

East of Eden, and Just a Bit South
Being a True and Accurate Account of How Cain Found Himself a Wife
Ken Scholes

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“‘East of Eden and Just a Bit South’ was mostly Jay Lake’s fault. We were yukking it up at Norwescon in 2003 and started talking about collaborating. Jay threw out the title ‘The Boy’s Guide to Dating Outside the Gene Pool’ and told me to go start a story. It intrigued me—I played with that title all day and a story sparked. I wrote half of it that night, sent it to Jay, then couldn’t stop thinking about it and finished it up myself. He graciously offered me the title but it was too cool of a title to keep. (I can’t wait to see what he does with it—it’ll be brilliant!) And so, we have ‘East of Eden and Just a Bit South,’ my first attempt at writing humor and perhaps the first true and accurate account of how Cain found himself a wife....”

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I WAS IN LINE AT THE SUPERMARKET, fixing to buy me some beer, when I decided to tell my story. I’d just seen the headlines on the papers saying JFK had been successfully cloned by alien tax professionals and Elvis was living his life as a woman named Loretta Stills in New Jersey. Way I figure, a bit more truth can’t hurt:

My name is Cain. The Good Book is flat-out wrong about me.

Most folks ask two questions about me. They want to know why I killed my brother. They think it was about sacrificing unto the Lord and such. My brother, Abel, with sheep; me with vegetables. Fact is, the Lord Almighty His Own Self is a meat *and* greens man. I should know. I had supper with him often.

No, that is not how it happened at all. And furthermore, I did not kill my brother. Not exactly anyways.

And the second question: Where did I find my wife?

Now I’m gonna tell you.

It started with supper, of course.

Ma and Pa were bitching about the good old days when the Lord banged on the trailer door. Yes, we lived in a trailer. Matter of fact, before the Big Flood, we all lived in trailers. The whole world was a bit like some parts of Mississippi.

“What’s for supper?” the Lord His Own Self asked and then sneezed

mightily.

“Meat,” said Abel.

“Greens,” said I.

“Beer,” said Pa.

“Not you again,” said Ma. She didn’t care much for the Lord in those days on account of her menstruation and childbearing.

Me and Abel set to gathering up and putting the cats out what with the Lord being allergic and all. Yes, the Lord God is allergic to cats. Possums, kangaroos and armadillos, too, if you must know.

Pa handed the Lord a beer. He cracked it and sucked down some suds. He sighed contentedly.

“Sure is hot,” he said.

“Yep.” Pa gave Ma a hard look and she set another place at the table. We all sat down. The Lord sneezed again.

We ate quiet, me and Abel, listening to the grown-ups talk. I was sixteen or so then; my baby brother was fourteen I think, though we never put much truck in age back then.

The Lord helped himself to more meat and greens and smacked his lips. Ma glared. Pa just sat looking sorry. Then, the Lord spoke.

“You two need to get busy.” He put down his fork for a moment to look at Ma and Pa.

“We’re plenty busy *now*,” Pa said. “What with that damn snake and you evicting us.”

“That’s not the kind of busy I mean. Babies. That’s what I mean.”

Ma looked perturbed. Pa looked hopeful. The Lord continued. “This whole world’s waiting on you two. Room for a whole lot of trailers, way I see it.”

Ma mumbled something, her face a bit pink.

“Now, I know,” the Lord said in His Most Understanding Voice, “That this is not a simple task. But I reckon a few more ought to do it.”

Ma had enough. “A few more?” Her voice rose the same way it did when Pa went past his nightly six pack. “A few *more*? I think not.”

The Lord got real quiet and just watched.

“It mightn’t be so terrible bad,” Pa said. “We’d have more help around here.”

She shook her head. “I think not.”

Me and Abel, we saw the storm brewing. I could see in his eyes that he was thinking the same thing: Time to go outside and throw rocks at shit.

“But,” Pa said and then everything else got lost as Ma banged her glass on the table, spilling Yoo-hoo every place. Yes, we had Yoo-hoo back in those days.

“I,” she said in her most serious voice, “think not.”

“But what about your boys?” The Lord pointed to us each. “Fine, strong boys. Almost men. They’re gonna need wives soon so as they can do their part.”

Ma’s voice became very cultured all of a sudden. “So you are suggesting that I have more babies so my boys can marry up with their sisters?”

The Lord shrugged. “Ain’t no law against it. Yet.”

My stomach hurt from this. Abel looked like he was going to throw up all that good meat and greens right there in the Presence of the Lord Most High. Part of me wanted to run away. Another part was curious.

But the decision was made for us. “Why don’t you two boys go throw rocks at shit or something,” Pa said. So we hightailed it out of there.

Abel looked squeamishly at me while we threw rocks. “You reckon He really means it? That bit about sisters and babies?”

“I reckon He does,” I said, lobbing a rock at a beer can on the fence post. I knocked it down with ease.

“Gross.” Abel set the can back up.

“Yep.”

He hucked his rock, missing by a long shot. “That dog won’t hunt,” he said. “That dog won’t hunt for a damn sight.”

So we decided to take matters into our own hands.

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Boys is curious. They were then, they are now. I can't count how many times we asked about stuff. All the way back, I remember pointing to my belly button and then pointing to where Pa's should've been. Sometimes, if he'd past his nightly six pack, he'd talk about how it used to be.

One night when we were very young he even talked about how he met Mama. "I just went to sleep," he'd say. "Woke up and I was married." Then he'd lean in, looking around to make sure Ma wasn't near. "Stay awake, boys. Stay awake."

Of course, he had a big scar when he woke up too, but he didn't know exactly why on account of him being asleep when it happened.

Me and Abel, we started to thinking about this. Seemed a nap and a scar weren't near so bad as copulating with our yet-to-be-born sisters.

But we didn't know where to start. We *did* have some idea as to who we could ask. But that was tricky.

In the end, near as we could figure, all we needed was a goat's head, a fat dead rat, and a six pack.

We headed west and just a bit north. Most of you all know that the Lord put an angel and a big fiery sword in the way of the Garden. What you most likely didn't know was that the angel's name was Bubba and he was bad-ass.

He was also dumb as wood.

He was stretched out napping in the sun when we got to him.

"Hey fellas," he said with a yawn. It was a powerful hot day.

"Hey Bubba," we both said. Then we offered him the six pack. He grinned.

Then we commenced to kicking that goat's head around while Bubba drank beer.

Every so often, Abel would kick the head up and over Bubba and it would land in the Garden.

Bubba'd go fetch it for us.

After a while, though, Bubba got tired of chasing the goat's head. Finally, he waved to us. "Get it your own damn self. Just mind the sword."

So we did. We made a great show of looking about for the head, all the while watching Bubba, who settled back down to snoring.

Now that fiery sword was big and noisy. It whistled and whizzed about but mostly stayed more to the middle of the Garden. We knew what we wanted wouldn't be there.

We spent all morning turning over rocks and talking to every snake we found. Mostly, they just hissed at us.

Then, just as we were like to give up, we found a big one. It was all orange and yellow and pink and blue and it had little stubs where it used to have feet. It lay under a big rock...one that took both of us to roll.

"Hiss," the snake said in a bored voice.

"Howdy," Abel said.

"Hello," I said.

"Hiss." It moved away, looking unhappy with us disturbing its rock and its rest.

"We came to talk to you." Abel had a way with words so I let him do the talking.

"Snakes don't talk," it said.

"You just did."

I'd never seen a snake shrug before, but this one did. "Hiss."

"We need your help," Abel said. "The Lord God His Own Self wants us to mate with our sisters and fill the world with single wide trailers."

"Doesn't sound like my problem. Besides, I like trailers. They're nice for sleeping under."

"We don't mind *that*. It's the sister bit," I said.

"We need girls," Abel said. "Ones we ain't related to."

"I don't make girls. I just get them to eat stuff." The snake slithered towards another rock. "You boys mind that sword, you hear?"

Here is where Abel pulled out the fat dead rat. He plopped it down in front of the snake. "We'll make them our own-selves. We just need you to tell us how."

The snake sniffed at the rat. "I might could help you out." It looked at us, its beady little eyes twitching. "You might could help me out some, too."

"We gave you a rat," Abel said.

"I'm a vegetarian."

"What's that?"

"Greens."

I beamed. I grew the greens on our farm.

"Then what do you want?" Abel looked perplexed.

The snake waved its stubs around. "I miss my legs."

"We don't make legs." But just as Abel said it, I had me an idea.

"So if we make you some legs, you'll tell us how to make us some girls?"

I didn't know snakes could smile; this one grinned and extended one of its stubs. "Shake on it?"

So the snake told us what we needed to know. While it told us, I looked around for sticks that were just the right thickness while Abel pulled string from the hem of his cut-offs. In no time, we knew all about how the Good Lord made Pa out of mud and Ma out of a rib and the snake was tottering about excitedly on little wooden stilts we'd tied to its stubs. All in all, it was quite a satisfactory bargain on both sides.

"So we just need some mud?" I asked.

"Or ribs?" Abel asked.

"Not exactly," the snake said. "See that sword yonder?"

We both nodded.

“There’s some trees there. One with red fruit and one with orange fruit.”

We both nodded again. Bits of this sounded a little familiar. One of the stories Pa told on two six pack nights.

“Mind you don’t touch the red, boys,” the snake said as it practiced high jumping its former rock. “The Lord His Own Self gets rightly pissed about that one and I don’t want to lose my legs again.”

In the end, it just came down to who ran the fastest and who threw rocks the best.

Me, I’m slow as hell. But I’m a crackshot with a rock.

We lay in the bushes outside the clearing and watched the sword flash by like a gigantic hummingbird set on fire. The snake had told us what to do with the oranges. It hadn’t told us how to get them. But again, Abel was mighty smart.

“You knock ‘em down,” he said. “I’ll just run out and grab us some.”

So I did, and he did. That boy sure could run.

Whack. An orange fell. Whizz. The boy flew. Buzz. The sword spun and saw no one there at all.

I guess Bubba wasn’t the only one dumb as wood.

Abel made the run three times and after that he was tired out but we had us five oranges on account of my excellent aim. I didn’t think nothing of it when he tore one in half and handed it to me. I just sucked the juice out of it and he did the same. Looking back, that was a mistake of sorts, but it saved our asses.

We figured we needed at least two more so I took aim at a branch and let loose with a rock after the sword passed. Whack. The oranges fell. Whizz. The boy flew. Oops.

Children, and you grown ups, too, listen up: When someone says to you that you oughta tie your shoelaces in the off chance that you might trip over them remember this bit.

Abel did *not* tie his shoelaces. No one had told him to before—wearing shoes was a bit new to us growing up in a trailer and all. We actually didn't know what those strings were for.

Abel bent over the oranges, grabbed them up, and then went ass over teakettle as he tripped. He sat up with an oh shit look on his face just as the sword lopped off his head.

His head rolled to the side and he blinked at me.

There wasn't much blood but his clothes had caught fire. I sat stunned for a second until he said something.

"Ma's gonna be pissed," his head said.

I didn't know swords could look confused; this one did. Of course, only being four of us in the entire world, it hadn't lopped anyone's head off before. But I'm sure it figured that this was not how it ought to go. I figured the same but then remembered the orange we shared. At least now we knew it really *was* the Tree of Life.

"Way I see it," Abel said (knowing I couldn't rightly talk without giving myself away), "We need a diversion."

I nodded to his head to show I understood. With that, his body lurched up and took off running through the trees. Even dismembered, that boy could run.

The sword gave chase and after they'd gone, I went out, scooped up the two oranges, grabbed another three just in case, and picked up my brother's head.

"Better get going," he said. "I'm pretty sure I can't outrun that sword."

"I grabbed a few extra oranges," I said. "Maybe I can make you another body."

"First things first. We still need girlfriends."

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And so we escaped the Garden of Eden. The snake watched us zip past Bubba's sleeping form and waved its little stick leg at us.

"Way to go, boys," it said.

I waved because Abel could not and I did not stop running until we reached the river. There, I propped my brother's head up against a log and commenced to

dig in the mud.

I decided to make Abel's girl first since he'd been cut up. I didn't know how exactly she should look so I kinda thought about Ma and all her curves. And I wasn't sure how the Lord God His Own Self had come up with hair so I just took some grass and shoved it into the right places. All the while, Abel gave me pointers.

After a bit, I tore some oranges and squeezed the juice all over the mud girl. The snake had thought this would do the trick even though the Lord had just breathed on his creations to bring them to life.

It did not work at all.

About this time, I was feeling a might angry and sad all at once. I think Abel must've been feeling the same way because he started to cry.

"You're going to be in *so* much trouble," he said between sniffs.

"Me?" I asked. "What about you?"

"Ma will say you're the oldest and should've known better. Besides, I ain't got no body. That's punishment enough."

I thought about this. "Can't do chores with no body."

He brightened up somewhat at this. "I hadn't thought about that."

"Besides," I said, "If we get this to work, I done *told* you I'd make you another body."

Funny we was talking about bodies because at that moment, a loud sucking noise made us look over yonder. There, dragging itself through the mud and marsh grass, was Abel's body. Or what was left of it.

Now it was more like half of a torso and an arm. The rest had been cut clean away.

An idea struck me. My brother wasn't the only one with brains. "Hey," I said. "Maybe we *do* need a rib after all."

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Suffice it to say that the rib did not work by a long shot. It was a disappointing setback given just how long it takes to cut out a rib with a pocketknife. And I broke the pocketknife all to shit, too.

So we just sat there, me and Abel's head, and stewed.

"We need us some help," I said to my brother.

"We had us some help," he said back. "It did not work."

I looked at his head, then at his cut up torso and at the bloody rib poking out of the mud girl. "No," I said. "It did not."

"Pa is going to kill us."

"Naw. He can't on account of the oranges."

We were quiet again. An old crow settled down and commenced to peck at my brother's eyes. I swatted it away.

"We need help," I said again.

"Maybe the Lord God His Own Self will help us," Abel said. And just as he said it, a big bug flew right up his nose and he sneezed mightily.

That gave me another bright idea.

In the end, near as we could figure, all we needed was a dead possum, Pa's razor, and one of Ma's old sheets.

I propped Abel's head up in the fork of a tree so as not to alarm our folks and headed back East of Eden and just a bit south.

"Don't be gone long," he said, looking out for other crows.

I found the dead possum right away. It was half squashed in the middle of the trail. For those of you who study such things, possums have been getting squashed in the middle of thoroughfares since the very beginning. I do not know why but I am glad because it saved my ass...sorta.

I helped myself to one of Ma's sheets, hanging on the line, and wrapped the possum up in it. I did not need to hide it though, or hide that I was covered in my brother's blood, because she and Pa were otherwise engaged when I snuck into the trailer. They had taken the Lord at his word it seemed and were making all kinds of hooting and hollering noises when I passed by their bedroom.

My stomach turned as I thought about the sisters to come.

I took pa's razor and ran back to the river just in time to scare off another bird.

First, I hid my brother's torso under a pile of brush. Then, I shaved that damn possum bald and tossed it into the river. It floated a bit and then sank.

I put all that possum hair into my ball cap, set it aside, and commenced to digging in the mud some more. This time I built me a mud man (without his head of course.) Abel gave me some pointers, having felt his former body was deficient in some areas below the belt.

"This works," I told Abel, "And we can share the girl."

He would have shrugged but could not. "I reckon we done shared everything else. And it's better than a sister."

So, I put his head in the mud and covered over the two mud bodies with Ma's sheet. Then I stood back and admired my handiwork.

"Now I'm going to fetch the Lord."

Abel grinned up at me. "You sure are smart, Cain."

"Thank you." I grinned back. Then I went to see Bubba.

"Bubba," I said. "I need to call upon the Lord."

Bubba looked abashed. "He was just here and he was pissed."

Bubba then told me the tale. Seems someone had hit him on the head, stolen some fruit, tied legs onto the serpent, and left a goat's head calling card. He told the Lord it was most likely Beelzebub helping his boss out and winked at me as he said it. Somehow Bubba had hid those beer cans. Maybe, I thought, he wasn't quite dumb as wood after all.

"Well," I said, "I still need to see him."

"He's looking over the tree. I'll send him by."

So I thanked Bubba and went back to the river.

The Lord God His Own Self strolled by a bit later.

"Hey boys, you seen a big demon 'round here goes by the name of Beelzebub?"

"No," we both said.

“We ain’t seen nothing,” Abel said.

The Lord scratched his head. “What in tarnation are you two doing?”

“We’re playing Genesis,” I said.

“I’m Pa,” Abel said and rolled his eyes towards the mud girl. “That’s Ma there.”

“And I’m playing you,” I said, trying to look all humble.

The Lord looked rightly pleased.

“Maybe you could help us out,” I said.

Now he looked even more pleased. More tickled than a girl on prom night.

“Way I figure it,” I said, “This game is a way for us to tell our story to the generations to come after. We want to be historically accurate and shit.”

The Lord nodded. “I like this.”

I pointed to the mud girl. “Is this how you did the hair?”

The Lord came over, stooped down and looked real close at the mud girl’s hair. This was my cue. I up-ended my ball-cap onto the Lord’s Own Head and all that possum fur and dander cascaded down.

For a moment, the Lord looked quite surprised. Then he sneezed mightily three times and ropy wads of snot shot onto Abel and the mud girl.

That mud girl started coughing and sputtering and the Lord His Own Self whipped back the sheet. Sure enough, it was a *real* girl, though her hair never was quite right on account of the grass I used. Sadly, Abel was still just a head. The body was just mud. I reckon him already being technically alive messed up our plan somewhat.

The Lord, he chuckled. “You boys done good.”

That, of course, was a relative statement given my brother’s predicament.

The girl sat up looking truly bewildered. She was the prettiest thing I ever seen and I named her Jenny right on the spot.

We all sat there a bit and just looked at each other.

“Ma’s still gonna be pissed,” Abel finally said.

The Lord looked at the brush where Abel’s hand poked out. “I reckon she is,” he said.

“What do we do now?” I asked.

“Way I see it,” the Lord said, “There’s this place called Nod out yonder. Room for a bunch of trailers there.”

“What about Ma and Pa?” I asked.

The Lord looked very thoughtful. “You just hightail it and leave that to me. I’ll think of something to tell them.” And he did. Though it was not historically accurate.

So Jenny and me and Abel thanked the Lord kindly and I scooped up my brother’s head. Then we left.

I started this out talking about two questions but there is a third that has made me famous. Am I my brother’s keeper? I reckon I am because of his peculiar condition.

Me and Jenny and Abel, we had ourselves a long life on account of them oranges and shit. We experienced a lot of fine adventures, what with the Big Flood and the Ten Plagues and that one time when God’s Own Son Himself hung out with us in the Orient for a spell. But those are all other stories.

Jenny is saying it’s time for supper. Sometimes I miss supper with Ma and Pa and the Lord. At least there are still trailers.

“What are we having?” I ask her before I wrap this up.

“Meat,” she says.

“And greens,” my brother says.

“I’ll grab us some beer,” I say.