

# VII

# CROON'S PAST

Ah. Now that the kid is to sleep I can settle into my favorite, dusty old armchair. My favorite time of the day. The hectic time of the dinner hour is over and her mother has just left to get sauced up and the local juice house. Yup, all is quiet in the old abode for once. The girl seems to be enjoying the tale of the Arnold-Tones so far, even seems like she started payin' attention to most of what I'm saying. Hope she's connecting to these characters and really gets an idea for what they is like. I know I get to thinkin' about those boys. Earlier I was thinkin' bout Song and his life growin' up...but I remember that just 'bout all four them had really interesting backstory's. Croon, yup Arnold Croon. I'd say he could well be my favorite Arnold-Tone, he could well be least. He's the one that always stuck hardest to my heart innards, and the one I've fought most to forget. Reckon now that I've got to bean spillin' ain't no point in casting him out of mind no more.

You could say Croon came from the right side of the tracks...that is if you were facing due North. He grew up on the side them tracks that is immediately to your right. That was the shitty part of town. He had two of the most loving parents you could imagine but life sure taxed them too. Y'see his Mom was a dancer and his Dad was a saxer. Mother Croon was in the Metropolitan Ballet Company, so her life very much resolved around her feet. She stayed off'a them 'cept for when she was training in very specific movements, so she might pirouette to the toilet or some shit like that. Heck they even rigged a complex system of hoists and pulleys and suspenders all round the house so she could move without steppin'. Croon's peppy, well he played saxophone for the Drag Bellweather quartet, which meant late nights and plenty a parlances with booze. Croon's folks in this way were intellectual types, but of the wrong variety...the kind that was broke as all hell.

The was persuain' their dreams and chasin' their passion one would say, but they always had a bigger dream laid out for Croon and his two sisters. They wanted their son to go to medical school. Dote as they did, love their son as much they did, they still tried to squelch down whatever passion he may a had for persuain' music and the arts. 'Bout the only time Arnold could get a singin' on was in the shower, but his papa would come in and flush the terlet for to get him to shut up.

People were ignorant in a special way in them times, sexist to be sure. So Croon's parents put all the pressure on him, hopin' he has to make a career and carry on the family name, neverminding all them sisters he had. So it was Arnold got the college fund and boy did they make sure he would apply to the best medical schools in the country. Wouldn'tcha know it, he got rejected by each one, all the way through. His grades were good mind you...but those admittance boards were just 'bout as bigoted as near everywhere else in the country. But daddy and Mama Croon didn't relent, and they sent Arnold packing off to Cuba for medical school.

Now, I bet you could just get to imagining what the sun drenched beaches of Havana do to a boy like Croon that has music in his heart. He went to class here and there sure, but as time went on here and there started getting' much further apart. Croon just couldn't stay away from them rocky sholes, songs floating out of his mouth and smackin' the air like the waves smacked the beach. The rhythms of that special Commie island sang to him, he was breathing and shitting la musica. The only thing that began ta sing louder than song in his heart, began to be the pangs of guilt, beating like those perpetual Cuban rhythms. Every nights as he ate a luscious Cuban meal in the company of a beautiful local seniorita, he would pore through a letter from home. A tear would swell behind his eyes as he thought of his parent's sacrifices. The sister that had to go without braces, the other sister that had to drop out of school to take care of the family.

Once word got out that Arnold was in medical school in Cuba, his Mommy and Poppy became mini celebrities within their artistic social circles. Though these events landed somewhere

during the Cold War, the artists their crowd ran with were leftists , if not outright Commie's. Mother and Father Croon in this way was always in demand for the high society functions. Mothers' feet were swollen from dance, while father had to booze excessively to make it through so many jazz combo club sessions. Arnold Croon surmised the trouble his family went through, all so for him to come out the other end a doctor and to make his parents proud.

Though he had started to sing on the corners and in the nightlife clubs to some success, Arnold tried to pack away his passion and hit the books harder than ever. If those words and diagrams on the pages would only dance and sing for him! Despite his days becoming a slog of grueling trials, he regained some rank in his class and looked poised to make it through if he so desired, though he'd come out of it as a practitioner of some esoteric field of medical study, like an obstetrician, podiatrist or gynecologist . Hardly the surgeon his parents had hoped, but he could do it. Yet, Dr. Croon wasn't to be.

Bad news was soon to come down. Word came via a local errand boy that worked at the local pharmacist slash mango and yam store. The boy ran to Croon with a message. Arnold unfolded that letter and received word via the errand boy from the Cuban pharmacist of a message coming from a hospital in his home nation, Arnold's mother, father, and two sisters were all dead.

The previous night, his family had packed in for a rare outing. Father was too tired to drive, having just come off a twenty hour recording session with Saul Ronald's, so mother took the wheel. While on the freeway, heading to the drive-in theatre located the next town over, Mother went to put her foot to the brake whence the car next to her cut her off. Uh oh! At that same moment she received what amounted to just about the worse foot cramp one could ever expect to have. Six days straight of marathon dancing left her breaking foot dumb in sudden excruciating pain. With no feeling except tha pang of lightning bolts in her appendage, she missed the brake. The Croon family car, travelling eighty miles an hour, struck the pickup truck in front of them, ejecting each and every

family member from the vehicle. Their bodies slammed on the pavement, parts missed by flying auto debris were soon run over by the rush of ensuing traffic. Piles of flesh and blood was strewn all over the freeway. The entire Croon family was dead, save for Arnold.

The boy reasoned it was all his fault, which come to think of it was pretty solid logic. If'n he woulda put his foot down, forgotten medical school and just stayed home and sang. Whelp, perhaps his whole family wouldn'a had to sacrifice so hard, been driven to such exhaustion for what to cause such a tragedy. Croon connected them dots all right. He gave up medical school right there on the spot. Plus he was broke, without having parents to foot his bills. He made back for the states on the dry side of a raft. After many days of floating, then many days of walkin', he did a sure hell of a lot of crying, moaning, and thinking. But it was the singing he done on the road home that really saved his life. By time he arrived home he had a sure fire idea for how he could keep from killin' himself over his grief, singing and Doo-Wopping was the answer and the path he would take forward for the rest of his days. Puttin' the group together after that was just cursory.

A fella finds a way of movin' forward after a heavy loss. What's the difference between coping and forgetting anyhow?

Dag, thinking on this makes me hungry. What the fuck does Cuban food taste like, hell what's it even look like? I can barely remember anymore. Figure thinkin' about Arnold Croon's origin got me hankerin' for some south of the border eats. Reckon I'll just have to hope I got some taquitos in the freezer. Thinkin' 'bout tragedy leaves me wantin' to run from it and eatin' is sure one way to get to digesting dark memories and thoughts.