SOURER THAN CITRUS

‘SOURER THAN CITRUS’ IS THE FIRST PART OF THE
EDEN TRILOGY.

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I entrust any reproductions or translations to the Holy Orthodox Church.
I dedicate this revised edition with gratitude to the late Archpriest Silouan,
who inspired me, supported me and gave me my name.
Eternal memory!

	FOREWORD	7
1.	GOD ABOVE GOD	9
2.	EDEN	23
3.	ASH' HADU	33
4.	HOMESICKNESS	41
5.	ON THE HUNT	49
6.	WINTER	73
7.	DJEBEL AKHBAR	99
8.	HE WHO KILLS BEARS	115
9.	THE FALL AND THE FALL	129
10.	TWO BATTLES	135
11.	THE FALL AND PIT CONVERSATIONS	145
12.	THE RIVER	153
13.	THE GIFT. PART 1	159
14.	THE GIFT. PART 2	165
15.	CAIN	169
16.	THE FAREWELL	173
17.	THE SACRIFICE	177
18.	THE BEND	189
19.	FAR AWAY, LIKE A PERFECT PEARL	193
20.	EVA	203
21.	MAN ABOVE GOD	211

FOREWORD

No one doubts that the story of creation was not written by Adam or Eve themselves. There is a strong suspicion that someone from Moses's entourage wrote it. The mystery surrounding Cain, who suddenly acquires a wife and children out of nowhere, has never been explained. Whether or not it is based on true events cannot be proven. But does it need to be? Let us at least marvel at the fact that the story is so relatable and contains so much wisdom! The story therefore reminds me of a parable. The mysterious writer may have omitted 'once upon a time' to prevent us from thinking that it is not about ourselves. After all, at least when it comes to people, we are all the characters in this story. Nor does this book need to bear an author's name. It was written by a disciple who learnt everything 'for nothing' from his spiritual forefathers, mothers and fathers, his present spiritual sisters and brothers, his critical readers, his name and his family. And when he was able to write this, it was not for what he has, but for what he lost. The book takes root best in a prison, where the beginning of regret resounds loudly. Witness to this are all the quotes from Oscar Wilde.

May it take root in the heart of every person

person.

1. God above God

Thus spoke the angel Lucifer, bearer of light and also known as the Morning Star, proudly in his thoughts to the archangel Michael: "Behold, Michael! Gold and diamond! At the same time! I shall never perish! I shall always appear on the other side! I shall never lose the light!", whilst he held aloft in his hand the sunlight of the first day. But when he looked up at the same moment, this light paled in the face of the dazzling and unrivalled spectacle of the ever-whirling six-winged seraphim, who circled and danced incredibly close to the divine light as if they were unquenchable torches. Their six wings, covered with countless eyes, caught every minuscule particle of light to pass it on generously to all the hierarchs beneath them. The cherubim, in turn, were the first to shine forth as radiant humanoid beings with four wings and faces; they bore the eight-wheeled throne-chariot upon which the Lord of Hosts had taken his seat. Beneath them, Lucifer heard how the dominions, the powers and the principalities, in all their glory, sang praise with one voice: "Holy! Holy! Holy!" One level lower, the principalities and archangels gazed upon the angels at the very bottom, to whom Lucifer also belonged as the most beautiful among them. And yet this was not enough for Lucifer, the Morning Star. Being part of this dazzling spectacle in the Holy of Holies was not enough for Lucifer.

Looking up at the divine light above him was already a difficult task, but when he suddenly saw below him how that same divine light was walking about with the Man in Eden in the form of a human figure, well, then he felt completely sidelined. Morning Star now felt himself to be not only the inferior of his superiors but also the inferior of his inferiors, as if the divine light wished to shun him personally both above and below. Lucifer called out in his mind to Michael, the undisputed leader among the archangels, and therefore also called 'Who is like God': "The Man is many times less beautiful than we are, and yet God reveals Himself as a human. I bear the light and am the most beautiful among the angels. Why does He not choose to resemble me?" Michael replied to him: "Only God can answer that." Lucifer found it difficult to accept this answer and tried to brush it aside. But when God created Mannin, His equal in the form of the wondrously beautiful woman, from the man's rib, Lucifer felt utterly subordinate and even rejected. Seeing God walking in human form with the Man and Mannin at His side in the glorious Garden of Eden, where everything spoke and breathed of love, felt like a direct rejection. "How can God create two kinds in one and yet have them both be equal to Him?", his thoughts burst forth. Michael answered him once more: "Man can procreate in freedom; we cannot. And love unites, just as the seven archangels are one and all are one with Him in the Holy of Holies, from whom all love comes." Lucifer could not fathom it and was bewildered: it seemed to him as though man could thus create creation itself. His jealousy and

envy reached a peak, finding refuge only in the purest arrogance. Michael, together with the archangels—the 'Mighty One of God', also known as Gabriel or Jibril, and Raphael, also known as the 'Restorer of God'—sensed the danger approaching and immediately summoned all 770,000 angels in spirit to serve mankind. "God created Man and Mannin in His image today. We shall serve Man and Mannin. Just as the seraphim and all the hierarchs above us transmit the divine light to us, so shall we in turn transmit this light to mankind. For this purpose we were all created." Indignant, Morning Star also addressed the 770,000 in her thoughts: "Must we then bow down before Man and Woman? What have we done wrong that He bestows His likeness upon mankind and not upon us? We, His earlier creations? Does love then mean injustice when I am not allowed to resemble God, yet man is? I bear the sun that rises every morning. The light I carry is like a diamond! Behold its brilliance! Why should I be allowed to bear this but not God's likeness? Why should I now kneel before Man and Woman? Is this love? I am certainly not alone: look how many discontented angels there are now! One more beautiful than the other! They are my clouds and support my arm. They listen to me and no longer to Michael! They are my legions. Michael is 'Who is like God'? He was given a mighty name, and without having been created in His image, is that enough for him? My wings tremble at such weakness. He will never be worthy of his name, given so much submission and humiliation. Shall I disguise myself as who Michael is, as

Who does God seem to be? It will always be me who is not God and whom I no longer wish to be. Am I not allowed to resemble God? Then I do not wish to resemble Him!" Lucifer sensed the approving attention many angels were paying him, and it emboldened him: "Then look at God's likeness! The Man dwells together with the Woman in the Garden of Eden: they need do nothing, they receive everything, and for nothing they walk side by side with God in the Garden of Eden. The Man and the Woman know no care whatsoever, whilst every day I bear the sun for them and my legions carry the water in an endless cycle. Oh no, never shall I serve man and throw myself at his feet as Michael and his kind do. I condemn the Man and the Woman. And I condemn God for the sake of His image in man. Eternally shall I fight them until nothing remains of their likeness to God. The God within them shall I slay. I release the sun and no longer wish to bear the light. I shall move in the darkness, in the unformed black light, invisible as a spirit in the face of the sun. I hate the name God gave me. I am no longer called Lucifer, but Belial, and many other names shall I bear. I shall shake off my wings. I shall distort my nature until nothing remains of my beauty. Nothing, absolutely nothing, do I wish to have in common with my Creator. My beauty shall cloak itself in all that love is not, and I shall worship and display only the beauty of its opposite, and I shall give it a name: I, Belial, create evil in word and deed. My cloud-bearers shall henceforth carry no more life-giving water, but only hatred. I shall henceforth create darkness and every

“I shall still shun the light. My eyes shall be blind, my tongue shall taste and grope, my bite shall kill, my muscles shall strangle.” Michael thought: “You are acting not only foolishly, but also ungratefully. Your place is no longer in the Holy of Holies, but in the depths of the earth!” And behind him stood his faithful angels, in overwhelming numbers, ready to bar Belial and his followers from the Holy of Holies. The light withdrew instantly from Lucifer and his followers, and they all retreated into the hidden realms of the earth. They did not regard their sojourn as a choice of their own, but felt it had been forced upon them by the arrival of humankind. It fuelled their hatred towards mankind. The consequence felt like the cause. Their thoughts grew ever quieter when it came to the lost light, but swelled all the more maliciously when it came to mankind. They felt like victims. Only Belial retained the true overview and revelled in his power over these followers. He did not correct them in the slightest. He revelled in their thirst for vengeance and, at the same time, in their stupidity. Just as he had once been the most beautiful angel, so now he was determined to become the ugliest and most feared angel. He would teach Michael a lesson and waited patiently. His plan was ready. There was just one thing he still needed to take his revenge: to gain access to mankind. Without access, he stood no chance of taking revenge on God. Michael’s angels had driven them out of Eden to Earth, but this felt like nothing more than a punishment as long as Belial and his followers could not approach mankind in Eden. Waiting required no patience, for time did not exist. Suddenly, Belial sensed a thought approaching. ‘Lucifer, where are you?’ Beli-

He immediately sensed his chance. ‘Lucifer, where are you?’, the thought echoed once more, as if the archangel Raphael, God’s Restorer, did not know where to find him. “Here I am, Raphael! Belial is my name!” And he did not wait for Raphael’s reply before attacking: “Have you come to restore us? Then first restore love itself! Man’s freedom to procreate proves how imperfectly and unequally God has endowed us angels!”, he thought proudly from the darkness of his soul. “He created us first. Why these wretched wings and this inability to produce offspring, whilst man is granted this gift? Does He lock man away in a golden cage in Eden? What fine freedom this is! Must I then submit myself to a will-less being merely because of his gratuitous likeness to Him? Then recreate me! Or condemn me! At least I know the freedom to reject His love! I challenge God: is man, created in His image, permitted to renounce love in freedom as well? It is easy to create something that slavishly follows you. And must I place myself at the service of that? Let someone else serve the Morning Star! Do not recreate me, but cast me off, or give me the means to cast myself off; make it difficult for no one! Do not make me a burden to your dissenting angels! Evaporate me into nothingness or dry me up into a grain of sand in the desert, where I would rather dwell today than perform the spectacle of the light that gladdens all for a world divided by Him, or at least created without freedom for those in His image. I am certainly not alone! Deliver us! Or let us prove ourselves! Give us a place in humanity and prove to us that that wingless creature,

created in His image of love in servitude is worth more, is capable of more, than the image of non-love in freedom which He apparently freely permits for me and mine. If His image-like one succeeds in providing proof of this, I will worship God as I worshipped and glorified Him on the first day. I, too, bear an image of my Creator within myself. It is exalted above all things. But it is mine! He created me in freedom. Or am I imagining this? Why did He create me as the fairest of the angels? Might I be the fairest so that I might then surely remain silent? That I, of all, might challenge Him? That I, of all, might summon you, His archangel 'Restorer of God', to keep watch? Do I have any freedom at all, or was I too slavishly compelled into this rebellion? Restore me to one of your own and I shall have certainty! Deny me access to mankind and I shall have certainty once more!"

Raphael, unperturbed and at one with God in light, replied

: "You are mistaken, Belial. In the very centre of the Garden of Eden has stood a tree since the very beginning. It is the tree of good and evil; its trunk is indestructible, its roots reach deep; its unripe fruits are sour at first, but once ripened, they become sweet. The tree stood there long before angels, humans or animals were created."

Belial interrupted him: "But no creature is allowed to eat the apple? How absurd is that? What does 'not being allowed to do something' have to do with freedom?"

"Because this tree is no ordinary apple tree. There are many apple trees in Eden, but through this tree God wishes to make something important clear to the Man and the Woman. God Himself is the trunk of this tree that bears fruit: every apple

The apple that grows on it is sour at first but ripens patiently until it becomes sweet, and it is the tree that indicates when the apple is sweet enough to be plucked, to be given to the Man and the Woman. These apples are not taken; they are given. Neither we, nor the seraph, nor humankind can possibly know for certain whether the apple is ready to be eaten as sweet. We must have faith in the tree and not try to distinguish for ourselves between its sourness or sweetness, between good and evil. The tree does not wish to give us a sour apple, so we wait until we take what we are given. The tree asks only to be trusted. It is infinitely generous and loving. Its judgement is always right because the tree loves us." "But not just!" Belial roared back in his mind, "I'll decide for myself whether I want to bite into a sour or a sweet apple."

"Why do you have to go and choose the sour apple? To

Do you harbour the illusion that you can create anything? Do you think you create evil or bitterness yourself? The word 'evil' has only existed since your rebellion against the good: you created nothing yourself, but your pride gives form to what is not love. The tree symbolises this free choice. Human beings cannot distinguish between good and evil, between sweet and sour, on their own. Just as little as you or I can. God asks only to be trusted. Human beings are free to decide on this. They live timelessly in the present. Just like us. And they too have a choice, just as you have now squandered yours. You would rather delude yourself into taking sour for sweet than give up your pride." "And am I not allowed to choose a sour apple? I am ten-

“At least I’m free!” Belial remained undeterred.

“Free and short-sighted! Sometimes, being able to deny yourself something is a sign of great freedom. Do you not see how your flawed understanding of freedom limits your present self and condemns you to a life in the wilderness? There is no gift of freedom in love without a response of love in freedom. Only in this way do taking and giving become complementary, and only in this way do they together mean more than either separately. Freedom thus elevates their covenant of love to a height surpassing even that of the seraphim. This ability to respond to the gift of love with love—far more important than procreation—is granted to the seraphim, the cherubim, the angels, and also to humankind. “Man received a little more, but perhaps also a little less.” And he deliberately did not move his wings, for Raphael was explicitly concerned with the Holy of Holies, where man apparently had no place. Raphael expressly used the word ‘perhaps’ because, in all his humility, he was certain that he could not fathom all of this.

“Why didn’t God create me just like you, as a so-
so-called free, loving angel who is happy to have his feet wiped?”

“Because that is precisely no longer love. You want to be free? Well, you are free!”

“I certainly am, and more so than you! Grant me access to the thoughts of mankind so that I too may prove that my choice is not unjustified. I will prove to you that the freedom you describe is an illusion. I will prove to you that a God who permits non-love for the sake of freedom thereby destroys love itself—not I! Non-love is many times stronger than

love. It will not be long before the free human being, precisely because of his capacity for procreation, loses the image of God within him."

"What are you getting so worked up about, then? Why so jealous? Were you created without gender? Then help humanity instead…" but Belial did not let Raphael finish his thought. "Restore us to being creatures without free will, instead of humiliating us, Restorer!" he said with biting sarcasm, "why should I bow down to someone who is lesser, who does not even dwell in the Holy of Holies?"

"Were we not created for that very purpose? We, the sexless ones, complete the image of God in man, Belial. Make no mistake: love comes from God and is like God Himself: the beginning. Love is as God is love, and love is God. Neither the seraph, nor the angel, nor man was created first. Love cannot exist without its parasite, non-love. Non-love, too, therefore belongs immediately to the choice, but only as a negation of love. Non-love cannot possibly exist on its own. You are therefore not inventing anything: you respond to your having been created with something you personally choose. We must by no means serve man first and foremost. The angels must always and everywhere serve love first and foremost, and that begins with every angel responding in love to God and thus also to man, created in His image. To serve humanity is to serve God. Just as humanity, in turn, must serve the animals, the insects, the plants, the air and the water just as well. Humanity's task of responding to love with love is, if anything, even heavier than ours, who are permitted to dwell in the Holy of Holies. God creates nothing that

which, in turn, cannot and must not provide for anything. You therefore have unhindered access to the human mind because you have always possessed this, just as I have. You do not need to acquire what you have always had. Your dark mind merely thinks that you do not have this. You reason from a place of non-love, which feels unreasonably constrained in its yearning to ever increase its freedom and, to that end, justifies every form of manipulation. Unjustly! In your blind drive to ever-expand freedom, non-love itself destroys the realisation of just how great that freedom was which you once possessed in love. Does non-love use coercion to attain freedom? Are all means acceptable? The more freedom strives for freedom in non-love, the less free it feels. You distort what love is because you have severed your bond with love and can no longer reason from a place of love. The tree in Eden has always been there. In that tree, if you wish, you can dwell in the hidden realm, disguised as an animal with characteristics of your choosing. No one will bar you from this. You may speak freely with the Man and the Woman. But all access to the Holy of Holies remains impossible to you henceforth. Your reaction is the reverse proof of God's love, that He gives man a gender of his own: God created His image in man not so much in appearance, but chiefly in the gift of passing on life and love himself." And even now, Rapha-el suspected that there was much more to it, but he simply did not know what. He continued: "We angels number 770,000. There will never be more, were it not for mankind. Man and Mannin are given the gift and the freedom to procreate. All their descendants will take their place beneath the same tree and

“They must have faith in the vine before they partake of its fruit.” And so Raphael concluded: “But they are all invited to prove that they will not do what you are doing now. They are asked, without compulsion, to respond with love to the love from which they were created.”

Both were angels of God. Both saw the Woman and the Man wandering in the Garden of Eden in perfect harmony with every living creature, with the water and the air. Whatever Raphael had in mind, Belial’s thoughts raced on, leaving no room for such considerations: “When I succeed in bringing mankind to its knees, it is evident that I shall simultaneously bring God to his knees. Every creature or force, even the life-giving force on earth, shall come to know me, and I shall fight them all. I shall use the procreation of man, his greatest gift, to bring man down.” Belial’s thoughts raged on like a hurricane: “I shall undo what no man can comprehend and I shall create what no one holds possible until they no longer even remember what was created in the beginning. I shall finally erase the image of God in man from his memory. I shall prove that I stand above God. I too am a seed and generously bestow my fruit upon man. I bestow upon them my greatest beloved, myself! They need not wait for me to give. I shall generously sow chaos in order to reap my order. Moreover, I shall un-create and at the same time place the responsibility for this upon God Himself. When God created me, did He simultaneously create non-love? That He therefore un-creates me, yet does not do so? Thus He is responsible!

“I now dwell in the earth and in darkness, but in glory I shall return to the Holy of Holies, and in my great courage I shall forgive God for this. I reign supreme. I am God above God!”, and he cast off his wings and immediately reshaped himself into a formless, bodiless being that in no way wished to resemble a human or an angel.

Resolving this conflict with Belial was not within Raphael’s or Michael’s power, knowledge, or means.
Angels exist, but they do not live. They choose love or non-love without hesitation. The angel of love seeks love and finds Yahweh in the human heart. The angel of non-love seeks itself in the heart of its prey.
Thus the genderless beings became consistently divided: not all followed ‘He Who Is Like God’, and not a few followed Belial. The struggle between love and non-love would ultimately be settled in the image of God. Belial would strive to ensure that every human being came to know him better than the image of God that each person carried deep within their heart. Mi-chaël sensed that he could not grasp the greatness of God as an image within humankind, and indeed that was the case. Only the Man and the Woman in Eden knew what this meant in concrete terms. After all, God did not need to grant the Man and the Woman a place in the Holy of Holies. For God had created the Holy of Holies within their hearts. It was immediately clear that the final battle would be decided within that heart. Any heart that fell for Belial would strike God Himself directly and would cause every seraph’s wings to cease fluttering for a moment, every cherub to tremble, and a shock to be sent through the throne chariot and

The archangels braced themselves, for every human heart symbolised the love of the entire universe, which God wished to bestow upon them as a single sweet apple.

Michael's thoughts remained silent for a long time. Neither horror nor pity, fear, sorrow nor regret could stir his heart. The angels of Yahweh do not laugh, do not weep, and have no need to speak to one another. For their thoughts are inscrutable; they cannot be hidden from one another and are read by them all.
'Who is like God?' he thought, concluding: 'Whatever Belial destroys, God will restore. Love has the last word.'

Michael watched impassively as the serpent climbed resolutely up the trunk of the Tree of Good and Evil, carefully examining each apple for its acidity. High up in the crown, Belial took up his post and looked forward longingly to the encounter with the Man and the Woman in the unrivalled Eden.

2. EDEN

All those nights before.

Their bed was warm and soft. It didn't need to be big. Naked against naked, sex against sex, that is how they lay.
Together and one.
They had everything and they were everything. This would last for eternity. They did not know how to name it: the word for it did not exist because that which the word was meant to denote was always there, and its opposite did not exist.
They knew only that it emanated from Yahweh, who called them 'Us'.
But there was no need to name what was always there, as long as Yahweh himself did not call them 'Us'—and he did not. Yahweh was Yahweh, and Yahweh was always near them.
This was the case for days, years, or perhaps centuries.
Until one day, the Man and the Woman could no longer accept this silence.

That night.

For the first time, no longer naked in bed and far apart.

Animal skins cover their shame against the shame. The cold of the cave is merely a side issue. He can still hear her sobbing: tense, legs drawn up.

How could this have happened? His head is buzzing. Thousands of thoughts wriggle through a crack of unfamiliar feelings. “How are we to go on living now?”, his mind screams. “Man-nin?”, he ventures after a while. Her sobbing only intensifies, her body convulses and she cries out frantically: “My God, why have You forsaken us?” Her pain pierces him to the very core.

Her hands feverishly cover her vagina and breasts; she doesn’t know where to start. But this man, her husband, is no longer the man he used to be. His semen sticks between her legs and, with undisguised revulsion, she wipes it wildly and desperately from her hands onto his beard and hair, failing to recognise the labour pains of the monster within her.

“It’s your fault!” he shouts, immediately striking her and numbing her pain for just a moment. He stares in bewilderment at these strange hands. He too bursts into tears and hides beneath animal skins. Shame overwhelms them in body and mind. They are no longer who they were; their eyes no longer see the same way. Their touch suddenly feels different. Their hands act strangely. Unfamiliar, strange thoughts and urges suddenly swirl through their minds like leaves in the wind. The meaning of words suddenly becomes ambiguous to them, and from now on their spoken words would no longer always be what they think.

That night, they paid the first price for the knowledge of good and evil.

They had never spoken of love before. But non-love was now born and would henceforth divide their lives into non-love and love, as a counterweight to an insatiable longing for the knowledge of good and evil. The Man is still trying to find words to express what he has never felt before. The words taste sour and sting his mouth. His vocal cords protest vehemently and rebellious throat muscles make his Adam's apple tremble.

"I'm sorry," he stammers, barely audibly, in a language that is foreign to him. But the Woman seems to have left this world and utters only unintelligible sounds.

They had tried to sleep outside, but the cold and the terrifying growls of wild animals drove them into a cave. He tries to see, but sees nothing. A long silence follows.

"Let us at least pretend," he finally whispers softly in her ear, and he cautiously snuggles up against her. Belial shuddered for the first time at such surprising words.

Darkness envelops them.

Yahweh watched as Belial strangled them with all his might on that first night, and how he revelled in every death rattle. And Yahweh spoke to Belial: "Let go! Let go, I tell you! I created Man and Mannin free, and I shall guard their freedom. Never shall I allow you to kill their freedom."

Belial froze, understood, loosened his stranglehold and slowly withdrew. Yahweh continued: "With the fruits of the tree, you have robbed them of eternal life in the good-

“But with the trunk, the wood, I will give it back to them.” Hissing and snorting, Belial quickly made himself as small as possible, so that only Yahweh was still able to see him. From now on, no movement or thought of Belial would escape Yahweh’s notice. Belial knew this and would no longer strangle, but rather use poison. Generation after generation, he would administer his dose to Man, Mannin and all their descendants. He would inject the venom secretly and in finely measured doses, just below the lethal dose, and thus, little by little, drive them further away from the Garden of Eden. Yes, he would now act cautiously, trying to use good for evil and disguise evil as good. Belial was delighted with this tale of freedom and suddenly saw all the scope opening up before him to deceive these wretched creatures. Belial would abuse their very senses and thoughts to his heart’s content. “Good times are ahead!” And after he had stripped the tree of good and evil of all its sour apples, he took them with him, cast off his serpent’s body for good, and evaporated into a spirit within the mind of man, alongside the spirit that Yahweh had previously breathed into them. Stamping with impatience, Belial presented himself with all the sour apples to all the senses to take his rightfully conquered place. Hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste. Immediately afterwards, Belial sought out the extremely important chamber of human thought and left all his belongings there at once: sheepskins, tripping cords, poisonous concoctions. The chamber of thoughts felt like coming home to Belial. It felt just like his stay back then in the tree of Eden with its sweet and sour apples that barely

could be distinguished, and here he left the bulk of the unripe apples. Wherever Belial went, a neat space had been cleared for him to leave his sour apples. When he reached the speech centre, things really got going. He would create foreign languages to divide mankind. He quickly built a large storeroom with lots of little cubicles, each containing a different language. One merely had to open a cubicle and that language would be spoken. In high spirits, Belial continued on his foray. A dark room immediately caught his attention. In the farthest corner of it, Belial found a heavily chained ego and immediately freed him from his shackles. “My saviour!” murmured the ego, overcome with emotion. “Yahweh be damned,” Belial agreed softly, and they embraced each other warmly. Oh yes, Belial quickly felt welcome in that great house of man, where there was now room for him too. “There is also a room of memories,” ego suddenly recalled from long ago. Not underestimating its importance in the slightest, Belial hurried there at once. Once he arrived, only disappointment awaited him. A large timeline dominated the room, and everywhere white cards hung from it bearing inexplicable symbols. As soon as he tried to pluck a card away, he grasped at thin air. No matter how he fumbled, he couldn’t make it disappear. “Ah well,” he thought good-naturedly, “sometimes this works against me, sometimes in my favour. Just wait until I’m really on a roll... This room will soon be too small,” he told himself, and he closed the door behind him. After this small triumph, Belial turned his attention to the ultimate goal of his quest and descended into the heart of humanity.

Upon arriving, he was deeply impressed by this organ where the final battle would be fought. With great respect, he searched curiously for a door through which to enter the heart, but no door could be found from the outside. No power whatsoever, not even the power of its Creator, could force the heart's free choice. The door of the heart could only be opened from the inside out by the human being themselves. Cautiously, Belial withdrew so as not to offend the human heart, and with determination he began to devise plans to win it over. He withdrew into the chamber of the human mind. Belial understood that this chamber of information held, par excellence, the key to penetrating the heart of man.

Yahweh watched with compassion as, in the Garden of Eden, the tree of good and evil was slowly stripped of all its unripe apples, one by one, until not a single sour fruit remained. Yahweh embraced the tree and promised: "From now on, you shall bear only life!" Once He was certain that man and Belial had left the Garden of Eden, He had a cherub with the flame of the whirling sword guard the high gateway. Outside the walls of Eden, mixed forces would henceforth reign, and Eden had to be safeguarded at all costs as the last refuge for unfallen nature. Yahweh was grieved by the many calamities that awaited His creatures outside Eden. Oh yes, Yahweh was mighty, but there was one thing Yahweh could not do: compel man to love Him and trust Him unconditionally. In His omnipotence, He created His own powerlessness because He resolutely chose love. What could He, who is love itself,

Could it have been any other way? Just as water can only be water in one way, so too can love only be love in one way. Yahweh saw and heard from afar, yet so close, the tears of the Man and the Woman, and just as He had created humankind in their hearts in His image, so too did their tears become His tears. Yahweh Himself shed no tears, but He bore them for them, and thus their tears became His. He who is love would not be love if He did not give His creation a second chance. Determined to save mankind, He embraced the tree and spoke to the trunk: "Now that the fruits of evil have forsaken you, I ask you to wait patiently and prepare your wood until you can once again give the very highest. Become strong as stone until your time too comes to leave Eden!" Alongside Yahweh's sustaining tears, the tears of the Woman and the Man also carved a deep path to the very core of the wood. From now on, the tree would no longer feed on water but on the tears of all generations of the Man and the Woman.

Afterwards, Yahweh spoke to the Man one last time, and the Man—nin: "I created you in My own image. When we walked together in the Garden of Eden, I called you 'Us', but this was not enough for you. All creation belonged to Us. That is how I created you. You would never have to die, provided you did not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But experiencing the good without the evil was not enough for you. Joy, love, gratitude, humility, openness and peace alone were not enough. You knew no tears, and yet you did not trust Me. You chose to gather knowledge about the

You chose evil over the certainty that evil would never have the chance to bring about illness, pain, strife, pride, backbiting and jealousy. You did not trust Me at My word. You chose first to renounce the good and then to endure the evil. So that you might then overcome the evil as quickly as possible? You first cast aside all your weapons before engaging in battle with a mighty enemy? You first fell away from Yahweh so that you might then defeat Belial? Only Yahweh can defeat evil. And so you wished to be like Yahweh. It is not for Man and Woman to call Us 'Us'. From this day forward, I shall call you Adam and Eve. Out of love for you, I shall let you die, for as slaves of Belial you shall live, and few among your descendants will succeed in catching a glimpse of Eden during their lifetime. Just as it will henceforth be much easier to do evil, so it will become all the more difficult to do good. Wounding and hurting will become easier than healing and restoring. You did not believe Me even when I walked side by side with you in the Garden of Eden! What then of your descendants who will not even have that chance? Generation after generation, the gulf between man and God will only deepen. Generation after generation, your hearts will harden. You will feel abandoned and rejected by Me, but nothing could be further from the truth. My heart longs for you eternally and suffers with you. I bear all your tears. Therefore, I will be closer to you than you think, but your closed hearts can no longer see Me easily. I created you free, and I will also save you freely. I love you always."

Yahweh had heard Eva's cry, and Yahweh spoke to

Eva in her vigil. "'My God, why have you forsaken us?' Are you quite sure you wish to know the answer to your question?" "Yes, Lord," every fibre of her being pleaded.
"Are you certain you wish to endure Belial's vengeance for My answer?"
"Yes, Lord."
"The answer is simple, yet exceedingly difficult. You will think that I have forsaken you, but I have not forsaken you. It is Belial who will make you think this. Remember this and keep it in mind." "Yes, Lord." And so it came to pass. Eve repeated this thought a thousand times.

Ten lunar cycles later, their first son was born. They named him Cain, which in the ancient language of Eden means 'Beloved Child'.

3. Ash' hadu

Prosperity, joy and success may be coarse in texture and rough in fibre, but sorrow is the most delicate of all created things. Nothing in the whole world of thought can stir it, or sorrow will tremble in response with terrible and tenderly violent throbs. The thin, trembling sheet of gold leaf, which indicates the direction of forces the eye cannot perceive, is coarse by comparison.

Oscar Wilde, De Profundis

"Is Abel back yet?", Adam calls out with difficulty from afar, clearly not yet fully recovered from a harsh and difficult winter.
Abel is their youngest son and, in the language of Eden, means 'He Who Laughs'.
Adam looks at Eve with concern. The years have left their mark on his skin and carved deep furrows above his eyes. His burden weighs heavily upon his shoulders. His spirit has only recently been filled with a new breath of life.
"The moon has already completed three full cycles. Djebel Akhbar is not that far from us after all," he cannot hide his fear for long.
Eve nods in agreement, but does not share his fear.

Djebel Akhbar, or ‘great mountain’, is also known as the ‘mountain that sees far’. Eva says nothing. Eva hasn’t said a word for years. It’s not that she can’t speak. “Ash’ hadu an la ilaha illa-llah,” she replies to Adam, but Adam doesn’t understand this language.

Even in the Garden of Eden, Belial was already very wary of the Woman. After all, how difficult had it not been for Belial to persuade the Woman to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? When he tried to persuade her, he came up against her deep devotion to Yahweh. Belial would have had to bring out his deadliest venom to get the Woman to go along with it. The Man would never have survived such a dose. Indeed, persuading the Man first would have been far simpler, but the Mannin would never have blindly followed the Man just like that. Belial had judged this correctly. The Woman’s heart was significantly larger than the Man’s. The Woman had been created to bear children, and bearing children remained her first nature. Not even Belial could change that, however much he might wish to. Eve frightened Belial even more when, in Eve’s chamber of memories, he saw the masses of white cards hanging there—far more cards than with Adam—with one strikingly large, white card at the centre of the room, as if everything were drawn towards this focal point, causing that single black card on the timeline to pale in comparison. In a panic, Belial rushed to the dark chamber of Eva’s ego, but there too he found only a frail figure that could in no way be compared to Adam’s strong ego. Belial clearly realised just how threatening Eva would be to his grand plan, and he took no risks. He had to silence Eva. No one would understand her anymore, and quickly he opened

In the chamber of speech, a cage where a completely foreign language was spoken time and again. As soon as Eve's children began to understand her language even a little, Belial promptly changed it so that neither the intelligent Adam nor the children were ever able to understand her. Every change of language caused Eva a tremendous shock. It was a terrible ordeal time and again, so that after repeated instances, out of fear, she chose to say nothing more, except for that one sentence which she repeated at every opportunity in the quiet hope that the children might at least remember that sentence, without necessarily understanding it. Eva endured Belial's vengeance with great fortitude. "Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah."

"Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah."

Belial may well have been master of the choice of language, but he had no answer to Eve's free choice of words and was sickened by this sentence. He wanted to tear out Eve's tongue, but could only watch helplessly as Yahweh took up more and more space in her heart and guarded her free choice.

All of Belial's misfortunes, however, were more than compensated for by his royal position within that hapless Adam. He manipulated him masterfully. On the one hand, he showered his ego with the greatest possible superlatives and made his logical thinking and intelligence his god. He encouraged Adam to rationalise his emotions so that he even came to believe he had them perfectly under control. He made him suppress all childlike traits within himself. He should rely solely on himself, quasi-perfect as he was. His ego grew ever larger. On the other hand, he deliberately led Adam into trouble, letting him fall grotesquely on his

face. Thus Belial brought the man's ego onto the stage, just as a cockerel solemnly struts onto the dung heap, inevitably ending with Eve being blamed for everything. Adam then harped on about how she had been responsible and that she had made him eat the apple, forcing them to leave the Garden of Eden. But one day, this went wrong. Very wrong.

Whilst both children, hidden beneath animal skins, listened in and shuddered at every horrific accusation Adam hurled at Eve, and then heard their mother reply time and again, with tears in her voice, "Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah", Belial stoked Adam's anger step by step. Adam began to mimic her meaningless words and imitated her in a bestial manner, as if she were a mad bigot speaking the language of some species of ape. Belial laughed himself silly. Adam completely lost control and made a move to strike her.

That was a turning point. An absolute turning point for little Abel, who ran straight to his mother, cradled her head protectively in his small arms, and softly whispered the words "Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah" into her ears, pronouncing them perfectly. Eve replied, sobbing gratefully, "Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah", and with a faint, comforting smile she stroked Abel's hair. Belial stood rooted to the spot as if struck by lightning and had no immediate retort for this child. Adam's fury abated abruptly and, wailing frantically with remorse, he rushed outside, closely followed by Cain, who feared his father might harm himself. Little Abel had spoiled Belial's party and from then on...

Belial regarded Abel as his primary target. After all, this was something new for Belial. He couldn't really compete with the memory of Eve, but against a child who had never known Eden, he was bound to succeed! His hatred and, at the same time, his fascination with the child swelled by the minute, and he quickly withdrew when he sensed Yahweh approaching.

Yahweh was saddened by this sorrowful sight, and his compassion was directed above all towards Adam. Adam sat outside the cave on a boulder, looking straight into the eyes of the worried Cain. In Cain's dark, beautiful eyes, he recognised the child he himself had never been and could never have been in Eden. Cain's eyes acted as a key to his chamber of memory, and Adam entered this special place with some trepidation. He followed his timeline and saw, for the last few years, often nothing but black cards. Intuitively, he fast-forwarded to the point where the white cards still alternated freely with the black ones. He reached for the very first black card and relived in detail how he snatched the apple from Eve's hand before she could even take a bite. He felt once more the eagerness and envy and the pride of not wanting to be outdone by the Woman. He now understood how he, the Man, had actually already fallen before he fell. It hurt, and quickly he reached for the next black card and saw how, on that first night, he had brutally assaulted the woman and wanted to possess her entirely. It all hurt so much in his heart that Adam no longer dared to look at the masses of white cards from the Edenic era and made peace with that next, small white card in which he saw how, on that dark night, he wrestled with himself to say 'I'm sorry' to Eve. It soothed

but for a moment the fire in his heart, yet it gave him hope to feel how such a small card could mean so much. Full of hope, he reached for the next white card, which was considerably larger than the previous one: "Let's at least pretend," he whispered in her ear that fateful night, and he nestled cautiously against her.

"Let's at least pretend." It was white. The card wasn't even small. He could see that now with his own eyes. Strange, the thought flashed through Adam's mind, how all those years he'd thought this had been a worthless and misguided notion, one that was incorrect because it didn't underpin a genuinely sincere action. Surely pretending had to be a lie? By definition, surely? How could you possibly do good by consciously pretending? Where had he gone wrong? Where else might he have gone wrong? Puzzled, he walked further down the timeline towards the end. He passed a pile of black cards and, at the youngest card—ink-black, large and fresh—he glanced back briefly to the very earliest beginning, long ago, from which a single radiant, blinding light emanated. Adam now understood what he had to do and closed the chamber behind him, awoke gratefully in Cain's eyes, smiled, took him by the hand, and together they entered the cave.

Fear was still evident in Eve's eyes. Cain broke free from
Adam and rushed into her arms. Abel feverishly studied Adam's every feature as he shielded his mother.

Adam now stood before the three of them. He knelt before them and bowed his head in shame.

"I'm sorry. Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah," Adam said with

perfect intonation, as if he understood a word of it. He was pretending. With tear-filled eyes, he looked up into Eva's eyes. Eva and the children moved closer to him.
They all linked together like rings to form a chain.
"Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah", they spoke as with one voice.

With exceptional care and love for their suffering, Yahweh gathered their precious tears, mingled them into the most precious of goods, and went to the Garden of Eden, nourishing the trunk of the tree of goodness with them.
That night, Eve and Adam slept naked against naked as in days of old, and for the first time since Eden, Adam felt love in his heart once more. Without pretence.

Belial trembled only briefly in awe of Yahweh's power. He had indeed lost the battle within Adam and Eve, but not the war within their descendants. Time would undeniably work in his favour, slowly causing all memories of the Garden of Eden to fade from their descendants' minds. "Patience is a fine virtue, and patience for the wicked an even finer one," Belial declared with certainty.

4. Homesickness

When I was first put in prison, some people advised me to try to forget who I was. It was bad advice. Only by making myself aware of who I am have I found some measure of comfort. Now others are again advising me that, when I am released, I should do my best to forget that I have ever spent a single day in prison. I know that this would be just as disastrous. It would mean that I would be haunted forever by an unbearable sense of shame, and that those things intended for me as much as for anyone else—the beauty of the sun and moon, the procession of the seasons, the music of dawn and the silence of the great nights, the rain falling through the leaves, or the dew creeping over the grass and turning it silver—that all of this would be tainted for me and lose its healing power and its joy-giving might.

Oscar Wilde, De Profundis

The years that followed were the happiest for Adam and Eve since their departure from Eden.

Not that things became any easier, but everything was different. Just as they had strayed further and further from Eden in spirit over the years, so they were finally able to put a stop to this and dared to look back critically. They often made mistakes, but they had found a path that was not obvious

to treat one another with greater love. Belial was always lying in wait for Eve, but Eve was no less of a threat to Belial. Eve uttered no sound or word other than, or in addition to, that one sentence which remained a mystery to Adam and the children. Abel, in particular, enjoyed reciting the sentence in every possible variation. Laughing, whispering, singing, shouting – each time, Eve thanked him with a beaming smile. Once, Abel had dared to make the phrase sound ridiculous, but Eva's expression quickly made him change his tone. Abel was thus certain that these sounds meant something. Something very important, and he begged Eva: "Come on, Mum, what does this mean? Tell me!" Eva then came towards him teasingly, as if she were finally about to reveal her great secret, and with agonising slowness she began: "Aaaa... sjhaaa doe' an..." and then Abel, in turn, pretended to get very angry and ran away, only to look back quickly, laughing. Abel had not stolen his name 'The Laughing One'. He loved his parents dearly. To human eyes, this seemed a trivial game between mother and child. But to Belial and Michael, it meant much more. Belial was furious and Michael was pleased, for both saw what they saw: a seed of burgeoning spiritual life in the inquisitive young Abel. The older Eve grew, the more she began to appreciate that she did not speak. She soon realised that, in this way, she could not hurt her husband with words or unwittingly cause the children pain. This made her very dear in Yahweh's eyes, and the more she could feel Yahweh back in her heart, the more she began to regard the handicap imposed on her by Belial as a gift. By keeping her mouth shut, she could

to open her heart more fully and listen more closely to what was going on deep within it. Just as she had once remained silent out of fear of Be-lial, so now she remained silent out of love for Yahweh. She vividly recalled what Yahweh had said to them: "It is easier to wound and hurt than to heal and restore." She had experienced first-hand how deeply Adam's words could cut through her heart like a knife. That is why she felt increasingly sorry for Adam, who was obliged to speak to the children, to bring them up, to reprimand or reward them. Especially when Adam was tired, she often heard him lashing out too harshly with his words. It caused her a moral dilemma time and again and threatened to make her speak out of a sense of guilt. Immediately, she would then fall back on Yahweh's final counsel: "It is Belial who makes you think this," and she would then focus on giving Adam extra attention and love. She whispered softly in his ear: "Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah." Adam noticed how her voice and tone had become more soothing and increasingly softer over the years. It encouraged him to speak more softly himself and to be more sparing with his words, even when he occasionally got angry at one of Abel's often idiotic jokes. Simply because Adam had begun to take her more into account, everything had become so different for Eve. After all, Adam too was becoming increasingly doubtful. He had learned all too often that what seemed good was not always so, or that what seemed bad could also be good. How long had it taken him to realise that 'pretending' was not always a bad thing? And even then, it took him much mental anguish to learn when it was appropriate and when it was not.

Whenever he put something to Eva and she was certain it was right, she would simply confirm it with ‘Ash’ hadu’. She would shake her head to indicate disagreement. But usually she, too, had to admit with a shrug that she didn’t know or didn’t dare to judge. It was often that difficult not to get lost in that strange, dark forest. The sparse light that sometimes shone through the treetops sometimes turned out to be nothing more than a lure to walk into a trap. At other times, the shadows cast by the play of light and treetops formed surprising patterns on the ground that did provide reliable clues, but it took a lot of trial and error before they could understand their meaning. It was no game. It was serious. Mistakes were paid for dearly. Where was the carefree time of pure enjoyment of the beautiful nature in Eden? A question that constantly arose between them was when Adam would tell the boys about Eden, about what had happened and how they had ended up in these difficult living conditions. Had Yahweh not, after all, entrusted them with the knowledge that few of their descendants would ever catch a glimpse of Eden? This implied quite plainly that it was still possible, and so their beloved children surely had to be given the chance to regain what they had lost. That they would one day have to tell their children this was beyond doubt. But when would the time be right? Too soon and it would be like casting pearls before swine; too late and it would simply be too late. Time and again, Adam asked Eve: “What do you think? Now?” And she would shake her head. Eve did not think the time was right. At fourteen, Abel was still far too young. For Cain, who was four years older and much more mature, however, it could not be left any longer.

However much they worried about it, other forces would decide the matter.

Fortunately, the two brothers had fewer worries. They loved each other dearly, but were also very different. Abel looked up to his older brother, who was very handy, enjoyed working, and felt a strong sense of responsibility towards his younger brother. Abel, on the other hand, was more of a playful soul and a great animal lover. The animals were, as it were, queuing up to be tamed by him. It was as if they were telling each other what a life of luxury they would enjoy: food at all hours and a warm place in the cave during winter. The birds, in particular, were very interested in Abel, and he pretended he could talk to them, much to Cain's amusement. But there was one animal for which there was no rival: Loep. Abel had once rescued the tiny wolf cub after it had fallen into a ravine that only the small, slender Abel could just about reach. Raised on goat's milk, the young wolf became Abel's great and strong friend. From an early age, Adam allowed Abel to tend the goats, and together with his faithful wolf Loep, he set out with the goats. Adam counted on Loep to protect his son from harm. From Eva, Abel had learnt how seemingly meaningless sounds could still have meaning, and shrewdly he applied this lesson to Loep. He learnt to speak to Loep by perfectly imitating his sounds and rhyming them with events or circumstances. It worked. With surprising combinations, he managed to give Loep very specific instructions: "I'm thirsty for water" or "I'm thirsty for milk", and Loep could follow the difference perfectly. "Loep doesn't

“You’re most welcome,” Abel also remarked in a rare moment of seriousness. Every time Loep did what Abel asked of him, Abel would ‘thank’ him in wolf-speak. Cain admired Abel’s achievement. “We’ve got a new little brother!”, Cain congratulated him and immediately tried it himself, much to both their amusement at the pitiful result. Loep enjoyed the attention, but it was Adam in particular who was secretly enjoying it. Because it was a balm for that old wound called Eden, when he and Eve spoke to all the animals and had been allowed to name them themselves. They knew every animal, insect or plant like no other because they had once lived so harmoniously with them. Now, seeing how Abel, completely unaware of Eden, was talking to Loep was proof to Adam that Eden might yet be regained. He thanked Yahweh for this glimmer of hope and for this vague sense of closeness. “Ash’ hadu!”, he called out loudly and cheerfully from afar to Eve. Even though he didn’t know what he was calling out, it always felt good to see her laugh. No matter how happy Adam and Eve often felt, nothing could burn the darkest memory out of their chamber of memory. Adam tried once again to put on a brave face. But with Eden, this simply did not work. It just wouldn’t work. Because every plant, every animal, every insect, every breath of wind, or even the smallest raindrop reminded him of Yahweh and Eden. The homesickness was immense, almost unbearable, and would indeed be unbearable were it not for Yahweh continuing to sustain them behind the scenes. The more Jahwe regained a place in their hearts, the more they longed to draw ever closer to Him. Thus, the longing blossomed into a primal force, into the foundation of human instinct, into an indelible memory of love.

And Belial?

He had prepared everything. The final offensive could now begin. The web had been meticulously woven with invisible threads and countless knots. He had practised taking on all forms. Throughout nature, he had fully taken his rightful place. Everything that had previously existed only as ‘good’ now also existed as ‘evil’. A gentle summer breeze could now also be a hellish hurricane. He had skilfully paid a visit to all animals, insects and plants, and everywhere he now left behind ‘evil’ specimens. Poisonous plants or animals became a speciality. Everything, yes everything, Belial solemnly promised to reveal to mankind what they had once asked to be allowed to know. Belial would offer it to them on a golden platter. They would get what they asked for, and he immediately unleashed his legions.

5. ON THE HUNT FOR

Behind joy and laughter, a disposition may lie hidden—crude, hard and insensitive. But behind sorrow, there is always sorrow. Suffering, unlike joy, wears no mask. Truth in art is by no means a correspondence between ideal reality and the contingent form of existence, it is not the likeness of the form to its shadow, or of the reflection in the crystal to the form itself; it is not an echo answering from the hollow of the hill, nor is it a silver pool in the valley, showing the moon to the moon and Narcissus to Narcissus. Truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself, the external made the expression of the internal, the incarnation of the soul, the body imbued with the spirit. Therefore, no truth can be compared to sorrow. There are moments when sorrow seems to me to be the only truth. Other things may be illusions of the eye or of desire, things that exist solely to blind the eye or satisfy desire, but the worlds are built upon sorrow, and no child or star is born without pain. Where there is sorrow, there is sacred ground.

OSCAR WILDE, DE PROFUNDIS

Skins.

The hunt for skins.

That was what it was all about from the start.

Skins to clothe, to cover, to shield, to warm, to make utensils such as ropes and carrying bags. Almost as important as food.

To say they were ‘hunting’ for skins was actually an exaggeration. It was more a matter of finding skins, because killing animals for that purpose was impossible and, for Adam and certainly for Eve, out of the question. When they left Eden, Yahweh gave them animal skins to cover their nakedness, and whatever came from Yahweh was, by definition, perfectly acceptable to them. But killing animals for their skins? That was out of the question under any circumstances. That is why Adam was obliged to search for fresh carcasses and skin them. It had, however, come as a shock to Adam to see how animals suddenly hunted other species, whereas in Eden they had lived side by side in harmony. Finding freshly killed animals in the very early years was fairly easy. After all, the predators recognised Adam as the Man from Eden who had given them their names and readily made way for him until he had skilfully stripped the animal hide. Moreover, he did not touch the flesh of their prey, and they also found it easier not to have to gnaw on those tough hides, especially when they had cubs to feed. But not many years later, their behaviour towards Adam changed and the predators became more fierce and aggressive. Adam could no longer skin animals alone without running the risk of becoming prey himself, so he decided to take Cain with him to keep the predators at bay with fire, whilst he worked as quickly as lightning to strip the hide from the carcass. Cain had been looking forward to setting out with his father into the vast countryside for days. He relished the danger. The feeling that he was partly responsible for his father’s safety by providing cover sharpened his

self-confidence and forged an unbreakable bond between them. But for some inexplicable reason, the hunt had become increasingly unsuccessful over the past year. Even when they did come across a carcass, it was often so rotten or torn apart that the hide was worthless. Time and again they returned home from a fruitless hunt, and whilst they worked in the fields, Cain pestered Adam with questions. “Why not set a trap to catch our own prey, instead of wasting our time waiting for a predator to come to our aid?” The discussions surrounding this sensitive and vital matter grew increasingly heated and even bitter. Adam understood Cain’s logic, but could not make him see that it was not for man to kill animals. “But many animals do it too, don’t they? Doesn’t Yahweh stop them either?” “Precisely for that reason: we are not animals,” Adam skilfully silenced Cain. Gradually, Cain lost his patience and retorted scornfully: “Why doesn’t your Yahweh help us, then? Why does He make it so difficult for us? We’re allowed to do less than the other animals because we’re supposed to be better! Explain that to me, then?” That hit home. Adam fell silent and he, too, felt abandoned by Yahweh. Adam fell silent. He continued chopping. Desperately. How was he to explain the impossible? He felt deeply ashamed that he could not. He felt more than ever like a punished child. Shame struck him like a sledgehammer blow, as if the heavens had fallen upon him. It reminded him of the darkest chapter of his life, of the punishing Yahweh, even though he knew for certain that this was not right, for he himself bore responsibility for his actions. But alas

Yet the passing years had all but erased one of these few true thoughts. He could no longer feel Yahweh's mercy, nor remember that Yahweh had given them the skins to ease the pain of their shame. On the contrary, he now experienced the shame and the act of covering it up more as a mark of disgrace. Everything felt more and more like a punishment. Simply living and being happy outside Eden became extremely difficult and often required too much effort for what it yielded. It was as if he suddenly had to learn everything all over again: walking without falling, speaking without stammering to find the right words, acting without hesitation. Upon leaving Eden, everything changed instantly and he felt himself becoming more and more foolish instead of a wiser being. If he ever thought he understood something, it felt like pure folly that had managed to disguise itself as wisdom. Bad things seemed foolish to him. Good things seemed even more foolish. Not only were his reason and feelings put to the test, but his entire sense of reality as well. It was as if he were playing the leading role in a terrifying dream from which there was no waking. When Yahweh created the Woman from his rib, it was evident that he experienced this as the greatest gift Yahweh could give him, because he also realised that he, the Man, had no merit in it whatsoever. He did not even need to think in those terms. He did not even need to desire it because there was no void. But it was precisely from that insignificant rib that the far more beautiful woman was created, who would exist perfectly in her own right, allowing him, in turn, to be the perfect gift for her in complete complementarity. They felt

They regarded one another without the slightest effort, as being in perfect balance, without the slightest difference in status. In this way, Yahweh ensured that not even a single sense of emptiness or difference could arise. It was a gift for a gift through a gift, to become a gift of a gift itself: there was no way around it; nothing else could be conceived of it. Then. In Eden, you didn't even have to think about it; it was self-evident. Back then. That is how it lived, as if by itself. That is how it breathed, as if by itself. Back then. This was the spirit of Eden. The Woman was not his wife and the Man was not her husband. It was so difficult to dredge up the details of it all. Adam racked his brains feverishly. The pain of the loss of the spirit, which had once hovered throughout Eden, sought its escape route outside Eden in the twists and turns of a bitter struggle for survival, day after day. What he still remembered of the opposite once outside Eden was, unfortunately, easier for the mind to recall. Adam no longer felt that equality, but quickly reduced Eve to his mere rib, a piece of property, on that first night. Conversely, Eve suddenly felt inferior, created from 'merely' a man's rib. Both now had to embark on the long journey back to the Man and the Woman from Eden, with more falls than rises. Everything had suddenly turned upside down and nothing was, at first glance, truly childlike and trustworthy anymore, precisely because they could no longer experience it as a child and they realised that they had never been children because they had never needed to be in Eden. "How can I explain the impossible?", the thought haunted his mind constantly. And he hacked away like a man possessed at the far too dry field soil,

while Cain found it hard to bear the fallen silence and the palpable tension amidst the frenzied rhythm of the chopping. It seemed to be trying to convey hurried words in a chaotic code that was impossible to decipher. Cain continued chopping as well. But he chopped more slowly. Ever more slowly. Every blow struck not only the earth, but also his respect for his father. Every blow made him withdraw further. Feeling less and less connected, he felt himself becoming increasingly superfluous to this introverted old man, to this foolish man, to this man who failed to take responsibility for his family whilst winter was not so far off. Oh yes, Cain felt responsible for the family and for gradually making decisions so that they might all survive the winter. His axe swung ever more slowly; with every blow, he was merely waiting for it to stop. Cain stopped and looked at Adam. Adam deliberately did not look up and went at it even more fiercely. He now felt like a complete failure as a father. He was nothing anymore. No longer a child of Yahweh, no longer Cain's father. Cain ostentatiously threw down his axe and looked at Adam once more. Once again, Adam pretended not to see and agreed wholeheartedly with his son. He did not feel like a failure; he was one. Had Yahweh not promised them they might die? Let Him then unleash His lightning upon him now, but He would not even grant him that. Hopelessly, Adam was trapped in the rhythm of the blows from his axe. The mercy that Yahweh had denied him, his heel now generously took over and would not let him go. His heel drove the rhythm ever faster. Heel, heel, heel, heel. That was the only thing he still dared to surrender himself to with complete trust. The only thing he knew that still

It was the right thing to do: turning over the soil to sow seeds for food for the winter. That couldn't be wrong. It had to mean providing for his family. Chopping, chopping, chopping, chopping, ch-opping, chopping, chopping, chopping, chopping. Cain expected and hoped that Adam would at least stop for a moment and look up. But the hoe wouldn't let him, and Adam couldn't. Cain turned around, walked away and didn't look back. Resolute because he saw no way out. Unsure because severing the umbilical cord with his father felt so awkward and strange. As soon as Adam was left alone, he collapsed, exhausted, face down in the freshly churned earth. He gasped for breath, began to suck the earth into his airways so that he would suffocate. He wanted to die. It had been enough. All the connections between his brain cells failed and he lost consciousness.

Yahweh looked on helplessly. Helpless because the free Adam denied Him so utterly. Belial did not have to do anything. He simply revelled in it.

Cain made his way to the cave. Eve was surprised to see him return from the fields so quickly. She saw a grown man approaching her very calmly, confident and dignified. She sensed and could tell that something had happened. "Ash' hadu, mother," he began, "I won't be sleeping in the cave tonight. Don't worry. In a few days, I'll be back in the morning to work in the fields with father. I need time to think." He gave Eve a hug and left without another word. When he was already a good distance away, heading towards the river, she called after him at the top of her voice: "Ash' hadu!" He looked back and raised his hand. Eva stared after him for as long as she could and waited patiently for

Adam's arrival. She did not even know where all the fields were. That was how long she had been cut off from life outside and around the cave. It had been just the same with her speech; she felt that the more she shut herself off from her immediate surroundings, the more vividly she could hold the memory of Yahweh in her heart.

Cain knew where he was going. Some time ago, he had found a place: safe, well-sheltered and impossible to find. During the dry season, when the water was low, he had once walked upstream along the river. As he waded through the river in a gigantic gorge, he suddenly noticed a wide cavern high up on the cliff face that immediately caught his attention. He took a good look around the place. He memorised the wildlife and the trees on the edge of the gorge, where a large ash tree cast its shadow prominently into the gorge. As soon as he saw an opportunity, he sought out the ash tree, took a leather rope and climbed down. It was dangerous, with a churning river strewn with boulders below him. The cave itself turned out to be spacious, comfortable and inaccessible to predators. Over time, he had already gathered a fair pile of old hides and utensils here. It became his place. He did not mention it to Abel, fearing that he might make the same dangerous descent in Cain's absence. In the summer, he had the advantage of low water, so that with another rope he could easily descend into the river and conserve his strength. From the es to his cave, and from the cave down into the river, and so back up to ground level. In the rainy season it was hard labour, for then he could not use the river as an exit and had to climb. There too,

He became more agile and, as he went along, he carved ridges and steps into the wall to help him. Using extra ropes tied around a strong overhanging branch of the ash tree, he made a handy loop for lowering loads. What had started as a boy's game was increasingly taking on the seriousness of an adult's endeavour.

That evening, Abel was returning with the goats, expertly guided by Loep. A lazy sun was beginning to cast its light upon the moon's elongated crescent, and he longed for the warmth and cosiness of the cave. Even from a distance, he noticed that something was wrong. Eva was waving frantically to get his attention. He quickly ordered Loep to look after the goats and ran as fast as he could towards Eva. "What's wrong? Where are Cain and Father?" And she shrugged her shoulders, her eyes filled with fear. "Right, I'll go and check the fields straight away and tell Loep to follow me once the goats are in the pen," he shouted, panicking and forgetting that his mother never spoke. He had to hurry before it got dark. He ran. He didn't know where to start. So first to the field by the river. Then up the first hill. Then on to the highest plot. Loep had already caught up with him by then, and out of breath he stopped, his lungs heaving with exertion. He tried to speak in Loep's language, but his voice failed him. Loep needed no words and off he went. Not long after, he heard the wolf howl. A long, plaintive wail. Hurry over there was the message, and in the twilight Abel saw Loep standing guard over what looked like a figure lying on the ground. With a cry of "Father!", he turned Adam over and soon realised how terrible he

was on the verge of death. He was barely breathing, and the rising moon made his skin look even paler and more lifeless. Adam felt ice-cold to the touch, and Abel instinctively threw himself on top of him to warm him. “Loep, skins, Eve,” he ordered Loep, who was already dashing off again. Meanwhile, he kept talking to Adam and cleared his airways with his fingers. “Don’t die, Father! Keep breathing! Where is Cain? Cain? What happened?” He saw Cain’s heel lying not far away. “Caiiiiiiin! Caiiiiin!” He quickly gave up calling out to attend to Adam again. He took off his own pelt and laid it over Adam. He snuggled close to him and rubbed him warm wherever he could. Loep returned a little later with a neatly rolled-up pelt tied around his chest. Quickly, Abel relieved Loep of his burden and asked him to go back to Eve and stay with her. Abel was deeply concerned about what was going on. Where was Cain? He crawled under the pelt close to Adam and wanted to breathe life into him. He told him how much he loved his father, how much he admired him, how sorry he was for the pranks that hadn’t always gone down well, and how much he appreciated everything Adam had ever done for him. But in the dead of night, he also spoke of his fears, of how much he too had suffered under the strains of the past few months. He told Adam how he could see that his mother was suffering too, how terrified he was of the coming winter because the harvest threatened to fail due to the early drought, and how he wondered how they would possibly get through the winter. He told him how much he loved his brother, how important Cain was to him, and he also expressed his regret that he, Abel, the play-

bird, who gave so little back to the family. He promised that from now on he would do his best once Adam had recovered. Yes, from now on he would help his father and Cain more in the fields. He promised him this in every possible way. In a long, hopeless sigh. In an indictment of his own failure. If Abel had a shred of childishness left in him, he lost it that night. In the distance, he heard Loep's howl, telling him that everything was fine with Eva, and he fell asleep, exhausted, leaning against his father.

At the first light of dawn, he was gently shaken awake. Loep was already lying patiently beside his master, waiting. Cain had heard Loep's howling during the night and realised there was a problem, but was subsequently reassured by Loep's final message. However, he did not feel entirely at ease. His premonition had led him at the crack of dawn to the field where he had left his father. Horrified, he saw Loep and a pile of fur from a distance and quickened his pace. Abel woke up dazed and immediately asked, "What's happened?" "Later, father first," replied Cain, and he checked on Adam, who was breathing steadily and gradually showing signs of life. "I'm going to mother and will be back straight away," he said. Abel was so glad to see his brother and immediately felt hopeful again that everything would be all right now that Cain had taken charge of Adam. On his way to Eve, conflicting emotions clashed in Cain's mind, ranging from anger to extreme love. Every shade and degree of guilt presented itself. The confrontation with his mother was somewhat awkward. She hadn't slept a wink. Neither had he. But both—

They were relieved to see one another. It pained Cain so much to see how unconditionally his mother loved her husband. The man who was also his father, with whom he had fallen out and who now compelled him to fight against a sense of guilt, driven by a sense of responsibility, in a life-or-death struggle. “Father is alive. Abel is with him. I’ll bring Father here. You get some fire and a hot drink.” Cain gathered two sturdy poles and quickly lashed together a stretcher using twigs and leather straps. Not long after, with Abel’s help, he was on his way to the cave with Adam on the stretcher. Adam was in a terrible state. As if in shock, completely withdrawn into himself. Dazed. In no man’s land. Death was close at hand. The will to die even closer. He was breathing. But not the breath of life. He breathed only death, and even then with difficulty. Inaudibly. Almost secretly, as if he were dead and merely feigning life. Just as a cat plays with a mouse, so Belial toyed with Adam. Letting him recover for a moment so he could continue playing afterwards. But Belial was not entirely at ease. Even Belial had no answer to his death wish, and so he now stepped back a little to give the family’s love a chance to patch up his plaything.
And that love was there. Day after day, Eva and the children—
Adam was there, and it was Cain in particular who most easily managed to elicit a sign of life from him. But Adam still did not speak. Every day, Cain reported on the work in the fields, painting a much rosier picture than the reality. It was a disaster. The late spring frost had already wreaked havoc, and the extreme drought during the summer had halved what little had survived the frost

both in number and in yield. Cain would often leave Abel behind in the fields after midday and set off on his own. He had to find other ways to survive the winter. Ways he could not, or dared not, speak of to anyone.

One morning, after the weary Adam had been laid to rest outside in the shade of a mulberry tree not far from the cave, and Cain was preparing to set off for the fields with Abel, something seemingly innocent happened. As if the devil were involved – and Belial was involved – Loep came trotting past, free and cheerful, with a half-dead rabbit in his mouth, straight towards the entrance of the cave where he began to merrily tear the poor creature apart and devour it. Adam's eyes suddenly bulged with fear of what was to come. Cain was scared out of his wits when, for the first time in weeks, he heard Adam's voice calling: "Eve!" Eve did not take long to appear and stared in bewilderment at the wolf, whilst Abel was already congratulating Loep on his fine catch. Completely taken aback, rooted to the spot and with trembling hands, she watched as the rabbit she had so often cuddled in Eden was now being devoured by her beloved son's best friend. It hurt terribly to see how Abel found this normal, even amusing, and saw nothing wrong with it. Whilst the half-eaten rabbit lay there dejectedly, Abel mockingly massaged Loep's full belly, whilst the wolf purred with bliss. But Eve's heart bled for what Adam and she herself had done to their children. She quickly retreated into the cave. "You see," Adam said pointedly to Cain, who dared not take his eyes off the cave so as not to have to look Adam in the eye

watch. Both now kept a close watch on the cave to see what would happen next. Adam sympathised with his wife and relived his inner struggle and the scene in the field. He felt despair gnawing at him once more and feared that his wife, too, might not survive this. Cain did not dare look at Adam. He had already felt so guilty during those first few weeks after he had abandoned his father, and he too waited anxiously. If Eve were to break down, it would reaffirm his guilty dereliction of duty towards his father back then.

Eva crawled into the furthest corner of the cave. Despair crept closer. She cursed herself. But she cursed herself above all for Belial's sake, whose curse she herself had unleashed. She was brave, extraordinarily brave, and in her mind she attacked Belial and spat at that merciless serpent. She bravely fought every evil thought. "Where is your Yahweh now? Is that not your dear son who has not a shred of pity for your dear little rabbit? Is that what you have taught your children? Why don't you speak to your husband and your children? You know you can speak, don't you? You know that I have long since restored to you the same speech and language as your family. But no, it's easier not to speak; that way you can easily wriggle out of it and let your husband make the mistakes. Yes, you'd rather let him suffer. You are not worthy of Yahweh's love. Where is Ash' hadu now?" Her struggle was unequal, seemed pointless, and Yahweh watched from a distance. The more the serpent's tongue stung and taunted her, the more courageously she resisted that hideous serpentine beast, and the closer Yahweh drew to her. Against every evil thought she set a good—

, retreating more and more into that one thought which Yahweh had once given her and which was of paramount importance in this struggle: “You think that I have forsaken you, but I have not forsaken you. It is Belial who makes you think this.”

It is Belial who makes you think this. It
is Belial who makes you think this.
Despair slowly gave way.
It is Belial who makes you think this. It
is Belial who makes you think this.

She repeated this dozens of times, whenever a new, evil thought arose, until she even managed to forestall the evil thoughts and let the thought of Yahweh take precedence, so that suddenly no more evil thoughts could arise. Oh yes, Eva was furious with that wretched beast that had brought so much misfortune upon them. “Ash’ hadu!”, she called after Belial, her tongue tied. “Ash’ hadu an la ila-ha illa-llah!” In her imagination, she lashed out with a powerful kick, thinking she had finally defeated Belial, not realising that it was Yahweh’s prominent presence that had ultimately caused Belial to slink away. Despair now gave way to a sense of gratitude. More intuitively than through actual knowledge, she thanked Yahweh for his nearness, even though she missed his physical presence as in the days of Eden. Yet she behaved with complete devotion, as if she had no reason to doubt this. It was as if. She dried her tears, pulled herself together, went back outside and stroked Loep. She respectfully removed the remains of the rabbit from under his nose and lovingly buried the carcass under a few stones beside the cave, whilst Loep watched dejectedly, much to Abel’s schadenfreude. Her life went on

on. As if nothing had happened. Abel was completely unaware of the hellish struggle that had raged within Eve's mind. Nor was there any sign of disapproval from Eve towards them. But Cain and Adam were all the more struck by her change of heart. Their mouths fell open. "See," said Cain, relieved, to Adam. He made a great effort not to gloat and whistled to Abel to follow him out to the field. He was now certain he was right. An incredible weight fell from his shoulders. He had worried needlessly and would soon ask for his mother's blessing. The future suddenly seemed hopeful. Refreshed, he set off for the field with his little brother, whilst Loep took care of the goats. Adam, on the other hand, sank completely into a fatalism without equal. He no longer understood his wife; he felt deprived not only of Yahweh, but now of Eve as well. He was alone. Superfluous. Useless and guilty. His son Cain had been right. He was just in the way. "How will you die?", his frantic mind begged for a redeeming end.

Cain and Abel reached the field. "Just put your heel down here for a moment

, I've got something to show you," said Cain to Abel, and he took him to the es above the gorge. The time was now right, Cain decided, and proudly he showed his younger brother how he could descend into the seemingly inaccessible cave in the rock face above the river.

"You little rascal," cried Abel enthusiastically. "Now I understand where you were always heading off to in the afternoons!"

"Just wait, you haven't seen anything yet," laughed Cain proudly, and he guided him into the cave.

Abel could not believe his eyes. "So many hides? And what a

“Quality, man! Not a single hole! A bearskin?” he asked, growing more and more excited. He saw a pile of large furs next to a pile of small furs. “Where did you get those from?” asked Abel, thinking feverishly and suddenly realising. “No, surely not! No! Tell me it’s not true?” Cain saw his brother’s joy wane. “It can’t be any other way, Abel. We have to, if we’re to survive the coming years. Do you think I didn’t have a problem with this? Our parents may have known something like Eden, but we, we live here and now in a completely different world with different laws. We’re forced to use our wits to survive, aren’t we? I’ve heard Father call out to Yahweh so often when the hunt yielded nothing, but Yahweh didn’t answer him, let alone give him a single pelt. I too have called out to Yahweh, but I’ve never been granted a sign of life from Him. Does Eden even exist? I’ve spoken to Mother about it and she always replies with the same phrase. I don’t know if she really understands me, or if she understands the gravity of our situation. How are we going to survive the winter this year? Not just how? But worse still, are we even going to survive it? We’ll barely have any food. All the animals are struggling now and show no respect for each other’s territory, stealing whatever they can from one another. The rabbits, to give just one example, are eating the few crops that survived the difficult spring and summer. Haven’t you noticed how Mother is now barely eating anything herself, just so we can have the food? I can’t stand to see this any longer, little brother. And I can stand even less to see how Father is stuck in indecision and powerlessness. I must

We have to make decisions. Look, these are the skins of those rabbits that were eating our food. Now these rabbits aren't eating our food anymore, and they're even giving us skins to boot. Loep would be jealous of my trophies. Oh no, I'm not proud of this, but we have no choice."

"Loep isn't human, Cain. Let the animals fight their battles and we'll fight ours. Shouldn't we try to do what's good, what's right?"

"Father said something similar: 'We are more than just animals.' Granted, we must do what is right, but in order to keep doing what is right, we have to survive the winter. We're heading into winter with very little food, and if we suffer from the cold on top of that, we'll all perish."

"I understand you and I thank you for your concern, but we're all going to die eventually, aren't we? Perhaps it's better not to give in to … just yet."

But Cain didn't give him a chance to finish his sentence: "Did you see how Mum reacted this morning when Loep came in with that rabbit? Didn't you notice anything? Dad and I saw straight away what was happening. At first Mum was absolutely horrified, but a little later she stroked Loep and was as friendly as ever. It was clear to us that she understood the necessity of the situation. I'm going to speak to her about it tonight. She'll understand me." Abel fell silent now and didn't want to get his brother into further trouble by pressing the matter. It struck him how sensitive Cain was about all this, how quickly he reacted.

"How long have you been doing that?", he asked, pointing hesitantly at the hides, as he didn't dare say 'killing animals'

.

"A few months now. I started with rabbits, but gradually I made my traps bigger. If you like, I'll take you along."

"Some other time," replied Abel. It was all a bit too much for him all at once. He needed time and was afraid of hurting his brother's feelings. "Let's get back to work in the field," he said, standing up. "Is it all right if I go and check a few more traps? I'll join you afterwards."

"No problem. How am I supposed to get out of this 'trap'?" Abel tried to be funny.

"The safest and easiest way is down the rope," laughed Cain, and he helped Abel descend into the riverbed. Abel was glad to be alone in the field that day. He was torn by doubt. His reason told him that Cain was right. But his intuition protested and his heart rejected it. His heel struck the ground relentlessly. Monotonously, the heel sang the song of the earth and brought peace to his mind. Trust in something tangible—that was all he needed now, and that was what the earth generously offered him. The rhythmic chanting of his heel restored the much-needed order to his mind.

That day, Cain did not turn up in the fields. Evening fell and Abel had long since returned home, where he was tending to his father alongside his mother in the cave. Adam's condition seemed to be deteriorating; his eyes were growing cloudier and he refused to eat a single thing. Abel was now watching his mother closely. On the one hand, he saw her radiant and strong, but on the other, he also saw her growing more anxious about her husband. It was already night when

Loep suddenly pricked up his ears and looked up at Abel: Cain! Abel ran outside and saw Cain approaching with a heavy bundle on his back. “What a fantastic day! Look, little brother, for Father!” and he threw a fresh bearskin at his feet. Eve also emerged and, in the moonlight, she bent down and touched the animal skin. Still warm from the fresh blood. She stood up calmly and, without really looking at Cain, went back into the cave. “Come in,” said Abel matter-of-factly. “There’s still plenty of corn and vegetable porridge; Father hardly eats.” Cain joined the fire and looked at his father. He understood this strange man less and less. He looked at his mother and tried to read from her face what was going on inside her. In any case, he detected no disapproval, and that gave him courage. He gratefully accepted her food, even though he wasn’t hungry. He hadn’t felt hungry for months whenever he came home, but he made an effort and ate. The tension was palpable. Every nerve in the cave was on edge. Even Loep grew restless and began to challenge Abel to a game. Abel eagerly took him up on it. Eve and Cain did not react. Cain stood up and said only: “I won’t be sleeping in the cave tonight: I still have work to do.” Before Abel could say a word, he had already slipped outside. Eve ran after him. Cain heard her and turned to face her. They looked at each other intently. The moonlight revealed to both of them who they were, just as they were. She saw her eldest son, his muscular frame, with a young beard, his prominent cheekbones and powerful gaze. He saw his beloved mother, with gentle yet fearful, questioning eyes. “Do not worry about me, mother,” he began. “Worry rather for us all. We urgently need those hides

necessary. We have no reserves whatsoever for the winter that is slowly approaching." She pressed him close to her, wishing he could read her heart, and whispered: "Ash' hadu", and he softly added: "an la ilaha illa-llah."

She fervently hoped that he now understood. He fervently hoped that she now understood. Full of hope, he asked her the redeeming question: "Do you now understand why I kill animals for their skins?" She, the Woman.

She, Eve.

Her heart was instantly torn in two. Her love for her son was locked in an impossible struggle with her love for Yahweh. Eve versus the Woman.

In a flash, she remembered Belial's words as she reached for the apple. "Sour," Belial had promised her. "Many times sourer than the citrus "

She saw her son's trust and love written clearly in his eyes, knowing that she was about to shatter that look into a thousand pieces, knowing that it would never be mended, knowing that the pain of this moment would last forever. In a final attempt to avert the inevitable and begging for a five-second reprieve, she forced her hand to slowly stroke his hair, to caress his cheek one last time even more slowly, taking in every crease and wrinkle, and she prayed to Yahweh to protect him, whilst tears were already welling up in her eyes at what was to come. With a bitterness many times greater than that of citrus, she finally shook her head in refusal.

A boulder a hundred feet high could not have struck Cain . He had never felt such excruciating pain before. He felt

betrayed. How could he ever trust this hand again? Quickly he pushed her away and turned so she wouldn't see his tears. He hurried away. With a storm of emotions ranging from helplessness to anger, from pain to despair.
He felt lonely. She felt torn.
Clouds drifted across the moon and the night swallowed Cain. Cain did not return that night.
He would never set foot in the cave again.

"Sour," Belial assured them. "Many
times sourer than citrus."

6. WINTER

I have now been in prison for almost two years. The natural man within me sank into savage despair, into a dejection born of suffering that was pitiable even to behold, into terrible and impotent rage, into bitterness and hatred, into anguish that wept aloud, into misery that could find no voice, into grief that remained speechless. I have experienced every possible mood of suffering. Better than Wordsworth himself, I know what Wordsworth meant when he said: 'Sorrow is enduring, lightless and dark,
"And bears the hallmarks of infinity."
But whilst there were moments when I found joy in the thought that my suffering might be endless, I could not bear the idea that it was without purpose. Now, somewhere deep within my nature, I find a hidden thing that tells me that nothing in the whole world is without purpose, and suffering least of all. That thing, buried deep within me like a treasure in a field, is Humility. It is the last thing left in me, and the best: the ultimate discovery I have reached, the starting point for a renewed development. It has come to me directly from within myself; that is why I know it has come at the right moment. It could not have come sooner, nor later. If someone had spoken to me about it, I would have rejected it. Had it been brought to me, I would have refused it. Now that I have found it myself, I wish to keep it. I must. It is the only thing that contains within itself the raw materials for life, for a new life, a 'Vita Nuova' for me. Of all things, it is the most marvellous: one cannot give it away, and another could not give it to us. One can only acquire it by giving up everything one possesses. Only when one has lost everything does one know that one possesses it.

OSCAR WILDE, DE PROFUNDIS

Winter came early that year. Far too early, whilst the harvest had not been good. The maize had been halved in the cob by a scorching sun during the summer. Vegetables had also suffered. Many fruit trees bore little fruit due to late night frosts during their blossom. The bees had also been caught off guard, and to make matters worse, a bear had wreaked havoc in their hives. It seemed as though the whole of nature had turned against them.

However incomprehensible and painful it was for Abel, Adam had regained his zest for life after Abel had told him why Cain no longer came to the cave. However much Adam grieved that loss, it did not outweigh the joy of feeling Eve by his side again and knowing that he had apparently done the right thing by making it clear to Cain that humans do not kill animals. It was a significant sign from Yahweh, and Adam understood that it had once again been the work of Belial to tear his family apart in this way. Adam's moods still fluctuated, yet the lows in his spirits were becoming less and less profound. Adam noticed that his mood grew increasingly gloomy whenever he forgot to give thanks to Yahweh or attributed his recovery to his 'own' strength, causing him to be sent back down without mercy. Just as a lark, at the sun's zenith, trumpets its joy across fields and forests, so Adam learnt to let his heart climb with restraint to great heights, carried on a hymn of praise to Yahweh, only to descend humbly once more at the end of the day into his darkest chamber and there, little by little, chain up his ego. In doing so, he learnt to cope with the paradox of his ego.

He first learnt to love his ego so that he could then persuade it to accept its bonds of its own free will. It was enough for Adam to reflect on how Yahweh continued to love him despite all his shortcomings, to approach his ego with equal understanding and love, causing the ego's resistance to melt away like snow in the sun and willingly stretch out its hands to fasten its own shackles. All this to the dying protest of Belial, who, after Eve, now saw Adam too definitively escape his suffocating grip and poison.
For Abel, however, things were quite different. It was very difficult to understand his parents' position on this matter. Even more difficult was understanding why they prioritised the lives of animals over their love for their son. He could not imagine why they made this sacrifice, and for whom? When Adam spoke of Yahweh, he wondered how Yahweh could ask such a thing of parents. As a brother, he felt the pain of Cain's fate very keenly. He missed his brother and often went to visit him in his cave above the river. Time and again he listened to his lament over his parents' lack of understanding. No matter how often Abel urged him to return home and assured him that his parents missed him, Cain could not bring himself to show his face to them again. After all, he hadn't done anything wrong, had he? Cain could not bear their disapproval of his actions, however friendly it might be. He grew bitter. Alone in his cave, he tanned his latest hides for... Yes, for whom? "The bearskin I gave as a gift, they do use it, but not a word of thanks or a concession comes from it." Abel didn't dare tell him how difficult it had been for their parents not to use that bearskin straight away on that fateful night

to put it into the ground. In the end, it was their father who reluctantly said he would sleep on it. For them, it was no gift, but a sacrifice. And when Abel returned to his parents, Adam immediately asked how Cain was doing, whether Abel had told him he would sleep on it, and why Cain hadn't come round. Abel then tried to explain to them that Cain wanted more and asked for their respect and approval in return, and then the story was forced to stop. Endlessly hopeless. On the other hand, in this way his parents bore witness to something that must have been so great that it greatly stimulated Abel's desire to acquire this knowledge. He sensed intuitively that this knowledge was the only way to reconcile both points of view. He did not, however, realise the tender way in which his mother had already begun her teaching that first night when Cain left the cave. After Cain's dramatic departure, Adam lay alone in bed and was very weak. For the time being, Eve was not sleeping with him so as to allow him maximum rest. Abel brooded and tried to imagine Eve's pain at the loss of Cain. When he saw her lying alone in her bedstead, he was overcome with immense compassion. He gently moved Loep aside and asked him to take up a position beside Adam to provide him with extra warmth. He himself lay down beneath the skins next to Eve to comfort her. And softly he began to speak to her. "Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah," he greeted her tenderly. Eve thanked Yahweh for this comforting angel. Now that she had felt her failure in raising Cain that evening, she knew she must not waste a single second more with Abel. She sought his hand in welcome and pressed it firmly against

her heart. Her heart beat slowly and powerfully. She repeated very slowly, “Ash’ hadu an la ilaha illa-llah”, pronouncing each word softly and rhythmically. Abel repeated her words in the same rhythm, feeling her heartbeat resonate in harmony with his own. Suddenly, Eva slightly altered the rhythm of the syllables, and Abel was surprised to feel how her heartbeat, too, shifted in perfect harmony with her words. Whatever rhythm she used to speak the words afterwards, her heart followed perfectly. What’s more, her heart also followed perfectly the rhythm that Abel chose. It was clear that the sentence and the words were directly connected to her heart and formed a single whole. The words must be of enormous importance; it could not be otherwise. Abel was delighted to be able to experience this gift. In the days that followed, he busied himself feverishly with searching for the meaning of it all. In a quiet place, he tried to see if these words had any effect on his own heartbeat, but no matter what he tried, his heart did not respond. He vaguely remembered how, as a child, he had once heard Eva speak several sentences that slowly revealed their meaning only to quickly transform back into completely strange sounds. Days later, he decided to consult his father about this. “Yahweh protects her. That is all I know about it myself, but I do not know how. At first, I asked her, by guessing and reasoning logically, whether ‘ash’ hadu’ sometimes meant this or that word. But she never said yes or no. I could only detect an unfathomable silence in her eyes. An almost painful silence that, over the years, seems to have given way to peace and tranquillity. I have never been able to discover what caused her pain

It was all there: the words, the meaning, not being understood, not being able to speak, not being allowed to speak, not wanting to speak. It is her secret, one she undoubtedly shares with Yahweh. These words mean everything to her. They are her whole life." Abel now put all the pieces of the puzzle together and set off once more with Loep and the goats. He began talking aloud to Loep. At first he was just rambling at random about everyday things, but gradually he told Loep about his problem with Eva's language. Suddenly he remembered how he'd learnt Loep's language. It had to be something similar. He immediately tried out new 'words' with Loep. Every time he uttered a sound—for that's all it seemed to be—that apparently meant something to Loep, the wolf pricked up his ears. And only then. Abel's face lit up and spoke volumes. "Found it! Loep, you're my best teacher!", he attempted in Loep's language. The wolf couldn't make head nor tail of it, but Loep too apparently knew the power of pretending and returned the joy in kind.

The following night, Abel snuggled up close to Eva again. "Ash' "Hadu an la ilaha illa-llah." He offered his hand; she pressed it once more to her heart, and hesitantly he began his explanation. "I strongly suspect that this phrase is about Yahweh, even though you don't hear the word Yahweh in it." And her heart responded immediately with a quickening rhythm. "It must have something to do with the fact that your heart speaks of or to Yahweh, for mine does not do so and does not react in this way either." Once again, her heart reacted violently. It danced, it sang. But above all, it burned. Whereupon she took his hand, kissed it tenderly and moved his arm. She allowed no more. Not that she

didn't want to, but Eva knew that revealing this secret could also be disastrous for the recipient. Abel could not possibly grasp the depth of the secret now. He would never be able to understand it to its full extent and might get burned by it. After all, there was a danger that he would never seek its true depth for himself again and thus would never again be able to experience the fire in his own heart. For it was not a matter of knowing something about the spirit with the mind, but of carrying the spirit itself in the heart. For her, too, it was still a mystery, and she feared that someone who had never known Eden might never be able to fathom the secret of the heart without hurting himself. She understood that it was beyond her power and even beyond her authority to judge whether or not Abel could bear this fire. Just as she loved Yahweh deeply, so too did she fear Him. Not out of fear, but out of love. A fear such as she had never known in Eden, but which outside Eden was of awe-inspiring importance. She had learnt how, outside Eden, suffering and humility went hand in hand to reconcile with one another in the highest love, the highest beauty. She also knew from experience that this was a lifelong learning process that would never cease. Learning meant making mistakes, but because of the mistakes with Cain, she now prayed all the more to Yahweh for help. How marvellous is Yahweh. In Eden it was simple: Yahweh was ever-present in body or spirit. But once outside Eden, she could only feel Him in that heart which had to be trained again and again. The heart had to constantly learn to speak with Yahweh and trust in Yahweh's help and love. Again and again, endlessly again, the heart had to learn to

confidence in knowing she was reaffirmed. Only in this way did she gradually dare to act or judge for herself less and less.
The next day, she took Abel aside and showed him a bowl of water. She invited him to look into the bowl as she said: “Ash’ hadu an la ilaha illa-llah.” She repeated this over and over again without having to avert her gaze and apparently managing to maintain her composure. She invited Abel to do the same. He too looked into the bowl and now saw his own gaze and mouth as he repeated “Ash’ hadu an la ilaha illa-llah”, and he too did not have to look away. Eve looked at her son. Abel did not understand her happiness, but felt happy for her. Eve thanked Yahweh for such mercy. But Abel did not understand any of it.

That night it turned freezing cold outside, yet Abel, Adam and Eve felt no chill. They were three happy people who regretted only two things: the absence of Eden and the absence of their beloved Cain. Abel now realised how close his mother lived to Yahweh and that Yahweh must therefore exist. He then decided to seek further explanation from Adam and urged him to tell him about Eden. Eve nodded to Adam and, by the evening fire, Adam laboriously began his story whilst a biting winter set in outside. It took a long time before Adam began to speak, but Abel waited patiently. “Eden is... Eden is: before it feels cold, it becomes warm. Before it feels warm, it becomes cold. Before there is life, there is life. Before a boundary comes, there is Eden.” Adam sighed deeply and wanted to

He wanted to stop right there, but Eva looked at him with pleading eyes. He continued: “Eden is the most difficult story there is. To tell. To explain. We simply cannot do this. Only Yahweh’s angels could. But certainly not us. We who failed so badly. Forgive me, for I shall fail again.” He didn’t have to wait for it: he already felt himself failing, and it hurt all over again. But he bravely carried on, struggling to piece together the fragments of the puzzle in the haystack of his memory. “To speak of Eden is at the same time to do it an injustice. The mere foretaste we receive today is already so incomprehensible, indescribable; how then can we speak of the full reward? No words have the strength, no feelings the power. To speak of it is hubris. Whilst I speak of it here and now, this is pure hubris. Forgive me, Lord, for doing this now, and I am sorry that I so often displease You. I am also sorry, son, that I have brought you into this wretched state.” Adam fought back his tears, but Abel’s respectful gaze helped him to control himself, and he tried once more, wobbling helplessly on his newborn legs, to explain the impossible. “Eden is, in every respect, love without the existence of non-love, without even the notion of non-love, without even the need to feel the need for love because love is always there, before anything has even begun. And every beginning begins with Yahweh, because Yahweh is the beginning of the beginning, and thus the very essence of all beginnings. The most loving moment does not exist there because everything there is the most loving. Even walking with Yahweh in the garden is no more or less loving than interacting with the smallest insect. So great is the gift that Yahweh gives to humankind

so that everything, absolutely everything, breathes his spirit of the most loving love. This includes the love between people, between people and trees, between people and animals, between people and insects, between people and water, and between people and air. It is difficult for us to speak of Eden properly now that our minds and understanding have been clouded by the arrival of Belial in our lives. When I lived in Eden, I spoke the language that could be understood by everyone and everything in only one way, always with the right words, always with the right thoughts, always with the same love. There was no need for doubt. Reason, feeling and heart: all their knowledge stood on one and the same straight line. Once outside Eden, I am often confused; I think I am saying the same thing a thousand times but say it differently each time, and the other hears it differently too, so that nothing can offer peace, certainty or lasting comfort. Even now, as I speak. Talking about it is difficult for me because it constantly confronts me with what I lost. It hurts. A gnawing pain. I keep falling into lamentation and homesickness. Even now. Who cares about that?"

Abel placed his hand in Adam's. Adam felt a lump in his throat

his throat and continued: "Yahweh's words in his final conversation with us left no room for doubt. 'Just as it will henceforth be much easier to do evil, so it will become all the more difficult to do good. Wounding and hurting will become easier than healing and restoring. You did not believe Me even whilst I walked side by side with you in the Garden of Eden; how then can your descendants, who will not even have that chance, believe? Generation after generation, the gulf between man and God will deepen. Generation after generation, your hearts will harden. Few among your descendants will succeed during their lifetime

‘just to catch a glimpse of Eden.’ So spoke Yahweh to us. And your mother and I, we bear the crushing responsibility for this.” Adam let out a deep sigh, shook his head in tears and withdrew further into his chamber of memory, whilst Eve took his other hand. His dear Eve gave him courage. “I, the Man, as Yahweh called me, was busy naming the animals as Yahweh had instructed me. The Woman, your mother, as Yahweh called her, was with me. As always. We were one. Then suddenly Yahweh passed by, and I said to her: ‘Go on ahead to Yahweh: I’ll be there in a moment’, and so she did. And that was where I fell for the first time: I carried on with my work; it was more important than Yahweh, and I would catch up with Him later. I suddenly felt important because I was allowed to give the names. Your mother did follow Him, but kept looking back to see where I was, and she kept calling out, ‘Hurry up!’ Intuitively, as I now feel, she was trying to prevent my fall by giving me extra time. But Yahweh walked undisturbed on towards the centre of Eden, where the tree of life stood, bearing the knowledge of good and evil. Your mother lagged a little behind and apparently didn’t quite know what to do, falling further and further behind Yahweh. Once she reached the tree, your mother looked to see which way Yahweh was going, intending to wait for me. Then she was addressed by the serpent in the tree. By the time I reached the tree, she had apparently had quite a conversation with the serpent. I have never been able to learn the content of this conversation from her, because everything happened so incredibly quickly afterwards. I only remember that I reached the tree and your mother spoke to me: ‘Man, this

‘This creature is called Belial by Yahweh, but prefers to be called “snake” itself.’ And then I was struck a second time: ‘Snake is quite a nice name,’ I said. ‘From now on, you’ll be called Snake.’ Even then, I preferred “Snake” to the name Yahweh had given that wretched beast. The Woman was already holding an apple from the tree in her hand. I was astonished. Utterly astonished! I couldn’t believe my eyes! ‘What are you doing? You know…’ and the Woman interrupted me: ‘The Serpent says it is an offering to Yahweh: there is no fruit more sour. And only in this way do we know how sweet Yahweh’s love is.’ I snatched the apple from her hand, without thinking, for I could not bear the thought of her being the first, and so I fell a third time. I bit into it and gave the apple back to her. Your mother bit into it too. As we tasted it, we heard a terrible clap of thunder in the clear blue sky in the distance, causing your mother to drop the apple in fright. ‘It doesn’t taste sour, does it?’ I said, and your mother agreed. ‘Be patient,’ said the serpent, ‘patience! The sourness is yet to come! Many times more sour than the citrus ’ And the serpent withdrew. You might now think

That was the end of it, but I hadn’t yet made my biggest mistake made. Yahweh approached and addressed me. ‘Man, what have you done?’ ‘I did nothing, Lord, the Woman made me bite into the apple!’ I laid the blame squarely at Eve’s door! And it could have been far worse: ‘If the Woman had never been created, then this would never have happened, Lord.’ I blamed Yahweh himself for my failure. After that, everything suddenly happened at breakneck speed.” Adam fell silent and stared into space until he burst into sobs. “How trivial, how innocent it all seemed: a small apple that would decide the fate of all our descendants? Yahweh had made it so trivial so that we

we might more easily have dismissed as too trivial to give a second thought. The most trivial aspect of that one trivial tree amongst all the other similar trees from which we eagerly ate was the very thing Yahweh warned us about; after all, He had banished all other evil from Eden. Lest we should feel trapped in a golden cage, lest we should feel like slaves to Yahweh, He magnanimously allowed that one little door, which led out of Eden without a single lock. All we had to do was trust Him to keep His word. We lived fully in the good, and the one evil—that little apple, that disguised serpent—we could not ignore, and it caused the gate of Eden to slam shut behind us and all our descendants. We are terribly sorry, dear son, that you must now grow up outside Eden. You were meant to be children of Eden and not of ...” Adam could go on no longer. His sobs came only in deep, choking gasps. His tear ducts, long since empty, had caked his eyelashes with salt and concealed his bloodshot eyes. The muscles of his forehead tried in vain to relax, reshaping his face into an impassive mask. Every muscle was starved of oxygen. Not a hair stirred. Not a nerve pulsed. Eve, too, seemed petrified. Abel looked on in awe at their suffering and admired the
dignity of these two frail people who bore witness to the greatest and most significant loss a human being could ever experience. Their remorse towards their children was profound and seemed irreparable, and so it was for them too: they could never make amends for this themselves. The loss of Cain was

They accepted their full responsibility directly and bore it courageously. But this realisation tasted exceedingly bitter and sour, just as the serpent had so generously promised them. Thus their fate became their doom: the self-evidence of Eden could never again be explained as self-evident and would henceforth always be met with disbelief by every child, because the spirit outside Eden was the complete opposite of the spirit within Eden. Had they first lived outside Eden and then in Eden, the incomprehensible would have been just as great and just as difficult to explain or comprehend for their children as the fateful choice they had made. Contrary remained contrary, whichever way you looked at it. Just as in the time of Eden there was no distinction in any form of love, so outside Eden the love of parents for children suddenly became different from the love of children for parents, just as the love of men for women became different from the love of women for men, or from the love between men or the love between women. All forms differed from then on, each with its own struggle and misery. This was the tragedy of humanity, which at the same time proved to contain the only fertile ground for the path back to Eden. Abel's heart stood wide open and listened eagerly to Adam's words and all the nuances between them. Abel observed his father and mother closely and admired their unspoilt beauty. They were not asleep. Their eyes stood wide open, gazing into a depth that stretched endlessly and lasted for an infinite time. As if the coming centuries, with all the suffering their descendants would yet endure, were now presenting themselves in their minds at the speed of light. Were it

Unable to experience that one glimmer of hope, they died on the spot. That one glimmer of hope. “In freedom I will save you,” Yahweh had declared to them in a final vision, and so it would be. They could rely on this more than anyone else. “But our children—what was to become of them?” the thought buzzed incessantly through their minds, even in their deepest stupor. The shadows of dancing flames in the fire conjured solemn movements upon their lips and sang a song without tongues, many times more melancholic than the evening song of the merman in early summer who, sheltered by the falling night, high upon the top of a birch tree, bids a regretful farewell to the passing day and sings his offspring to sleep. Abel had never heard a more beautiful song. This marvellous singing sealed his unshakeable trust and faith in his parents’ testimony. Never had he felt less important, and yet never richer. Never smaller and more loved. Meanwhile, Abel looked after them, added wood to the fire and kept watch with Loep all night long.

Eva remembered the conversation with the snake as if it were yesterday. Every word, every movement, every rustle of the wind in the leaves of the apple tree—she remembered it all clearly. “At last!” she suddenly heard a strange voice behind her and turned around.
“What do you mean, ‘at last’?” she asked, and saw a peculiar creature with no arms or legs.
“I don’t have a name yet. Yahweh calls me Belial, but I much prefer to be called Snake.”
“The Man is busy giving names: I’ll tell him

in a moment. Why aren't you sitting with all the other animals?" the Woman wondered.
"I guard the tree: no one is allowed to eat the fruit because no one can tell the difference between a sweet apple and a sour one," said the strange creature. "Yahweh has indeed commanded it so. You have an important task," said the Woman with the utmost respect.
"They are, after all, special fruits that are not meant for everyone," replied Belial.
"What do they taste like? Do they taste like other apple trees?" asked the Woman, who loved fruit very much.
"The sweet apples taste just as sweet as honey, just like the other apples you know, but the sour apples taste extremely sour—many times more sour than you've ever tasted," the snake wasn't lying at all.
"Brrrr... more sour than citrus?" A shiver ran down her spine.
"Many times more sour than citrus," hissed the snake with its peculiar tongue.
"I don't like sour things." For the Mannin, the matter seemed settled.
"And yet this is important: you can only truly appreciate what is sweet if you also know what is extremely sour. I am a specialist in distinguishing between sweet and sour. Until you have tasted the sourest, you cannot appreciate the sweetest for what it is truly worth. Anyone who has never known sour cannot claim to know what sweet is. Moreover, the flavours of this special fruit from this marvellous tree are timeless."

“Yahweh doesn’t want that,” replied the Woman, still unconvinced.

“You’re missing something,” replied the serpent wittily. The Woman looked somewhat startled. “Perhaps that is precisely what Yahweh asks of us: to miss something, not to have or know everything?” replied the Woman’s heart aloud.

“But you don’t know WHAT you’re missing, and that’s rather lazy. Then it’s not a gift, because it requires no effort,” said the serpent in a hissing voice.

“I’m not missing anything; Yahweh told us not to eat it, and I love Yahweh. Isn’t love everything, after all?” The Woman slowly drove the serpent to despair. Belial thought feverishly about how to proceed and thought he had found the answer: “That’s exactly the point: you were given a mind by your Creator, and we are obliged to use it, alongside our love for Him,” the serpent hoped to speed things up. “I don’t need reason. My heart doesn’t lack reason, for I have love,” she said as if it were self-evident.

“Of course you’re right,” and Belial, taken aback by such strong opposition, continued desperately, “but Yahweh created reason precisely to serve love! Not to use reason is to dishonour His creation!”

“Yahweh told us not to eat the apple,” she reiterated, which Belial dismissed once again in despair, and he now had to pull out all the stops: “Of course He doesn’t want this! You don’t give something so sour to your loved ones. Eating it is a sacrifice, and not everyone can bring themselves to do such a thing. Only the highest being is permitted this, and that is why I am here, watching over it to ensure no one else eats it.” Belial noticed a slight look of

He spoke to the Woman and did not give her a chance to interrupt. “Look at me! I am the ugliest creature in creation, and yet it is I who guard the tree of good and evil out of love for Yahweh! He entrusted this to me out of love for me, His ugliest creature! I am the finest proof of Yahweh’s love! He grants the ugliest being what He entrusts to no other! Would I then dare to deceive my noble Creator? Every day, out of inexhaustible love for Him, I taste all the apples. I examine for Him which apples are sour and which are sweet. Has He ever driven me away? Has He ever forbidden me to speak to you? Sometimes you must follow your reason to serve love. Reason that serves the heart strengthens love and can never weaken it!” Belial now exaggerated emphatically with his hissing ‘s’ or ‘z’ to arouse pity in the Mannin. The Mannin was silent for a while. Something happened in her heart: she opened it a crack. Belial smelled his prey: “Love simply demands sacrifices! Through the sourness of the fruit, you will come to know what sweetness means. You will grow! You will become as Yahweh intended: His equals. He created you in His image. But that very last bit of becoming His equal must come from within yourselves! Therein lies your true freedom. The freedom that Yahweh granted you. If what He said is true, and it is true, then it is right that He now waits patiently, without pressure or haste, until you are ready to perfect His creation.”

The Mannin fell silent, and the serpent sensed that the Mannin was finally beginning to give in, and solemnly, as if Belial were now revealing a great secret, he brought out his final weapon: “And

if you think it through—and that is precisely what the mind is for—then eating this fruit is not only a sacrifice of love, but also the acceptance of the ultimate gift. Making the greatest sacrifice often consists in accepting the greatest gift, both sweet and sour—sweet is easy, sour is difficult—that you can receive from someone, but also that you can give back to Him, your Creator. Yahweh is worthy of the greatest gift!"

And the snake solemnly closed its eyes, as if to say that everything was perfectly clear and that the Mannin now simply had to make a 'sensible' decision. The debate was over. It was a high-stakes move, but it worked.

"Which apple shall I take, then?"

"This one."

And the Mannin , she fell.

Eva came to with a start and looked straight into the eyes of her beloved son. The confrontation with the memory of the defiled apple had once been so painful, and still was, but over the years it had lost some of its sharpness. Gradually, she came to understand how cunningly Belial had gone about his work and how, through Belial's reasoning—and thus through reason itself—she had allowed herself to be seduced into pledging her heart to Yahweh to this serpent. With great determination, she had set out on the path back to the spiritual Eden and had gradually found it. She learned, with difficulty, to give priority to knowing through feelings, then knowing through intuition, but ultimately, even more accurately, knowing through the heart, over knowing through reason. Eve was completely...

Weak and empty, and Abel covered her. No ‘Ash-hadu an la ilaha illa-llah’, no superfluous gesture, no sigh or breath: just two pairs of eyes that met only fleetingly and that spoke more of love than any human could ever describe in words. Abel himself could not sleep. Even Loep did not sleep. Eden existed! But where? For years they had wandered haphazardly until they had ended up in this place. No clue as to direction, no idea of altitude, no notion of mountain or valley. “Few of your descendants will ever manage to catch even a glimpse of Eden in their lifetime,” the thought haunted his mind incessantly. So it was possible! “As soon as spring comes, then... Yes, then...”, he finally drifted off to sleep.

Outside the cave, a fierce snowstorm raged, as if Belial
was trying with all his might to drive the warmth from their hearts. When that failed, he buried the entrance to the cave under mountains of snow in a final attempt to contain the danger of contamination for the rest of creation.

The snowstorm could not reach Cain in his cave in the gorge above the river, yet he found it impossible to feel warm inside. No matter how many furs he wrapped around himself, he could not shake off his frustration and loneliness. He was constantly wrestling with himself over whether or not to give in to his parents. He hoped that if he remained stubborn enough, they would eventually yield. Abel’s daily visit was both a ray of hope and a thorn in his side. He was deeply upset that his brother no longer openly took his side and that he did not try harder to convince their parents of

convince them that he meant them well. He wasn't doing this for his own pleasure, but to help them. He had no shortage of food—he'd sorted that out long ago—and winter didn't seem any harder for him than summer. After three days of snowstorms, the wind finally died down and a warm sun shone down on his spot. He had just begun his midday meal when the rope at the entrance to the cave suddenly showed signs of life. He heard Abel's voice echoing. Cain reacted with surprise, not knowing at first what to do, but it was too late and it had to happen sooner or later. As Abel descended on the rope, a strange smell met him. Numb with cold, he reached the entrance. Cain pretended nothing was amiss, greeted Abel warmly and sincerely, and immediately wrapped a few skins around him when he saw how cold he was, gesturing for him to take a seat by the fire. A leg of snow hare was roasting over the fire. Cain acted as normally as possible. Abel pretended not to look at it at all. Cain handed him a piece of the leg as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "Hungry? Try it! It's really tasty and nutritious," he said, looking at the gaunt Abel with genuine concern. He took a large bite himself and chewed slowly whilst observing Abel closely. Abel's thoughts raced back and forth, just as his eyes squinted and crossed with hunger. But meat, er, eating animals? No! How could he possibly not hurt Cain's feelings? He opted for a loving counter-question so as not to have to answer. "I'm going to look for Eden when spring comes," he replied quickly, before Cain could repeat the offer. Abel was confident that this would come across as a question. Cain calmly continued chewing

until his mouth was empty, and out of respect for Abel he did not dare to take another bite straight away. Abel waited, seemingly patiently, for a response to his half-hearted question. “Eden?” Cain replied curtly, with eyes that seemed questioning yet unbelieving, and he immediately put Abel to the test a second time. “Here, have a bite! Try it! It won’t kill you, and it’s actually quite tasty,” and he held the piece of meat right under Abel’s nose. Cain had Abel in a tight spot. “I’ve just had a good meal,” he tried, with some success. It was a clever move. Cain tried not to feel rejected. He loved his brother too much, and he also respected his consistent behaviour despite the visible hunger in his eyes. The question of what exactly he had eaten ‘well’ was already on the tip of his tongue, but he just managed to restrain himself from mocking Abel’s choice. He quickly changed the subject: “Eden? Isn’t that a long way off?”

Abel replied gratefully: “Father told me this morning
that a cherub with a flame from the whirling sword stands guard at the gate. It must be visible from afar.” In the same breath, he continued: “I’m going to climb Djebel Akhbar first to see exactly where this flame can be seen.”

Cain could not bear such childish naivety, and his heart broke when he heard his younger brother speaking so enthusiastically. But he was worried about his physical condition, for he was certain that Abel would do as he said, and in that wretched state no man could conquer the Djebel Akhbar alive. He would help and protect him, and he took the bolt in his hand once more, drew little figures in the air with it, and, shaking his head, he finally made a

proposal. “Let’s make a promise to each other: you’ll find out where Eden is, you’ll keep me informed, and I’ll go with you to Eden on two conditions. One, you must fortify yourself with this food now. And plenty of it, not just a bit! Two: Loep is coming too! Without Loep, it’s life-threatening to travel that far through unknown territory,” and he now held the bolt right under Abel’s nose and looked him deep in the eyes. Abel was trapped: his stomach and his mind immediately said yes, as did his feelings for his brother, and his heart offered only feeble resistance. Naive and inexperienced, he accepted the bolt with relief. He took a bite of it, and his brother’s sincere smile tasted like the finest seasoning on top. They chatted for a long time afterwards, and Cain was delighted that he could finally boast about his hunting tales. Abel listened with pleasure, for he saw his brother beaming like that for the first time in a long while, but he himself did not utter a word about what he had been allowed to experience in the cave and submissively lent a one-sided listening ear.

Just as Abel was about to leave, someone asked—

An enthusiastic Cain asked him to wait a moment, then went deep into the cave, returning with a waistcoat, trousers and footwear all expertly crafted from bearskin. With a look of pity, he helped his brother put on the clothes. Cain had to swallow hard when he saw Abel’s shoulder blades and the sharp points of his vertebrae standing out sharply against his chest. How must his parents be faring, who had no doubt saved food from their own mouths just to give Abel something to eat? It made Cain feel both sad and rebellious.

“I knew I’d be able to give you this as a present one day.” Abel be-

replied to his brother, a lump in his throat. “It’s far too big!” he said, trying to laugh it off, “it’s as if I have to put on one of those hand-me-downs again!”

“Take this bag with you too, and I expect you back here tomorrow when the sun is at its highest.” Cain quickly filled the bag with bolts for Loep and some extra meat for Adam and Eve. Cain hadn’t felt this happy in a long time and waved Abel off as he began his perilous climb upwards. Loep looked puzzled when he saw Abel in a new suit. It immediately brought Abel back down to earth. If Loep looked so surprised, just imagine how his parents would react. Loep was more interested in the bag, and Abel gave him the bones. And was he ever pleased: he gobbled them up as if he had to suck them dry. With mixed feelings, Abel made his way home and carefully rehearsed the scenario he was going to play out. He would speak to his mother alone and tell her everything honestly, just as it had happened. He arrived at the cave. The snow had piled up so high against the entrance that he and Loep had had to dig a tunnel through it earlier. The advantage was that the heat lingered much better inside the cave and that water was literally within reach. He called out Eva’s name before going in, so as not to disturb his father’s rest. Eva came out and was startled at the sight of his enormous coat, but composed herself. “Got it from Cain; Mum and I send our regards,” he tried to sound cheerful. She gave a faint smile and he got straight to the point. “There’s something else, but give me a chance to explain.” He opened the bag containing the roast meat. Eva kept her composure. She looked for something to sit on and Abel sat down in front of

He sat her down and recounted word for word what had been said in Cain's cave, placing particular emphasis on the agreement between him and Cain to search for Eden together, on condition that he would grow stronger. Abel chattered away like a waterfall, asking for understanding for Cain and harbouring the hope that they would go in search of Eden together. He emphasised how Cain had been revived and how his bitterness had melted away like snow in the sun. He pleaded, almost desperately, not to lose her love. Eve listened with only half an ear, whilst the other half was constantly gauging her heart. She suddenly pressed her index finger to his mouth. He fell silent. She took a piece of meat in her left hand. With her right index finger, she pointed from the meat to her breast and shook her head to say no. Then she pointed to his chest and mouth and nodded to say yes, and she fed him by bringing the meat to his mouth whilst saying "Ash' hadu". She allowed him to take only small bites. And with each small bite she added to the phrase "an la", next bite "ilaha", next bite "il-la-llah" and again and so on. Then she gave him the whole piece and signalled that he must now do it himself. And Abel ate the meat and prayed at the same time, as she had asked. He would continue to do so. She smiled encouragingly, stood up, but Eve's heart felt uneasy and she vaguely doubted whether she had acted correctly and whether she would not be better off breaking her silence to give Abel more explanation. She had long suspected that Belial would not change her language, as it had never held her back. On the contrary: it had made her stronger and often protected her.

Belial was by no means dissatisfied with the way things were going.

People were now eating animals and had fallen just as low as the animals themselves. But above all: the faint trace of doubt in Eve and the thought of a ‘concerned’ Michael in the Holy of Holies were enough for him for the time being. He would turn the defeat he had suffered earlier into a resounding victory here on earth. Everything lay wide open before him and, in a generous mood, he immediately broke down his resistance to a mild winter.

7. Djebel Akhbar

Reason is of no help to me.

Oscar Wilde, De Profundis

Before Abel could even catch a sound, Loep pricked up his ears with full attention. Excitedly, he showed Abel which way to go. "I think it's more this way, Loep," he said, but Loep would not be dissuaded. Abel became curious as to the reason for Loep's unusual behaviour.

They stood at the foot of the western foothills of the Dje-bel Akhbar. High above them, the mighty Mountain-That-Sees-Far stretched out its long ridge. Loep walked impatiently ahead, but waited restlessly each time for his master to catch up with him. Suddenly, Abel too heard a song echoing in a monotonous chant.

From the top of a mountain, you can
see far On a mountain, you feel big
You can sleep in a mountain

But the mountain does
not change.
The raindrop does, As it
falls,
Not knowing where,
When or how It
meets the sea,
Becomes the sea.
The mountain knows the passion of the raindrop To
become the sea

.

An old man in front of a cave!
Loep ran towards him, frantic with joy, but a metre away from him he stopped abruptly, bowed on both front paws, tucked his head between his legs, laid his ears flat and conjured up the most submissive look in his eyes that Abel had ever seen.
“Do you two know each other?” said Abel, pleasantly surprised, as the old man stroked Loep.
“I knew his parents and ancestors well, a long time ago. What brings you here, young man?”
“I hope to be able to see Eden from the summit. If there is one place from which Eden must be visible, it is th ”
The old man interrupted him: “The mountain is incredibly high and difficult to climb.”
“Have you ever been to the top?” asked Abel curiously. “I used to, yes, when I had legs and arms as young as yours are now. You’ll need them. I can’t make it to the top anymore. I know the way

, though."

"Then surely we can help each other? Look, I've got a long leather strap with me. I'll pull you up or give you a hand. And if I have to, I'll carry you up! As long as you show me the way. Can you see Eden clearly from there?"

"Yes, very well indeed. But why do you need to see Eden so badly?"

"That's a long story."

"Come on, it's getting dark. We'll light a fire for the night, and then you can tell your story over some fruit and honey cake."

And so went the first meeting between the old man and young Abel, who poured out his story to the old man like a waterfall. The old man listened patiently, for he did not wish to hurt Abel in any way. The old man was particularly moved when Abel told him at length how he thought he had unravelled the secret of Eva's hair, and for the first time Abel dared to voice his strong suspicion in his own words, knowing that Eva could never get into trouble because of it and assuming that this old man would never meet her anyway.

Early the next morning, they got ready to begin the climb. "Loep must stay here to guard my cave," said the old man, and Loep obeyed with surprising docility. "I'll carry that heavy pack of yours," insisted Abel, who set off on the climb like a laden mule. The old man dared not refuse his offer, for he was careful not to discourage Abel in any way. So they set off. Loep stayed behind.

Seven days and nights! It would take seven full days before they reached the

'They've reached the top,' the old man Abel had said.
"Are you sure you're up for this? It's a steep climb," the old man had asked again, and Abel had replied resolutely: "I've got no choice: I have to do this, for my parents and my brother." As soon as they started up the first steep slope, Abel turned round, took the leather strap and tied it between them. "If you like, you can just hang on to it, and I'll pull you along; I'm just so glad you know the way." And so they pressed on that first day. However young and strong Abel was, it was a gruelling struggle. The old man walked behind him, occasionally letting himself hang a little on the rope so as not to show that he was finding it hard, for he did not want to hurt Abel's feelings in any way. However beautiful the scenery was, Abel soon found he could no longer enjoy it. The pack on his back weighed like lead and was quite painful. Every time he saw the mighty peak ahead of him appear through the clouds, he was only too glad to have a guide, so that the risk of needlessly wasting energy by choosing the wrong paths was reduced to a minimum. As evening fell, just before Abel was about to collapse from exhaustion, the old man cried out: "I can't go on! Just up here to the left there's a cave with some provisions. Let's spend the night there." Abel sank to the ground and the old man pretended he couldn't go another inch, for he didn't want to embarrass Abel under any circumstances. The old man lit a fire, heated a small pot of water with herbs before Abel had even properly recovered, and gave it to him to drink. It tasted delicious and, above all, lifted his spirits. After a rich honey cake, he just managed to say "thank you" and fell asleep with a broad smile

while the old man sang the song of the mountain.

From a mountain you can see far On
a mountain you seem tall
In a mountain you can sleep
But the mountain never
changes.

The next morning, the old man was up early and had a delicious breakfast ready. “Help yourself to everything; I’ve already eaten.” He complained that his bones ached all over, for he didn’t want Abel to think he was weak in any way. “If you like, I’ll take some of your load. It’s going to be a tough day,” the old man asked, gauging Abel’s mood. “No, I can’t let you,” Abel assured him. “It’s hard enough for me; just imagine how hard it must be for you? If you can’t go on any longer, just call out and we’ll rest,” said a genuinely concerned Abel.

So they set off again. The path grew steeper and was now strewn with large, angular boulders, on which Abel’s leather soles soon began to give way. Large blisters formed on his heel and toes. “Stop. I can’t go on,” the old man pretended. “I’ve hurt myself.” He took some marigold and aloe ointment from his bag, rubbed it over his heel and gestured to Abel. The latter gratefully held out his feet and the old man tended to them expertly. Then he produced an old pair of soles. “I always carry a spare pair,” he winked at Abel, who gratefully accepted them.

They continued on their way. The old man knew exactly which path—

The difficulties were still ahead, for he knew every stone, every bend, every step. Even though it would have been better for him to lead the way, Abel still wanted to spare him by letting him take the lead, and the old man remained careful not to hurt Abel. However, it soon became harder and harder for Abel, and the old man called out just in time: “Stop! Let’s take a breather, I can’t go on,” so that Abel could regain his strength while the old man kept conjuring up something refreshing from his bag. “There’s a difficult stretch coming up: steep and not without danger. Do you mind if I lead the way for a bit? I know exactly where to place our feet.”

“No problem. Take your time. Looks like the summit isn’t going to walk itself,” Abel chuckled bitterly, looking up. It felt as though they hadn’t moved a single metre; it seemed so hopelessly far away.

They pressed on. The old man now walked in front, and at the slightest tension on the rope he gently slowed his pace. They made only slow progress. The old man had to stop regularly. Not for himself, but to let Abel catch his breath. Abel no longer asked to lead the way either. “It’s wiser for you to lead. You know the way. I’ll carry the load,” he managed to convince himself. That evening, the old man stopped much earlier than planned because he sensed how Abel was increasingly relying on the rope between them to keep moving forward. “Here’s a cave with supplies. We’ll stop here a bit earlier to build up some extra energy for tomorrow. See that steep mountainside over there? We’ll have to climb that tomorrow. There’s no way round it.” Abel didn’t protest and looked on with undisguised disbelief at

tomorrow's impossible task. The gleaming, untouched, sheer face acted as a mirror for the setting sun. The old man immediately lit a fire in the cave, gave Abel some extra animal skins for the night, tended to his wounds, brewed a herbal drink and divided up the meal, giving himself a little less. In truth, he had no need for food, but he ate so as not to embarrass Abel. "Don't worry about tomorrow. I know this mountain face like the back of my hand. For many years I have climbed this face every week," he said, trying to encourage Abel. The warmth, the hearty meal and the hot drink did their work, and Abel soon drifted off to dreamland. The old man looked fondly at the exhausted young man. Young Abel's willpower surprised him, and yet it did not. After all, Abel's motive was noble, just as his love for his family was great. The old man softly hummed the song of the mountain to him. Abel himself was so exhausted that he was unaware of what was happening around him. After barely two days, he was so worn out that he failed to realise the depth of the care with which the old man was constantly surrounding him, let alone think clearly enough to grasp that no human being was capable of conquering the summit of Djebel Akhbar on their own.

The third day dawned. It was cold at that high altitude and the north-western side was devoid of any sunshine.

The old man dressed in extra animal skins and foot protection, even though he did not need them, but he did not want to offend Abel and managed to persuade him to dress in the same way. With great skill, he made with care

He fastened straps into a harness around Abel's waist and thighs to secure him to himself as they climbed the steep face. He lightened the load on Abel's back without the slightest protest from Abel. Abel endured it all stoically, for he had been deeply shaken when he stood at the foot of the steep mountain face and looked up. The first section was manageable, he thought, but the highest part looked like a vertical mirror. He gradually realised that his only chance of survival lay in unconditional surrender to this friendly man, who also turned out to be Loep's friend—whatever that might mean—but the thought helped. He realised he had to obey meticulously and surrender himself without hesitation to that old man who apparently knew the mountain like the back of his hand. He had no choice and, for the first time in his young life, had to place his life blindly in someone else's hands. And into the hands of a stranger, at that. But he understood more than that. This was not to be a matter of 'having to', but of 'wanting to', and the love that the man radiated contributed enormously to that as well.

"Ready?" The old man crouched down with remarkable agility in front of his

He moved with caution, deliberately choosing a slow pace so as not to frighten Abel. With what little mental strength he had left, Abel focused on every movement made by the old man above him. Seeking support with his left hand on that ledge, then placing his right foot in that crevice, pushing off and at the same time reaching with his right hand for that small rock peg a little higher up, before placing his left foot back in that higher groove. Endlessly and meticulously, he followed every gesture of the man; he burned it

in his memory so as not to mix up the order. However, like a predator, an enemy crept into his mind. At first, the pain in his head was merely a dull ache, nothing serious at first glance, but not long after, it became a throbbing, intense pounding. Concentrating became extremely difficult, but with sheer willpower he persevered, fearing that otherwise he would fall and drag the old man down with him. They weren't even halfway there, and to make matters worse, he now began to feel sick and vomit. The old man looked down with concern, understood what was happening, and made his way towards a solitary ledge nearby so they could rest for a moment. Abel's head was spinning hopelessly and his skull felt too small. His heart was racing and his breathing tried in vain to keep up with that hellish rhythm. "I'm sorry," he stammered to the old man. He was panting heavily and felt all the energy draining from his body and limbs, sinking into the abyss below them. The old man fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a leaf from some strange bush, putting it in his mouth to show Abel he should chew it. The abyss at his feet, the sky never so close. "We really must carry on," the old man said softly to Abel after a while, and for the first time Abel looked him in the eye without hesitation and recognised the eyes of a young man in the prime of his life. He saw no wrinkles, nor grey hairs, but only a pair of sparkling eyes. Abel didn't know whether he was dreaming or hallucinating, but he nodded in agreement. He had no choice. But it was stronger than that: he had rock-solid trust and unshakeable faith in this man. His life was safe with him, and he too wanted this man

not to hurt him. The old man stood up straight for the final and most difficult stretch. Step by step as he climbed, he felt the rope with Abel pulling him down harder and harder. Abel leaned against the wall, almost unconscious, and the old man slowed down slightly so that Abel wouldn't notice, for he didn't want to hurt him, and so, slowly but surely, he pulled Abel up the mountain as if he were a feather. Lead turned to air. Abel had lost all consciousness and grip.

Abel first came to hours later, by the light of a crackling fire. His mind was still painfully numb, and time and again he drifted off, lost in some strange tale or adventure. He was delirious, or perhaps dreaming within a dream. Sometimes he thought he felt a hand stroking him, just as Eva often did. He kept repeating "thank you", not that he knew to whom or why he was saying it, but that was what he felt. Sometimes he saw an old man, then a young old man, then an old young man, and more and more he saw a young man. A young man who shone. "Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah," he intuitively addressed the young man in one of his dreams or delusions. "I believe: there is one God," Abel repeated in his own mother tongue, for even in his daze he did not wish to offend the young man. The young man suddenly leaned towards him cautiously and whispered softly in his ear, for he too did not wish to offend Abel: "I bear witness: there is no God but God." Abel received, in all simplicity and the most childlike humility, the exact translation of the secret of Eve as a gift, only to sink back immediately into a deep coma. At once, Eve appeared in his dream and he also heard

Eve addressed him in his own mother tongue: “I bear witness: there is no God but God.” Immediately, the dream carried him back to last winter, when large icicles at the entrance to the cave surrendered themselves in thick drops to three people who themselves no longer wept. Drops which, freed from the icy cold, selflessly sacrificed themselves for them to purify them and allowed themselves to be carried by Yahweh to the primordial tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden.

Drops.
Ticking away the seconds.
Adding up to days.

“Eden!” Abel suddenly cried out, and he sprang to his feet. His mind was instantly clear; the throbbing headache had vanished. The young man came over to him and gave him something to drink. Abel was so happy to see the young man and not the old man, happy because it turned out that not everything was a dream and this provided proof of what was real. His gratitude continued to grow. “I bear witness: there is no god but God,” Abel cautiously tested the young man, who answered the question exactly: “Ash’ hadu an la ilaha illa-llah.”
“It’s the seventh day. The sun will be rising any moment now. We can head for the summit,” said the young man, and he began to adjust the leather strap and the harness. How they had suddenly managed to get so close to the summit was a mystery to Abel, but when he saw that leather strap, he suddenly understood what he had to do. Abel walked towards the young man on wobbly legs and placed his hand on his arm. “Carry me,” he asked

he said softly. The young man, however, continued undisturbed with preparing the leather armour. “Carry me once more,” Abel urged again, thereby demonstrating his unconditional trust and gratitude.

And so it came to pass that on the seventh day, a young man carried another young man in his arms to the summit of Djebel Akhbar. It was still dark. Not for much longer. The young man carrying the other young man did not stumble once, did not rest once, did not speak once. He knew the mountain, and the mountain knew him. He knew its boulders, rocks, crevices and ice. From the West, they now crossed the summit towards the East and, without a single word, they gazed at the rising flame of the whirling sword that slowly emerged from nowhere in the distance and began its rotation of that day. Abel was grateful. Eden existed and he now knew where to find it. Abel looked at the young man beside him who glowed in uncreated light.
“‘Who are you?’ That’s the question you want to ask me now,”
the young man broke the long silence, looking at Abel. Abel was not surprised and nodded in agreement.
“I am Djibril, one of the seven archangels of Yahweh.” “I wish I were an angel of Yahweh too,” Abel mused aloud, sincerely.
“I must warn you, for there are also renegade angels who harbour ill will towards mankind.” Upon hearing this, Djibril recounted to him the story of the fall of Belial and his angels in minute detail. Abel’s eyes grew wider and wider with astonishment. He tried to absorb every word down to the finest nuance

in his mind. Even though he could not grasp it immediately, his memory recorded everything word for word, and he was firmly confident that understanding would come later.

There was a silence.

The cherub's sword had by now swung far from its starting point and looked down kindly upon the man and the angel of Yahweh, seated on the summit of the highest mountain.

"I want to stay here forever," said Abel, "together with you, Djibril."

"Then we really must be off now," said Djibril, springing to his feet with a laugh. "Because you don't reach Eden at the top of a mountain. To reach Eden, you have to go down. Deep down. I'll show you!" As he took Abel back into his arms, he commanded, "Close your eyes," and Abel felt a gentle breeze caressing his hair as if he himself were the wind. "Open your eyes," and Djibril let Abel go.

They were standing just a hundred metres above sea level on the first plateau of the mountain, where there was a gigantic mountain lake with an overflow of water that was rushing down in a roaring torrent.

Surprise! Loep came running up happily, and yes, nothing surprised Abel anymore.

"There are three things I wish to give you," said the angel, and Djibril led Abel to the edge of the gigantic waterfall. Abel was not afraid; Djibril was near.

"Turn around again for a moment and look at the mountain. Can you see all those little, tranquil mountain streams that feed into this great lake?"

The angel dipped his hand into the lake and let the drops fall from his hand into the water.

“All these drops make up this lake. There are drops that say: ‘That’s enough for me now; the fall was painful enough, and at last some peace,’ but in this lake there is a feverish buzz of rumours about a distant sea. Each drop represents its own choice. At the bottom of this great waterfall lies a smaller lake where, time and again, the same rumours, stories, dreams and testimonies play out amongst the drops. Then, in a lower basin, once again and countless times over, the same choice that every drop must make for itself: ‘whether it is willing to brave the pain of the next fall’, and Djibril did not finish his sentence as he gently turned Abel back towards the enormous waterfall at their feet.

Then the angel dipped his hand into the water once more and let the drops from his hand fall into the waterfall before Abel’s eyes. “But this is what you must become, Abel: as small as the drop, with as much passion as the drop to lose yourself in the sea and thus become the sea. Do not fear the pain, Abel! The greater the fear you overcome, the less pain you feel! Embark on the journey of your heart!”

Abel repeated every word.

Djibril then took him back to the open space on the plateau and produced a small parcel.

“This gift is for your parents and them alone. They will immediately understand who has sent it,” and he slipped the small parcel into Abel’s leather bag himself for the journey. “Guard it with your life.”

He then made his way to a large boulder and stood behind it, well out of Abel’s sight.

"Whisper something!" Djibril called out loudly from behind the boulder. "I love you," Abel said in an inaudibly soft voice.
"You see, you can't see me, but even if you speak so softly I can't hear you, I can still hear you, and I too say to you: 'I love you'."
"Think of something now," Djibril commanded once more.
Abel thought of Loep, who had nothing but a sad premonition about all this.
"You cannot see me, and yet I know you are thinking of Loep." "Look at something!" commanded Djibril once more.
Abel looked at the top of the mountain.
"You cannot see me, and yet I know you are looking towards the summit." Tears of gratitude welled up in Abel's eyes once more. He waited for Djibril to reappear. But Djibril did not come. How could he come when he was always there? Loep immediately began a plaintive farewell.
"Djibril!" Abel roared passionately at the summit of Djebel Akhbar, as if he imagined him hiding there behind the peak. "I bear witness: there is no God but God!" echoed from his mouth, and the mountain echoed it many times over.
He waved towards the summit, knowing full well that Djibril could see him. Abel and Loep cheerfully began their descent, and Abel sang the song of the mountain at the top of his voice.

From a mountain, you can see far
On a mountain, you seem tall
You can sleep in a mountain
But the mountain never
changes.
A raindrop does,

Which falls down
Not knowing where
When or how It
meets the sea,
Becomes the sea.
The mountain knows the passion of the raindrop To
become the sea
.

8. He who kills bears

I became indifferent to the life of another. I indulged my lust for pleasure wherever it pleased me, and moved on. I forgot that every small act of daily life has a formative or destructive effect on character, and that one must therefore, one day, proclaim from the rooftops what one has done in one's inner chamber. I ceased to be master of myself. I was no longer at the helm of my soul, and did not know it.

Oscar Wilde, De Profundis

The moon had already waxed from a crescent to a full disc twice, and still there was no sign of Abel. From his cave at the end of the gorge, Cain could see the mighty peak of Djebel Akhbar looming up. Whereas he had scarcely noticed this peak before, he could now not take his eyes off it. It was now the end of spring, and Abel's absence was making him more anxious by the day. Oh yes, Abel and Loep had set off greatly strengthened by the hearty food Cain had provided them with, but the summit of the mountain simply seemed unattainable. He could only hope that Abel would soon return. Whatever excuse Abel might come up with, Cain resolved

He did not want to embarrass Abel or put him in a difficult position with awkward questions. He was deeply worried about the brother he loved so dearly. He made a decision: at the first light of dawn, he would take his spears and provisions and set out in search of his brother. He could no longer stand by and do nothing. The direction was clear, and he knew all the various routes to Djebel Akhbar like the back of his hand. His decision brought him immediate peace, but the night could not pass quickly enough. In his dream, he intensely tasted the same sweat as when he approached one of his traps and could already hear the distraught, dying, wounded animal crying or snorting from afar. Physically unrested, but mentally sharp, he set off before dawn. First walking, then quickening his pace, then running, chasing after his love for his brother in the hope of leaving the fear and unease behind him more quickly. Cain knew his vast hunting grounds like the back of his hand. His body was well-trained. No animal dared stand in his way. His fame was widely known. 'He who kills bears', all the animals called him out of awe. He walked for one day. He walked for two days, three days. On the fourth day, around midday, he came running up the crest of a slope and stopped with a start at the sight of an unexpected spectacle. Down in the valley, he saw Loep standing amidst a pack of wolves, completely surrounded, with their leader facing him. Loep, strengthened by Cain's food during the winter, had managed to hold off the pack the whole time and still had energy to spare. The leader of the pack realised his position was at stake and was prepared to defend his place to the death. Loep was confident and refused to be intimidated—

He ran. Something gave him superhuman strength. Neck hair standing on end. Fangs bared. He could keep this up for days, compared to the pitiful state his opponent was in. Cain's eyes searched for Abel. In vain. 'He who slays bears' launched his attack without delay and ran down the mountain, howling loudly. Loep looked up in surprise, which distracted him, and the leader of the pack struck immediately. He lunged at Loep's throat, but Loep managed, in a quick reflex, to just dodge his first attack. The other wolves followed their leader's attack and Loep was buried beneath them, with no chance of escape. In their blindness and fury, they forgot about Cain's attack until Cain, with a skilful throw of his spear, struck one of them squarely in the belly. His target howled so loudly that all the other wolves scattered in disarray.

"Abel!" he bellowed loudly, without waiting for a reply

He immediately took Loep under his wing. Whether he was whimpering in pain or joy, Cain couldn't tell the difference. His hind leg was torn open and bleeding profusely. "Abel?" he asked Loep, and the wolf nodded in a certain direction. This gave Cain the certainty that Abel was still alive, and it gave him wings. Cain stood up, first dispatching the wounded wolf without hesitation, and immediately began applying a pressure bandage to Loep's terrible wound. Deftly, he made a fire and placed a stone slightly smaller than the wound into the flames. He tried to explain to Loep what he was going to do. Once the stone was hot, he clamped it between two sticks and pushed it into the wound to staunch the bleeding. Loep did his best not to whimper. Then Cain took the sharpest point of his knife and pricked

small holes in both sides of the long, open wound. He then took a sharp bone from the largest river perch he had ever caught. He skilfully tied a peeled tendon from the front leg of a roe deer to it and began to sew in the same way he made his leather waistcoats or coats. Loep's wound now needed at least a day's rest to prevent it from starting to bleed again. So he went out on a reconnaissance mission. Cain sought a spot that seemed defensible at all costs. Loep's safety had never been an issue before, as long as he could flee from danger. Because Loep's life was of paramount importance in finding Abel, surviving the night on solid ground was of the utmost importance. It would be the first night that Cain could not sleep in a tree, or in a safe cave, or on a high ledge. After all, all bears were keen to avenge the death of their loved ones with the life of 'He who kills bears'. To make matters worse, Cain found fresh bear droppings not far from a spot that seemed perfectly defensible: a fairly large rocky plateau beneath a steep cliff face, accessible only via a narrow path surrounded by dense scrub. He no longer hesitated and immediately carried the weakened Loep in his arms to the spot, laid him down carefully and straight away began gathering a large supply of dry wood. The previous summer had been extremely dry, and with the dry wood he made a circle that was difficult to penetrate, which would betray and hinder any approaching animal in good time. His precautions were aimed primarily at bears, and he busily made torches from dry grass and fine twigs in several layers of greener

to drier ground. As always, he skinned the wolf with the utmost respect for the pelt, and he cut the usable meat into pieces that might appeal to and satisfy a hungry bear. He then searched for and found water in a stream not far away. He gave Loep something to drink and eat, and refilled the small gourd. Everything was ready: the entrance was carefully sealed off with large branches woven together with young twigs to form a network that was difficult to pass through. The gaps between the surrounding bushes were made just as difficult to access. There was water, there was fire, there were provisions, there was more than enough wood for the fire, and he had his spears and torches. And not to be underestimated: there were Loep's ears and sense of smell. When he finally had some time to rest and began to reflect on the situation whilst smoking a leg of the dead wolf over the fire, his thoughts turned to Abel. Loep without Abel! Abel without Loep! Something terrible must have happened to Abel. That much was clear. He looked at Loep, who had recovered somewhat from the pain and had already tried to get up once, but quickly gave up and lay back down. As the day was still young, Cain tried to get some sleep during the day, knowing that the night would offer no rest. He rested, but did not sleep. The tracks of a large bear nearby worried him. For the first time, he found himself in a weak position against them. An extremely weak position compared to fighting a wounded bear from above after a deep fall into one of its deadly pits. The scent of blood in the enclosed valley would surely lure them here. It was not a question of if they would come, but when. And with

How much? When a good opportunity arose, they would sometimes dare to operate in pairs. Whilst resting, he suddenly realised his precarious position with crystal clarity. It became clear to him that this time he had set a trap for himself with the way he had built up his defence. He realised that his only chance of survival lay in turning the tables, and a daring plan slowly took shape in his mind. It was a bold move, for he decided to turn his poor defence into a daring attack. Without a plan of attack, he would, after all, be defenceless against the brute force that would soon break through his cordon. He thought feverishly: what did he know about bears? Where were they most vulnerable? How did they react? What would he do if he were the bear? What were his strengths? What were his weaknesses? What resources did he have at his disposal? He jumped up; it was an illusion to think he could rest now, and he set to work again. He cleared half the entrance and walked to the spot where the remains of the dead wolf lay. Using intestines and other entrails, he laid a trail of bait leading to the entrance of his hideout. He wanted to lure the bear exactly to the spot he wanted. He stuffed the pelt with the dead wolf's head full of grass and sturdy small materials so that the wolf rose from the dead. He placed the effigy in the middle of the entrance as if the wolf were guarding the entrance with his life. He positioned the effigy in the brushwood so that he could use a rope to make the wolf wobble slightly from a distance, so that it would appear alive in the dark and draw all attention to itself. Whereas he had previously planned to keep the fire burning brightly, he now opted for total darkness. The moon was just past the new moon and

He didn't promise to cause too much trouble. He did, however, keep a good supply of charcoal and glowing embers at the back so that he could light his torches quickly. He then began to plan his attack position. It was crucial to measure out the perfect spot. The aim was to strike the bear with his strongest and sharpest spear beneath its left armpit, just below the ribcage, so as to pierce through the diaphragm from bottom to top, reaching its heart and lungs. He would have only one chance, that much was certain, and so his concealed attack position had to be perfect. He mimicked the bear's movements, imagined what it would do with the wolf cub, attempted to adjust the proportions, took the length of his spear into careful account, and made a decision. Immediately he began to build a flimsy wall at that spot using dry wood, interwoven with dense, green undergrowth with sharp protrusions, so that the bear would choose the clear path to the wolf pup over being pricked by unpleasant pinpricks. He tied a thin rope to the wolf effigy and tried to guide the other end as invisibly as possible behind the wall, where he would take up a concealed position, spear at the ready. The bear had to be taken completely by surprise. He hung bits of inedible wolf remains all over the wooden wall so that their scent would mask his own body odour. He rested for a moment beside Loep. He joked a bit with the wolf, gave him something to eat, had a hearty bite himself and drank. "Today it's make or break for both of us, little brother," he said, stroking Loep over the head. "Do you remember, Loep, how Abel used to teach you to growl and look angry?" And he immediately tried to imitate the Abel of those days

to imitate. Loep surprised Cain by actually doing it. “You can still do that!” he cried, and an idea immediately struck him. “Watch closely, Loep! I’ll show you what’s going to happen tonight.” He stood up, went to the entrance and pretended to be the bear. “The bear can smell blood from a great distance and follows the trail of entrails and bits of meat. He comes over here, he looks around but it’s pitch black. All he can see in front of him is a shadow of this dead wolf. I’m sitting here on the left, right next to him behind this wall, with my spear ready through this opening. From there, I pull this cord and the dead wolf starts to move. It would be great if you got angry then. Will you do it again?” Cain pulled the cord and mimicked Abel once more. Loep got the idea and immediately began to growl and howl ferociously. “Brilliant, Loep! The bear will certainly want to teach this dummy a lesson. As soon as the bear can reach the dead wolf, he’ll be barely half a metre away from me. I’ll thrust the spear with all my might diagonally upwards through his soft flank, straight into his heart. Then I’ll run to the torches, light them, and walk towards the bear to wear him down until the spear has done its deadly work!”

Whilst conducting this dress rehearsal, he suddenly saw a large—

a flaw in the plan. He had left the semicircular cordon from his original plan untouched. He realised that neither he nor the frail Loep would have an easy escape route if things went wrong. He immediately rectified this flaw by drastically reducing the size of the cordon and concentrating it around Loep, so that he would have a little more time to flee through a small opening in the neighbouring bushes. Given that everything on the battlefield already smelled of wolf, it would be difficult for the bear to find the living

He could just about make it out in the dark. At least, that was what Cain hoped. Cain wasn't really scared: killing bears was his job. His only concern was that two bears might come at once.

Night fell quickly, with a waning moon that seemed to reproach the sun for its profligacy during the day. It grew dark in no time. Cain smeared the remaining blood from the wolf's heart over his hair, arms and legs so that his scent would blend with that of a wolf. He blackened his face with charcoal. He took his place behind his flimsy shelter and took the rope in his hand to test Loep once more. He pulled, and Loep reacted immediately. He congratulated Loep once more, and then it grew quiet. Quiet in a way that it is never truly quiet when evening falls. The light invariably gives way to the night and lays the day to rest.

Every night, we are faced with the choice between sleep and wakefulness. No earthly force is greater than the night-time vigil, which offers the human mind the opportunity to gain insights: broader, truer and clearer than the brightest sunlight.

Watching through the night whilst a person faces death amplifies this power to supernatural proportions and inevitably carries the spirit to the highest peaks and the deepest abysses of the soul. It can open the heart of the hardest kind. It can flood the most rigid soul with new life, just as only a storm surge carries the sea to strange places, teaching the submerged land a new reality, never leaving the earth unchanged in its wake. So too did that night carry Cain to unknown lands

den. The loneliness he had felt in recent years was swept away by new insights, as if he were allowed to visit himself and, as a privileged witness, look back on the fateful parting between a mother and her son all those years ago. For the first time, he saw her anguish, her love for him. He saw her dignity and beauty. He saw a father on the land who adhered to strange principles, but who meant well by his children. He also saw their eldest son, who judged them harshly. He saw that this son felt regret. Regret that he could not feel regret for that. He saw everything he had previously been unable to see. When the sea enters the new land, it pauses for a moment and allows its treasures to settle slowly before returning the transformed land to itself. But Cain was not alone. Belial lay in wait in his mind's chamber. He cursed these images from the bottom of his heart and struck back.

Loep suddenly broke the silence with a loud growl. He snorted and He was on the verge of doing exactly what Kaïn expected of him when a colossal bear suddenly appeared, just a little too far away from the wolf pup. A massive rush of adrenaline brought Cain back to his senses, and just a few centimetres in front of him he saw the bear's snout sniffing its way through the thicket, held back by the prickly twigs in its eyes. Cain held his breath carefully and was glad that he didn't just smell like a wolf, but reeked of it. Kaïn tugged at the rope and the bear's snout quickly withdrew, now focusing its attention entirely on the wobbling wolf pup and Loep's growl. The bear shuffled a metre forward until it was right in front of the wolf pup. Loep perfected

the scene, with a bit more frightened whimpering. Cain watched the bear's movements closely through a peephole and was delighted when he saw the bear come to a suspicious halt exactly where he had calculated and hoped. His spear was poised in the perfect position. The bear was just about to strike the dummy with its left forepaw when Cain thrust his spear forward with all his might, carefully maintaining the angle from low to high, driving it into the bear's soft flank and piercing its diaphragm. The bear roared in pain. Cain had calculated perfectly how deep he needed to thrust to stand any chance and could only hope that the heart, or at least the lungs, had been hit. The bear roared menacingly and immediately turned towards the flimsy palisade from which the spear had come, lunging murderously at Cain. But Cain was not waiting for this and was already busy lighting his torches. It took what felt like an eternity for this to succeed, and the furious, awe-inspiring bear reared up towering high, standing barely two metres away from him, seething and roaring, with a spear dangling from its side, blood gushing down it. Cain had calculated the length of his spear meticulously. He'd had to trim a bit off it, and perhaps a little too much, as it now turned out, for he hadn't reckoned on such a colossus. But too short was better than too long. Loep's role was over, and he dragged himself out of the bear's sight, into the safety of the bushes where Cain had made a shelter for him. Waving two torches at once, Cain now kept the bear at a distance for as long as possible. The two torches circled constantly back and forth, in front of and around his head, so that the bear could not

didn't know where to strike first with his mighty claws. It drove him mad with rage. Waving the fire about, Cain focused his attention on the position of the spear protruding from the beast's side, for the bear was bound to fall at some point. Seconds seemed like minutes. The bear showed no sign of weakening, until suddenly foaming blood came from its snout and it looked as though it were coughing up blood. Cain saw the bear's gaze grow dazed and it begin to prepare to fall. Timing was now crucial. As the bear's centre of gravity shifted forward, he dropped the torches, threw himself beneath the mighty body and grabbed the end of the wobbly spear to pin it into the ground, so that the bear's own weight would drive the spear further through its lungs and heart. The mighty beast was dead in an instant. Cain, reeking of bear and wolf blood, crawled euphorically out from beneath the bear. The adrenaline was still coursing through his body. He cut off the bear's foreleg, took a torch, and ran to the entrance, shouting it out into the dead of night. "If any of you stand between my brother and me: he's a dead man!" He turned in all directions, holding the paw high in the air like a trophy, and in the light of the fire, he roared again and again, foaming at the mouth: "Death! Understood?!" All of nature fell eerily silent before this man-beast. Moths sought safe shelter, rabbits fled into their burrows, the wind held its breath, bats hurried to their caves, not a single leaf on a tree dared to stir. Even Loep fearfully closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep. "Perfect plan, perfect timing and perfect execution." Cain's arrogance knew no bounds.

Conceited and feeling untouchable, he went to the stream with his torches and washed the filth from his body. But he could not cleanse himself.

9. THE FALL AND THE ‘ ’ FALL

What we might make our own for a single moment, we lose again in the long hours that follow, weighed down by her leaden feet. It is so difficult to keep the soul at ‘the heights she is capable of reaching’. We think in terms of eternity, but we move slowly through time; and how slowly time passes for us who are imprisoned, I need not repeat, nor of the lethargy and despair that creep back into our cell and into the cell of our heart with such a strange persistence that we must, so to speak, adorn and sweep our house for its arrival as for an unwelcome guest or for a harsh master or for a slave whose slave it is our fate or our choice to be.

I must turn everything that has happened to me into something that is good for me. The wooden bunk, the disgusting food, the rough rope that is twisted into work until the fingertips go numb with pain, the drudgery with which every day begins and ends, the harsh commands that seem to be a necessary consequence of the grind, the hideous clothing that makes suffering a mockery to behold, the silence, the loneliness, the shame—all these things, individually and collectively, I must transform into a spiritual experience. There is no humiliation of the body that I must not strive to turn into a spiritualisation of the soul.

OSCAR WILDE, DE PROFUNDIS

Abel was moaning aloud. He could no longer say how many days it had been. For some inexplicable reason, he was in a pit

He fell. Loep had tried to warn him, but as he was singing enthusiastically on the way back, it was suddenly as if the ground had literally given way beneath his feet. He landed very badly, with his right leg striking the edge of a boulder, and after that he couldn't remember anything for several hours. The pain woke him up.

His lower leg was bent at an angle opposite his knee, and a section of his shinbone was just about to pierce through the skin. Instinctively, he tried to adjust his position, but the excruciating pain quickly caused him to faint again. Loep looked on helplessly from above. "Djibril," Abel called out again and again, and Loep wondered whether Abel was calling out to him or to Djibril himself. Either way, Loep took it as a command and immediately rushed back to Djebel Akhbar to look for Djibril in the cave at the foot of the mountain. Abel was left behind alone.

It was a strange pit. There were bones and carcasses of large and small animals. There were also sharp stakes standing upright in the middle of the pit. Abel's terrible pain paralysed not only his actions but also his mind. It only slowly dawned on him that he had stumbled into a trap set for animals, and there could be only one person responsible for it. He therefore hoped that Cain would soon turn up to inspect his trap. He knew he had to splint his leg as quickly as possible before he weakened completely, and with enormous willpower he managed to apply a splint to his leg, using shin and thigh bones wrapped in the leather straps he had in his travel bag. He tried to stay alive by sucking the marrow from some-

to crush the soft young bones and gnaw on them, just as he had so often seen Loep do during the winter months. The rain of those days occasionally formed a little stream that flowed neatly into the well. Abel collected the water in his gourd or in the skull of some animal. Loep had not been seen for the last few days, and that made him feel so helpless that he lost all confidence and became desperate.

"Loep has left me! Djibril has left me! Djibril, where are you now?" Day after day, he tried to sit up. "Help me, Djibril!" Only to fall back down roughly and, exhausted, slowly recover from the pain. Abel could no longer make sense of it. "Can you hear me, Djibril? I can hardly call out anymore. Can you see me? I can no longer show myself. Can you still read my thoughts, Djibril? They are merely begging for your help." Gradually, his despair grew. "Where is the love I saw in your eyes? Where is your light step that carried me? You treat me without mercy! Is this the journey of my heart? I can neither feel nor hear your heart anywhere. What game are you playing? Why save me on a mountain and let me die in a well?" Djibril did not show himself, at least not in a way that a desperate spirit could see. Yet, at the edge of the well, Djibril fought a fierce battle with Belial and his followers to protect Abel and the gift. He kept watch at the well's edge without ceasing, but Abel's resistant spirit could not see it.

Another night was drawing in. Every night

people to choose between sleeping and staying awake. Abel was no longer given a choice. That night, however exhausted and weakened he was, he simply could not sleep. His eyes were wide open.

His mind was receptive. No greater earthly force than the vigil of the night offers the human mind the opportunity to gain insights: broader, truer and clearer than the brightest sunlight.

Watching through the night whilst one faces the prospect of death or life intensifies this power to supernatural proportions and inevitably carries the spirit to both the highest peaks and the deepest abysses of the soul. It can revive the most desperate soul, breathe life into the driest heart, just as a storm surge carries the sea to strange places, allowing the submerged land to discover a new reality, never leaving the earth unchanged in its wake.

And so, that night, Abel was carried away to long-forgotten lands. As his head rested on his travel bag, he experienced once more the unapproachable beauty of his parents. The icy winter night in the cave, the endless weeping of the icicles, like images dredged up by wild waves from deep chasms and ancient caverns in his mind, paying homage to their incomparable sorrow and dignity. All fell silent and stilled his desperate spirit. The sea regained its peace and calm and took its time to gently lay these images upon this new ground. Only slowly, at first still hesitant, did it withdraw, completely emptied, towards a tide on a distant shore. The remaining images then revealed themselves, clear and distinct. The moon and the sun displayed their beauty, unfiltered and pure.

Nothing could wake Abel now, for he was already awake. His reborn spirit stubbornly resisted leaving this moment behind. He drank the water, nibbled on a few

nutritious bones, relieved himself, but nothing woke Abel, for he was awake. He did not resist. He merely resisted resistance. The unknown became his ally. The intangible became his friend. Despair his enemy. The impossible his lover.

Not a single thought stood between his heart and the image of his parents. The pain in his leg no longer felt like pain. Nothing could wake Abel, for he was already awake. He no longer felt loneliness or abandonment. He dwelt in the unchanging, eternal company of the Man and the Woman of Eden. Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah. Hours became seconds. Seconds became hours. Nothing woke Abel, for he was awake.

Whenever he was awake, he would whisper "Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah".

When he was awake, he murmured "Ash' hadu an la ilaha il-la-llah".

When he slept, he dreamt "Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah". For he was awake.

Not for a single moment did his consciousness or subconsciousness break contact with his heart, and so his heart gradually learnt to beat to the rhythm of prayer, until heart and prayer merged into something that can no longer be separated.

Until suddenly a voice called out to him.

10. Two ‘ ’ struggle

Wisdom is a wound that bleeds whenever any hand other than that of love touches it, and which must bleed even then, though it is painless.

Oscar Wilde, De Profundis

The more Loep signalled from his shoulders which way Cain should go, the less at ease Cain began to feel. He knew the way all too well. He knew where the path led, and a sense of foreboding crept over him. He was not far off now. One more bend. He would now have preferred to have trudged on for days with Loep on his back, heavily laden, rather than see his premonition confirmed. He was approaching the trap. He could now see what he feared. Something was in his trap. “Abel?”, he called hesitantly as he set Loep down on the ground and threw off his heavy travel bag. He didn’t know what he wanted most right now: to hear something or to hear nothing. Cautiously, he made his way to the edge of the pit and peered fearfully into the depths. “Abel?”, he barely dared to repeat.
A rustling sound.

“Cain?”, came a soft voice from below, and Loep replied immediately, whimpering with joy.

Cain did not know whether to feel glad or sad and hesitated for a moment. “I’ll be right there.” A few minutes later, Cain descended into the well using a rope. A pungent stench overwhelmed him, but at the same time a strange sensation washed over him that he could not define. It had something to do with uncertainty, even though it didn’t feel that strong. Perhaps it was more a sense of shame he had never known before. From a distant corner, Abel looked at him with strange eyes. Cain’s unaccustomed eyes forced him to approach only slowly in this place shrouded in darkness. In the sparse light, Abel appeared to Cain as some sort of animal. Filthy, dirty, stinking, and yet Abel’s shining eyes betrayed a warm, unshakeable joy. He did not know whether his brother realised that he himself had dug this dreadful pit with all those upright spears, from which Abel had miraculously escaped upon his fall. Once again, something strange was stirring within Cain. He shuddered, and yet he felt as though he had come home. For the first time, it felt wrong to feel at home here. A house in which his beloved brother now lay as prey. Wrong. The triumphs of bears slain in this house not so very long ago now tasted rather sour and bitter. Once his eyes had gradually adjusted to the darkness, his gaze fell upon the imposing bandage around Abel’s leg, and this broke through his hesitation: “What happened? How long have you been here?” Abel looked a little dazed and had to gather his voice for a moment

scraped away until he managed to make out something intelligible.

“Long,” he smiled with difficulty.

“Can you stand up?” Cain tried to help him. It had been quite a while since Abel had last tried, and with Cain’s help he managed to put weight on his leg. The weeks of enforced rest had given his splinted leg time to heal, but all his muscles had wasted away and his last reserves of fat had been eagerly consumed by his body. For the second time, Cain felt deep pity for his brother’s pitiful physical condition.

“How on earth did you manage to survive here on your own?” he asked, his voice generously exaggerated with admiration.

“I’m not alone here,” he blurted out without thinking, and Abel’s eyes lit up.

Either he had gone completely mad, or he was so weakened that he could no longer think straight; Cain quickly dismissed this answer.

“Can you put any weight on that leg? Does it hurt?” Abel had already collapsed before Cain had finished his question. Cain wasn’t quite sure what to make of it. “Does it hurt when you put weight on it?” he repeated, and Abel shook his head. Cain found it awful to see his brother struggling in such a emaciated state and turned his anger inwards. In a fit of rage, he took it out by knocking down the vertical spears in the middle of the trap so that it would quickly look less like a trap. ‘What a stroke of luck that Abel managed to escape their deadly trap,’ he consoled himself as he threw the spears in the other direction.

Abel watched and could guess what was going through his mind. “Cain, thank you for being here,” he said, trying to soothe Cain’s conscience.

Cain swallowed hard and said resolutely, “I’ll take you home, little brother!”

“I’m going to miss this place,” Abel replied calmly. Cain pretended not to hear him and looked worried. Abel had to get out of here as quickly as possible before he went completely mad, and his practical mind and organisational skills immediately sprang into action. How could they travel home safely with two disabled creatures without leaving either of them to fend for themselves? He couldn’t carry them both or support them at the same time. And what if they suddenly came across a bear? Neither Loep nor Abel would be able to get away quickly enough. His mind analysed everything quickly and efficiently. There was only one solution: the river, to keep them all well out of the reach of any predator. The only dangerous rapids between the nearest starting point and the mooring place below his cave should be navigable during the summer due to the low water levels. The distance from the pit – Cain no longer liked to call it a trap – to the river was just under a day’s march. He estimated it would take a week’s work to build a sturdy raft. He still had to make leather ropes. He still had to gather fresh provisions by hunting, even though he had previously filled his travel bag well with bear meat. Abel and Loep had to be able to stay safely behind in the pit on their own. So many things that needed doing, and yet he had only two hands and two legs. But he had something to make up for and would succeed.

First, we need to get rid of that awful smell of excrement in the well. He gave Abel something to drink and told him what he was going to do. “Press yourself firmly against the wall of the well, or better still:

“Use that alcove over there,” he said, and Cain climbed back out of the pit using the rope, letting the remaining cover fall into the pit itself: the earth would come in handy to cover the filth at the bottom, the twigs and branches to make a fire, whilst allowing more air to circulate in the pit. He climbed back down into the pit once the dust had settled, and Abel now looked every bit the little earthling. Cain began to cover the spot where Abel always relieved himself, sorting through twigs and branches. The carcasses were neatly piled up so that it all looked a bit tidier and less grim. In the centre, Cain gathered the boulders and arranged them in a circle. Abel watched gratefully at such dedication. Cain crawled back out of the pit and a moment later he descended with Loep on his neck. The reunion between Loep and Abel was beyond words. Abel gave free rein to his joy; Loep howled with happiness and licked Abel’s face clean. With the twigs and wood, Cain made a fire, and the resin from pine branches and pine cones dispelled the odours. “Here’s a good chunk of meat for you: eat it slowly. I’m going to scout the area and fetch some water so you can wash up a bit. You’re safe here. I’ll leave the rope hanging. I’ll leave my travel bag with the rest of the provisions here. If danger threatens, ask Loep to howl and I’ll come,” he said, gathering his spears and empty gourds.

As he took hold of the rope and prepared to climb out of the well , Abel suddenly said: “Thank you very much, brother, for looking after me.” Cain merely glanced at Abel and, awkwardly, quickly climbed out. Once out of the well and out of sight

From Abel, he walked down the slope towards the stream. Completely bewildered and lost in his own thoughts, he tried to stay strong. Tears were not an option. But the gnawing feeling grew ever stronger and weighed ever heavier on him. Going in search of water had merely been an excuse, because he simply could not bear Abel's presence. Cain descended the slope towards the valley whilst his thoughts swirled around like leaves in the wind. Until he suddenly stopped: only now could he name what he had felt smouldering all this time: it was pain! Abel's love and gratitude for him burned painfully! It was as if he saw himself in Abel, but himself in his finest form, as if he saw in Abel the Cain he wanted to be. He was distraught, unsure whether he had ever been that Cain and had lost it, or whether he had wanted to become that Cain but had simply failed. He felt so insignificant compared to his younger brother and could not quite grasp it. He felt painfully small, as if he had missed something important somewhere. He would far rather have endured Abel's anger and reproaches so that he could fight for it and battle him with fists or sharp words. But no: Abel knocked him out from the very first gong with his unconditional love and gratitude. He would far rather have wrestled with a ferocious bear. That was his language and he respected it, but his language had neither words nor sounds to describe Abel's love. He reached the stream, filled his gourds and, on his way back, gathered a few sprigs of soapwort, wild thyme and lavender. Cain returned to the well with long, slow strides.

Abel's eyes fluttered. The glow of the fire made him

Slowly awakening. He was naked. He had been naked for weeks. And yet not naked. His body bore the slime of the newborn child like a precious robe, intended to honour his birth to most noble parents, hailing from the unrivalled Eden. The raindrop had fallen from high above. As difficult as it was now to bid farewell to this inexhaustible oasis of prayer, so difficult was it to experience the arrival of the iconoclast Cain unequivocally as a salvation. For the fall was no longer a prison, but had rather become a safe haven in which he first learned, of his own free will, to become small, only to then plunge downwards, as Djibril had advised him to do, and allow himself to be carried in an endlessly recurring prayer to Yahweh led by the Man and the Woman from Eden.
If it were up to the drop itself, it would have preferred to fall even deeper , but smallness also implied obedience, and if the fall had to stop, then he had to accept that with gratitude. Thus, Abel gradually awoke to the memory of his purpose: to undertake the journey to Eden.

Cain climbed back down into the pit, surprised that Abel still hadn't roasted any meat, and so took the initiative himself. He threw some thyme onto the fire to season the meat and make the smell in the pit more pleasant. He scattered the lavender around. "Come," said Cain, "I've brought water and soapwort. I'll help you wash." Abel let him get on with it. Cain began rubbing the herb into Abel's hair and skin and rinsing him off with water. A lively...

gaunt, sunken eye sockets, shoulder blades like featherless wings, hip bones like oyster shells. Abel might well have been washed, but there was no need to purify him.

"I'm going back to the stream one more time to fetch some more water. Give me your pelt so I can leave it to soak in the stream overnight; then we can let it dry tomorrow," said Cain, picking up Abel's animal-skin coat and reaching for his travel bag. Abel quickly snatched his travel bag from Cain's hands: "Not this, brother, I'll explain it to you later." Surprised, Cain took both gourds and Abel's fur coat, and he tried to flee the well quickly, but Abel proved too quick for him: "Thanks again, brother, for looking after me so well." Suddenly, the man who kills bears broke down and could no longer hold back his tears. He let himself fall to the bottom of the rope and his shoulders shook with sobs. "I'm sorry, brother, that you stumbled into my trap here and had to suffer so much: you could have been dead."

Abel dragged himself over to him.

"It doesn't matter, Cain, I've suffered a great deal, but I've received much more. I really must thank you. Go now before it gets dark; I'll keep an eye on the meat and then we'll have a bite to eat together." He placed his hand on Cain's shoulder, but Cain pulled himself together, quickly withdrew from Abel's grasp and climbed out of the pit. Abel's enigmatic, utterly illogical words continued to trouble him, and he felt misunderstood—indeed, belittled rather than comforted.

11. THE PIT AND WELL-'S WORDS

Bear in mind that the sentimentalist is always a cynic at heart. In reality, sentimentality is merely cynicism on its day out. And whilst cynicism may be entertaining for its intellectual side, now that it has learnt good manners and moves in respectable company, it can never be more than the perfect philosophy for a man without a soul. It has its social value, and for an artist all modes of expression are of interest. But in itself it is a poor affair, for there is nothing in it that ever reveals itself to the true cynic.

OSCAR WILDE, DE PROFUNDIS

What are you going to do tomorrow?

We need some extra food, so I'm going to set a small trap first. You really need to put on some weight, otherwise we'll never get out of here. Loep won't be a problem, but I'm worried about you.

Thank you.

Man, give it a rest: I don't understand you. Why do you keep saying 'thank you'? I'm the one who made this damn trap that's the cause of all your misery. You'd have been home ten times over by now. Our parents are now worried sick, and it's all thanks to me. I

deeply ashamed.

.....

No need to thank me.

.....

How was it on the mountain?

.....

Did you see
Eden?

Yes.

Are
you
sure?

Yes.

Far away?

Yes.

Very far?

Yes.

How can you be so sure, then? You can't really see that from so far away, can you?

Djibril.

Djibril?

An angel of Yahweh showed me Eden.

You're not well, my dear brother. And that's entirely my fault. We'd better get some sleep. We've got a tough day ahead of us tomorrow. Goodnight.

Goodnight.

&

What are you going to do tomorrow?

You'll have enough food to last a few more days. Tomorrow I'm heading to the river, the same one that flows past my cave. I'm going to build a raft. We need to get home before the water rises

. How's your leg?
Fine, I'm just limping a bit; my foot is turned outwards slightly and I can't walk properly anymore, but I'm hardly in any pain.
Would you be up for staying on your own for a few
days? I think so.
Have you managed to climb upstairs yet? I
can't manage it yet. My arms are still weak.
How is Loep?
I'll just ask him.....He says he's fine.
Maybe you should take him to the river; that'll do his fitness good.
Good idea. Won't you miss him?
I hardly dare say it. I'll be glad to be here on my own again for a few days.
Aren't you glad I came to your aid?
..... I'm not always sure. Forgive my hesitation. I've gained so much in this place.
Must I leave you here then? May I simply return to my cave with Loep tomorrow and leave you here in this beautiful place?
No.
Not then?
We must go to Eden.
.....What was it like up there on that mountain?
.....May I sing you a song?
Yes.
From a mountain you can see far
On a mountain you seem tall

In a mountain you can sleep
But a mountain
You do not become.
A raindrop, no, That comes
crashing down
Not knowing where,
when or how He
meets the sea, The
sea becomes...
A mountain knows the passion of the raindrop To
become the sea
.
.....
.....
That's lovely, but what does it mean? It is
the song of the mountain, of Djibril.
I'm going to sleep now. Tomorrow will be a tough
day. Goodnight. Goodnight.

&

Glad you're back.
Really?
Of course, how're you getting on?
I've made good progress with the raft, but I need more rope. Tomorrow I'm going to cut a few animal skins we're not using into strips, or perhaps you could help, then I can go hunting in the meantime.
That's fine. No problem. How did it go with Loep?
He's slowly getting back to his old self. Hey, Loep? But are you already

reached the top yet?
I could, but I won't.
It's late already. I'm going to bed.
Goodnight. Goodnight.

&

What are you going to do tomorrow?
I'm going back to the river tomorrow to finish the final work on the raft, so that you can feel a bit happy on your own in this miserable hole. That's what I'm going to do.
I'm sorry.
You don't regret a thing, just as you don't do a thing. I have to do everything here on my own, and the only thing I ask of you—to help me gradually get stronger again—you sweep gloriously at your feet. The least you could have done was gather some herbs to keep the stench out of here. What on earth are you doing here all day long in this stinking pit?
. .....Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah.
Man, you don't even know what that means or if it means anything at all.
Oh yes, I do.
Who put that idea in your head? Djibril, surely?
Yes, indeed.
Man, wake up, Abel! Stop daydreaming! You were nearly dead when I found you! Can't you see how not only your body, but also your mind has weakened, and how you're rambling?
- Loep snuggles up close to Abel -
Thank you for everything.
Stop thanking me! Go to sleep.

Are you still coming with me to Eden?
You eat meat, Loep is coming, so I'm coming too. That was the deal. Goodnight.
Goodnight.

&

What are you doing tomorrow?
We're setting off from here – that is, if you're still willing to leave this fantastic, idyllic spot to head for the river, a day's march away. We can't wait much longer, as the water is starting to rise. We'll see what happens after that.
Thanks.
Stop it, Abel, and go to sleep.
I'm sorry.
Do I really have to get down on my knees and beg you to stop? You owe me absolutely nothing. You're not doing anything wrong. It's because of me that your foot is now crooked on your leg. It is I who brought you into this misery. Or is this actually your way of taking revenge, tormenting me time and again by making me thank you for that terrible disability? This is no misery; I simply want to thank you because I have been able to experience so much good here, so why would I want to torment you? The fact that my foot is now crooked is but a small price to pay for what I received.
Help, I'm going mad! Have a bit of mercy! Please let me sleep.
Goodnight, Cain.
.....
At last. Goodnight.

&

And so it came to pass that every evening, in the pit, both brothers lay wide awake, pretending to go to sleep in order to preserve some semblance of peace. The closer they were to one another, the further apart they felt. Where were their childhood years of laughing together and enjoying each other's warmth beneath a single fur during the long winter evenings?

For Abel, the pit had become a gift; for Cain, it remained a terrible pit, and both were deeply concerned for the other. Cain continued to regard the pit he had dug as a dreadful murder weapon, from which his brother had escaped death by sheer chance, and which he wanted to forget as quickly as possible. In that pit, he felt more like his brother's perpetrator than his saviour. That his brother had adopted a grateful attitude towards him was completely incomprehensible, but led him to suspect that he had suffered serious damage to his mind, and it was this injury in particular that weighed heavily on Cain's sense of guilt. Although he tried hard not to get angry every time, he became increasingly convinced that he needed to be a bit tougher on his brother now and then. He no longer shied away from sarcasm, hoping that his brother would start to defend himself. On the other hand, it gave him back a sense of superiority to be the big brother, to have everything back under control, to be able to look after Abel rather than feeling inferior to him. Cain fervently hoped that their journey to Eden would quickly bring Abel back down to earth, knowing full well that they would never find Eden anyway, and then he would be there to support and comfort his brother. Not seeing Eden would solve everything.

For Abel, the fall had long since ceased to be a fall, but had become a wellspring of value that, through absolute dependence and abandonment, had taught him to control his defiance. There he had experienced how Djibril carried him without being physically present. He had learnt how rebellion caused him to stand in his own way. But now he was deeply concerned for his brother, who was drifting ever further from the path leading to the spiritual Eden, and so he was all the more eager to see Eden together with Cain. Only Eden itself could make his brother realise that there was more to life than food, survival and killing animals. It was becoming increasingly difficult not to offend Cain. Abel had to answer certain questions as briefly and tactfully as possible to protect Cain from himself and not to widen the gap between him and the spiritual Eden. Above all, do not hurt him, thought Abel, and silence seemed the best means to this end. But he missed his brother and regretted that he could not speak freely about what he had experienced on the Djebel Akhbar. Abel consoled himself with the thought that even the strongest fortress of the mightiest beaver is powerless to withstand an onslaught of simple raindrops. Every painstakingly built dam will one day encounter that one raindrop too many which will break through its ranks and set all the other drops free in its wake.

Seeing Eden would solve everything.

12. THE RIVER OF THE ‘ ’

When one is moved to the depths of one’s soul, one becomes as simple as a child.

OSCAR WILDE, DE PROFUNDIS

It had to be said.

Whenever Cain made something, it was solid work of which he could rightly be proud, and he was.

They had set off on the raft. The journey to the river had been arduous, as Abel was still far too weak, much to Cain’s annoyance; he felt he’d simply wasted his time in the pit. “Do you really think you’ll ever reach Eden like that? You waddle like a goose,” he could no longer hold back his mockery after a few hours. Loep walked endlessly in circles around them to anticipate any danger so that Abel could always find cover in time. They reached the river just before sunset and Cain hurried to steer the raft to an island in the middle of the river to spend the night there safely. Abel was completely exhausted and could have slept standing up. Exhausted, he lay down

He rested his head on his travel bag, whilst Loep snuggled up against him.
“What is it with you and that travel bag?” asked Cain, puzzled. Abel had held his bag close to him the whole way.
“I’ve brought a gift for our parents, from the mountain,” he didn’t dare mention Djibril yet.
“And? Anything special? What is it?”, asked Cain, genuinely curious.
However tired Abel was, his mind was quick on the uptake and had become extremely adept at sidestepping difficult topics over the past few weeks. There was no way he could admit that he himself didn’t know what was inside Djibril’s gift for their parents. “It’s something valuable, but it has to remain a surprise. For you too!”, he deftly sidestepped the issue once more. This time, it was Abel who was keen to be the first to say “goodnight” to Cain, and he seemed to be saying it whilst he was already asleep.
“Goodnight, Abel. Tomorrow will be exciting, for a great rapids lies ahead.” Cain turned and followed Abel to the land of the birds.

The next morning they set off in peace, but the late afternoon heralded itself as ominous. The heat of the past few days now began to demand its lost moisture with urgency, and Belial’s heavily pregnant rain clouds thundered and raged, flashing as if their lives depended on it. The vanquished fell in torrents, whilst the victors continued their triumphal march, only to eventually face a

to meet several people and lose oneself completely in a cascade of fresh raindrops.

Abel revelled in it. He welcomed the raindrops as if he himself had organised this celebration. He held out his open hand and caught them gently. “Welcome, I’ll take you with me,” flashed through his mind as he thought back to Djibril on the edge of the mighty waterfall of the Djebel Akhbar. He shouted with joy above the roar. “Go and do not be afraid, my friends!” he shouted, as he stroked the water of the river and realised just how important it was. “Why is that?” he asked the water. “Part of you comes from the lake of the Djebel Akhbar? I was standing there!” He felt Djibril so close and smiled at him. “I cannot hear your voice, Djibril, yet I hear you in the wild roar of the swirling river. I cannot really see you, Djibril, yet I recognise your face in the foam of the water. You do not tell me what you think, Djibril, yet I am certain: Ash’ hadu an la ilaha illa-llah.” Abel began to laugh heartily out loud. The drops that could fall no further down made Abel blissfully happy. They were all his kindred spirits and he spoke to them as he cupped them in his hand: “Pleased to meet you, my name is Abel. You haven’t hurt yourselves too badly, have you? Have you seen the sea yet? Tell me and take me with you, you know the way, we are together now, we are going together.” He boldly plunged his hand into the water to let them continue on their way. Abel’s heart sang the song of the mountain in its purest tone without actually singing it. The sea beckoned, and amidst his fellow pilgrims he turned, cast one last, eternal glance into Cain’s eyes, and slowly rolled over

the edge of the raft to become one with the river. No friction, no corners or edges, just the caress of gliding droplets.

Cain was busy steering the raft and, amid the roar, could only catch snatches of Abel's cries of joy. He didn't know what to make of it. But seeing Abel so exuberantly happy made him happy too, even though he couldn't understand why Abel could be so elated in the midst of such a savage storm. Until it seemed as though the violent storm had swept Abel away before his very eyes and the river had offered him a welcoming refuge. Everything happened with such disarming simplicity, so childishly obvious before his very eyes. Cain was terrified and tried, even if it was absurd, to move. In vain. He cried out, or rather, thought he was screaming, but felt his voice stifled before it could form words. The subtle simplicity of Abel's rolling movement, like simplicity and evidence itself, captured in the beauty of a slow-motion image, slowed every muscle in him just as much and halted every stream of thought. To his even greater astonishment, Loep's utterly surprising reaction to the event followed: merely lifting his head for a moment, only to lay it back down calmly on Abel's travel bag, as if he wanted to say to Abel: "See you soon, I'll keep an eye on your bag." The hallucinatory event was beyond compare. Cain's mind surrendered and, helplessly, he was drawn into this surreal scene. He left his helm, crawled over to Abel's empty spot, lay down just as Abel had been lying there before, looked very closely into Loep's eyes, and neither of them moved. Over the years, Loep had come to mean

more and more for Cain. The more often they went hunting together, the more the friendship between them offered Cain comfort in the bitter disagreement with his parents.

“Surely nothing is wrong?”, Loep seemed to whisper to him now. “Djibril is watching over us!” and Loep’s calm settled upon Cain. No horizon, no shore, no sun or moon, no rock or goal, no thought nor story.

Loep closed his eyes. So Cain closed his eyes.

And for the very first time in his life, Cain allowed himself to be guided, as if blind, by the equally closed yet clairvoyant eyes of a wolf, whilst demonic forces raged above them, yet could not touch them. The stakes of the battle unfolding above their heads were awe-inspiringly high and revolved purely around that one simple gift in plain wrapping inside Abel’s ordinary travel bag, which Loep guarded with his head as a matter of course.

Djibril watched intently and left the battle with Belial above their heads to Michael and his followers.

Just as Djibril knew the river, so the river knew Djibril. He took the helm and steered the raft smoothly past the treacherous rapids, whilst ensuring Abel’s safety.

The gift would reach its destination at any cost.

13. THE GIFT
PART 1

The moment of repentance is the moment of initiation. More than that: it is the means by which one changes one's past.

OSCAR WILDE, DE PROFUNDIS

There are events or moments in life that seem so simple that talking about them seems not worth the effort, even though it is sometimes precisely those moments that carry the most beautiful and profound meaning.

Simplicity often seems banal, but it is not. It requires trained eyes, but better still, trained blind eyes. So that that one intriguing sixth sense of intuition is neither blinded by the eyes nor deafened by the ears, and thus remains on course.

For Eva's intuition, not even an event was needed to know that 'it' was on the way.

Whilst Adam was worried about Abel's prolonged absence, Eve was not at all. Abel was alive; of that she was certain, and the more certain she became, the more she felt it would not be long before she saw him again. Her prayer,

and thus her heart, beat ever more fiercely whenever she thought of Abel.

Eva was therefore not at all surprised when she suddenly saw Adam gesticulating wildly in the distance, coming towards her with a wolf at his side. Barely a minute later, she saw Abel struggling to make his way towards her from down by the river, leaning on a large walking stick. Loep had been sent ahead by Abel to fetch Adam from the field so that the three of them could be welcomed together. Abel was limping badly, but his face beamed with joy.

Adam had to fight the urge to cheer and held back so as not to overshadow Eva's silence. He wrapped his arms around his wife's waist, and the joy on their faces was plain to see from a distance.

Abel approached and first turned to Eva, embracing her tenderly and kissing her just as she had kissed him. He quickly took her hand and held it to his heart. He spoke: "Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah", and she immediately felt his heart respond to the rhythm. Her eyes widened with surprise and joy. Humbly moved, she gestured towards his father, and the three of them linked arms. "I am so terribly happy to see you again. Praise be to Yahweh. Have you seen Eden?"

"From far away, Father."

"Thank Yahweh! Come into the cave and tell us your story. Mother will have something to eat for you. You look as though you could do with a bite to eat. Do you know anything about Cain? We haven't heard from him in ages."

"Cain is fine, Father, don't worry."

Eve gave Loep a quick welcome stroke and immediately pulled the cave

to prepare a simple feast.

Not long after, they were all sitting around the fire, whilst an early autumn sun generously showered its rays into the cave. Abel gratefully ate the honey cakes. He savoured every crumb. Loep was lying against Adam. Adam saw his backside and could no longer suppress his curiosity: “Did Loep hurt himself on the mountain? And you too?”

“Not on the mountain, but I’ll start from the beginning.” Abel recounted every detail, not just the events themselves, but also all the feelings of doubt, hope and resignation. Adam and Eve’s eyes sparkled as soon as he began to tell them about the old man on the mountain who turned out to be Djibril, and how Djibril had shown him at the summit that Eden could be found ‘where the sun rises’. He sang the song of the mountain for them and told them about the waterfall. He told them everything except ‘I bear witness: there is no God but God’; he did not dare reveal that in Adam’s presence, because he did not want to get his mother into trouble under any circumstances. After he had recounted in detail how he had said goodbye to Djibril, he came to the gift that Djibril had given him for his parents, and he took his travel bag.

“What is it?”, Adam couldn’t contain his excitement
and Eve was no less curious.

“I don’t know what it is; I had to guard it with my life,” said Djibril. Abel took his travel bag, took out the treasure and handed the parcel to Eve. She trembled and prayed very softly, “Ash’ hadu an la ilaha illa-llah,” as she slowly removed the strange wrapping, afraid of breaking something. Adam held his breath. The

The sun made one last effort not to hide a single detail.

Their mouths fell wide open.

In her hand, the apple from Eden appeared: gleaming and whole, untouched. Where their mouths had once bitten into it, only two marks remained visible—fine black lines on the beautiful green. Yahweh had preserved and healed the apple, just as He had accepted their sincere repentance. Their joy knew no bounds. Abel was completely overwhelmed. Eve and Adam fell into each other's arms and kissed the apple as if it were Yahweh Himself.

"Ash' hadu an la ilaha illa-llah," they both declared aloud, and they thanked Yahweh for that one precious piece of Eden that had been allowed to return to their midst.

The emotion became too much for Abel; he crept quietly outside, looked at the setting sun and cried out gratefully: "I'm coming, Djibril!" Abel went back inside and found it impossible to continue telling the rest of his story. His parents' happiness and gratitude knew no bounds, and he did not want to interrupt their joy at Yahweh's gift. "I'll be back tomorrow. I'm going to Cain now, before it gets completely dark," he said, thinking of his brother's loneliness.

Eva quickly stood up and walked over to him. The apple had made it clear to her that she no longer needed to fear Belial, and that Abel had grown so spiritually and matured to such an extent that she could whisper in his ear: "Go to your brother and look after him well." For the first time in his life, Abel heard his mother speak in his language, and he replied to her just as quietly: "I bear witness: there is no God but God." Joyfully they took

saying goodbye to each other.

Eve joined her husband once more to continue enjoying the gift. That night, Eve snuggled close to Adam with the apple between them. Adam had been praising Yahweh all evening for His mercy towards them. He began by praising Him ten times, then a hundred times, and he simply could not stop singing Yahweh's praises. He could not understand what he had done to deserve this. "What shall we do with the apple?" the question suddenly rang out in a deafening silence in his ear, and Adam looked in surprise into Eve's gentle eyes.

"You can speak?" he asked, suddenly feeling ashamed of all the noise he'd been making over the past few hours. "You can speak?" he repeated, to make sure he wasn't hallucinating.

"Yes."

Adam kissed the apple once more and embraced Eve tenderly. "I won't say another word; I've said so much over the years, too much too often and too often too much," he realised all too well.

"Will you really be able to do that?" Eve laughed softly at such childlike good will.

"You'll have to teach me," he said earnestly.

"Then you'll just have to copy me, because I won't be saying much; I actually find it strange to speak, and I don't think I really want to anymore. Unless it's to thank Yahweh."

"What are we going to do with the apple?" Adam quickly repeated her question.

"If you plant an apple in fertile soil, doesn't it grow into a tree?" Eve wondered aloud, thinking.

"Brilliant idea; there's a small patch of fertile ground near this cave that also offers shelter during the winter."

He looked at her again in disbelief. “You’re speaking! May I ask what Ash’s…” “I bear witness: there is no God but God,” Eva replied quickly, and she fell silent once more, for she felt how all this was distracting her from speaking from her heart to Jah-we. Adam now followed her example and fell silent at once. Nothing more needed to be said. The healed apple between them spoke volumes, and tomorrow they would bury the apple so that its seed might sprout into a tree to bear lasting witness to Jahwe’s care for his creatures. The following day, as soon as the sun began its daily course, Adam set to work. They buried the apple close to the cave, right next to their smallest plot of land, and immediately built a wall of rocks and stones around it to offer the future young plant maximum protection. Every morning thereafter, Eve would make her way to the river carrying a gourd. The journey down was already a joy, but the journey back up, heavily laden, was an even greater joy.

Blessed is the reader who understands this.

14. The Gift
part 2

I must confess that I brought ruin upon myself, and that no one, great or small, can be brought to ruin except by their own hand. I am fully prepared to confess this. I strive to confess it, even though people may think at the moment that it is not so. I bring this merciless indictment against myself without pity. Whatever the world did to me may have been terrible, but what I did to myself was far more terrible.

Oscar Wilde, De Profundis

"So, how were the two old folks? Everything all right?" began Cain, glad to see Abel again. "Are you all right to make the descent?" he asked, at the same time concerned.

"Everything's fine down here. They asked me to give you their best regards. They asked about you straight away and were very worried." Abel immediately threw his empty travel bag next to his sleeping place. "I'm exhausted." He wanted to sleep.

"Were they pleased with your gift?" Cain's question betrayed the curiosity that had been building up for days.

"Oh yes!" Abel was suddenly wide awake and could no longer contain his joy, firmly convinced that the marvellous experience Cain had had during the retreat on the river

would undoubtedly have left a positive mark on his mind. “The gift was the most beautiful, the most important, the most incredible, the most surprising, the very ”
Cain interrupted him: “Excuse me, may I finally know what it was?”
“The apple!” cried Abel, delighted, with a mixture of reverence and disbelief. “Pardon me: the apple?” Cain could barely suppress a mocking look of surprise.
“Yes, the apple! I never thought that I—that we—would be able to return to our parents with such an important gift.” “Hold on, you’re getting ahead of yourself,” said Cain, asking for clarification, no longer feeling at ease because he felt he’d missed a great deal. “What’s this about the ‘apple’?”
“It’s a long story, but I’ll try to summarise it,” replied Abel, and, taking a deep breath, he recounted in far greater detail than he had intended everything their father had previously told him about Eden and the sad tale of their fall and expulsion from Eden. Abel, however, forgot to answer the question. “But tell me at last: where on earth did you get that apple from?” Cain interrupted him abruptly, eager to finally satisfy his curiosity. “I received it from Djibril, the angel of Yahweh, on Mount Akhbar. He asked me to deliver the gift to our parents.” Abel no longer wished to avoid the subject and went on to recount, in one breath, the long story of how he had been carried over the summit and had caught sight of distant Eden in the East. Abel then went on to tell of the fall of the angels. In exactly the same way that Djibril had told him. Without understanding everything, let alone being able to explain it. But Abel loved his brother and

wanted to give him this.

But the gift fell on deaf ears with Cain. Cain's ears closed off at the sight before him: the immense peak of Djebel Akhbar. Impossible to reach. Impossible to believe that his brother had been there. But suddenly he was no longer sure. It annoyed him immensely that he could no longer dismiss Abel as a deranged soul hallucinating due to deprivation. What he now realised cast many of his own words and deeds towards Abel in a completely different light. A light that showed little of beauty and begged to be allowed to fade quickly. Could it be that his parents, too, had been driven mad by deprivation? But what about that gift? He had seen it with his own eyes. Loep had guarded it. Was Loep mad, then, too? Why, then, was he himself not mad? He desperately sought support and counsel at the edge of the cave, so that, with growing faith in the face of disbelief, he might gaze upon the summit of Djebel Akhbar as the sun set. The summit pierced through a ermine-coloured collar of clouds and, majestic as a king, wore a crown of purple, orange and gold. The bear slayer did not know what to make of this story. Surely it was not possible to reach such a summit? Was his brother a liar, then? If only it were as easy as killing bears! It was above all his brother's eyes that made him doubt so intensely. He recognised those eyes. They were exactly the same sincere eyes he saw just after he had dealt the fatal blow to an animal. Eyes which, once the fear of death had passed, had nothing left to hide. Which no longer had to beg to be spared. They were the eyes of natural surrender and truth.

Eyes he had always loved, that moved him, that gave him comfort. Eyes that bore peaceful witness to the fear and pain he had previously overcome. Yet at the same time, he doubted whether he would be allowed to die with them. They were glass and mirror, but that was precisely what Cain could not and would not see. The mountain peak was too high. The moon had now taken its place above the summit and wanted to show Cain something, but ...

There was a long silence in the cave. Abel held his breath. Cain breathed with audible sighs. Suddenly: “Perhaps I want to be blind,” Cain said in a deafeningly quiet voice, speaking to himself into the thin air, without looking back. Abel looked up, pleasantly surprised. He recognised a similar thought from those first desperate days he had spent in the pit, when it took him days to realise that he might have been blind to Djibril’s presence. Abel cheered at this realisation in Cain and now quietly hoped for more. He dared not move, lest he disturb this sacred beginning. Djibril watched helplessly from the moon. Belial laughed at such naivety.

In the cave above the river, silence reigned once again for hours on end. Beneath them, billions of droplets flowed towards the sea in the pitch-black darkness. Abel longed to follow them, but would never go without his brother. Only when the sun, rolling across the sky, began to reveal the place of Eden once more and Abel saw Cain reeling, did he rush to his side and help him to his bed. He kept watch over him and the fire. No sleep could keep Abel from caring for his brother now. Abel cared for Cain just as he knew Djibril had once cared for him high up in the cave of Djebel Akhbar. He had received nothing in return then, and he too would give nothing in return now.

You're welcome.

15. CAIN

To regret our own experiences is to bring our own development to a standstill. To deny our own experiences is to place a lie upon the lips of our own life. It is nothing more or less than a denial of the soul.

OSCAR WILDE, DE PROFUNDIS

When we begin to live, the sweet is so very sweet to us, and the bitter so very bitter, that we inevitably direct all our desires towards pleasures, and seek not merely 'to live on honey for a month or two', but to taste no other food throughout all our years, without realising in the meantime that we are actually starving the soul.

OSCAR WILDE, DE PROFUNDIS

In the days that followed, Cain remained silent. He tested his brother, but the test threatened to backfire on him every time. He closely observed every one of Abel's actions, but found no contradiction between his words and deeds. Abel continued to treat him with patience and love, no matter how moody and harsh he behaved towards him. It drove him to despair, causing him to doubt intensely

about all his words and deeds over the past year. It was not a pleasant feeling, but he could not fathom how he could have been so wrong in his judgement. It was now Abel who was looking after him, and Cain did not like that one bit. It made him increasingly bitter and rebellious. He felt as though he were standing defenceless before a bear, with his hands bound behind his back. What had happened to him on the river, and the inexplicable way in which the raft had successfully navigated the rapids, had been pure coincidence. However convincingly Abel had previously tried to make it clear to him that Djibril—that Djibril again—had helped them, he increasingly denied this reality with rational arguments. He was exhausted, wasn't he? Barely able to see out of his eyes at the time. Had he eaten almost nothing for days?

The man who was briefly allowed to look into the mirror of truth did not dare to open his eyes. His ego stood in his way like a Djebel Akhbar.

Cain remained silent.

However much he hungered for light, he preferred to remain blind rather than face the truth. He thanked the truth profusely for its consequences. The tartness of her citrus was not for him. Only honey could appeal to him. He had asked to be allowed to be blind.

He was, and remained so. Without

question. The days dragged on.

One day, when Abel brought some corn cakes, Cain rudely threw them away. He felt steadfast once more. He got rid of

his shackles and took up his weapons again, ready for battle. He was back! Back as if he'd never left. More than ever. Back. Ready to kill bears. Ready to prove that Eden doesn't exist. Ready to be the firstborn.

"Is that all you can give me: corn cakes? Do you think you'll be strong enough to reach Eden? Tell the old folks we're setting off for Eden next week! I'm going hunting now. In the meantime, go and fetch Loep. Without Loep, there's no Eden!" Woe betide the poor bear that should cross his path now. He had dithered and procrastinated long enough. What could have driven him to this? It was a mystery to him. It had been a waste of time.

Abel listened and obediently complied. Only seeing Eden could convince Cain.

16. THE ‘ ’ FAREWELL

I remember once discussing this subject with one of the finest characters I have ever known: a woman whose compassion and noble kindness towards me, both before and after the ordeal of my imprisonment, were beyond all power of description; one who, though she does not know it, has given me, more than anyone else in the whole world, real assistance in bearing the burden of my torments, and that solely by the mere fact of her existence, by being what she is: an ideal as well as an influence: a being who not only inspires the thought of what one might become, but also offers actual help in becoming it; a soul who sweetens the common air, and makes all that is spiritual seem as simple and natural as sunlight or the sea: one for whom beauty and sorrow go hand in hand and share the same mission. On the occasion I refer to, I said to her – I remember it very clearly – that there was enough suffering in a single narrow London alley to prove that God did not love mankind, and that, if sorrow reigned anywhere, even if it were merely the grief of a child sitting in its little city garden weeping over something it may or may not have done wrong, the face of all creation was marred. I was entirely wrong. She told me so, but I could not believe her. I was not in the frame of mind in which one can attain that belief. Now it seems to me that one love or the other is the only possible explanation for the extraordinarily great sum of suffering in the world. I cannot conceive of any other explanation. I am convinced that there is no other, and that, if the world is essentially, as I said, built of sorrow, it is built by the hands of love, because in no

otherwise the soul of man, for whom the world was created, could attain the full measure of its perfection. Suffering not for the beautiful body, but suffering for the beautiful soul."

OSCAR WILDE, DE PROFUNDIS

Cain spoke:

"Is this all you can give me: corn cakes?"

Abel remained silent, took it to heart, and hurried straight to his parents to fetch Loep. Loep, fully recovered from his wound, came to meet him from afar.

"We're leaving in a few days, Loep. Your life of leisure is over!" he teased Loep with a laugh, delighted to be setting off with his brother. He arrived at the cave where his father was putting the finishing touches to a stone fence around the spot where they had buried the apple, to shelter it from the harshest winds and all manner of vermin.

"Father, I have come to say goodbye to you. Cain and I are leaving for Eden next week. It won't be long before you can hold Cain in your arms again."

"My son, how can I thank you for all you have already done for us?" asked Adam, pointing to the small garden of Eden.

"Praise be to Yahweh, Father. Don't thank me. I am the one who should thank you." They said a quiet farewell, after which Abel went to find his mother.

Eva had just returned from the river with a gourd full of water

at the spot where they had buried the apple. Abel was waiting for her. He wanted to hold this moment in his mind forever. He took in every movement of hers with care. Every stone she touched and moved became a stone that would henceforth be sacred in his memory. Her dignity. Her devotion and obedience to Yahweh. Her awe and, at the same time, her unguarded, fearless reverence for Yahweh. But above all, her humility in speaking and not speaking, in doing and not doing. Deep in his heart, he was grateful to Yahweh for the parents he had been given and for his brother's love. He realised in a flash that his spiritual training through her had already begun on the day he had protected her as a young child from a raging father. It was her love for him, after all, that had made him so strong that, even as a mere child, he had proved capable of thwarting Belial; only now did he understand this. Thanks to this strength, he himself had been spared a sense of guilt had he not intervened here. A wound that his father, however respectable he later proved to be, could never have healed. At that thought, Abel was overcome with emotion and limped towards her to take the full gourd from her.

"Mum, I've come to say goodbye. Cain and I are leaving—

I'm gradually making my way to Eden, and I just want to thank you for everything. Don't thank me. I could never repay you for what you gave me: my body, my mind, my heart... " Eve interrupted him and whispered soothingly in his ear: "I love you." She took the ka-lebas back from him and, seemingly unperturbed, continued along the path towards their little Garden of Eden, without looking back. She left Abel behind and did not look back. Eve's

Her earlier joy at carrying the heavy load was suddenly overshadowed by her sixth sense, and now she felt gloomy. “Sourer, many times sourer than citrus,” she worried deeply, and she did not want to alarm Abel in the slightest. Abel watched her in surprise. With these words, which he was hearing for the first time in his life, she expressed her love to him in words. “I love you,” the words echoed in his mind. The words overwhelmed Abel’s mind. He heard or saw nothing else. Everything remained focused on those few words that brought joy at their birth and carried sorrow because of this parting. Once again, it was his faithful friend Loep who gently showed him the way to Cain.

Yahweh watched over them and mingled the tears of mother and son in the gourd, so that the seed of the tree of life might sprout in full in the little garden of Eden outside Eden.

17. THE ‘ ’ SACRIFICE

I faced everything with a kind of stubborn determination and a great deal of innate defiance, until I had absolutely nothing left in the world but one single thing. I had lost my name, my position, my happiness, my freedom, my wealth. I was a prisoner and a poor man. But I still had my children. Suddenly, they were taken from me by the law. It was such a staggering blow to me that I did not know what to do. I fell to my knees, bowed my head, wept, and said: ‘The body of a child is like the body of our Lord; I am worthy of neither’. That moment, it seemed, saved me. I saw that the only thing left for me to do was to accept everything. From then on – it will no doubt sound strange – I felt happier. I had penetrated to the soul in its ultimate essence. In many ways I had been its enemy, but I found it waiting for me like a friend.

OSCAR WILDE, DE PROFUNDIS

Cain was in his element. He had everything under control. A supply of meat in his travel bag for the very first few days. Abel had a few dry biscuits to hand in case of emergency. Furthermore, Cain himself carried a second, well-stocked travel bag containing all manner of necessities, as was his custom when he set out on a long hunting expedition. He promptly exchanged Abel’s walking stick

for a proper spear. It was funny to see the look on Abel's face. "No comment! It's as good as a walking stick, and if you see a bear looming in front of you, you'll be only too glad to have something like that in your hands instead of a Djibril somewhere up in the air." The purpose of the journey was immediately clear.

"Ask Loep to run in circles again, just like he did when we were travelling to the raft." Loep didn't wait for instructions and immediately sprinted off.

And so the party set off towards the sunrise. They did not make much headway. Abel had grown somewhat stronger, but 'less weak' was a better description of his current condition. Every two hours they had to rest a little, which did not please Cain. Danger lurked around every corner and without Loep he would never have dared to embark on such a journey with a weakened companion, but the wolf fulfilled his task perfectly. Every two or three nights they sought a safe shelter, usually in a cave or on a hard-to-reach ledge, so that Cain could go hunting whilst Abel rested safely. Once their supplies were replenished, they pressed on. All Abel had to do was show the way. They passed the foot of the Djebel Akhbar and Cain avoided mentioning it again. He still found it hard to take Abel's story seriously. Whenever they came across a wild apple tree, he would pluck a fruit and hold it up to Abel's nose: "Are you sure that apple didn't come from this tree?" Then Cain would take a bite out of it before disrespectfully throwing it away. "Where is that Djibril now?", the question echoed in his head again and again, and only with the greatest

With great effort, he managed to clench his jaws. “How long is he going to keep up this nonsense?” Thus Cain constantly fuelled his disbelief in the whole expedition. But Abel did not waver. He concentrated intently on the East. He had once seen Eden lying in the distance: a glow, a hope, a salvation for his brother, a joy for his parents.

The brothers grew increasingly silent in each other’s presence. Cain kept his word: he went with them to Eden. Abel kept his word: he ate meat. When Djebel Akhbar was already far behind them, its peak as small as a cherry stone, they suddenly heard Loep barking furiously. He was still quite a distance away, but his signal was clear. A bear! No problem for Cain, were it not for the fact that his brother was hanging like a ballast on his leg. “There!” Cain pointed out a suitable tree to Abel and helped him to safety first. “Stay here and don’t come out under any circumstances. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

Freed from Abel and the heavy travel bags, he sprinted towards Loep, as agile as a deer. His eager hunter’s blood began to boil. His spears had been dry of bear’s blood for weeks, and that was about to change. Soon he saw the experienced Loep playing games with a young bear. Cain shouted confidently at the bear to attract its attention; otherwise, there would be no fun in it for a bear-killer like him. When the frenzied bear turned and hesitated for a moment, Cain stepped back to twenty metres from the bear, having long since memorised all the escape routes. The inexperienced bear was still unaware of any danger, uncomfortable with a wolf at its back and a strange creature in front of it. Cain raised his spear. He calculated exactly the time his spear would take

combined with a charging bear. A plan disrupted by Loep's unexpected verbal attack, for unfortunately the bear slowed down and turned abruptly towards Loep, causing the spear to graze past his head and merely brush the hair on his mighty head. Cain could not harvest a single claw, for the startled bear had had enough and wisely beat a retreat.

Cain was a little disappointed, but nevertheless he praised Loep for his excellent effort.

"Where is that Djibril now?", the thought ran smugly through his mind once more, and he spat on the ground. A moment later, they were all together again, and Abel too sang the praises of Loep and thanked Cain. Cain felt strong. "A little further on there's a safe place to spend the night."

As evening fell, a lively debate broke out between the two brothers. "When I threw my spear, I didn't see your Djibril anywhere," Cain said bluntly. This could count as a provocation.

"Perhaps he was standing right behind you," replied Abel, as if he could actually picture it.

"What are we then? A bunch of fools putting on a meaningless little play, whilst the real battle is being fought behind our backs?" Cain fumed.

"You're only a fool if you don't see what's going on behind you."

"So I'm a fool and blind, and you can see?" he asked sarcastically.

"Or, to put it another way, I am blind to your blindness, just as you appear to be to mine. I can just

as well as you ignore the reality that was shown to me," Abel remained calm.

"Then why isn't your reality the same as mine?" Cain asked, his tone softening slightly.

"It's a bit like when you look at the same landscape together. We're looking at the same view, but each of us experiences it differently – sometimes because of how we feel, perhaps we're feeling unwell that day; sometimes because of our emotions at that moment, such as cheerfulness or sadness. All these facets of our state of mind colour our perception and cause us both to interpret the same landscape differently. From disapproval to contempt, from approval to acclaim."

An awkward silence fell. "Your interpretation is the right one for you, and mine is the right one for me. We need only answer to our inner eye," Abel tried, at the last moment, to offer Cain some reassurance.

"Inner eye?" Cain shook his head, as if all this nonsense was making him feel dizzy.

"Glass and mirror. Our eye is what we use to see, and our eye is also the only thing through which we see ourselves in the river's water. Only in this way can we speak to ourselves through ourselves, just as I am speaking to you now. You see yourself answering all the difficult questions you ask yourself, and as you answer, you already know whether you are lying to yourself or not. The mirror makes you as transparent as glass," said Abel, remembering the bowl of water by his mother's side.

An even more awkward silence fell. The atmosphere didn't get any cheerier. Abel had to speak up now. His need was now the greatest; he didn't want to be struck—

by his own words, and he did not wait for a question. “The inner eye is like our heart,” he thought, hoping to move the matter forward. He quickly realised from Cain’s commanding silence that it was not enough, and that anger was even beginning to grow because he could not understand.

What followed was a final, at the very least hasty, indeed, even reckless attempt. “Our hearts can speak,” he ventured one last time, and then he gave himself up. He knew it straight away. He had made a mistake. That was the end of it for him. Far too late. He now fell truly silent and asked Yahweh for mercy. He asked that his brother be spared after he had said what he had said. He begged for forgiveness for his words that had put his brother in such danger by possibly making things worse for him. He had threatened to have sinned against the very first rule of all spiritual life: first and foremost, do no harm. In a final, inexperienced reflex, he still wanted to protect his brother from what he had said, but declared something that could never be understood by him. He begged for Eden, the conversations with his father during the winter still clear in his mind. “Once outside Eden, I am often confused; I think I am saying the same thing a thousand times, but I say it differently each time, and the other person hears it differently each time too, so that nothing can offer peace, certainty or lasting comfort. Even now, as I speak.”

So spoke his father, and so were Abel’s thoughts and words now inextricably linked to a similar sense of powerlessness to that of his father back then.

Cain stood in front of a massive wall. “Oh no, not again!

No, I’m not putting up with this any more! You’re not going to pull this on me twice in a row

, little brother!", his mind raged, remembering all too vividly the recent conversations in the cave in the gorge.

Cain saw a way out.

"Everything you say sounds fine, but who's going to feed you? Who's going to keep you safe?"

Abel was so glad to receive this redeeming reply. The answer made no sense whatsoever, but it gave Cain the last word, which Abel was now happy to grant him. It was so completely beside the point, but at least it offered, in all humility, a way to bid farewell to this sensitive subject without Cain having to feel hurt. Abel quietly hoped so, but nothing could be further from the truth. The damage was extensive and it brought Cain's aversion to Eden to a head. For Cain, the conversation proved once again that the journey to Eden was utter nonsense. The brothers both felt it best to discuss matters with each other as little as possible and hardly spoke to one another anymore. Loep was their only remaining topic of conversation. Loep sensed perfectly what was going on and comforted them both. The wolves, too, had once lived in Eden, and they, too, had fallen, but even a wolf's heart remembers Eden.

Days passed, the landscape changed and leaves
fell. The Djebel Akhbar was no longer in sight. "When are you finally going to accept that Eden doesn't exist?" Cain suddenly asked Abel aloud, worried that they might not make it home from this pointless expedition in time for winter. "Eden exists, so I don't need to assume it doesn't exist," replied Abel decisively, his gaze fixed on the East. Cain was gradually growing thoroughly fed up with having to

having to exert the greatest physical effort and did not want to leave it at that, when Loep suddenly interrupted them with an ominous howl. Loep was giving the highest warning signal. You could hear the panic in his howl. The danger was coming from behind them and apparently the bear had taken Loep by surprise too. Abel and Cain turned round and soon saw a she-bear with two cubs charging towards them from behind the final bend. Cain positioned himself protectively in front of Abel and threw his heavy luggage aside. “Run for your life!” he ordered Abel, who immediately threw down his bag and began limping towards a tree far too far away. Cain judged the distance between himself and the she-bear too short to throw a spear with any confidence, so his only chance of survival was to flee himself and hope that Loep could buy some time so that they could both reach the tree safely. Loep ran after the bears like an arrow from a bow and realised that this she-bear was no pushover. He saw how the she-bear had set her sights on Abel, after the swift Cain had already climbed into the tree and was preparing to help Abel up. But everything went wrong. Abel could never reach the tree in time and seemed like easy prey. Loep had now sprinted past the she-bear and tried to distract her, but the beast smelled blood and was determined to protect her cubs, so she didn’t slow down. Just as she was about to pounce on Abel, Loep leapt at the she-bear’s throat, sank his teeth in and wouldn’t let go. The she-bear, winded, had no choice but to stop and abandon Abel. But she used her claws to tear Loep apart, furious at the missed opportunity. Once Abel was safely in the tree, he watched in bewilderment as the she-bear crushed Loep’s skull with

With her powerful jaws clamped shut, Cain threw himself from the tree with a death-defying leap. In a fit of rage, he aimed his spear at what was most precious to the she-bear and wounded her first cub only on its left ear. Quickly, he used his second spear and, with a masterful throw, killed her second cub. “You’re our brother, I’m your cub!” he shouted furiously, with only a tree trunk standing between them. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth! The cub’s screams unsettled the she-bear. She hastily took the lifeless Loep with her and walked towards the remaining, helpless cub, glanced back once more, recognised “He Who Kills Bears” and took to her heels, taking the body of the dead Loep as a meagre consolation prize.

Cain was beside himself with grief and directed his anger

Now turn to Abel. “He was our brother! Where’s your Djibril now? Behind my back? Tell me? Can you see him behind my back now? Bit of a cop-out, isn’t it, that sort of answer? Why didn’t he defend us then? He knows full well that Loep was your brother. If Djibril is your friend, as you say, then he’s a coward, and I don’t want a coward like that! Not in front of me and not behind my back!” Cain had had enough. “Do you see that bend over there?” He pointed to the bend in the road they’d come from. “I’m going back home. Loep is dead, and I’ve always said I wouldn’t make this journey without him. Now that he’s dead, I have the right to break my promise. I’m going back home, and I’ll wait for you for twenty-four hours after that bend. If you want to come, then come. If you don’t, I’ll leave on my own!” He gathered his most essential belongings and magnanimously left the travel bag with the provisions behind at

Abel. Angrily, he pulled his spear from the dying bear cub, stamped his foot once more in helplessness and rage against its dying head, and soon he had disappeared around the bend.

Abel stood there, dumbfounded. As he watched Cain disappear around the bend, only the cub's carcass and Loep's blood bore witness to the terrible event. His brother's rage over the loss of Loep had taken him by surprise. Cain's intense grief and fury had, until then, stifled his own sorrow. Yes, where was Djibril now? Exhausted by his emotions, Abel sank down against the tree trunk and feverishly wondered what it all might mean.

What a blow! Loep! Losing Loep hurt just as much as breaking his leg in the well. In fact, it felt even worse. After all, there was nothing to put in a splint. The pain did not subside. A flood of memories surged unstoppably into his mind and cut into his heart like a knife. He wept bitterly for his dear friend. He howled loudly in Loep's language and shouted out his thanks for giving his life. His cry echoed through the mountains and valleys. All the animals around him fell silent and shared in Abel's grief. Feeling abandoned by Loep brought him back to his fall into the well, when Loep had suddenly vanished to go and look for Djibril. He vividly recalled once more how he had been saved in the well from that cunning beast called despair. He had learnt how to accept his fate and not to rebel against it. To doubt the existence of Djibril or of Eden would be fatal. He suddenly thought back to Loep's remarkable encounter with the old man at the foot of the mountain, where the wolf had already recognised the angel, only

but upon hearing the song of the mountain. How lovingly Djibril had treated Loep as a friend. He also recalled how Loep had guarded the travel bag during the river journey whilst Djibril had taken the helm. He no longer doubted that Djibril, too, had watched with great compassion as Loep had sacrificed his life to save him. Amidst his tears, he stood up, determined to resume his journey to Eden. He cried out loudly: "I cannot really see you, Djibril, but I see your grief for Loep in the sun mourning behind the clouds, and I hear your lament in the silence of the wind. I know what you're thinking, Djibril, 'Go, Abel! Follow the path of your heart, fall like a drop!'" Abel fell to his knees and thanked Yahweh for Loep, for his parents, for Djibril, but above all for Cain. He stood up again, threw the spear-staff and every travel bag far away, and, freed from all baggage, he limped on. He no longer needed to eat meat. With a lump in his throat and a cracking voice, he began the song of the mountain in honour of Loep. Loep's death must not have been in vain. Accepting Loep's sacrifice became a sacrifice of Abel's unshakeable trust in Yahweh.

The drop of Abel plunged uncontrollably downwards.

Yahweh saw that it was good.

18. THE ‘ ’ TURNED

My mother, who knew life in its entirety, often used to quote to me a few lines by Goethe, which Carlyle had written in a book he had given her years ago, and which, if I am not mistaken, he had translated as follows:

> “Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
> Who never spent the midnight hours
> Weeping and waiting for the morrow, He
> knows you not, ye heavenly powers.”

These lines were often quoted by that noble Queen of Prussia, whom Napoleon treated with such gross brutality, during her humiliation and exile. My mother often quoted these lines during the hardships of her later years. I utterly refused to accept or acknowledge the overwhelming truth contained therein. I could not comprehend them. I remember very well how I used to tell her that I had no desire to eat my bread in sorrow or to spend a single night weeping and waiting for a more bitter dawn. I could not imagine that this was one of the particular things that fate had in store for me, that I was indeed destined to do little else for a whole year of my life. Yet such is the lot that has been allotted to me, and only in the last few months, after terrible difficulties and struggles, have I managed to grasp some of the lessons hidden at the heart of suffering.

OSCAR WILDE, DE PROFUNDIS

Cain was waiting round the bend. He had no doubt whatsoever that Abel, now completely defenceless like a bird before a cat, would not dare to press on alone. He had given him twenty-four hours to give Abel ample opportunity to swallow his pride and take a step back towards him. His anger was intense. Because of this idiotic adventure, he too had lost his beloved little brother. He was moody, angry and, above all, saddened by the loss of Loep, the only one with whom he could share his hunting instinct. Evening was drawing in and Cain was surprised that Abel still hadn't turned up. But he steeled himself by thinking that it was only natural that Abel, too, had his pride and must be finding it difficult to find the right words to explain the loss of Loep and to carry this guilt with him for the rest of his life.

Cain had firmly resolved to welcome his brother with open arms to receive him and immediately grant him forgiveness for the pain and suffering Abel had caused him, so that they might then set off home together as sworn brothers. As it grew even later and the sun had almost disappeared, he thought it might be better for Abel to face the dangers of the night on his own for once, so that a night of fear and terror might help him overcome his shame by daybreak. He himself sought out a safe place. The night was very restless. The bright full moon, together with a storm of images, kept his mind wide awake. Where would Abel be sleeping? Was he hungry? What would his parents say if something happened to Abel? Could Abel even look after himself? He found it hard to resist the urge to peek around the bend to see if everything was all right, but his pride held him back

He stopped in his tracks. Suddenly he heard a bear growling in the distance, almost certainly the she-bear returning to her dead cub and now encountering scavengers. Cain held his breath and automatically braced himself for the attack. Silently, he crept towards the bend, pricking up his ears to intervene at the slightest cry for help from Abel, but fortunately he heard nothing more. He had now approached within a metre of the bend. He couldn't resist edging forward inch by inch to be sure whether Abel was still there. Finally, he took the final step and tried to make out something in the distance, but as far as the full moon allowed, he saw nothing. He quickly retreated, angry at himself for not having been able to control his curiosity. He had indeed made the bend, but not the bend in his mind. "Let him do his own thing; he must know where he stands. We'll see tomorrow whether or not he turns up," he tried to deny his disappointment, and sleep eventually put him out of his misery.

19. In the distance, , like a perfect pearl

From afar, like a perfect pearl, one can see the City of God lying there. It is such a marvellous sight that it seems as though a child could reach it in a single summer's day. And a child can indeed do so. But for me and my kind, it is not so easy. What we may grasp for a single moment, we lose again in the long hours that follow with their leaden feet. It is so difficult to keep the soul on 'the heights which it is capable of conquering'.

Oscar Wilde, De Profundis

Cain had overslept. It was only when the sun began to shine directly on his head that he woke up, realised where he was, and immediately looked around to see if he could spot Abel. He decided to investigate the site of the fight with the she-bear before continuing on his way home.

He arrived at the spot and found traces of scavengers near the dead cub. Further on, by the tree, he found the rucksack containing provisions, but also Abel's other rucksack and, a little further on, Abel's walking stick, which immediately set his heart racing. Something must have happened to his brother, and he began to call out to him. Calling out his name was a relief and made him forget his pride for a moment. Djibril might be a coward

and abandon his brother, but not him! His brother was in trouble and he couldn't let that happen. He tried to read the tracks and managed it quite easily. The more he followed Abel's trail and found no traces of animals or a fleeing Abel, and the more everything pointed towards the east, the more it dawned on him that Abel was not in any danger at all, but had clearly chosen to continue on his way. "What a bloody, stupid, stubborn fool," he thought, condemning his brother. He decided to find him first, then keep a close watch on him so that he could still intervene if necessary, and he set off in pursuit at a trot.

Abel had walked all night long. A generous moon had been his ally, and the rising sun seemed brighter and more promising than ever before. He sensed his goal drawing nearer, and it gave him wings. With every step he prayed: 'ash' hadu', step; 'an la ilaha', step; 'illa-llah', step. He felt neither thirst nor hunger. Everything felt just as it had during his stay in the well not so long ago, and he was focused on what was now fast approaching. Around midday, he suddenly felt eyes on his back. He turned abruptly and had a strong inkling of what was happening behind him. He thanked Yahweh if it were so. The landscape was hilly and difficult to traverse, but with great willpower he managed it. After climbing yet another ridge, he reached the top of a bare hill once more and stood there spellbound. His face glowed with the light reflecting from below him, and he suddenly turned and called out: "Cain! Cain!" He waited until the surprised Cain

really did come into view. “Quick,” he beckoned to him, “it’s far more beautiful than I could ever have dreamed!” Cain sprinted up the mountain to join him in marvelling at the delightful sight. The brothers fell into each other’s arms. “Thank you, brother, without you we would never have made it here,” Abel lied, and yet he was not lying. Eden lay there in all its regal splendour, completely walled in. A huge gate was guarded by a magnificent being, just as his father had told him. A cherub with a sword of fire sternly barred the entrance to Eden. As far as the eye could see, so vast did the city appear. The brothers were both overwhelmed by its allure. “You go first, Cain; I’ll follow later. You are the firstborn, and it is because of you that we are able to behold this.”

“No need to thank me, little brother,” he replied as if it were the most natural thing in the world,

clearly not understanding what Abel was indirectly getting at, “I’m off already.” He set off straight away.

“Cain!” Abel called after him, “won’t you leave your spears here?”

“I can’t! I can’t very well turn up there naked!” Cain called back, laughing, and he hurried swiftly towards the entrance gate of Eden.

Abel followed him at his own, much slower pace, and at that moment he, too, relished this slowness. He wanted to prepare himself for the encounter with the cherub and paused briefly on a boulder. He hesitated as to whether he should go any further. Cain had rushed to Eden, and that seemed enough to him. Here his purpose ended, and he gave thanks to Yahweh and spoke with Gabriel. He tried to see him and now saw him everywhere. He tried to hear him and heard him in everything. He tried to read his thoughts but felt—

only a respectful silence. Thus, he understood that he should not dwell on 'what ifs', but let whatever was to come, come. He sat motionless on the rock to rest and to continue enjoying the gem before his eyes. The beauty was unparalleled and was enough for him. He recalled the cave conversations with his parents during the winter and was so grateful to have been allowed to behold the exterior. The interior held no appeal for him. The view from outside was enough for him, and from afar he watched with joy as Cain presented himself at the gate. Seeing Eden and entering it would resolve the conflict between Cain and his parents.

Cain had now reached the gate where the cherub stood waiting for him with his mighty flaming sword, blocking the entrance to Eden. He stepped forward with confidence.

"I am Cain, the firstborn of Adam and Eve. I demand entry into Eden," he said, looking the cherub straight in the eye without flinching. Standing tall as a warrior, spears in hand, he stood ramrod straight before the gate, a short distance from the cherub. The cherub did not budge, holding his sword horizontally across the entrance. Cain waited patiently, in no doubt that this would not take long. The sun beat down, but it did not bother him.

"I am Cain, the firstborn of Adam and Eve. I ask for entry into Eden," he repeated in a slightly louder voice. The sun continued to beat down mercilessly. The cherub did not move. The sword turned white with heat. Cain grew impatient.

"I am Cain, the firstborn of Adam and Eve. I ask for

“Admission to Eden,” he almost shouted. He continued in the same breath: “I brought my brother here. I have endured many hardships and pains to do so. I have killed bears and risked my life time and again to reach this place safely. I have saved my brother, protected him, cared for him, fed him and helped him wherever I could. I am Cain, the firstborn of Adam and Eve. I ask for entry into Eden.” He grew increasingly anxious that Abel might arrive at any moment and witness this embarrassing scene. “I am Cain, the firstborn of Adam and Eve. I demand entry to Eden!” He had now completely lost his patience; he strode towards the cherub, held his spear out in front of him in a fighting stance, and made as if to simply ignore the sword. Even before he reached the entrance, the hilt of the sword began to swell. The sun blinded Cain’s eyes through the gleaming blade of the mighty sword. His attack was parried before he had even properly made a move, and he spun round like a drunken man to retreat safely a short distance further, into the faint shadow of the first tree. He cursed the cherub, the first enemy to whom he had been so humiliatingly defeated without a single blow. He cursed Yahweh from the bottom of his heart for not allowing him to enter.

The long-awaited moment for Belial had arrived. With the utmost patiently entrenched herself in Cain’s heart all those years until a crack appeared in this strong fortress. At the moment of Yahweh’s curse, Cain’s heart tore apart and Belial triumphantly forced his way into his heart to cause even more chaos and misery. Outside stood the legions of Belial

eagerly waiting to completely capture his heart, and Belial immediately set about his deadly, destructive final act. His triumph beckoned. “Yahweh does not deem you worthy, Cain, you who have had to suffer and endure so much at the hands of your parents and your brother. Your parents never thanked you for all you did for them. And what did they give you in return? Nothing but loneliness and sleepless nights. They rejected you just like that foolish cherub at the gate, who is deaf and blind to your dedication and efforts. Do not worry about your eyes. This blindness will only last a moment, and then I shall show you how to teach him a lesson. Have some water and cool your eyes; it will do you good.”

Meanwhile, Abel, astonished by the whole scene,

down the hill to reach Cain, touch him sympathetically and ask what on earth had happened, and if he could help.

“Leave me alone, I don’t need your pity. You go inside; they don’t need me. I curse this place and will leave as soon as I can see again.”

“Wait a moment. I’ll see what I can do for you,” Abel replied, bewildered and concerned.

“I want nothing to do with you,” Cain cried out in anger and shame at the rejection, dabbing his eyes with cold water. Abel didn’t understand a thing, but continued on his way to the cherub and stopped at a respectful distance. He bowed his head to the ground and spoke:

“I am Abel, and I need not tell You of my origins. You know me, Lord, as no one else does. My faults and shortcomings. My thoughts and words.

Lord, You need not grant me access to Eden. Standing here at the gate is more than enough, and more than I can bear outside Eden. Eden is more beautiful without me.

Teach me first to find stillness in my mind and to empty my mind, Lord, so that the spirit of Eden may then fill it. Teach me first to repent as my father did, in the way that truly pleases You and not in the way I think pleases You.

Teach me first to be silent like my mother, so that I may then speak in the way that truly pleases You, and not in the way I think pleases You.

Teach me first to fall like a drop of rain, as Your angel Jibril taught me, and let me land where it truly pleases You, and not where I think it pleases You.

Teach me first to give my life for my friend or foe, just as my friend Loep did, so that I may learn to die as You truly will, and not as I think You will.

I am not worthy to enter Eden, Lord.

My brother is more worthy. The distance he travelled to get here is many times greater than the distance I had to travel. I received help from my parents, whereas he had to do without such help. Forgive me once more for my presumption and pride in thinking, yet again, that I know what You might be thinking."

Abel could find no better words than "Ash' hadu an la ila-ha illa-llah. I bear witness: there is no god but God."

And so Abel's spirit did not cease repeating the first words of his life, his head bowed low before the gate of Eden. The phrase he had learnt from his beloved

his mother was the only one he was certain pleased Yahweh, because he had seen the fruits of this in his mother and had experienced it himself in his heart whilst he was in the well.
And Yahweh was very close to him.
The monotonous, endless repetition and the ceaseless, soft weeping suddenly calmed Abel's mind. His mind fell silent and ceased to move, just as his body remained still. He no longer needed words and forgot the world and his body. All his senses were sealed in silence. His soul entered a fathomless darkness and was deemed worthy to stand before Yahweh with a pure spirit. He felt so immensely small and yet so immensely loved. "Were You so close all this time, Lord?" The sun seemed to burn mercilessly, but in reality burned with the utmost mercy, consuming itself every second until only its tiniest fraction remained motionless, thus slowing the entire cosmos and halting the hunger of time. Abel had everything he sought: to be close to Yahweh. How close would be determined by Yahweh himself. Not by him. And Yahweh was awfully close to him. Endless. Together. It felt like eternity, as if it had never been any other way or could ever be any other way. Suddenly, Abel felt the cherub take away his sword and clear the way. Abel was surprised. His first thought, a reflex, turned to his wounded brother, and he looked back hopefully, questioningly. He did not want to believe what he saw there.
Belial had driven Cain mad with jealousy. Djibril saw no
no chance of stopping Belial now. "Look, open your eyes, now your brother is allowed in and you're not! This is the world turned upside down! This is so unfair. It's awful to be deceived like this by

your own blood. He's got you right where he wants you, lad! You're practically carrying him here, and he just says dryly, 'Goodbye, and make of it what you will, little brother! I'm going inside!' Look, he's turning away now, but just look! Can you see that strange smile on his face? He's laughing right in your face, man! You can't take this " Cain

He looked contemptuously into Abel's eyes, took his spear, and with a powerful throw that drew strength from every fibre of his body, he struck Abel squarely in the chest. Abel fell to the ground, disbelief in his eyes. Cain walked towards his brother. The fury continued to burn in his eyes, just as it kept growing in his mind. Belial had completely shattered his heart, and her legions marched into the space, occupying every square millimetre.

"You got what you deserved, man!" snarled Cain, spitting at the cherub who had instantly sealed the entrance once more. "Forgive me, brother," Abel managed to utter just before his final heartbeat.

"Enough of this nonsense!" Cain placed his foot on Abel's chest and roughly pulled the spear out. "You're not getting that," he sneered, carefully avoiding his dying brother's eyes, as if he were dealing with a bear. No matter how his blood boiled, his heart remained ice-cold.

Abel breathed his last. Cain was unmoved. He quickly buried his brother beneath a pile of stones. Then a clap of thunder echoed and lightning struck the tree beneath which Cain had been sitting, out of the blue.

Belial whispered to him: "Enough! Hurry, man! Get out of here! Yahweh is looking for you!" As quickly as Eden vanished from his sight, so quickly did Cain make his escape. He did not walk, he flew as only a devil flees from Yahweh. Only a

second bolt of lightning right in front of his nose forced him to a halt.

"Cain? Where is your brother Abel?"

Cain replied, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Then Yahweh said, "What have you done? Hear how your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground! Therefore you shall be cursed, banished from the ground which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand! The ground which you till shall no longer yield its fruit. With every swing of your axe, your brother's blood shall be revealed. A wanderer and a fugitive you shall be upon the earth!"

Yahweh's curse upon Cain immediately signalled Belial's triumph; he left his heart in triumph, leaving behind a few legions. From afar, Belial listened with insatiable delight to the wretch's plea.

"This punishment is far too heavy to bear, Lord! You are driving me from the cultivated land, and I shall have to remain far from You. I shall be a wanderer on earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me."

But Yahweh replied to him: "No! The mark will protect you!" And, much to Belial's delight, Yahweh marked Cain's left cheek with a very conspicuous mark to prevent anyone who met him from killing him. Unaware of the significance of this visible curse, Cain walked home, dejected.

He threw away all his clothes and spears. He
was naked in body and spirit.

20. EVA

The irrelevance of human procreation and nakedness in the days of Eden demonstrated the immense gift bestowed upon humanity by Yah-weh at that time: to experience love in its highest possible form, stripped of all sexuality. The fall of humankind caused a dramatic loss of that divine simplicity. The loss of irrelevance caused a terrible cosmic shock. Suddenly, gender was noticed and, for the first time, humankind experienced physical inequality, and this simple gift suddenly turned into a complex challenge. Sexuality as such made its entrance and became a double-edged concept that could manifest itself both for good (love) and for evil (abuse, rejection, shame, humiliation). Alongside the loss of immortality, this must have been the second greatest shock following the Fall, and it is no coincidence that the latter is linked to the former.

LUCIUS RUFUS VARUS

Cain's journey home was a veritable nightmare. His brother's blood clung to his mind, and the maps in his chamber of memories had long since ceased to be black, but were now red. His naked ego roared and raged, wandering aimlessly within that wretched body, whipped into a frenzy by Belial's legions. He dreaded returning home, yet at the same time he longed for the understanding, warmth and affection that only a mother could give him. For years he had refused to admit this to himself, but now things were different. From now on, he was cast out from all of humanity. Only a mother

could make an exception here.

He now suddenly understood the cub whose world had collapsed and who sought refuge and comfort in the den with the surviving mother or father every time he, Cain, had killed their father or mother. Only the thought of an understanding smile or a tear from a parent could somewhat quench the fire.

Once again he ran at breakneck speed, but this time as if he were fleeing from the devil. Birds could barely keep up with him. He wanted to empty everything. He did lose his breath, but by no means the memory. This time, it was not a glance that made him stop, but a howling, chasing Belial behind him who would not for the world miss the sight of his encounter with his hated mother and kept driving him ever onwards. Ever faster, ever more madly. Cain could not understand how every animal he crossed on his path, dangerous or harmless, turned away from him at the sight of him. But none of this mattered to him now. He wanted to see his mother. He wanted to throw himself at her feet for mercy, without having to say why. He didn't want to say anything. Didn't know how. How, then? Just like that? 'Just like that' doesn't exist when you've killed her other son. He reached his cave by the ravine first but felt he had no business there anymore. The memories of Abel were too vivid there. He slowed his pace. His mother was not far away now. He had become sharp with misery, and he no longer felt nakedness or shame. He had neglected himself in every way over the past few days. Everything clashed with everything else. Nothing was in order anymore, nothing was certain. One thing remained standing. There was a name for it. Mother. Belial could erase or destroy many things, but not the memory

born of his flesh from her flesh.

He dragged himself to the cave where he was born and saw, from a distance, both his parents working near the cave. He watched his mother in particular, as she and his father tilled the soil close to the cave. Between the small field and the cave lay a tiny plot, walled in with stones, which he himself had never seen before. The closer he got, the more he saw how his mother was literally bent double under the heavy labour. He approached slowly. He couldn't go any faster; only slower was possible. Returning proved so difficult when leaving had been so easy. He hoped to feel her soft hands glide over his face once more, as they had in days gone by, but even this memory now caused him pain.

Eva looked up, as if she were expecting someone at that very moment and that very second. She was startled by the shocking sight of the naked, barely recognisable man, but she composed herself almost instantly and smiled sparingly. Immediately her eyes searched his surroundings, but they soon ceased their search to give him her full, loving attention once more. It lightened his step and he quickened his pace.

He now saw the questioning creases on her forehead. She now saw the mark on his cheek. Cain's nakedness, combined with this terrible mark, immediately made her fear the worst, but she remained strong. He stood before her and thought to embrace her, but she gave him no chance. She saw what she saw, "Cain? Where is your brother, Abel?"

Cain was rooted to the spot by her unexpected choice of words and eloquence, and replied, bewildered and at a loss

stammered helplessly: “I don’t know. Am I supposed to look after my brother, then?”

Eva didn’t let her disappointment show. “Would you mind helping me chop this last bit? Then perhaps we can have something to eat together and have a chat,” she said, and without waiting for his reply, she handed him her chopping board. “All right, Mother.” Cain was just glad his mother hadn’t asked any more difficult questions and looked at his father, who glanced at him briefly and smiled awkwardly, but just as quickly returned to his task of hoeing the field in a rhythm that seemed eerily familiar to Cain. When Cain took the hoe in his hand, his fear grew. Wary and hesitant, he gently plunged the hoe into the hard ground, afraid of bringing the curse to life. Nothing happened or became visible, and, relieved, he continued hoeing. He didn’t have to work long, for Eve had quickly prepared a small meal for him in the cave and called out to him. He handed the hoe back to her, relieved, at the entrance to the cave.

She asked again: “Cain? Where is your brother, Abel?”

Cain replied: “I don’t know. Am I supposed to look after my brother?”

She looked at him intently. And she repeated the same question in the ancient language of Eden: “Dear Child, where is your brother, He Who Laughs?”

Cain replied once more: “I don’t know. Am I supposed to look after my brother?”

“Turn around, Dear Child.”

Cain turned and saw a blood-red field with a defeated, introverted father at its farthest edge,

On his knees, his hands digging and searching in the red earth. Cain fell at her feet. He begged wordlessly for mercy. He could not weep. Speak even less. Eve bent over him and gently helped him to his feet. “You know,” Eve explained bravely, “I am grateful to Yahweh that we may know Abel’s blood to be so close to us on this blood-soaked field.” She went straight to Adam to comfort him, knelt down beside him, and together they lovingly cupped the dark red earth in their hands. Eve kissed Abel’s blood, tasted it between her lips and caressed her cheek with it. Cain watched from a distance, looking unreal and absent-minded. The sharpest acidity of the citrus did not penetrate him. Eve saw this, returned to Cain and addressed him once more. She now stood face to face with her child and with her child’s murderer. “You brought Abel with you? I am also your mother and shall remain your mother forever,” she said, and she kissed his left cheek, for all that came from Yahweh was holy. She traced the contours of the mark meticulously with her finger, without Cain understanding what she was doing. She took the hands with which he had killed his brother and kissed them with the utmost reverence. She mourned for Abel, but above all she mourned for Cain. Cain was more dead than Abel, and she and her husband had failed him terribly. In a desperate attempt to make amends, she guided his hand to her heart, which was beating wildly. She spoke slowly: “Ash’ hadu an la ilaha illa-llah.” Her heart slowed as she watched Cain, but she detected not the slightest reaction in the dull eyes that had long since left their youth behind and bore lenses scarred by blood and death. His cold eyes now compelled her

to close her own eyes, in the ultimate hope of being able to recall, with both hands, every millimetre of that noble face of yesteryear. She stroked it gently, but felt only bitter wrinkles and hard, unrecognisable lines. She thought it might be the calluses on her fingers or the dirt from the earth, but no matter how she wiped her fingers clean with her tongue, Cain's skin continued to feel like dead parchment. She then dabbed her bitter tears on a piece of leather and tried to wipe away the mark on his cheek. She knew how terribly painful this must be to bear. It didn't work. Next, she tried to soothe his ears, eyes and mouth with her soft lips, hoping to dispel the curse. Nothing helped. Cain remained in the deepest cave, at the bottom of the deepest sea, beyond the farthest star. Finally, she took a large bowl of water and sought out the corner where the light fell. "Glass and mirror," she had once taught Abel too.

Cain looked, could not look away, and saw to his great—

To his astonishment, the reflection in the water showed a bruised apple imprinted on his cheek. He felt the mark of Yahweh. He tried to wipe it away. He scratched at it with his fingernails, but nothing helped. He knocked the bowl over. He was horrified and distraught. He saw his years of sarcasm, stupidity and blindness etched on his cheek. How often, on his way to Eden, had he mocked that apple? How often had he not believed his brother's word? Yahweh's answer as to why him entry to Eden was denied was etched on his cheek. More than desperate, he looked at Eve. She read his thoughts and kissed him once more

the mark. Cain now understood what she was kissing, but even that barely registered with him.

"It is not for us to curse you," she tried to make clear to him. "It is bitter to be the mother of a murdered child. It is even more bitter to be the mother of a child who kills your other child. But believe me, it is a thousand times more bitter to be the mother of a child who cannot find the path to remorse and repentance. Leave us now, dear son, do as Yahweh has commanded you, try to forgive us for what we did to you and what you did as a result, bear your fate with dignity and remember the path your brother went before you. Forgive us." Eve, like Cain now, had known what it was like to bear a bruised apple, and they gazed into each other's eyes in silence for a long time. Eve's eyes of forgiveness and her plea for forgiveness gradually sank into the heart of Cain. The granite cracked only through her forgiveness of his terrible deed, but it shattered into a thousand pieces when, on top of that, she herself humbly asked for his forgiveness. Belial's remaining legions could not bear the presence of such eyes and sought the slightest opening to flee Cain's heart without delay.

And finally, finally, Cain's eyes took on their

turn, just as only the eye of the daffodil adorns its iris with black dots.

Yahweh accepted these most precious dark tears in silence and carried them with the utmost reverence and care to the small plot by the cave to nourish the budding young tree of life with them.

Cain looked at his father for a moment and left. Eve quickly asked him: "Cain, what were Abel's last words?"

“The hardest and the most beautiful, mother.”
The accursed “He Who Kills Men” turned around one last time, descended the slope towards the river, and went his way for ever.

She called after him heart-rendingly, calling his name in the ancient dialect of Eden: “Dear Child!”

Jet-black clouds gathered above the valley.

21. Man above God

The heart has its reasons which reason does not know.

Blaise Pascal

Both stood before the gates of Eden. Michael and Abel had managed to open the gate. Belial and Cain had, at the very last moment, managed to close it. Neither angel could foresee what would happen to Abel next. All of this was entirely new to them. Death could hardly signify the end in the eyes of an immortal angel. Michael drew hope from this, but Belial was utterly indifferent. He revelled in his victory, even though it was not complete. Abel's heart had eluded him, but Cain's terrible deed made up for everything. That the firstborn of mankind, outside Eden, was capable of murdering his beloved brother was a significant statement and an enormous victory of prestige that would continue to reverberate through all future generations of mankind. The shock this caused in the Holy of Holies had been just as intense as when the Man and the Woman ate the apple. Michael and his followers had once again been defeated. Michael was pondering how he might better protect mankind. For him, the

task significantly more difficult. It was almost impossible for Michael to preserve free will without infringing upon free will itself. Michael saw no other way out than to strive to preserve the legacy of the ancient, distant Eden in some way within humanity's primal memory, however complex and difficult human coexistence might become. Belial had it much easier and merely had to observe Michael closely in order to do the opposite and thus overshadow the primal memory. His greatest advantage over Michael was that, for him, any means were acceptable to achieve his goal. The human mind would therefore become Belial's primary theatre of operations. After all, the human ego proved easy to seduce by glorifying reason, thereby checkmating intuition—the sole crucial means of communication through which Michael could subtly engage in dialogue with human freedom. The resulting arrogance, in turn, created space to sow confusion in the ability to distinguish between good and evil, thereby undermining man's moral compass and ensuring that his thoughts would no longer be easily questioned. From then on, man's principles would adapt to his actions, rather than actions adapting to principles, before storming the human heart unfiltered. Thus, Belial, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, would convince people that any action is justified so long as the intention is good. The circle was now complete, helping man to justify himself in everything in accordance with a new yet strange compass that Eden had never known

had. Man was born above God. What pleased Belial was that, in time, man would also teach this to his children, and Belial himself would scarcely need to add anything to it. But the most extreme consequence of Belial's influence on man's thoughts was that he created the illusion that man, whatever mistakes he made or might make, retained his free will. God created man in His own image with a pure love coupled with a pure free will. The love was so pure that it easily rendered reason superfluous, and free will yearned for love and wished to contribute 'freely' to love. There was no need to think; there was only love. Love and the will lived together in perfect harmony within the human heart. The heart made use of a reason that reason itself did not know and had even less need to know. This was the divine frame of reference.

Belial, however, is said to have buried human consciousness so deeply—It was a hindrance that man remained arrogantly convinced that, as the pinnacle of his consciousness, he always retained his free will, even though he had by then lost his connection with pure love. Pure love hindered reason immeasurably in its influence over free will and became a source of disruption from Belial. From then on, reason would essentially guide the will and checkmate pure love. Man continued to think and act as if his intellectual reason were the best yardstick for his free will, thereby creating his own human frame of reference that was alien to any image of God and that scarcely even acknowledged the existence of the heart. Generation after generation, man would increasingly hold his fellow man responsible for his evil deeds, punishing rather than showing mercy

continue to be charged. Guilt was born and had to be paid for at any cost, and preferably dearly, with 'dearly' often being presented as more just. The self-evident question of guilt would become the virus that would infect free will ever more deeply and push it towards retribution, thereby dealing the ultimate blow to pure love. The price could not be high enough and would drive humanity to the point where it would deem it fair and just to claim and execute the very life of a human being as the highest retribution for their debt, and to do so with broad consensus. The chamber of memory played a crucial role in this entire process of guilt, and revenge—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth—became the norm. It was not without reason that the card of memory of the first motherly love was fiercely besieged by Belial and his cohorts to ensure it was visited as little as possible. Belial did the same with the card of love between people. Any form of gratuitous love was a thorn in his side, and he wished to reward it lavishly with far more generously bestowed gratuitous non-love. His extremely sour apples were not to be asked for, but were, on the contrary, 'bestowed' with royal generosity upon the ego in the most enticing packaging. Eden would vanish forever from the sight of humankind, and the love of Eden became increasingly incomprehensible and indefinable. For all the hierarchs at the bottom of the Holy of Holies, with Michael at their head, it became increasingly difficult to continue radiating love and divine light to mankind. Thus, the image of God within man became increasingly buried under metres of ice and creaked like a glacier as it crept towards the edge of

the heart to chill it mercilessly. Eden was doomed to become a myth.

Belial was intoxicated by the notion that he could now create non-love himself, even though he failed to realise that creating and causing were two entirely different things. He thought he was providing proof of something he wanted to be, but which he could never truly become. It all seemed so easy to Belial now that, to his own surprise and delight, he had been able to experience how a person, struck by love, could inflict so much pain on their fellow human beings. This extremely powerful side-effect of non-love was a welcome bonus and made it so much easier to set people against one another. Belial became euphoric at their tears and regarded God's creation of love as nothing but popular entertainment, bluff and pretence. Becoming God above God turned out not to be difficult at all. But his newly acquired insights had a downside: the less loving he himself became, the less he could still fathom the godlike image in the heart of man. And what he vaguely suspected of it was very, very, underestimated. It was precisely this that had now become his blind spot, which would come back to haunt him bitterly. For the trunk of the tree of good and evil grew stronger through the tears Belial caused in mankind. The colder the winters, the more one longs for the summers! Although Belial gained insight into mankind and presented himself as a connoisseur of human nature par excellence in order to abuse this knowledge for his own ends, he himself, as an angel—and this was of no consequence whatsoever to Michael and his followers—could never have shed a single tear for the suffering of mankind. It was precisely for this reason that he could never fully comprehend mankind, nor possess them completely.

Therein lay the weakness of his entire ‘simple’ plan. Without tears as a corrective factor, there was no chance of the image of God surviving within man. Belial wandered, alone, though he himself did not know it. Michael’s powerlessness and Belial’s error indirectly proved once again just how great God’s love and creation truly were, and how towering God’s throne was above angels and seraphim.

There was, however, one thing both angels had in common: they would reveal themselves explicitly as angels to only one type of person: to the person whose compass unwaveringly pointed the way to Eden. Michael and his kind, because they could not possibly disturb the freedom of love in such a person. Belial and his kind, because only their personal appearance might still cause such a person to waver through fear, or rather through pride. In the worst-case scenario, there was a serious risk that the righteous one might be provoked in his pride, due to his chosen status, by Belial’s attack in the flesh. After all, Belial had nothing to lose in such an attack, and who would believe the victim if he were to tell his fellow man? Belial understood better than anyone the importance of acting in public with the utmost selectivity and restraint, so as to gradually make man doubt the very existence of angels. His cunning art lay in—and this could certainly be counted as his merit—ensuring that the handicap of his adversary Michael was certainly not exposed to earthly mortals. Thus, over time, it became increasingly difficult for Michael and all the other hierarchs in the Holy of Holies to rely on the underestimated and ‘insignificant’ intuition

to get a word in edgewise. Michael and his people could never have sorted this out themselves.

Love. It comes from God and is like God Himself: the beginning. Before the fall of the angel and humankind, the word ‘love’ had a meaning as unyielding as a monolith; it did not need to exist because love was always there and had but one meaning. The word was free and irrelevant, for it required no description or explanation. After the fall of the angel and humankind, the word ‘love’ transformed into a complex verb and had to be freed from subjective interpretations, judgements, and meanings of all kinds that cast a thick fog and sucked the human heart dry into an oppressive, oxygen-deprived swamp, instead of showing the heart the way to a liberating sea. Man would be born a stranger in his own home. It was Michael and his kind who set the example of reducing this verb to a single meaning: have faith, unconditional faith. But to have trust is, for an angel who dwells in the Holy of Holies and breathes the divine light as man breathes air, a far more evident task than for the distant descendant of man who has never known Eden and whose divine image in the treasury of the heart became buried beneath a sheet of ice. For Abel and Cain, as the first in line, trust was a learning process of trial and error. Abel succeeded masterfully, but ‘He Who Kills Men’ was immediately the first human who had to correct a deep fall. ‘He Who Kills Men’ still had to learn to kill what truly needed to be killed, Belial, and to learn to live with

how truly one must live, Yahweh.
The apple tree of Eden, the tree of good and evil, would become an ever-greater enigma to humanity, and its fruits would be plucked ever earlier and ever more sourly, because mankind would increasingly lose the closeness of pure freedom, trust and love in God. All this also indirectly implied a learning process for both Belial and Michael. Both angels had to get to know man in his ever-evolving being, as he was created in the image of God and as he fell into the image of Belial. The dialogue between man and angel was now working counterproductively in both directions. Michael understood this, but Belial did not. In short, it was a hopeless task for any angel or human to hold their ground in this situation.

All hope rested on that frail, budding sapling in the small garden by the cave, where two people lived who, more than anyone else, understood what the word ‘love’ could mean, and who suffered immeasurably because of the meaning the word ‘love’ had lost through their actions. Their suffering was therefore at its peak and could never be worse for any descendant after them. As the forefathers of hundreds of generations of children after them, they were inextricably responsible for hundreds of generations of tears. These streams of tears would form a constant throughout time, and over this God, as a man-like being, as a son of man, could remain free to dispose as He wished without in any way endangering the freedom of man, His beloved until and after death.

In the days of Eden, the tree of good and evil symbolised man's eternal life in goodness, but after the Fall it became a symbol of man's temporary survival in evil.

Just as Belial would force the sour apples upon mankind by every possible trick and deceit, so would God graciously and lovingly offer the healed apple to mankind whenever mankind, like a child, humbly sought it.

In their chamber of remembrance, this gift will shine like the purest divine white light that makes Belial tremble with awe. And this card will remain indelibly etched in his memory in every respect, forever reminding him of his noble lineage from the paradisiacal Eden.

The myth of Eden becomes the past, and Eden becomes the new present.

"In the distance, like a perfect pearl, one can see the city of God. It is such a marvellous sight that it seems as though a child could reach it on a summer's day.

"And a child can do that too."

Oscar Wilde, De Profundis

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'He Who Kills People', is expected in 2023–2026.
The third part of the Eden trilogy
'Close, like a perfect pearl', God willing.