

Caught Forgiving

A note from the person who gave you this:

Hello.

Thanks for spending a little time with these workbooks.

They aren't races.

They're walks.

Some people move through one in an afternoon.

Others take their time over days or weeks.

Either is just fine.

I won't ask you to agree with everything here.

I won't ask you to finish every page.

I won't ask you to do every exercise.

I'll simply invite you to notice a few ordinary moments as you go.

If something stays with you, wonderful.

If nothing does, that's okay too.

Thank you for taking the walk anyway.

I'm glad you're here.

— *Frank*

Caught

Forgiving

A Workbook

By

Frank Wood



A CAUGHT SOONER BOOK

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This book was written to be shared in spirit. Please feel free to recommend it, lend it, or give it to someone who may find it useful.

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For more information, visit
caughtsooner.com

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Welcome

Yes, this is a workbook.

Eight lessons.

Some short stories. A few small questions along the way.

Nothing here is going to transform you.

Not the goal.

The goal is smaller.

To notice the thing a little sooner than you might have.

That's it.

And — worth saying.

This workbook works with you. Not on you.

Some part of you brings the willingness to look.

The lessons meet that part.

Where the willingness goes, the work goes.

That part is yours.

It does ask something of you.

A little focus.

Not a lot.

Enough to be in the room while you're reading.

If this is your first Caught book — welcome.

Different door. Same you.

If you've been to another one of these — welcome back.

Different room. Same porch.

This workbook will explore something that may already be operating in you.

A line, a look, a move, a version of you that arrives before you've quite chosen it.

Lesson 1 will both name the workbook's focus and offer you an anchor
— a way of helping visualize the book's focus.

The pace is yours.

Take what you take.

Come in.

A Note from David

Hello.

I'm glad you're here.

You can call me David.

You'll find me throughout the Caught workbooks, audio lessons, and other conversations that live around this work.

Over the next few lessons, I'll be walking alongside you through this workbook.

Whether you're sitting with a coffee, taking a walk, riding a train, or spending a few quiet minutes in your favorite chair, think of these pages less as a class and more as a conversation.

As you read, you may notice stories, questions, and small moments to reflect on. There are no grades here. No right pace. No finish line.

Just ideas to sit with.

If it helps, imagine me as a workbook companion. A friendly voice beside you on a porch, a park bench, or a walk around the neighborhood.

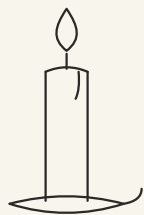
Take what helps.

Leave what doesn't.

And take your time.

I'm glad you're here.

— *David*



LESSON 1

Forgiving is a word

Forgiving lives partly in the moments before we noticed we were carrying anything at all.

Glad you found this.

This one's for someone carrying something they did not expect to still
be carrying.

A wound. A grievance. A line they still hear. A look they still see.

If that is you —

What you find here may help.

To carry it a little differently.

Glad you came in.

STORIES.

Two short moments before we go further. No hurry.

Her sister said something at Thanksgiving four years ago.

Not the worst thing said that weekend.

One line. About her dress. On the way to the kitchen.

Her sister probably forgot by Sunday.

She didn't.

My dress?

She told her husband twice that week.

Once a year later, at a different holiday.

Her shirt this time.

Then again last month. When her sister called about something else entirely.

She could still hear the exact tone.

— I've held a line longer than it deserved.

— Different sister. Same kitchen doorway.

He was fourteen when his father said it.

One sentence about how he held his bat in the fourth inning.

Said in the car, on the way home, in a tone he had never forgotten.

He is fifty-two now.

His father has been gone for nine years.

Every time his boss gives him feedback — even the kind anyone would want —

Something in him hears the car ride.

Holding the bat.

No one had ever really taught him how to hold it.

— I've heard an old voice in a new room.

— Different car. Same lecture.

Most of us have a version of this.

A line we still hear.

A look we still see.

Something we picked up at some point and somehow forgot to put down.

Yours is in there somewhere.

Maybe more than one.

The carrying is the same, or at least similar.

Just a different kitchen. A different car.

Here's the part that's easy to miss.

The thing we are carrying does not stay where we put it.

It shows up in rooms that didn't earn it.

It changes how we sound.

It changes how we see.

It rides into the next conversation. The next exchange. The next time someone says something that sounds — not the same, but close enough — and the body recognizes it before the mind does.

A little sharper.

A little more guarded.

A little less like ourselves.

That's the cost.

Not what happened.

The residue.

And there's another cost.
The one that doesn't show up in any single moment.
The one that builds underneath.

A morning that starts already loaded.
A conversation that didn't quite land because a part of you was
somewhere else.
The hours spent rerunning instead of being here.
What didn't happen — because the carrying was happening.

In this workbook, what you've been carrying has a shape.

Some of it warms quietly.
Other parts catch fire when something today brushes against them.

We'll call it a candle.

What this workbook is for.

Here's what I want you to know before we go further.
Whatever you've tried — it came from somewhere real.

There isn't a clean way to put the candle down.

This workbook is not going to ask you to.

Not to put it down.

To notice when it catches.

In a room that didn't light it the first time.

That noticing is enough.

One thing.

Again, you came to this workbook for a reason. This workbook is about something you've been carrying.

Think about that something. A wound. A grievance. A line you still hear. A look you still see.

If nothing comes to mind right away, something from another season of life is also fine.

What you've been carrying is

Before we close this lesson, two thoughts to sit with.

— *I almost didn't open this.*

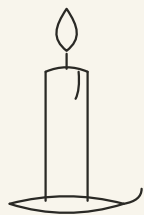
— *I'm glad I did.*

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

The candle was a gift.

See you in Lesson 2.



LESSON 2

The candle was a gift

*Some of what we carry came from hands we cared
about.*

Glad you're back.

Last lesson you named what you've been carrying.

Maybe more plainly than you had before.

This lesson is about why it has stayed.

STORIES.

Two short moments before we go further. Both about the same thing.
No hurry.

He learned to throw a curveball the summer he was fifteen.

Saturday mornings in the bullpen with his coach.

Index and middle fingers across the seams. Snap the wrist down at the
end.

The first one that broke, the coach said —
there it is.

He wasn't a very good pitcher. He knew it then.

He wasn't really competitive. He hated grass stains on his uniform.

Other kids wanted it more.

He did like throwing the curveball.

He liked the Saturday mornings.

Then the playoffs came. Coach Martin started Billy.

Billy. He still doesn't like that name. Billy.

Seven innings on the bench.

Billy was a better pitcher. He has known that for forty years.

The bench still lives in his body when he watches someone else get chosen.

— *I still throw the way he taught me.*

— *Different bench. Same Saturday morning.*

They had both been up for the promotion.

His friend got it. Regional manager.

They stayed friends.

Lunches. Family events. Fishing trips.

Not much changed, on the surface.

And yet there was a pull. Between the meals and the memory of the promotion.

His. Not mine.

One night, after a holiday party, with his now lifelong friend, he said to his wife —

friendships are good, aren't they.

She patted his arm. Said nothing.

Nothing needed to be said.

— *I have a friendship running on top of something.*

— *Different lunch. Same memory.*

Most of us have a version of one of these.
Not the dramatic version. The quiet one.
The decision someone made about us that was probably the right call.
The wound that doesn't have a clear villain.
And your body kept it anyway.
A bench. A promotion. Yours.

The candle.

Picture a candle on a table.
Maybe one you've actually had.
A dinner candle. A votive. A pillar by the window.

The wax is the record.
The wick is the live part.
It lights when something today resembles something old.

That's the candle.
What you've been carrying.

Here's what tends to be true about the candle.

It was a gift.

Whoever gave it to you mattered. One person. Or two. Or more.

They gave it to you in moments that were probably also full of other things.

Their attention. Their presence. Sometimes their care.

The one who gave you the candle was the one who gave you the curveball.

Or the table you keep sitting across from.

Or a recipe. A way of laughing. Whatever else came along.

That's why you don't put it down.

Or won't.

Or can't.

The candle is connected to other things you don't want to put down.

Of course it has stayed.

Because, often, perhaps more than we like, the giver mattered.

This workbook is not going to ask you to take the candle apart.

The wound and the good likely came from the same person.

Sometimes from two people. Sometimes from more.

The memory. The carry. They are real.

They don't come apart cleanly.

What can change is what you do with the candle from here.

And what you notice when it lights.

THE CANDLE — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a recent moment.

A specific one. When the candle lit.

Something today resembled something old.

A line. A look. A tone. A memory that landed.

Just the moment.

Write it in a couple of words

2.

Now — what came out of you?

The brace.

The reach.

The going quiet.

The rerunning.

The holding back.

Just the move.

Name it

3.

Now — what else did they give you?

Not the wound. The other things.

Something they taught you.

A way you still move.

A sentence you still hear in their voice.

Or something you still carry from them — even if you can't name it.

That's the rest of the candle.

Name what else they gave you

4.

Look back at all three.

Not analyze. Just look.

Anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

Did you linger longer with one answer?

Write a word or two

Not to fix.

Not to solve.

Not to figure out.

Just to notice.

Sooner than you might have.

They gave you the wound. Or similar wounds.

They also gave you what you still want.

Both came from the same place.

You've been holding both this whole time.

Without language for it.

Without anyone telling you how.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

The candle lights more often than you may notice.

And when it does, something small is available.

In Lesson 3 we'll look for it.

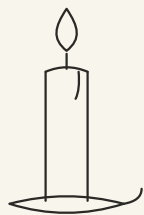
See you in Lesson 3.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — when the candle lights:

Just — there it is.

That is enough.



LESSON 3

When the candle lights

The flame can be bigger than the room.

Still here.

Last lesson you named the candle.

The same person brought all of it.

This lesson is about what happens when the candle lights.

STORIES.

Two short moments before we go further. No hurry.

She was at the grocery store.

Cart full. Short line. Two people behind her now.

She handed the cashier her card. Declined.

Try again. Declined again.

Really?

She reached for cash. She didn't have any.

She heard no comments from those in line behind her.

The card worked on the third try.

She thanked the cashier. She looked back — three people in line now.
Gathered her bags. Walked to her car.

The flame was still up in her chest in the parking lot.

Still up on the drive home.

Still warm at home, putting the forks away.

The card had worked. Nothing was wrong.

— *The card worked.*

— *The flame stayed anyway.*

He shared a new idea in the 10am meeting.

He'd been thinking about it for weeks.

A colleague offered a small piece of feedback.

Reasonable. In tone. With care behind it.

And something in him shifted.

Heat behind the eyes.

A small recoil in the throat.

The wish, immediate and quiet, that he had not said anything at all.

The meeting moved on. He moved on.

The flame stayed up through the afternoon.

That night, making dinner, it was still warm.

The comment had been small. Reasonable.

The kind of thing anyone might say.

— *The meeting moved on.*

— *The flame did not.*

A memory of your own may have arrived. From somewhere earlier.

That's where the carrying is.

Most of us have a version of one of these.

Something happens. The situation is not large.

And the flame goes up bigger than the moment.

And it stays up after the moment is gone.

Different card. Different room.

What the flame illuminates.

Picture the candle on a table.

The table has cut flowers from the garden.

The flame goes up. The light reaches the flowers.

A hint of purple. Or is it lavender.

She remembers her dad in the garden.

Meticulous about the depth of every hole. Six inches. No more, no less.

He used a tape measure. Just to make sure.

That is the candle lighting.

Not just the moment.

Everything attached to it.

The moment the wick catches.

Something today brushes against it. The flame goes up.

Sometimes the flame is bigger than the situation.

Sometimes it stays longer than the situation.

It's carrying more than what just happened.

It often feels older than the moment.

This lesson is not asking you to figure out why.

Not asking you to make it stop.

Not asking you to feel through it.

Not asking you to talk yourself down.

See it while it's happening.

The flame. As it is. While it is up.

WHEN THE CANDLE LIGHTS — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a recent moment.

A specific one. When the candle lit.

This week or last.

Not the original wound. A recent moment when something small happened and the flame was bigger than it.

Or the moment that's still warm in you now.

Just the moment.

Write it in a couple of words

2.

Now — what came out of you?

The brace.

The recoil.

The heat behind the eyes.

The going small.

The door closing somewhere in you.

Or the move that doesn't have a name but the body knows.

Just the move.

Name it

3.

Now — what else came with it?

Not just what happened.

What the flame illuminated.

The connected memory. The older thing. The hint of purple, or is it lavender.

Something not in the room — but in the room anyway.

Name what came with it

4.

Look back at all three.

Not analyze. Just look.

Anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

What stayed longer than the moment called for?

Write a word or two

Not to fix.

Not to solve.

Not to figure out.

Just to notice.

Sooner than you might have.

You saw the flame.
You named what came with it.
That's what's been happening.
In rooms that didn't earn it.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.
The flame is older than the moment that lit it.
Probably older than you know.
In Lesson 4 we'll take a look at how long.
See you in Lesson 4.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — when the flame goes up:

See it while it's up.

Not figure out why.

Not make it stop.

Just see.

That is enough.



LESSON 4

The older flame

The body knew this before words.

Good to see you.

Last lesson you saw the flame go up.

Bigger than the room. Longer than the moment.

This lesson is about how old the flame really is.

S T O R Y .

One story this time. It may run longer than the others. No hurry.

She was ten.

It was a sleepover. Five girls. A house with a hallway.

The host's mother decided which girl got which room.

Four of the girls ended up together — in the den, on the floor, in sleeping bags.

Doing what girls do on sleepovers.

She slowly walked to the bedroom.

Down the hallway. Past the bathroom. Around the corner.

That was her bedroom for the sleepover.

She slept alone in that bedroom.

Mrs. Jones told her this was the best room.

She could hear her friends laughing when she went to brush her teeth.

She didn't say anything in the morning.

She said nothing to her mother on the ride home.

Her body didn't stay quiet. A dull ache. She logged it.

The shape kept showing up.

The middle seat in the car on long trips.

The cereal nobody else wanted.

The bicycle slightly older, slightly different color.

The dull ache, again.

The end slice of the loaf of bread.

Then her senior prom. Her aunt asked her to take her cousin.

She remembered that dull ache when she said “sure.”

Her cousin was kind.

She watched the rest of the night happen at a different angle than hers.

Some of them were real.

Some of them weren't, exactly. The cereal was just the cereal. The middle seat was just the middle seat.

The body didn't always know the difference.

She didn't have words for any of it.

Just the body and that dull ache.

Not every time. But often enough.

Same ache. Different rooms. Different decades.

And too often, the dull ache. And still — she didn't say anything more than “sure.”

Her “sure,” or something like it, kept showing up.

In meetings. With her own children. On the phone with her sister.

Last Thanksgiving.

She was sixty. Her mother was eighty-seven.

The family was at her mother's house. Cousins, grandchildren, in-laws.

Her mother had set every seating arrangement of every gathering since she was a child. She had set this one too.

She walked in. Her mother said — you're at this table, dear.

It was the kids table.

Not named that way. But that was what it was.

The younger cousins. The folding chairs. The smaller plates.

She looked at her mother. Without thinking, she said it.

“Sure.”

Her mother was eighty-seven. Tired. Smaller than she used to be.

Still in charge of the seating.

And the flame went up.

The bedroom at ten. The cereal. The bicycle. The bread. The prom.

All of it. The dull ache too.

Arrived in seconds, without warning.

And underneath, quiet — older than all of it —

Sure. Here we go again.

Ugh.

She walked to the kids table. She sat down.

And — for the first time in fifty years —

She saw it.

There was a shape. The bedroom where this thing started.

She was now sixty. Her mother was eighty-seven.

She ate her dinner. She found a way to talk with her younger cousins.

They were good kids.

The flame, that dull ache, burned through the meal. Through the drive home. Into the next morning.

Smaller than it might have been.

Not gone. But smaller.

A few months later.

She was on a plane. Window and aisle were taken. She was given the middle seat.

The flame started up before she had her bag stowed.

Here we go — the ache arrived, almost on cue.

And then the person in the aisle seat — a twenty-something, headphones around her neck — looked up.

Would you like to switch seats?

She said “sure.” They switched.

The young person had no idea about the bedroom at ten. Had no idea about the kids table.

Just a kind person who saw a woman who looked like she’d prefer the aisle.

The shape had nothing to do with that swap.

And the shape also did not yield.

The flame was still warm in her chest the whole flight.

Longer than the moment called for.

The kindness was real.

The carrying did not stop because of it.

— *I have a shape that started somewhere.*

— *Different rooms. Same ache.*

That is the older flame.

The flame that goes up in the moment is almost never about the moment alone.

It has been building for a long time.

It has been there since something earlier. Often much earlier.

Something the body learned at an age it had no language for.

Something it has been carrying ever since.

Sometimes it's real.

Sometimes it isn't — and the body reads it as real anyway.

Sometimes the world is kind and the carrying continues anyway.

This lesson is not asking you to put it out.

Not asking you to find the original moment and resolve it.

Not asking you to forgive the one who gave you the earlier candle.

Just to see how old it is.

THE OLDER FLAME — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a recent moment.

A specific one. When the flame went up.

This week. Last week. Last Thanksgiving.

Or one still warm in you now.

Just the moment.

Write it in a couple of words

2.

Now — how old does this feel?

Not the age you are. The age the body knows.

Write the age

3.

Now — what rooms has this flame traveled through over the years?

Different rooms. Same ache. Consider a short response in your mind.

4.

As you look at Q1-3, anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

Write a word or two

Not to fix.

Not to solve.

Not to figure out.

Just to notice.

Sooner than you might have.

You named the age.

You named the rooms across the decades.

Some of what we carry is older than the words we have for it.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

The flame isn't the only thing in the room.

There's something else next to it.

In Lesson 5 we'll look beyond the flame.

See you in Lesson 5.

CARRY THIS.

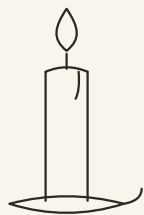
This week — once — when the flame goes up:

Notice the age it feels.

Not the age you are.

The age the body knows.

That is enough.



LESSON 5

Looking beyond the flame

There is more in the room than the flame.

Here you are.

Last lesson you saw how old the flame is.

Older than the words for it.

This lesson is about something the body can do while the flame is up.

Not to put it out.

To look beyond it.

S T O R Y .

One story. The same Thanksgiving. No hurry.

She was at the kids table, again.

Same mother. Same arrangement.

That dull ache in the chest. As she arrived.

She'd already known about her seat. She'd made her way to the table.

Sat down.

The younger cousins were eating their rolls.

And the flame was doing what flames do.

Filling the room.

Last week, the colleague who said something measured — that dull ache followed.

Tuesday, the husband who forgot to get milk —

“sure, no problem.”

This morning, the car that didn’t let her merge — the ache again.

Friday, the work lunch — the remaining pizza slice was smaller than the others.

“Sure.”

No need to make a scene.

Every event since the bedroom — it was like the dull ache had become a part of her life.

That is what flames do.

And then — almost without meaning to —

She let out a long breath.

Just the exhale. She wasn’t aware she’d been holding it.

This holiday, she also felt the texture of her sweater against her arms.

The soft one she'd worn at most holidays.

She owned three of these sweaters.

She smelled the soup.

The recipe her mother had been making since she was a child.

And something settled a bit.

The flame was still up.

And yet the speed of the night, for a moment, slowed.

The moment, briefly, expanded.

And the room came back.

She looked at her mother.

Her mother. Doing what her mother had always done.

She saw the light through the window.

The view of the field behind the house.

The view she'd loved when she was four. When she was twelve. When she was thirty.

The view she'd told her mother she loved, a hundred times, across a lifetime.

The kids table this year was right by that window. Just where it always
was at holidays.

The big table was in the dining room. The view was here, in the den.

Her mother had put her at this table.

By the window.

Where the view was.

Oh.

Both were in the room now.

The flame. And the view.

Stuck. And placed.

Both true. Neither cancelling the other.

And then — quietly — she chose where to look.

Not what to feel.

Not what was true.

What to look at.

The flame was still in the room. So was the view.

She decided to look beyond the flame.

Her mother. The window. The field. The light. The younger cousins.

The soup on the stove.

It had all been there.

She had not been able to see it because the flame had been her whole field of view.

And her eyes expanded.

The flame did not go out.

The room came back.

The flame was no longer the whole room.

She ate her dinner. She talked to the younger cousins, who were sweet.

The flame stayed warm through the meal. Through the drive home.

Into the next morning.

Smaller than it would have been.

Not gone. Smaller.

— *I've sat at that table.*

— *Different room. Same window I almost missed.*

That is the move.

The flame goes up. It fills the room.

Every event becomes evidence of the same word.

Stuck. Cut. Left out.

Whatever your word has been.

And then — sometimes — there is an exhale. The texture of something soft. A smell from the kitchen.

The speed drops.

The moment expands.

The room comes back.

Then there is a decision.

What to look at.

Fixate on the flame. Or look at the rest of the room.

The flame is still in the room. The rest of the room is also there.

Looking beyond the flame is the move.

Not denying the flame.

Not putting it out.

Not pretending.

Just letting the eyes find what is also in the room.

And the eyes expand.

That is the freedom.

Not the absence of the flame.

The eyes finding the rest of the room.

LOOKING BEYOND THE FLAME — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a recent moment.

A specific one. When the flame filled the room.

Maybe a holiday. Maybe last Tuesday. Maybe this morning.

Just the moment.

Write it in a couple of words

2.

Now — what word did the flame write on that room?

Stuck. Cut. Left out. Less than. Overlooked.

Or your own word — whatever it is.

The one the flame keeps writing on every room it lights.

Just the word.

Write it

3.

Now — what else was in the room?

The light through a window. A person's face. A sound from the kitchen.

The texture of a sweater. A smell from the stove.

Something true about the one who lit it — that the wound doesn't tell you.

Something the flame had been hiding by being your whole field of view.

That was beyond the flame.

Name what else was in the room

4.

Look back at all three.

Not analyze. Just look.

Anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

What was harder to see before?

Write a word or two

Not to fix.

Not to solve.

Not to figure out.

Just to notice.

Sooner than you might have.

You used your eyes.

The room got larger.

Your eyes already know how to do that.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

There's a moment that comes after the holiday.

After the meal. After the goodbye. After the door closes.

In Lesson 6 we'll look for it.

See you in Lesson 6.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — when the flame is filling the room:

Take a breath.

Let your eyes find what else is here.

That is enough.



LESSON 6

The drive home

Sometimes processing is digging.

Here we are.

Last lesson you looked beyond the flame.

The room came back. Larger than the flame.

This lesson is about what happens on the way home.

S T O R Y .

One moment at the door. Then the drive. No hurry.

It was almost time to leave.

She'd eaten her dinner. She'd talked to the younger cousins.

The flame had stayed warm through the meal.

Smaller than it would have been.

She was helping clear the dishes when her mother caught her arm.

Her mother was eighty-seven.

Her hand was lighter than it used to be on her sleeve.

"I hope you didn't mind sitting there, dear."

And the flame went up.

Fast. Hot.

Fifty years of stuck.

Fifty years of not enough.

Fifty years of being placed away from where the others were.

And then — almost without meaning to —

She let out a breath.

She remembered telling her mom about the view she loved.

Homework done together at the kitchen table.

Her mom in the car at swim meets.

Birthday parties, always with friends.

Then she looked at her mother.

The seating and also the care.

Then she flipped them.

The care even with the seating.

The flame was still up.

The love was older.

She smiled.

“Sure, Mom.”

Her mother nodded. Patted her arm. Walked back to the kitchen.

That was the whole exchange.

She finished the dishes.

She got her coat. She said goodbye to her younger cousins.

She got in her car.

On the drive home.

Something she usually does — did not happen this time.

She did not replay the comment.

That was new.

She did not compare it to what her mother had said five years ago at Easter.

Ten years ago at the wedding.

Twenty years ago after the graduation.

She drove. The radio was off.

She thought about her mother’s hand on her sleeve.

And — somewhere on the drive — three things arrived.

The first.

There had been a gap. Just before the response.

A small space.

She had not known the gap was there.

She had used it without meaning to.

The second.

What she had been carrying for fifty years had a name.

Not the wound. The carrying.

The wound was something that happened then.

The carrying was something still happening now.

They were not the same thing.

The third.

The carrying had not been serving her.

The wound had stayed real.

The daily carrying had cost her more than it had given her.

Then a fourth thing.
Quiet. Almost embarrassing in its plainness.
She had been calling it processing.
It had been a shovel.

The shovel.

In her mind's eye she pictured it.
Her dad's shovel.
The wooden handle worn at the grip.
The logo she could almost remember.
The garden the cut flowers came from.

Every replay had been more digging.
Tonight, she hadn't picked up the shovel.
The hole hadn't gotten deeper.
She sat with that for a moment.

She thought about her dad.

Her dad had been a gardener.

Not by trade. By Saturday.

Meticulous about every hole.

Six inches. No more, no less.

He used a tape measure. Just to make sure.

She used to laugh at him for it.

Dad. It's a bulb.

He would shrug. Keep measuring.

She had never asked where the six inches came from.

Dad had spent forty years figuring it out.

Plants that didn't come up.

Soil that was wrong.

The slope of the yard. Where the water actually went.

The depth one foot push could move.

The Farmer's Almanac. Or a county pamphlet from somebody at the hardware store.

Try this. Try that.

By the time she was old enough to laugh at the tape measure, Dad had already known things he hadn't known when he started.

He didn't talk about how he learned them.

He just kept measuring.

Dad had a great-grandfather.

He had never met him.

Stories. Mostly from his own father. A few from an aunt.

He could grow anything.

Anything.

The land knew him.

People didn't.

Hard with his wife.

Hard with his sons.

People walked carefully around him.

No one liked him.

Dad knew that.

Dad had still wanted what the great-grandfather knew.

Not who he'd been.

What he'd known about the land.

Some inheritances come down whole.

That one didn't.

Dad rebuilt it.

Plants that didn't come up.

Soil that was wrong.

Forty years of trying.

He took the soil knowledge.

He left the rest with the great-grandmother and the sons no one mentioned anymore.

He didn't talk about that either.

He just did it.

For forty years.

In the garden she'd walked through every Sunday.

She'd been there the whole time.

She had watched him without watching.

She had not known she was being taught.

She'd inherited the shovel.

And — without anyone telling her —

She had also inherited the discipline.

Take what was worth taking.

Leave the rest.

She thought about what the shovel had been for.

Dad had used the shovel to plant.

She had been using it for fifty years to dig up the same hole.

Same shovel.

Different work.

Dad's shovel had built something.

Hers had dug up something.

Across decades. The same hole.

The shovel wasn't the problem.

What she'd made of it was.

She turned into her driveway.

She put the car in park.

The flame was still warm in her chest.

Smaller than it had been at the kids table.

Still there.

And the body said something simple.

I am tired.

Tired of all the digging.

Tired of all the looking.

Tired of all the pairing — this with that, today with then, every event held up against the original to make sure it matched.

Fifty years of work the body had not agreed to do.

It was just too much.

She sat in the car. She didn't get out yet.

In her mind's eye she saw the shovel.

Dad's shovel.

The wooden handle worn at the grip.

The garden the cut flowers came from.

She sat for a moment.

Saw the shovel.

Remembered her dad.

Remembered the cut flowers.

— *I've held that shovel.*

— *Different garden. Same hole.*

That is the lesson.

The flame goes up. The shape starts running.

And — sometimes — there is a gap.

In the gap, two people are in the room.

The one in your head. And the actual person in front of you.

The response that comes out, shaped by both, is small and honest.

And then — afterward — there is another moment.

The drive home. The walk back to your office. The minutes after the call ends.

Something in you invites you to replay.

To compare.

To not let it slide.

The invitation is the shovel.

You do not have to pick it up.

THE SHOVEL — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a recent moment.

A specific one. When something brushed against the candle.

Something the person did or said.

The exchange.

Or just the part of it that's still in your body.

Just the moment.

Write it in a couple of words

2.

Now — what came out of you in that moment?

The brace. The reach. The going small.

Whatever you said. Whatever you did.

The response — small and honest or otherwise.

Just the move.

Name it

3.

Now — what came afterward?

The drive home. The walk back. The hour after.

Did you replay it?

Did you compare it to last time?

Did you tell someone?

Or did some part of you let the moment pass without picking up the shovel?

Name what came afterward

4.

Look back at all three.

Not analyze. Just look.

Anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

What is the body tired of carrying?

Write a word or two

Not to fix.

Not to solve.

Not to figure out.

Just to notice.

Sooner than you might have.

You named what the body is tired of.

You saw the shovel.

The body has been waiting for you to notice.

The shovel is on the seat beside you.

Dad knew how to use one.

You can too.

Or you can leave it where it is.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

You've been carrying something since Lesson 1.

We'll look at it one more time.

In Lesson 7 we close together.

See you in Lesson 7.

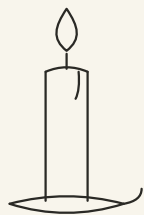
CARRY THIS.

This week — once — after the moment passes:

Notice if you reach for the shovel.

You don't have to pick it up.

That is enough.



LESSON 7

The carry

Something has already started happening.

Still here.

Last lesson you saw the shovel.

And the dad who used it.

And the great-grandfather behind him.

This lesson is not about something new.

It's about what has already started happening.

STORIES.

Two short moments before we go further. No hurry.

A Tuesday.

The colleague said something measured. The flame rose quickly.

Warm in her chest through the rest of the meeting.

On the walk back to her desk, she let out a breath.

By the time she sat down, the flame was smaller.

By lunch, it was almost gone.

In any other year, she would have replayed the comment all afternoon.

She would have told her husband at dinner.

She would have lain in bed at eleven, still hearing it.

This Tuesday, by three o'clock, she hadn't forgotten about it.

But she felt more room.

She remembered, briefly, that night, while she was unloading the dishwasher.

Oh — that thing this morning.

And then she went back to the dishwasher and removed silverware, forks first.

A Saturday.

Her sister called. Told her about her Saturday accomplishment list.

It was only 10:30.

The flame went up fully.

She felt an urge to replay the conversation twice on the drive to the grocery store.

She didn't.

And then she told her husband about her sister's productivity list when she got home.

She told her friend on the phone that night.

She lay in bed at eleven, still hearing it.

“Where’s your accomplishment list?”

The shovel was in her hand all day.

She did not notice picking it up.

— *I’ve had a Tuesday and a Saturday.*

— *Different week. Same body.*

Both happen.

Some days the carry is operating before she has noticed it.

Some days it doesn’t land.

Both are real.

Both are her life now.

Most weeks, more days are like the Tuesday than they used to be.

Some weeks are not.

That is the practice doing its work.

She didn't set out to make this happen.

She didn't decide to be different.

She'd been doing the small thing once a week.

The exhale.

The look beyond.

The notice when the shovel was in her hand.

Most weeks she had forgotten by Wednesday.

And the body had been carrying the practice anyway.

Without her keeping track.

Without her organizing around it.

The carrying had been doing its work whether she'd been watching or not.

She thought about her dad.

Dad had spent forty years figuring out the six inches.

Plants that didn't come up.

Soil that was wrong.

Try this. Try that.

He had a great-grandfather he had never met.

No one liked him.

He could grow anything.

Dad had taken the soil knowledge.

He had left the rest with the great-grandmother and the sons no one mentioned anymore.

He hadn't talked about it.

He'd just done it.

For forty years.

In the garden she'd walked through every Sunday.

She had been there the whole time.

She had watched him without watching.

She had not known she was being taught.

And — without anyone telling her —

She had begun to do what Dad had done.

Take what was worth taking.

Leave the rest.

She thought about her mother.

Her mother had put her at the kids table.

Her mother had also put her by the view through the window.

The seating she'd been carrying for fifty years.

The view she'd loved when she was four. When she was twelve. When she was thirty.

Both.

Same person.

She had begun to take the view.

She had begun to leave the seating where it was.

Without anyone telling her how.

The way Dad had with the soil and the rest.

That is what the carry is.

Not a thing you do once and have.

Not a state you reach and stay in.

A small thing the body returns to, sometimes, when the flame goes up.

Sometimes it lands. Sometimes it does not.

The days when it lands accumulate, slowly, into a different kind of week.

The days when it does not — those are also part of this.

The body is allowed to have them.

The carry is not a performance.

Where the carry leads.

For some carriers, after years of the carry, the wound becomes something that happened rather than something happening.

The forgiving arrives without anyone deciding it should.

For others, it does not arrive.

The wound stays. And the carrying around it loosens.

The not-yet of the forgiving softens.

The hard no becomes a less hard no.

For others, what arrives is not about forgiveness at all.

Better mornings.

More energy for what matters.

The capacity to be in the room with the person in front of them.

Not the one in their head.

All of these are the carry working.

Where the carry leads is not the lesson's to tell you.

The carry is yours.

Where it leads is yours.

One quiet thing.

The shovel is still in the shed.

Dad's shovel.

The wooden handle worn at the grip.

It is still hers if she ever wants to plant something.

Next to the hole. Or somewhere else entirely.

That part is not the lesson's to tell you either.

THE CARRY — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a recent moment.

A specific one. When the flame went up this past week.

A Tuesday-shaped one. A Saturday-shaped one. Whatever yours was.

Just the moment.

Write it in a couple of words

2.

Now — what came out of you?

The breath. The look beyond. The not-picking-up the shovel.

Or the replay. The compare. The shovel in your hand all day.

Honest accounting. Not failure.

Just the move.

Name it

3.

Now — what has the body been doing without you watching?

A flame that faded sooner than it used to.

A replay that didn't start.

A small moment that landed differently than it would have a year ago.

Something the carry has been doing quietly.

While you were not keeping track.

Name what the body has been doing

4.

I'm not sure about every person reading this question.

But if you're the one I'm thinking of — maybe even the one this question was written for — would you look up and smile?

Not to fix.

Not to solve.

Not to figure out.

Just to notice.

Sooner than you might have.

You're seven lessons in.

You looked at both kinds of days.

The body has been doing this work whether you've been watching or not.

You've already been doing this.

Without anyone telling you how.

The way Dad had with the soil.

The way she'd begun to with the view.

Before you go.

Mom is in the kitchen.

Her hand on a sleeve.

Still in charge of the seating. Still by the view.

Dad is in the garden.

The tape measure. The six inches.

Forty years of trying.

Come back if you want.

They'll be here.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

In Lesson 8 you'll have a turn.

Two letters.

We'll start there.

See you in Lesson 8.

CARRY THIS.

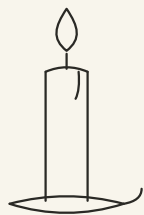
This week — once — when the flame goes up:

Notice sooner.

Notice that you noticed.

And, if you do, smile.

That is enough.



LESSON 8

Two letters

Your turn.

You're back.

Last lesson — the carry.

Both kinds of days. Dad's six inches. The great-grandfather behind him.

The view and the seating. Both real. Both yours.

You looked up.

Maybe you smiled.

Seven lessons taught.

This one is yours.

Here is what this lesson asks of you.

Two letters.

Both letters are to you.

One to the you who is holding the candle.

One to the you who, at least some of the time, looks beyond.

Two versions of you.

Both real.

Both yours.

A word on how to do this.

Here's what tends to land for people.

Write the first letter.

When you're done — sit with it for a moment.

You don't have to do anything with it yet. Just keep it close.

Then write the second letter.

Then read them together.

First one. Then the other. Then side by side.

That's the part that tends to do the work.

Reading them together. Both at once.

When you've read both — that's when you'll know what to do with them.

Keep them. File them. Tear them up. Frame them.

Whatever your body says.

Any way you'd like.

On paper. On a screen. In a notebook you have. In a notebook you'll buy. On the back of an envelope.

Short or long.

In one sitting or across a week.

If your body doesn't want to do this — don't.

The book continues to be the book.

The carrying continues whether you write these or not.

The first letter.

To the you who is holding the candle.

The you who picked it up.

The you who has been carrying it.

The you the flame goes up in.

The you who reaches for the shovel.

The you who replays at 2 a.m.

That you is still here.

Still real.

Still doing the carrying.

Some things you might say to that you.

You don't have to say all of them. You don't have to say any of them.

These are just here in case the body has trouble starting.

— *I see you.*

In the bedroom at ten.

In the car at fourteen.

In the kitchen at sixty.

Wherever the candle has been lit in you.

I see what you've been carrying.

— *You picked it up because you had to.*

There wasn't somebody there to pick it up for you.

Or there was. And they couldn't.

Or wouldn't.

Or didn't know how.

You did what you could.

— *The carrying made sense.*

It got you through.

It found you a way to keep moving.

It kept you here.

That mattered.

That still matters.

— *What it has cost.*

The mornings that started already loaded.

The conversations that didn't quite land.

The hours rerunning instead of being here.

The shovel in your hand all day without noticing you'd picked it up.

What you didn't get to.

Because the carrying was happening.

— *You don't have to keep carrying it the way you have been.*

Not because the carrying was wrong.

The carrying made sense.

And — the carrying isn't the only way to hold it anymore.

Some days that will be available.

Some days it won't.

Either is alright.

— *Anything else.*

Whatever the body wants to say.

To the part of you that has been the one keeping this carrying going.

Whatever that part of you has been waiting to hear.

Take your time.

Or don't.

The letter is yours.

[illegible]

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

When you're done — sit with it for a moment.

Keep it close.

You're not done with this lesson yet.

The second letter.

To the you who, at least some of the time, looks beyond.

The you who exhaled at the Thanksgiving table.

The you who saw the view through the window.

The you who didn't pick up the shovel on the drive home.

The you who let the moment pass.

The you who said sure, Mom — and meant it differently this time.

That you is already here.

Has been here.

More days than you've been counting.

Some things you might say to that you.

Again, you don't have to say any of these. These are just here in case the body has trouble starting.

— *I see you too.*

On the drive home.

At the kitchen counter when the flame faded sooner than it used to.

In the moment a replay didn't quite start.

In the small Tuesday-shaped moments that landed differently than they would have a year ago.

I see what you have been doing.

— *You didn't set out to do this.*

You didn't decide to be different.

You'd been doing the small thing once a week.

Most weeks you forgot by Wednesday.

And the body had been carrying the practice anyway.

— *Dad's discipline.*

Without anyone telling you how.

Take what was worth taking.

Leave the rest.

You've been doing it.

— *You aren't the one I expected to find.*

I expected to find the one with the shovel.

And there you were too.

The one who set it down. Sometimes. Without making a thing of it.

More often than you've been counting.

— *Keep going.*

Or don't.

Some days the body will look beyond.

Some days it won't.

Both are part of this.

Either is alright.

— *Anything else.*

Whatever the body wants to say.

To the part of you that has been doing this quiet work.

Without keeping track.

Take your time with this one.

It often takes longer than the first.

Sometimes the body has been waiting for someone to notice this
version of you for a long time.

That someone is you.

[illegible]

Now — read them together.

You have both letters now.

Read the first one.

Then the second one.

Then — if your body will let it happen — read them side by side.

Both at once.

This is the part the lesson has been pointing toward.

Both versions of you. On the page in front of you.

The one holding the candle.

The one who, at least some of the time, looks beyond.

Both real.

Both yours.

Both with you at the same time.

Take your time here.

Sit with both.

Let what happens happen.

Sometimes the body does something quiet when it reads both at once.

A small softening. A small recognition. A small smile.

Sometimes not.

Either is alright.

Then — what you do with them is yours.

Put them in a drawer.

Folder them somewhere safe.

Tear them up.

Burn them in the fireplace.

Frame them.

Read them again next year.

Where they go is yours.

The work has already happened.

That is the work.

Two letters.

Written by you.

To two versions of you who have been with you all along.

The you who is holding the candle.

The you who, at least some of the time, looks beyond.

Both real.

Both yours.

The candle is still here.

The shovel is still in the shed.

Dad's discipline is still in your hands.

Mom is in the kitchen.

Her hand on a sleeve.

Still in charge of the seating. Still by the view.

Dad is in the garden.

The tape measure. The six inches.

Forty years of trying.

Come back if you want.

They'll be here.

This was the workbook.

The carrying continues.

Some days the flame will go up.

Some days you'll exhale.

Some days the eyes will find the view.

Some days they won't.

Either is alright.

This is the carry.

A comment from the author.

Years working with people.

Never much liked wasted time.

Still don't.

Also prefer a more targeted focus.

Hence the domain.

Glad you stopped for a moment.

Hope something in here landed.

If not, hope you heard a good story.

Till we meet again.

Frank.

Caught Book Club Opportunity

There is no required way to do this.

Some people read the workbook on their own.

Some listen to the audio version.

Some do both.

Some groups read or listen together.

Some arrive having explored the lesson beforehand.

All are welcome.

Then meet.

Pull up a few chairs.

Have a coffee.

Take a walk.

Sit on a porch.

Leave an empty chair for David if you'd like.

Not because he has the answers.

Just because every now and then it helps to remember there is a quiet companion sitting with the conversation.

Ask a few questions.

What stood out?

What felt familiar?

What surprised you?

What might you be seeing differently?

What is the upside?

What is the downside?

What is the hmmm?

There is no need to agree.

There is no need to solve anything.

There is no need to leave with a plan.

Just look together for a little while.

Sometimes you will discover something about yourself.

Sometimes you will discover something about another person.

Sometimes you will discover something about the room.

Sometimes you will simply notice something sooner than you might have.

Then look up.

Smile.

Take a picture if you'd like.

And carry on.

That is enough.

Frank keeps the intention simple. If this work helps twenty more people, that will be enough.

You may read it free.
You may listen free.
You may find the physical book.
You may share it with someone else.

THE CAUGHT SOONER HOUSE

SOONER	Caught Paying the Bill
Caught Waiting	Caught Recovering
Caught Being	Caught Wanting
Caught Forgiving	28 Days · A Journal
Caught Leading	The audio
Caught Graduating	

If something in these pages landed,
there's more on the porch.
Come sit awhile.

CAUGHTSOONER.COM