

TALES FROM LIMESTONE COUNTRY

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Caudill College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Morehead State University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

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July 2011

Accepted by the faculty of the Caudill College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences,  
Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts  
degree.

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## TALES FROM LIMESTONE COUNTRY

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The five stories which make up this creative thesis follow the lives of men and women who have been most affected by the limestone belt which runs through southern Indiana. While each story can be read independently of the others, the first and last are intended to serve as a narrative frame for the thesis. These stories share a narrator who has not worked in the stone industry but whose life has nonetheless been impacted by the culture around him – in particular one man whose love of his time spent quarrying deeply influences the young man. The other three stories deal more directly with those who worked in the mills and quarries hauling, shaping, and carving stone – including an Italian immigrant, the son of German immigrants, and a local who has lived in the region for several generations. While the tales are connected by a common element, the goal has been to pull back the layers which cover over the stories of the ordinary people who lived, worked, loved, and died surrounded by and immersed in a culture founded upon the limestone industry. This thesis focuses on the culture of southern Indiana and works to fill a gap in the larger story of America and its people.

Accepted by: Mark A. Graves, Chair

Crystal Wilkinson  
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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people without whose help and inspiration this thesis could not have been completed. For her encouragement and patience, I offer my deepest gratitude to my wife, Lacy Hawkins. To Professor Crystal Wilkinson for her editorial assistance and guidance, I offer my thanks. It is only because of her confidence in me and her faith in my ability to write fiction that I attempted this work. For that, I will remain eternally in her debt. I would also like to thank Professor Chris Holbrook and Professor Mark Graves for agreeing to serve on my thesis committee. No less important to me was the inspiration I found in the work of Scott Russell Sanders, particularly his book *In Limestone Country* which helped me to see how compelling the Hoosier story could be - not just because of the stone in the ground, but more importantly because of the people who were drawn here to work it. My deepest thanks go to Dr. Sanders for showing me that southern Indiana folks have much to share with the rest of the world. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank the men, women and children who inhabit, now and in days long gone, a land built in so many ways upon limestone.

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## Grammy and Pappy

Pappy used to tell me about the old days, back a long time ago, when he was young. He mostly talked about working in the quarries. Limestone quarries. That's the kind of stone we have in southern Indiana, and where it has not already been dug up it lies beneath us all.

He wasn't my real grandpa or anything, but I called him Pappy. His wife was always Grammy. They babysat me for a couple of years before kindergarten. Before *I* went, that is. I am pretty sure no one went to kindergarten when they were kids. As long ago as my time with them was, there are moments when I feel them smiling at me from across the lunch table, the three of us with peanut butter sandwiches or grilled cheese on white bread. I can see them both in my mind munching and talking as clearly as I can see the page in front of me right now. In truth, I only spent a few short years in their part-time care, but for the rest of their lives they would be my family.

They lived in Oolitic when I stayed with them but hadn't always. My mom told me once that they had owned a farm out near Fayetteville before retiring to "town." I think that was true, though I never spoke to either of them about living on a farm.

Pappy still worked, when I was little and long after. He was the night janitor at the one-window branch bank just down the road from their home. The work wasn't hard and he liked doing something to keep himself busy.

Pappy seemed so big to me at four years old. Later, when I would visit them, he appeared withered, as if he were a balloon and God was slowly letting out the air.

Part of that, no doubt, had something to do with how much I had grown, but I think that in reality he *was* getting just a little smaller and frailer each time I saw him. He had stopped working completely when the branch closed a few years back, and as he limped into his mid-eighties, anyone watching could see that the finish line was inching closer and closer.

Grammy was a stocky woman, always in a muumuu. Vicki Lawrence made us laugh when she wore them, but for Grammy my imagination fails if I try to picture her in anything else, except maybe a Sunday dress. They were Pentecostal after all.

As old as always Grammy seemed in my head, each time I saw her over the years I marveled at how young she looked. Her hair had always been gray, as far as I was concerned - not white at all, more the color of eye-beams ready to be set in a new building - but her face never bore the lines and wrinkles which make other faces look like dry, crumbling earth after a season-long drought. Grammy had some crow's feet at her eyes and a smile-line or two at her mouth, but the rest remained smooth, like mine must have been when she kept me.

The old pair were in their 60's when I knew them, having been born just four days apart back in 1923. Childhood sweethearts, they had married young and though they *would* later farm in rural Lawrence County, Pappy did his first hard labors in the limestone quarries of Oolitic, Indiana. Maybe that's why after they sold their land they decided to move back there - to the town where they had graduated high school. Where they had begun their married life.

Whatever the reason, Oolitic is where I spent so much of those first four years of my life. Pappy would take me out walking, and I would balance along the stone ledge separating the yards – that’s what we call them around here instead of lawns - from the sidewalk, feeling like one of The Flying Wallendas. If I had known who they were back then. Each time, as my ledge ran out, I would leap - executing a perfect, death defying, one-half turn as I fell back to earth - before crashing down onto an empty Thompson buttermilk milk carton with its green label. Anything else that happened to litter my path faced identical danger from my trash-destroying acrobatic skills.

On these walks, or often after we returned home from the bank - or maybe Bob’s Market, the local grocery – Pappy would regale me with stories of the quarries and the men who had worked them. He always said that while he only worked for Indiana Limestone for five years, those were some of the happiest years of his life. He married his beautiful bride square in the middle of those years, and he always felt, forever after, that he had accomplished more for his country by digging out limestone than if he had been able to fight in the war or in all the years he worked the farm. He never did say why he wasn’t drafted, just that “Uncle Sam didn’t think I was fit to send to war, so they left me here to marry to Grammy.” Then, I didn’t understand the subtlety of the laughter that always followed this remark. I also used to wonder if he had always called her Grammy, even back then.

In my imagination, the preacher would say, “Pappy, do you take this woman, Grammy, to be your wife?” He would say, “Yes!” of course. They both looked young



when I pictured this, thin and attractive, but for some reason Grammy still had gray hair. When I think of her now, at any age, she still does.

Some of my strongest memories from that time – really, *most* of them – have to do with Pappy. The time he took me out onto Lake Monroe up near Bloomington in his little boat, for example. Still the only time I ever fished that lake from the water and not the shore. We may not have been more than a hundred yards from land, for all I know now, but it felt like we were in the middle of the ocean. I think I caught a tiny sunfish that day, just one, though relative to my size it might as well have been the giant marlin straight from Hemmingway. I know it didn't happen but I can see us, in my mind, tying that little sunfish to the side of the boat, rowing for all our lives to get back to shore where Grammy would be waiting, proud of us both as she stoked the fire meant to cook the supper she knew we would catch. In reality, we must have thrown the itty-bitty little sucker back. That was a good day.

Or the time he took me to cut firewood. The chainsaws seemed larger than I was, so needless to say, I did not do any of the cutting. But I remember that it was fall, everywhere fiery leaves the color of danger and madness as the world loses control of itself – the uniformity of summer gone – and not the drabness of late fall, the intrigue giving way to the brown of watered down soda that will cover the ground as winter prepares to take hold. We were in the country, the deep country, where there is no highway noise at all and Pappy has to drive the truck into the woods because there is no road. I remember that he gave me multi-colored gloves (I felt just like Joseph – without all the brothers) so that I could pick up sticks and throw them in the

truck bed. I am sure I played with more leaves than sticks and I remember becoming bored and sleepy. Right now, today, I would trade most of what I own to go back to those woods.

And when Grammy would make me nap – I hated it, no boy wants to nap after lunch when there is so much playing to do – Pappy would again take me back in time to the quarries where the stone was born and to the mills where the men would make it most truly alive.

He would tell of the immigrants who had come to the area to work the stone. German, Italian, Czech, Slovakian, Polish - all words that had no meaning to me beyond their strange foreignness, but sounds I would never forget. Some would dig it from the ground while others would finish it in the mills. The most respected men were the carvers, mostly the Italians. The company would give them blocks of stone and say, "Make it breathe." And they would.

What strikes me now is what was absent, the hole in his story. What Pappy never told me was the discrimination these men faced in moving to a new land where most of the residents had dug their Anglo-Saxon hands and tools into the soil almost a hundred years earlier. While not regaling a young boy with stories of intimidation and hatred may seem less than controversial, the stories did not get told for one, much simpler, reason. Pappy was not trying to save a boy's innocence. There just weren't any stories to tell.

Maybe in the mid to late 1800s when the men first began to arrive some folks were not too happy about it. Maybe. By Pappy's time, so many families had

immigrated to the area to work, no one thought much about it at all. In fact, the stone companies sought them out, executives travelling to Europe in search of talent the way baseball scouts decades later might fly to the Dominican Republic because they heard a kid there could really hit the ball.

“One time,” Pappy told me, “this fella came in from Germany. First day on the job, they started him in the quarry, but we all knew he was there to work in the mill. Those German guys already knew what they were doing but the boss like to give them a little time in the pits to see where our stone came from, what Indiana rock looked like when it was still in the ground.

“So, this German fella didn’t speak a word of English. Well, that’s not true, honey. He knew three words. Cigarette, limestone, and lunch. So the guys tried to ask him where he was from and what his family was like, but all he could answer was ‘Lunch’ or ‘Cigarette.’ He musta known ‘limestone’ wasn’t never gonna be the right word. But it was ‘cigarette’ that got everyone goin’. It sounded somethin’ like ‘Kick-a-rett-a.’ Every time he would say that, the boys would give him a fresh one. He must have smoked three packs that day.”

Smiling the whole time, Pappy told the story with no malice. His fondness for the new man, and those who perpetrated the minor hazing, showed though all those years later. And I would laugh whenever he would imitate the man, deepening his voice in mock German and say, “Cigarette.” A little extra throaty on the “g” and the “r,” he would giggle with me as the tale collapsed into the two of us saying words in what we imagined were perfectly good imitations of non-native speakers. Sometimes,

we would even act out our own little drama where we were foreigners pretending to speak English. You know, like we do sometimes when we pretend to speak Chinese. “Ming mow gao sho,” making sounds like we think we hear the language. Imagine a sixty-something year-old man sitting in the floor with me pretending to be a German speaking fake English. Sometimes good-natured laughter is just more important than being PC.

He would also tell me of the buildings all over the world built from Lawrence County earth. As a boy, this meant little to me. How can a boy imagine the world when all he wants or needs is the backyard? Even when he would walk me to Main Street (really, that’s what it’s called) and show me the statue of Joe Palooka - boxing gloves on, washboard abs flexed, and knowing smile for his next opponent – the life-sized figure only impressed me because of the way Pappy looked at it. The legendary, cartoon boxer was nothing to me; Pappy was everything.

And I did enjoy hearing the stories about the men who did the work. He told me of fingers that were cut off and the man back the next day working like he had not been born with five on that hand to begin with, so what’s the big fuss? He told me of the mud and the grime and the men who actually *lived* in little shacks right there by the deep holes in the ground. He would tell me of the enormous noise the steam channeller would make and then try to imitate it. “FUSH-FUSH-FUSH-GRRRR-CHUG-CHUG-CHUG-FUSH-GRRRRRR.” I never even wondered if these sounds had any resemblance to reality. His funny faces as he was CHUGING across the room

and FUSHING steam from the top of his head made me laugh. I can't imagine the truth mattering anymore than that.

The one story that I could understand, the one I will never forget, was about the man, the only man, he ever saw die on the job. Maybe he shouldn't have told me, but 1980 was a different time and Pappy was a man of a bygone era.

I say I will never forget it, but the truth is I am not sure I remember the details at all. A man - I want to say his name was Fred, but I would not bet a paycheck on that one - fell from the top of a crane after he had climbed it to repair part of the pulley system. He died on impact, that I know. What I really remember is the way Pappy looked when he told the story. In traveling to the past to bring back the other stories, all the time really, he was jovial. The idea that anything could be wrong anywhere just went away when I was near Pappy. He loved to flip his false teeth out at me and make faces; he smiled when there was nothing to smile about. He loved Grammy and he loved me. I think he was one of those guys who loved everyone, but it still made you feel special to know it. But when he told that story - the one time he told me that story - he became someone else. Not a man who had lost the zest for life, but one who seemed to recognize precisely the moment he fully came to understand his own mortality.

I think he cried. Not that he would have been ashamed for me to know it; his heart was far too tender for him to feel shame over showing emotion. But he did get up off the couch, where he had been sitting as I lay with my feet on his lap, and leave the room. As he walked through the threshold into the dining room, he turned and

said, “Grammy’ll get me if you don’t get your nap. Get a little rest and we’ll go down to Bob’s for a Coke when you wake up.” In truth, he hadn’t needed to say anything at all.

As he walked past the dinner table, I saw him reach in his back pocket for the hankie he always kept there. Even at five, I knew what was happening. To this day, I don’t quite understand how. I can say that if I had not loved the man before, I would have after seeing that handkerchief come out. Funny how I was less horrified by the story than concerned for Pappy, a man I had never seen upset about anything.

I guess I can recall a lot of the little stuff, too. Of course, the channeler and how it was like a little train that ran along tracks, pounding holes in the stone so that later the men could blast it free. The crane that lifted the stone out of the quarry, and the powerman (I couldn’t help but imagine this man as a superhero, sitting in the cab, working the levers and dressed for all the world just like Robin, the Boy Wonder) who operated it all by himself. I also learned that hooks (handled by men called “hookers” – knowledge which lead me to some great confusion years later on the school playground) would hold the stone as the crane lifted it out of the hole and that the work, mostly done in the summer months, made you “hot as the devil.”

Grammy did not have stories. She cooked, did laundry, and always found something to dust. In fairness, though her house smelled to me like old people, the sharp odors of creams from assorted tubes permeating all of existence, it was orderly and clean. Whether I recall it happening or if I just have the story imprinted in my brain from my mother’s many retellings, I have this image of Grammy gently

chastising my mom for washing my pants each time I wore them. Her manner would not have been scolding or unfriendly, but Grammy simply did not see any reason to launder a young boy's pants, wearing them prematurely thin, each time he put them on. Experience raising three kids of her own, and taking care of countless grandchildren, did make her something of an expert. I am not sure Mom ever took her advice; as a teenager I had to hide pants I had only worn for a few hours so they would not get thrown into the hamper. As a male, I completely understood Grammy's point of view and saw no need to wash those clothes every day. Of course, our motivations may have differed a bit.

Grammy could be tough but never unkind. She was absolute on those naps, let me tell you. She is also the only woman I ever knew who still used mercurochrome on small injuries. I hated that stuff – it looked awful and stung like I imagined a wasp must, if he were really mad. But her intentions were good, to protect, rather than hurt, me. And, to Grammy's way of thinking, if medicine didn't hurt a little, it must not be doing you any good at all.

Looking back, I must have spent most of my time with Grammy. I don't know why, but Pappy was not around for most of the day. It's funny, but I never thought to ask why. I never saw them fight; I am not sure they knew how. I guess I imagine him down at the store talking to Bob or drinking coffee at the diner that sat just a block away from their house. Probably, he spent many more days cutting wood and fishing than I knew about, and today I am glad to think that he might have been filling his retirement years with all manner of diversion.

Though most of my days were centered around Grammy – eating her meals or watching her pick clothes out of the dryer with a claw at the end of a rod so she wouldn't have to bend as much and stress her back – the time I spent with Pappy was always special. I imagine it could be the paucity of time we had together that made it that seem so important, but I prefer to think that it was the man himself.

He treated me like the little kid I was but he talked to me like the adult I would become. In part, he told me his stories because he knew I enjoyed them and he liked to make me happy. But I think there was a more subtle intent as well. He wanted me to be proud of where I was from. He wanted me to be proud of the people who built our country – not the politicians and the warriors, but more literally. To him, the real heroes of the land were the men who worked it, who gave their bodies to honest labor and allowed the distant bankers, legislators and other people doing jobs that he could not quite imagine a place to do what he could not understand.

As I sit here, really trying to think, I am struck by the fact that what I recall most vividly is how *proud* Pappy was about it all. To be honest, I set out mostly to retell the tales he passed on to me. To keep alive a time that seemed ancient to me thirty years ago. Truth be told, it probably seemed that way to Pappy as well. Instead, the stories I find most interesting are not the ones he told but the ones he lived. On occasion, those were the same.

One final story of my own and then the end.

When I grew up, and I did eventually grow up, I ran into one of Pappy's many granddaughters. She was working in the limestone business herself, not swinging a



crane in the quarries or lifting large blocks onto trucks, but in a post-modern way, you might say.

She and her husband operate a business that, among other things, sells limestone products, conducts tours of quarries, and promotes the industry to the world. I asked her what Pappy, that's what she called him too, thought about her involvement in the business all these years after he had left it.

She said he loved it. "He told me all these stories when I was a little kid, and I grew up fascinated with stone. He told me about those couple of years he worked in the quarries and that's all I ever wanted to do, drop black powder into holes and blow the stone free. I didn't find out until later that women *never* get hired for those jobs. Even when I was a girl, he and I would play around in the back yard, pretending to blow stone, load it onto the hooks and get it ready to send to the mill. He never told me I couldn't do it. Never."

I told her that he had shared many of the same stories with me. "I guess I just thought that stuff was between us. But I'm glad. I'm glad to know it all."

Missy, that's her name, told me Pappy was still doing well. I hadn't seen him in several years, though I would visit him again soon after my conversation with his granddaughter. Not enough though. Not nearly enough.

Then, he was still sweeping up at the bank and Grammy had been through a couple of health scares but she had come out of them little worse for the wear. Life had kept me busy, school and a little work. I was still pretty young and as much as you want to see the people from your childhood, the ones who defined your whole

world in those innocent days, it's hard to find time to hang out with old folks. I hate to say that, but it's just the truth. And that's a shame really. When I think of how much I learned from those people, how much more I could have learned if only I would have listened... well, if nothing else, it makes me realize what the past has to offer. People I never met. People dead long before my parents were born. People I could not even find in a cemetery if I had to.

Maybe in some ways I am more tied to the past than I am to the future. Sometimes that's a problem for me. But the past is not scary like the future can be.

Just today, I stopped by Oolitic, a town that was first named Limestone, to drop my paycheck in the ATM machine at the little branch bank where Pappy used to work. Now, that machine is all that remains of the business. The building is still there, and several other branches operate throughout the southern half of the state. But in Oolitic, it's the world's largest automated teller. Several trucks were parked there where carpoolers meet in the mornings - despite the signs announcing that no unauthorized cars are permitted and will be towed. An idle threat in an idle community.

Bob's Market is long gone. A cycle shop occupied that building for several years, but it too has disappeared. The five-and-dime store owner was older than Pappy and has been dead for years now. It's hard to believe that building even still stands. The hardware that was on the same block changed owners a couple of years back and it too is now closed. A Dollar General has opened just down the block, but every town has one of those. The liquor store across the street hung on for a while,

but it's shut up now. The old junior high stands abandoned – three limestone buildings that just can't seem to find a place in the next century. One has been apartments and held various businesses that could not make it. The other is a nominal community center that hosts the equivalent of rookie-league professional wrestling from time to time. The school moving out to the far end of the community and closing campus for lunch probably hurt the little town as much as the highway closing and the mills downsizing. Whatever caused it all, Oolitic may soon go the way of Bountiful or the Whistle Stop Café.

This afternoon, I decided to park in the bank lot, against the threat of being towed, and walk up the street like I used to do with Pappy. Naturally, I noticed the empty buildings and lack of commerce or even people out and about. However, about half a block up from the bank, I passed by the post office, still in operation – at least for now, and saw the first sign of life. As I strolled by the large front window, the postmaster, whose son was a scout in my troop back when we were in school, waved. I waved back as I headed towards the next building down the block, the town hall - still in use and attached to the small fire station serving the little town.

In between these two government buildings, about all that keeps people returning to Main Street these days, Joe Palooka still stands there with his broad smile and chiseled physique. A few years back someone had smashed his face with a hammer – the same thing happened to Michelangelo's Pieta in the Vatican, too. He was repaired immediately, and there is only a small scar visible today. Marred or not,

he continues to stand guard, day and night, over the heart of the community, an organ on life support no doubt.

In contrast to his smile, the rain mixed with whatever pollution it carries – or maybe the birds – had left a few dirty streaks down old Joe's face. Even with his smile, he still gave the appearance that he had been crying. Tears for his community. Tears for the old men who made him who are now all gone. Tears for the old men like Pappy who soon would be. Tears for men like me who must live to see what the future holds for Oolitic and for him.

There's a part of me though, maybe that little part of me that Pappy can claim responsibility for, that won't give up. Part of me that looks up at Joe Palooka and knows that as long as he stands there, boxing gloves on, that we won't do down without a fight. Whatever the future holds, whatever the past can teach us, we have to keep swinging at the present – swing like our lives depend upon it.

He may not have been a fighting man, but Pappy would approve - I have no doubt.

### Karl: What We See When We See Too Much

For two days in late January 1904, the skies above Lawrence County, Indiana let loose with a snowstorm that left more than a few folks reaching for their Bibles to find out once and for all if God had planned for the world to end by ice rather than fire. Because the winds never picked up nor did the snow reach white-out levels, no one called it a blizzard. Instead, the snow simply began one morning and did not stop for two full days. When it finally ended and the men of Bedford began shoveling the dense white layers from the streets, carriages gradually but steadily reappeared as commerce once again took hold of the small town.

For its part, the school administration offered no respite from the daily grind of classes. Most students, and all teachers, lived within walking distance of the schools – in town at least – and there was no need, in the minds of the old men who made such decisions, to lose any valuable educational time to a bit of snow. This meant that requisite duties of snowmen making and snowball fighting were necessarily confined to recess time and the couple of hours of light left after school let out each day.

However, by January 21 while the snow still dominated all of the lawns and many of the less frequently traversed streets, the main thoroughfares and sidewalks were mostly cleared.

That day Miss Sarah Schafer, first-year Latin teacher at Bedford High School, had decided that the improved conditions warranted the reinstatement of her evening tutoring session at the school, which she had chosen to cancel during the worst of the snowfall. Word spread to the usual students who attended such after-hours meetings,

and by the last bell of the day, several had signaled that they would indeed join her for additional Latin study. A couple of hours later, she took her supper at the usual boardinghouse.

In Indiana, nightfall comes early in late January. Often by five or five-thirty, especially if wintery clouds have settled in, the world is as dark as the Middle Ages. The town's busiest streets had recently been equipped with lights, as had some of the more "prominent" residential area. However, the alley that ran between 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets just to the west of Lincoln Avenue had no streetlamps at this time and the officer who would walk this area as one leg of his beat happened to be running on time and was still four and a half blocks away on the northeast corner of the courthouse square when the last of the daylight faded into the wintery night sky.

To this day, no one can say exactly why Miss Sarah Schafer - born of a respectable family in Elkhart, Indiana and lately of the Indiana State Normal College in Terre Haute – walked down that alley during the evening of January 21, 1904. Maybe she saw it as a shortcut to the school. Possibly she had plans to meet someone there. A man perhaps? Some evidence suggested she did not enter the alley of her own volition. The students she was to meet waited for an hour but decided to go home when their teacher did not arrive at the school.

No matter the reason for her presence there, sometime on the morning of January 22, the body of Miss Sarah Schafer, Latin teacher, was discovered in a carriage house that abutted the alley. Her head had been caved in by a brick.

Several men, over a period of many years, were arrested for the murder. These included men of some standing and a few of ill-repute:

- James Heitiger, Indiana University senior whose romantic overtures may have been thwarted by the deceased.
- Henry Behr, opium smoker who confessed in his sleep.
- James McDonald, petty criminal who claimed to have seen the woman shortly before her death and may been the killer.
- Ernest Tanksley, kidnapper who may have killed Schafer by mistake.
- William Barnes, a railroad worker who may have stolen the ring off of Schafer's finger.
- Frank Evans and Elmer Browning, two men given up by Browning's ex-wife whose claim of innocence was proven to be true.
- George Berger (alias Frank Harris), a suspect whose confession was dismissed almost immediately.

A few others have been accused or suspected in the years since but were never arrested or charged:

- Asa White, the man Berger claimed to have hired him to erase his clandestine wedding to Schafer.
- Dr. James B. Duncan, a local physician whose offices were located near where Schafer lived and who was one of her final, verifiable stops before taking supper the night she died.

- Simpson B. Lowe, deputy prosecutor who could have used his influence to deflect suspicion – also the man Browning's ex-wife claimed had hired Browning and Evans to murder Schafer.

Others were arrested. None were ever convicted.

Sightings of a man in a top hat, a stranger in an overcoat lurking around the area, or a red-headed man running from the scene came to naught. Maybe one of the men arrested for the crime had, in fact, committed it yet escaped punishment on Earth for the deed. Surely someone knew for certain to whom the guilt belonged. Someone besides the murderer himself. Someone who, for reasons only he might know and with which only he would have to live, would never come forward to tell the story of the murder of Miss Sarah Schafer.

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Karl worked his way through town, stepping over and around the snow piles as best he could, on a frigid day in January - cold even for the deepest days of winter. He had just exited The Sportsman where he had downed a few beers with his buddies after having done little more than sit around his house for the last couple of days. For a while, he felt the snow might keep coming until it had covered up the small town just like that Volcano had done to Pompeii and that other place over in Italy almost nineteen hundred years before. Though Karl had been out of high school for almost three years, that stuff about Mt. Vesuvius would stick with him forever, he thought. All those bodies. All those kids. What a sad shame.



Since he had been filling his days with the simple tasks of keeping the stove supplied with wood and brewing coffee on top of it, he had taken the opportunity to get out this afternoon for a drink with some old high school friends. As a sort of bonus for losing a couple of days in near solitude, and as there was no need to rise early for work the next morning, he had had one or two more than he might have on a regular weekday afternoon. He also had no anticipation of seeing his girl, Loretta, today. Her family lived a bit out of town and her father and mother would, no doubt, not want her to wander out of doors in this cold.

Karl was bundled against the arctic air with an added layer of warmth provided by the alcohol he had recently consumed. The beer acted like an internal radiator, sending out bursts of heat from his core to the farthest reaches of his body. While his exposed face took the brunt of the frozen assault, even there he could feel his blood working beneath the skin to ward off the cold. Only a block or so away from the bar, Karl wondered if the brew would hold up until he reached home a mile and a half distant.

While he did not want to linger too long in the open air as the temperature continued to drop with the setting sun, he was also in no hurry to get back to his house just to be alone for the rest of the evening. Too many thoughts had been running through his head the past few weeks, and getting out tonight had provided some needed diversion. Of course, he had not told his buddies about his dilemma; he had not really wanted to talk about it anyway, wanting nothing more than conversation with other men about manly things like work. The boys had spent considerable time

arguing about the exact date they thought the quarries might open again in the spring. If the limestone is harvested too soon, the water inside the stone can freeze while the block is curing, splitting it and ruining its value. Karl put down two dollars on March 5 as Opening Day, a risky bet considering the severity of the winter that had hit the region. Two dollars might not mean much to his budget, but he placed the money on that date more because of the challenge he saw in the eyes of his friends, like they were pushing him to admit that he didn't have the balls to take a risk. None of them knew just how reckless Karl had become recently and all were surprised when he not only pushed his bet to before the school's spring break, but almost to February.

Generally, Karl did exercise more caution than most of his buddies. Because work for the quarrymen was less than steady in the winter months, many of them could not make it until spring on their summer wages. If the men had saved well from late spring to fall when they could work all the overtime they wanted, then they could usually get through the winter by picking up nothing more than a few odds jobs, such as shoveling snow for neighbors, without much financial trouble. Unfortunately, these were not the kind of men who planned for the future. Each winter, too many of the men would be reduced to asking for help from the churches or the trustees because the money had run out. In contrast, mill work stayed steady year round, and occasionally the bosses would need a man or two from the quarries to help with some of the heavy work at the mill that did not die out over the winter. The quarrymen pushed and pushed to maximize their output of stone during the good months; it was simply not

possible for the men at the mill to keep up on their end. In addition, orders for finished façades or sculptures came in year round.

Karl was never the kind to run out of cash before spring, even before when he had worked exclusively in the quarries. He usually budgeted his money well enough that the mill work had not been necessary to keep him from starving or paying his rent at the boardinghouse. He even had a small account at the Stone City Bank so that someday he could afford to get married and maybe put some money into a nice little house just on the edge of town.

Just thinking of the house he was planning to buy his fiancée stopped him in his tracks. He had only covered a block or so of his journey which put him in front of one of the newest buildings on J Street, which served as the western border of the courthouse square. Turning on his heels, he stood there on the sidewalk and looked up and the new limestone office building. Because he had helped quarry much of the material used in this modern edifice, it drew his attention early and he often swung by to look it over when he was downtown. To think that his hands had helped to pull these rocks from the ground, nothing to look at when they were fresh, but full of life and business when finished and put into a logical, mathematical order like this. The building was only two stories, but it pulled in the eyes of any passers-by who happened to come within sight. Karl's favorite feature was the rounded turret on the north side – it gave the structure the feeling of a medieval castle that had been married to modern technology. Architecture, stone, construction – these things all made sense to Karl. He only wondered why the rest of life could not be so logical and orderly.

As he drew his eyes back down the front of the building, he caught his own reflection in the plate glass front. Maybe it was shock at the sight of a stranger bundled against the cold, or it could have been the weight of reality hitting him after moments lost in the fantasy of what hard labor can produce. Whatever the reason, Karl's reaction to his image in quickly fading light was to lurch backward off the sidewalk into the street. He kept his footing until he caught a patch of ice under the worn soles of his boots. Normally, he was as sure-footed as anyone on the county, but in this instance the combination of liquor and fright pushed him to the ground on top of the train tracks which ran directly down the middle of the street.

For a moment, Karl did not move. No trains were coming, and because of the weather, most men had their horses in their stables so there was no real traffic out tonight. Lying there, embarrassed at his reaction but resigned to the consequences, Karl tried to figure just how responsible the beer was for this incident.

While he had imbibed several steins, he had not thought his consumption anywhere near enough to impair his judgment. That, he reckoned, was the German in his blood. Born to Wilhelm and Angela Rhodler when they were, as some would say, fresh off the boat, beer had been as much a staple in his home as bread. No matter the laws of their new homeland, the Rhodlers served beer at every meal but breakfast and Karl could not even remember when he had taken his first drink. This meant that while Karl rarely saw a day go by without emptying at least one stein, it also meant that he rarely drank to drunkenness. Most weekends, his friends enjoyed downing beer and hard liquor until they passed out, but Karl saw no need for that kind of

excess. Beer might have been a way of life, but it was by no means a way for him to escape life. It wasn't escape he needed in any case, just resolution and a strong backbone.

And that was one body part he thought might be pretty sore in the morning.

After a moment, he pulled himself up and did not bother to brush the snow and ice off of his clothes. He did look around to see who might have witnessed his fall, but so far as he could see no one at all had been out on the street at that moment. He guessed that was lucky, but had he been knocked unconscious or seriously hurt, he supposed he would rather endure the shame of being found by one of his buddies rather than one of those coal black locomotives that steam down the street on a regular basis.

As he stepped back on the sidewalk and pointed himself north once again, Karl almost smiled at the absurdity of it all. Lately, his life had been much like the last five minutes – a near disaster with no one around to share his misery or pull him out of harm's way. He had gotten himself into the mess, and now, he knew, he would have to pull himself out of it.

Life should have been good for Karl. A steady job, a steady girlfriend, and a loving family. *What else could a man want?* he asked himself. In truth, he had an answer for that question, but it was not the answer he felt proper. Still, he knew what he wanted, right or wrong. He just did not know how to go about getting it.

Conflicted or not, Karl knew he would have to fix this mess and fix it quickly. Indecisiveness was not a trait he wanted to cultivate within himself and even if he was going to have to break someone's heart, he wanted to do it swiftly and humanely.

Regardless of what his heart desired, he had already made commitments. Pulling his hat lower on his head, Karl began to compose the speech he was going to have to give. He simply did not know to whom he was going to deliver it. Yet.

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Karl had met Loretta Turpen at a church social slightly less than a year before. If there was one thing Lutherans knew they could beat the Catholics at it was their Sunday dinners. The Baptists might think they had the Casserole Wars won, but the true defenders of the faith, the men and women who led in the Reformation, had no doubts that on any given Sunday their tables would be filled with more chicken, more cookies, and more new ways to prepare green beans than any other denomination in town.

At the time of the first social of the spring season, Loretta and her family had been attending services for only a few weeks; in fact, Karl had spotted her in worship the first time she had graced the sanctuary of the Calvary Lutheran Church of Bedford, Indiana. There was no one thing about her that stood out – her figure was fine (more than fine actually), her hair long and dark, and her smile a stark contrast to the often gloomy pictures of Christ that had been painted and hung in the narthex a few years before and appeared on a rotating basis every quarter. Karl knew that approaching her abruptly might prove difficult considering the broad-shouldered man who

accompanied her that day. He looked too old to be a husband or boyfriend and quickly Karl realized the large man had to be her father. This did not help to alleviate his timidity.

The church social, however, would prove the opportune time to introduce himself, and if he were lucky maybe they would get tied together in a race across the church yard or sealed together in a potato sack. As it turned out, Karl was not so fortunate, but at one point that afternoon, she did walk away from the festivities to stand looking at a large oak tree at the edge of the church property.

As he neared her position, Karl did not know exactly what he intended to say. She must have sensed him coming because she did not give him the chance to speak first. Just as he was about to introduce himself or make a comment that would probably not seem very witty to him later in the day, Loretta turned her head only slightly and said, "I knew when I saw you that you would be the man I will marry. And I *do* think this is the prettiest tree I have ever seen."

Taken aback at her abruptness, no girl he had grown up with would be so forward – at a church social no less – nor so flippant about such a thing as marriage, Karl had no reply for a moment. While he was by no means a saint, not in any way one might outline *any* criteria for sainthood, he simply had not spoken so openly about such things with a woman. He might drink with his friends and gamble more than Jesus would approve of, but his mother had taught (or threatened) him to respect women, and he had. His eye was always on alert for a pretty face and a nice form, but he had never done more than kiss Amy Harris behind the school gymnasium a few

times after school. Even after he had graduated, most of his socializing had been with the boys and he rarely found himself alone with a girl. He had visited with some on their front porches, with parents ever-ready behind partially closed curtains, and he often walked girls home from social events. But at twenty, marriage was still only an abstract idea that only took form in the images of old people like his parents. He had thought of it, but only in the way one thinks of disease and dying at that age – it happens to people all the time, but never right *now*.

With more reproach in his voice than intended, Karl finally replied, “Hush woman before one of these old gossips hears you! It’s scandalous, it is. Scandalous.”

And then, at nearly the same moment, he caught the smile in her eyes and they laughed.

For the rest of the afternoon, they talked, and thanks to the marathon Lutheran luncheons, there was time for much conversation.

After more formally introducing themselves, they discussed everything – where she was from (up north near South Bend, which Karl had heard of), why she was here (her father was to assume a partnership at a law practice), and what they had planned for the future (besides getting married).

“Do you like working in the quarry, Karl? It seems to dirty and dangerous,” Loretta asked him just as the old ladies across the yard were beginning to clear the dessert table – the surest sign that the afternoon was coming to an end.

“Well, yeah, I do. But I don’t want to be down there in the grime forever. I’m proud of what I do, but here, in America, they say people can become anything they



want. I want to be a foreman someday, work in the mill year-round. I want to be the boss. In fact, maybe I'll just end up owning the whole company," Karl replied with a broad grin which Loretta returned.

"My, my, that is quite ambitious of you." In truth, she was relieved to hear this. To her mind, the physical work of lifting and hauling stone had paid off well for Karl, giving him some very attractive muscles which she did not mind at all. But she also knew he would be a hard sell to her father if he was too content with his current position.

"Let me tell you something, Loretta. I haven't told anyone this yet. You know, the guys at the quarry, most of them don't see past quitting time. They are my friends, but I can't think I'll always live life like them. The other day, Mr. Kirkman, the manager up at the mill, asked me if I would come in for training soon to learn how to run some of the equipment. Sometimes they need a few guys part-time in the winter, and he wants me to be one of them. I think the boys will be happy for me, but they might think I've been going behind their backs to get a promotion. No one my age has been asked to come up to the mill. Not that I know of, at least. The truth is, this will move me into supervision much faster. And it will mean more money." Karl did not know why he confided so much to a girl he had just met that very afternoon, but something about her felt comfortable. He didn't know if he could trust her, if she would turn his good news around and ridicule him for aspiring to be the kind of man that was so beneath her father and her family.

For her part, Loretta saw more than just a future foreman. She saw a future mill owner and a ticket to a comfortable life in this small town where she knew almost no other men, let alone one with some sense of the future and more than a little ambition. She reached out and touched his hand. She might have been joking when she had told him they would marry. She might have meant it. But now she did see something in Karl, a trait that she loved more than his muscles. This man would be successful – she could sense it like a pig can sense truffles. And she would be there with him through it all. “I think that is just wonderful Karl. I think you’ll do a very good job in the mill.”

Rising from where they had been sitting, they joined hands. Loretta smiled and Karl stood slightly more erect than usual. *All these other men, and here she is with me*, thought Karl. For him, this had been the best church picnic of his life. For several months, he still believed this to be true.

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Karl, thanks in part to the beer he had recently consumed, was thinking about none of this on that day in January as he began walking north along Lincoln Avenue. The cold had not reached past the alcohol yet and even under his rather thin topcoat, he felt warm enough. His home, the one he was renting while trying to save enough to purchase his own shortly before the wedding, was located on the north end of town. He had just turned off of 15<sup>th</sup> onto Lincoln and that meant he had about thirteen more blocks to cover before the beer wore off and he could build the fire back up in his stove.

Dark had fallen completely now and few people were out. It was not late by anyone's reckoning, but the piles of snow, along with the gray slush accumulating on the sidewalks after having been thrown from what remained on the streets, seemed to be keeping decent people inside.

The quiet allowed Karl to ruminate a bit about the last few months. His life had been dominated by Loretta and learning the new jobs in the mill which had been, to him, much more satisfying than working the quarry. Sure, planning and cutting *were* a bit easier on your body, but that was not why he preferred it. Quarrying was rough work better suited, he believed, to rough men. The deafening noise of the steam channeler as it ran along its track ramming holes in the topmost layer of stone, the massive blasts of black powder poured down those same holes – even the removal of the dirt and trees, called the overburden, to expose the rock hidden beneath the ground – these were all jobs made for men who appreciated destruction. Karl wanted refinement in his life. He wanted to smooth out the rough stone – to finish a stone panel to be used in some distant building for the utility of people he was unlikely ever to meet. Or from time to time, he would provide a building for his friends and neighbors right here in Bedford. He liked having been the last man to leave his mark, to have stripped away layer after layer of stone until the surface was just as the architect ordered.

Orders were coming in everyday, faster than his bosses or their competition could fill them, as cities all over the country were growing upwards – fed on his limestone. He thought that soon a much bigger promotion might be in the cards. All

he needed to do was learn the mill jobs well, and he hoped he would climb up the company ladder. With Loretta right there behind him.

While this notion, he felt, should have left him with some sense of accomplishment and contentedness, he could not help but feel the weight of the future pull at his soaring hopes for a lifetime of love and happiness. Most of the time he spent with Loretta *was* nice. Increasingly, however, Karl had to fight against her intensifying jealousy and quick temper.

Just a few weeks ago, the couple had strolled downtown on a Saturday night to share some ice cream at Hoover's Confectionary. One night a week, the courthouse square became the center of Bedford's social world. The candy stores and pharmacies, along with most of the other retail establishments, stayed open late, and folks would congregate around the four blocks to get their gossiping out of the way before Sunday morning came, or just to catch up with friends and neighbors they had not had the opportunity to see the preceding week.

Upon entering the shop, Karl ordered and Loretta found a seat for them near the back of the store, away from the windows that looked out on the street. Karl returned with the frozen dessert, and Loretta began to poke at it with her spoon.

"Are you feeling okay, dear?" Karl asked.

"Yes. I'm fine. I do enjoy the ice cream here. They make it fresh each day, just like I remember my grandfather doing when I was young," she replied.

"You don't seem to be enjoying it much. Is there anything else you need?"

Karl did not want to press her further. However, tonight he had been extra careful not

to speak to any other young women, or even to look at them for that matter. Not if he could avoid it, anyway. It was possible that her somberness tonight was unrelated to something he had done, or that she imagined he had done.

“No. I am fine. It’s simply that... outside... the window. Well, there’s that girl, and I simply don’t like her.”

Karl turned to look. “You mean Amy? The one I introduced you to last Saturday? Good God, Loretta, you only talked to her for two minutes. How could you not like her?”

“Because I saw how you looked at her.”

“Looked at her? I didn’t even know that she was out there.”

“Not tonight, Karl. Last week. The way you looked at her when I met her. She’s very pretty and I hate her!”

While there were no other patrons in the store at that moment, the two boys behind the counter turned to look in their direction. Karl knew they were staring but did not turn his head to verify this or to wave them off.

“Lower your voice please. This is ridiculous. I am sitting here with you, right? Why are we even talking about this? Why do we always have to talk about this? We are getting married – me to you. I am not marrying anyone else nor do I wish to. This subject has to drop and it must be very soon.”

“Yes, you are going be my husband, but you are also a man. I know how men think. I know how men act. I know what my father has done to my mother. Oh, yes.

Does that surprise you? It shouldn't. You are a man and he is a man. I know what you are thinking all the time."

"If you feel that way, Loretta, maybe you should finish your ice cream and we should leave. I will take you back home and I will go on to mine and you shall be done with me. How does that sound?"

Loretta, of course, did not feel that this was a good idea at all. "Karl Rholder, we are not separating. I am going to marry you and you will be mine. My father may not think much of you, but he will see his only daughter have what she wants. So don't think you can threaten me idly. I know you are not strong enough to stand up to him. Not unless you want him to call the owner of that mill you work for. Neither of us wants that. Now the answer is simple – you simply must stay away from those other girls."

By the end of her speech, Loretta had undergone an alchemy of sorts from almost hysterical to a frozen calmness. Karl was not sure which manner he detested more. He hated when she made a scene but the coolness of her gaze at the end of her monologue chilled his marrow. Either way, he felt out of his league.

The real problem was that he did love her more than anything else in his life. He knew even as he spoke the words, threats about her father's involvement aside, he would not leave her. Still, the part of him growing uncomfortable with her behavior had been gaining strength and was beginning to threaten his more stalwart emotions with a serious prospect of all-out battle.

Part of him understood her discomfort, even if he felt her outbursts were overreactions. Much of her anger, Karl believed, was driven by Loretta's self-designation as an outsider in the small town. Karl seemed to know everyone, including all of the eligible young ladies, and Loretta knew almost no one who did not attend their church. Karl tried to assuage her feelings of isolation by taking her out and introducing her around, but meeting people Karl had known for years only exacerbated the problem and seemed to make her more bitter.

In his heart, Karl knew that this was the exact reason he did not take her out more often, even though he used his frugality as his excuse.

In truth, Karl had been successful at saving some money and almost had the money for a small house he and Loretta could inhabit after their marriage. It was nothing special – definitely not what she was used to. But he had showed her the property and because it was in the heart of town, on one of the better streets, she was willing to overlook its size. Her father was less satisfied than his daughter, about the house and about Karl. But as he had denied her very little in the past, he could not now deny her what she claimed her heart wanted so desperately. “At least the boy’s a Lutheran,” he had been overheard telling more than a few folks around town.

The house in question sat a few blocks to the west on 14<sup>th</sup> Street which he was about ready to pass on his walk home. The nicest homes in town stood on this street, but within the next two or three blocks. The one he and Loretta had designs on was further down the street, about five blocks or so. He paused as he neared the intersection of Lincoln and 14<sup>th</sup> trying to determine if his internal heater, fueled by

hops and barley, would last long enough to allow him a quick trip up the street and past the house. He had seen it hundreds of times, dozens since talking to the owner several months ago about purchasing it after, or shortly before, his wedding. He had no need to see it again, but need is much less powerful than want to anyone who desires a worldly possession.

Just as he made the decision to turn down the street, out of the corner of his eye, he caught a figure ducking down the alley halfway to the next street. He thought only a little of it, as few were out tonight in the weather and after dark traveling down alleys, even in the better neighborhoods, was not the wisest choice. However, after proceeding carefully down the gently sloping sidewalk on the north side of the street, he began to feel that the figure he had witnessed darting into the alley was a woman. If this were true... how could this be true? Women needed to be careful in the best of times out alone in the town, and there was little doubt to Karl that the darkness and the cold made this much less than an ideal time for that lady, even if she turned out to be less than respectable in her character.

The verdict to escort her to her destination came with only one thought as Karl began to look for the first throughway into the alley from the street. *It's good that Loretta is not here at this moment to seem me walking alone with a woman in a dark alley. What a row that would cause us!*

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A couple of weeks earlier, just after the students' return from Christmas Vacation, the Bedford Cutters had hosted the Needmore Hilltoppers at home.



Basketball had only been introduced to the countians a few years earlier, but already there were signs of the Hoosier Hysteria that would develop in years to come. While the games were not fast-paced compared to later standards, the local folks found them action-packed and cheered wildly with complete enthusiasm for and dedication to their chosen teams. Since Needmore High School, represented by the boys in purple and gold jerseys, was only a few miles north of Bedford, the make-up of the crowd which would nearly fill the gym was fairly split between fans of the two schools for this particular game.

Karl had arrived at the gym early enough to secure good seats on the lower level near the home team's bench. Loretta had planned to come along later with her father who had to get back home from the bank in order to escort his daughter back into town. Her mother, naturally, saw no reason whatsoever to leave the house for a silly game where boys bounced a ball at one another. As game time approached, the crowd began to stream in steadily, like bees returning home to their hive. As game time neared and the excitement of the impending clash grew, a steady buzzing noise filled the enclosed space and served to more fully complete the resemblance. Karl had no idea that what was coming his way would prove much more dangerous than if he had, unaware and unprotected, disturbed a seriously unhappy apiary.

The bleachers around Karl were steadily filling and his efforts to keep two seats cleared for his fiancé and future father-in-law quickly came to naught. With just minutes left before tipoff, one of his saved seats had disappeared to the backside of a particularly rotund Bedford fan. Afraid that his remaining seat would be swallowed

by those same thighs, he allowed a lady about his age to slide past him and fill the remaining space.

“Thank you for giving me a seat. I did not think I would ever find a suitable opening. My name is Sarah, Sarah Schafer,” the young lady said.

“I’m Karl. Rhodler. It’s very nice to meet you, m’am,” Karl replied. “I was expecting some friends, but it appears they are not going to be able to secure a ticket.”

“Well, Mr. Rhodler, it seems you will have to make do with my company.”

“Karl, please, Miss... Schafer was it?”

“No, if I am to call you familiar, then I insist you do the same – Sarah.”

“Yes, m’am. I don’t believe I could disobey you if I had to.”

Throughout the first half of the game, the two did much more talking than watching. Bedford was ahead 20 to 16 at the break. Karl never did see Loretta and her father enter the gym. As he was returning from the concession stand with a drink and a snack to share with his new acquaintance, his thoughts turned to all he had shared with her, and she with him, over one half of a basketball game. She had told him that she grew up in Elkhart, that she had graduated from the Indiana Normal College the year before, that this was her first year teaching Latin at the high school, and that she believed Bedford might become her new permanent home. She had intimated, to speak of it more openly would not have done at all, that she had left a man back in Elkhart, and Karl formed the distinct impression, even from the little information she revealed, that she had no interest in renewing whatever had once been

between them. He had shared the story of his immigration and his dreams for the future. He, curious even to his own mind, had said nothing about Loretta to her.

The second half of the game saw Needmore come from behind to win 32-30. It was only for the final shot that Karl had been able to turn his attention to the action on the court. After the game ended, he did not bother to look for Loretta, thinking that he could not have missed her in the crowded but limited seating of the gym. Fearing that Sarah would have to walk herself home, Karl volunteered to accompany her and vowed silently to seek out Loretta the next day to find out why she had not arrived at the school.

Her boardinghouse only two blocks from the school, Karl did not have to go much out of his way to deliver the teacher to the safety of her home.

As they walked, Karl said, "You know, Sarah, I did okay in high school. If my family had the money, I might have gone to college. It was always important to me to do well in school, my parents being from another country and all. I never thought I'd be walking a teacher home though."

Sarah smiled beneath her scarf and said, "I hope it doesn't make you feel too old since we seem to be about the same age. Being a teacher, Karl, does not make me any different from anyone else."

"That's true I suppose, but when I think about my teachers and how old they seemed... Not always old though. Take my principal, for example. Did you know Mr. Guthrie?"

“No, I did not have the pleasure of meeting him, but I have heard of him. He left just a few years ago for Montana, correct?”

“Yes, at the end of my senior year. Mr. Guthrie, Alfred – that was his name – took his whole family, including his tiny little son he’d named after himself out west to principal a brand new school on the frontier. But see, Mr. Guthrie, for some reason, he always liked me. Even wrote me a few letters when he got out west. He was bigger than life. I guess he wasn’t too much older than I am now, but he seemed so smart. So much more than I could ever be. He always told me that wasn’t true, but I don’t know. I always thought teachers knew everything, that they couldn’t do anything wrong. Is that you, Sarah? Do you know everything?”

“My goodness no! But if you want to keep on thinking I do, I would not continue to correct you.”

Now it was Karl’s turn to smile as they arrived at her door. Conscious of the situation, he traveled with her only as far as the top of the steps but did not enter her room.

She said to him there in the claustrophobic hall, “Thank you for a very pleasant evening. Walking me here was in no way necessary. I could have made it home on my own – I do every day, you know. But I enjoyed spending a few more minutes with you.”

Karl could sense that she was waiting for him to speak. In any other situation – meaning before he had met Loretta – Karl would have asked to call on her some evening during the coming week. Not knowing that this was impossible for him, her

expectations put him in an unenviable position. He felt that if he did not ask to see her again, she would be offended. If he were to tell her at this time so late in the evening about his fiancé, she would likely be very angry with him. The truth was that he did want to see her again, and tonight that would simply have to outweigh any other considerations.

He replied, "I have to get home now. I'll have to get up early for church in the morning, as I suppose you will too. May I call on you next week?"

Delighted but reserved, as only proper women can be, Sarah answered that a visit from Karl would be delightful.

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Karl had seen only one dead body in his life before entering the alley that night.

Because his grandparents and older relatives had stayed behind in Germany, he had simply not made friends with the older folks in town - so death had not been a regular feature in his life. Young men typically spent time with other young men. The world often works that way.

Though he had not often been around death, his one experience with dying took place up close, too close, and not at the comfortable pace most respectable people keep when they can, visiting in homes or the mortuary for funerals where the bodies are boxed like cargo ready to be shipped to some distant port for others to deal with. The accident had occurred six months into his tenure at the quarry; a stone block had fallen from the hooks onto a man below.

Normally, one man operated the crane while several men stayed with the block, attaching a hook at either end of the stone. Often the powerman could not see down into the quarry from where he sat. Instead, he had to rely on signals from the men to know when to begin to lift the block. Most companies had a set of signals that all men used, and though those might vary from one concern to the next, usually they were similar. These men had established that once a block was ready to go, one man would call out to the powerman, "Ready ho!" and he would call back "Set!" The final sign of affirmation came from the man below who would yell, "Take it away!"

For no reason that anyone could later discern, just as the final call was given, one man, Adolf Drehobl, noticed that the hook nearest him would not likely stay in place. He tried to wave off the signal but, realizing that he was too late, ran to it and tried to secure it in place. Rather than traveling forty feet and falling, as Adolf had feared, it rose only eight or ten feet into the air before the hook slipped, crashing the block to the ground. Adolf was still out of position and when the stone fell, it landed in such a way that only his upper half could still be seen.

Some later whispered in reverent tones about the miracle, for only God could have prevented him from having been killed instantly. For the men who had witnessed the last moments of Adolf's life, a miracle would have meant nothing less than sudden death. And no one claimed to have seen God that day at the quarry. Instead, he had not even passed out as the block crushed his lower body, or if so, he had regained consciousness almost immediately. Karl would never forget his screams – much different than the tiny sounds that had come from the alley. Adolf's torment

became unhuman vocalizations of suffering as violent as they were repentant. For the few minutes he was able, he pleaded – to the men standing helpless, to an absent God, to anyone who could hear. Quickly the screams turned to sobs and Adolf Drehobl, whose family had come from Bavaria as well and who was a cousin to the Rhodlers by marriage, knew that he would soon rejoin the land that had produced the instrument of his demise.

Ken Evans, the man who had given the all-clear signal to the powerman, walked through the blood to hold Adolf's head and his hands. That night, at The Sportsman after a few beers and several shots of whiskey, he would tell the men listening that he felt as though he could have pulled old Adolf – the crazy son of a bitch, God bless his soul - right in two, clean out from under the damn block, and it wouldn't have been any harder than pulling a sack of potatoes from under the cabinet at home. That afternoon, he had simply lied to Adolf and told him it would be okay – that the doctor was coming from Oolitic and he would be home with his wife and kids in no time. Evans told him that just because he was hurt he better not think he could miss too much work, that there was too much to do around here for him to lie at home like a woman. And by God, he wouldn't cover Adolf's part of the job, that was for sure. The whole scene occurred in less than five minutes probably, though it felt like hours to those watching it all unfold. Drehobl's injuries were beyond traumatic and biology can only be held at bay for so long. The witnesses, who would tell their own stories at the local taverns for years to come, often were heard to say that no one had ever told lies full of so much love as old Kenny Evans.

What Karl remembered most about that scene was that the blood, spreading quickly across the fairly smooth surface of the stone, was not a thin pool of liquid as some might imagine. Instead, Adolf's blood looked thick, like a puddle of red glue, and filled with chunks that Karl could later only figure were bits of Adolf's insides. Parts of the human body that God had not intended to be seen by others nor meant to be left out in an open limestone quarry

In truth, he had not seen much of the detritus of what once had been his co-worker because he had gotten sick to his stomach almost immediately and had climbed out of the hole to lie on the ground and vomit - well out of everyone's way, and well out of sight.

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As Karl snaked his way through the side yard of one of 14<sup>th</sup> Street's nicer homes, he pulled his coat tight around his body in a futile attempt to keep the warm air in and the frozen air out. By now, though it had only been a short time since he his departure from the tavern, he could tell that the internal heat fueled by the god of grain was waning and that it would be up to his body, no longer bolstered by artificial means, to defend against the weather for the remainder of his walk home. As badly as he wanted to get back to his wood stove and crawl into bed, feeling the full effect of the frigid evening made him even more determined to help this mysteriously wandering woman home.

He had seen the woman enter the alley from a distance, and by the time he had found an unfenced lawn suitable for trespassing (he thought that cutting across would



save him time) and entered the darkened, narrow lane, the woman had traversed almost the full distance of that block and was standing near the place where it opened onto "M" Street. To Karl's surprise, however, she was no longer alone.

Another figure - also seemingly a woman based on the slight figure she cut, evident even in the dark - stood as if she had been waiting for the other. They stood close enough to one another that the tableau they formed in the very dark alley made them look almost conjoined, like a set of twins that might visit with the traveling circus that would come to town in the summers. Though they were barely visible to Karl in their distorted shape, because they had come together near the entrance to a small stable, they were just out of sight of any passers-by along the street - had there been any. Though, considering the chill in the air and the snow still on the ground, it did not seem to Karl that anyone would likely interrupt the scene.

No longer feeling the urgency of the previous moment to walk the lady home, Karl turned to slip quietly out of the alley as not to disturb the women and their clandestine meeting. *Everyone should be allowed her fun*, Karl thought as he began to head back down the tracks he had imprinted into the snow upon entering the alley.

Only a half-step or so into his retreat, Karl froze. One of the ladies had spoken, and though they were now out of his line-of-sight and he could not tell which one, he had heard the voice. And for him, there was no mistaking it.

While a world filled with snow muffles all sounds, those of nature and man alike, it can also serve to funnel it if the conditions are just right. In this case, the voice could not have been more clear, and Karl did not have to round the corner to

know that one of the women standing just yards from his position was Loretta. *What in Jesus' name is she doing out on a night like this*, Karl thought. *Let alone in an alley meeting another woman.*

For an instant, he wondered if it might not be a man, a small one for sure, but a man she was seeing behind his back. In some ways, the thought offered him some comfort. Might not this provide a way for him to settle what had been vexing him so much for the past two weeks? The idea seemed plausible enough to root him in place, for now, so that he could witness whatever might transpire between Loretta and the stranger.

"I'm thankful that you acknowledged my letter and agreed to meet me here," Loretta said. "We do need to speak and I felt that it was only appropriate we do it in person."

The stranger replied, but Karl could not make out the words – she must have been facing the other way or holding something up to her face. He could tell from the pitch of her voice, however, that the stranger was most definitely another woman. Karl was unsure how he felt about having that part of the mystery solved. While a roving Loretta would have given him some legitimate release from their agreement, he was also relieved to know that she appeared to remain true to him. For a moment, he considered the idea that he was the one who did not deserve a woman like Loretta.

"I understand that you have a meeting and cannot stay. That is fine; I do not intend to draw this out any more than is necessary. But I must say what I have to say

before you depart,” Loretta said. Karl could hear the edge in her voice and he knew that she was more than a little angry.

“I am engaged to one Karl Rhodler. He is mine, and I insist that you refrain at once from spending any amount of time in his company. This is your only warning. I would hate to feel that my father would have to cause trouble for you at the school. I know your character as I have heard from others about your conduct in Elkhart. If you continue to act the floozy here in Bedford, that is your business. But you will not corrupt my Karl any further.”

Karl’s stomach dropped. The realization of what was occurring mixed with the beer in his belly conspired to lead him to nausea. Though he was able to hold back the wretches that threatened to give away his position, he was forced to steady himself against the wall of the house in order to maintain his upright position. He wanted nothing more than to leave, but he knew that he could not. His instincts told him to reveal himself, but the fear inside him would not allow his body to move forward nor his voice to sound. In truth, he did not know what he feared more: Loretta’s anger or Sarah’s disappointment in him.

“Miss Turpen, you seem to forget that I, too, am familiar with the past – yours in particular. I know why your father had to leave his practice at home and come south. I have heard about your behavior with men and your propensity for causing trouble with respectable women. I wonder if you even know Karl, other than to identify him in a crowd. I do not believe a word of your slander and I will not stand here and listen to this rubbish any longer,” Sarah replied.

Karl heard the rustling of clothes and feet against snow as Sarah prepared to depart. But something in Loretta's voice (it may simply have been the volume) stopped her because she did not continue towards the school, which would lead her to walk directly in front of Karl.

"Stop this instant! I am telling you that you have been keeping company with a man who is spoken for – by me! – and you dare to walk away!"

Sarah turned back toward the irate woman. "I hear what you are saying. I do. But do you know what I think, Loretta? I think you are insane. There, I have said it. I will talk to Karl about this when I see him next, and if, if I say, he admits what you are saying, you can be sure that I will no longer see him. Unless, that is, his desire is to be with me. I can see how a good man such as he would long to get away from someone such as yourself. That is not to say I believe anything you have just told me. In fact, I would like to demand, here and now, that it is you who stay away from us. Good evening." Again Sarah turned, in her mind putting an end to the interview.

What happened next, Karl did not have to see with his eyes to witness. Loretta - angry at Karl, angry at Sarah, and angry at the world she had left behind – discovered a loose brick lying on the ground next to the stable, hoisted it into the air above her head as high as she was able, and smashed it squarely into the back of Miss Sarah Schafer's skull. When the teacher fell to the ground, Loretta dropped to her knees and continued to pound the brick into her rival until her arms could no longer lift the object and her tears would no longer flow. Suddenly cognizant of what she had done, she pulled herself from the ground and ran towards Lincoln Avenue.

Stepping from his hiding place, Karl caught her in his arms and she shrieked as Sarah did not have the chance to do. Anyone who later claimed to have heard noises in the alley that night most likely heard Loretta screaming out in surprise at Karl rather than the schoolteacher who had remain as mute as the snow upon which she had fallen.

“What have you done?” Karl asked though clenched teeth. “What have you done?”

“I... I... I... hit her, I think. Oh, Karl she’s hurt. She’s hurt and I don’t know what to do. You must help me. You must,” Loretta pleaded.

“Help you. Get the hell away from me. Get home. You have blood all over you. Her blood.” This sight, along with Sarah’s body lying just beyond where they stood, almost led Karl into the kind of insanity which had clearly infected his fiancé. For a fleeting moment, he considered smashing in Loretta’s face with a brick of his own. Breathing deeply, he managed to regain enough of his composure left to hide this murderous thought. Instead he repeated his command, “I said get out of here now, woman. Go home. Clean up. I’ll deal with you tomorrow. If I can.”

“Oh, Karl. I knew you would help me. I knew it. My horse is just a street over. I’m going home, but I want you to know I love you. I didn’t mean to hurt her, but I did it all for you. For us.”

This fact once again almost made Karl physically sick. He dropped his eyes from Loretta, and when she tried to place a small kiss at the corner of his mouth he released her from his grip with a slight shove, not hard enough to make her tumble,

but with enough force to produce a whimper from her. For Karl, there was some satisfaction in knowing that he had hurt her, though it was nothing more than a shallow emotional wound, but even that slight victory hardly registered as he pushed past Loretta to check on Sarah.

He knew the second he dropped to his knees beside her that she was gone. Her chest did not rise and fall with breath nor could he discern, with a hand so flat and cold, a heartbeat in her chest. He laid his head between her breasts and felt the familiar shape that had given him solace and had allowed temporary escape from the reality of life with Loretta. He smoothed her hair and began to weep. With the tears dripping down his face freezing when they hit the body in his arms, he first placed a kiss on her already cold brow and then one on her lips.

“I only knew you for a short time, Sarah, but I know that I loved you. I loved you with my soul in a way that I will never love another. I don’t know if you loved me or not, and I know that my deception has caused this. Oh, God! I’ve killed you! I’m so sorry. So sorry. I hope that you can forgive me from heaven. After what I have done, I doubt that I will see you there – my reward will be an answer to my actions here, fiery and eternal. But I know you are an angel in heaven as you were on Earth. Goodbye. I love you.”

Knowing that he could not stay with the body, that the police would never believe the true story of what happened, Karl stood to leave. Unsure of when the body might be discovered, he recoiled at the thought that this woman who had drawn him in

so quickly and so completely would lie exposed all night. With solemn reverence, he lifted her and placed her as gently as he could in the barn that stood nearby.

No one saw him leave the alley that night, nor was Loretta spotted during her departure. Anyone who passed Karl on his way home simply chalked up his weaving stagger along the dark streets to the drunkenness so common in those German immigrants. Even his tears could be dismissed as the outward expression of a life of quiet desperation brought to the surface by too much alcohol consumed at the rowdy Sportsman.

Both Karl and Loretta stopped passing by the house on 14<sup>th</sup> Street they had planned to purchase. The owner had been certain that Karl would be his buyer and had no explanation to give himself when the young man abruptly stopped coming by to visit and discuss the price.

Sarah's body was taken by train back to her hometown where she was buried in the family plot. Once a year, on her birthday, Mr. and Mrs. Schafer would receive a card addressed to them but intended for their daughter. Every year the card would contain at least one basketball program from a Cutters game and would be signed Mr. and Mrs. Karl Rhodler of Bedford, Indiana.

The Schafers mourned their daughter for the rest of their lives. As the murderer was never found, the one small consolation that the grieving parents held onto was that Sarah had been so very fortunate to have made at least two such good friends during her short and tragic time as a teacher of Latin in southern Indiana.

### Walt: Sculpting Life and Death

Things certainly were looking up for Walter Murphy, but one could not blame him for wanting more.

Typically, his days were filled with work - backbreaking, hard work – and so at quitting time, on most days, Walt would carry himself back home for a quick nap before heading out to whatever entertainment he might be able to find. It seemed no matter how long a man worked in the quarries or how strong his body became, the whistle at the end of day gave him permission to be tired. Like his father, and his father before him, Walt was a stone man. With the market crash in '29, just about a year and a half before, he knew he was lucky to have work at all. Men outside the industry who had been jobless for months now considered a few sore muscles or a smashed finger here and there signs of prosperity, not symptoms of a grueling lifestyle of labor.

On this day, as on all others, when the final whistle blew to signal quitting time, Walt stored his tools and made for the time clock to punch himself out. To do this meant climbing out of the deep quarry and entering the pole barn that had been erected at the jobsite as a temporary office. These buildings were never too sturdy - even if a job at a particular location took several years, whatever structures were erected would still only stand for the duration of that project.

After punching his timecard and replacing it in the holster on the wall, Walt stood for a moment just outside the door to the office to take in the scene before him. At this height, he had a view of the entire quarry – in fact, he could see several others



beyond it as well. Visitors from another planet, or maybe just another county, might imagine that Paul Bunyan had stopped here to dig for some reason lost to time. At least, that's what Walt often told himself when he stood to look out over the pitted horizon. Maybe the giant woodsman had stopped to bury his blue ox but had not been satisfied with his own work. Could be that he was searching for water, or gold perhaps. No matter his reasons, he had left behind negative space for future generations to ponder and explore.

Walt, however, knew the truth.

The land around his southern Indiana home quietly rolled, undulated, across time and space, pushed towards the sky by ancient glaciers thousands of years ago as they moved relentlessly southward, simultaneously flattening the land to the north. The decent eventually slowed, however, and the ice stopped, near what someday would become the small community of Waverly, finally retreating back to the wastelands of the Arctic Circle. The rolling hills which they had formed ran with rivers and streams from the water provided by the melting glaciers and which helped to feed the growing deciduous forests and enrich the land that someday would be home to cattle, swine and crops. Those hills also protected for thousands of years the remains of a tropical sea, ancient even to the glaciers which men had never seen. Millions of years before, tiny crustaceans had prowled the oceans which would not last, as nothing does, and had – without thought or intention – left behind their shells in a watery graveyard that over time would form the limestone Walter and his father and his father would pull from beneath the hills to help build a nation.

Even though quarry work ran in the family, Walt aspired to become a carver, one of the men who would, with hammer and chisel, to strip away layer after layer, ridding a fine piece of art of its superfluous shell – pounding the excess material into nothing but dust, until something beautiful and unique emerged. For now, the company hired mostly European immigrants, trained in their own countries on other kinds of stone, generally marble, to do the most artistic work. The men in Walt's family, and their own friends and neighbors, had always worked in the quarries, pulling the stuff from the ground, running the crane, or leading the steam-powered channeler. But Walt had, on occasion, filled in at the mill running the planer, which smoothed the stone to be used for structural façades, and he had gotten a taste of what he determined was the high life. No sweating it out in the summer and no layoffs in the winter. In truth, he also like the idea of being the last one to touch a slab before it was loaded and shipped, the last one to make his mark before the piece would be set and displayed in front of an appreciative and awed public. Planing would do, but the idea of carving had drawn him in and would not let go. As counterintuitive as it might seem to some, in this time and place immigrants were valued for their skill and a local man of Irish descent had little chance of moving into such a coveted and lucrative position, for the carvers often made more money than the foreman – at times more than the executives if the project was important, and difficult, enough.

When he finished surveying the land before him, Walt exhaled deeply and turned towards home. From behind him a hand landed on his shoulder. Walt had been sufficiently lost in his own thoughts not to hear the work boots kicking gravel as

the owner of the hand had strolled up to him. He started a bit - not enough to be noticed, he was sure -- as he turned to see Hal Cobb attached to the hand that still lay on his shirt sleeve.

“You wanna go down to Turner’s and play some cards tonight?” asked Hal, another local who worked down in the open quarry with Walt. He was generally the powerman, the man who ran the crane. The wrong gear mashed in the wrong direction or too quickly before the hooks were set, and a man could be turned to sour mash between the quarry floor and a large block. A good powerman meant safety to everyone on the job, and usually this position was given exclusively to an older worker with many years of experience. Hal had a steady hand and the fact that someone of his age, roughly the same as Walt, had been entrusted with the lives of his crewmates spoke to his skill and trustworthiness. No one gained, or kept, that job if the men did not believe in him.

Walt paused before reaching out to collect his lunch pail, usually the last item to be gathered before leaving the work site. In truth, Walt rarely passed up a card game, but he always liked to take a second to be sure he didn’t have a better option. Plus it made most guys think he might have other things going on in his life than poker. “Yeah. I guess so. He got any whiskey tonight, you think?” Walt asked.

Turner’s was not the only store in the tiny village of Needmore. Since Oolitic was nearly two miles away, and Judah another two miles in the opposite direction without so much as a single store of its own, Needmore acted like a mini version of what politicians would someday call a Regional Center of Commerce. At that time,

Bedford, the county seat, was just too far of a trip to make for dry goods, tobacco, or a little kerosene. So Needmore always had at least two stores, and cars were beginning to become common enough that both now sold gasoline, and had for some time. It was Turner's, though, that had the market cornered on homemade liquor – the stuff folks down south called moonshine. This went a long way towards explaining why the quarrymen most often held their games at this location rather than Cotton Evan's place just across the road and back toward the quarries about a half mile.

“Got enough for you, me and the rest of ‘em – plus enough for every preacher in town. That is, if they happen to stop by tonight,” Hal said.

“Aww, I figured he must,” replied Walt. “Sign’s been up all week.”

Though Needmore had no marshal, the county boys did come through once or twice a day now that the department had a couple of automobiles. Old Turner might not have been a scholar worthy of a chair at Harvard, or even a chair at the barber shop for that matter, but he knew the way the world worked. When the whiskey was in, a Coca-Cola sign hung in the front window. If the store was dry, the sign would disappear. Even though most of the sheriff's deputies would stop by Turner's during their off hours, it seemed to be asking for trouble to put out a sign that said “MOONSHINE SOLD HERE.” So long as he kept it quiet and away from the ladies and the kids, the cops left him, and his customers, alone.

“I suppose I'll stop by. Around eight maybe,” said Walt. “I got some stuff to do around home, then I'll come over.” Admitting to a nap would not exactly get a guy ribbed by the fellas, but talking about how tired his body was after a day moving stone

surely would. Napping, for the single men, had become an unspoken component of the daily routine. The married guys were different. They had to go home and take time with the kids, eat the dinner their wives cooked them, and maybe work in their yards or woodsheds for a while.

*Why don't those old timers need more sleep?* Walt wondered to himself as Hal, too, headed for home.

"See you then buddy!" Hal hollered as he began his short walk, though Walt only just heard him.

As Hal slipped from his conscious mind, Walt began to ruminate on his own living conditions. He wanted to be married. Someday - but not right now. This was about as close as he could come to setting a date.

For Walt, getting girls to take out on dates had never been a problem. Getting more than that from most of them had never meant much effort on his part either. He may never have had much money but he had always been rich with girls. Lots of girls. As many as he could get a hold of, in fact, but he had never gone steady with just one girl.

He had only just turned twenty-five and felt in no hurry to settle down. In fact, he saw twenty-five as just about the perfect age. The eighteen year olds practically chased him around; they saw him as being much more mature and worldly than the high school boys who wanted to take them to basketball games or the senior prom up to the high school. No, Walt was a man, and they could smell it on him. The sweat of a day's labor, the hard muscles developed from lifting and moving the stone, and the

tan on his bare arms and bare back from days working in the sun. And if there's one thing a man like Walt can do, it's make a girl a woman.

Walt, of course, never passed up the opportunity to oblige them when the opportunity presented itself.

But he also liked a real woman from time to time, and at his age the thirty-year olds unhappy with their husbands, or wild enough never to have been married, found a thrill in his youth. Again, Walt obliged them when he could and allowed them to indulge in their own fantasies of youth. He did none of this out of magnanimity or a sense of duty to his community.

He was just horny. Not unlike everyone else on the planet, Walt figured.

Most weekends he would find a girl and take her out to some country version of a big city speakeasy – usually little more than a congregation of locals in some farmer's barn. That is, if she was a little older. Then he'd get her drunk and him drunk and head back to his little shack near the quarries. If the girl was younger, he'd just drop by Turner's or some other place, buy the homemade sauce, and head back to his place early to give the little lady her first taste of booze – and of Walt.

Recently, Walt had been juggling a couple of girls. One had an uncle who carved up at the mill and the other was a tart he would have graduated high school with, had he stayed in past the ninth grade. Walt had known her for just about his whole life and she was comfortable. In fact, they had shared one of their first sexual experiences together just before Walt had dropped out of school entirely, out behind the school gym. The road around the school passed this area but the ground dropped

off sharply so that anyone who could climb down just a few feet would not be visible from the road or from the school. Not much happened that day, but she had let Walt put his hand up her skirt. At the time, he figured the world couldn't treat him any better than that.

The other girl was Italian and much more exotic. Her parents would not have accepted her seeing a non-Catholic boy. Had they known what else Walt had led their daughter to do... well, he just hoped they didn't have any connections to those big city mafia types you always read about in the papers. He probably wouldn't stick with her too much longer anyway - it's not like he was in love. He was after all still alternating weekends with another woman - but he was growing fonder of her than he felt comfortable being.

Mostly the Klan had died out in Indiana after D.C. Stephenson's conviction for rape and murder back in the twenties. However, there were more than a few men around who would not like the idea of a nice white boy settling down with a dark-skinned, Italian Catholic. They could come to work, attend church wherever they wanted and spend their money in every store in town. But when it came to making babies darker than the pasty white color their momma's gave them, there could be trouble. One thing Walt did not want was a two-front war - one to fight against some mobster from New York and the other a bunch of hillbillies who thought screwing Italians was okay so long as nothing solid came out of it.

That was getting too far ahead of himself anyway. Even if he wanted to settle down, which he did not, Walt did not have the means to support anyone but himself.

Maybe he could if he gave up the drinking and the gambling. But for now, in the battle royal between his heart and old Ernie Turner's still and poker games, the heart would have to wait. Besides, for now Walt just lived in an old quarryman's shack at the about a hundred yards off of a tapped-out hole.

Late in the previous century, some of the stone companies got the idea that building shanty towns at the quarry site could benefit them in at least two significant ways: 1) The men would be there and ready to work in the mornings without having to worry about transportation, and 2) The company could control their behavior almost completely. The on-site housing worked particularly well at quarries far from the towns. Up in Owen County, the Statehouse Quarry practically housed an entire village of men. Spencer, the nearest town, was eight or ten miles up the road, so staying at the quarry made sense for most of them.

The company housing never quite worked out in the Needmore quarries. They were simply too close to the towns. Needmore proper began no more than a half mile down the road and Oolitic only about two miles in the other direction. The smaller of the two, Needmore, was also more family oriented with a couple of churches in addition to the stores. Oolitic drew most of the younger men, even the ones with families. It, too had a couple of churches in addition to several stores, hotels, restaurants, and one moving picture theater meant more to do all the way around.

Currently, Walt was the only person staying in one of the remaining twelve cabins. When he arrived home each evening, he imagined that he was a lone wanderer in a lost age who responsibility it was to repopulate a ghost town. Each was identical,



about fifteen by fifteen – plenty of space for one man but crowded when a family had need to take up residence. This did not happen often but had been not uncommon during the early years. Walt's living space had a bed and two chairs, one rocking and one an old Victorian piece with plush cushions on the seat and on the back. The arms in particular were quite ornate; they had clearly been hand carved. The wood was scratched in a few places and the cushion back had a tear that ran its length. Since this was on the back, Walt just pushed it up against the wall. He always said he found it at the edge of a quarry one day, but the way he looked at it made you believe that there was more to the story than Walt told.

After pushing open the front door he did not bother to keep locked, Walt followed his usual routine – he fell fully clothed and booted onto his bed to grab as much rest as possible before having to attend to the duties of the night. Upon waking, he would usually step outside to one of the communal pumps still in use and splash his face with a couple of handfuls of the cold water. Baths were for Saturdays, before a date. Heating up the water on the stove, filling the tub, and then cleaning up the mess simply took too much time and effort to repeat daily. Smelling and looking clean made for a nice evening with the girls, but the men who surrounded him during the week were hygienically similar and smelled no better.

On this day, as on the others, he stepped back into his one room to see if he had any food he could throw down before heading out to the card game. Left with a few semi-stale Saltines at the bottom of an old tin, Walt downed them and figured the

few cents it cost to grab a plate at Turner's made just as much sense as keeping food around the place.

He had to exit the deserted workman's camp by a different route than he entered when coming from the quarries since Turner's was in the opposite direction. Walking up to the highway, just at the edge of the last shack, Walt noticed that the dead raccoon which had appeared a couple of days ago was still lying just off the footpath. When Walt first noticed it, he didn't even bother trying to figure what might have happened. But after two days of passing by and watching it slowly bloat with the gases of death and decay, he began to feel some sympathy for the creature. Several possibilities had run through his mind concerning the demise of the raccoon, but none of them seemed sufficient to him. He had not seen the sign of a fight, so it was unlikely it had died from wounds sustained protecting a home or babies. Maybe it had been rabid? This thought sent a chill up Walt's spine. Being tough enough to haul stone was one thing, but he had seen, once when he was very young, the effect of rabies on a boy who had lived down the road from his family. The boy had been only eight but Walt still could recall the intensity of his screams –shrill and high pitched like the mountain lions that still roamed the woods around the small village - at night when the boy's mother had tried to wash his head with a cool cloth. He had seen through the boy's window how his family had locked him away. He had heard his parents whisper about how the boy had raged and tried to bite his siblings. Cruel as it might seem, no one knew what to do. A day or two later, a doctor had come from

town, and a short time after that Walt remembered that they held the funeral up at the Baptist church.

More likely, the 'coon had gotten into some engine oil or coolant kept for use on the quarrying machines, but the threat of rabies right outside his door still put Walt on high alert for anything or anyone displaying weird behavior. Soon, he knew the bloated body would begin to disappear, other animals coming to feast on the carcass and the remains drying up until nothing would remain but what might look like a scarf left in the rain for too long, until that too was blown or washed away.

Trying to put those thoughts at the back of his mind, Walt climbed the gentle hill and met the road where it would lead him, in about ten minutes, to Turner's store. When he arrived, only old Turner was behind the counter, bacon frying behind him on a larger, big-bellied stove. Walt must be a bit early; that meant he would have time to down some dinner before the game began.

Ernie Turner greeted Walt as he approached the counter, "You ready for some of the good stuff, kid? I finished a batch off fresh today."

Walt smiled and replied, "Naw, Ernie. Not yet. I will take some of that bacon with whatever else you got around here. All I had at home was some crackers. I want to get something down 'fore the cards come out."

"You say that like you ever have food around that place of yours," Ernie cracked. "When's the last time you came in here and didn't want something to eat? Why you think I had the bacon going already?"

Walt smiled. Ernie was a good man. Old, yes. Bootlegger, sure. Still, he looked after the men of the community. He remembered what it was like being young and he tolerated a lot from them. He also could offer a firm hand when they needed it. He may not have been a deacon up to the church, but he cared and probably did a better job leading his flock than many of the men who claimed to be doing it for God.

As Walt bit into his sandwich, Ernie asked him, "So you still lookin' to get into carvin' son? Lou stopped by the other day and mentioned he might be looking for someone to apprentice with him. I didn't say nothin' to him, but I figured it wouldn't hurt if you stopped by to see him one day."

Lou was Luigi Garfola, the best carver at the company and not too long off the boat. In truth, he had lived over by Oolitic now for going on thirty years, but he had been born in Italy and had learned his craft carving Carrera marble, the same kind Michelangelo had used to carve his most famous works. Foreigners had never fit in completely in these small towns – that is why they all lived together over in a small area that might have been called Little Italy anywhere else but was known as Dago Town here – but all things considered the men who worked in and around limestone recognized the skill the immigrants had and generally accepted them. If anything got in the way of full assimilation, it was often less their foreignness than it was their Catholicism. Even the non-religious men had a distrust of Catholics left over from their Puritan ancestors; they just could not understand how men supposed to be worshipping God could follow a pope who thought he had a direct line to the Man Upstairs himself.

Walt did not look up from his plate but answer Ernie with a quiet melancholy, “Well, I might stop by. I kind of know his niece, but I don’t think he knows that. All he can do is tell me no, right?”

“That’s the spirit, kid. Just look at what all I got here. My pop wasn’t nothin’ but a sharecropper – couldn’t even get on at the quarries. He was a good man, I’ll tell ya, but never had a dime. Now, look. I got a store and a still and you guys to bother me all the time. What more could a man want?”

Walt grinned at Ernie as he finished the last of his potato chips. The guys had begun congregating around the table in the back room so Walt wiped his hands and made his way behind the counter to where the action would be.

The game was always five-card draw or seven-card stud. Nothing wild. Stakes were pretty low, but then again money was pretty tight. On a good night a guy could figure on having a pretty big Saturday night in his future, but not much more. A bad night at the table might mean that a guy would have to count on someone to feed him lunch the rest of the week.

Still, times were hard around the country. Men were out of work everywhere so the fact that the quarrymen had any money at all to spend, let alone gamble away, said something about the importance of limestone to the area. Right now, there were orders for stone coming in and stock market or not, men would have work in southern Indiana.

One way or the other, Indiana Limestone had to get the stuff out of the ground; nothing else mattered Monday through Friday. To the men working the quarries, the

Wall Street doings of a bunch of Ivy League snobs too good to sit down on a slab of limestone and drink a beer with them meant next to nothing. Or less. Of course, they had all heard about a lot of people losing money when the stocks fell, but only a couple of them had even some vague idea about what that meant. The local paper had run a story the morning after the crash about two businessmen in Bedford who had decided jumping out of their office windows would be better than being broke. To make a guy want to jump out of a window, Walt figured, stocks must be something pretty swell. Even then, guys who had never had money found it awful hard to feel a lot of sympathy for those who had and then lost it. Besides, he could imagine a whole lot worse than broke and saw no reason to leave this world with all its women and liquor just because you ended up poor.

He didn't know anything about heaven, but he knew women real well and that meant he intended to hang around as long as he could. Anyway, a guy didn't need money to get a girl. Leastways, not as long as he spent what he did have on her. That was usually enough and went a long way towards explaining why Walt struggled to hold on to his cash for any length of time.

Getting paid and getting laid meant that Walt and the others just did not have the time or the attention to focus on the news coming in from the rest of the country about farmers with no crops to sell and men with no way to feed their families. In fact, most people around here, not just those in the quarries, still had work. Pay the men doing the labor and the men selling groceries, hardware and illegal liquor had plenty of business too.

And the relative prosperity was all about one project – one building. Out in New York, a bunch of bankers, or some similar kind of people, had decided to put up a skyscraper and call it the Empire State Building. Reaching the entire one hundred two stories, the limestone façade would be mined exclusively from one single quarry in Needmore, Indiana. That business had gone to the company on whose land Walt was living and with whom he had occasionally been employed. They needed men again and he needed work. For the duration of the project, Walt had been one of the men to liberate the raw materials from the ground, load it onto trucks, plane it in the mill, and get it ready to ship by rail. Like the others, he took pride in his work, but he also took pride in the stability of a regular paycheck, even if he did tend to spend it on life's fleeting pleasures.

All told, when the project was finished, the building would take one hundred forty five days of jobsite labor exactly. Walt had been working for nearly two years in the pit that was already being called Empire Quarry and he, along with the other men, knew the balance of the order would be filled any day. After that, there might be one more load if the men in New York had dropped or otherwise destroyed a number of slabs, but in a real sense the job was almost done.

That meant uncertain futures for them all, but today the men had worked. Tonight, at least, there was money enough to play cards.

Tonight the game had drawn five men: Walt, Hal, Ermal Turner, Bailey Scales, and John Bushman, a foreman at the quarry who thought that playing cards with his men every couple of weeks was good for morale. The deal was his first.

“Boys, dealer calls the game, draw or stud, nothing wild, one cent ante. Throw ‘em in and I’ll deal first,” recited the foreman as if from rote.

The antes hit the center and the cards flew around the table clockwise. Bushman had chosen to begin with a game of draw.

Over the next three hours or so, the men gambled and drank what Ernie would bring them. They smoked their cigars and laughed, louder too as the hard liquor began to work its magic.

When he drank and played cards, Walt found the best way not to reveal what he was holding was to daydream. He imagined being the one to carve the chair that sat in his one-room shack. How smooth the hand must have been that worked the wood away until the ornate figures emerged. How delicate must have been the tools that whittled away hundreds of years of nature in order to bring forth designs that had been there all along but that only the master carver could see. To be responsible for producing a piece of art that was as useful as anything more plain and less well made must have brought some kind of contentment to that man’s life. Walt knew that stripping away the stone to reveal what was beneath would do that for him, would make his life mean something not just to himself but to the world. He didn’t want or need fame, but he did need to know that his work meant something to someone.

“Dammit, Walt! Boy? You gonna bet or fold? Do something or go home,” chided John. Though he fit in well enough with the men who worked for him, the foreman mentality was sometimes hard for him to shake.

“Sorry guys. I’ll fold this one. I got shit,” replied Walt.



This last curse brought Ernie into the back room from the front. "Watch that language now. You all know the rules. Keep the cussin' to the quarries and your homes. Last warning for the night." Moonshiner or not, Ernie did have his limits. His philosophy was that if any women or children wandered into the store, they wouldn't be able to see the half-filled Ball jars in the rear of the store. But swearing could not be confined to one room, and Ernie was not going to have his paying customers with their families scandalized by that kind of language.

The men glanced up sheepishly at Ernie and apologized as he returned to the front. At some point during his scolding of the five grown men, another had entered the store. Had they been paying attention, the men would have heard Ernie greet Luigi Garfola out front and the Italian insist that he would be allowed into the back room. "I got someone to talk to. Let me in," Lou stated firmly and with the confident but slightly broken English of an immigrant who had been in America longer than he had lived in his native country.

The curtain to the back room flew to the side and the angry carver planted his feet as he glowered at Walt.

"You. You did this to my niece. My baby Gina. And you gonna make it right."

Walt, who had no cards in his hands to hide behind, did not realize at first what the old Italian was talking about. He was sure Lou did not know what was going on with his niece. Why he would be here in the middle of a card game, Walt could not figure.

“She’s gonna have a baby. Your baby. I’m either gonna kill you, you gonna quit your job and move away, or you gonna marry that girl.”

The other men at the table were reacting more quickly than Walt. Ermal and Bailey had pushed their chairs back as if to distance themselves from Lou’s target, as if he really were the kind of Italian they watched in gangster movies. Hal and John Bushman had stood in case Lou decided to make his move. Out of respect for Lou’s anger, they had not completely blocked the space between the Italian and his soon-to-be nephew-in-law, but they were positioned to respond if Walt needed an assist.

For his part, Walt did nothing more than stare at the old man. Two thoughts had entered his mind and carried him away from the confrontation. One was of the raccoon just outside of his shack, the bloated creature that would soon return to the ground. Deep in his mind, away from the events unfolding around him, he wondered why people never carved death. Some took pictures of their dead relatives, but when stripping away the stone, layer after ancient layer, to find what hid inside, why did no one ever see death? Those little fossils that made up the limestone showed that it was only here because of what had passed away. Walt knew that were he ever to carve, his first project would be that dead raccoon, bloated as it was just at this very moment only a half mile away.

His second thought was that he in fact had brought something from nothing. He had not craved it from stone but from flesh.

He guessed he must be some kind of artist after all.

### Luigi: The Italian Carver

Standing on the deck of the passenger ship, the old woman leaned against the rail and contemplated the waves as they slapped against the hull. Over and over, the water crashed and retreated as the boat cut through the endless ocean. After days at sea, the old woman had decided that she and her family would never again see land – let alone feel hard dirt beneath their feet. Like Noah before them, only without God's promise, her family's destiny would be a life on the water. Italy had been home to the Garfolas, her late husband's family, since the time of the Caesars, possibly earlier when the first Brutus liberated the Romans from the Tarquins. These stories her husband had claimed to be true. Who was she to say otherwise?

Her own family, the Monacellis, had an ancient history of its own, for which she was exceptionally proud. Many Monacellis had served the church, and at one time, the Medicis of Florence as trusted friends and allies. At one time she had felt her family's place in history to be indisputable because, as a young child, she had travelled to Florence with her mother and father where she was shown the family name carved into one of the old palace walls. Many years later, in remembering this journey with her parents, she realized that the name could have been no more than that of an artisan who worked on the building. A mason who laid brick and mortar – nothing more. Stories were no more than ghosts that haunted those who still lived. No one could prove them false any more easily than true.

However, in one season of her life, within her youthful fantasies - indulgences during the drearier moments when she had to help her mother with the endless duties

of washing clothes, cleaning the house, or preparing meals – she envisioned an even more profound and glorious contribution with which to credit her ancestors. For her, nothing less than having her great-grandfather times one thousand sailing to the shores of Italia from the ruins of Troy with the noble Aeneas would suffice. Together they had encountered and defeated the Cyclops, the Scylla, the Sirens, and all of the other beasts of the Mediterranean too hideous and too dangerous to name in a more rational age. They had landed, as brothers, on the shores of Italia and conquered the land to rebuild Troy. Though they had not lived to see the glory days of the Republic and the Empire, they surely had spent eternity together admiring what had come after them and reliving their many adventures in fleeing a dying city so that it could be reborn.

Now those were no more than dreams, myths she had created in order to survive the drudgery of household chores. Myths she had been forced to abandon once she had her own husband and children to care for – not to mention both her and her husband's aging parents who had all now departed for heaven, bless their souls.

The time for dreaming was over, she knew, and though her son had told her that life in America would be a “new beginning,” she was wizened enough to understand that, at her age, there would be no starting over. The years in a small Tuscan village may not have exposed her to the beating pulse of the world, but she had come to know that life is hard, people grow painfully old, and then they die. A few are allowed escape from the crippling misery of aging - both a beautiful blessing and terrible shame, to her way of thinking. A person can try to squeeze as much happiness out of his time as possible, but no deals with God nor Satan will alter the final results.

As she broke the spell under which she had fallen while staring at the waves, the old woman turned her head once to the right and once to the left to see who might be watching her there. Seeing no one, she smiled to herself and spit as far into the vast ocean as she was able. She watched as the white glob of pure Italian saliva bobbed and weaved with the current until the last discernible trace of it disappeared, returning to the world from which it came.

*Ah, maybe one can reclaim some part of youth, even if only for a moment,* she thought as she prepared to spit once more, this time with something deeper and more substantial so that it might remain in sight even longer.

With a snort and a grunt, she prepared to launch another over the side of the ship. Just as she thrust forward to achieve maximum distance, her son, Luigi, yelled from somewhere behind her, "Momma, are you okay? What is the matter?"

*Blast. I've been caught,* she thought, but not without recognizing the humor of the situation. Turning to confront her son, she marshaled every bit of the stoicism she had ever possessed in order not to laugh at the sense of urgency in his voice.

Coughing into her hand to stifle the giggle in her throat, she replied, "I am fine, son. Can't you see when an old woman is thinking? Why are you here to interrupt me at all? I thought you would be looking for the land we are never going to reach."

"Momma, you are not old. You are fifty, and in America fifty is not old. It is young and you can do anything you want. Second, you looked sick, like you were going to spit up over the rail. I was worried that you felt unwell. But I can see that

you are fine now. Finally, we will get to America, Momma. I promise. We are due to arrive sometime tomorrow, the captain tells me.”

Though she had to regain her composure once again at the mention of spitting up, she chastised her son. “Of course, I am not sick. Do you think I would not tell you if I were?” She was not exactly embarrassed for anyone to know of her little game against the ocean, but for now she wanted to keep it for herself. No one needed to know; it was no part of her son’s business. She was still his mother and if she did not wish to share, she would not.

The old woman said, “I do not see why you are so excited, Luigi. I know you have a job waiting, but I do not know why I came with you. I have lived my whole life in Italy, as did my mother, and her mother before. How different can America be, I ask you?”

“Momma, it is almost the Twentieth Century. Everything is changing, and no where faster than America. They say everyone is free to do as he pleases. Everyone is rich and has money to ride in trains. They say no one goes hungry. They say it is ‘The Promised Land’.”

“I do not know who you have been talking to, but in church I have learned that Moses did not get to enter The Promised Land and I do not think we will get to either. Maybe you should have listened to the father more closely. All I see is water, and that is all I’ve seen for days – for weeks it seems. I think we will soon fall off the edge.”

“Oh, Momma, why do you have to be that way? You know we will get there – tomorrow. The men from the stone company will meet us after we have come through officially and put us on the right train to get to Indiana.”

Luigi’s mother did not know Indiana from Jupiter, but when her son said the word all she heard was “India.” She had imaged for weeks statues of people with many arms or heads like elephants. This she has heard from travelers to the land of spices – of men with wraps on their heads and women with tiny dots between their eyes. If the place they were headed even slightly resembled the pictures in her head, God help them all.

“I know the people there do not speak Italian. How long do you think it will take them to learn when we arrive at our new home?” The old woman knew no one would be learning to communicate with her, that she would be the one to do the changing, but she liked to tease her son whenever she had the opportunity.

Smiling at his mother, Luigi replied, “Momma, we are going to have to learn English. The men tell me that where we are headed there are other Italian families. Remember Matteo and Gina Scarpellini? I forgot to tell you they are living in Oolitic - that is the name of our new village - already.”

“Scarpellini? No. Matteo left his wife to run off with that prostitute, the one from Florence who passed through our village after last Easter. The one with the mole above her left eye. Bad luck, for certain. I am sure Gina threw herself in the Arno after he left.”

“You and your gossip, Momma. No. The Scarpellinis are living where we will be living. You can still speak Italian to some, but we must learn English, all of us.

“And now, we need to get back inside. It is getting dark and everyone else is already in for the night. Besides, even though you are feeling fine, little Stefano is not. Too many days on the ship, it seems. Come. Let me walk with you. And then you can help Sofia care for him tonight.”

“That boy’s mother knows nothing. I will tend to him the way my mother taught me and the way her mother taught her. She’ll kill him if left to her own. If Sofia ever had a mother of her own, you could not prove it by the way she acts. What Stefano was thinking to marry her!”

As the old woman took her son’s arm, she could not help but wonder about the situation in which she now found her whole family. Her husband, the first of the three Stefanos she would live to know, had gone home to be with God and the saints two years before; she had come because all of her children were leaving as well. What choice did she have? No choice.

Luigi had arranged this with the stone men. If he was to work for them in this far-away place called Indiana, the company would have to get permission for all of his siblings, their families, and his mother to come as well. Though Luigi was only in his early twenties, his reputation as a carver was such that the stone men had agreed. And now here they were, on a boat sailing the Atlantic, just as Columbus had, on their way to a new country, a new home. His brothers might even have jobs when they to their



new home. No one had promised him this, but he had told her that some were saying where they were going, the companies had more jobs than people to employ.

As she stepped off the boat's deck into its dark belly, the old woman thought, *With all my son has said about America he probably expects to find gold or honey hidden within the stone he will carve.*

Luigi himself did understand that life would change, but he knew with his heart, even if his mind was yet unconvinced.

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The decision to leave his home for America had not been any easier for Luigi than it had been for his mother or the rest of his family, though he had not let his doubts bleed beyond his optimistic demeanor. He knew how difficult departing was going to be for everyone else and saw no sense in making the move harder by letting on that he, too, had his doubts about uprooting centuries of family tradition and trying to replant it across the ocean, even if the stone men had promised fertile "soil" for them all.

The "adventure," as he would come to describe it to his family, had begun almost a year earlier when Luigi was still working his native Italian marble. At the time, he was carving a pieta ordered by the church in Rome. He did not know exactly where it would reside once he had finished, but he knew he would be told someday – not that he had the time or money to visit his creations after they were shipped off across Italy and the rest of Europe. This fact of life did not bother him; he kept them

all forever inside his head, never forgetting even the slightest detail of any piece he had carved.

This particular statue was no exception; indeed, already he felt as proud of it as any that had come before it. Once, later in life, when asked, of all the sculpture he had carved, which was his favorite, he replied that every piece was his favorite – that when a man works the stone he must fall in love with *each* creation as it is born and takes its final form. Not to love in this way would bring the artist to nothing less than total failure. And just as in life when a man loves a woman, some piece of that love must stay with him forever – even if that woman must sometimes leave him for another.

While this pieta contained the figures of Mary and the dead Christ as always, he knew that for centuries to come, men would look at the love and despair flowing from the inanimate rock and understand how Luigi had felt as he took chisel to stone – though they would probably never know the name of the artist whose small signature most often went unnoticed. Maybe his work did not compare to the masterpiece enshrined in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, but when men did encounter it, Luigi knew that they would have no choice but to think of God and his sacrifice for their souls. *Maybe that is the duty of art, Luigi contemplated, to give us no choice.*

In contrast to the intricate folds that Michelangelo had designed for his colossal Mary nearly three hundred years earlier, Luigi's Mary was plain, simple even. A woman more concerned with her dead son – not the Son and Savior, just her firstborn child - than with how she looked or what she was wearing. Luigi's Christ did not display the anguish of the crucifixion, but instead his face appeared peaceful, as if

he had embraced the fullness, the stillness, of death which had brought Him nothing less than reunification with his Father in heaven. Instead, he placed the full torture on Mary, the one left behind to deal with the aftermath of his death, the unknowable future. Grief had not supplanted her faith nor had she betrayed her God by claiming her right to express sadness. To Luigi's way of thinking, men could not help but see Mary's full sainthood as a product of her humanness – once they knew his sculpture, of course.

On the day the Americans came, he was almost done with the pieta, sanding and filing down a few still-rough spots left from the less graceful chisel work. Absorbed in intricate detail, he did not hear the man in the hat as he said in passable Italian, "That's a very fine pieta, my friend. How long did it take you to carve it?"

Luigi did not look up from his work.

"I said, that's a very fine piece. How long did it take?" the man asked again, this time tapping him on the shoulder to ensure that he had Luigi's full attention.

The carver turned to the man and looked him over. Nice suit and a fine hat, even on this warm day. He knew the man was not Italian, but could not exactly place his accent. He did not necessarily mind being interrupted in his work – sometimes a man had to stop for other things. However, he did not particularly like being asked silly questions.

"From the time I started until today or tomorrow or the next day after that. As long as it takes," Luigi replied. Knowing the man was not a native speaker, he fell back into the heavy dialect of his village. Though the Tuscan dialects, through the

works of Dante in particular, had become the *lingua franca* of the country many centuries before, and thus the one foreigners were most likely to learn, each village, isolated from the others, often developed dialects ranging from something very close to standard to languages almost incomprehensible even to native Italians. Luigi's village, lying not far from Florence, had not strayed too far linguistically, and the man could mostly understand what Luigi had said, though he likely had missed the tone by which the sentiment had been conveyed.

"Ah, of course," the man said, "an artist never thinks of time. You are Luigi, correct? My name is Sam and this is my colleague Stanley. We won't bother you anymore right now, but we would like to talk to you at the end of the day. Your employer has agreed to let you off a bit early so that we can discuss some business. How about right over there in the main office?"

Surprised that the men wanted to talk to him, Luigi nonetheless agreed to see them. He did not seem to be in trouble, and so far they were not causing him any. If anything were wrong, he knew that his boss, a cranky old man with gout and far too much nose hair, would be here screaming at him.

"Of course. What is this about?" Luigi asked, stepping almost imperceptively closer to his *pieta*.

"Well, come on over after work and then we'll have something to talk about, won't we? It was nice to meet you Luigi, and we look forward to talking with you for a bit this afternoon," Sam answered as he and his partner moved past him to look at other work lying around in various states of completion.

The other man had said nothing, but he did not appear to Luigi any less friendly than the man named Sam. *What kind of names are those? Sam and Stanley? I have never heard of such people in my life*, he thought before turning back to his work.

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Later that night, when he returned home, Luigi's world had grown larger than he ever imagined it would. Men were born in this village, lived here, and died – often in the same house as their fathers and grandfathers. Upon entering his home, he realized that he was now likely to serve his eternal rest halfway across the world in some place he had never heard of until only a few hours before.

Luigi's two oldest brothers no longer lived at home, but they often brought their families for dinner on Friday evenings. His mother often cooked large meals through the weekend, culminating in a Sunday feast fit for the pope and all his cardinals. The Garfolas may not have had many luxuries, but they never lacked for food – Luigi's mother saw to that. In fact, as Luigi's wages were ample enough to support his mother and three younger siblings, her single purpose in continuing to wash and mend the laundry belonging to the (very) few wealthy families who still chose to reside near the village was to provide extravagant meals for her children and grandchildren when they had time to enjoy her cooking.

This meant that Luigi would be able to broach the subject that night. The stone men would be leaving in the morning to visit other quarries and other workers in the region. They needed an answer quickly. Luigi needed just a couple of hours now to

finish his project and told them he would be coming in to do it on Saturday – he would tell them of his intentions then.

When Luigi had finished his work for the day, he had met the men in the office as they had requested. Sam continued to do the talking because, as he explained to Luigi, Stanley did not speak Italian. He did speak German, unlike Sam, and so they shared responsibilities as they travelled Europe looking for talent for their employer, a company called Victor-Oolitic Limestone.

They explained to Luigi that the rolling hills of a place called Indiana were fairly bursting with limestone – some of the best building and carving stone to be discovered anywhere. All throughout America and the world, government and companies were knocking down older wooden structures and replacing them with more permanent, and more impressive, buildings made of material they ordered from Indiana. His company wanted only the best men to work the material once it had been quarried and they would move Luigi to Indiana if he would agree to work for them for at least five years. Wages would be double what he was making in Italy. Yes, America was a bit more expensive, but not doubly expensive, Sam explained.

“But I do not carve limestone. I carve marble. They are very different. Limestone is softer – I have worked with it before – and easier to carve. But why me? I have worked only marble for many years from some of the same quarries where Michelangelo found his great works, or very near. What do I know of this “Indiana limestone?” Luigi asked. The question was genuine. He did not know why these men from so far away would be asking for him.

“Luigi, we have, of course, seen your work. Not just the pieta today, but others. Indeed, we saw two statues just last month when we were in Bavaria. Did you know you had work there? No, I did not think so. Luigi, we did not come here and happen to see you today. We came here because you are here. We want you to come to America and work for us,” Sam explained to a silent Luigi. “We need an answer tomorrow morning. All we are asking is that you talk to your family tonight and consider our offer.”

“I will. I ask only this: If I agree, you must allow my family to go. You, too, think about this, but if you come without an agreement saying this will happen, my answer will be to walk away. I will not leave my family here - no matter the money you are offering,” Luigi said. Though he was not an aggressive man, Luigi looked Sam in the eyes as he made his demand and his voice never wavered.

“We might be able to work something out Luigi. Think it over tonight and we will see you tomorrow morning,” said Sam.

Now, at dinner, Luigi would have to tell his family that he had decided to leave and convince them to come as well. This would be made more difficult as his mother did not have a table, or a room, large enough to fit them all. At each meal, food would be served and Garfolas would begin to spread throughout the house, into the yard, and sometimes as far as the corner where the blacksmith had set two benches outside his shop for the old men of the village to gossip during the day.

Because of the meeting with the Americans, he arrived home a bit later than usual. By the time he had washed the stone dust from his hands at the pump out back,

most of his siblings, and all of their children had already gotten their food and begun to scatter. Luigi realized that trying to corral them all at this point would be futile, and so as he ate his meal he found each one separately and asked that they gather together before leaving for their own homes.

Some time after dinner had been finished and the last remnants of food shoved into already full stomachs or slipped to the stray dogs which ran the streets, Luigi met together with his mother and her other children to discuss the day's events.

Luigi's oldest brother, Stefano, was named after their father. He and his wife, Sofia, already had three children of their own – a third Stefano, Guillermo, and Sofia. The next brother, by age, was Lorenzo who had two children, Luca and Vittoria, with his wife Francesca. His two younger sisters, Giada and Martina had not married, though Giada was more than old enough to have a husband. His youngest brother, Christian, was only ten and Luigi hoped that America could allow him to become something very special, something more than a laborer who works for other men. Of course, he knew the hardest to convince would be Stefano and Lorenzo – or maybe their wives.

Lacking the knowledge and the persuasive power of the Americans, Luigi quickly came to fear that he might not be able to convince them at all. At least not on this night when their stomachs were full and the world's harsh glare had been eclipsed by the closeness of the family dinner.

Christian saw an opportunity to become a pirate on the vast sea, so he was won over almost immediately. Giada and Martina seemed to have no opinion or had been



drowned out by their older brothers and could not have spoken if they had wanted. Luigi's mother ran off crying at the first sign that her son might leave the village she still wanted to believe had been founded by Aeneas himself – a fantasy she found too strong to leave completely to her youth. Stefano and Lorenzo were split and could not come to terms, like a seemingly interminable soccer match that finally ends with a score of 0-0. Surprisingly, Lorenzo sided with Luigi and agreed that they could all get jobs and become wealthy Americans. Stefano refused even to consider moving his growing family, and no one need mention this to him again. His wife sat with a Stefano on each side of her, trying to calm one (her husband) and coddle the other (her son). Everyone ended up leaving angry, and no one slept well that night, least of all Luigi.

The next morning, when he met the Americans at his work station, they told him that they had spoken, and though employment would be offered only to Luigi, his skills were such that they saw no problem in attaining the proper documentation for his entire family, all fourteen of them.

“Then we have an agreement,” Luigi said, not daring to indicate that his family was far from solidarity on the issue of immigrating to America.

They told Luigi it would be several months, maybe a year, before they would all leave and that they would soon be in touch with him.

The hardest sell remained his eldest brother. Stefano argued that moving was too great a risk to take, even if village life had little to offer his children. He clung to the fact that his own namesake, his own Stefano, had always been too puny, too sickly,

to make a long sea voyage. Luigi would not persuade him, no matter the effort; he swore it.

Luigi needed only six months, many uncomfortably silent family dinners, and subtle but persistent help from his sister-in-law who believed that Americans must have medicine that would undoubtedly improve her son's health, to convince them all.

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Early in the morning on the day of their arrival, the Garfolas, all of them, gathered on the deck of the boat along with many of the other passengers in order to see their new country at the moment it became visible on a horizon filled for so long with nothing but water, a horizon that Luigi's mother might have sworn to be the edge of the world. To the men, women, and children who had sailed for so many days full of expectation, missing the first glimpse of America was not an option. A game, unspoken but real, had developed among some of those watching. No prizes would be awarded, but the winner would forever be able to claim that he or she had been the first, on their voyage at least, to discover America.

"Little Stefano, come over here. Do you see where I am pointing? Look there – that will be where we will see the colossus, the great lady I have been telling you about," Luigi said to his nephew. The boy looked to Luigi a bit better this morning, though he had heard the child's coughing last night, a deep, throaty sound that reminded him far too much of the sound old men made in their last days. Like two giant blocks of marble grinding together, sliding away from those whose attention had strayed, out of control and dangerous to any man who stood nearby. The sea air, the

endless swaying of the boat, the poor nutrition – Luigi did not understand what factors had contributed to Stefano’s illness, but the boy’s constitution had always been slight and his uncle knew that they needed to get him to land, to their new home where the local doctor could care for him. For today though, the boy was looking spry and the cough had diminished to infrequent hacking from the constant spasms he had been experiencing.

“Do you remember the statue I told you we would see? She is not made of stone but of metal. The French gave her to the Americans. They call her ‘Lady Liberty’ and she stands in the ocean beyond the city of New York to welcome us to her country.”

“Yes, Uncle Luigi, I remember. You said that she was put there when you were a boy but even the men of our village talked about her. I think she is green.”

Luigi smiled. What children remember! “Yes, she is. She is green, but I think she will be beautiful and when you see her you can tell the others that you have found America for them!”

This time it was Stefano who smiled. This was a game he knew he could win. He might not be able to run as fast as the others, and he got tired more easily, but he would stand here with his uncle until he saw the giant lady with the torch. America would be his country; he knew it.

Stefano stood with Luigi for some time in silence. So many days and nights spent in bed had given the boy a patience his siblings and cousins did not possess. Soon his mother wandered over and said to him, “I think you need to go inside,

Stefano. We do not know when we will be there. It does not matter who is the first to see the country, it will be there for us all when we get off the boat. This air is not good for you.”

“Sofia, let the boy stay. He has on his coat, and it is not cold. He’ll be fine. I will watch him myself, as I have been doing. Just for today, remember how you would have felt as a child if your mother had not let you stay on deck for all of the excitement,” Luigi argued.

“Yes, Momma, please. Let me stay. I feel much better. Please?” Luigi begged.

“Yes, Momma, please?” added Luigi.

Sofia did not appear happy to have been contradicted by her brother-in-law, but she also knew that this was not the morning for a fight. While she had her hands full arguing with her children’s grandmother, she was not about to add Luigi as an antagonist to the play she had been forced into acting out each day on this boat. Every minute of every day, it seemed to Sofia, she had to fight the old woman about something, as if she knew nothing about being a mother. At least for now, with the excitement of the impending landing occupying the family’s attention, she did not wish to begin a fight she knew she could not win. No matter what side she chose, she knew the old woman would be opposed.

“Fine. But I will be watching. If you seem to be tiring or if your coughs begin to worsen, you will go inside with me no matter what your crazy uncle says in your defense,” Sofia conceded.

This time Luigi and Stefano looked at one another and both smiled. A small victory for the boy, but a victory nonetheless in a life already full of too many disappointments.

As the morning wore on, the pair began to think that they would have to leave the deck without seeing the great statue. Eventually, Luigi knew they would have to go inside for food or to relieve themselves. In truth, the man was as excited about seeing the first signs of the new country as was the boy – even if his enthusiasm was tempered by some anxiety, a burden his nephew did not have to carry or even be aware of. And Luigi was not oblivious to the boy's condition. The cough had been intermittent that morning, but he had started with every hack and switched his attention from the water to the sound coming from the boy. Thankfully, he was convinced it was drier, less harsh, and Luigi felt that maybe the worse had passed.

“Uncle Luigi, look! I see it. I see it! America!” Stefano fairly shouted while pulling on his uncle's pant leg. Indeed, Stefano had been the first to spot the statue, still amazingly far away to Luigi's eyes, little more than a vertical line, a shadow really, running perpendicular to the expanse of the horizon line.

At the sound of the boy's shouts, the other passengers ran to them to see if the violence of the indistinct sounds meant land or something more ominous. Upon arriving, Stefano pointed to what he had seen and explained to them all what his Uncle Luigi had told him about the lady who stood in the harbor awaiting them.

As the news spread throughout the boat, almost all of the passengers, even those who had stayed or strayed below deck, joined the others to see what had caused

all of the commotion. As the boat crept, or so it seemed to those watching across the rail, closer to the image in the distance, what had looked like more water all around them was coming into clearer focus and now formed into the distinctive shape that land makes when it climbs out of the ocean. As more passengers amassed on deck and began pointing out new forms, coastline, even other ships in the distance, Stefano slipped through the legs of passengers and himself went back into the belly of the boat to climb into his bedding.

Pulling the blanket his mother had brought for him up to his chin, he began to let loose with the soul-wracking coughs his body seemed to have forgotten about in the excitement of the morning. Phlegm tore loose from his lungs over and over with each spasm. He spit it, along with small bits of lung tissue, into the bucket left by the bed for urination. His head began to hurt from the violence of his body's expulsion of the substances it deemed foreign and dangerous. Muscles torn from previous episodes which had begun to repair during the day's reprieve were damaged anew. As his family above deck celebrated his discovery of a new land, Stefano slipped into sleep, exhausted not only from both his long stint as lookout as well as the illness which continued to ravage his young body.

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Several more hours passed before the boat docked in New York Harbor. To Luigi's dismay, they did not disembark on the island where the colossus stood in even greater majesty than he had imagined but instead at a neighboring island which the captain called "Ellis." Still, they had sailed close enough to the statue that Luigi could

see even the folds of her robes in detail and marvel at just how large she really was. To his mind, God would stand no taller, would be no more welcoming, as he greeted His followers at the gates of heaven. While Luigi had only his imagination to create that scene, here was something real, as solid as the land he was soon to reach and as vast as the ocean he had crossed, by which he could measure America and what it might offer in the years to come.

“Momma, we are here. I told you we would make it. Surely you are a little excited?” Luigi asked his mother.

Impressed as she was by the huge green statue, what use was a pile of metal to her and her family? “I will be excited when I see where we will live and you are paid by these men with all of their promises,” she replied.

“Of course they will pay me,” Luigi said. “Look at all they have done for us so far. They have gotten us to America, have they not? Do not worry so much, Momma. Here I will make enough you will not have to take jobs from other families. Here you can relax and take care of your family. I know that is what you want.”

Not entirely convinced, the old woman began to gather up her younger children, Martina and Christian – Giada already clung to her mother as if she had taken sole responsibility for her well-being, as she always had.

To Luigi’s way of thinking, this motherliness his sister exhibited meant that she would no doubt be wonderful with her own children but was likely the reason she had never been able to find a man to marry her. Attractive in her own way, Giada rarely left her mother long enough to meet a man, and when one did show some

interest in her, she found her mother a convenient excuse not to get to know him. *Momma needs help with the children. Momma has to cook tonight and I must help her. Momma has taken too much laundry; she needs me to help her finish so that she can return it all on schedule. Momma is sick and needs me to care for her.* The reasons were often different but came to the same thing – whatever man had begun to pursue her quickly grew tired of being put off and moved on to another. Luigi did not know what her excuse would be once their mother was gone, but maybe if Giada was lucky she would be so old that men would no longer care to win her affections. He felt uncharitable to think this way about his sister, but he had long ago lost the energy to worry about her romantic life with so much else to occupy his time – things he could influence and control, unlike his sister's desires. Or her baffling lack of them.

Once the old woman had found her son and daughter, she joined Lorenzo and Francesca, who had already brought their children together in anticipation of the boat docking. As they all stood on the deck, they were joined by Stefano and Sofia and their three children – including little Stefano. When Luigi's oldest brother and his wife had gone below deck to collect their belongings, they had found him asleep. Assuming he had worn himself out searching for some sign of America, but unaware of his coughing fit, they had woken him and brought up with the luggage and his siblings. Soon after they had congregated with the others, Luigi joined them carrying the remainder of his family's belongings.

The short nap had done Stefano good; his cheeks held some color and he had regained a bit of the energy he had displayed earlier in the day. Looking at the long



pier as the boat maneuvered into position to unload its cargo, both human and inanimate, Stefano felt adrenaline shoot through his body, though he had no name for it. To him, the jitteriness and increased focus was the anticipation that came the night before Christmas or when his mother was about to give him another brother or sister. He had been old enough to understand, albeit in a limited way, what was happening as his mother's stomach grew until the day she and the strange lady who lived up in the hills near their home would disappear into another room where his mother would scream and cry while his father stayed with him pacing the floor and walking in and out of their little house.

“Everything will be okay, Stefano,” his father would say. “Of course it will.” He always trusted his father, so even if the elder Stefano did not believe his own words, it took no more than once for the younger Stefano to be convinced. And it always had been okay. He did not like to hear his mother sound as if she were in pain, but after the horrible sounds ended, Stefano had gotten someone else to care for and play with. Once he had gotten a brother and once a sister. Surprises always thrilled him in a similar way. A present at Christmas, a little brother or sister, or a new country - not knowing what was to come always seemed much more interesting than finding out and risking disappointment, though he had never known that feeling. In Stefano's world, the anticipation had always paid off.

He hoped that today would be no different.

He hoped, as he prayed a child's prayed to St. Jude, that he would not fall sick and ruin this day for his family.

His grandmother's prayers to St. Christopher for a safe voyage seemed to have worked. He could only hope that the patron saint of lost causes listened as well.

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Three days later as Luigi sat in one more train car, he and his family had still not arrived in Indiana.

*This is the fifth train we have ridden on, Luigi complained to himself, and still we are not yet there. There are not so many trains in all of Italy.*

When they had landed at Ellis Island, the Garfolas had managed to make the sometimes arduous journey through immigration without much trouble. At one point Lorenzo and Francesca lost sight of Luca, but he had been with Giada and so was safe. No one got separated from the others and once they crossed over officially, Sam and Stanley were there waiting just as they had promised Luigi the last time he had spoken to them three months before.

"Luigi, my friend! It is good to see you. Welcome to America! Has everyone come through with no problems?" Sam asked.

Luigi looked around and took one final headcount. "Yes, we are all here and glad to be off that boat. Momma thought we would fall off the edge if we kept sailing, and I am not so sure that I was not beginning to agree with her," Luigi said with a grin which quickly disappeared when he caught sight out of the corner of his eyes scowling at him.

"That's very funny," said Sam who had not picked up on the old woman's displeasure. To Sam, all old Italian woman looked as if their faces had been

permanently frozen into masks of displeasure. "I can understand that as many times as I have traveled back and forth across the big pond myself. Well, look, we need to get you on the ferry and across the harbor to Grand Central Station. I'll explain how you and your family will get to Indiana while we are on the way."

To Luigi, this was the first true surprise of his journey and unlike his little nephew, surprises were unwelcome. He wanted – needed – to know everything that was to happen and to know it well in advance. No one had told him otherwise and so he had assumed that someone would accompany them to Indiana, which was - as he had learned recently - very far away from New York. Farther than traveling Italy from top to bottom. Too far to reach on their own in a country where they could not ask for help.

"Excuse me. Are you not going with us to Oolitic? How are we to get there without you?" Luigi asked.

"Oh my, no. Stanley and I have to stay in New York. In fact, neither of us is in Indiana very often at all. Only on occasion for meetings with our bosses. No, we work out of New York. It makes it easier for us to travel to Europe and to meet people like you who are coming across to work for the company. In fact, we anticipate meeting two more boats today, one sailing from southern Italy and one from Portugal with some men from other parts of the continent. But don't worry about it Luigi. I'll tell you all you need to know and write it out for you. Hey, and get this – the company is even giving you some traveling expenses so you can buy food or other necessities on the trip. Doesn't even come out of your pay," Sam said.

While the news of money was good – they had only been able to bring a few Lira and he knew they would have to trade that for American dollars before they could spend it – Luigi did not like hearing that they would be without guidance. Already the city in which they had landed with all of its noise and commotion intimidated Luigi, a man who had only been to Florence a few times and had never even visited Rome. New York seemed to him as endless as the ocean, stretching as far as he could see in either direction. If the rest of the country mirrored this city, he saw no way his family could arrive at their destination safely. In his horror, he imagined Indiana as one sprawling city full of people, horses, and noises so numerous they blended into one cacophonous assault on the ears and the mind. For some moments, Luigi wondered if he might get his family back on the boat and sail the route in reverse, back to a land which might offer limited opportunity but was safe, comfortable, and quiet.

Once he had entered Grand Central, Luigi knew that it was too late. The decision had been made. Whatever America might look like, however many people awaited them in the metropolis that he imagined Oolitic to be, he was committed to moving forward, to the beginning of a new life.

As Sam delivered them to the proper platform, he guided Luigi through the directions once again. They would take the train from New York to Philadelphia where they would switch to a line running to Pittsburg. Then, another train to Columbus, another to Indianapolis, another to Bloomington, and finally the small, narrow gauge rail which would deliver them to Avoca, Indiana, just a short walk from company headquarters.

To Luigi, this all meant very little. He had never heard of the places Sam had written down for him, but now, at least, he knew which signs to look for and had the appropriate schedules to find the connections they needed to make. Sam had told him there were more direct routes, but because of reasons Luigi did not entirely grasp, this was the route the company had chosen. Again, whether he liked it or not, the journey would continue.

Over the next three days, he and his family did not face the same monsters as his mother's imagined ancestor. They found no Scylla, Charybdis, or Cyclops on the train. There were no Siren songs calling to them in the night. But there were challenges – more mundane, to be sure, but much more real and equally frightening.

Delayed trains and slow progress had frustrated them all. Everything from bad weather through the mountains of Pennsylvania to cows on the tracks in Ohio conspired to keep them from moving swiftly to their destination. In Columbus, a city he feared less for the simple reason it was named after an Italian, they almost missed their train entirely, Luigi and his two oldest brothers having to lunge aboard as it pulled out of the station.

Through all of the delays, Luigi became concerned that whoever was waiting for him in Oolitic would think that he was not coming, that once he and his family had arrived in America they had lit out for some other place instead of Indiana and its limestone beds. Having no way to communicate with anyone beyond his immediate family, Luigi could only hope that when he finally did make it to the company he would find that his new bosses had not given his job to someone else. What would

happen if they were to report to the address Sam had given him and no position was available? How could he care for his family? Where would they live? What would they eat? Most important, what would become of little Stefano?

As they slowly trekked west from New York, the boy's condition had worsened. The coughing had deepened somewhere between New York and Philadelphia, and he had weakened considerably and consistently over the next two days. Luigi knew that he needed a doctor, that he must get some real rest and not the broken sleep he had gotten while jumping from train to train and jostling along even the best of the railways they traversed.

Now, as their final train was departing from the town called Bloomington, Luigi sat down as gently as possible next to his sleeping nephew who looked as peaceful as something Luigi might have carved from marble at his work station back in Italy. *He is not made of stone. He is much softer, much weaker. God help him,* Luigi thought as he reached out his own toughened hand to smooth the child's hair. *Stone is strong; people are not. Stone lasts for centuries but we all must die.* The thin form stirred beneath the thin sheet that covered him and Luigi pulled his hand back. Stefano's eyes opened slowly as he looked up at the figure next to him which must have looked to his frail body as large and powerful as the lady he had spotted from the deck of their ship.

"Are we there yet, Uncle Luigi?" asked Stefano.

"Be quiet, boy. We will be there soon. This is our last train and Sam's directions say that it will only be another hour and we will arrive. We have already

been riding for twenty minutes or more, so it will be very soon. If you sleep, you will wake up in our new home.”

“I do not want to sleep. I want to be the first to see it, like before.” Stefano tried to raise himself into a sitting position but the effort was wasted. He could only prop himself up on one arm and then he collapsed right back into the slight dent his body had already formed in the couchette.

“No, you need to rest. I’ll make sure to wake you when we pull into the station. Sleep.”

Luigi did not have to command his nephew again. In fact, Stefano had already drifted off before Luigi’s last words had been spoken. Luigi slipped away and sought out his mother. On the way, he passed his brother who was coming back to sit with his ailing son. Stefano looked up at Luigi as they passed in the narrow hall, and to the younger man’s amazement he saw no hatred or anger in his brother’s eyes, only a father’s concern and sadness. Still, neither spoke.

In the next compartment, Luigi found his mother sitting with Lorenzo and Giada who seemed on the verge of tears herself.

“Momma, little Stefano is sick. Worse than I ever thought. Oh, Momma, if he dies, it will be all my fault,” Luigi said.

“Luigi, do not talk that way. Stefano will be fine. He must be. We are almost there and you said we can get him to a doctor. You said it, and I know it is true,” his mother replied.

“Yes, Momma. I hope so,” said Luigi. Leaning back in his seat to try to relax for the first time in days, he looked over at Lorenzo who seemed ready to jump from his seat. For a moment he said nothing; he simply stared at his brother with the kind of powerful emotion that only family members can draw from one another.

“Luigi, the boy will die and it *is* your fault. You had talked us into this. Without your scheming we would all be safe at home where we have always been. Where things were fine. You had better be glad that it is not one of my children who is sick. All I can tell you is that if I lost a child because of your stupid plan to move to America, I would kill you myself. If you had any honor, you would jump from this train now and disappear. You killed that boy. Live with that, stone carver. Luigi who never did anything wrong. How does it feel to be a murderer?” Lorenzo spat. At the end of his tirade, he stood up, threw one final glare at his brother and stormed not just from their compartment but into the next car on the train.

Luigi’s mother, for once in her life, had nothing to say. She sat still and silent, looking out the window at the rolling countryside.

“Do not listen to him, Luigi,” said Giada. “He is sad, tired, and scared. He will calm down once Stefano is better and we have a place to live and when he finds a job. It will be okay, Luigi.”

“Thank you, Giada. You are kind to say so, but Lorenzo is right. It is my fault,” said Luigi.

He, too, now stood, and walked in the direction opposite of his brother. Stepping between cars, Luigi did contemplate, if only for a moment, leaping off the



edge of the platform into the rocky bed that lined the tracks. As he looked down, he realized that the world was nothing but a blur – the whiteness of the gravel became like pavement, smooth and even, as it slid by underneath the train. It blended almost seamlessly into the browns and greens of the sloping earth that men had built up in order that trains could run through the land. At this speed, Luigi could not discern any solid shapes – everything ran together, smear of colors, as if the world were shifting out of sync and truth had become too distorted to exist at all. No one could live in a world without shape, where all matter bled into the nothingness. In a reality where speed and distance controlled our perceptions, there would be no meaning and a man would have only shadows and smears by which to judge his life's work. *Is this the world into which I am leading my family*, Luigi thought.

Raising his gaze from the area immediately below the train, he began to see the budding deciduous trees a few yards away, some of them far enough out they looked as if they were stationary. He began to notice a few houses in the distance, a dog or a cat running into the brush over there, a bird settling into a tree somewhere. He even thought he heard a woodpecker seeking lunch over the rumble of the railcar. As he looked farther from the train, Luigi realized the world was still there. If he focused at what was at his feet only, he could see nothing. If he looked to the distance, the world appeared almost normal.

Taking a deep breath of Indiana air, Luigi stepped back into the car from which he had come determined to see his family through this journey. In truth, he knew that he had no other choice.

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The train carrying the Garfola family pulled into its final station. The sign which hung above the platform read "Avoca," and this matched the directions Sam had given Luigi back in New York, back in what already seemed to him like another lifetime. Luigi knew they would have to walk the mile or so to their new home, the paper in his hands told him that much. In fact, that was written in the next-to-last line exactly. *Leave the train at Avoca and follow the road southeast to Oolitic. 1 mile.* The only other words on the paper told the exact address of the company offices.

Once they found the headquarters of Victor-Oolitic Limestone, they would be assigned temporary rooms until they could arrange for a more permanent situation. But Stefano needed to rest now. He had been travelling for weeks and Luigi doubted that he could even walk into the small station let alone traverse a mile or more until he could be assigned a bed.

With Stefano trying to carry all of his family's luggage along with the added baggage of a child or two and Sofia two small and weak herself from the travel to handle her oldest boy, Luigi distributed the parcels belonging to his mother and younger siblings among other family members and scooped little Stefano into his arms for the final leg of the journey.

"Oolitic?" Luigi asked the porter at the station.

Not unused to foreigners looking for the mill town, the man pointed down the road running behind the station and said lazily, "That way."

Though he did not understand the words, Luigi felt confident that this road would lead them to their new home.

His fears of a sprawling metropolis called Indiana had been assuaged much earlier upon entering the state when all he could see for miles out of the train windows was flat farmland and then later rolling hills which seemed home to more cattle than men. In truth, this village of Avoca was smaller than his own. A small creek ran between two small hills, each with its own church perched atop. Other than the station, and the churches, he could only discern what appeared to be a small schoolhouse and a general store along with a few small houses nestled into the base of each hill and dribbling along the dirt road they were about to travel.

“This way. *Andiamo*,” he instructed his clan, of which he had clearly become the de facto patriarch, as the weary travelers shuffled from the station and headed south fueled only by the knowledge that their trip was nearing its end.

The road followed the creek for a time and then diverted away from it. In the spring, the road would often flood, though Luigi did not yet know this. Had he been aware of the fact, he would not have considered himself lucky. At this point, he did not consider much of anything, except the boy in his arms.

While a healthy person could travel the mile between Avoca and Oolitic in fifteen or twenty minutes, it took his family closer to forty – almost the same amount of time they spent on the last train from Bloomington, more than thirty miles to the north. As tired as Luigi was, Stefano added little to his burden. The boy weighed almost nothing in his arms. Several times along the route, the caravan had to stop so

that luggage could be rearranged or children could slip behind a shrubbery for relief. Once his mother simply made them halt so that she could sit for a few minutes. Each time, Luigi would tell Stefano how close they were to their new home. Each time Stefano's smile grew fainter.

"I can see the town ahead, little Stefano. We are almost there. When we make it, when it is time to cross over, I will put you down so that you can be the first to enter. Would you like that?" Luigi asked.

Stefano smiled at his uncle and nodded his head so slightly the motion was nearly imperceptible. Less than two hundred yards away, he tugged on his uncle's sleeve and said, "I knew you would get us there. I prayed to St. Jude that I would not stop our adventure and he answered me. We are in Indiana, aren't we Uncle Luigi?"

The carver, toughened from his hard work with hard men, could only nod to his nephew as he choked back a sob. No matter, Stefano could not have heard his reply. His head had already lolled back as he fell asleep once again in Luigi's arms.

Five feet from a sign that announced their arrival in the town of Oolitic, Indiana, Luigi stopped and announced to the others, "I have promised Stefano that he would be the first to enter. And so he will be."

As he put the boy down, Luigi did not know if he would have the strength to walk the few feet across the boundary line. Stefano steadied himself against his uncle's leg and still holding onto the older man's hand, limped to the finish line. His father and mother dropped their only possessions and set the other children down and

ran to their oldest son. The others cheered as if the boy had kicked the winning goal in a football match.

Just as his parents reached him, Stefano collapsed into the dirt road that had promised deliverance from the Old World into a new life and new opportunities in a land which promised everything for everyone.

The first of his family to see America and the first to enter into their new world, Stefano Garfola, the third of that name to be born and the second to die, did not rise from that road that day or any other.

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The family picked out a plot on the other side of the quarries from where the boy had died. Using the last of his advance money, Luigi had paid for a small rectangle of land in Hopkins Cemetery between their new home of Oolitic and another small hamlet called Needmore. He would rest on a hill overlooking the stone beds that had brought his family to this place.

The men at Victor-Oolitic understood that for his initial project, Luigi wanted to carve the tombstone. They told him that it was appropriate and privately felt that it would give him a chance to learn to work limestone without damaging a more important project.

At his work station, similar to the one he had left behind in Italy, Luigi considered the material with which he was working. The material he would likely work the rest of his days.

He knew that used as a building material, limestone will last for centuries. Solid blocks each weighing several tons could be assembled in configurations immense and imposing with all but one side of the stone protected from nature's abuse. The exposed side would, over time, stain, pit, and wear. But the corrosive nature of nature (and man's toxic additives) tends to erase the surface rather evenly and a good cleaning can make the soiled material look new in a matter of minutes. Limestone is abundant and it will last for eons.

In contrast, the art of carving stone is an exercise in futility and mortality. The more elaborate and intricate the design, the more quickly it will smooth over and disappear - rain, wind, and air pollution will end its life as surely as human lives must end. From dust to dust. Ashes to ashes. Earth makes a life and life returns it in death.

*Time will win. In the end, it always does. But for now and for generations to come, a monument will stand as tall as Stefano but stronger than the boy ever could have been in life,* Luigi thought.

No matter, for Stefano would carve the boy as he remembered him at his happiest, standing at the rail of a ship looking into the distance like a conquistador of legend.

And Luigi was right – for many years, when people visited the little cemetery where so many families had buried their loved ones they would marvel at the stone boy who stood at the top of the hill, bold and proud, as if the whole world awaited his commands.

## Pappy

On the day of Pappy's funeral, after the graveside service, I stuck around the cemetery to wander, as David Allan Coe once sang, through the field of stones by myself for a while. Grammy had him buried at Hopkins in Needmore. A small piece of land on a gentle hill surrounded by quarries on three of its four sides. It was an inspired choice, though I am not sure she had given much thought to the proximity of the limestone... but maybe she had. I simply never saw fit to ask her why she had chosen this location, among several other, more central and much more easily accessible, possibilities for their final resting place.

At the funeral home, that morning, Grammy had looked older than I had ever seen her. During the service, she sat in the back, in the Family Room, and I off to the side with my back to her. She didn't wail and cry. I guess she was too old for that kind of behavior. And too dignified. However, at the end of the service, she took her son's arm and leaned on him as she made her way down the aisle to hold her husband's hand one last time in the physical world. She never let go of that arm until he deposited her into the car that would take them halfway across the county to the cemetery. Once they arrived, he opened the rear passenger door and allowed her to clamp right back on to his arm for the short walk to the blue tent which had been erected over the casket, poised in such a way as to cover fully the hole over the hole it would soon occupy. Grammy's seat was in the front, right in the center at the edge of the Astroturf temporarily laid to protect the mourners from the bare ground beneath.

In the cold, she looked worse. Broken somehow, as if she wanted nothing more than to lie down on top of the wooden box to be lowered into eternity with Pappy. This thought struck me so completely, I became almost convinced that we would all be back in a few days to bury Grammy right next to her high school sweetheart. Keeping one ear on the oratory, so at least I would know when to bow my head or when to cry, I let my eyes give their full attention to Grammy. Her dress was black and conservative, no frills for this Pentecostal lady, and she wore a heavy coat over it. She also had on an appropriate black hat – something you don't see much these days, women wearing formal hats – with her long, uncut hair, piled up underneath. No box of tissues on her lap, she kept a handkerchief, a piece of cloth no less delicate than she was in that moment, curled in her right hand to dab at her eyes before the tears could freeze on her face.

Even through my own hurt, I found the picture of this elderly woman crying for her lost lover as fascinating as it was painful. Filled to the natural roots of that gray hair with faith in God and his Heaven, I am convinced that Grammy held onto her belief that she would soon be reunited with the only man she had ever loved as tightly as she gripped that handkerchief – even in that moment of abject misery. In times of grief, sometimes our beliefs become even stronger, and if I had to bet, I say that's just exactly how Grammy handled the pain. But no amount of devotion, even in one so righteous as that old woman, could entirely allay the fears and passionate anger she must have felt as she looked, for the first time in her adult life, into a future – no matter the duration – without Pappy. And for my part, I think that's the way it should



be. Still, what I saw in her that day did make me wonder if she would end up being one of those people so closely linked to her spouse that her own will to live might have died with him. In some ways, maybe I think that's the way it should, too. Still, the notion gave me pause to feel some real concern over Grammy's health and her potential state of mind.

As for the service, it was actually quite nice, as much as any funeral service can be deemed "nice" anyway. Clearly the pastor knew Pappy quite well, and even the saddest and most solemn funerals seem less dire, less hopeless, when the preacher can memorialize the deceased in an authentic way - with stories and memories and, sometimes, a little laughter thrown in for old time's sake. Contrarily, there may be nothing sadder in this world than a pastor for hire whose relationship with the deceased began on the day of his death and ended on the day of his burial. But sometimes, that's the way it goes.

When the service ended, I stood in line to greet the newly consecrated widow as she remained in her seat near the casket. The winter sun was shining through the blue tarpaulin and cast an eerie azure shadow over everything. All of the flowers brought from the funeral home looked blue if they were white and purple if they were red. Grammy's dress still appeared black, but it seemed to be leaking blue - kind of like the odd, two-toned hair with which artists coiffeured Superman in really old comic books. Lord only knows what effect that strange lighting had on my pasty face, but it must not have radically altered my features. When I finally reached the front of the tent, Grammy looked up and cried my name immediately. But what almost broke

my composure was that she turned to her daughter to confirm that it was really me. Had it been that long since I had visited her? Was it merely the stress of the moment that led to her confusion? I am afraid that it was probably both and had very little to do with the surrealistic lighting.

I bent down to kiss her cheek, to let her know how sorry I was, and to tell her that I loved her. I meant it too. I've never said it enough to those who deserve it, but I mean it with everything I do and say. No matter what the words sound like.

She hugged my neck and cried, just a little, into my shoulder before I told her I would be by to see her soon and that I wanted her to take care of herself. Naturally, I told her that if she needed anything to promise she would call me though I knew she never would. Standing there, that close to her, I could see that underneath her hat the gray hair looked as it always had. Except that maybe she did look older. Maybe today the mass of steel threads whipped into civilization upon her head made her seem more vulnerable, more *fragile*, than before. So often, I had thought, that industrial strength shade of gray had given her a subtle power, a slight resistance to the aging process. It said, "I'll get this old, but that's where it stops." It said that time and the world could challenge her, but they better bring their A-Games because she was packing a lunch, two lunches, and she was gonna do her best to hand 'em out. In the end though, the eternal enemies of humanity always do get one too many good licks in on us all, don't they?

Finally, as I gave her one last hug, I couldn't help but notice that though the lines at her eyes and the corners of her mouth might have deepened slightly over the

years, or possibly during the last couple of weeks, her cheeks were as smooth as I remembered. Smoother maybe – if you choose to believe it.

I stumbled a little as I pulled away from her, intending to head back to my car and head home. I don't think anyone noticed. When I reached my Explorer, parked at the bottom of the hill near the gate, I turned the key in the ignition but did not put the car in gear. I am not sure when my decision to stay became conscious – at first, I just wanted to warm up a little before pulling out. I popped in a John Prine CD and a song called “Souvenirs” came through the speakers. A song I had heard hundreds of times, it felt more than a little appropriate to the situation. In the second verse Prine, and his friend Steve Goodman, sing

“I hate graveyards and old pawn shops  
for they always bring me tears.  
Can't forgive the way they robbed me  
of my childhood souvenirs.”

To be honest, I do *not* hate graveyards, as the speaker in the song seems to imply we must. I had no idea if Prine did or didn't hate them, and I had no desire to question his wisdom. Still, what does it mean that we collect the dead bodies of our loved ones and relocate them to what amounts to little more than an ancient version of cold storage? Why do we, as humans, so universally need to visit the empty shells of friends and family? Even if we believe that the spirit persists, as some do - as I do - what compels us to honor their physical bodies in these places – ghettos for the departed? We could as easily place a picture at our bedside or on the mantle. And we do. But we

also feel a need to provide something for future generations to visit, I guess, though I am not sure how sad people who never knew us will be when they come to “pay their respects” to long-gone ancestors just because their parents taught them to bring flowers on Memorial Day.

By the time I had given some consideration to all of this, most of the attendees had themselves departed. Grammy, her children, and grandchildren seemed to be gone as well. In truth, only the men from the mortuary and those who would fill the hole remained. I watched them work from where I sat, feeling a little out of place, but at that point determined to hang around until they left. Finally, they finished up their work, piled into their various cars, trucks, and one hearse and headed toward the gate. A couple of them threw me curious (suspicious?) waves as they returned to the real world. The backhoe remained, I assumed to be used again soon for another funeral, or maybe just to be retrieved at a better time for the men. I turned off the car and stepped back into the bitter cold.

I knew a bit about the cemetery because much of my family was buried there as well – in fact, most of my immediate family on my mom’s side had lived and died right there in Needmore. Hopkins was the name of the family which had once owned the land and had begun burying there back before the birth of anyone now alive. It sits today where it always has, at the end of a short gravel road just off of what had once been the primary arterial highway from Indianapolis through Bloomington into the southern third of the state. The road that once fed life into the little community now terminated into four or five gigantic limestone blocks the company placed in the

middle of the road to prohibit traffic from entering what had once been state property. The industry which had allowed a village to prosper, through no real demonstration of anything that could be mistaken for benevolence, exercised its option to foreclose on those good times when the newer bypass highway was built and the state opened up a few more acres of prime stone for quarrying to the boys in suits.

Executives had, at one time, resided in the community, mingling with laborers at pancake breakfasts, church socials, and at the local dry goods stores. Those in power at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century ride behind their chauffeurs to posh offices in far off cities that their employees will never see, outside of their annual two-week vacations, rather than in the community they are stripping of its one precious commodity.

Closing the road to thru-traffic had effectively cut Needmore off from the larger world and its commerce. Ten years later, one business remained and when the elementary school finally moved out to the highway the one hold-out closed in a matter of weeks. But the company got the gray gold they had been coveting for no less than two generations.

Maybe it was the sadness of the funeral, or possibly the cold weather had chilled my mood as well as my body. I am sure that it was both, but on that day I had no desire to be generous to the men who were then running the business that had for so long been the lifeblood of the county and now seemed to want nothing but more rock and fewer men making less money.

As I considered all of this, including the frigid air which was already penetrating both my winter coat and the suit beneath, I climbed the hill I had so recently descended. I walked up the paved road, wide enough for cars to travel in one direction, rather than choosing to weave through the markers that littered the hillside. Pappy's grave was at the crest where several quarries south of the cemetery would actually be visible – to visitors of course. As I reached the spot, I marveled at how bare it looked, how lonely. An hour ago, dozens of people had filled the space under the blue tent, almost covering the Astroturf. In fact, many of the family and friends who had made the drive after the service at the mortuary were forced to stand around the tent rather than in it. Now the only thing that remained was a mound of fresh dirt and a tin plate, bolted to a stake thrust into the hard ground, with Pappy's name along with his years of birth and death. I was more than a bit surprised, though it was silly of me, to see his real name on the temporary marker rather the moniker by which we all knew him. Of course, there would be no permanent marker for several months but when it did arrive the front had his name and Grammy's, which is standard procedure for married couples even when there is a surviving spouse but still feels a little but spooky to me. The reverse, however, had carved in large script "Grammy and Pappy/ Love Forever." The family had not consulted me on the wording, nor should they have, but I felt it could not have been more appropriate.

As I stared at the tin plate which would have to do for the time being, I began, with no self-consciousness whatsoever, to talk to Pappy. "I'm sorry I didn't get by to

see you and Grammy more often. I'll miss you, Pappy. I think - I hope - you know that. I'll never forget you. Ever," I told the mound of dirt at my feet.

A couple of lines from Shakespeare popped into my head right about then - "all that lives must die,/ Passing through nature to eternity." As true as that sentiment may be, it offers little comfort when you're standing at a pile of dirt covering someone you will miss until eternity comes for you too.

Wiping the moisture from the corners of my eyes, I noticed a small monument just to the south. I had seen it before when visiting the graves of my own family, but never in this proximity to the fresh grave of someone I loved. It was a limestone carving of a boy looking out at a horizon he would never reach. The name, which I had never really noticed before, was Stefano Garfola and the date in the late 1890s. I think in the past, when I had admired the skill so obvious in the figure, I had never really considered that a real boy lay beneath it. The family had obviously spent a great deal of money for such an elaborate memorial – unless a family member had carved it. The name *was* Italian. Still, the time commitment would have been extraordinary for a man who would have had little energy left over at the end of a work day. Every child is precious to his or her family, but I felt that this one must have been quite special and deeply loved to have ended up with a true piece of artwork for a tombstone. Too bad he never got to see it.

I wandered closer to the carving and noticed how time had betrayed the artist's vision. While it was still fully intact, the surface was pitted and the details of the face were softening. Hard edges were beginning to round off and a few areas looked thin.

enough that a good hail storm, or a strong wind even, might easily knock off some rather large chunks. Thankfully this had not yet happened, and I made a mental note to see what the historical society might be willing to do to protect it. I knew that in the end, we can only guard our treasures for a limited time – like a fire sale, everything's got to go. Eventually.

*I guess it won't hurt to give it a try, I thought.*

Just then, I looked up and found further evidence to support my original conclusions, as if God were trying to prove a point. To the south from where I stood between Pappy and Stefano, whoever he had been, the view opened up into a patchwork of quarries that stretched all the way from the edge of the cemetery to Oolitic. From there, you could see almost all of it – at least seven holes were visible, some still being mined while others had been spent years ago. The higher the vantage point, the more you can see of course. Now that we have the sometimes frightening Google Earth, you can see just what men have wrought on this planet. What took millennia to form, we can dig out in decades, centuries at the most. From space, when you look down at this stretch between the two small towns, it almost seems as if the world has vomited its guts out. (*Maybe we're the ones who have made her sick, I speculated.*) Rock stands both scattered and stacked at the edge of a series of holes that seems to go on forever. Some of it was undoubtedly spall, the waste stone that is too flawed for use as anything but piling up. Other stacks may have been what were called grout piles used for stone that was less than perfect and so set aside for later inspection. Sometimes it was recaptured and used for suitable projects. Other times,



as it was left behind, never to become anything more thrilling than an illegal diving board, or as a home to snakes, birds, foxes, or whatever else might find a path to its crevices and caves. On occasion, in some of my less optimistic moments, I imagine the layers of grout and spall as evidence of a sickness men have spread to the Earth. The words even sounds like *grunt* and *spew* - perfectly appropriate, it seems to me. When she can't stand it anymore, the Earth spits up what we desire of her in hopes that someday we'll go away and leave her alone. Scott Russell Sanders has said that the damage, the quarry holes, looks like smallpox scars. I guess it all amounts to about the same thing.

Then again, sometimes all this destruction just looks beautiful.

After telling Pappy I would get back to see him soon (and meaning it at the time), I chose to walk to the northern edge of the cemetery first, thinking I would circle around clockwise and end up back near my car at the entrance. I guess moving around to the right add a little unscientific evidence to the theory that righties tend to do that kind of thing.

The slope from the apex of the hill is most abrupt heading north, but the incline is never really steep. In the summer, the uninitiated would see little more than trees at the border between the graveyard and what lies beyond. The graves are concentrated near the middle section, though they stretch pretty well from the front to the back. For some reason, people do not choose to place their loved ones near the northern or southern boundaries. The caretaker of the place told me once that the cemetery was bigger many years ago. You see what I'm saying? The stone companies may just

have taken sliver here and a sliver there – except those thin strips of land they were carving off were already in use by former residents of the community. If Uncle Homer or Aunt June had been unlucky enough to get planted on top of good rock... well, I can believe that some of these companies would have done it. I can believe it for certain.

Anyway, in the summer it looks like the woods begin right there at the edge of the open area where there are no headstones. Really, no one has much reason to look this way or to venture down, unless they are bored or know what to look for. In the winter, if you squint just right through the bare branches, crook your neck, and hold your breath, you can see two of the oldest quarries in the county.

In truth, I have no idea when they were in use or when work stopped on them. But if you've seen working quarries, or even those put out of use as early as the 1930s, there is a distinct difference. These are not just overgrown; they look *reclaimed*. Somehow trees have managed to gain a foothold in the rocky bottom of the nearest hole and were it not for the piles of unused rock (grout or spall again – who can ever tell the difference when it has all been forfeited?), also covered with hardy woodland species of flora and fauna, along the rim this could be an oddly geometrical, but completely natural, canyon. In quiet moments, we might imagine that they are nothing less than footprint made when the gods walked the earth.

Beyond it, almost out of sight unless, again, you know where to look, the green water of another quarry has pooled over the last one hundred plus years. On that day, the water was not green but white - frozen into one solid layer which would be perfect

for ice skating were it accessible to those not equipped with grappling hooks and mountain climbing equipment. Most abandoned quarries hold water, though not all. In fact, the first one I mentioned – the one with the trees growing up from its forest floor – does not. Most quarrying is nothing more than strip mining and what is left is usually a solid stone floor with three or four walls just as solid. Often one end was left open so that large equipment and men could be moved in and out. This is most often filled up with scrap stone to ward off trespassers (it doesn't work) and if it is piled right and the holes plug up fast enough, water begins to accumulate.

Locals often treat these like private swimming holes. Kids, especially, swim and dive into what can be crystal clear water. It can also be murky, holding ominous secrets beneath the waveless calm of an unbroken plane. Not only do water levels change, bringing large chunks of rock closer to the surface, but a certain segment of the rural population has always believed these empty quarries the perfect places to dispose of that old washing machine that no longer works. Or an old tractor that no one wants. Maybe the car your cheating, douchebag husband loves so much. In each case, the items not only can leak hazardous fluids into the water, but they can end a high dive in a way the young buck trying to impress his girlfriend never imagined. On occasion, swimmers have simply gone under water, gotten disoriented and tried to surface only to find themselves inside natural or unnatural caves filled with water. Many times those unfortunate few never find the way out. Regardless of the dangers, locals still frequently understand this to be a rite of passage, a Southern Indiana

distinctive not to be lost to modernity with all of its warnings, overly-cautious parents, and indulgences in litigation.

As I stood there at the precipice, warm air condensing as it left my nostrils, I thought about all of these things somehow. Not fully. Not always consciously, but my mind was mining what I knew about the industry in the same way the industry mined this land. I was bringing up more bad than good, even if Pappy had taught me to feel pride in the stone. But he was gone now. And I would never hear his stories again.

The truth was, I hadn't heard any of them in a very long time. And that was my fault, not his. The door to Grammy and Pappy's home was unlocked to me anytime I chose to enter. It's just that I didn't try the knob very often.

College. Girls. Work. Church. Anything and everything – add them all up together and they don't amount to nearly enough to justify the fact that I did not visit that old man when I should have. Want to hear something worse? Even after he passed and I knew I needed to make it up to Grammy. Go see her like I didn't before. Well, guess what? Nothing changed. I am pretty sure the next time I saw her after Pappy's funeral was a couple of years later at her own.

How's that for loyalty?

I walked back up the slope, staying along the edge of the quarries which literally began as the cemetery ended, a sheer drop into empty space that had once represented millions of years of dead sea creatures, if the scientists are to be believed. The eastern quarry has always been a bit harder to see, even with the more generous

winter landscape, because the trees were a bit denser there and you had to step through them to stand on a sketchy stone slab jutting out over the abyss. This one had never been as interesting to me, dry but littered with spall and, in the summer at least, overgrown with some kind of vine which, based on its complete consumption of the area, I have always figured to be an invasive, non-native species. Here and there I could see old appliances and the remains of at least one automobile, though it was too far gone to be reliably classified as either a car or a truck. As I stood there, not quite so far out to place my weight on the precariously balanced slab, I realized that this junk hole might serve as an adequate metaphor for my life. Filled with crap that didn't need to be there and overgrown with weeds. This didn't mean that I was a bad person – I didn't believe that. I often kept people just to the other side of the tree line and then only provided them with a wobbly place to stand if they ventured any closer. Even if I didn't allow them to see me fully, I often welcomed them close enough dump their trash on me. I was forever saying “Yes” to everything asked of me and allowing others the use of my time and services, but, like a quarry turned landfill, I just couldn't seem be whatever it was nature or God had intended me to be.

I pulled back from the ledge before it had a chance to go ahead and dump me into the pit and continued on my clockwise path to my final stop at the southern edge of the cemetery. Probably the most famous, maybe the only famous, limestone quarry in the world, Empire. The singular source for the legendary building's façade, the quarry had never been used for anything but that one project. A giant, the quarry was textbook perfect, everything they were supposed to be. The eastern end had been

opened but was now closed by an enormous pile of spall; the other three sides exhibited the reverse-pyramid style of quarrying stone used throughout the region. Widest at the top, the hole narrowed as it deepened; theoretically, if the work had continued, all sides would meet at a perfect point somewhere far below.

This one did hold water, and today it was frozen solid, or appeared that way from where I stood. Carefully peering over the edge, most of my field of vision was filled by a sheet of white nothingness. I had visited Empire more than any other quarry. Trespassing on company property in this day and age could get you arrested, but this one was so accessible and at the farthest end of the property, my friends and I had often come out to shoot guns down into the water. Maybe some new debris would have surfaced, or not – it didn't really matter because it was a place we could safely shoot and generally not worry about getting in trouble. One time I had visited Hopkins and had seen some guys trap shooting over the open pit. Not a bad idea - if you ask me, though I was less comfortable with the idea that it was other fellas who had the guns rather than me. I didn't stick around too long that day.

My first visit to Empire, or any quarry for that matter, came back when Pappy was one half of the babysitting team responsible for me. He brought me right up to the rim, very near the spot I occupied on the day of his funeral, but we had come down to see much more than the standing water. Only thirty yards or so from where the old highway ends today, the local Chamber of Commerce had begun construction on what was to become a theme park of sorts. In Needmore of all places. The idea was to build scaled-down replicas of the world's most famous pyramids. There would be a

visitor center where families could watch a video on the limestone industry and see demonstrations. A picnic area had been cleared and plans were to provide playground equipment for the children. Guided quarry tours would also be part of the admission price.

Although the park never opened – some congressman caught wind that federal money (to be honest, several million dollars) was being used for construction and made a rather big fuss over it – a few people got to see the joint before the doors closed for good. Pappy knew the director of the Chamber, so he took me to visit while we had the chance. By this time, work had stopped but there was still hope, though faint, that private funding might be secured to complete the project. Pragmatic as he was, I think Pappy realized this wasn't likely to happen.

While the intervening years have taken from me much of what we did that day, I do recall how excited I was as we drove past the unmanned gatehouse – one of the few bits of construction, made of limestone of course, that remains today. I looked up at Pappy with eyes approaching the dimension of bowling balls and asked, “Are we going to get to see the men make a building? Like the one in New York?”

He paused for a moment – at the time, I thought he was deciding which building he would allow me to help erect, but now I am sure he was suppressing his laughter - smiled and replied, “No honey, they don't build buildings here. But we will get to watch a little movie and see part of a pyramid.”

My interest in mummies and the iconic tombs of Egypt was no less than any other 1980s kid my age, so I let loose with something that must have sounded equal

parts squeal and thunderclap. "Are we going to see mummies? I want to see one! But I don't want to touch it, okay?"

"No, we won't see any mummies either." He paused again, taking a drink from his coffee cup. "They won't bring them in until the pyramids are all the way done. Otherwise, the mummies would get wet and their wrappings would fall off. No one wants to see an unwrapped mummy, do they?"

Disappointed, I nonetheless agreed that, indeed, a mummy without its clothes would not be much of an attraction. At that age, his logic made perfect sense to me. People, dead or not, couldn't move into their house before the roof went on.

The other thing I clearly remember was my disappointment in the park. Just the summer before, my parents had taken me to DisneyWorld. Even at five, I could easily see that Needmore, Indiana was not Orlando. The movie was okay, but not written for five year olds. The playground had not yet been installed, and never would be. The bases of two pyramids - one a replica of Giza, the other Mayan - had been laid, but with only two levels finished they looked like nothing more than a couple of very big empty squares. I only know now what they were trying to replicate because I have read several articles on the debacle. At the time, they might as well have been the beginnings of two stone spaceships, for all I knew or cared once I saw them.

"Can I climb, Pappy?" I asked. If there were not any pyramids, I decided I could put the single layer of stone to some kind of use.

"No, honey. I don't think Grammy would be too happy with me if I let you do that." I could see that he thought it a splendid idea; maybe he even considered



shinnying up there with me. However, I could see immediately that visions of his wife and my parents had already won the day - three little angels on his right shoulder overruling the one devilish boy on his left.

Sad and ready to return to Oolitic, I walked with Pappy back to the truck we had left at the Quonset hut that served as the visitor center. "Hop in, buddy. We're gonna see one more thing before we head home. I think you'll like this one," Pappy said and then winked at me. I brightened up a little at this. Dejected or not, Pappy always had a way of lifting my spirits. I climbed in and scooted over to sit next to him as he got behind the wheel - no car seat or lap belts required in those days - as we drove back past the gatehouse, across the old highway, and down the short gravel road that lead to Hopkins, a place I had visited with my parents a few times. Nonetheless, I at that age I was still ignorant of what lay just beyond its borders. We parked outside the chain link fence, opened the gate and walked in past the two rows I recognized as my family to the edge of the cemetery. Seeing the steep limestone walls and sparkling green water for the first time, I thought the quarry might be the biggest thing ever - bigger than an airplane even.

True to my nature, I had learned nothing from being denied the right to climb and have a little fun. I always figured that if you hear "No" once, you can always ask about something else. "Can we swim, Pappy? Pleasepleasepleaseplease."

"Sure. You want me to throw you in from here?"

He lifted me in the air, and held me the way you do when you let a little kid fly through the air like Superman. We weren't close to the edge at all, though I suppose

in the years of my adulthood that bit of playfulness might be enough to get a parent arrested for endangering his or her child. I will be forever grateful that I got to live a few years before the world decided courtrooms should solve all of our problems. I squealed and laughed, begging Pappy to toss me over the edge into the water five or six stories below. Somehow, I guess I figured that Pappy could do me no harm, that I was perfectly safe, so if he were to launch me into the pool below I had no reason to feel afraid of the flight or the landing.

He didn't do it, of course. But I was laughing hard enough by the time he lowered me, I had forgotten all about day's earlier disappointments.

"Let's not tell Grammy about you and me almost taking a dip in that quarry. Wadda ya say?" I agreed that this should most definitely be our secret. Pappy reached into his pocket, pulled out a shiny disk, and handed it to me. "Here, let's promise on this quarter and then throw it in the quarry. Kind of like our own big wishing well – only it'll be our promise well. See if you can hit right there in the middle. We'll say this quarter has our secret in it, and when you chuck it out there, it'll sink to the bottom where nobody will find it. Ever."

Like all humans, I liked the idea of pitching a solid object from such a height, but I was less enthusiastic about sending real money into a gulf that would swallow it forever. "You mean nobody will ever find it and be able to buy candy or nothing?" I asked him.

"Well, maybe someday. In a long, long time, maybe some little boy like you will skip through here, and maybe all the water down there will be gone, and he'll pick

it up and take it into town to buy a pop or put it in his piggy bank. I bet they'll still have piggy banks in hundreds of years, don't you? Just think, a little boy in five hundred years might have this very quarter in his bedroom."

Pappy's look into the future was more than enough for me. With a stubby-toothed grin, I turned to the quarry but cast one glance back at Pappy for final approval. Once he gave me the go-ahead nod, I squared up to the rim and threw as hard as I could, hitting about as close to the center as one could expect from a five year-old boy.

"Let's go home, kiddo," he said as he grabbed my hand to walk me back to the truck. Smiling and swinging our arms, the day ended like a poem begins.

As these memories flooded back to me, I had decided to brave company security and stroll around to the southwest corner of Empire. A trespasser once again, my hope was that the cold had kept the guard on duty glued to his warm office rather than the drafty old truck I had seen their rent-a-cops use on other occasions. Even when caught, people did not usually get arrested for being at the quarry, just invited to leave and not come back. But in this increasingly litigious age, the companies were becoming more and more paranoid about trespassers, getting hurt or killed and then suing because no one had made them leave. Knowing all of this, I weighed risks and determined that I would give it a go.

The corner in question is one large grout pile running from floor to rim, easily negotiable unless the mountaineer in question happens to have the balance of a one-legged giraffe as I do. I had seen others climb down to water level, but being large

and clumsy I never felt the need to press my luck. I have never been a good gambler, and my odds at making it safely to the bottom, let alone back up to the top, seemed to favor the house. Being a fan of roulette though, I never did let the odds bother me as much as they probably should have, and sometime between waking up that morning and finding myself squarely where I had no business being, I knew I would end up down there in Empire for the first time.

By the grace of Lady Luck or Father God one, I made it down and back, suit and all, with nothing more eventful than a couple of small stumbles and a missed step or two. Aren't things always like that? Never as bad as you imagine they'll be.

When I got to the bottom, I did put a foot out to test the ice. Large though I am, I knew it had been cold enough long enough for the ice to be more on the safe side than not. After pausing a beat or four to make sure I was going to be crazy enough to complete my task, I stepped out onto the ice. I had seen trucks drive out on a lake in Wisconsin a few years before, and while this is not Wisconsin, I am no truck either. With that, I began my walk down the White Mile towards the center of the quarry. When I reached it, I looked around to see the sheer gray walls reaching up around me towards the land where everyone else lived. Where I had spent my whole life. Today, I was in a place that by all rights no human should be before death. I stood where stone that now graced the most famous building in the world had rested for hundreds of thousands (millions!) of years. Where men had dug to feed their families and put this town on the map of the world. Where I might have landed if Pappy had actually thrown me that day almost thirty years before.

I looked up at the spot I had occupied just a few minutes before; the spot where a tiny boy had laughed and played with a grown man so long ago. Possibly it was the angle, or the clarity of the moment, but it was then that it hit me like a pestilent frog falling from the sky –so far above my head, the rim of the quarry was still probably two or three feet *below* where Pappy had come to rest underneath the crest of the hill in the cemetery beyond. If I had brought along with me the ability to see through rock and dirt, I would have to look up more than fifty feet to see the bottom of Pappy's coffin.

I am not sure what it means really, but at that moment I smiled. The only thought that entered my head, cluttered as it usually was, made sense to me at the time and so I said it aloud. I don't know if Pappy heard me. I believe he is in Heaven. I believe his body, if he has one, works better than it did when he was a young man working with the stone. But I am less certain that he knew I was there on that day much less what I said. It doesn't matter, really, because while the words were for him, they were for me too. If they don't seem as lucid now... well, that's going to have to be okay.

I tried to guess about where Pappy would have been, relative to my position. I looked up into the stone cliff to the north, estimated about how high the hill behind it was, figured in that he was about six feet beneath that point, and made as good a guess as I could. Had the cameras been on, Dick Clark waiting with Ed McMahon to have a good laugh at my expense, I might have felt a little goofy. At the time, I felt like I belonged no where else in the world more than at the bottom of that abandoned pit.

“Pappy, do you remember that day you brought me out here? I do. I never said I was sorry for being such a brat that day and acting so spoiled rotten. You brought me out here to show the place off and I was mad that there was no seesaw. But I also know that when we left, we were both laughing. I just wanted to say that I think you did more than pretend to throw me off the edge that day. I think you really did do it. It just took me thirty years to land. Love you old man.”

I dropped a quarter where I stood and knew that when the ice melted it would sink to the bottom to land in the deep, where divers don't go and little boys can't reach – yet. After I climbed back to the top, I looked back once, to see if I could still identify the quarter from that distance. Maybe there was a tiny dimple in the snow and ice very near the center of the quarry. Maybe it was only my imagination. Either way, I knew it was there and that when the first good thaw came, it would drop another ten or twenty feet to the bottom of the hole, but it would not be alone.