needles fragmented the sky like stained glass windows, distorting the world beyond and yet somehow revealing its true shape, its inherent nature. Except there was something else about it—something almost magical—that was nothing like going to mass. It probably sounds silly, but walking through the woods, the ground soft and forgiving under our feet, was like

entering a portal to another world, and I could only expect that the world it was transporting us to would be far more beautiful than the one we had known—a place divorced from the violence and greed that we'd chosen to leave in Chicago.

But then, the line of trees opened up into what could only be called a pine graveyard. What was once a great forest had been clear-cut but for the misleading stand hugging the island's perimeter—most likely for privacy. The open canopy of the island's interior left us exposed, and I felt my skin shrinking in the brightness of the mid-morning sun. I don't know what came over me when I saw all those stumps, most wider than Junior was tall, but I felt faint and had to sit down. I wrapped my arms around the remains of a lost pine, the soil sun-baked and as hard and hot as an asphalt parking lot at noon. The sense of loss was so profound, it felt like a part of me had been harvested from this place, like each stump was a piece of my body, the desiccated half that had been left in the ground to rot.

[LR] So much loss in that passage.

[AC] I'd felt that way twice before. The second time was after Lawrence was born and they took away my womb. I tried not to think about the first time, the robbing of my childhood. I'd rather not discuss that.

[LR] That's okay. Let's focus on your life with Frank. How did you feel in that moment with the stump?

[AC] It's complicated, of course. I was awash with all the sadness I was trying to leave behind. My dreams were shattered. It had been true for years now, but I'd been unwilling to accept it. There had been an emotional distance between Frank and me, and it had been expanding rapidly ever since I lost my womb and, with it, a chance to bridge the gap between us with a daughter. No matter how much Frank gave to me, it was never enough. It wasn't his fault though. Some people just aren't meant for happiness.

But I wouldn't admit these things to myself. I couldn't see them. I wasn't done processing my own pain—pain that had nothing to do with Frank. [*Ada reads from her journal again.*]

Only when surrounded by the physical evidence of so much violence, so much unvoiced suffering, could I finally allow myself to feel my own suffering, to understand it as a fact that needed to be faced. Out of this graveyard, we can build new life, I thought, and if this island can be reborn, then so can I. Maybe I'll never have a daughter, but I'll have this damaged but beautiful place.

I cried into the ground, and with my tears, I buried the memories of my long-disappeared mother and presumed-dead father in the pine graveyard. Frank gave me his hand, pulled me up out of the dirt, out of the darkness, and offered me his handkerchief.

"I'm so happy that I could cry too, Ada," he said, wrapping me in his arms. "This is going to be such a great new start for us all."

Of course, he didn't understand. He usually didn't, though he certainly tried. I'd never felt sadder, but I also knew the real suffering was over. I didn't feel the empty kind of misery I knew all too well—maybe better than I knew myself—the kind of misery that had made me feel alone and like quitting was the only way out. This new feeling was a brand of sadness that filled me up and gave me resolve, moved me forward.

Whoever owned Pine's Island before us used it up and ran. They left it with an emptiness that my family and I were going to fill. This place was resilient, like me, and we were going to build a paradise out of Eden yet.

[LR] That's lovely, Ada. It truly is. Let's jump forward a little bit then. How do you even begin building a paradise?

[AC] Well, it starts with recognizing that you have to actually build it. At first, I wanted to keep Eden the way it was when we found it. Not in an entirely natural state—it was too late for that—but to avoid further damage. I figured the human race evolved without the luxuries of the twentieth century, and why can't we learn to live without them?

[LR] And Frank?

[AC] Of course, Frank didn't think that was acceptable. He wanted the best for his family, and though the cabin was outfitted with a wood-burning stove and water pump when we arrived—the

foreman of the lumber camp and his family must have lived there before—there was no electricity or indoor plumbing. After the sun went down we lived by the light of oil lanterns.

And when winter came, we realized just how drafty the cabin was. The walls were sturdy, mind you. But the doors and the windows seemed to let everything in. We ordered some heavy tapestries from the Sears catalog. Sometimes when we ordered things, they would be there within weeks, but in the coldest months, deliveries took much longer. When the tapestries finally came, we hung them over every window and door, but they blocked out the light as well as the wind and cast us into darkness even during the day. By that time, winter was almost over, and we'd gotten used to being cold, so I decided we didn't need the tapestries.

Frank hated to see us suffer. I always told him we could manage, that we could get used to it, but he said we'd all go to early graves if I didn't let him take care of things his way. Frank had grand ideas about what Eden could be—should have been. Well, you can see that.

By the time the first workers arrived, Frank had all of this planned out. The factory and the Carson Estate, but really, the whole town was outlined. The roads and the homes and, at my insistence, a few areas that would continue to thrive in their natural state. He forgot a few things: a school, a hospital, a jail of some kind, a church—though the church might have been a purposeful omission. But we figured all of that out as we went along.

This was the time of the Great Depression, you understand, so Frank had legions of men just begging for work. And I came to see that it wasn't so bad, all of this building. My own father had murdered things for a living, so it was great to see Frank in the opposite role. He was a creator not a destroyer.

[LR] Where did all of these men come from?

[AC] Eventually, Frank would get support from the government, the Civilian Conservation Corps. But before the New Deal, all we had were Frank's old connections.

[LR] Capone?

[AC] That's right. When he let us go, Al knew it was only a matter of time before his whole operation got shut down, so he let other men get out of the Outfit as well. A lot of them didn't actually want out. They had gotten used to a certain lifestyle, and no one got as generous a severance package as Frank. When Al was arrested in May of 1929, they could only lock him up for nine months, but they seized most of his assets—or at least all they could get their hands on. He continued to run things from his cell in Philadelphia, but he couldn't keep paying the men what he used to. So he let them go. Fired them, I guess. Frank and Al had been writing to one another, and Al knew that Frank needed men, so the workers started showing up by the score not too long after we arrived. They were like the flotsam Franklin Junior would find littering the beaches, telling fragmented stories of unknown shipwrecks.

Frank was constantly dismissing guys who strayed from his strict—but entirely reasonable—code of conduct. It was the compromise he struck with Al. It was a one-strike-and-you're-out kind of deal.

[LR] How did you feel about the kind of men that were populating your new home, your Paradise? With so many criminals around, I imagine it could be difficult to feel safe.

[AC] Of course, I wasn't thrilled with the idea, but Frank appealed to my sense that people are essentially good and that even the worst have the capacity to be good.

"I was in their line of work too," he said. "I got caught up in it. Don't you think I deserved a second chance? Who's to say they don't?"

It was a convincing piece of rhetoric, but I worried that it belonged to Al, not Frank. Sensing my hesitation, Frank promised me that he'd make them toe a strict line and that there wouldn't be any guns. There wasn't any need for them here. And it was temporary. The men didn't come with their families. They were just here to do the job, send money home, and leave when it was all over.

And the men mostly worked out just fine—the ones Frank kept on anyway. They moved fast and with very few accidents. The construction continued almost nonstop, through wind and rain and snow and hail—not to mention the heat, which can be just as, if not more, dangerous. They had the brewery operational in months, and Frank promised me I would have a new home before a second winter crept into the drafty cabin. I thought maybe I'd even have neighbors—dare I say?—friends by then. Frank thought it was best for the men to stay sequestered in their own little camp, two long buildings that used to house the loggers. Frank called it the barracks.

Though I was lonely, I never sought friendship among the men. It wasn't that I didn't trust them—I'm sure that most of the workers were decent people, despite any misdeeds they might have done in the past. Frank wouldn't have brought anyone he knew was dangerous to Eden. He preferred men with wives and children, figured they had stronger character because they had to care for people besides themselves. They were never nasty to me or anything, those men. I just had no interest in getting to know them. All of my adult life, the only friends I'd had

were wives or mothers or sisters or daughters of criminals. Coming here was supposed to get me away from that kind of life.

[LR] I understand. And you were right to be wary. This was before the Great Fire of 1930, right? I've heard conflicting stories about that event. Can you tell me a little bit about it?

[AC] Sure, of course. That's an important part of the story. Let's see, it was a little over a year since we had arrived on Eden: July 3, 1930. [*Ada closes her eyes, remembering.*]

We were still living in the cabin then. The day began like every other morning since the men arrived: steel colliding with steel. The first worker's hammer beat a steady clang, ticking off the seconds with the regular rhythm of his swing. The earliest carpenter banged away on his own until more and more men raised their tools and found their targets, driving their nails home at beats one-half- and one-quarter- and one-eighth-note apart until the schizophrenic metronome echoed across the island from every worksite like a great grandfather clock striking twelve.

Except in this world, it took all day for 12:01 to come. The sun might trace a sweeping arc from the east horizon over Eden and into the west, but still, the great clock would chime until the light had all but gone out, the sun seemingly dissolved into the clouds, which held their newfound glow briefly, smoldering in still silence just long enough for the men to pack up their tools for the day and retire to the barracks for supper.

Each morning, Frank would rise before the sun to make it out to the factory before the day's cacophony began. After making sure the brewers had gotten started, he visited all three worksites in turn, and he didn't come home until the quiet had settled in. I told him he couldn't

possibly supervise everything forever, but he said he'd be "asking for a world of trouble" if he didn't at least try.

Franklin Junior and Lawrence seemed to be able to sleep through anything, so it was only me whose days began with the first hammer's blow. There was something strangely comforting in its constancy even when I thought the patternless array of incessant clangs would drive me mad. It set my mind humming like a hive full of honeybees.

The next day would be a special day, a day when Frank let his industrial orchestra rest. It was Independence Day, of course, and he was going to call off work so the men could attend a special celebration he'd been planning. But that was tomorrow, and July 3 was still an ordinary day.

So like any other morning, after I sent Frank off with both a full stomach and a packed lunchbox, I sat at our square kitchen table with a book, waiting for the kettle to boil. Like every other morning I started reading and stopped, started and stopped, again and again, picking up the thread but then losing it in the hectic sounds of life on Eden.

I remember I looked up, out the window at the birdfeeder I'd ordered from Sears the year before—a miniature log cabin much like our own—but the birds never returned that spring. With all the noise, who could blame them? I stared at the feeder until I wasn't really seeing it anymore, until I wasn't really seeing anything. The sounds of all but one hammer fell away, and the one that survived beat in time with my heart.

Eventually, a sharp whistling cut through my trance, bringing me back to Eden, and all the sights and sounds that had faded away into the background rushed in, overwhelming my senses with bright colors and "the sounds of progress," as Frank liked to call it. I tried to pick out the hammer that had aligned itself with the rhythm of my pulse, but its singular chime was lost

again in the collective drone. I stood to take the kettle off the stove, just like every other morning, but then, in the smallest fraction of a second, it wasn't like any other morning anymore.

[*Ada's eyes pop open.*] I'd like some tea. Would you like some tea?

[LR] That would be lovely, thank you. [*Ada goes into the kitchen and, after a time, returns with tea for each of us.*]

[AC] Oh, what was I even saying then? You get old, you start forgetting things like that. Just wait, Lee, you'll see.

[LR] You were telling me about July 3, 1930. The workers were banging away, and it was just like every other morning, but something was about to happen to change all of that.

[AC] Oh yes, that's right. [*Ada closes her eyes again.*] Just like every other morning and then, like a shiver of lightning ahead of the thunder's patient roll, I witnessed the glow of the eruption out of the corner of my eye before I registered its throaty roar. I felt the heat of the blast before it shook the screaming kettle from the stove, before the smell of burned flesh could settle in the air. It rose like a second sun in the north—the first sun still low in the east—and when it set, the toll of the great clock had ceased.

Silence settled over the island, and as much as I hate to admit it, in that moment between the blast and the bleating, I felt a shameful sort of peace. [*Ada opens her eyes.*] You must think I'm a horrible person.

[LR] Not in the slightest, Ada. Please, continue. Why did you feel peaceful?

[AC] Well, my mind drifted back to Chicago, an earlier time, before Lawrence was born. A man came by our home one morning. Frank had stayed home from work that day. He never stayed home from work, but he said he wanted to spend time with his family. I was making lunch when the doorbell rang. Frank was playing with Junior in the nursery, so I went to get the door.

“Mrs. Ada Carson, daughter of Henry and Emma Roy?” the stranger asked.

He was a rather short man, but the way he carried himself made him seem several inches taller than his actual height. He wore a cobalt suit without a tie. The button-down collar of his white shirt was open, revealing a small red mole on his collarbone. His dark hair was smoothed back with pomade, and the ends of his mustache were twisted together with wax. He smelled of smoke and, more faintly, honey.

“Who wants to know?” I said. I smiled politely enough, but I kept my hand firmly on the doorknob.

“I’m sorry to bother you, Mrs. Carson. But I wanted you to know that your father is dead.”

The man pivoted on his heel, but I grabbed his arm to stop him from leaving. “What happened?” I demanded.

“There was an accident.” He looked straight into my eyes, his own absent of any emotion, and gently removed my hand from his arm. He turned to leave again.

“What kind of accident?” I called after him, but he didn’t answer or turn around. “Wait. Who are you?”

I heard Franklin Junior's cry from the nursery, and I looked away from the man for just a moment, and when I looked back outside, he was gone.

On my way to check on Frank and Junior, I caught a glimpse of myself in a mirror. I hadn't realized it, but I was smiling. It dawned on me then that I was actually glad another human being was dead. My mouth tasted like copper. Like it did after the explosion.

[LR] What happened next? After the explosion.

[AC] I don't know. I was lying on the floor of a cabin on an island in Lake Huron, and I couldn't remember how I'd gotten there.

A chorus of cries surged in my inner ear, and it took me a long minute before I realized that I wasn't hearing a collective howl but the voices of my own two sons. I climbed to my feet and stumbled over to their bedroom. Franklin Junior stood in the doorway with tears carrying sleep out of his eyes. Behind him, Lawrence was sitting up in bed, red-faced and screaming like he was being physically tortured. Franklin spread his hands over his groin trying to cover the dark spot on the front of his nightshirt. I pretended not to notice.

I crouched down so I can look slightly up at him, put my hand on his shoulder, and leaned close. "Something has happened at the worksite, Franklin, and they need my help. Will you be a big boy and look after your brother for me? Lawrence is scared, and he needs his big brother to calm him down, let him know that everything will be okay."

The boy swallowed a gulp of air and nodded seriously. "What happened? Is someone hurt?"

He looked so grown right then, so much like his father did when we first met. I pulled us even closer together, like confidants, and lowered my voice. I said, “You’re almost a man, Franklin, so I’m going to tell you the truth. I don’t know what happened, but everyone is probably not okay. You and Lawrence are safe. I’m okay, and I am sure your father is fine too, but he needs my help right away. Do you understand?”

He nodded.

“I need to go right now, so I need you to promise me that you will stay here with your brother—don’t step foot outside this cabin and don’t let him out of your sight—and look after him—make breakfast for the two of you, get him dressed, keep him away from the stove, maybe read to him from your favorite books, I’m sure he’d like that—and just take care of the house until I get back. Can you promise me you’ll do that, Franklin? Will you be in charge?”

He took a slow, even breath, put his right hand on my shoulder, and made me a very serious promise. Lawrence was still crying, but I trusted Franklin to tend to him.

In the kitchen, I set the kettle on the counter, closed the damper on the stove, and retrieved a first aid kit out from behind the garbage can under the sink. I did these things without thinking about them. It felt almost like someone else—someone with rational thoughts—had taken over my body, and I was just watching, waiting for her to finish so I could have it back.

Frank just had to be okay. I had resented him for so many things over the years—some of it was fair, a lot of it wasn’t, but none of it mattered anymore. I wondered how much time we had lost because I was unable to forgive him for what he had had no control over. And how much time we had lost for the things he did have control over but had done with the best intentions. All the secrets and lies and sneaking around and long hours—all of it, I’d always known, was for me and the boys. I was afraid I wouldn’t get to tell Frank as much.

I leapt into the Roadster even though I didn't actually know how to drive a car. Frank had taught me once, but I never practiced. I just didn't see the point when everything I needed was no farther than a good walk or a bike ride away. Besides, ours was the only car on the island, and it seemed unfair to lord our wealth over these men who were barely making enough to keep food on their families' tables back home.

It's hard to describe, but in the silence, it was as if time froze and evaporated all at once. I don't know how long I fussed with all the damn buttons and switches before I gave up, hopped out of the car, and sprinted to the most direct route to the factory.

We were still living in the old cabin back then, sitting at the factory's feet, just to its south at the base of a small cliff. The cabin was half the size of our old house in Chicago, but it was well-built, weathered time and abandonment just fine, and was roomy enough for the short-term. The old shipping road connected the cabin to the factory through a series switchbacks slashed across the cliff face, but there also used to be a pedestrian bridge that got there more directly, using stairs to scale the vertical rock wall.

[LR] What was going through your mind?

[AC] I was worried about Frank, of course, but I couldn't stop thinking about the kids. I felt like I was abandoning them. Again.

[LR] Again?

[AC] In Chicago, once, I tried to give up and abandon my family just like my mother had done to me. She just disappeared on Christmas Day one year, when I was almost three. My father had gone out for something, and when he came back, he found me alone, and it was just the two of us after that. For too many Christmases, I'd hoped for my mother to return and rescue me from him, apologize for the lapse of judgment. I was dimly aware of the fact that there was no way for me to know that she was still even alive, but I avoided considering that possibility.

I never expected to take after my mother—not in the way that I resented her most for—but I wasn't thinking clearly when I ran away from my own responsibilities. My mind was fogged, my body was drained, and my soul seemed to have been excised, along with any surviving optimism for my future. I'd felt hope throughout my pregnancy with Franklin Junior, you know? Hope for a daughter, hope for myself, hope for my husband. I'd felt hope for our family and hope that once Frank had a child to look after, he'd find a new line of work. He didn't, of course. I'm not sure it ever occurred to him.

Frank didn't know that I'd known all along what he did for a living. He thought I didn't ask because I didn't *want* to know, but he should have known me better than that. Really, I didn't ask because I didn't need to. I knew the moment I saw him in his new clothes. He was a man transformed. He even started talking differently. Everything became a question, often an accusation. I never saw Frank approach violence, though, so I trusted that he was still the man I married, not some murderous thug. He would come home from work anxious and exhausted, frustrated and sullen, but he never showed anger toward me, or his son.

I was the one who grew angry. Instead of finding a new job after Franklin Junior was born, Frank took a promotion and started working longer hours, bringing home more money than we knew how to spend. Before, when we were each desperate to earn our basic freedom, the

ends had justified the means. But with so much excess, I started to feel sick knowing where it came from and what might have been done in its service. The trip to Round Lake helped assuage some of my misgivings. Capone seemed like a nice enough guy—for a criminal, at least—and Frank was obviously trying his best to regain my trust and repair whatever fissure had cracked open between us.

But then I became pregnant again. I could tell it was another boy from the moment he colonized my body, and some part of me knew that he was going to ruin me.

When Frank insisted that we name the baby Lawrence Alphonse if it turned out to be a boy, I didn't mind, at first—for two reasons. First, I was resentful and didn't really care what we called him, and second, I thought it was a nice enough name. But I asked him where he came up with it, and not only did he lie but he didn't even bother to try and come up with a halfway convincing story. I didn't tell him that, at Round Lake, Capone had told me the whole story about how he'd "suggested" a name for our second-born son as a means to test Frank's loyalty. Frank was a mostly good man, but he didn't have enough faith in my love for him to ever tell me the truth.

Then, after Lawrence's complicated birth, Frank let the doctors cut away my prospect for a daughter. I didn't stop loving him, but I didn't think I could ever forgive him for it. Recovering in the hospital, I mentally catalogued all the lies he'd told me over the years—the ones I knew about, at least. I came to the conclusion that I was a fool for ever trusting Frank.

I'm sorry. I feel like I'm getting off track. What was I supposed to be talking about?

[LR] Abandoning your children?

[AC] That's right. Like the day of the Great Fire, if that's what they're calling it, the day I left my children started ordinarily enough. I woke to a column of warm sunlight falling on my face. I reached out, but Frank's half of the bed was cold. It was still dimpled with the shape of his body. I rolled over into the impression and lay flat on my back like he always did. Behind closed eyes, I tried to see things like Frank. Get up, work hard, make money, lie about it, support family, sleep; repeat. It seemed so easy. I was jealous.

"The baby has a stool in his pants," Franklin Junior said. He stood in the doorway not wearing any pants of his own. Lawrence wailed from somewhere else—he was always wailing. The sun was higher now. I realized I must have fallen back asleep.

"Don't you think it's time you learned to change your baby brother's diaper?" I asked, hoping for just fifteen more minutes. I didn't have any real reason to be so tired, but the idea of doing anything, even reading, exhausted me even further.

"No thank you," he said politely and then went back into his bedroom.

I jumped out of bed, threw on my housecoat, and changed Larry's diaper. I fed both boys, packed a bag, and scratched out a note on the perfumed stationary Frank had gotten me for our first anniversary. I'd like to say I don't remember what it said, but it was so cruel, I haven't been able to forget. It just said, *Gone. The boys are with Pia. I can't do this anymore. I'm sorry. —A.*

I didn't want to do to my children what my mother had done to me, but I was starting to move beyond the realm of anger. I felt violent. I needed to hurt someone; I needed someone to feel at least an approximation of my profound suffering. I chose Frank.

Pia, the mother of an associate of Frank's, was surprised to see me, but she accepted my story about a doctor's appointment and cancelled babysitter. After dropping the boys off, I took a

taxicab to Union Station. The next train went all the way to San Francisco, and I bought a one-way ticket.

It was my first time traveling west of Chicago, but I didn't care about the vast landscape rushing by outside the window. All I wanted was sleep. I closed my eyes, and I felt free.

When I woke up, I didn't know which state I was in or what day it was, but the train had stopped, and Frank was sitting next to me, watching me. He looked tired and old but, above all else, concerned. I couldn't believe he had caught up to me. It seemed impossible.

"What do you want, Ada?" he whispered.

It was such a simple question, but the answer was too complex for me to understand, much less articulate.

Frank took my hand and held it to his lips. "What can I do?"

"It's not your fault," I told him. I didn't believe it yet, but I felt that it was true. "I just need to do something else. I need to go somewhere else." He waited in silence for me to continue, and I lowered my voice to a whisper. "Leave with me. Please? All of us can go. As a family. It will be better. I'll be better."

That's what I was thinking about as I rushed toward Frank. I'm sure you think I'm a terrible mother now.

[LR] With all due respect, Ada, stop doing that. I don't think anything of the sort. I've never been a mother, of course but I have a mother—or had one—and I know it isn't easy. Please, let's continue, if that's okay. You were rushing toward Frank...

[AC] The sky seemed to darken as I climbed the steps, and it took longer than ever to close the distance to the factory. The thick smoke stuck in my throat, chemical and meaty, and the heat scalded my eyes. Tears traced rivers through the grit on my face until they pooled in my ears. To the east, Silver Stream looked as white and lustrous as the precious mineral we named it for. Ash frosted the broad green leaves of the maples lining the shipping road.

And then the canopy opened up as I crested the cliff, and I stopped short.

You can't imagine, Lee. A blackened crater yawned before me, ringed in artifacts of what used to be—men and their machines, disassembled and thrown into a great pot in the earth—burning and melting together until I couldn't tell what was human anymore.

A circle of fire, ringed with smoldering chaos, a handful of panicked and bloodied survivors screaming and crying and gasping, running around and huddling in well-muscled balls on the ground. I tried to match names to each of their faces, but they were all strangers.

I saw Frank before he saw me. He sat alone holding something out before him. I couldn't tell what it was at first, but then I realized it was someone else's arm, and he was still clutching its hand mid-shake, supporting the elbow with his left hand. But where there should have been a shoulder connecting the arm to the rest of a body, there was only empty air. Frank's face was blank as his eyes rolled over the scene until they found me, and he smiled. He actually smiled. It was eerie. Frank gently set the arm on the ground and pushed himself up to his feet. He took a few ginger steps and then started jogging toward me. We met in the middle. His lips tasted metallic, like blood. His front was covered in it.

He had a gash on the side of his face, and through it, I could see the pale white bone of his jaw. I felt faint, but I summoned the woman who knew what to do back at the cabin and let

her take over. Remembering the first aid kit cradled in my arms, I set it on the ground and started unpacking the alcohol and bandages and medical tape.

“Are you okay, Ada? Are the boys okay?” he asked, but he didn’t wait for me to answer before continuing in the same breath. “I don’t know what happened. There was some kind of fight. They had guns, Ada, and the warehouse...” His face slackened, his gaze soft. “They’re gone now. They were there, and then bang. They weren’t.”

He kept apologizing, kept saying he never wanted anything like this to happen, that he had broken his promise to me and hated himself for it. But most of all, he was obsessed with sending me away, sending me back to the boys.

“Don’t worry about us,” I said. I tried to clean the blood from Frank’s face, but there was too much.

“Leave it,” he said, becoming himself again.

“I have to stop the bleeding, Frank.”

“Then put a bandage over it,” he said. I did, and it was woefully inadequate, but it was all the fussing Frank would allow me. “Where are the boys?” It came out as more of a statement than a question.

“At home,” I said.

“You left them?”

“Franklin is taking care—”

“They shouldn’t be alone right now. You should be with them right now.”

“Franklin is very mature. You need me here.”

“Franklin is mature, but Lawrence is difficult. He needs his mother.”

“But Frank, you need help.”

He looked around at the dozen or so men strewn about. Most had calmed down considerably. They sat quietly, waiting for instruction. The anarchy of just moments ago was only a memory.

“I can handle this, Ada. I need your help but not here. I need you to take care of the boys. But before you go home, find the Meridian Street crew and tell them to get their asses over here.”

“Should I get the Main Street crew too?” I asked.

“No, let them keep working. They’re not on holiday yet. I promised you that you wouldn’t have to spend a second winter in that fucking cabin, and that’s a promise I intend to keep.”

Frank took off his bloody shirt, wiped his face with the inside of it, and dropped it on the ground. He pulled me close, and I could see that his bandage was already soaked through. “I love you, Ada,” he said, his voice warmer, “but I couldn’t live with myself if anything happened to you or one of the boys. Please, just let me fix this. It’s my mess.”

I wanted to argue. I wanted to help. But rational Ada was in control, and she knew that I couldn’t change his mind, no matter how much time I wasted trying.

“Yes, Frank,” I said. “I’ll do what you need me to do.”

[LR] I’m sorry, Ada. You’ll have to forgive me. I’m still not sure I understand what actually happened at the factory. What caused the explosion?

[AC] No need to apologize, Lee. I’m afraid I don’t know myself. In those first moments after it happened, Frank let his guard down and told me as much as he ever would: there was some kind

of fight amongst the men. Guns were involved. Frank would call it “The Accident” after that, but I was never even sure if it *was* an accident or if someone did it on purpose. No one was ever charged with any crime related to it, so I assume that whoever caused the explosion must have died in it or else gotten so maimed that Frank deemed further punishment unnecessary.

[LR] Frank never told you about what happened that day?

[AC] No. I asked, of course, but Frank was a very private man when it came to certain things. Most of his life was as open to me as a book, but there were some things he just refused to talk about. The only time he ever became angry with me was when I pressed him about these things. So I’d ask, but then I’d leave it alone.

[LR] What kinds of things wouldn’t he talk about?

[AC] Failures, I think. Or what he perceived as his failures, anyway. He wasn’t always like that. I worry that I might have done that to him. By punishing him unfairly. I treated him like he had failed me for so long that by the time we came to Eden, by the time I was done resenting him, it was too late. He internalized every thing that went wrong, took personal responsibility for it, and refused to talk about it. Even in his journals, which I was not allowed to read until after he died, he never spoke of “The Accident.” He never wrote about the hard times we fell on after Prohibition ended or any of the troubles he had with Carson Industries. He was very concerned with his legacy. He didn’t want anyone to know about his failures.

[LR] I see. So back to the day of the explosion, you went back to the cabin to check on the boys?

[AC] Yes, and they were fine. I mean, certainly rattled, but minimally traumatized, all things considered. That night, Lawrence begged to sleep in bed with us, and when we gave him permission, Franklin Junior said he wanted to sleep with us too, so all four of us piled together on the bed. It was a tight squeeze, so the boys lay in the opposite direction, with their pillows next to Frank's and my feet. It took a while for them to fall asleep, and I was so relieved when I finally heard their even breathing. I squeezed Frank's hand softly, and he squeezed it back to let me know that he was still awake too. I thought I'd never be able to fall asleep. All I could think about was Frank and the man whose arm he was holding.

[LR] That must have been so difficult for both of you—for everyone really. So what happened after that? I understand that most of the men left, right?

[AC] Yes, that's right. The next morning, the island was so quiet, I slept in past noon with the boys. Frank had gotten up early to visit the barracks before dawn. The men still had the day off, but Frank cancelled the Independence Day celebration. Part of the surprise he'd planned was renting a cruise ship to take everyone, the whole damn island, out on Lake Huron for what he was going to call a Travelling Fête, but the party boat was used instead to ship the wounded and the dead—or pieces of them, anyway—back to the mainland.

That evening, Frank gave a speech by the dock before sending the ship to sea. I tried to put a clean dressing on his wound before the ceremony, but he wouldn't let me.

“Bandages make a man look weak,” he said, so when he stood before the crowd as their leader, he wore the open gash like a badge of honor.

He talked about friendship and a common future and a need for people to learn how to get along. He talked about Franklin Junior and Lawrence and the world he wanted them to grow up in. He talked about personal responsibility, and he took responsibility for what happened even though everyone knew it wasn't his fault. He also told the men that the barracks would be taken down in the fall, by which time he expected Eden to be a town that people could actually live in—thrive in, even. He told them that they had the opportunity to apply for permanent residency, for themselves and any families they might have left behind on the mainland, but that only applications from the best men would be accepted.

He didn't tell them what “best” means. Nor did he tell them that the bonuses he planned on giving them would go to those who sustained physical deformities in the explosion and the families of those whose injuries were much graver. But he moved some of them, and those that he did considered, for the first time, whether or not Eden was a place they wanted to call home.

When the turkey vultures flew in and started to circle the gathering, Frank unveiled another surprise he had planned: an expensive five-minute fireworks display. It wasn't dark enough for a stunning visual impact, but the explosions echoing over Lake Huron chased the birds away and thudded heavily in all of our chests like a collective heartbeat.

I closed my eyes and listened, trying to picture Frank the way he was when we first met. I realized, then, that he wasn't the same man I married at all. He was better than that man. Better, even, than me.

After the last firework had resounded in the pit of my stomach, I opened my eyes and saw Frank as if for the first time. The cruise ship had already left the dock, and it seemed as if the vultures were never there.

In the summer, we were happy. The sun was warm, the days were long, and even the wind was welcomed, offering respites of coolness when the heat became unbearable. At the same time, we were ever aware that our good fortune wouldn't last forever. Soon things would start to die, and knowing this reminded us that we would die too some day. Still, we were very thankful for the time we had, and we tried to use it well.

—Frank Carson, Senior

## CHAPTER 3

## THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF LAWRENCE ALPHONSE CARSON

*Editor's Note: This oral history interview with Lawrence Carson [LC] was conducted by me, Lee Rickels [LR], in several sessions in late April 1964, at the Historic Carson Family Cabin.<sup>15</sup>*

**Departure**

[LC] Is it on?

[LR] Yes, but try your best to forget it's there. The benefit of such technology is that I can actually focus on what you're saying instead of just ferociously trying to copy it all down. The drawback is that I'd like us to simply have a conversation, but many people find it difficult to speak naturally if they're thinking about being recorded.

[LC] I'm not a big fan of technology. [*Lawrence sweeps his hand about the cabin.*] But you might have already guessed this given that I choose to live here instead of in the obscene mansion erected in my name on my family's estate.

[LR] I just thought you preferred solitude.

---

<sup>15</sup> As with all of the interviews I conducted for this project, I recorded our conversations on tape. I have transcribed the interview here in such a way that preserves the back-and-forth nature of our conversation, which I believe can offer extra insight into Lawrence's story. I have, however, employed compression where I believed it would benefit readability. I've combined the transcripts from all six sessions and then broke them apart again into logical chunks befitting an epic tale such as this. Edits proofed and approved by Lawrence Carson.

[LC] I do.

[LR] Which is why I truly can't thank you enough for agreeing to meet with me. You're something of an enigma to everyone in Eden. The stories they tell of you—it's almost mythical.

[LC] So what is it you need from me?

[LR] Just the facts. Specifically, the story of your years off the island. Why you left, where you went, what you did, why you decided to return—that kind of thing.

[LC] It was a long time ago, Lee. I'm afraid I can't recall all of the details.

[LR] Who could? Just do the best you can. When you left, did you plan to return?

[LC] Some day, yes. But I guess I had imagined that when I did return, I would be old and wise by then. At peace with everything that had caused me to leave in the first place.

[LR] And you weren't?

[LC] Not really. I mean, I was *older* but still very much a child, *wiser* but with a long ways to go until I reached wisdom. I'd long forgiven my father for abandoning Eden—that part was

easy—but I had no interest in absolving Frank for his self-seeking opportunism, and I knew Eden was now his domain.

[LR] Have you?

[LC] Forgiven my brother? Not yet. I'm working on it.

[LR] Is that why you came back?

[LC] No. I don't know. After four years of wandering, I was just drawn back. It wasn't my mother's embrace or the comfort of sleeping in my own bed that I looked forward to feeling again but that abstract sense of home only gets more difficult to define with age.

I still have this essay I wrote when I was just a boy. The assignment was to write about our favorite place using all of our senses and including at least one memory. [*Lawrence pulls a ragged sheet of paper from his pocket, smooths its creases out on the table, and reads from it.*]

Golden Pond is my favorite place because it is shaped like a lopsided heart. I used to share Golden Pond with my brother Franklin. The bigger side was Franklin's because he is bigger than me, but I didn't mind because I always liked the smaller side the best. It suits me, as Dad always says. Franklin does not go to Golden Pond with me anymore because he has friends and a girlfriend named Betty and a job at the factory, but that's okay too because I am now big enough to

go to Golden Pond by myself, and without Franklin, there's no one there to push me down and hold me under the water until I can't breathe anymore.<sup>16 17</sup>

Golden Pond looks like it loves one side better than the other if you look at it from up above, like from up in a tree, but from the shore, the smaller lobe side so perfectly sized that the bigger side seems like it is trying too hard. Plus, Dad says that if you try to watch the sunrise from the big side, it will burn your eyeballs.

Golden Pond only looks golden sometimes. When the leaves on the trees have turned yellow and orange, they cast a kind of halo over the Pond, and when the leaves fall, they gather in thick mats around the shore like a custom-made crown for an oddly shaped head. When the sun sets just right, the Pond can look like it is on fire, but none of that is real, solid gold.

The only time Golden Pond is truly golden is on a perfect dawn. Not every morning has a perfect dawn, so you have to watch as many sunrises as you can if you want to see one. Dad knows that I sneak out early most mornings to watch Golden Pond as the sun comes up behind me. He caught me once, but said he would keep it secret for me.

Golden Pond sounds like waves if you listen hard enough, but sometimes, like when I am supposed to be at recess and all the kids are playing outside, people make too much noise for me to be able to hear what the Pond is saying.

---

<sup>16</sup> “Betty” refers to Elizabeth Freeman. The Freemans were among the earliest group of families that moved to Eden and likely the wealthiest Eden family after the Carsons.

<sup>17</sup> When I asked Frank Junior about this incident at Golden Pond, his response was “no comment.”

The birds say things too, and sometimes I count birds to see how many different kinds visit the pond just during recess. I've seen twelve in one day, and those are just the ones I can name.

Golden Pond feels like sticking your feet in the mud and wiggling your toes around, and it feels so good you want to roll around in it and smear it on your face and yell YIPPEE!

Golden Pond sometimes stinks like dead fish, but I don't smell things very good, so I do not mind the fish odor like Mom does. I like to look at the dead fish and their eyeballs. I wonder if fish eyes can get burned out by the sun too.

Golden Pond tastes like aquatic plants—not seaweed because it is fresh water. I keep a jar of the water hidden under my bed and take a little drink every night before I go to sleep. Golden Pond tastes like it could make me live forever.

When I go to Golden Pond, it makes me think about how beautiful the world is. Mom prefers the view from the 12:00 dock, and I think it's okay, but Lake Huron is just too big for me to take in. It makes me feel small. Golden Pond makes me feel like I belong somewhere, like I am a part of the world, and so is everyone else, and we can never really be alone.

It might not be my best piece of writing. [*Lawrence laughs.*] But I have been carrying this timeworn scrap of paper with me for decades now. Whenever I felt like an outsider, reading it reminded me that there was one place in the world that I could always call home.

[LR] Thank you for sharing that with me, Lawrence. I think I understand what this place means to you. So let's go back to why you decided to leave in the first place.

[LC] You've been living here, what, six weeks?

[LR] That's right.

[LC] Then you should know why I left.

[LR] Boredom?

[LC] Precisely.

[LR] That's the only reason. It didn't have anything to do with your father's death?

[LC] Of course it did. But you know that already too.

[LR] Please, Lawrence. Indulge me. Just tell me your story. 1941. Let's start there. Not just why you wanted to leave but the actual impetus that preceded your leaving.

[LC] Well, before I left Eden, I had been working on the dock for a month or so, just before my father got called up.<sup>18</sup> I'm sure you know: It was actually Frank who had been drafted, but our father volunteered to go in his place. That part is true. My dad said he always wanted to see the world, but I never believed that was why he did it. He was protecting Frank, and anyone who did not understand that—namely, Frank—was an idiot and an ingrate.

Anyway, I had just learned about what happened to my father, and for some reason, all I could think about was how much I did not want to go into work the next morning to help Garrett load a bunch of DDT containers onto a salty for the European front.<sup>19</sup> It was supposed to control typhus or something like that.

[LR] He wouldn't give you the day off?

[LC] Oh sure. That I would be given the day off as soon as Garrett found out what happened in Hawaii was a given, but as soon as Garrett knew, the whole town would know, and I would never get a break from all the sympathetic looks and feeble expressions of appreciation and mass market patriotism. It made me sick.

---

<sup>18</sup> In a separate, informal conversation with me, Lawrence would explain how he came to work on the dock. His passion lay in working close to the land, but his initial apprenticeship at the community farm didn't work out. He daydreamed too much, he told me, and after his third time overturning a tractor, was asked to find another calling. "I don't know which possibility worried them the most," he said: "that I hurt someone else with my carelessness or that a son of Frank Carson gets hurt while under their supervision." Frank Senior gave Lawrence the choice between working in the factory or working on the dock, and wanting to spend as much time outside as possible, the boy chose the latter.

<sup>19</sup> On the Great Lakes, there are two kinds of freighters: lakers and salties. Lakers are those boats from and for the Great Lakes, while salties are visiting ships that belong on the Atlantic.

After Pearl Harbor, practically every young man in America was begging to go to war. I seemed to be unique in wanting to pretend there was no war going on at all. That Frank was happy enough to have avoided my father's fate and was as disinclined to fight as I was made me feel somewhat of a coward. But unlike Frank, who cried about not wanting to die after he received his draft notice, I didn't fear dying.<sup>20</sup> Only killing.

So after hearing the news, I lay awake in bed all night waiting for my mother's sobs to turn into soft snores, and when they did, it was almost daybreak. I snuck out of the house and went to Golden Pond. It was one of those perfect dawns, but I just couldn't stand to look at something so beautiful. It represented a peace I thought I could never know again. As the sun rose higher in the sky, it was like I could feel myself growing older by the minute. Every second, I moved closer to age eighteen, when I would be called into a war that would inevitably still be raging. I had better things to do than wait around for the draft notice.

I went to work, and I helped Garrett load up all of the DDT containers before making my escape. I stowed away on the salty after we finished loading it up and caught a ride all the way to Québec City. I planned on staying for just a night or two, but the days and weeks bled into each other, and I lost track of time. I enjoyed the pace and temperament of the place.

[LR] How did you get by?

[LC] After securing a job at the port, it was easy. I got an apartment and picked up French quickly. At the docks, I made the first real friends I'd ever had: René and Étienne, a couple of guys who had been friends for twenty years. They had already lived such exciting lives. Their

---

<sup>20</sup> Again, Frank Junior had "no comment" on how he felt about being drafted or about Frank Senior taking his place.

stories made me hungry for adventure. When they spoke of a cross-country skiing marathon, I begged them to take me along.

[LR] Was this an organized event or—

[LC] No, something they wanted to do on their own. They had been planning it for years. At first, they said I would just slow them down, but they only spoke five words of English between the two of them, and I convinced them that I would be an asset once they got outside of *La belle province*.<sup>21</sup>

We trained all summer. I received an invitation to Frank and Betty's wedding, which was to be on December 7, 1942, the one-year anniversary of the day my father died saving my brother's ass. I wouldn't put it past Frank to take that date for himself, but I was surprised by Betty's complicity. She was always very decent to other people. Anyway, I had no idea how the invitation found me, but I planned to be halfway across North America by December. I wouldn't have gone anyway, and I didn't *répondez s'il vous plaît*. I returned the invitation to the post office, telling them I had received it by mistake.

---

<sup>21</sup> The beautiful province—a nickname for Quebec.

### Initiation

[LC] After the first snow, René, Étienne, and I packed our bags and prepared to leave as soon as we had a good eight inches on the ground. The goal was to ski west across the country and make it to Moose Jaw before the spring thaw. [*Lawrence lights a cigarette with a match. For an ashtray, he uses what appears to be a polished fragment of bone—probably a piece of an animal skull.*]

We wore animal skins and each towed a sled packed high with hides that kept us warm in our tents at night. We only had a proper washing on the rare occasions when some generous local offered us a room. Or, more often, they offered René the room while Étienne and I were allowed to sleep in the barn. The two men had been classmates in school, but age suited René much better than it did Étienne, who was often assumed to be my father. René was also more sociable, smiled easily, and had no trouble charming women, even when they didn't understand a word he said.

We reached Moose Jaw in late February, ahead of schedule. René and Étienne were ready to turn around and head back immediately, making it a race to see how close to home they could get before the earth softened and the snow sloughed into itself, meaning they'd have to hitch rides the rest of the way home. I declined to return with them, however, for the *chez nous* they spoke of was not my own.<sup>22</sup> Instead, I continued on alone, caught a train that took me all the way to the west coast and then a ferry that brought me out to Vancouver Island.

[LR] Why Vancouver Island?

---

<sup>22</sup> Literally, “our house” but also understood as “our home” or “our place.”

[LC] I don't know. I guess I like islands. They give the illusion that you are more self-sufficient, more independent, more insulated from the rest of the world than you actually are. Like it or not, we're all connected. The barrier between us is only water. It's always passable.

[LR] You recognize that the quality you love most about islands is an illusion, and yet you are still drawn to them?

[LC] We all lie to ourselves, Lee. It's by necessity. If we concerned ourselves with all the trivial matters, we'd never get on with the business of living. I let myself dream like everyone else. The only difference is that I wake up.

[LR] What did you do on Vancouver Island?

[LC] I found work and a cheap room at the Port of Victoria. I made one friend, a woman named Regina who taught me the ways of...physical love. I suspected that she was a prostitute, but she never asked me for any money, and she gave me something to look forward to every day, so I never bothered to ask how she earned a living. In the end, she robbed me though. Took everything from my apartment except my cross-country gear, which was stowed underneath a pile of foul smelling furs that she clearly was not willing to touch.

[LR] I'm sorry. That must have been devastating.

[LC] I was less surprised by Regina's betrayal than I was disappointed by it. I never expected us to have a future together. I didn't love her—my heart belonged to someone else—but I cared for her very much and hoped her feelings for me were genuine too. Autumn was already coming to a close, so I had no choice but to hitch a ride as far as Moose Jaw and ski the rest of the way back to Québec City.

[LR] Why not just hitch the whole way home?

[LC] Anyone can do that. I had something to prove.

[LR] What's that?

[LC] That I was a man of action. That I wasn't going to let my life just happen to me. That I was in control.

[LR] And you felt you had to prove this to your friends in Quebec?

[LC] No, I had to prove it to myself.

[LR] And did you?

[LC] Of course.

[LR] Did you reconnect with your friends when you got back?

[LC] Yes, but things were different. René and Étienne had changed. René had met a woman, Julia from Nipigon, and she was living with him, so I stayed with Étienne instead. Étienne had been married once and still had pictures of his ex-wife all over the house, but he didn't like to talk about it. I never pried. My friends welcomed me back and begged me to tell them stories. I told them about Regina—the whole story, including how it ended—and expected them to make fun of me for being so naïve, but they only laughed when I did and seemed to have a newfound appreciation for my companionship.

They were old men now, and maybe they always had been, but I suspected it was the cross-country trip that had tired them out on living. Cross-country skiing is a young man's game, and for them to go to Moose Jaw and back in one season drained all the vitality they had left. Even Julia acted more interested in me than in René. The first time I met her, she dressed rather plainly and wore no makeup, but after that seemed to put more effort in her appearance and took to smiling and laughing all the time. René noticed but was not bothered any by it. [*Lawrence laughs.*]

Later, he would tell me that she was putting more effort toward their bedroom activities with me around and that I was welcome to stay with them if Étienne's was too depressing. I wasn't trying to do that, but René had a point. It wasn't just the photos of Étienne's ex-wife; it was everything, the men themselves—all of it was just too damn depressing. The guys were working at the port again and were convinced that I could get my job back too. But I wasn't tired yet, not like them. I was still restless.

While I was away, Étienne received an invitation for me to attend a celebration of Eden's fifteenth anniversary party. Holding the thick, creamy cardstock in my hand, tracing my fingers over the raised lettering, I couldn't believe it had already been fifteen years. I tried to imagine what Frank would think of my life. I didn't care if I had his approval, but I wanted his envy, and the one thing of mine that my brother had always coveted was my freedom.

[LR] How's that?

[LC] Frank always wanted to get out of Eden. He even enrolled at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, though he never finished his first semester. After our father volunteered to fight in his place, Frank had to drop out of school to run the factory, which was finally doing well after our father converted it to DDT production. He had struggled for years to get the factory going. First, the end of Prohibition limited the demand for bootleg, and then the Coast Guard shut down our hemp production.<sup>23</sup> Carson Industries was just starting to turn record profits when Frank took over, and I figured he likely had not left the island since—not even for his honeymoon.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Before converting the factory to DDT production, Carson Industries produced both bootleg and paper made from industrial hemp. This was before the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 made the cultivation of hemp illegal. Hemp was to be the legitimate business of Carson Industries, and it was the only thing that kept the enterprise from going bankrupt after the repeal of Prohibition in 1933. Isolated as Eden is from the mainland, Frank Senior was able to continue producing industrial hemp after the 1937 ban. He exported it to Canada, where its use remained legal until 1938.

That DDT was the saving grace of Carson Industries is simply the third piece of bad luck for the business venture. In converting the factory to DDT production, Frank Senior was only being a smart businessman. DDT—that is, dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane—was first synthesized in the 1800s, but its insecticidal properties were only discovered in 1939 by Swiss scientist Paul Hermann Müller.

Frank Senior immediately realized the tremendous value DDT could have for disease control and was the first American manufacturer to start producing it in mass quantities. It should be

[LR] How long did you stay in Quebec?

[LC] Not long. It was my third night back, and I was sitting around with René and Julia and Étienne, and they were talking about how things would be just like old times as soon as I got my job back at the docks when I surprised all of us—myself included—and said that I was only stopping in Québec City on my way through. “I didn’t tell you?” I asked. “I’m on my way to Charlottetown.” I left for Prince Edward Island the next morning.

[LR] But you hadn’t planned that?

[LC] No, but once I said it, I knew that moving on was the right thing to do. I was sick of moving containers around, and I’d grown out of my old friends.

When I got to P.E.I., I found work on a big fishing boat. I didn’t have any experience, so at first I was just an ordinary deckhand—and the one with the least seniority at that—so I had to do all of the worst jobs: washing dishes, scrubbing the deck, cleaning out the latrine. But guys

---

noted that Frank Senior had no inkling of the hazards associated with DDT and, like the abolition of hemp production, could never have anticipated that the legitimacy of producing it could come into question some day.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence is not quite correct here. Frank technically left Eden for his honeymoon, though he didn’t go far. It’s surprising that Frank and Elizabeth Carson went anywhere after their wedding, as December is the most dangerous month to try to travel on the Great Lakes. The ferries quit running at the end of October. But Frank was well connected and had a northbound freighter take him and Elizabeth up to Manitoulin Island for their honeymoon.

Manitoulin is another Lake Huron island but one on the other side of the invisible International Boundary. Considered part of Ontario, Manitoulin is the largest freshwater lake island in the world. It has over one hundred freshwater lakes of its own; several of these lakes have their own islands; and some of these micro-islands have their own ponds. In this sense, Manitoulin is like a pair of mirrors, reflecting the same object back and forth to one another as far as the eye can see.

were always quitting or getting called up, so the boat was always hiring, and I was able to move up in the ranks. Soon enough I was supervising men at least twice my age.

While we were at port, I enjoyed the company of a variety of women. I may not look it now, but I was a catch back then. The tourists loved my French accent, and my body was in great shape from my active lifestyle. I had no trouble getting the attention of lonely women who needed companionship for a night. They seemed to need it even more than I did. Many of them had boyfriends or husbands or fiancés, but their men were deployed. They were desperate for physical affection.

[LR] But you never developed strong feelings for any of them?

[LC] No. The women always returned home in the end, and though I was not predisposed toward loving them in the first place, our encounters were so fleeting that I never had the chance to care any more for them than I care for a stranger.

[LR] Were you in Charlottetown for long?

[LC] No. It couldn't have been more than a few months before that night when I met a woman slightly older than my usual dates but still very beautiful. She wore a simple black sheath cut wide at the neck to reveal her delicate collarbones and cinched at her thin waist with a pink and violet sash. It billowed behind her when she walked. She carried herself so confidently that it became clear that the girls I had been with were still girls. This was a woman. She reminded me a bit of cleaned-up version of Regina.

She took me back to her hotel. Her husband was waiting for us in a plaid robe tied over his pajamas. The woman seemed unsurprised to see him, but I was caught off guard and panicked, trying to think up some excuse for why I would be escorting another man's wife back to her room.

He walked up to me and stood very close, our noses just centimeters from one another. His eyes were so dark they were almost black, and they bored into me like a nail into a wooden plank that is soft and rotted from sitting out in the rain. I was certain he was going to punch me in the face, and no matter the gray in his hair, by his sheer size, I expected him to lay me out.

[LR] He didn't?

[LC] No. It was the damndest thing. I'm expecting him to hit me, bracing myself for it even, and instead he asks me, "So are you going to sleep with my wife or not?" Of course not, I said. But he wanted me to. I guess he'd already been to the Western Front and back and had his genitals blown to bits at Dieppe.<sup>25</sup> The closest he could get to making love to his wife was watching other men do it.

[LR] And you did?

---

<sup>25</sup> The Dieppe Raid—also known as Operation *Jubilee*—was a World War II battle that took place on August 19, 1942. Dieppe was a German-occupied port on the northern coast of France, and the Allied attack on it was predominantly fought by Canadians.

The raid was short-lived. In less than twelve hours after storming the beach, the surviving Allies were evacuated or left to be captured by the Germans. More than sixty percent of the men—and almost seventy percent of the Canadians—were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. Though Dieppe has been cited as a success because it was a learning experience that prepared the Allies for Normandy, many Canadians resent this characterization, not wanting the loss of more than three thousand men to be considered the mere dress in a "dress rehearsal."

[LC] I felt bad for the man. What else was I going to do? Afterward, we lay in bed, all three of us, smoking Chesterfields and drinking imported wine until the wife was ready to go again. It was strange.

[LR] Yes. Sounds like it.

[LC] The next morning, I awoke alone and, after dressing, found the couple happily breakfasting on the patio. It had rained late last night, but the sun was warm. It sparkled on the East River in a promise that it would never go away again.<sup>26</sup> Summer was here.

“Ah, Lawrence,” the man said, pronouncing my name with the French inflection I always used to introduce myself.<sup>27</sup> “We were just talking about you. Please, join us. Order some room service. I apologize that we started without you. We didn’t want to disturb your rest.”

I told him he had nothing to apologize for but that I wouldn’t be staying for breakfast.

“I insist,” he said. “We have a business opportunity that we’d like to discuss with you.”

I had the day off and nowhere else to be, so I sat and listened to his proposition. They owned a sailboat and were taking it down the coast to Cuba. They wanted a third set of hands.

“Someone who can catch fish for us in calm water and give me a hand when the sea gets rough,” the man said.

“And someone who can help keep me company,” his wife added, placing her hand on my knee and sliding it up my thigh.

---

<sup>26</sup> Also known as the Hillsborough River.

<sup>27</sup> Emphasis on the second half of the word: law-RENCE not LAW-rence.

“We’ll compensate you for your work, of course,” he said.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I don’t even know your names.”

“You don’t need to,” the man said. “Just call us Mickey and Minnie.”

I told him that I would have to think about it, but I already knew what my answer was going to be. I was bored with Canada but wasn’t ready to go home yet. I was eager for a new adventure, and Mickey and Minnie were full of it.

This must sound unbelievable to you.

[LR] Not unbelievable. But I can see why there are so many different rumors about this time.<sup>28</sup>

You have a very unique story. Please continue. What was it like sailing with this Mickey and Minnie?

[LC] It was a bizarre trip, longer than I expected. Mostly ecstatic but at times frightening, like when Minnie got jealous of the attention her husband paid to me and shoved the boom at me. It knocked the wind out of me and sent me overboard, where I treaded water until Mickey convinced her to let him pull me back in. Once we reached Cuba, they invited me to stay with them in the small cabana they were renting out, but I declined and said I would make my own way in Havana. Mickey had been nothing but kind to me, and Minnie was mostly a pleasure, but

---

<sup>28</sup> The town gossip ranges the full gamut from the plausible to the completely fantastic. Some say Lawrence Carson crossed the country four times—east-west first, then north-south—only stopping when hypnotized by the Northern Lights, which painted his face green with the night sky. Some say he was a homeless beggar in Toronto who fell into prostitution. Some say he never left Eden. Still others maintain that Lawrence went on a spirit journey in which he transformed from a boy into a bear and then from a bear into a man. One thing is sure: no one knows what happened for sure except for the man himself.

she lost her temper often, and there was no telling what she would do during these episodes of madness.

[LR] How did you get by on your own in Cuba? Did you know any Spanish?

[LC] Not a word, but the large Haitian immigrant population spoke a French-based creole that I understood well enough. A man with a seiner hired me to sell his catch on his behalf. I thought he wanted me to work the markets, but he'd carved out a nice little niche enterprise for himself. He caught baitfish and sold them to lazy tourists who came down just for the marlin. Or rather, he caught the fish, and I sold them.

[LR] What was the man's name?

[LC] Couldn't tell you if I wanted to. He didn't speak. Not ever. I never knew if his silence was a choice or not, but I appreciated it nevertheless. We didn't become friends or get to know one another in any way. We just did business together and lived our separate lives, and things were easier that way. Cleaner.

[LR] It sounds like you were actively avoiding friendship.

[LC] Sure. I spent my time thinking. Sometimes, we spend so much time talking and listening that there isn't enough space for us to just think. I couldn't even grow a full beard yet, but I was already exhausted on life. Solitude slows things down, gives you time to recuperate.

I spent my nineteenth birthday at Le Soleil, my regular Haitian bar, but drank too much and got into a scuffle with some locals. The bartender came to my rescue but told me to leave and never return or else he wouldn't—couldn't—protect me. I'd run up a fairly decent tab, and he was going to let me walk out on it, so I left without protest and stumbled around Havana looking for my next favorite bar.

“Fucking Haitians,” I heard some guy with a deep American voice say behind me. I spun around thinking that someone from Le Soleil had followed me, but the growl had come from a man climbing out of an Oldsmobile Convertible. He clearly hadn't been talking to me. Hadn't even registered my existence.

He was tall—at least fifteen centimeters taller than me. His dark hair had been smoothed to one side with pomade, and his thick, bushy mustache made me self-conscious of my own inadequate fuzz. His clean white shirt was short sleeved and open at the collar, exposing a patch of wiry chest hair. He walked fast—not like he was in a hurry but like he knew where he was going and wasn't wasting any time getting there. I, on the other hand, had no idea where I was going, so I followed him down an alley and into a restaurant called Casa Martinez. He sat alone at the bar. I sat three empty seats down. The bartender began mixing a drink, served it to the man, who hadn't even ordered anything, and only then came over to me. I figured that he asked for my drink order, but I didn't understand anything after *Hola*.

“Hola,” I said. “*Parlez-vous français?*”

The bartender sighed with annoyance and shook his head.

“Do you speak English?” I tried, but he threw up his hands.

“What luck, a fellow ex-pat,” the American said.

He picked up his drink, came to sit beside me, and spoke in Spanish to the bartender, who began making me a drink identical to the one the American was drinking. There were leaves inside of it.

“It’s called a mojito,” the man said. “It’s the whole reason I bought a house in Cuba.”

He raised his glass, and so did I. I took a small sip while he seemed to swallow his whole. The cocktail was refreshing, sweet even, so I drank mine down too. The man raised two fingers, and the bartender started muddling more mint.

“So what brings a guy that speaks two languages but knows only one word of Spanish to Havana?”

“Oh you know, just seeing the world,” I said.

He looked at me skeptically. “How old are you?”

“It’s my nineteenth birthday, actually.”

“Cheers, then,” he said, as the bartender served us our second round. We both raised our glasses and drank deeply from our mojitos. “Where are you from?” the American asked me.

“The Midwest,” I said.

“No shit,” he said. “Whereabouts?”

“I was born in Chicago, but I grew up in Michigan.”

“Small world,” he said. “Same here.”

Yeah, you know where this was headed. I still had no idea who he was. [*Lawrence lights another cigarette.*]

He nodded to the bartender who started prepping two more mojitos. It seemed like a rigorous process to make them.

We talked for a while about Chicago, Michigan, and our common love of fishing. I told him all about the adventures I'd had since leaving Eden, but the only thing he commented on was Mickey's injury. After that, he only wanted to talk about the war.

"Does the government know where you are?" he asked.

"I suspect not," I said.

"How about your parents?"

"My father died at Pearl Harbor," I said. "I haven't seen my mother since 1941 either, so no, I suspect she doesn't know where I am."

"Does she even know you're alive?"

"Probably not," I said.

"Going to war isn't so bad," he said after a pause.

"Really?"

"No, not really." He laughed. "It's dreadful, but so are a lot of things that are a part of living. Doesn't mean you shouldn't do it."

"I'm not afraid of dying," I said.

"I didn't say you were."

"I just can't kill anyone."

"But you're a fisherman, right?"

"Not exactly," I said.

"You kill fish for a living."

"I sell the baitfish live," I said. "It's fresher that way."

"Okay, so you sell fish to be killed for a living."

"What's your point?" I asked him.

“You said you were afraid to kill.”

“I didn’t say I was ‘afraid,’” I corrected him. “I have morals.”

“And your morals don’t extend to fish?”

“Fish are different,” I said.

“Are they?”

“I’m tired,” I said. “Could you please help me settle my tab with the bartender?”

“Don’t worry about it,” he said. “It’s on me. Happy Birthday, kid.”

I left the bar and started walking down the alley, though I wasn’t sure which direction to go once it opened onto the street. I tried asking passersby for help, but I was well outside of the Haitian district, and no one spoke French—or English, for that matter.

“Fucking Cubans,” I heard a familiar voice behind me say. It was him, the American, in his Oldsmobile making fun of me. “All they want to speak is Spanish.” He offered to give me a ride, and I accepted. Once I got back to my room, I wrote a note to my mother.

[LR] What did it say?

[LC] Just that I was alive and well. I didn’t send it.

[LR] Why not?

[LC] Once I sent it, I’d have to go home. I wasn’t ready to do that yet.

## Return

[LC] The next day I was hung-over and stayed home all day in bed. At seven o'clock, there were three sharp knocks on my door. Still in my pajamas, I shuffled over to the door and opened it a crack. It was him, the American, and he pushed himself past me into the apartment. The room was small and looked even smaller with him in it. The ceilings were so low, he had to tilt his head to move around.

“I thought we’d get some dinner and drinks,” he said. “Have you not dressed all day?” For his part, he was wearing the same style of shirt as the day before but pale yellow instead of white. The color a dandelion casts on your throat if you hold it under your chin.

“I wasn’t feeling well,” I said.

“How are you feeling right now?” he asked.

“Hungry,” I said. “Thirsty, too.”

“Good. I’ll wait in the car. Ten minutes.”

We enjoyed another night at Casa Martinez and the night after that and most nights throughout the summer. He was going through a divorce and talking to me seemed to take his mind off of his own misery. He tried to impart his wisdom to me like I was his student. But everything he tried to teach me was a lesson in home. He was adamant that I return to Eden.

“War or no war,” he said. “If not for your mother than for your Golden Pond. It might already be too late.”

“What do you mean ‘too late’?” I asked him.

“People always think that when they leave home, they can always go back, but they can’t. Places change while you’re gone, Larry. If you go back now, you’ll hardly recognize it, but if

you wait too long, it won't recognize you either. You won't belong there anymore. You won't belong anywhere. And then you'll be like me: an old man who can't stay in any one place—or even with any one woman—for too long before he goes crazy. A place called Golden Pond? Haven't you ever read any Frost, Larry? Nothing gold can stay.”

“I'm not much of a reader,” I said.

“That explains it.”

“Explains what?”

“A brilliant man once said, ‘Going to another country doesn't make any difference. You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another.’”

“Who said that?”

“I did,” he said.

Yeah, but I still didn't get it.

He took me on his boat to Miami, where he insisted on paying for a series of train tickets that would take me all the way to Detroit. I tried to give him all the wages I had saved up, but he insisted that he could afford it easier than I could. He stopped at a newsstand and bought a stack of papers that he dumped in my arms.

“You should probably read up on what's been going on in the world,” he said. “A lot has changed since you left.”

“But what are you going to do?” I asked. “Do you want to come with me?”

“Can't Larry. I've got my own life to try to make sense of.” That was the last thing he said to me.

Reading the newspaper he's selected for me was all I had to do to pass the time on the trains. In this manner, I quickly learned that the war in Europe had been over for months now,

that the United States had just dropped atomic bombs on two large Japanese cities and Japan was expected to surrender any day now, and yes, that my good friend Hem was a world-famous novelist.

[LR] You're so lucky. What I would give to have one drink with Hemingway. One drink! And you spent months with him.

[LC] I know. But I didn't know. I hadn't read any of his work yet.

[LR] I bet you have now.

[LC] Oh yes, I've read them all. [*Lawrence is silent for a moment.*]

I didn't pay enough attention at the time, but the man was miserable. I don't know why he took the time to try to help me when he clearly had so much going on in his own life. You know he killed himself a few years ago?

[LR] Yes. I heard. I'm very sorry for your loss. His wife said it was an accident, that he was cleaning his gun.

[LC] We tell ourselves what we need to in order to go on living.

[LR] We can stop now and finish up some other time.

[LC] No, it's okay. I'm almost done. Come, let's go for a walk. I want to show you my garden. *[Lawrence leads me outside and around to the back of the cabin, where a path winds through a half-acre kitchen garden. He picks some asparagus spears. Some broccoli and cabbage also look ready for harvest. Lawrence is quiet for a while, and I wait for him to start speaking again.]*

I got as far as Detroit, but I didn't have enough money to pay someone to take me out to the island. I spent a night in the city, hoping to meet someone I could somehow talk into giving me a ride for free. I got pretty lucky. I was always pretty lucky. At the hotel bar, I met a couple that had just married. Mark Orton was a fighter pilot, and now that he was back from the war, he and his bride Caroline were looking for a place to start their new lives together. I told them all about Eden and invited them to visit for a day to see if it suits them. The idea of living on an island seemed exciting to them, and they accepted my offer.

The next day, Orton paid a fisherman to give all three of us a ride to Eden. My timing couldn't have been any better for the Ortons—or for me since I was able to slip into town unnoticed. Main Street was closed off for a festival celebrating the end of World War II, my father's heroism, and, apparently, DDT. There were several new businesses on Main Street, and they seemed to have emptied their contents out onto the thoroughfare.

A swarm of girls stood outside a new penny arcade called Victory Arcade, where a mechanical fortune teller moved one hand over a glowing crystal ball while the other hand passed over a fan of cards, dispensing them one at a time to squeals and delights. Victory was running carnival games in the street. A clown blew up long balloons of all colors and twisted each one into the same Y-shape. I didn't get it at first, but then I saw the boys running around, thrusting their balloons into the air and chanting "V for Victory," and it all made sense. There was a new café called Victory too, and they gave out free samples of Carson Apples Sparkling

Soft Cider. Girls in pink dresses zoomed around on roller skates handing out cupcakes frosted with stripes and spangles. The logo on their apron read Stope's Sweets, which had opened up next door to Franklin's Pub.

The pub drew a large crowd on the sidewalk, and the Ortons were drawn in. People were playing some kind of carnival game where they threw raspberries into five pint glasses filled with beer and arranged in a V-formation on a card table. Anyone who got one of their six raspberries into each of the five glasses won a free dinner and a bottle of Carson Apples Hard Cider. The Ortons wanted to stay and play, so I agreed to meet them back at the pub at six for dinner and left them to enjoy the rest of the festivities.

I walked east down Main Street toward the Carson Estate. When Carson Lane forked into three driveways, I hesitated between the one that leads to my mother's house and the one that leads to my own, which I hadn't ever had the chance to live in. For all I knew, Frank and my mother had turned it into a library. My curiosity got the best of me, and I put off seeing my mother a little longer.

The front door to my house was locked, but a back window was open, and I managed to climb inside, finding myself in the kitchen, which was tidy but completely outfitted with pots and pans and bags of flour and sugar. I turned on the sink, and water rushed from the faucet.

"Hello?" I whispered. When no one answered, I walked around the ground floor, which was likewise fully equipped with a glossy dining room table and matching chairs, a pair of couches, and a record player but no records. "Hello?" I said again, louder. Nothing.

I climbed the stairs and poked my head into each of the rooms. Like every other part of the house, they were furnished and decorated, but there was something about them that looked

neither lived-in nor abandoned. It was all too new, too tidy. There wasn't a layer of dust to be found anywhere. "Hello?" I yelled as loud as I could down the hallway, just to be sure. Nothing.

I snuck back out through the same window I used to break in and headed to Golden Pond, taking the long way to avoid the hoopla on Main Street. On my way there, I grew ashamed of myself for staying away for so long. It was painfully obvious how right Hem was. Eden *had* changed. There were roads everywhere and houses on either side of them. I could tell Frank had done very well for himself throughout the war, and he invested his profits into developing Eden. The arboretum, thankfully, was still a protected nature reserve, and the cabin was still here, of course, but it had been renovated and designated as a historical landmark. It was as if Frank was trying to turn Eden into a tourist town.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Indeed, he was—and did, at least for a little while. In the 1950s, Eden's population rose to approximately 1,000 persons and doubled each summer with the influx of tourists—mostly Michigan families but also a fair number of Ontarians. Frank Junior knew nothing about DDT but was a natural at business. He paid someone to manage Carson Industries for him, while he came up with new ways to "improve" Eden.

He gave free land to entrepreneurs willing to start new businesses on the island and pursued an aggressive marketing strategy for Eden's tourism, paying men to go door-to-door in Detroit and even up to Mackinac Island to promise an equally wonderful vacation at half the price. He built several small communities of summer homes for the rich, who spent money at the shops and restaurants. He built a vibrant economy. The only flaw in Frank's business strategy was building his empire with Carson Industries as the foundation.

The tourist industry Frank built could have continued to thrive without him, but it couldn't without DDT. That the 1967 Incident eliminated Carson Industries before it could have a chance to collapse on its own—and take Frank's and his father's legacy with it—is part of the argument made by those who theorize that the explosion was Frank's dramatic take on suicide. He was forcing it all to fail on *his* terms, they say. On that matter, I'll say what Frank Carson always said to me: "no comment."

With Frank's death and the destruction of Carson Industries, tourism grinded to a halt. The very rich abandoned their summer homes, and the recent transplants who could pick up and leave again did. In an instant, half of Eden's residents were out of a job, and without their business or that of the tourists, everyone else was poised to lose theirs too. Anyone who could afford to leave Eden did, and everyone else was left to live in ruins.

Information provided by Ada Carson and confirmed, where possible, with historical records.

I made my way to the pond, took off my shoes, and waded in. It was the same place, but there was something just off about it. Maybe it was the smell, at once chemical and rancid, or the itchiness that sent me back to dry land. I lay there for a few minutes, and I realized that it was the sound of the place that had changed most of all. Instead of the calm little waves licking the shore, birds trilling, and squirrels chuckling—sounds that added meaning to my silence—I heard a folk band playing just down the street. Unable to just think, I tried to count the birds, but before I saw a single one, the sun dipped into the horizon, and I figured it was time to go and meet the Ortons for dinner.

## CHAPTER 4

## ADAM'S EDEN (1)

**The Subject of Caroline Orton**

*Editor's Note: What follows is a draft of Chapter 6 of Frank Junior's unfinished, unpublished manuscript, Adam's Eden: The Autobiography of Franklin Carson Junior.*<sup>30</sup>

December 7. It's the seventh anniversary of my wedding day, a date I knew I could never forget, but I am going to pretend I did anyway.<sup>31</sup> I'm staying late at the office, ostensibly to catch up on some paperwork, though the whole point of getting a secretary is generally to spend *less* time at the office, not more, but Elizabeth is always tired, too tired to think of any argument.

I'm not a bad guy. I know everyone will think that I am a bad guy when they all find out about my affair with Caroline. And they will find out, eventually, because that's life on an island for you: all secrets have a shelf life. (That said, it's taken much longer than I would have expected for them to notice the scandal just under their noses. It seems the dim-witted masses are so caught up looking for the circus that they fail to actually see the big striped tents in front of their faces.)

I mean, I know for a fact that my own damn mother thinks I am a bad guy. I may not be Lawrence, this paragon of ascetic morality, but that doesn't make me wrong. It makes me

---

<sup>30</sup> Frank began writing his autobiography in 1963, in response to his mother's initiation of this project, *Eden: A Genesis*, in which Frank declined to participate. He did not want anyone else telling his story. Lightly edited for readability and published with the permission of Frank's estate executor, Ada Carson.

<sup>31</sup> If it is Frank and Elizabeth's seventh anniversary, that means Frank is writing about 1949.

human. I have feelings, needs, desires. More importantly, I have obligations. I suppose it's easy enough to go off and live in the woods away from everyone else after you've spent years running away from your own life and letting everyone believe that you're dead. I knew he wasn't dead, of course, because Ada made me hire a private detective to follow him through all of his adventures. (As if I didn't have anything better to do, like run a factory or an entire town.) The P.I. lost him for a few weeks on his Atlantic voyage, but given the suspicious circumstances of that arrangement, it was probably for the best that we never got the specific details about it.

Meanwhile, I can't even go to mainland to watch a Detroit Lions game without all of Eden falling to pieces. I suspect that if I even considered taking a vacation, the whole town would be at a loss for what to do with themselves.

I didn't ask for any of this. I never wanted this kind of responsibility. I never even wanted to come back to this damn island when I left for Ann Arbor. What I wanted was a normal life. What I wanted was to go to college, meet new people, expand my horizons. I didn't want to bear the burden of my father's legacy. Our shared name and my implied responsibility for his death were more than enough for me. The factory, the town, the hero-worship—I'm not cut out for it. I didn't necessarily want to marry the only girl I'd ever kissed. I mean, I loved Betty for as long as I can remember, and I always thought we might end up together, some day, but I never even got a chance to consider any other options. She was the only woman I'd ever been with. Before Caroline, that is.

But try talking about your need for a woman's touch with your mother just after she's caught you on your desk with the secretary she tried to talk you out of hiring in the first place.

"I hope you sanitize that thing when you're done," she said when she saw us and then shut the door quietly on her way out.

This was the previous Sunday. The factory and offices were closed, as they were every Sunday since I had the First Church of Eden built the year before. There wasn't supposed to be anyone around besides Caroline and me. Sundays were our special days. There was always a mountain of paperwork to catch up on, and being stuck at the office is always much more tolerable with company. Especially when that company is Caroline Orton.

Ada and I haven't spoken about it since then, but she's been dropping her little hints like pinecones shaken loose in the wind. Some are subtle: "You must be exhausted from all the extra hours you're putting in at the office." Some are less subtle: "How does Mark Orton feel about all the time you're spending with his wife?"

I don't really care anymore though. I'm a grown man, for chrissakes. I shouldn't have to worry about what my mother thinks of me. She's just an old drunk who hasn't had a lay in so long she won't be happy until everyone else is as goddamn miserable as she is. I don't care if she's chairwoman of the board. I'm the goddamn *President* of Carson Industries. I can hire whomever I want. And I can sleep with whomever I want, wherever I want.

You know how fun it is to have sex with a sick person? Not fun at all. Take my word for it. Elizabeth and I tried it once, but I couldn't handle it. I know she's my wife, but it just felt wrong. Like I was taking advantage of her. Honestly, it felt like I was forcing her. I wasn't, of course, but she merely tolerated my presence while going somewhere else in her mind.

I didn't expect my mother to keep mine and Caroline's secret, given how judgmental she can be, but she's kept quiet for some unknown reason. "Just don't get that girl pregnant," is what she told me. Her discretion surprised me most of all because she loves Betty like a daughter. She

always loved Betty more than I did. [Certainly loves her more than she's ever been able to love me.]<sup>32</sup>

When I came back after being forced to drop out of college, Betty was there for me. She was my best friend. She was the only one who didn't look at me differently from before I left, from before Pearl Harbor. There was no pity or fear or resentment or suspicion. There was only care and respect—as much for my wishes as for my needs—and love. It had always been there, her love for me, but it wasn't until I was so angry with the rest of the world that I was able to see it in her and recognize the feeling reciprocated inside of me. Love was not a feeling to which I was accustomed—on the giving or receiving end—so perhaps it took me a little longer than usual to understand my own feelings.

As soon as we got married, though, everything started sliding downhill. Nothing good ever lasts, it seems. We tried and failed and tried and failed again to have a baby. This, for five or six years. The pleasure of trying—of chasing her around the house like we were a pair of animals—the joy of conception, and the complete and utter loss of that hope that followed, again and again: it was almost too much to bear. Then, finally, she got pregnant and stayed pregnant, and it we were both so happy—until carrying the baby drove her inexplicably mad.

Committing Betty after Robin's birth was the hardest decision I've ever had to make, but she said she was hearing voices, that the island had voices and they were telling her to do things. Terrible things. I couldn't have her around our daughter like that. She could have been dangerous. I just couldn't live with myself if I did nothing and Betty went on to hurt our daughter.

---

<sup>32</sup> Sentence scratched out on the manuscript.

I brought Elizabeth home as soon as she told the doctors the voices had gone, but she just hasn't been the same as before the voices began. She seems like she is only ever half aware of what is going on around her. It's like there is some distant other world she travels to.

"Where do you go?" I asked her once.

"Checking the cupboards," she said. "Still bare." Whatever that means.

It just isn't enough for me, having half a wife. And she attracts so much attention. We are the talk of the whole damn island. The first few weeks after Elizabeth came home, every woman on Eden stopped by the house with a cake. Every damn one of them. These women are so bored with their lives that they create excuses to come to the house and gawk at Elizabeth. To see how weak she is. I wouldn't have minded the company, but the ladies looked at me so sadly, telling me I was "so brave" and that I was "handling everything so well." Like they had any idea what the situation actually was, much less how I was handling it. The only woman that didn't bake me a cake and treat Elizabeth and me like a one-ring circus act was Caroline, probably because she knew what it was like to be the object of everyone's gaze.

Caroline came to the house sure enough. But without a cake full of pretense. A pitcher of lemonade cut generously with whiskey, yes, and there was surely some intention behind it, but for the first time since I married, someone was at my house to see me. Just me. Elizabeth was resting upstairs, and Robin was at Ada's.

"Thought you might like someone to talk to," Caroline said, grinning out from under a too-large hat that hid half her face. She wore one of those short black sheaths that showed off her slim white arms and calves while hugging all the rest.

I did need someone to talk to, but I hadn't realized how lonely I was until I saw my feelings reflected in her. We're the same, Caroline and I.

Of course, I was nervous about her visit, nervous to invite her into my home. I'd never had a conversation with Caroline before. Funny, she was the most talked about person in Eden, and I'd only ever seen her in passing. The closest thing we ever had to an interaction was me politely nodding hello and holding the door open for her as I was leaving the pub and she was going in. Caroline's reputation preceded her, but it didn't matter how much was fact and how much was fiction. Everything they said about her became true after she arrived that day at my front door.

I led Caroline around back and set her up on the patio before running back inside to get us a pair of tumblers. [The whole time she was waiting for me, my brain was telling me to send her away. *You got enough woman troubles in your life already*, it said in a voice not unlike my father's. And it was true, really. Between Elizabeth, Robin, and Ada, women were the source of my daily struggle. At least they stuck around unlike the men in my family.

My dad couldn't get away from us soon enough. I know that I'm supposed to be grateful that he took my place in the service, but I was in school. I could've gotten a deferment.

And ever since Lawrence came back he's barely gone into town, spending all of his time either in that bedraggled cabin we lived in when we first came to Eden or wandering around in the woods or something. As the de facto king of this godforsaken rock, I've had to deal with multiple complaints from people who have stumbled upon him lying nude in a rowboat on Golden Pond, in full view of the public. He hasn't been normal since the day our father left.]<sup>33</sup>

I could see that Caroline was different from all the other women, especially Elizabeth. Trouble through-and-through, yes, but the kind of trouble I needed in my life. The pleasurable

---

<sup>33</sup> Passage scratched out on the manuscript. Lawrence does not deny the allegation.

kind that you bring upon yourself knowing full well what the consequences of your actions are going to be.

Especially after I got back to her on the patio and she removed that ridiculous hat to reveal the most beautiful set of ears I'd ever seen. The smooth cartilage with ridges and valleys to explore by tongue, the soft lobes to pinch between the teeth. She wore pearl earrings, probably imitation. Her hair, too, was like a dream. In the sunshine, it was mahogany and gold all at the same time. I'd never seen such a fiery head of hair. It was so luminous there was no wonder she wore so many damn hats. The rumors were bad enough without the extra mark of difference. And her legs, I could go on for days about her legs. She didn't wear pantyhose, so in the bright sun, you could see every imperfection, every dimple and stray hair, and somehow, that made them perfect. I feel dizzy all over again just thinking about that day.

Caroline and I avoided talking about ourselves. Instead we talked about:

1. The nice weather we'd been having.

“Isn't it a lovely day, Mrs. Orton? The nourishing heat from the sun, tempered by a light breeze,” I said.

“Quite,” she said.

I felt foolish. Like a failed poet.

2. The ambiance of the patio.

“This is so beautiful,” she said. “You have a wonderful view of the Lake.”

“It's the best view on the island,” I said, proud but then immediately self-conscious. Was I being arrogant? I had heard that

Caroline comes from a humble background. I worried that she might find me overly boastful.

3. The size of the Carson Estate.

“How big is it, exactly?” she asked.

“Big enough,” I said. “One hundred sixty-eight acres to be exact.”

“That seems like a lot,” she said, “especially for an island.”

“Maybe,” I agreed, “but half of that is our private nature reserve with hundred-foot white pines, and the rest includes an apple orchard and three homes.” I didn’t know why I was explaining things I was sure she already knew. Carson Apples is almost as old as Carson Industries. Ada and Elizabeth make applesauce every year and give a jar to every household for Christmas. Even Lawrence knows about Carson Apples Applesauce, and he’s barely a part of this world. “My mother’s, my brother’s, and my own, with a coach house above each garage,” I continued stupidly.

“I’d love to see inside of them some time,” she said. “Buildings fascinate me. They’re so...permanent. I always secretly wanted to be an architect.”

Soon I was telling her about things I couldn’t share with Elizabeth or anyone else, and our conversation only grew more intimate from there. We talked about my brother and her sisters. Our incompetent parents and our crazy spouses. Loneliness. I hadn’t realized how much I actually had to say until I had a perfect pair of ears to listen. Someone who gets me, who understands. I don’t care what folks think when they find out about us.

Of course, Ada suspected I was having an affair before I even did anything besides talk with Caroline. She was always exceptional at seeing, my mother. After Caroline left, I went inside and found Ada sitting at my dining room table with Robin.

“New friend?” my mother asked. Her eyes flickered down to the lipstick-stain on one of the tumblers in my hand.

“Business meeting, actually,” I said, regretting the words even as they came out of my mouth.

“Oh?” Her eyebrows arched, wrinkling her forehead. I’d always refused to do business at home. And she didn’t like it when I made big decisions without consulting her.

“Yes, Mom. I need a secretary, and Caroline mentioned to me, when I saw her at the grocery store last week, that she was looking for a job. She was worried she might have to take a job on the mainland, and we can’t have that.” It wasn’t all a lie. I *had* seen Caroline at the grocery store the week before—that much was true.

“Well, that’s very generous of you, Frank, to give a girl like Caroline a chance.” She couldn’t have disapproved more, but the look on her face only convinced me that it was time to take back some of my Presidential authority that I’d let her encroach upon out of apathy.

“Did she get the job or are you interviewing other candidates? I might have some recommendations if you—”

“She’s perfect. I offered her the job on the spot,” I said, hoping that Caroline would take the job when I offered it to her tomorrow.

She did take the job, of course, and it wasn’t long before we were sleeping together. It wasn’t just sex, though. I never stopped loving Elizabeth, but there was no more relationship to be had between my wife and me. We couldn’t make love, we never touched, we stopped talking

even. Her intelligence and wit—the things I loved most about her—were gone. She didn't care about raising her only child, much less being the companion she'd promised to be for me. We couldn't even go out on the town together any more. Ada raised our daughter for us because we were too tired to do it ourselves. We were a joke and not even a good one at that. A horse walks into a bar and the bartender asks, "Why the long face?" and the horse tramples him. That sort of joke.

I have never been entirely sure what, exactly, I really wanted out of the affair. A woman to touch and to touch me, yes, but there is something more, something animal. I wanted a son. I needed a legacy, and I couldn't find it with Elizabeth.

One morning, Caroline came into work complaining of not feeling well, and I spent the rest of the day trying to get her to discuss boys' names with me. She laughed and told me I was foolish, that she wasn't pregnant.

"Humor me," I said.

"Anything but Franklin Carson the Third," she said. "You pick."

"What do you think of Niles?"

"Works for me," she said, not taking any of it seriously.

But I took it very seriously, and as my fragile wife picks at our anniversary dinner at home by herself, a meal she probably spent most of the day and all of her energy preparing, I think about Niles and the second chance he represents.

## A Letter from Frank Carson

*Editor's Note: What follows is the cover story of the December 18, 1949, issue of the Eden Times, a weekly two-page newsletter Frank Junior produced from October 1946 until October 1966.<sup>34</sup>*

Dearest Residents of Eden,

Twenty years ago, the Carson family came to Pine's Island looking for a fresh start. We found the place so idyllic, my father renamed it Eden. Twenty years ago, Eden was a different place than the one we all know and love today. There was but one road and one residence. There were no telephones or electricity. The only running water was that of Silver Stream and Carsons Creek.

Eden was perfect excepting one thing: we had no one to share it with. There's something to be said for the joys of solitude, but it cannot be sustained indefinitely. Eventually, one must return to the world—or, as my parents chose to do, invite the world in. Because of this decision, not only did I learn to swim and climb my first tree here but also I fell in love and had my first kiss in this place. I went to school here, got married here, and chose to raise my own child here.

I might not have been born here myself, but I will likely die here, and I say that without a hint of sadness or regret. Eden is my home. I can't think of any other place where I'd rather spend my days or any people with whom I'd rather spend those days than you, dear readers and fellow citizens.

---

<sup>34</sup> Printed on hemp paper, the newsletter was one way Frank Junior made good use of all the excess hemp pulp in storage after the Coast Guard shut down Frank Senior's exporting of the product in the late 1930s. Due to the ephemeral nature of the contents of the *Eden Times*, very few copies of the issues exist today. It seems even Frank did not save back copies of the issues. Ada Carson, however, saved every one and generously granted me access to her collection.

In honor of Eden's 20th birthday and in celebration of all that we have built together on this rock, my wife, Elizabeth Carson, will host a Christmas Gala at our home. All adult Eden residents are invited. My mother, Ada Carson, will host a children's Christmas party at her home next door.

So please join us at the Carson Estate this Friday, December 23, at 6:00 P.M. for dinner, drinks, and dancing. The occasion is black tie. Carson Industries will close at noon to allow workers time to get ready. Elizabeth and I look forward to the pleasure of your company.

Sincerely,

Franklin Carson, Junior

CHAPTER 5  
SHE OF BAY CITY

*Editor's Note: This oral history interview with Caroline Orton [CO] was conducted by me, Lee Rickels [LR], on Tuesday, August 4, 1964, at Franklin's Pub.<sup>35</sup>*

[CO] Sorry I'm late.

[LR] It's no problem at all, Mrs. Orton.

[CO] What time is it, anyway?

[LR] 6:24.

[CO] Dreadfully late, then. I am so sorry.

[LR] I don't mind waiting. Truly. Here, let me get you a drink.

[CO] Okay then. [*Caroline downs half a glass of cider one swift gulp.*] Where do we start?

[LR] It's your story. Start wherever you like. Where are you from?

---

<sup>35</sup> As with all of the interviews I conducted for this project, I recorded our conversation on tape. I have transcribed the interview here in such a way that preserves the back-and-forth nature of our conversation, which I believe can offer extra insight into Caroline's story. I have, however, employed compression where I believed it would benefit readability. Mrs. Orton declined the opportunity to proof and approve the transcript.

[CO] I was born in Bay City, and I left there for the last time in 1940. I guess I was looking to put as much distance as possible between me and everyone who *thought* they knew me. But I didn't have the means to get very far, so I went to Detroit to be hired as an airhostess. They were hiring girls like crazy, you know. I thought any woman who would choose to get married and have babies and settle down in some nosey town where everyone is so bored with their own lives that they have to busy themselves with talking about other people when she could fly around the world instead, is no woman at all but just another foolish girl. The only reason why I stayed in Bay City for as long as I did was because I needed a high school diploma to fly.

I guess it seems pretty stupid now, given where I am: exactly the kind of place where I didn't want to end up.

[LR] It doesn't seem stupid at all. Go on please.

[CO] I had gotten my hair done that day—fat curls rolling off my face with a loose chignon in the back, it looked great—and wore a dark blue jacket over my favorite white dress, even though it was after Labor Day. I always thought I looked rather good in white, especially at the end of the summer, when my skin is all warm and bronzed. Looks were everything for a woman who wanted to fly. Society only made up silly rules like “no white after Labor Day” to keep ladies from looking bad anyway, so as long as I looked good, the rules didn't apply to me. [*Caroline drinks the rest of her cider—more slowly this time—before continuing.*]

I grew up the middle child in a large Catholic family with too many children—mostly girls—and not enough means to take care of them. Before leaving Bay City, I stole my oldest

sister's leather shoes because they were new and unscuffed, unlike my own shoes, which were too small and hardly holding together. They had known at least two previous owners, and the soles were like a mold of someone else's feet, so it always felt like wearing a pair of stolen shoes anyway. If anything, my sister's shoes felt more like mine than my own ever had. Catherine—my sister, that is—hadn't even taken the time to break them in. [*Caroline laughs.*]

I was probably lucky she had no idea where to find me and no way to get to Detroit, or else I would have been half-expecting her to march right up to me and snatch the shoes off my feet at any time, even if I was smack-dab in the middle of an interview. Catherine saved up so long to be able to afford them, babysitting every night and cleaning houses on the weekends. She was convinced that a pair of nice, new shoes were the ticket to landing a husband. But then, after all that work to get the shoes, she never even wore them out of the house. Not even to church. I didn't get it. Why let them go to waste?

Anyway, I'm pretty sure I was trying to hide a stain on my skirt with a carefully placed scarf, and I walked right into Mark Orton, the man who would eventually give me his name and move me to Eden, but that's getting a little ahead of things, I suppose. When Mark and I first met, we weren't the same people as we were when we married. We didn't know it, but we were both whole that day in September—or at least as whole as either of us was ever going to be... You don't want to hear this. You want to know about the Carsons, right?

[LR] I want your story, Caroline, and your husband is a part of that story. What happened next?

[CO] He said to me, “It’s a good thing they don’t let you behind the yoke of an aircraft!” Or something like that. I don’t know for sure. It was a long time ago, but whatever he said, it was funny. He was clever and charming like that. He looked clean in his uniform. Oh, you should have seen him. Mark was boyishly handsome back then, with blonde hair and dimples. His smile was bright then, too, and somehow honest looking.

“I believe *you* ran into *me*, Captain,” I told him. “At least as much as I did you, if not more.” I’d never actually met a real pilot before, but I didn’t think it showed. I desperately wanted him to believe I belonged there, in the airport, chatting with a pilot.

“Please,” he said. “Call me Mark. Mark Orton.”

He outstretched his hand.

“You must excuse me, Captain Mark Orton,” I said without extending my own hand to formally meet his acquaintance. If I had been looking for any other job, I might have given him time—he was gorgeous, after all, and so seemingly kind—but only single girls could stewardess. “I don’t want to be late for my interview,” I said, starting to step around him.

“No, excuse me, Miss—?” His hand still hung in the air like a bad joke that no one laughs at but everyone is too polite to acknowledge the failure of.

“Caroline,” I said, finally touching Mark’s hand with my own, almost feeling sorry for him, not knowing which of us was the greater fool.

“It was a pleasure to meet you, Miss Caroline,” he said.

“Likewise,” I told him and released his hand. “But I really must go now.”

He wished me luck that didn’t take. If I were ten pounds lighter, maybe, or if I were a registered nurse, they would have me, but it “just wasn’t the right fit.” It seemed to be the same problem to matter where I went.

I did get hired to answer phone calls and type letters, however, and though I saw Mark Orton several times over the next few months, I tried to make sure he never saw me. I didn't want to have to explain why I didn't get the job—or worse, lie about how I had always dreamed of becoming a secretary. What kind of woman would set such a low bar for herself?

I couldn't see the world from behind my desk, so I looked for it in bed with men who had. The airport was the most exciting place I had ever been—smartly dressed people buzzing around, carting sturdy bags that contained all they really needed to get by in this world if they could never return home again, for some reason. But to the men I...spent time with the airport was nowhere, a non-place.

Sometimes, on my days off, I would pack every item I owned into one bag and take it to the airport. I would sit in the terminal amongst the passengers and dream of what it would be like to be anywhere but Michigan. [*Caroline is silent for a long moment.*]

In the winter, I could never seem to get the cold out of my bones. I had always reacted poorly to the cold growing up, but the problem had gotten worse since I left home. The heat in my crummy apartment was terrible, and there were no raggedy siblings around that I could huddle close to. That was another reason why I loved the men so much: they brought me to their heated hotel rooms and gave me the warmth I needed to get through the night.

And that's about it as far as my story goes until after the war.

[LR] Okay, let's jump forward, then. What happened after the war?

[CO] We married about a month after Mark got back. He was sick, and though he sought treatment early enough to prevent any more serious problems, we could never have children. I

wasn't as bothered by this as you might think. I mean I would like to have had the option to have children, but it wasn't an important part of the dream.

We rented a room at the Hotel Pontchartrain—or “The Pontch,” as it was affectionately called—while we shopped around for our first home. We disagreed about what, exactly, we wanted. I, for example, didn't want to stay in Detroit. It wasn't far enough from Bay City to suit my liking. But Mark had grown up in Detroit, loved the city, and couldn't imagine living anywhere else.

Plus, having had to share a bed with my younger sister Charlotte for most of my life, I wanted space, and lots of it. None of the houses we looked at were large enough for my tastes. Mark, on the other hand, came from a fairly wealthy family and, as a consequence, idealized the quaintness of a small home. “After all, it will always be just the two of us,” he reasoned. We couldn't agree on a compromise, and it seemed that we would never get out of the Pontch. It seemed we would go broke trying.

[LR] This was when you met Lawrence?

[CO] Yes, an opportunity fell into our laps when we met a young man who turned out to be Lawrence Carson. He invited us to a Lake Huron island where homes were much cheaper than those in Detroit and, therefore, where we could afford something I could live with.

[LR] It wasn't too close to Bay City?

[CO] The idea of living on an island was appealing to me. It seemed exotic, even if it was still technically Michigan. There are several miles of Huron spanning the distance between here and Bay City, and it's not like my family has access to a boat, so it might as well be an ocean. I felt distant enough from them to make a truly new start.

[LR] What was it like when you got here?

[CO] It was so different from regular life, being separated from the rest of the world like that. I didn't expect my lush island paradise to be just another too-small town where a woman with red hair was the most exciting person around, but I wouldn't discover that until later. The day we arrived, we'd purchased our new home. Mark phoned the Pontch and had them ship us all of the belonging we had left behind.

You know, I sometimes think that if only we had found some other compromise, something on the mainland, sooner, before we met Lawrence, everything would have turned out so differently.

[LR] Are you saying you regret coming here? [*Caroline doesn't respond.*]

Let's get back to the story. You just bought your house.

[CO] No, I... [*Caroline hesitates.*] Look, I don't know if I should even be talking to you. Frank probably wouldn't like it.

[LR] I'm sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable, Mrs. Orton.

[CO] Call me Caroline. Please.

[LR] Caroline, then. I'm sorry. I want to tell your story the way you would tell it and nothing else. I didn't mean to put words in your mouth. If you want, we can call it a night and pick up another time?

[CO] No, it's okay. [*Caroline smiles.*] We had just bought our house. We were newcomers on the island, but we were one of the first families to actually own our own home. We had never met Frank Senior, and never would, of course, but we thought he sounded like a self-righteous hypocrite. Can I say that?

[LR] You can say anything you like.

[CO] It's just that we had a difficult time believing that people had actually moved here to live as serfs in this man's, I don't know, kingdom, or whatever. They didn't see it that way, of course. They still don't. They honor his memory like he single-handedly delivered each of them from evil. Ask damn near anyone in Eden, I found, and they'll tell you Frank Senior was a God, or at the very least, a saint.

That was their problem, though. As for us, we were landowners. We were both really hopeful about the future, but that didn't last long...

[LR] Why not?

[CO] It's hard to explain. I loved Mark. I really did. But I found out that he was a different man than the one I thought he was. He wouldn't let me apply for a job at Carson Industries or do any kind of work for money. He wanted me to stay at home and keep house. But it wasn't that large of a house—not large enough to require all that much effort to keep, anyway. Not to mention the fact that simply keeping house was never the future I'd wanted for myself.

Meanwhile, Mark struggled to make enough money to cover our mortgage. He grew angry and resented me for his problems. It wasn't long before we couldn't even talk to one another anymore.

There was this one time when I was meeting Mark at Franklin's Pub, and Frank was coming out of the bar as I was coming in. He held the door open for me, smiled, said something polite, I can't remember what, but Mark saw and started a very public, very embarrassing argument about how I shouldn't be smiling so much at other men.

I had to move through my own home like a stray cat in a thunderstorm. Every time I spoke, he would get angry. He'd tell me to stop telling him what to do, to stop nagging and lecturing him all the time. I never meant to do any of those things, but it didn't matter what I said or how I said it. Every word was wrong. Everything I did was wrong. Even when I cried, he got cross with me, said I was only trying to make him feel guilty, that I was manipulating him. I tried to be a good wife, I really did, but there was no pleasing Mark. I was cold and alone once more except it was worse than actually being alone because I wasn't free to do whatever I wanted.

[LR] I understand that must have been very difficult for you.

[CO] With all due respect, I don't think you're capable of understanding. It's different for women. You have an opinion on something, and it's a bad thing. You disagree with someone, and you're starting an argument. With men, having opinions and not being afraid to express them is seen as a strength. It's not the same for us. If a woman thinks for herself, she's asking for trouble.

[LR] I underst—I mean, you're right. I can't possibly understand. But I'm trying to. Please, go on.

[CO] I guess I finally found a warm place in the bed of Frank's Ford. He was lonely because his wife belonged in the loony bin, and I thought I would go crazy too if I didn't start getting some affection from someone.

Frank hadn't seen the world any more than I had—less, perhaps—but he told me all about growing up in Chicago. He told me his father was no saint but not for the reasons I had suspected. He said his dad had worked for Al Capone, probably killed someone—maybe even a lot of someones. It was strange the way Frank talked about it. He was neither repulsed nor ashamed. He didn't worship Frank Senior like everyone else, but he seemed strangely jealous of his father. Frank, my Frank, was bored. Just like I was. We both needed some excitement in our lives, and we filled that need for one another. But above all, I simply enjoyed spending time with Frank. He was always nice to me—even when I wasn't nice to him.

[LR] And what about your husband?

[CO] Excuse me?

[LR] Your husband, Mark. How does he feel about your fairly public relationship with Frank?

[CO] Oh...I don't know. You know, this was a bad idea. I'm sorry, but I really shouldn't have said these things. I shouldn't have come here.

[LR] I assure you that your words will not be taken out of context.

[CO] No, of course not. That's not why I...When will this be published?

[LR] Not for some time.

[CO] Okay, very well. I really should go, though. I'm sorry, but I have another engagement.

[LR] I understand. Shall I call you to schedule a follow-up meeting?

[CO] No...I think that's all I have to say. That's my story. Thank you, Mr. Rickels. Goodbye.

## CHAPTER 6

## EVE'S EDEN

*Editor's Note: This oral history interview with Elizabeth Carson [EC] was conducted by me, Lee Rickels [LR], on Friday, July 25, 1965, at Franklin's Pub.<sup>36</sup>*

[EC] Louis cancelled. I'm sorry. I don't think he'll be rescheduling.

[LR] That's okay. I'd love to speak with both of you, but as a Carson, your story is the one I'm most interested in.

[EC] Maybe he'll come around.

[LR] If he does, great. If not, that's fine too. You're here, and I'm here. Why don't we begin?

[EC] Where should I start? I mean...it's a long story.

[LR] Start wherever you feel the most important part of the story begins.

[EC] Well, I guess I'd have it say it all started with the whispers.

---

<sup>36</sup> As with all of the interviews I conducted for this project, I recorded our conversation on tape. I have transcribed the interview here in such a way that preserves the back-and-forth nature of our conversation, which I believe can offer extra insight into Elizabeth's story. I have, however, employed compression where I believed it would benefit readability. Mrs. Carson declined the opportunity to proof and approve the transcript.

[LR] I'm sorry. Did you say whispers?

[EC] I'm surprised you haven't heard. It's a small island. Things tend to—

[LR] I'm not all that interested in gossip, Mrs. Carson. I try not to pay too much attention to all that.

[EC] But isn't that...I mean, all due respect, but isn't that sort of your job?

[LR] No, my job is not to document every word ever said about the Carson family. I have very specific instructions from your mother-in-law. She wants the story from the people closest to it. The family and...

[EC] Lovers?

[LR] Close friends, I was going to say.

[EC] But people lie.

[LR] Pardon?

[EC] Sometimes the gossip might be truer than the story you get from the people closest to it. People lie, you know. Especially when there's a lot at stake, like their reputations. Besides, I thought you were having trouble getting some people to talk to you? Frank won't budge, I know.

[LR] Let's not talk about Frank. Not yet, anyway. Let's get back to your story. Forget I interrupted. You said it all started with the whispers, right? Tell me about that. What were they like?

[EC] Yes, well, my thoughts were entirely my own until I got pregnant with Robin. In fact, that's how I knew I was pregnant. It wasn't just my body I shared with her but also my mind. That's not to say it was my baby's thoughts that invaded my brain. Rather, it was like some grownup version of Robin. The whispers came from somewhere else. They warned me not to have the child. [*Elizabeth hesitates.*]

I didn't tell anyone I was pregnant right away. I was afraid to say anything about the whispers. I knew everyone would think I was crazy. Plus, I needed time to consider the arguments the whispers made. I know I must sound doubly crazy you to right now, but the whispers were quite rational. I had no intention of terminating my pregnancy, but if the future revealed to me by the whispers could be trusted at all, I wasn't sure that bringing a little girl into this world was the right thing to do. Frank always wanted a son.

[LR] How did you know it was a girl?

[EC] I guess I'm not making myself clear. She was in my brain. Her thoughts. Still is. Not her as she was then or is now but the future Robin, the woman she will grow up to be.

[LR] And you're still in communication with this future Robin today?

[EC] I don't know if I would call it "in communication" but yes, she still speaks to me.

[LR] Going back to when you first started hearing her. What did you make of it?

[EC] I didn't really trust the whispers. Not at first anyway. Because I didn't want to do what they were telling me to do, but, more than that, because the very idea of listening to voices in your head that aren't yours seemed just as insane to me then as it does to you now.

[LR] I don't think you're insane, Mrs. Carson.

[EC] That makes one of us. Anyway, I was weeding the garden when I finally made up my mind: I was going to have this baby. I hadn't even told Frank I was pregnant yet because I wanted to wait until I knew for sure, you know, that I was keeping it. So I put my tools away, changed into a clean dress, scrubbed my face and the dirt out from under my fingernails, and went looking for Frank. I found Ada instead, reading in the kitchen. She saw right through me.

“Well, I suppose congratulations are in order,” she said when she looked up from her book. She was so perceptive it was annoying. It's like, can't anyone have secrets in this place? What's wrong with wanting a little privacy? I asked her where Frank was.

“He doesn’t know yet, does he?” Ada closed the book without inserting a place-marker and set it on the table. She sipped on a glass of white wine. It wasn’t even noon yet.

“I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said. Lying, of course. Frank deserved to know before she did. “I’m just looking for Frank.”

“Of course, dear,” she said and smiled knowingly. “I haven’t seen him since this morning. I believe he had some work to do at the factory.”

“On a Sunday? Well, if you see him before I do, please tell him that I have to talk to him. It’s very important.”

“Very important indeed,” she said. “I’ll tell him.”

I thanked her. Called her “Ma.” I knew she would like that. Frank told me she’d always wanted a daughter but lost the ability to have children after Lawrence was born. Ada could be a pain sometimes, but she was kind-hearted and meant well. She was always very sweet to me.

I turned to leave.

“Elizabeth,” she said, and I spun around to face her. “You’ll let me know if you need anything? I’m a good listener,” she said. I nodded.

But I didn’t go to her when I couldn’t bear it anymore and needed to talk to someone about the whispers. I went to Frank first, and when that wouldn’t do—he dismissed them with a wave of his hand and wouldn’t discuss it with me any further—I went to my mother. My real mother. I should have trusted Ada. She would have believed me when I said I wasn’t crazy. She would have kept my secrets. She wouldn’t have conspired with Frank to deliver me into psychiatric treatment almost immediately after Robin’s birth. Ada loves me too much to do that, even when the sight of me seems to give her incredible sadness.

The doctors said the therapy would cure me, but I wasn't really sure I wanted to be cured. The prophecies were a gift, I realized, as they tried to take them away from me. They belong to me. They have made me special. And I certainly didn't want to be "cured" that way. The doctors said they were helping me. They said I wouldn't remember the treatment at all. But I had read accounts of people losing a lot more than that to the seizures. They didn't just forget about the shocks. They forgot who they were. Sometimes the convulsions were so great that patients fractured and dislocated their own bones.

[LR] That sounds awful.

[EC] Oh, I wasn't going to let it get to that point. I got plenty of shocks—and still remember every one of them despite losing other memories—but it could have been much worse. The nice thing about hearing voices that no one else can hear is precisely that no one else can hear them. Only you can say whether or not they've stopped. And if you still have your wits about you—and don't mind living the rest of your life in a lie—you can make the voices stop whenever you wish. And of course, then you have the joy of being released into the care of the people who betrayed you in the first place.

[LR] That must have been very difficult for you.

[EC] You know, Frank thinks I'm brain dead or something. Ha. My brain is actually very active—more active since I started hearing the voices than ever before. It was my heart that died. Just deflated like a wilted old balloon. I can't even think about Frank without the feeling that all

of my blood is draining out of me, so I just don't think about him. I don't love him anymore, haven't for a long time, but I can't hate him either. I just completely and utterly nothing him.

[LR] We don't have to talk about Frank if it makes you uncomfortable.

[EC] No, it's okay. With time, the betrayal hurts less. It's good to talk about what happened to my relationship with Frank. I don't really...open up to people very often. It tends to go rather disastrously for me when I do.

[LR] Can I ask, then, why you agreed to speak with me?

[EC] I don't know. Ada trusts you. *We* trust you.

[LR] Since, as you mentioned, Frank has declined my interview requests, would you mind telling me a little about how you two first met?

[EC] I was young, not even a woman yet. After the Carsons, my family was among the first wave of families to settle on Eden. It was us and the Hargroves and the McIntyres on that first ferry.<sup>37</sup> You couldn't really call it a town yet. There wasn't even a school. No restaurants, shops, or a theatre yet, but we did have our own home with a Frigidaire even, and our home stood out from the rest in that it was painted robin's egg blue. So we felt special. Like we were going to play a large role in the formation of something grand.

---

<sup>37</sup> Unlike most of the other families that eventually left Eden, the Carsons, Freemans, Hargroves and McIntyres all stayed.

We were the first family the Carson's invited into their home. We had to fend for ourselves that first night, but they had us over the next day for breakfast. The snow fell in sheets that morning, and though it was only a half-mile walk, we were afraid of getting lost in the blizzard. Frank Senior picked us up and drove us around the island for a brief tour, but everything was so white, you couldn't even tell what was what. It was pretty though.

When we arrived at the Carson Estate, it was rather intimidating. I mean, I had seen some large mansions in Chicago, but I guess because there's so much other stuff around, it doesn't really look as big. They had only built the main house by then, but the Carson Estate was like this...monolith jutting out of the earth. Does that make sense? A monolith.

[LR] You're making perfect sense, Mrs. Carson. Please continue.

[EC] Lawrence and Frank—Frank Junior, that is—greeted us at the door in matching blazers. They were such cute little boys. I was seated next to Frank on the kids' side of the dinner table opposite my parents, who made encouraging faces to me when they thought no one else was looking. Ada, to my right, noticed everything though, and based on the purple hue of Frank's ears, I guessed that he had noticed enough to see the matchmaking going around us too.

The Carsons set up a school in the old cabin—you know, where Lawrence lives now—with the high school age children, like me and Frank, meeting in the mornings and then going out to apprentice in the afternoons. I wanted to be a teacher, so I just stayed at school all day, helping out with the younger children like Lawrence. He had a crush on me then. He was devastated when I started going with Frank even though everyone else—Frank and me included—seemed to think it was an inevitable pairing.

It was like some kind of fairy tale. They were the young princes, and I was to wed the one who would be king one day. And he'd be king sooner than any of us expected, as it were.

I guess we didn't really start going steady for a few years though. My father said I was too young to date. Frank showed up at our home late one night—I think it was his fifteenth birthday. He was drunk and throwing pinecones at my parents' bedroom window, thinking it was mine. My father had him arrested.

After that, we went on a few dates. Nothing wild, just going for walks around the island, hanging out at the beach, or sharing a Coke here at the Pub. We talked about marrying someday, after we both graduated from the University of Michigan. He wasn't sure if he'd even want to come back to Eden after that, but I always knew he would. He's always felt obligated to this place, even more so after Frank Senior died. When he came back, Frank wanted to get married right away. I wanted to wait. Lawrence was missing, and it didn't seem like the proper time for a celebration. We did wait, one year, and though it was a grim sort of affair, we were happy enough for a little while.

But after he sent me away, things had changed between us. Frank thought he was being sneaky running around with Caroline Orton, but I knew what he was up to, maybe even before he did. I knew since that first day they spent smiling and laughing on the patio as I watched from the bedroom window. If I was crazy, like people say, I might have thought they were laughing at me, at the ways they were about to betray me. But I'm not crazy, and I suspect that they were really laughing because they had momentarily forgotten that I existed. They were happy when they pretended that Frank didn't have a sick wife to take care of.

Sick. According to whom? That's what I wanted to know. Frank's affair didn't upset me. On the contrary, it freed me. Once I knew my husband, the only man I'd ever been with, was fishing in another pond, I was free to do the same.

A few months after his first meeting with Caroline, Frank had forgotten his lunchbox at the house before heading off to work, so I brought it over to the factory. That's when I found Louis Andrews, Eden's newest resident, waiting outside Frank's office.

Frank came out and tried to greet me with a kiss, but I turned my head so his lips only grazed my cheek. He smelled like Caroline's perfume.

"Thank you, dear, for bringing this in," he said. "I don't know what's gotten into me lately. I've been so scatterbrained. Would you like to join me for a drink?"

"No, thank you, I really must get back home," I said. "Besides, you have an appointment."

He knitted his brows in confusion. I jerked my head to the side to gesture toward the man sitting quietly behind me.

"Oh," Frank said with a laugh, "that's no appointment. That's just Andrews. He's been sitting there for days. Doesn't know how to take no for an answer."

I turned to peek at the man out of the corner of my eye. If he had any feelings about my husband, they weren't betrayed by his expressionless face, which was lined from suffering. I imagined the secrets that must be contained within the creases.

After Frank closed the door on us, I introduced myself to the man. "Elizabeth Carson," I said, extending my right hand. He offered his left, and our mismatched hands embraced awkwardly. "Have you eaten lunch yet today, Mr. Andrews?"

“Please, call me Louis,” he said. “I’m afraid I haven’t, but I really ought to stay right here, ma’am. I’m demonstrating my work ethic to your...?”

“Husband,” I said. “Work ethic? You’re just sitting in a chair.”

“I’m afraid it’s all he’ll let me do right now,” Louis said. He raised his right arm to show me the stump where his hand should have been. “Won’t let me anywhere near the factory floor. I offered to work for free for a whole month, just to prove I could do the job. But he said a factory is no place for a one-handed man. Funny, if there is a place for a one-handed man, it’s awfully hard to find.”

“Join me for lunch, Mr. Andrews,” I said. “I insist. You look like you’re half-starved, and you certainly can’t do any good work without having had a decent meal.”

Seeing that I wouldn’t take no for an answer, Louis agreed to leave his post outside Frank’s office. I called Ada and asked her to meet us at the pub.

Louis and I grabbed a table on the front deck. The man looked as if he was in desperate need of sunshine. He spotted Ada approaching us and rose to greet her. He raised his stump to his face in what could only have been a handless salute.

“At ease, sailor,” Ada said and embraced Louis for what felt like an entire minute. He pulled out a chair for her.

“So, I take it you two know each other already,” I said.

“We met briefly at Frank’s—my Frank’s—memorial,” Ada said. “Louis here was stationed at Pearl Harbor too. Was lucky to make it out alive.”

“Perhaps,” Louis said, “but I sure don’t feel lucky. I can’t get a man’s job to save my life.”

“Is that why you’re here?” Ada asked. “Looking for work?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Louis said. He produced a weather-beaten letter from his breast pocket, unfolded it carefully, and passed it to my mother-in-law, who stared at the letter for five silent minutes.

She must have read it at least three times. When she looked up, a film of moisture puddled in her eyes. “Of course we will give you a job, Louis. It’s the least we could do.”

“With all due respect, ma’am, it ain’t so easy,” he said. “Your son says he doesn’t have any use for a one-handed man at the factory. Not that I blame him. I—”

“My son says a lot of things,” Ada said. “But he only runs that factory because I let him. Don’t worry, Louis. Elizabeth and I will get you the job my husband promised you. The Carson women can be rather convincing. Has my son seen this?”

“He has, ma’am,” Louis said.

“Well then shame on him,” Ada said. “He disgraces his father’s memory and his country, and for what? Running with that—”

She looked at me with surprise, as if she had forgotten that I was there and just realized her mistake.

“It’s okay, Ma,” I said. “I already know about the affair.”

So Ada found a place for Louis in Eden. I found a place for him too. We understood each other, Louis and I. We both knew what it was like to be treated differently because of something that had been done to us, something we ourselves had no control over. When we met, we were broken, partial people, but our pieces fit together so that we made each other whole again. Louis was a welcome distraction from a life I’d grown to loathe.

In retrospect, we should have been more careful. When I woke up one morning, not remembering what I had dreamt but sweaty and fearful enough to know it was a nightmare, I

knew that I was pregnant again. I knew it was a boy this time, and I knew it was Niles Carson, the one my whispers had warned me about. They told me to get rid of him.

[LR] To get rid of the child?

[EC] Yes.

[LR] Wasn't that what they said the first time, when you were pregnant with Robin?

[EC] Yes.

[LR] But this time was different.

[EC] This time, they expressed my own wishes. I didn't want another child—not with Louis, not with Frank, not with anyone. When Frank sent me away, Ada took over raising Robin, and when I came back, I couldn't strip Ada of the one thing she always wanted. I didn't want to be a mom anymore. I'm just not cut out for it. The whispers had shown me what Niles would become if I let him into this world, and that went a long way toward assuaging my guilt.

[LR] Forgive me, Mrs. Carson, but I have to ask. It seems we've been skirting the issue of what, exactly, these whispers told you.

[EC] They told me that my dreams were not fiction but a window into the future. I saw all kinds of things in my dreams, horrible things. I saw myself blowing up the factory. In my dreams, I watched myself follow the news coverage in the aftermath of Rachel Carson.<sup>38</sup>

It was all “Carson vs. Carson,” “Carson’s factory poisons US,” “Farewell to DDT.” It was clear that this was a battle Frank will lose. I watched myself—that is, the future Elizabeth—retreat inside herself, drawing back from everyone but the voices in her head.

In my dreams, I also watched Frank, impervious to it all. He whistled to himself as he moved through the house before and after his shift, and he’d continue to talk about work over dinner, mentioning all the men and women who had resigned their posts that day by name but without commentary. As if it mattered who left or who stayed, just waiting for the axe to fall, hoping for a pension or a severance or any kind of relief. As if the factory that made Eden a town, that made the Carson family matter, would still be around in five years to take stock of who was on the payroll.

The Elizabeth Carson of that future refused to leave the house. Not after Caroline somehow got her hands on a copy of *The New Yorker* and spread the Rachel Carson story all over town. As if it wasn’t enough for Caroline to sleep with my husband, she resented him ultimately leaving her so much that she had to exact revenge upon the whole Carson family legacy. It would be intended to hurt Frank and me, but it would accomplish so much more than that. Eden was built on the Carson name, on Carson Industries money. To take us down is to shred the fabric of our society.

Meanwhile, Frank kept keeping on, infuriating me—or her, *that* Elizabeth—more and more with every show of contentment. When he noticed that other Elizabeth had stopped doing

---

<sup>38</sup> No known relation to Eden’s Carson family.

the groceries, he started doing them himself, coming home to show off the latest products he bought at a new Meijer supercenter, luxury products we—or they—surely wouldn't be able to afford any more once the DDT business went under. He started borrowing my—her—cookbooks, planning our meals and preparing them himself, annotating the margins of my favorite recipes with modifications. Like, *Double the salt, I'd say.* —FC. He lit the candles on the dinner table to create ambiance even though she didn't change out of her housecoat. Smiling with an idiot's pride that made me—her—want to do something terrible. I could feel it in her. In me.

Eventually, that Elizabeth Carson would follow the instructions of the whisperers. She'd add some items to Frank's grocery list. "Cleaning products," she'd say by way of explanation. She would know that Frank had to get some paperwork done at the office on Sunday and slip out of bed in the middle of the night to plant her bomb in her husband's office. She set it up to go off as soon as the door was opened and then snuck back into bed before Frank woke up. For the first time since the electroshock therapy, Elizabeth would feel frisky with her husband, climbing on top of him and waking him up with a kiss. They'd make love with a passion I have never felt before with Frank, and after making him breakfast, she'd tell him she loved him and send him out the door with a packed lunch. Only after she heard the explosion would she swallow the cocktail of chemicals she found in the basement, including DDT. "Destroy the parasites of man and his dwelling," the package would read.

And Frank, having decided to walk to work that day, would run back to the Estate after witnessing the explosion, which leveled his factory but killed only Caroline, who had expected to find Frank in his office but discovered Elizabeth's surprise instead. Caroline wasn't supposed to be there; she had only come to try to blackmail Frank out of more money. Not yet knowing about

the death of his former mistress, Frank would return home and find his wife's body—my body—sitting in my favorite chair, one foot from the television, which was still on. That woman's face still haunts me: her eyes open and her mouth frozen in a maniacal smile. [*Elizabeth stops talking, and we sit in silence for a long moment.*] So, do you think I'm crazy yet?

[LR] Do you want me to think you're crazy?

[EC] No, it's just...*I'd* think I was crazy.

[LR] I'm not here to pass judgment, Mrs. Carson. I'm just trying to understand. What does any of this have to do with Niles? Or Robin?

[EC] It's complicated. It's all connected.

[LR] But none of that happened. It was just a nightmare. You and Frank are still separated. He's still with Caroline. *Silent Spring*, well, it doesn't look good for Carson Industries, but you didn't blow up the factory. They're still manufacturing poison by the drum-full.

[EC] Yes, it's changed a little. It's because of Louis. In that Elizabeth's world, Louis didn't help me get rid of the baby. He left me. [*Elizabeth falls silent, seemingly overwhelmed with emotion. Sadness, perhaps, but also fear, I think.*] Don't you see? We killed our baby, and it didn't matter because Frank got Caroline pregnant, and Niles was still born, just with the name Orton instead. I have to go. Please, turn the tape off.

In the fall, everything died, and there was always something sad about that. The temperatures fell, and you knew that winter was coming and, with it, harder times. But before they dropped their leaves, the maples put on a brilliant display, and that made things a little better too. It reminded us how much greater we appreciated things simply because they didn't last forever.

—Frank Carson, Senior

## CHAPTER 7

## REMEMBRANCE

*Editor's Note: This oral history interview with Ada Carson [AC] was conducted by me, Lee Rickels [LR], on Thursday, January 1, 1970, in her home ("Main House") on the Carson Estate.<sup>39</sup>*

[LR] Happy Birthday.

[AC] Thank you, Lee. Happy New Year. You really shouldn't have. You know, I was going to call to cancel, but I didn't want to stand you up on the first of the year. It's bad luck.

[LR] The first of the decade too. That's ten years of bad luck. Thanks for sparing me. I know this project is taking longer than you expected, but—

[AC] Nonsense. I knew this wasn't going to be easy. Everyone in this family is so secretive, I'd be surprised if you compiled one ounce of truth for your book.

[LR] It's impossible to know for sure, of course, but I believe people have been fairly honest with me. Those that are willing to speak to me, anyway. They don't say much, but I'm inclined to believe that much of it is true.

---

<sup>39</sup> As with all of the interviews I conducted for this project, I recorded our conversation on tape. I transcribed the interview here in such a way that mostly preserves the back-and-forth nature of our conversation and have employed compression where I believed it would benefit readability. Edits proofed and approved by Ada Carson.

[AC] Do you need any more money?

[LR] No, ma'am. Thank you. The research doesn't cost me a cent, and my wages at the school are fair.

[AC] Did you get a raise this year?

[LR] No, ma'am. With all of the families leaving Eden after the explosion, our enrollment has plummeted, along with our funding. I'm just lucky to have a job. They let go the middle school English, math, and science teachers.

[AC] So who is teaching the children English, math, and science?

[LR] I am.

[AC] But you're a historian, not a mathematician.

[LR] I actually have quite a grasp on all of the subjects, ma'am. Up to the middle school level, at least. I am very happy with the arrangement. Like I said, I'm lucky to even have a job. Now I'm spending more time with the students, mentoring them. All the kids are mixed in together, but it's only thirty or so students. Lawrence has been volunteering. It helps a lot, actually.

[AC] You poor dear, I am so sorry. I will send a check to the school tomorrow. I wish I could volunteer my time, too, but I'm afraid I haven't been well.

[LR] Is that why you wanted to cancel?

[AC] Yes. It's my memories. [*Ada looks away, out the window where the world outside is smothered in freshly fallen snow.*] I'm losing them.

[LR] You're forgetting things?

[AC] Yes, but not where my purse is or that there are cookies in the oven or anything like that. I'm losing important memories. Like Frank.

[LR] It happens, Ada. Time does this. We start to forget.

[AC] But I don't want to forget. Not this. Will you save it?

[LR] Save what?

[AC] The story. Will you include it in your book and finish the damn thing after I've gone?

[LR] I will. I promise. What story?

[AC] The first time I met Frank. It's one of the only memories of him that I haven't lost. It was at St. Ursula's, where I'd been volunteering for an excuse to get out of the house and away from my father. I wrote it down. [*Ada reads from her journal.*]

I was on my break, and Frank was sitting alone, so I helped myself to one of the many open seats around him. He was clearly drunk and still bleeding from a split lip. His left eye was swollen and bruised. I had noticed that he was a little beat up when I served him in the line, but it looked much worse up close.

"Merry Christmas," I said. "My name is Ada. Ada Roy."

"Merry goddamn Christmas, huh? And a happy fucking New Year," he said.

I felt sorry for him despite his rudeness. It's hard to explain, but I could sense that there was something very sweet about him. In my experience, bad people were almost always outwardly pleasant. My father, for example. He was loved by everyone who didn't really know him. Only the good suffered too profoundly to mask. I wasn't going to give up on Frank that easily.

"And you are..."

"It says so right here on my nametag," he said, puffing out his chest to make the card pinned to his blood- and dirt-stained red flannel shirt pop out. We don't normally ask those who come to the kitchen to wear nametags, but someone thought it'd be a good idea to try for the holidays. It was supposed to encourage camaraderie or something like that.

"Or can't you read?" he asked.

“Franklin Carson,” I said.

“Frank is fine.” He avoided eye contact and focused his attention instead on the bowl of stew I’d ladled for him minutes before I took my break. It was still steaming.

“Frank, then,” I said. “It’s nice to meet you.” I extended my hand.

“If you say so, Ade.” He eyed my hand while slurping broth from his spoon, but he didn’t take it.

I’d painted my nails to try and make my hands look pretty, but the cherry red lacquer failed to distract him from the bite marks tracing several arcs across my knuckles. One set was fresh, another scabbed over. Most had healed and become scars that have since been absorbed by wrinkles, I suppose. [*Ada spreads her hands out on her dining room table and examines her hands. I look too, but neither of us see any scars.*] When I cried, it only made my father angrier, and biting myself was the only way to stall the tears.

I pulled my arm back in, hid my hands below the table, and leaned toward Frank. His hair stuck out in every direction, and he didn’t look like he had shaved in at least five days, but he smelled faintly of soap. Not what I expected.

“Why are you sitting alone, Frank? On Christmas of all days.”

“Are you in the habit of asking people questions you already know the answer to, Miss Ada Roy?” Frank asked and met my eyes with his, amber around the pupil graduating into a shade of green that matched my own. “Or is your own life so pathetic that on Christmas, of all days, you have to go and bug hobos who want nothing more than a bowl of hot stew and some goddamn peace and quiet?”

I had successfully avoided letting him get to me so far, but his attack was justified, even if I didn't believe he was a hobo. I felt like he had exposed me as a fraud. "I was only trying to be polite in asking you your name—" I started.

"Well, there was your first mistake," he said, his gaze unswerving.

"—but I couldn't possibly know why you would want to be alone, Frank," I said. I looked out across the cafeteria, the whites on one side, everyone else on the other, mostly men—both groups equally garrulous and equally reeking of the gutter.

A group of about a dozen carolers came in and began singing "God Rest You Merry Gentlemen" with snowflakes still melting on their eyelashes. The men on each side of the cafeteria continued joshing one another, raising their voices to be heard over the choir. Frank returned to his stew. I watched the carolers, feeling guilty that no one else was paying them any mind.

"I bet you could guess," Frank said after they finished "God Rest" and moved into "Joy to the World."

"Or you could tell me," I said. I wasn't normally this bold with strange men. Back then, it was all but unheard of. But for some odd reason, I felt safe with Frank. And I knew I'd lose his attention if I were less aggressive.

"Just guess," he said. "Why was I sitting here all alone on Christmas Day?"

I thought for the remainder of the song. Frank continued to slurp up the stew—beef with carrots and potatoes. Much heartier than the kitchen's usual fare,

chicken noodle soup, which was really just noodles and chicken stock. The choir began “The First Noel.” I always liked that one.

“I prefer to allow people to speak for themselves,” I said finally. “But if I had to guess, I would say you got in a fight with someone at your regular table.”

“Try again. This,” he said, pointing to his lip, “is from home.”

“I don’t know. Maybe you don’t feel like you belong at any other table.”

“See? Now, you didn’t even have to come over here at all, did you? You got all that on your own. Will you leave me alone now?” He dropped his spoon and issued a glare as sharp as a chef’s blade.

“No. I won’t,” I said.

“And why not?”

“Guess.” I said, smiling.

“Jesus Fucking Christ. Fine, I’ll tell you why you won’t leave me alone. You get everything you want. This bores you. If there’s no desire, there’s no pleasure in having that desire realized. So you give your time to the peasants. Serving soup ain’t enough though. There’s two feet worth of counter space between you and your starving masses. So you come out from behind the counter and mingle. You try to make a friend. You don’t realize that you don’t belong out here with us.”

I was furious but couldn’t find a single word to say. I’ve always struggled to retrieve the right words in the intense moments that call for them. I had no script for this encounter. I recognized that there was a lot of truth to his pronouncement, but I also knew that there was so much more to me than that. He

was wrong about me. Like most people tended to be. I don't know why I'd expected him to just *know* who I really was.

"You can go back behind the counter now, Miss Roy," he spat. It was hurtful, but I knew he was just protecting himself. I didn't have any friends for the same reason.

"Maybe I do belong here, at this table," I said. "Have you ever thought of that, Franklin Carson? You're right that I need a friend, but you're wrong if you think you don't."

Frank slurped the last of his stew, and the carolers began "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing." He wordlessly buttered his roll and ran it along the inside of his empty soup bowl. He devoured it in one large bite—too large for him to close his teeth around. He made no effort to cover his mouth as his teeth broke the bread down into more manageable pieces. He seemed incapable of embarrassment.

He took a long drink of water. When he spoke again, he was calmer. Almost nice but not quite. "Hey, I tried being friendly with the guys. This table wasn't my first choice."

"Yes, I saw that. Your first choice was over there. Did they tell you to leave?"

"Is that what it looked like to you?"

"That's what my question implied, isn't it?"

Frank smiled, revealing to me for the first time his straight and proportionately sized teeth—perfect except for a chipped canine. “You got me there, Ade. Yes, they told me to leave.”

“So you know how it feels when people tell you that you don’t belong.” I’d recently read a study about how people who are suffering can mitigate their pain by hurting others. I tried not to fault him for it. He was clearly suffering a lot.

“I suppose I do,” Frank said, his face softening. “I’m sorry about saying that. I forget my manners when I’m hungry. I wasn’t trying to hurt your feelings.”

“Yes you were, but that’s okay,” I said. “I forgive you. Or at least I will forgive you as soon as you tell me why you chose the table you did. Why didn’t you just sit with the other whites?”

“Because I don’t belong there either.”

“Why is that?”

“Cause I ain’t one of them.”

The choir finished “Hark!” and wished everyone a Merry Christmas. An embarrassingly lackluster smattering of applause followed them out the door as they moved on in search of a more interested audience.

“What are you then?”

“I don’t know,” he said.

“Your mother, she’s...”

“Dead.”

“Me too,” I said. It wasn’t entirely true, but it was close enough as far as I knew.

“Oh,” he said.

“And your father...”

“Died in an accident on the docks. I live with his brother, my step-father, I guess, who’s a complete asshole. I can’t imagine why my mother married him.”

“My father isn’t so nice either,” I said.

“I bet mine is worse,” he said. “Want to see my Christmas gifts?” He pointed first to his black eye and then to his split lip.

“I don’t want to trivialize your suffering like you did mine because I believe that yours is real too, but at least cuts and bruises heal,” I said. “Some things never do.” I looked down at my hands.

“When did your mother die?”

“I don’t know. Maybe she’s not dead. She could still be out there somewhere. She left when I was two.”

“That must have been hard for you,” Frank said. “A girl growing up without a mother.”

“What about you?”

“She died when I was six.”

“How?”

“Childbirth.”

“The baby?”

“Dead,” Frank said.

“I’m an only child too.”

“The baby was the lucky one,” he said.

“What was your mother like?”

“Beautiful,” he said.

Frank picked at the dirt under his fingernails. I stayed his hands by filling them with mine, no longer ashamed of my blemished knuckles. We sat there like that for several moments. We were like a pair of ice cubes melting silently into a single puddle.

*[Ada looks up from her journal.]* That’s all I remember.

[LR] Thank you for sharing that story, Ada. I promise you won’t ever lose it now. After you’re gone, I’ll finish the book and give it to your granddaughter. Do you have any other stories you’d like to share?

[AC] I don’t know. Not really.

[LR] Tell me.

[AC] It’s not a memory, really. It’s like an echo. I’ve been thinking about it a lot, though. I wrote it down somewhere. *[Ada flips through her journal until she finds the page she is looking for and starts reading.]*

After the explosion at the factory, the first one, I dreamt of fire every night. It wasn’t the image of a second sun rising in the north that returned to me,

the explosion that I actually saw: the bud of fire opening up over the factory, taking down man and machine but finding the soil too moist to spread and sizzling out. Instead, I dreamed of the entire island swaddled in flames. The windows into the homes along Meridian, the shops on Main, and even my own estate were hollow, the structures nothing but empty shells until colonized by fire. The smoke crawled under beds, curled up flights of stairs, and dug for secrets in closets. They pressed anxiously upon the windows until they burst and spit ice-like shards out, breathing oxygen in and keeping the fire fueled.

The strangest thing about the dreams was that they weren't frightening. From some hiding place deep within the soil, I watched Eden burn away with anticipation. The fire of my dreams did not make men scream or bleed, nor did it disassemble man and machine piece by piece like the one I'd witnessed. No, the fire of my dreams was wrought with peace, and after chaos, it brought quiet. It was like a baptism, and I welcomed it each night as I lay in bed, closed my eyes, and prepared to sweat.

Beside me, Frank dreamt of flames too, but he didn't see the fire I saw. He relived the explosion over and over each night, the shuddering of early sleep giving way to convulsions, building gradually toward a final crescendo: he cried out for Samuel, the owner of the missing arm, at midnight of every night like a wound-up pocket watch coming undone. Frank slept noiselessly through the rest of the night after his outbursts and claimed to never remember them in the morning, never spoke to me of Samuel or the other men he lost that day.

[LR] You asked Frank? About his nightmares?

[AC] I tried. [*Ada skips to the next page in her journal and resumes reading.*]

“Was Samuel that boy from Chicago?” I asked him the day after his first nightmare. It was the morning after the accident. I didn’t mention the arm. I hadn’t known whose it was and didn’t want to reference it as long as Frank was holding up okay, but as soon as Frank shouted the name, my mind attached the long, ropy arm to the tall, thin frame it belonged to. Samuel: blue eyes, a big crooked smile, and dimples. I’d never met him before Eden, but Frank once told me he used to be an altar boy at St. Ursula’s. The kid couldn’t even grow a beard yet.

“*Was,*” he said. “I don’t want to talk about what *was*. Let’s talk about what *is*.”

“*Is* everything okay, Frank?” I asked. “I can only imagine what the past twenty-four hours have been like for you.”

“I’m more concerned about you, Ada. You shouldn’t have had to see that,” he said.

“No one should have to see that—including you,” I said. “Did you have any strange dreams last night?”

“Slept like a baby,” he lied.

“But in your dreams—”

“I didn’t dream at all,” he said. “I must have been pretty tired. What about you, how did you sleep?”

“Okay,” I lied. If he wasn’t going to tell the truth, why should I?

The screams that punctuated the furthest depths of the night before and all the nights thereafter twisted my veins and irradiated my nerves. I’d be up for hours, only finding sleep as Frank got up in the morning. I took to writing each night after midnight and found that stories came readily to me, unspooling from my mind onto the page like memories. A different piece of the story begged to be written each time I sat down, and with each piece, I knew the sequence of what would come next as if I had witnessed the events happen myself. But I hadn’t. Not yet anyway. They were only fictions. After I finished writing them down, I burned them in the stove. I didn’t want Frank to know that he woke me every night. He already had enough guilt to last him a lifetime.

[LR] Has it helped your memories to write things down now?

[AC] No. I mean, things come back in flashes, and writing them down captures them, like a photograph, but it doesn’t keep them from flashing back out. Sometimes I’ve already forgotten by the time I get my journal open and pen in hand. And what’s worse is that sometimes I get flashes of the dreams, things that didn’t actually happen, but they feel just as real as the memories. Sometimes they feel more real.

[LR] I’m sorry for interrupting. Please go on.

[AC] You weren't interrupting. I was done. That was all I could remember.

[LR] That's okay. We can—

[AC] I bet, to you, Frank seems like a bad man. I don't think that's a fair portrayal. For all his flaws, he was a good man. You would have liked him.

[LR] I have no doubt.

[AC] I just needed to say that. But I think I'm going to have to call it a day. I'll let you know if I remember anything else.

## CHAPTER 8

## ADAM'S EDEN (2)

**“Becoming a Man”**

*Editor's Note: What follows is another excerpt from a draft of Frank Junior's unfinished, unpublished manuscript, Adam's Eden: The Autobiography of Franklin Carson Junior.*<sup>40</sup>

It was my 15th birthday, and since I had been in school all morning and then at work all afternoon, my father let me tag along with him when he headed to the pub.<sup>41</sup> He had at least one drink—usually several—at Franklin's Pub every day after we wrapped things up at the factory. This was the first—and last—time he invited me to join him.

“You might be a man now, Junior, but you're still not old enough to drink,” he said and ordered me a Coke. But then he disappeared for ten whole minutes, and while he was gone, in the bathroom I guess, Jonny Mac poured a splash of whiskey—Dad's poison-of-choice—into my pop. I remember how I thought the booze made the Coke taste hot even though it was ice cold and the outside of my glass was frosty.

When my father came back, he asked me all kinds of questions about what I wanted to do with my life, told me that I couldn't just follow him around at work forever. Like I didn't know

---

<sup>40</sup> Much of the rest of the chapter deals with the man's early sexual exploits. I have excluded that portion in order to spare you the very detailed and rather awkward encounters, to protect the privacy of Elizabeth Carson, and to stay focused the family history, which has little to do with a boy masturbating in his bedroom. Published with the permission of Frank's estate executor, Ada Carson.

<sup>41</sup> If it is Frank's 15th birthday, then this must have been 1937.

that. Still, it was true that I really didn't know *what* I was going to do when I finished high school. I'd grown up so fast, I kind of just wanted to be a kid for as long as possible.

"My math and science teachers tell me I should go to the University of Michigan for engineering, and Betty wants to go to Ann Arbor too, to be a teacher, so I'll probably do that," I said.

"And then what?" he wanted to know.

"I don't know, and then I'll come back to Eden and help you with the factory."

"I'm not going to be around forever," he said. He avoided eye contact by staring into the bottom of his glass.

"I know that," I said. I looked at the bottom of my glass, but I didn't find anything interesting down there.

"Another neat please, Mac, and a refill on Junior's Coke," he said and left for the bathroom again.

"How'd you like your drink, Franklin?" Jonny Mac wanted to know.

"It was okay," I said. In truth, I hadn't really liked it all that much, but Mac was treating me like a grown-up, and I didn't want him to think of me otherwise. I wanted to remain childlike in the sense of lacking responsibility for as long as possible, but at the same time, I liked the respect that came with being perceived an adult. So I lied, and he spiked my Coke again.

"So you like living in Eden, do you." My father asked me when he got back. It sounded more like a statement than a question the way he put it. I always hated the way he said things that way. It assumed an affirmative answer, making it a lot harder to express what I was really thinking if it didn't conform to his expectations. It required me to correct him, which I never felt comfortable doing.

“Sure I do,” I said. “It’s swell.”

“Swell, huh.” he said. He sipped his whiskey. I always thought it was funny, the look on his face when he took the first sip from a freshly poured glass of whiskey. There was a kind of calm that came over him that made him look like someone else. “So you think you’ll live here for a while.”

“Sure,” I said. “I can see starting a family here.”

“A family, huh.” Another statement-question.

“I suppose so,” I said. It was what was expected.

“With that Betty of yours, I take it.”

“Sure,” I said. “I like her a lot, and I think she likes me too.”

“You think she likes you, huh. You two ever have a little date or anything like that?” he asked. “You ever kiss?”

His last two questions were, in fact, questions. Not because he didn’t know the answer but because he knew the answer was *not* affirmative.

“No,” I said. “Mr. Freeman says Betty’s too young to date.”

“Mr. Freeman says Betty’s too young to date, huh? What do you say?”

I said, “I say Mr. Freeman’s a good man, and I should respect his wishes.”

He patted me on the back in the patronizing sort of way I’d seen him use with workers who needed to feel just the slightest bit of appreciation to motivate them to put their noses back to the grindstone, as they say.

“I guess Big John’s not so bad,” he said.

Six hours later, after we’d gone home and ate dinner and birthday cake, and after Lawrence and my parents had all gone to bed, I snuck out and down to Meridian, to that robin’s

egg blue house, and started chucking pinecones at what I thought was Betty's bedroom window. It turned out to be her parents', though of course I didn't realize this until Big John Freeman was standing in front of me in his underpants, the flaps of his overcoat billowing behind him in the wind, pointing an M1 Thompson at my face.

"For heaven's sake, John, put that away," called a voice I recognized as Lucy Freeman's. "Can't you see that it's Frank Junior?"

At the sound of her mother's shrieking, Betty turned on her bedroom light, one window down from the one I'd been aiming my pinecones for. I figured, now that I knew my proper target, I'd never make the same mistake again. Assuming I lived to have the opportunity.

"I can see that it's the middle of the night," Big John said without lowering the submachine gun, "and I can also see that someone is out here throwing stones at my window."

I said, "Pinecones, sir."

"I don't care if you're throwing rainbows, darn it. You're not doing it at my window in the middle of the night."

"Yes, sir," I said. "I'm sorry, sir."

"Lucy, get my keys and give Harlan a ring. Tell him he's got company for tonight."

"Is that really necessary, John?"

"Lucinda, get my keys," he said.

Sheriff Hargrove wasn't any happier than Big John Freeman to be woken in the middle of the night. He threw me into a large pen—at least I had it all to myself—and left me there for the night. He offered me a phone call before he went back home to bed, but I thought it best to wait until morning when I'd sobered up a bit use it. I knew my parents—my dad, especially—were going to be sore with me no matter what, but I imagined that waking them up in the middle of

the night too wouldn't help my case any. Besides, what if some great tragedy befell Eden that night? I'd rather us all go out with my parents still proud of me than have them knowing what I'd done and being ashamed of me. One could always hope.

But the morning came, same as always, and I eventually had to make the call. Dad was the one who picked up.

"Does your mother know?" he asked.

"Not yet."

"Good," he said. "Let's keep her out of this. I'll deal with you myself."

He hung up the phone, and I had a good fifteen minutes of waiting for him to pick me up to pace my cell and think about how he'd punish me. He'd never hit me before, but I'd never done anything to deserve it. Dad had just told me the night before that I was a man now, and I'd think a man is too old for a spanking. But my actual punishment turned out to be much worse than anything I'd imagined.

"I'm sorry, son," he said, as if it were his fault, and then he didn't speak to me again for a month. I couldn't, for the life of me, figure out what *he* had to be sorry for, but it sure ate me up inside trying to figure it out.

**“Losing My Father”**

*Editor’s Note: An excerpt from a draft of Adam’s Eden:  
The Autobiography of Franklin Carson Junior.*<sup>42</sup>

I never wanted to go to war, but I also never asked my father to go in my place. I never would have let him if I had been aware of his plans. I’d rather be responsible for the deaths of hundreds of other young kids like me from the other side of the world than for that of my own father, but we don’t get to choose our futures. Only our parents do.

This is not to say that I blame my parents for the way my life turned out. On the contrary, I recognize that I have been very fortunate, and I owe everything that I have become to them. And when someone gives his life for yours, there can be no response save “Thank you.” But I wasn’t a kid anymore—hadn’t been for a long time—and I have always felt that I should have had some say in everything. I don’t think I’ll ever revise that feeling. My heritage is a blessing and a curse.

Some people say my father was a bad man. Most people say he was a very good man. As for me, all I can say is that he was a good father. Whether that means anything to anyone but me is not my concern.

When he died, the Carson family fell apart. It was all I could do to keep the factory afloat. I think my mother would have held together better had Lawrence not taken off. I don’t mean to say that she was useless. She was able to keep the pub open—thanks in large part to

---

<sup>42</sup> This chapter was incomplete. A jump in page numbers on the original manuscript suggests that this chapter was once 27 pages long, but the following is all that remains. Frank does, however, mention the topic of his father’s death in several other chapters. Published with the permission of Frank’s estate executor, Ada Carson.

Mac—and to supervise my leadership at Carson Industries, but her energy went entirely into her work, as did my own, and we were left without time for things like love.

Without my father, the Carsons just weren't much of a family anymore. It's no one's fault, really. The fine thread holding us all together was simply severed. I tried to start a family of my own. I wanted that feeling of connectedness again, of being a part of something, but I didn't know how to replicate it. I inhabited my father's role as the leader of the people, but I didn't practice what I had observed from him with regards to family: How to be a good father and a faithful husband. How to put your family above all else and be willing to sacrifice everything for them.

Caroline gives me great happiness, and she gave me the one thing I grew to want more than anything else: a male heir. But at what cost? My wife runs around with other men, my mother has to raise my daughter, my mistress's husband spends more time with my son than I do, and my own brother won't speak to me. Lawrence and I were never close and even less so after he returned from his wayward travels, but Elizabeth and I could always coax him out of his hovel and into our home on the holidays. But ever since the town caught wind of Caroline and me, Lawrence good as dropped off the face of the Earth, as far as I was concerned. I know he's still here—I've heard things—but I haven't looked on my own brother's face since it was soft and unlined.

And Niles turned out to be an odd kid. He didn't like baseball or trucks or building things. He liked taking things apart—anything, really. When I got him a baseball, he carefully removed the stitches with a seam ripper he'd filched from Caroline's sewing kit, flipped the hide inside out and sewed it back together with a raw egg inside. Weird.

My mother's cat went missing one day while she was watching Niles and Robin, and she refused to have the boy over after that. She thinks he did something nasty to the cat.

The worst part is, neither Caroline nor I were incredulous when Niles was accused of such barbarity. I mean, to my mother's face we were, but to one another we assumed that he was, in fact, to blame and only wondered to each other, "What the hell do you think he did to that cat?"

So now, when Mr. Rickels puts him out of school, which is not an uncommon occasion, we have to call Mark Orton to pick the boy up and look after him until Caroline and I get out of work.<sup>43</sup> I don't really like the two of them spending so much time together, and it's awkward to rely on Mark like that, but I figure if I can't be a father to Niles, maybe he can. Mark seems to really like the boy.

---

<sup>43</sup> It's true that Niles Orton often had to be put out of school for breaches of school rules and conventions of proper social conduct. And it's true that it was generally me who put him out because, knowing my close relationship with the Carson family and afraid of upsetting Frank, when his other teachers had a problem with the boy, they would always send him to my room.

In fact, the reason I put him out of school was for not reporting to my room as directed but instead hiding out in a stall of the girls' bathroom, where he was caught peeping through the cracks at the young ladies. If his father hadn't held such power in Eden, Niles likely would have been expelled—perhaps even arrested—for his infractions rather than simply being suspended for the rest of the day.

**“Being a Father”**

*Editor’s Note: An excerpt from a draft of Adam’s Eden:  
The Autobiography of Franklin Carson Junior.*<sup>44</sup>

I always had a feeling I would die young. I suppose that’s the real reason why I really didn’t want to go to war. I didn’t want to kill anyone, of course—who does?—but more than that, I just had this sense that if I went, the only way I was coming home was in a pine box. I know it might seem cowardly, but you must understand that it wasn’t simply a fear that I *might* perish. I was certain that I would.

When my father died in my place, I thought I had avoided my fate. But when Elizabeth started telling me this wacky dream she had of me surviving an attempt on my life, I just knew that it was more than a dream.<sup>45</sup> I knew that it was my destiny coming back to reclaim me and that I’d already used up all my good luck. I hoped that having the doctors silence her voices would free us both from that future, but eventually it seemed that the only way for us to not become those people in her dreams was for us to be apart and stay apart.

Robin is a ray of sunshine in this world, the only good thing that came out of my marriage with Elizabeth. I stay out of her life because I don’t yet deserve her, and I’m not sure I ever will. My mother, on the other hand, did nothing but love this world, and she deserves a second chance at happiness. Robin is everything she ever wanted that I could never be. Letting

---

<sup>44</sup> This chapter is likewise incomplete, but unlike “Losing My Father,” there is no evidence to suggest that there was an earlier, more complete draft of “Being a Father.” These are the last pages we have of the unfinished manuscript. Published with the permission of Frank’s estate executor, Ada Carson.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 6, “Eve’s Eden,” of this volume, where Elizabeth recounts this dream in an interview with me.

my mother raise my daughter is probably the one thing I did right in trying to be a proper father to that girl.

Niles is a shadow, a boy written in cipher. It seems that we have nothing in common—or rather, that he has no interests. Neither books nor balls, friends nor family, work nor play. After his lessons, he goes to the police station to apprentice with Sheriff Hargrove. I figured, at the very least, it would keep him out of trouble, and I wouldn't mind him working in a field that would teach him some discipline. I only hope that I have enough time to teach him the rest of what it means to be a man, though I'm still working it out myself.

### Acceptance Speech

*Editor's Note: What follows is a copy of Frank Jr. 's acceptance speech following Eden 's first mayoral elections, delivered the next morning, November 4, 1964.<sup>46</sup>*

“Thank you ladies and gentlemen for assembling here today to take part and pride in Eden’s decision-making processes. And thank you, Mr. Andrews, for suggesting such a fair and democratic process. For too long, the Carson family has run this island with de facto authority purchased and inherited—not selected by the populace as befitting a democratic society. While my father and I have always put your best interests before our own, it was time we gave you a choice in all of this. [PAUSE for applause]<sup>47</sup>

“So though I ran for this important office unopposed, I do not take your vote of confidence lightly. In garnering your support, I made campaign promises that I intend to keep, and in four years, I will answer once again to you, dear citizens, who are now empowered to change the course of your lives should you decide to elect a new leader.

“I know some of you have concerns about Carson Industries, but I assure you that we will keep producing DDT because, regardless of the negative impacts the chemical can have in large quantities, our country still needs our help if they are to rid their agricultural fields of the insect pests that threaten to destroy our great nation’s food production systems. And the rest of the world needs us too. In some impoverished parts of our great planet, women and children are dying everyday of malaria, and our DDT is welcomed as a ‘miracle weapon’ against mosquitos

---

<sup>46</sup> Having attended the address, I can attest that the speech Frank actually delivered was very close to the written speech, if not a verbatim reading of it. Published with the permission of Frank’s estate executor, Ada Carson.

<sup>47</sup> Frank’s annotations, not mine.

carrying the disease. Rachel Carson never called for an outright ban on DDT because even *she* understands how important this product of our hard labor is for sustaining future generations in American and elsewhere. Your jobs are important, and no one is going to take them away from you. [*PAUSE for applause*]

“But in light of what we all now know about DDT, we must take greater precautions in working with it. New workplace regulations will limit factory workers’ exposure to the chemical, new approaches to agricultural production will limit DDT’s ability to make its way into our food system, and new waste management procedures will keep DDT out of our water systems. Your children’s children will be able to wade in Carsons Creek, Silver Stream, and Golden Pond as I did when I was a boy—without fear of contamination. [*PAUSE for applause*]

“For some of us, however, it’s too late for prevention, and we, as a community, need to protect and care for our sick. I regret to inform you that my own mother, Ada Carson, who with my father founded this town and brought every one of us together on this beautiful island, has fallen ill. After sixty-four years of health, my mother is now battling a mysterious illness that has mystified doctors all over the Midwest. How this illness found my mother is unclear. Most likely, there is no connection to DDT, as my mother has never worked directly with the chemical. However, our isolation in Lake Huron limits her ability to seek the treatment she requires, and if Ada Carson can’t get treatment for her life-threatening disease, how can the common man expect to do so? [*PAUSE for dramatic effect*]

“So I am pleased to announce that tomorrow, ladies and gentlemen, we are breaking ground on a new, state-of-the-art medical facility, and once we open for business, all residents of Eden will be entitled to a free health screening. [*PAUSE for applause*]

All employees of Carson's DDT will be entitled to free treatment for any illness that could be even remotely related to the hard work they've done in service of their country.

*[PAUSE for applause]*

I, Franklin Carson Junior, your humble mayor, promise to take care of you, Eden.

*[PAUSE for applause]*

“And I promise to take care of the birds too. Tomorrow, the Carson Estate will give half of its land back to nature. In the coming months, six acres of relatively undisturbed land will be designated as a bird sanctuary. The Garden of Eden Bird Sanctuary will be a refuge for recovering species. *[PAUSE for applause]*

“Eden's future is bright. Tomorrow will be a watershed moment in our history. We are in the process of defining who we are and what we have to offer this world, and in doing so, we'll be welcoming world-class medical professionals and ornithologists into our community. We are going to start making something more important than alcohol, hemp products, or insecticides. Together, we are going to start making healthy, educated citizens who wake up to bird song in the morning. *[PAUSE for applause]*

“There will be no silent spring in Eden. I, Frank Carson, your elected leader, promise you that. Thank you.”

### From Frank's Datebook

*Editor's Note: This hand-written note was found in the October section of Frank's 1966 datebook.<sup>48</sup>*

We lost out to the Upper Peninsula in having the Garden of Eden Bird Sanctuary designated as a National Lakeshore, but fuck the U.S. Congress and the Pictured Rocks. And fuck the Garden of Eden too and fuck Lee Rickels. And fuck the Eden Community Health Center and Dr. Cooper, while I'm at it. Mom's just getting sicker, and all of the free health care I'm having to pay out to my employees is scavenging all of my profits so that we're barely breaking even. All I can do is make *more* DDT, but that's a waste of fucking time. The market's been drying up ever since that Carson bitch testified before the Senate subcommittee. Fucking government—again.

And of course, *I'm* the fucking government now. I can hardly look at myself in the mirror. It's like everything me and my father ever did is one step forward and two steps back. We try to do something good, and *that's* our fucking problem. These people, the ones who are supposed to be *my* people, don't care about me or the hard work that I've done or the sacrifices my father made for them. They're selfish, and it's time *I* start being selfish too. So I'm dropping out of all of it. College kids all over the country are doing it, and I never got to be a college kid. Not for a full term, at least. We'll see how my people do without me there to put food in their mouths.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> There are several such notes in Frank's datebooks, or at least the six we have recovered (from 1957, 1959, 1960, 1962, 1964, and 1966). He seemed to use them, infrequently, as a sort of journal. Most of his notes are just brief thoughts or sudden ideas. Published with the permission of Frank's estate executor, Ada Carson.

<sup>49</sup> The note seemed to continue, but the next page was ripped out of Frank's datebook.

## A Letter from Frank Carson

*Editor's Note: This letter was found in Frank's desk drawer underneath the unfinished manuscript for his memoir.<sup>50</sup>*

To Whom It May Concern:

If you are reading this letter, I must be dead. And my mother must be rifling through my personal effects. Hi, Mom. I'm sorry I was such a pain in the ass all the time. I hope it goes without saying that I love you.

I am writing this letter to state that, no matter the circumstances of my death, Elizabeth Carson is in no way responsible. She was a far better woman to me than I ever deserved, and no matter what evidence you might have against her, she is innocent.

Sincerely,

Frank Carson, Jr.

Mayor

---

<sup>50</sup> After the 1967 Incident, Elizabeth Carson was sentenced to life without parole for the first-degree murder of her husband, Franklin Carson Junior, by explosives (Michigan Penal Code, Act 328, Chapter XLV, MCL 750.316a and 750.327). The primary piece of evidence used to prosecute Elizabeth Carson was a letter Louis Andrews sent to the police relating Elizabeth's prediction that something like the 1967 Incident would happen and revealing that her electroshock therapy had never cured her mental illness. After sending the letter, Andrews disappeared from Eden, never to be heard from again. Investigators have been unable to locate him or find any evidence of foul play regarding his whereabouts.

This letter from Frank is being used in an appeal to overturn Elizabeth Carson's conviction on the grounds of insufficient evidence. Published with the permission of Frank's estate executor, Ada Carson.

## CHAPTER 9

## HOW DIFFERENT IT WAS WHEN YOU WERE THERE

**The Obituary**

*Editor's Note: This obituary was published on March 21, 1971, in the Sunday edition of The Times Herald.<sup>51</sup>*

EDEN—Ada Carson, 71, died alone in her home at 11:56 P.M. Thursday night. Those close to her say she knew she was in her last days and was prepared to go.

The memorial services will be held at 10:00 A.M. on Saturday, March 27, at the Meridian Funeral Home with family friend and Eden's Mayor Jonathan McIntyre officiating.<sup>52</sup> Internment will be at the Garden of Eden Cemetery. Friends may call from 4:00 to 8:00 P.M. at the Carson Estate, Main House.

Ada was born January 1, 1900, in Chicago to Henry and Emma Roy. She missed being a "century baby" by just a few minutes. In 1921, Ada Roy married Franklin Carson, who perished a World War II hero in the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. Ada and Franklin had two children: Franklin Carson, Junior, who passed away in 1967, and Lawrence Carson, who survives her

---

<sup>51</sup> Reproduced with the permission of its author, Lawrence Carson.

<sup>52</sup> After the death of Frank, Junior, an immediate election was held to determine who would fill his mayoral seat. Only two candidates ran for the position: Jonathan McIntyre (known affectionately as "Jonny Mac" by those who became familiar with him as the long-serving bartender at Franklin's Pub) and Caroline Orton. McIntyre won in a landslide, earning 75 percent of the votes. He served out the rest of Frank's term and interim mayor and then ran unopposed for reelection in 1968.

After Ada's death, Mac told me that, while it was his civic duty to finish out his term, he did not plan to run for reelection in 1972. Eden's fate hung in the balance, though I may have been one of the only people who knew just how serious the situation was.

along with one grandchild, Robin Carson, daughter of Franklin, Junior, and Elizabeth Carson (née Elizabeth Freeman).<sup>53</sup> The Carson family founded Lake Huron's island town of Eden in 1929.

Mayor McIntyre will rename the Eden Community Health Center the Ada Carson Memorial Health Center in honor of Eden's fondly remembered matriarch. The dedication ceremony will be at the Health Center at 10:00 A.M. on Sunday, March 28.

"Ada Carson was more than a member of our community," McIntyre said addressing the town of Eden Saturday afternoon. "She *was* the community. None of us would be here without her. This town wouldn't *exist* without her. Everything Eden has accomplished, we owe to our collective mother, Ada Carson. She will be missed."

---

<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that Ada Carson was also survived by a second grandchild, Niles Orton, son of Franklin, Junior, and Caroline Orton (née Caroline Vachon).

## An Interview with Lawrence Carson

*Editor's Note: This oral history interview with Lawrence Carson [LC] was conducted by me, Lee Rickels [LR], on Thursday, March 25, 1971, at the Historic Carson Family Cabin.<sup>54</sup>*

[LR] Thank you so much for having me. I apologize if I am intruding. I know this must be a difficult time for you.

[LC] And also with you. My mother was very fond of you. She trusted you. Like a son, even.

[LR] She kept me out of war.

[LC] That too. I heard you were trying to finish this project.

[LR] Yes, I promised your mother that I would finish the book after she was gone. My work here is all but done.

[LC] You don't want to wait to find out what happens to Elizabeth? It would make a nice ending for your book.

[LR] Maybe. Maybe not.

---

<sup>54</sup> As with all of the interviews I conducted for this project, I recorded our conversation on tape. I have transcribed the interview here in such a way that preserves the back-and-forth nature of our conversation, which I believe can offer extra insight into Lawrence's story. I have, however, employed compression where I believed it would benefit readability. Edits proofed and approved by Lawrence Carson.

[LC] She didn't do it, you know. She'll walk. I'm the star witness in the appeal.

[LR] Do you mind telling me what your role is in all of this?

[LC] Let's just say that I'm giving her an alibi. She couldn't have blown up the factory. She was with me that night.

[LR] Had this been going on for a long time, you and Elizabeth?

[LC] I'm not at liberty to say right now.

[LR] I understand. [*We are both silent for a beat.*] Are you in love with her?

[LC] I was—once, a long time ago. I don't really interact with people that way anymore. Hem warned me about love. He told me, "If two people love each other there can be no happy end to it." He was right. I only wish I would have listened to him sooner. Anyway, I told you, I'm not able to talk about it. Sworn to secrecy until the trial.

[LR] Did you ever serve in either the U.S. or Canadian military?

[LC] In World War II, you mean.

[LR] Did you?

[LC] I already told you where I was from 1941 until 1945. What, you don't believe me?

[LR] It's not that I don't believe you. It's just a really fantastic story. You must understand that I'm just trying to consider it objectively. Are you familiar with Occam's razor?

[LC] Something, something, the simplest explanation. Tell me, Lee: what is the simplest explanation?

[LR] You volunteered, you fought—under an assumed name because you were underage—but you didn't want to shame your brother, so you came home and made up a wild story about where you had been while the war was going on.

[LC] And you think *my* version of the story's wild? What's so wild about it anyway? Is it my literary friend?

[LR] No, actually. That's the part that gave your story the most credibility. If you're going to invent a story, you don't go out of your way to make it completely unbelievable. No, I believe you met Hemingway—probably in Europe though.

[LC] So that's your hypothesis: that I went to war but didn't tell anyone because I didn't want to embarrass Frank. Clearly you know nothing about my relationship with Frank.

[LR] Maybe, maybe not, but I know something about you, and I'm inclined to question the alternative.

[LC] You know me to be a liar, so you don't believe my story? How have I proved myself untrustworthy?

[LR] It's not your version that I'm referring to as the alternative. It's the one sometimes whispered about town.

[LC] That I'm a deserter.

[LR] Trust that I don't rely on such rumors for information, Lawrence. But if you are, I want you to know that I support you. You don't have a record like Slovik, but there can be serious consequences for deserting, even going AWOL.<sup>55</sup> Anyone would understand why you'd try and hide the truth.

[LC] What about my story don't you believe?

---

<sup>55</sup> Eddie Slovik (1920-1945), a U.S. Army soldier during World War II. Born in Detroit, Michigan, Slovik was executed in Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines, France, for desertion. Slovik is the only American soldier to be court-martialed and executed for desertion since the American Civil War. Though thousands of American soldiers were convicted of desertion during World War II and 49 were given the death penalty, only Slovik's sentence was carried out.

[LR] It's nothing specific, it's just...the Lawrence in that story isn't the man I know. The man in the story is social, full of adventure.

[LC] I'm living a different kind of adventure now. Time changes things.

[LR] So does war.

[LC] But isn't the simplest explanation that I'm telling you the truth? It's like you said, why would I tell such an implausible story if I wanted you to believe me? [*Lawrence is visibly agitated. For a time, he seems to struggle with what to say next.*]

I think you should go now.

**Follow-Up Interview with Lawrence Carson**

*Editor's Note: This oral history interview with Lawrence Carson [LC] was conducted by me, Lee Rickels [LR], on Thursday, April 1, 1971, at my temporary residence on the Carson Estate, Main House Coach House.<sup>56</sup>*

[LR] Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me on the record again. I apologize that my questions came across as intrusive last week.

[LC] No, *I'm* sorry. I was rude to you, and I had no right. I appreciate what you are doing for my mother—for my father too, really, for all of us.

[LR] I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. I promise we'll stay off those subjects today.

[LC] I overreacted. I know this project hasn't been easy for you.

[LR] I'm honored to have worked with your mother.

[LC] Please, let's get started. What was it you wanted to talk about today?

---

<sup>56</sup> As with all of the interviews I conducted for this project, I recorded our conversation on tape. I have transcribed the interview here in such a way that preserves the back-and-forth nature of our conversation, which I believe can offer extra insight into Lawrence's story. I have, however, employed compression where I believed it would benefit readability. Edits proofed and approved by Lawrence Carson.

[LR] Oh, nothing specific. I just wanted to give you the opportunity to speak. You've suffered a lot of tragedy in your life. What was the best thing that ever happened to you?

[LC] Interesting question. I guess I'd have to say the best thing that ever happened to me was for Caroline to start staying in my old house after her affair with Frank became public. I'd been relying on it during cold winters, thunderstorms, and even the scorchiest summer days. The electricity and running water were hooked up, but I never used them. Not only was I opposed to such ghastly wastefulness but also I was afraid of drawing Elizabeth's attention to the usage meters. I'm ashamed to say that, at the time, I cared more about being *perceived* as a man of the land than actually living that way.

A soft bed to lie on and a pillow to support my head, a roof and four walls to keep out the wind and rain and snow, and a library of books to read had all conspired with my human weakness and turned me soft. I'd become attached to the same world I'd turned away from. When Caroline took up intermittent residency in the "abandoned" Carson house, I was forced out of my own hypocrisy. What's the point of taking ascetic vows if you're willing to abandon them the moment the world gets tougher to live in? So I went back out into the woods and began fasting as penance for my petty indulgence.

[LR] How long did you fast for?

[LC] I waited for a sign of forgiveness from the island, and I was prepared to starve if I didn't receive it. One week passed and then a second week and then a third. I lay cradled in the

branches of a relatively young white pine, hidden from view by the soft needles—though I rarely saw anyone passing through the woods.

A great bird passed overhead and settled in the crown of a sycamore on the far side of Carsons Creek. My vision was fuzzy, but I watched the tree long enough for my eyes to focus. Twelve nests—a proper heronry—and at least seven of them occupied by a Great Blue. I honked at them, to alert them of my presence, and they croaked back, raspy and guttural, but did not flee.

I collected pine needles, for herbal tea, and a small amount of cambium, which I ate raw, right off the corky outer bark. I cleansed myself in the ice-cold creek and gave thanks for just being alive.

[LR] Would you say you completely detached from the civilized world after that?

[LC] No. I tried, but I couldn't. I could make my own bed out of branches or a fallen trunk, construct a shelter out of pine boughs, but it felt unnatural. That's why I started living in the cabin—it's a compromise, I guess.

[LR] Have you ever considered moving? You've had the opportunity to return to your home ever since Caroline moved back in with Mark.

[LC] The cabin is my home. It always has been. When my father built the Estate, the whole enterprise felt...wrong to me. I was under the impression that we came here to begin a *new* way of living, not simply a better one. I don't think bigger is better. I like my cabin. It's how one ought to live on a lovely rock such as this.

[LR] So do you think your father was wrong in the way he developed the island?

[LC] Of course. He's wrong, I'm wrong, we're all wrong—even you, Lee.

[LR] You don't seem to be bothered by this?

[LC] Why should I be bothered? I accept the way the world is, and most importantly, I accept myself. I do my best, and I move on. Anyway, you asked what made me happy, and I answered your question: being close to the land, to Eden. That's really all I want or seem to need. What else do you want to know?

[LR] I do have more questions, but...it's about your mother, her death and all. Perhaps we can finish up another time?

[LC] Another interview? Sure, I thought you were the one anxious to wrap this thing up.

[LR] Not anxious, no. I do want to finish soon, of course, but I won't do a slipshod job of it. I owe it to your mother to capture as much of the story as possible.

[LC] But you won't wait for Elizabeth.

[LR] Your story means more to me.

[LC] Next week, then. My place or yours?

[LR] Do you mind if we do it here? It just feels closer to Ada's memory.

[LC] Sure, if you say so.

**Final Interview with Lawrence Carson**

*Editor's Note: This oral history interview with Lawrence Carson [LC] was conducted by me, Lee Rickels [LR], on Thursday, April 8, 1971, at my temporary residence on the Carson Estate, Main House Coach House.<sup>57</sup>*

[LC] So you want to talk about my mother's death. What is it you want to know?

[LR] The reports all say that your mother died alone.

[LC] And you suspect that isn't the case.

[LR] Someone saw you. Sneaking out the window.

[LC] I thought you didn't listen to gossip.

[LR] I'm the someone. *I* saw you.

[LC] Okay, then you have your answer: she didn't die alone.

[LR] Will you tell me what happened?

---

<sup>57</sup> As with all of the interviews I conducted for this project, I recorded our conversation on tape. I have transcribed the interview here in such a way that preserves the back-and-forth nature of our conversation, which I believe can offer extra insight into Lawrence's story. I have, however, employed compression where I believed it would benefit readability. Edits proofed and approved by Lawrence Carson.

[LC] The winter had been hard on her, and I guess she knew she didn't have a lot of time. She left a note for me, pinned to my favorite sugar maple on the east lobe of Golden Pond. We used to visit that particular maple every fall, just the two of us, and never ceased to be dazzled by the eruption of fire in its foliage—at once amber and apricot, tangerine and vermilion. All the beauty of fire without all the heartbreak. We'd lie underneath the maple and wait for the fire to rain down on us. She made a game out of it: it was a competition to see who can get buried in the most leaves in one hour. But we could never declare a winner because when we stood up, they'd all fall away.

[LR] When was this that she left the note?

[LC] It was the thirtieth anniversary of the day we tapped that maple: February 14, 1941. That was our last spring together as a family. We never got enough sap to try to make any syrup—it probably didn't help that Mom and I snuck out there at dawn to drink the maple water straight from the bucket. Maybe it was a little greedy to not share with Dad and Franklin, but we knew we'd hardly get any syrup out of one tree anyway, so it was better to avoid the messy process of boiling it down and concentrating it, and we just relished the sap raw. What the maple water lacked in concentration it made up for in texture—instead of a drop of syrup each of our tongues at the end of the season, an entire mouthful of fresh sweetwater for Mom and me each morning. We invited Dad and Franklin to come out with us to check the bucket the first time, the morning after we'd installed it, and they were too busy, so we kept it to ourselves after that.

[LR] It sounds like this tree was a special to both of you. Did you ever retap it?

[LC] No. After Dad died and I left, Mom never retapped the tree. She didn't go there in the fall either. I know because I did, after I came back anyway. The hole in the maple's trunk scabbed in, but the single mark was still there three decades later. The note was pinned off-center inside the scar with the brooch Franklin and Dad and I gave her our last Christmas all together, an antique eighteen-karat gold *fleur-de-lis* set with twenty-nine diamonds. One of the diamonds was missing, a smaller stone that belonged at the tip of one of the petals. She'd worn it everyday as far as I could tell. The errant diamond went missing around the same time I left. Or at least, the first time I saw her after I came home, I noticed the omission.

The note was folded and typed on thick stationary that smelled faintly of honey. I still carry it with me. [*Lawrence digs around in his pockets and pulls out an already well-worn note starting to fall apart at the creases.*] Here. [*He hands the note to me and waits patiently as I read it.*<sup>58</sup>]

It was unsigned.

[LR] You went to her.

---

<sup>58</sup> The contents of the note follows:

Son—

I am going soon. If you are still out there, I beg you to come see me before I leave. I am alone every evening after 11:00.

For everything, I am sorry. Know that I love you.

Reproduced with the permission of Lawrence Carson, Ada's estate executor.

[LC] Of course, but before I did, I rummaged around in the pole barn and recovered some relics from our past. I drove a tap into our maple and hung the old metal pail on it. I was able to get a few drops right away—proof enough of what I’d done. I waited outside the main house until I was sure she was alone—a nurse I didn’t recognize was the last to leave—and then brought her my peace offering in a flask. I promised to deliver the sweetwater every evening as long as the sap was running.

Her skin was frighteningly pale and papery. It did little to soften the angles of her bones, prominent like there was no flesh at all.

“I can’t believe you went all the way out to Golden Pond in your condition,” I said. She hadn’t. Jonny Mac, apparently, was the one who delivered the note.

“I brought your pin back,” I said.

She told me to keep it.

“It’s missing a stone,” I said.

She liked it better that way.

“So are you and Jonny—”

“Friends,” she said.

“You don’t have to lie to me anymore,” I said. “I’m not a kid.”

“We are friends,” she said. “Exceptionally close friends. That’s the truth.”<sup>59</sup>

“It doesn’t matter,” I said. “That’s what I’m telling you.”

“You look so old,” she said.

---

<sup>59</sup> Though I try to avoid indulging in town gossip, it might be helpful for the reader to know that many in town suspected that Ada Carson and Jonny Mac had entered into a romantic relationship several years—decades, even—after the death of Frank Senior. Ada preferred not to talk about her romantic life and denied the rumors. There is no evidence to contradict Ada’s word, so all we have at our disposal is speculation.

I told her I *was* old.

“You need a haircut. And a shave,” she said and offered to do it for me.

I told her that wasn't necessary. In the bathroom, I found a pair of scissors, a safety razor, a shaving brush, and a mug of shaving soap sitting on the countertop. It had all been used, but the tools were perfectly clean and well cared for. I selected the scissors and trimmed my hair, my beard, my nostrils. I looked like a different man already: only half-wild. I decided to keep going and find out what else I could find buried within my own face. I lathered the soap like I remembered watching Dad do and shaved my beard clean off. When I emerged from the bathroom, she had fallen asleep. I found her instant camera, took a photograph of myself, and left it, still developing on top of journal on her bedside table.

[LR] And that was it? She was gone.

[LC] No. The next night, I returned with the flask, still mostly empty but considerably fuller than it had been the day before. She made me take a taste as well.

“You look so young,” she said. “Like the young man I never had the chance to know.”

I told her there was still time.

She wanted to know everything. How I survived the cold winters, what I ate and how I cooked it.

“I learned it all from you and Dad,” I said, “when we first moved here and didn't have all the conveniences of the mainland.”

She wanted to know how I entertained myself and how I avoided getting so unbearably lonely I could die. I told her how much I had appreciated all the books. Every week since I'd

moved into the cabin, I received a box of books on my doorstep. Diverse selections that I recognized from her private library. I guess Jonny had been delivering those as well.

[LR] So you got to spend a lot of time with her at the end?

[LC] I could only stay for about an hour each night because she was always so tired by the time that I got there. She had me take a shower and have a shave during that hour, so we didn't end up having much time to talk on any one single visit, but I kept coming back each night, and I had more and more maple water to offer every time. It seemed to help her strength.

But the nighttime temperatures were warming, and one Thursday, they failed to even approach freezing, and the same thing happened the next night so that by Saturday night, the bucket was dry. I ran to her house but stopped in the kitchen. I just knew something was wrong. I picked up the phone and considered the two emergency numbers listed on the pad: Jonny Mac and Dr. Cooper. Jonny was listed first, so I called him. I left the phone off the receiver and ran up the stairs to her bedside.

Her eyes were closed and her breathing so faint that the expansion and compression of her chest were as subtle as the coloring in her pallid skin. I took her small bony hand in mind and kissed her knuckles. "You've never been alone," I said. Her fingers twitched against mine in response.

I heard car doors slam, and I don't know why, but I ran. I guess it was all I knew how to do. At least two pairs of feet were stomping up the stairs. If I'd had more time to decide, I might have stayed. That's what she would have wanted. But I responded instinctually and fled out the window.

Dr. Cooper's hypothesis that her death was due to a chill brought in by an open window is completely erroneous. I think he's just unwilling to recognize his own failure to figure out what was actually wrong with her. People pointed fingers as suspicions arose about who was to blame for leaving the window open in the middle of winter. But it wasn't the middle of winter; it was winter's end, the beginning of spring. The problem wasn't the chill in the air; the problem was it wasn't cold enough. The run was over.

In the winter, the snow and ice made our little piece of the world glitter like a jewel, but the freezing winds coming off the lake made me question the whole endeavor. But no matter how brutal life was in winter, you always knew that spring would inevitably follow and then summer again, and everything would be warm and full of life once more.

—Frank Carson, Senior

## AFTERWORD

It was the first snow of the season. The winter of 1972, that is. The dry leaves were still on the ground, so the wet powder crackled upon contact with the earth, like a light rain on a tin roof. I had just, I believed, finished writing this book and was bringing the final manuscript—along with all of the artifacts Ada had entrusted to my care—over to the Main House.

Robin ran away when her father died but returned when we lost Ada. She brought with her a man named Jack Hamilton, and though Robin said they didn't plan on staying for long, after she married Jack and got pregnant—not necessarily in that order—it was clear that their plans had changed, and they were going to try to make a life here. The Hamiltons took up residency in the Main House, and though Robin told me I could stay in the coach house as long as I liked, or even take up residency in one of the many abandoned homes in town, I felt my time on the island was coming to a close. Ada had brought me here to work on this project, and without her or the book, Eden didn't need me anymore.

Lawrence was volunteering at the school pretty much full time, so if I resigned my post, he could step in and actually get paid for his work. The war hadn't officially ended, and there was still a risk of getting called up, but Vietnamization had begun, and I was tired of feeling like a coward. I had come to enjoy teaching very much, but I had accepted the job in Eden for the wrong reasons. I felt it was time I look for a new job and a change of scenery. I figured if there was a gap in my employment and my number came up during that time, then it must have been meant to be, the odds were so slim. Besides, Elise was almost a year old, and Robin had been elected mayor, beating out her half-brother, Niles Orton, by a comfortable margin. Eden—and the Carson family—was entering a new chapter, and it was a chapter in which I didn't belong.

I planned on just giving everything over to Robin and letting her deal with the logistics of how to publish the book and archive all of the documents and tapes I'd compiled over the course of the nine-year project. I had four Bankers Boxes worth of papers and other artifacts. When I arrived at the Main House with the first two boxes, I discovered that Robin was out. Getting a haircut, Jack said. I was embarrassed that I hadn't called first. I had seen their car in the driveway from out of my kitchen window and just assumed Robin was home. Robin preferred to ride her bike though, even in cold weather. I should have thought of that.

"Where should I put these boxes then?" I asked Jack. "I've got two more back at home."

He said he didn't know. He was busy with Elise, who was crying and continued to cry no matter what Jack did to try to please her. He was expecting Robin home soon and asked me to wait.

"Just keep them," she said when she got home. She was obviously busy, and this was a terrible time for me to stop by. I should have called.

"I can't keep them," I insisted. "This is your family. You should have them."

"No," Robin said, bouncing Elise up and down, which made her stop crying. "*This* is my family. I'm sorry, Lee. I don't mean to be cold. Ada was like a mother to me, but she's gone now, and my family is here, not in those boxes."

"But don't you think, one day, Elise will want to know about her family history?" I asked. "And her children and her children's children?"

"Honestly, I think the less they know about their family history the better. In fact, I have something for you, a box of papers that belonged to Ada. I think she would want you to have them."

"Me? But I'm just—"

“Jack, honey, will you please get that box of Ada’s papers for Lee?”

“Lawrence should—”

“And help him carry it home?”

“Here,” I said. “At least take this.” I tried to give her the manuscript, but her hands were full, so I set it down on the table.

“I don’t want that,” she said. She wouldn’t even look at it.

“I beg your pardon?”

“I don’t want it. I don’t want to read it. I don’t want Elise to ever read it. I don’t want it in my house. Look, Lee, I know how hard you’ve worked on this project, and it meant a lot to my grandmother. It meant the world to her, in fact. And for that, I will always be grateful. But I never understood her motivations for asking you to do it—”

“Perhaps if you read it—”

“I won’t. I’m sorry. I just won’t. It’s your book, and you can do whatever you want with it. I’m not going to try to stop you from publishing it. But I’ll have nothing to do with it. I hope you understand. It’s just...I’m trying to start over, and I can’t do that if I’ve got one foot stuck in the past.”

At that moment, Jack came in with a Bankers Box of his own, and Robin stood up.

“I have to put Elise to bed,” she said. “Please know: I’m not upset with you or anything. I know you only did this because Ada asked you to. But *she* asked *you*. Not me. Goodnight.”

With that, Robin walked away, singing a lullaby to Elise in French.

“*Frère Jacques, frère Jacques, Dormez-vous? Dormez-vous? Sonnez les matines. Sonnez les matines. Ding, dang, dong. Ding, dang, dong.*”

My mother used to sing me the very same cradlesong each night. I hadn't realized that my mouth was hanging open until Jack spoke, at which time I promptly clamped it shut.

He said, "Sorry about that, Lee."

He did look apologetic, but he went to the door and waited for me to gather my things and leave. I did, and he followed me out.

"I...I just don't understand," I said.

"Don't you?" he asked. "You of all people should know why Robin is eager to forget where she comes from. Her mother is in prison for killing her father. Even before then, they never paid attention to her. They were too preoccupied with their own lives. Ada was Robin's only tie to this family, and once she was in the ground, that tie was severed."

"But Elizabeth didn't do it," I said.

"I know that. And Robin knows it too."

"She knows who did?"

"No one knows for sure. She thinks the Ortons were involved. Mark or Caroline or Niles or, heck, maybe all three of them."

"I've been trying to figure out any possible connection there myself," I said. "I was hoping I could find some evidence that would exonerate Elizabeth."

"Good luck," he said. "After Niles lost to Robin in the election, Sheriff Hargrove felt bad enough for him that he went ahead and deputized him. Old man's not going to be around much longer. Before you know it, Niles will be running the show, and after that, anyone who even *considers* implicating the Ortons in anything better think twice. If you're going to publish that book of yours, you should probably do it sooner rather than later."

We'd reached the front door to my apartment. I set the boxes down so I could fish around in my pockets for the key. I didn't really know what to say. Of course, I knew Niles was working with Hargrove—he had since he was a boy—but I hadn't really considered the implications. Jack was right. I found the key and opened the door. I picked my boxes back up, we stepped inside, and Jack closed the door behind him.

"He's sick," Jack said. He spoke in a near whisper, as if someone might be listening. "You know that right? When he and Robin were just kids he used to...well, she woke up one night, and he was in her bedroom. It was dark, but he was using her hand on himself. She used to think that it had just been a nightmare, and she's convinced herself of that again now. But I've seen the way he looks at her. I know she didn't just imagine it."

My boxes seemed to have doubled in weight, and I set them down on top of the other two I had planned to come back for. Jack handed me the box in his arms, Ada's box.

"His own fucking sister," he said, and then he was gone, the door still bouncing on its hinges, falling snow and dead leaves blowing in and all around me. I was still struggling to find the right words, even though there was no one there to say them to anymore. I just opened and closed my mouth over and over again like a fish suffocating on the shore.

\*

I went to the fridge for a Pabst, but there was only one left, and I knew that wasn't going to be enough. The roads weren't too bad yet and would only be getting worse, so I drove down to the pub to stock up. Meijer was closed, and I wouldn't have wanted to go there anyway, even if the beer was cheaper. The bright fluorescent lights make me feel like some specimen under a microscope, and scrutiny was not something I was up for that night.

I couldn't stop myself from wondering how I had failed so epically at the two tasks that had given my life meaning. I had missed a critical piece of the story, but more importantly, I had failed to protect my student. Intellectually, I knew it wasn't my fault, but I was wracked with guilt anyway. Only in the pub, dark at any time of day or night, could I show my face at that moment, my moment of great shame. I really wanted to be alone, but I could face Mac, who'd gone back to working the bar after leaving office.

"For here or to go?" he asked when I walked through the door.

The place was dead, as usual. Most of Eden's residents had left after Frank's death since the destruction of the factory meant that they were out of their jobs. Most of the families that stayed did so only out of loyalty to Ada, and they had no reason not to leave when she passed away. The pub probably had higher profit margins than other businesses in town, which were shuttering their doors one-by-one, because the one thing left for people to do was drink, and Mac was generous about letting them run their tabs up. Profits didn't really matter to the pub though. It was maintained by Carson money, and even though that well was no longer being recharged, the family had made a fortune off of DDT sales, and it would be a while before it dried up completely. Plus, Mac had stopped taking a salary. He'd made enough money as the mayor that he now only worked for tips, though I can't imagine those were very forthcoming. The school had paid me well enough that I had a decent savings, so I always tried to make up for the destitution of Mac's other customers by over-tipping. Sometimes as much as 50 percent.

"To go," I said. "I'll need a whole case."

"Well if you're stocking up before the storm, you might need more than that. I hear it's going to be a doozy."

"You know best, Mac."

\*

At home, with three cases of beer loaded up in the fridge, I settled in for what was about to be the most interesting 72 hours of my life. I started drinking—at first without purpose, but then I remembered Ada’s box and brought it in to the kitchen, where I took all of my meals. I only had two chairs set out at the small round table. I never had more than one guest at any given time. I pulled the guest’s chair around next to mine, and set the box down on it.

I slid the lid off and placed it carefully on the floor as if it were made of glass instead of cardboard and might break if handled too roughly. The box was only about three-quarters of the way full, though it had felt much heavier. On the top were several newspaper clippings, each preserved in a plastic sleeve.

There was a 1970 article from the *Times Herald* about the conscription and how draftees were dodging it by escaping into Canada. There was mention of a “Michigan Moses” who was helping the men of Port Huron. It was objective reporting, but I thought it a little funny that the article was all but telling the conscripted how to evade the draft. I didn’t understand why Ada had saved the article, but I placed it at the top of the table—12 o’clock, essentially—so that I might maintain the order, if any, in which the box’s contents were stacked.

The next two articles were from the *Detroit Free Press*. First, a 1969 article about the indictment of the Chicago Eight and, below it, an article from 1968 about the riot they allegedly incited at the Democratic National Convention. Again, I didn’t understand their significance, but I placed them on the table next to the first one, trying to preserve the reverse chronology.

The deeper I dug into the box, the more relevant the materials seemed. It was essentially an unassembled scrapbook of the Carson family. I wondered why Ada hadn’t given me access to these materials. Some of them would have been very helpful for my research. I laid each item out

on the table, first in a large circle and then spiraling in on itself. Toward the bottom of the box, I found some artifacts from when Frank Junior, and Lawrence were very young. Their respective baby teeth were collected in paper envelopes, as was a lock of each of their hair, presumably from their first haircuts. Their newborn footprints were also there, labeled with each of the boy's birth dates.

At the very bottom of the box was a folder that had its own chronology separate from the rest of the items laid out before me. Like the first few articles I had found, the items in the folder baffled me. Why had Ada kept them—and how had they had come into her possession in the first place? There were newspaper clippings and other dated documents that spanned a 60-year period: from 1903 until 1963.

The file contained copies of several birth certificates: my grandmother, Ruth, born to Emma and James Rickels at Blodgett hospital on June 9, 1903. There was a birth certificate for my mother, Joanna Rickels, too. St. Mary's hospital, November 22, 1921. And my aunt, Helen Rickels, also born at St. Mary's but two years later, August 30, 1923. There were no fathers listed for either of them. And then there was me, Lee Rickels, born at Butterworth hospital on March 6, 1940. The name of my father, Lloyd Charles, was there. I only knew him through the letters he had sent my mother. After Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the Navy and fought in the Pacific Theater. He was brave and almost survived. He died in Okinawa—along with over 12,000 other Americans and more than 100,000 Japanese. I knew that story. My mother had told it to me dozens of times when I was a boy. It's why I decided to major in history.

The entire folder was a history of my family—or as much history as an outsider would be able to glean from very thorough research. There was a packet of information that was completely new to me, summarizing the years from 1903 until 1924. It seemed to have been

assembled by a private investigator. I hadn't known that my grandmother was a nun. I guess she joined the convent when she was pregnant with my mom and, apparently, was kicked out after she became pregnant with Aunt Helen. It was all very interesting information, but I couldn't figure out *why* Ada had it. By this time, I was drunk, however, and not in a position to make much sense of anything. So I packed everything back into the box, in reverse order with the folder on top, carefully slid the lid back on, and decided to return to the folder in the morning.

But the next morning, I couldn't bring myself to open the box again. I considered it warily from the corner of my eye while I brewed my coffee and fried some eggs. But I took my meal into the living room and ate there to avoid having to come to terms with the folder and the revelations I might find within it. When I finished, I left my dishes out instead of washing them right away as I normally do and went outside to chop some wood. It was still snowing and very cold, but I was low on wood for the stove, and doing something physical, something that required all of my concentration took my mind off of the folder and its contents.

Once there was no more wood to chop, I went back into the house, took care of my dishes, and made lunch. Again, I took my meal in the living room, in front of the television, where I remained for hours, only going into the kitchen for beers and, when I had to walk past the box, averting my eyes as if it were the face of Medusa and one glance at it would turn me into stone. When I finally got bored with the television, I retired to my room and read until my eyelids grew heavy and sleep descended upon me like a great wave.

\*

The next day was the coldest day of the winter. The snow had stopped and the skies were clear, but it was a bitter chill that kept me inside and forced me to finally face this box of Ada's. I woke, brewed a pot of coffee, made breakfast, and ate at the kitchen table, watching the box as

if it were a wild animal. But it wasn't and simply sat there, still, until I finished eating, washed my dishes, and returned to the table.

I opened the lid a crack, just wide enough to slide the folder out, and put the lid back down. I reviewed the folder's contents again but slowly this time, with greater thought and care. When I finished, I brewed another pot of coffee, fixed myself a sandwich, and ate at the kitchen table again, my mind chewing on what I had discovered.

Only about half of the folder's contents were about my family history. The other half was all about me. Clippings of me in the local paper, like one featuring local history work I had done with the Rotary Club. There was a picture of me with my high school baseball team. There were other photos of me—originals—and my report cards, and I couldn't imagine *how* Ada had acquired them. But as I laid each item out, creating a spiral on the table as I had with the rest of the box the previous night, I started to understand what the collection meant.

After lunch, I took care of the dishes and brought the four boxes I had collected during my researches into the kitchen. I pulled out every document I had concerning Ada and flagged every mention of her parents. There weren't a lot, and most of them were about her father, but I found what I was looking for. Emma Roy, Ada's mother, left Chicago in December 1902. Approximately six months later, Emma Rickels, my great-grandmother, gave birth to a daughter in Grand Rapids. There was a photo of my great-grandmother with my grandmother, her two daughters, and me—a four-generation family Christmas photo taken in 1962, shortly before my great-grandmother and my mother were killed in a tragic car accident and my grandmother took her own life.

My mother, Joanna, had been driving my great-grandmother, Emma, home from the hospital when they were T-boned by a drunk driver running a red light. My grandmother, Ruth,

was supposed to be the one driving, but she never showed up to the hospital as expected, and my great-grandmother called my mother to come and get her.

Grandma Ruth never forgave herself for it. “It should have been me in that car, *not* Jo,” was what she had written in a note left on her kitchen table, anchored with a bowl of sugar to make sure it stayed put. It took more than a month before they found her body. A man fishing off the end of the pier in Grand Haven caught a piece of her dress on his hook. They dredged the area and found Grandma Ruth—or what was left of her, anyway. There was a rope tied around her waist, attached to a cinder block on the other end. She had been just a four months shy of her 60th birthday.

I remember the four-generation photograph. Not posing for it but seeing it in the local newspaper, where it was printed after the car accident, again after my grandmother went missing, and yet again after they found her body. It was such a tragic tale, the papers couldn’t help themselves from running with it.

That was how Ada got the photo. It was probably how she learned that her mother, her only sister, and one of her two nieces—none of whom she had ever really known—were all dead. When I graduated from the University of Michigan that spring, Ada contacted me and offered me a job that would keep me safe. She said the school had given her my name.

\*

Since discovering my relation to Ada, everything has taken on new meaning. I haven’t been able to stop reliving her funeral in my mind.

The sun still shone, but snow began to fall as the procession travelled from the funeral home to the cemetery. Spring snow isn’t uncommon on Eden, but it felt like a special send-off to Ada anyway. Dick Noble drove the hearse, and since we only had to go two blocks, everyone

else followed on foot. Six men in matching black suits walked in pairs ahead of the group: Jonny Mac, who was starting to look his years, strode shoulder-to-shoulder with Lawrence, who looked the same as always but for the deep lines in his face. Dr. Cooper and I followed, then Sheriff Hargrove and Big John Freeman, not so big anymore, both hunched and unable to keep pace with the rest of us, and holding back the procession. Niles came next, 18 and wearing a strange expression unfit for the occasion. I remember, his shirt was open at the collar. No tie. Behind Niles followed thirty or so town folks who have come to pay their respects. Robin and Jack, newly arrived, had missed the service and were already at the cemetery waiting for us. Robin wore the same outfit she wore to bury her father, even the pillbox hat and veil.

The hearse crept to a stop. Dick got out, opened the back hatch, and helped pull the pine casket out so we could hoist it up to our shoulders. We had less than fifty yards to take her, but the snow melted on the metal handrails, and our bare hands slipped here and there. It felt as if we might never get her to her place beside Frank Senior. Robin and Jack grabbed each other's hands and whispered to one another. Jack released her hand and took long elegant strides toward us, leaving Robin alone next to the open wound in the ground, waiting to receive Ada.

As he got closer, Jack noticed something I didn't, and closed the rest of the distance in a sprint, diving at the ground like a volleyball player and catching the back end of the casket before it could smash on the ground. Freeman was sprawled out at our feet.

"Tripped on a root," he said. Niles laughed at the old man.

Robin came forward to help her grandfather off the ground and walked him the rest of the way, their arms wrapped around one another. Jack took Freeman's place as pallbearer, and we made it the rest of the way to the site without issue.

A single goose honked as it arced over the somber mob, and then everything was silent as Ada, Grandma Ruth's sister, was gently lowered into the earth.

Dick invited everyone to come forward, one by one, to help bury her. Lawrence was given the honor of throwing the first clump of soil onto her casket, and he handed the shovel to Niles, who repeated very mechanically what Lawrence had done and passed the shovel to Mac, who did his piece and passed it to me. I let Robin cut in, and she tried to pass the shovel along to Jack when she was done, but he put his hands up, so instead it went back to me and then to Dr. Cooper, then Freeman, then Hargrove, who insisted that Jack take his turn next. On it went after Jack, through the rank and file members of the community.

Robin looked at me sadly, and I pulled her into an embrace.

"Where is everybody?" she asked.

"We're all that's left," I told her. "But Ada would be so happy to know that you came back."

\*

It's been almost a decade since I first set foot on this island, and I know now that it was no accident. I owe it to Ada, to my family, to stay put.

Eden is my home.

Lee Rickels

January 1, 1972