

The Logic of God
Short Stories
By Amanyire Daniel

Introduction

The following stories are not meant to be historically or biblically accurate; rather, they are fictional reflections inspired by biblical themes and truths. Their primary goal is edification—to stir thought, reflection, and perhaps even revelation in the heart of the reader.

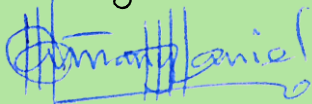
These short stories are written for both Christians and non-Christians. They are an invitation to see God in a new light, to encounter His heart in unexpected ways, and to explore questions of faith, love, justice, mercy, and the mystery of divine presence in ordinary and extraordinary moments. Whether you are already walking with God or still asking if He's real, these stories are for you.

It is my hope that through these tales, your relationship with God may be deepened—or, perhaps, begun. You may not agree with every interpretation or picture of God found here, and that is perfectly okay. This is not theology in its strictest sense. It is storytelling. And storytelling, after all, is one of the oldest ways humans have tried to understand the divine.

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I pray these stories bless you, challenge you, and maybe even surprise you.

With grace,
Amanyire Daniel



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Na.a.seh

Weird title? Worry not; I am here to solve all your problems. Those you know and even those you don't know; especially those you don't know. I am good like that. So what is with the title and full stops in the middle of the word? Worry not, I have thy answer: welcome to the ancient language of Hebrew – and no it has nothing to do with anyone brewing something; or maybe it does, because there is definitely something cooking.

Our prehistoric scene opens with - did you see that, I actually just used that word, prehistoric, makes me sound fancy – but it really is prehistoric, since this scene is before history, before written word, before Genesis 1.

And who do we have here, let me see; oh yes, three persons, sorry I mean people, wouldn't want to be giving away all the clues; – wink, wink – seeming to be in the process of doing something. Let us listen in, two of them seem to be in a boiling conversation, is that how you say it, boiling, steaming, whatever manner of fire-ness, this conversation was it:

“Who should say it? I think it should be me.”

“Why? They are my siblings I should say it.”

“Oh really, we are pulling credentials now; then how about I know them more, literally from the very first moment of their life.”

“Are you two really going to be doing this for *everything*? You two know, that they know that, you love them.”

A heavy sigh, as if saying, ‘well thank you for taking all the fun out of it’ but really answering, “Yes Father, but this, is not about that, or at least not only about that. It's about the Rizz?”

The Father looked at them confused. “What is ‘the rizz’?” with very loud air quotes, “...and what does it have to do with this?” he gestured at the something they were doing.

The Son swallowed another sigh – yes, the actually can do that - and answered, “Okay, to put it another way, it's about bragging rights, you know. The one who says it will get to brag about it for... well... eternity.” And gesturing around them as if to prove a point, while intentionally not looking at me, the narrator and my camera, He continued, “Eternity is a long time for someone to have bragging rights Father.” The third person nodded along in acceptance - the very one who a minute ago had been arguing with Him.

You see they may be competitors but that doesn't mean they don't see the truth. It is probably the very fact that they can see the truth so clearly that they are competitors. It wouldn't make sense to be competing for two different things; matter of fact... – **‘Okay,**

okay Ahbab, is this our story or yours; you are turning it into a discourse? You know the work of the narrator is to talk about what is happening, not record themselves giving a lecture.'

'Yes Ma'am, I know. But it was such a delicious opportunity.'

But back to businesses then, where was I, Oh yes, someone was answering the Father something about bragging rights.

And the Father answered, "Now that I think about it, I think I too should be the one to say it."

"Now see what you have gone and done." The third person humped, "...as if two of us wasn't competition enough, you had to go and influence Father too. Negatively. I should add."

The Son looked harried, and turned to the Father, "You know, you always put me into these situations. One minute, you are completely oblivious, and the next you want a piece of the action. And it always ends in the same way. Now how are we going to solve this?"

"Well," the Father answered with a smile, one that hints at the fact that maybe all along this was the play. When you think about it – **Ahhbab!** – Okay, okay. And the Father said, "...we could say it together."

"That's no fun." The third person cut in dejectedly, already knowing the battle was lost.

The Son who already knew this was where they were headed all along said "Okay, then on three," and added "...and please Father, look into the camera..."

"I know, I know, you have already told me like a hundred times," he harrumphed eliciting a chuckle from the Third person.

They all smiled and prepared their best postures, and the Son counted down – like you see them doing in movies, silently - three....two....one:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food."
And it was so.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

All the above was said in a mighty and thunderous voice to instill fear and trembli...,

'No Ahbab, not mighty, nor thunderous. All said in a normal human voice.'

'Wait, what?! You want me to say, you said all the above in like, like any regular human voice, not thunderously. You know they sound like minions.'

'Don't you mean we, Ahbab. And minions are not human, they are a made up character from *Desperate House Wives*. I don't know why you keep calling them human.'

'I am not even going to answer to that. Okay, how about in Morgan Freeman's voice. That would sure sound like you.'

'I sound nothing like Morgan Freeman.'

'Yes you do.'

'No I don't.'

'Pretty sure you do.'

'No I don't....'

'Pretty sure you do.'

'Are you sure, you are one of mine.'

'Pretty sure I am.'

Heavy sigh!

Potter's Clay

"You have got to stop moving, or I am not to blame for any smidges."

"Oh please don't blame Father, it is those big fingers of yours. You are making him all bulky. Why are you making him bulky?"

"Father can you get her off my case, I am doing serious work here. This man is going to be perfecto."

"Just wait for my turn, just you wait." The third person interrupted, rubbing her hand comically in anticipation.

The 2nd person looked up from molding the biceps and asked, "By the way what do you mean, your turn?" He looked questioningly at the Father.

"I am not going into the middle of this, that's your role." He smiled at his joke, as the 3rd person answered, "Of course *I* will be sculpting her." She gestured to herself expansively.

The 2nd person looked like he wanted to continue the argument but changed his mind in the middle, "I don't see the difference anyway. She will be exactly like him."

'Oh ho ho ho ho," she made a happy twirl, "like him she will look; but she will be nothing like your bulky brother there; I solemnly tell you, he..." she gestured to what the Son was sculpting, "will not know what hit him."

The 2nd person rubbed the face of his sculpture and soothed, "Wama, don't listen to her, you will be up to the task. You are going to be the toughest thing in this world; the word protector will be invented to refer to you."

"And the word, earthshattering will be invented to refer to her." The 3rd person cut in.

"Please let us not be shattering the earth, we have only one of it." The Father reminded the two.

"I wonder, who will need the other more." The 3rd person asked rhetorically.

"You don't have to wonder, she will be running to him all the time for help." The 2nd person intuited.

"That maybe so," answered the 3rd person, "but I guarantee you, he will be doing a lot more running." She finished with a knowing smile.

"Okay, how about we agree that they will both be incredible, hmmm. After all they are molded after someone pretty incredible."

“Father are you referring to yourself in third person.” asked the 2nd person distractedly.

“You know language is fluid...” the Father started in his lecturing voice, “and it depends on the cultural context. Take for example, a pumpkin is a fruit; but in some instances a pumpkin can be a person...”

“Well you have gone and done it...,” whispered, loudly, the 3rd person to the 2nd, “you have unleashed the Philosopher. This lecture may be longer than the last one.”

The 2nd nodded, looking very invested in laying the basilic vein just right, to make the arm look manly, as he added “the last one lasted throughout the whole Mesozoic era.”

“Okay, I will not let it last that long, if you two promise not to poke at each other anymore” the Father interrupted his own lecture.

“That is going to be a very hard promise to make Father,” answered the 3rd person, “I mean, even if I wanted to, I just couldn’t help it. Look at him all going over everything again just to make his Adam ravishing.”

The 2nd person looked up at that with a roguish grin, “you didn’t think I was just going to let her walk all over him. I am going to make him irresistible. There is no way you are winning this.”

The father sighed dramatically, “I see there is no way you two are letting this go, is there?”

The other two shook their heads in the negative without a contrite look in sight.

“Okay, so what are the rules?” the Father asked looking all invested now.

The 3rd person looked at the 2nd questioningly, “Did we make any rules?” “Nope,” He answered, “we didn’t at all.” “I guess that means...” they both turned to look at the Father, “you are making the rules; since you are now the judge and all that.”

The Father looked at the other two and shook his head, “I walked right into that, didn’t I?”

“That you did, oh Father, that you did.” The 3rd person affirmed.

“Would you look at that, I believe he is ready.” declared the 2nd person, stepping back from the human sculpture he had been sculpting. He stood for a minute looking him over, and then whispered in awe “He looks...devastating.” As if even He didn’t know how perfect he was going to be.

The 3rd person looking down at him also nodded in agreement, “Well done brother. He is quite ravishing.”

They turned to look at the Father and the 2nd person asked, "Would you mind doing the honors."

The Father moved from where he had been sitting and leaned in to look over the sculpture, he spent time, just looking, as if memorizing every line, every angle, every pore, every strand of hair; the solemnity of the moment just kept deepening. The other two stepped closer too and leaned over the sculpture and the gravity of the stare would have at any other moment birthed a universe.

Their servants took a few steps back. That was customary whenever the three came together like this, united and in absolute unity. The area around them would be too heavy for any being to bear. So they kept stepping back, until the weight lessened enough, that it could be born. It was obvious to everyone, this was about to be one of those moments that came too seldom, a moment of birth, of bringing into existence what had not been; something from nothing. It would be a sight to behold and tell of for ages.

And suddenly all sound fell off, like all eternity paused for this moment and then as softly as a feather drop; although it could be heard from eons, the Father blew so tenderly; with such vulnerability as one could never expect to see on the face of such a majestic being, into the perfect nostrils of the sculpture.

And just like that, a new existence had just been created; a being never before seen had just been brought to life. A light seemed to run over the entire sculpture and everywhere it passed, the hue turned. It was a subtle turn; nothing explicit, but something happened that unquestioningly signified that this body of clay was now imbued with a quality it didn't have before, life.

"Welcome Adam." Whispered the 2nd person to the human being, who was looking first at them and then around, looking completely bamboozled on what was going on. Then..., "Is there anything to eat? I am famished; I bet I could eat a whole tree of guavas."

"This is your fault, one hundred and 50 percent your fault." The 3rd person in no uncertain terms told the 2nd as they walked over to the tent with a basket of guavas, "the first thing he says; the very first recorded thing a human being says is, 'I am hungry.'"

The 2nd second person hardly walking because of laughter, managed to chip in, "He is perfect. Exactly how I envisioned him."

"It is all those muscles." The 3rd person retorted, "'I am hungry.' Unbelievable!" She harrumphed as she entered the tent, dragging the still laughing 2nd person with one hand and while carrying the basket of guavas with the other.

The Other Half

This ought to be a good one.

“What are you all staring at?” Adam asked as he drew closer to the Father and the Son. His favorite time of the day was when the whole family visited him, they had endless things to share and talk about then; but two out of three was not a bad catch. Sometimes he took part in the conversations, asking or sharing his own experiences of the day; but most times he just sat there and savored being with them, in their presence; listening to them, enjoying their company. Their bickering was the best, like three old grannies with nothing else to do.

Although today he had thought he was going to spend the day with the Son. He usually spent the most time with him, he had so many things to learn, and the Son was always readily available. But that was really just in his head, in fact they all were readily available, whenever he needed them, he was just always drawn to the Son; maybe because, he looked like him, or how Adam hoped he would one day look like.

He reached them and saw what had been holding their attention all along; what had been obscured from him by the massive tree he had made his home.

“Nope, nope, I am so out of here...” he blurted out as he turned around and started walking back fast, hoping to disappear into the dense vegetation forever and ever. He upped it to a jog when he realized he was not disappearing fast enough, ‘this would have been a perfect time for wings,’ he thought; but Father would never hear of it.

The 3rd person blew in and stood next to the Father and Son, watching the fast retreating back of Adam and said to them with a big grin, “He took off?”

“We know, no need to be so grinnish about it.” The Father cut back, as the Son left them and jogged in the direction of the now distant Adam.

“So, where are you up to?” the Son asked Adam when he caught up to him. “Ummmm, making my rounds, you know...” He cleared his throat and laughed nervously. “So, what have you been up to?” Adam asked the Son; who continued to look at him with, ‘is that the best you can come up with look’ not convinced at all, as Adam looking around, faking a busy-ness that was not that convincing either.

“Father has brought you someone to see.” The Son informed Adam, when he saw how determined he was in his acting. He had not broken character even once, going so far as to start breaking off the lower branches of a tree as if this was his plan all along; even though, he had not carried any tools for the pruning.

“Really, that is nice. I always love visits. So, is it a new... ummm, animal maybe?” trying and failing to lift the hoof of a passing by bison, he asked feigning disinterest. “I will come, but I think, I think, I should first finish with the rounds, who knows some animal may be needing me right now.” He finished now actively trying and failing to hold the bison in place. The son continued looking at him unconvinced, “Are you really going to keep the whole family waiting?”

Adam seemed not to have heard him and started dragging the animal back; but not able to, gave up the act and lamented, “I know, I know. I saw her.” He stood for a minute staring into space, recalling all that he had seen of her and then exclaimed, “Oh my loving good Lord, I had to take off from there.” And the Son stepped closer and put his arm around him, before he dashed off into the forest again, “There, there...” He soothed his, as he patted his back “it is not as bad as you think.” He consoled Adam.

Now it was Adam’s turn to look at the Son, unconvinced, “Really? Do you promise?” Because I saw her and she looked like she definitely is going to be trouble.” Adam answered; then he looked down again dejectedly, “What am I saying, we have different

definitions of these things.” He answered himself. “That we do, my lovely, lovely man, that we do. Now are you ready to go welcome *your* visitor?”

“You know...” Adam answered looking around, “look over there that bison seems like it is going to need my help any minute now, I mean look at how the poor thing is walking or waddling really.” The said bison not wanting to be part of whatever it was his two caretakers were discussing disappeared into the vegetation... fast; leaving the two stunned at his disappearing act, and then they broke into peals of laughter. “Even the animals don’t want to save me.” Adam mused. “Yes. They must be tired of your whining about loneliness.”

Adam took a few minutes to get himself into shape emotionally, before nodding to the Son that he was ready. As they walked back, the Son’s arm on Adam’s shoulder, maybe in companionship or more likely to stop him from taking off again, Adam, asked “I am in trouble, aren’t I?”

And the son, with the biggest grin ever answered him, “In a whole world of it.” And the two burst out laughing hysterically.

“So, where have you two been?” asked the 3rd person knowingly, the minute they reached the compound. “Running...” the Son answered, and Adam quickly added, “Running errands, around, you know, doing chores, looking after the garden, rescuing the sheep from thorny bushes, the usual, running around.” He finished breathlessly. Nothing at all to show he was hiding something – **‘wink, wink. Ahbab, can you stop winking at the readers. I honestly don’t know how you are my ancestor.’**

‘Buzz kill’ but said in a whisper, don’t want to anger the great of the great grandfathers, as he is about to...’

‘Ahhbab!’ – okay, okay, shish. Where was I, oh yes, Adam pretending he had not been running away from his future wife.

Together the family moved out of the shade, Adam ahead, with the three persons behind, definitely not closing off any and all escape routes. The visitor was standing in the sunlight, seeming to enjoy the warmth.

And when Adam saw her, clearly for the first time in that sunlight, accentuating every bit of her, all he could say was, "God, Almighty!" and the Father answered, "Yes, I know." while looking at him.

The Son patted him on the back reassuringly as he stepped out of the shade to go the last bit alone and meet her; he walked over to her and he could no longer hide his awe, "At last, born of my born; flesh of my flesh. You are woman; since, you are of me; and I name thee Chavah, for you will be the mother of life on earth." He whispered under his breath.

He reached her and bowed to her, and she returned it delicately; all the while looking at him curiously.

He offered her his arm and she took it, and together they moved off to see some animals or more likely plants, definitely not roses, the blue ones I mean.

"Running, really?" inquired the Spirit to the Son.

"Running, making rounds, that's what he said." The Son answered hauntingly.

"I told you, he will not know what hit him." The Spirit answered back mischievously; as they all looked on at the young couple in understanding.

Dominion

"I wouldn't do that?"

"Why not, it looks exciting and need I remind you, Father gave us dominion."

"I don't think this..." she gestured at whatever it was Adam was trying to do "is what He meant."

"Dominion! Eve." He gestured like an Italian – of course Italians are not yet born at this point but they exist if you get my meaning - "Dominion, Eve, dominion means control, authority, sovereignty over a particular area. It implies a degree of ownership or the right to govern and make important decisions."

"Yes thank you very much for defining the meaning of dominion. You sound like you are trying to convince yourself."

"Of course not; I am all convinced. Don't I seem convinced to you? I am very convinced."

"Then why are you jumping up and down like you are scared. Are you scared Adam, I would be, I would be very very scared if I was you?"

"Btthhthth..." he scoffed, "I laugh in the face of danger. And this is me warming up, don't you see me all warmed up?"

She sighed, "God knows I have tried to stop you. Okay just as long as you remember not to come to me for any sort of healing, or massages, or anything at all."

"Don't you worry my lovely wife, I have this in hand. And not to mention we need this; I mean do you know how easy it will be to do rounds on that." He said pointing to the monstrous creature. He continued, "This bird is the fastest thing here. I could be to both rivers and back in no time at all. So you see, I won't be keeping you waiting my lovely."

"Oh please don't you make this about me Adam, or I will bundle you up and lock you in our home. This is hundred percent you. Isn't that right Mikha'el? Back me up here. You know what he is about to do is very stupid." she begged.

"I am not getting involved in this." Mikha'el answered

"See, he understands, don't you Mikha'el?"

"I am soooo not getting involved in this."

“Come on Mike, back me up here, bro to bro. We need this, right?” Adam continued, “It is simple, I believe Father put me in charge of this, I have faith that I can do this; so, I ought to walk over to that there mighty bird and climb it and it will whisk me to anywhere I want to go. Right?”

“I don’t think that is how that was supposed to work.” Mikha’el reasoned and added, “You know what, I would recommend you asking Him what he meant. How about that?”

“Exactly...” Eve jumped in, seeing a chance to save her husband from his own foolery. She couldn’t imagine how she would feel if anything happened to him. Even the small accidents he got while working normally distressed her so much, so she added, “You could ask the Father, He may be coming here any moment now, let us ask what he meant?”

Adam stood back and thought, or seemed to do so, then he answered, “I don’t know why this all sounds like perfectly good advice and why for some unknown reason I still want to do it.”

There was a minute of undecided silence and then Adam, said “I alright, alright. Let us wait for Father, but I bet I have this pretty down. I am pretty sure this is exactly what Father had in mind. I bet you.”

Eve sighed a relief and Mikha’el commented to her, “Well that was a close one. You know some of my siblings had pretty huge bets on this.”

“What?” Eve asked in disbelief.

“Yeah,” he answered, looking a bit ashamed of that, “we happen to enjoy his... adventures. We knew this was coming for some time. He often came and stared at it; so, they started betting on the next crazy thing he will be doing. But not even I foresaw him deciding to ride that...” He turned to point at the bird, and gasped.

Eve whirled to see and found Adam looking at them as if startled that he had been caught, trying to climb up the back of the monstrous bird; so, he didn’t see it turn from whatever it was eating to look at this little man disturbing it; because that was exactly what he was in reference to it, a little man.

In the next second, it took a great big jump as if to shake him lose in one movement and in shock Adam grabbed it around its neck, since he was still partly mounted with his feet hanging in the air; that seemed to really tick it off.

It sprinted off at a speed that was hard to believe, not in the direction of the river. And the last they saw or heard really was a very high pitched squeal, hardly expected from a man of his size as he and the bird disappeared down the gorge.

Eve screamed in shock then smacked her forehead, "I swear sometimes I want to strangle him so bad." She then looked at Mikha'el questioningly, "Do you think I am allowed to strangle him? Do you Father would be angry at me?"

He looked at her like she was mad, "Of course you can't strangle your husband. That would only make things worse. Instead, try to understand him, that will save you a whole bit of worry."

"I know, I know. I didn't really mean it. I actually enjoy what he does..." she thought about it, then added, "sometimes. I enjoy what he does sometimes; but ohhh, it drives me crazy when he puts himself into such dangerous scenarios. Like he just doesn't understand what it does to me when he is hurt; that I am lost without him."

Mikha'el chuckled at that and said, "Would it surprise you if he felt the same exact way about you; and from his perspective, he actually does these things for you."

She looked unconvinced.

"Like I said," he added, "the best you can do is understand him and this will make more sense to you. But so you know, before you came along, he never used to do any of these things"

That brought a smile to her lips, "

"I believe that is why he has you, my dear." Mikha'el answered with a cheeky smile.

"Don't make me smack you." She retorted as she ran off after her husband, whose screams could still be heard getting further and further. And she added, "And we shall one day soon need to talk about you betting on my husband."

She increased her pace, she needed to get to him fast, before he broke something. If anything was to be broken in his body, it would be she who broke it. Then she could rightly run around doing all his work. She thought to herself. She couldn't help the smile that bloomed on her face as she thought of how he would look after this misadventure. She hoped the bird dropped him in a mud or something, she jogged on towards the screams, wait, there were no more screams. She increased her pace even more, silently praying, "Please God, let him be okay."

A few hours later, she had been jogging and walking alternatingly; worried and angry alternatingly, when she turned a corner and found him walking towards her. The minute he saw her, he seemed like he wanted to jump into the nearest bush and hide, but she rushed over and threw herself into his arms, running her hands all over his body to make

sure he was okay. She realized that now that he was actually here and safe, all she felt was relief not anger as she had expected. But she couldn't let him get off that easy.

"You are such, such.... I don't even know what to call you. What did you think would happen if you climbed on it? That it would listen and do what you want? I want to bite you for all the stress you give me. I feel like I have lost weight. You made me jog here. Do you know how... how exhausting, how traumatizing that is? I swear..."

"I am sorry my love. I truly am." And he looked it too, "I did not see it going that way at all."

She gave him a look like, do you have a brain?

"Okay, I sort of expected that it would go that way." And she could see him trying to look repentant and failing. He could hardly keep his composure as his eyes lit up, and he started explaining with gestures that were becoming wilder and wilder at how the bird jumped this, and dodged that, and how it could have knocked him into a tree many times but dodged it at the last minute,... he continued but she was no longer listening to what he said, but instead just watched him. This is why no matter how many times he did these absolutely stupid things, she kept on coming to search for him, this moment here, seeing how happy it made him, how excited it made him. This was why. She loved seeing him like this; maybe this is what Mikha'el had meant to understand him.

He seemed to realize that she was no longer listening but listening; because suddenly his eyes got that look like he had caught her doing something secret. She tried to quickly resurrect her anger but she couldn't, she was in the moment now and dang it, she knew, he knew he had her.

"I am so, so..., hmmm, angry at you right now..." she started unconvincingly; as she stepped away from him and he prowled towards her with predatory intent.

Oh no, this was definitely not happening here. She whirled around and was off at her highest speed, and as she had expected he followed her laughing maniacally. For a moment there, she knew she was going to be caught any moment; but she had come on this trail jogging while he had passed through it carried, she took turns and jumped over things that made him hesitate. She couldn't believe they were doing this, and why for some reason she was enjoying it. He was definitely rubbing off on her with his barbarism, she thought. That brought a smile to her lips again as she knew she was going to make it. She had just made her last turn to enter the area of the garden that was mainly used by them when she nearly bumped into... "Sister!"

"Hello Eve. Do I want to know why you are running this fast from your husband?"

She looked aside and couldn't help the flush. "Um, well I was checking on him. And he... Oh God please don't make me say it."

"Okay, okay. You are off the hook today, but next time, I am not letting you go, until I get the tea. So, is he okay?"

Eve looked at her and nodded gratefully, "He is. Thank you."

"Of course!" The 3rd person then looked at Eve for a minute, and said, "Can I tell you a something?" Eve nodded, "He was not in any real danger; every animal, bird, reptile and all else know who he is. He is their steward after all. That bird was actually having fun with him knowing he would enjoy it." After letting that sink in, the 3rd person added, "However what I wanted you to know is, like this garden and all that is in it is his responsibility; Adam and your future family is your responsibility, and as such I will always rush to answer all you ask of me on this behalf." The 3rd person confided.

Eve nodded her understanding. There was a lot she didn't know but that she was glad that she had been right in worrying about him, he was after all her responsibility.

She turned from her thoughts and smiled, as she listened to Adam crash through the forest heading towards them. She couldn't wait to see the look on his face when he saw who was here; knowing what was on his mind, it was going to be epic.

She held out her hand and felt the other person clasp it as they waited.

Eve had always felt a sense of camaraderie with the third person. Of course she had spent just about the same amount of time with the other two; but, she was always drawn to the third person. It was why she asked if she could refer to her as sister. And she had enthusiastically accepted, in her words to balance out the brotherhood. Eve knew these terms couldn't really define the creator; but as the Father always emphasized, relationship is how they could be understood.

Adam broke out of the forest and skidded to a halt, his face going through a kaleidoscope of emotions that had the two in laughter; as he out of breath, stammered out, "Eh, ah, your most welcome, to our humble abode."

Communion

"I think He will love this."

Adam nodded vigorously, "Of course He will."

Eve looked at him askance, you are acting weird. She pinned him with one of those stares that made him know he was in trouble, "You do believe He will like this right? Right?"

"Well." How was he going to say this? He was in a trap if there ever was one.

"No easy way out of this one, eh" Piped in Mikha'el

"Shut up Mikha'el, some steward you are"

Mikha'el put his hands up in surrender, "Hey don't bite my head off. I told you a long time ago to tell her."

"Tell me what you two?" Eve asked advancing on Adam menacingly.

"Well I hope I am not interrupting... something." The Father called from outside.

"And that is my cue." stated Mikha'el as he stepped out of the house and bowed to the ground when he met the Father outside; before standing up and in one motion stepping out of their presence.

The other two following Mikha'el out, followed suit but only bowed to the waist; after all this is their Father and the Father touched each of their heads lovingly with a ruffle.

Adam straightened and answered, "Not at all Father. Please come in, Eve has prepared her best cooking."

"Lucky me." The Father answered, entering in and sitting down with Adam and Eve on either side of Him.

"So, where is this wondrous cooking I am hearing tell of?" the Father asked after settling in.

And Eve busily started bringing out dish after dish. She had been busy as a bee since the previous day when Mikha'el told them the Father was coming over for a visit.

After the food was set and everyone was ready, Adam took the food into his hands and prayed,

"Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you; fruit of the earth and work of human hands."

And Eve finished, "Blessed be God forever."

The father accepted their offering by taking a piece of the bread offered and dipping it into the vegetable soup, commenting "this looks mouthwatering Eve, well done."

She blushed at the praise and they looked on as their Father dipped the bread into the sauce and took a bite. Adam knew it the minute the father felt it. He wondered whether he should have dissuaded his wife from preparing this food. Well now it was too late, signified by more twitching of Father's eyes as He tried to condense the fire that must have been in His mouth without showing it; especially not after praising her cooking.

Adam to signify solidarity with Him, also broke off a piece of the bread all the while looking at the Father as if to let he know he understood and he too dipped into the salty and spicy laden vegetable soup his wife had prepared. He saw the Father raise an eyebrow in question, and Adam shook his head to signify no he had never told her and he was never telling her; especially not now when the Father of all creation had praised her cooking. He went on to slowly and painfully push the piece of bread into his mouth.

They looked at each other as they painfully and sufferingly chewed and swallowed the food all the while holding their faces in a neutral position. Eve was looking from one to the other, waiting for their verdict, and Adam, cheekily said, "well father, what do you think?"

If there ever had been a time when the Father wished he was anywhere else but here, it was this time; he looked at Adam with a look that told of how someone was going to be turned into a frog after this. He then turned with a smile towards Eve and looking at the expression on her face, he broke off another piece of bread and dipped into the sauce and said as he put it into his mouth, "It is definitely an eruption of flavor. Try some more Adam."

And Eve nodded encouragingly and Adam knew he was not getting out of this, easily.

The Angel's Gambit

It started like all the other days for Adam, Eve kicking him out of bed. He sometimes missed the days when he was alone; but not for long, since after the aforementioned bed-kicking out, he got to have a heavy meal all prepared and ready for him to attack. Even in the days when he would wake up early enough for this, he would never have gone to the effort of collecting the myriad of edibles that was laid before him. She seemed to take pleasure in exceeding his expectations daily. So he also made sure to exceed her expectations in the amount he edibled.

"I sometimes wonder whether there is more people in you than I see. Because I cannot fathom how you ate all that."

"Of course there are more people in me," he answered with a glint in his eye, "I am the father of all humanity."

She rolled her eyes, "I can't believe you can be this daft in the morning."

"I can be daft any time you want me to be my lady."

She rushed out of the room. She was still as jumpy about this as she was in those first days. He had taken time not to rush her, and now it was slowly paying off. She now sometimes; once in a blue moon sort of thing, sort of initiated.

He was thinking of how to scandalize her again, when she called from outside, "there is someone here."

Must be a new one if she was calling him...

He stepped out and indeed it was a new one, he had never seen this one before. They had only one custodian – who was in charge of their welfare, but every now and then, they received some of his siblings who came to keep them company and chat.

The visitor was standing at the edge of their compound; Adam signaled him to walk in like all the others did, but he shook his head, instead signaling for them to go to him. He was a weird one. So he held out his hand to Eve and together walked to the strange visitor. He wondered a bit if they should call Mikha'el, but then he disregarded that. They would find out for themselves what this is all about and inform him later.

They walked out of the compound and he was not where they thought he was, instead he too had walked further away. Adam was not finding this funny; he debated just letting him

stay out there in the bush, but then they had already walked out this far. So they walked on and found him at last standing by the tree.

Adam sighed in exasperation, "So you brought us this far just so you can meet us here."

"Apologies Gardener, I thought it would be a nice place for us to have our meeting." The stranger answered.

Eve looking confused asked, "So what is so special about this place?"

The stranger looked at Adam and asked, "You have never told her?"

Adam ignored the question, instead looking at Eve answered, "This is the place where we were created, that is what the Son told me. He molded me from here; it is here that I received the breath of life; it is also where you were created from, although I didn't see that part; it is also here that in the first days, we used to meet with the Father as he introduced to me all that is my responsibility; this is the middle of the garden, our place of meeting."

"So why did he," she pointed at the stranger "bring us here?"

"Exactly my question?" Adam answered as he turned to the stranger, "Who are you and why did you bring us here."

"I apologize again Master of the Garden for the inconvenience. I am but your humble servant, Helel. I too wanted to have the august pleasure of your company."

"Why do you speak like that?" Eve asked, "None of the others do."

He looked surprised at that, "Really? That surprises me."

"What is so surprising about it?"

"Well that they act normal in the presence of such, such esteemed persons, the carriers of the very Spirit of the creator in physical form. I stand in awe of who you are." And he made a very deep and reverential bow.

Adam had never had them referred to like that. It seemed this strange visitor knew more about who they were than others.

He seemed like he wanted to say something; but he kept stopping, and so Eve asked, "What?"

“Is it true that the Creator said you are to learn only from him? That He is to be your only and absolute source of knowledge and wisdom?”

And Eve answered, “Oh no, of course not. He said we are to learn by ourselves, from our experiences in the garden; like how to manage our animals and care for their needs and so on and so forth; and so determine who we should be; that is why he made it possible for us to learn by ourselves in the first place.” she finished, laughing at the sheer absurdity of the thought in the first place.

Adam added, “What He said though was we are not to take guidance from any other person other than himself. He forbade us from seeking certain knowledge; knowledge of some certainties; like knowledge of right and wrong by ourselves. He said only He would give it to us.”

“Exactly!” enjoined Eve, looking at her husband lovingly. He really understood things.

Helel smiled shyly and said, “Oh I see.” And he said it in such a way that made it obvious he had more to say on the subject but he preferred not to say.

“What do you see?” Eve asked

“I don’t know if I should tell you this, after all, you may rush back to Father and inform Him and cause me all sorts of trouble.”

“Don’t be daft,” Eve answered with a smile, “we won’t, do we look like children to you” Eve cut back.

When he still looked undecided, Adam added “So what is it?” The stranger seemed to come to a conclusion, “Okay, he told you not to listen to anyone else but him because, well, He didn’t want you getting powerful very fast and taking over His place, you see.”

“Pfhhh!” they both scoffed at that, “That my dear is utter hogwash. He himself told us he was already preparing us to take over from Him, to be like Him in everything, that is why he created us.” Eve turned to Adam, “Adam, I think I see why father stopped us from associating with people like this one. We should go.”

Seeing that he was losing them, Helel quickly added, “Of course, He is. You are his absolute treasure after all.”

They looked at him like, we know who we are, what exactly are you adding. And they didn't walk away.

He made an inward sigh, 'that was a close one, he nearly lost them and once gone, it would have been impossible to get them back. They would have run to their Father, and it would have been over. At least now he still had their attention.' "What I meant was, of course He is grooming you to be like Him; but that a long, long way off. That way is so long that you cannot conceive of how long it is. That's all I was saying."

The couple looked at each other and nodded, that was indeed true; they were getting the impression that they were far from being like their parent. No matter how many times they asked, the answer was always the same, patience.

Seeing that he had them added, he added, "I on the other hand have a much faster way, it is how we all know how to do what we do."

"Tell us," Adam asked, or more like commanded. They knew their worth and didn't see the need to be circumspect. He had come to them after all

"Well I would but this is privileged information. I can't just give it away."

'Just one more, he whispered to himself, he nearly had them, all he needed was just one more step and they would be his.'

"What do we have to do?" Eve asked haughtily. Not realizing that they had already fallen into the trap. They had allowed themselves to be convinced of something their parent had discouraged; they had allowed themselves to believe that this stranger was more trustworthy than their Father. The noose was already tight around their necks, they just didn't know it yet, confident in their capacity to know when they were led astray. He had already maneuvered them into the perfect scenario; he had approached them in subservience, needing their time and attention, now they were the ones asking for his knowledge and attention. If only they would have realized that one change, they would have stopped and thus, escaped the trap, but they didn't. He had them exactly where he wanted them.

He answered, "It is not really that hard," affecting nonchalance, "all you have to do is acknowledge me as your teacher; pay homage to me as such and the information is yours, that's all."

They looked at him in confusion, “What?! What does that even mean, pay homage to you? Father never asks for such.”

“Oh it is nothing much. You see, you will be showing that you have agreed that I should give you this information. It is how things work here; right now, you only have one teacher, but in order for me to validly teach you, I too need to be acknowledged as your teacher. It is a legal thing, nothing much to it.”

‘Oh, okay, I guess that sort of makes sense. So how do we acknowledge you as our teacher, how do we do this homage thing?’

If they had been paying attention, they would have noticed a shiver that ran through his body.

He answered, “All you have to do is say, we agree that you, Morning star, Son of the dawn should tell us what we seek, then go down on your knees and bow to me.”

They looked at him like he was mad, “Yeah I am not doing that, we are definitely not doing that.” Eve cut in in outrage.

“I mean it is a small price to pay for what I am about to tell you. Imagine you would be like God in like, snap, that fast. It is really a small price to pay, if you ask me.”

Something about all this didn’t seem right to them, somehow they felt, they should just walk away, there was gnawing feeling that something is not at all, what it seemed, but they had never experienced anything that they couldn’t manage. They were the stewards of this realm, they could manage anything. Only this time, this was the one thing that was beyond them, but they didn’t know that.

“Maybe we should first go talk to Father about this,” Adam whispered to Eve, “He will know exactly to how handle this situation, I bet.” And she also was feeling the same, “I agree, we should first ask Father. Something doesn’t feel okay here.”

Helel stepped closer to them, allowing his full grandeur to be seen, light shimmering off him like the sun, further emphasizing what they would be giving up and he said, “Now that I think on it, a kiss on my ring should suffice instead of the bow.”

“Just a kiss on your ring?” Eve asked.

“Yes,” he answered magnanimously, “but you have to say the words. I just realized that I am asking a lot out of you, and you may end up missing on something important without knowing.”

Eve looked at Adam, “I mean it couldn’t hurt to know, right?” she asked him and Adam nodded, “we are already here, we may as well do it.”

So Eve stepped forward, followed by Adam and together they said, “We come to you Morning star, son of the dawn, that you may tell us what we need to know.” And Eve held his hand and kissed the ring; then she turned to Adam, and he too took the hand of the Morning star and kissed the ring; unknowingly or maybe knowingly but ignorantly freely choosing to be his disciples.

Something happened. The minute his lips touched that ring, something happened, they felt something change; they felt something go.

He straightened up quickly and looked around, nothing seemed to have changed; but, something was different. They both, man and wife turned to him and he was looking at them intently as if looking for something; and then finding whatever it was he was seeking, he smiled triumphantly; and asked, “Do you know what you have done?”

They whispered hesitantly, “yes...something...something bad.”

“Indeed you have. Now you have God’s knowledge, you know what is right and what is wrong.” with that, he stepped out of their presence.

They looked at each other in dismay and could indeed see. The glory of God which had clothed them from the moment of their creation was fading away. They were naked.

A Kingdom Lost

“Soon we shall no longer allow you as you are into our presence.”

“You hate us that much already.” Eve cried out heartbreakingly

“No no no.” the 3rd person answered as she pulled her close and held her, and Eve made heartbreaking sobs. “We can never hate you. You are from us. You are ours. You will always be so. We want you to live. That is why we will close off our presence from you.”

And seeing that both Adam and Eve were not getting it, the Son explained, “You see our very nature is one united in harmony, everything that exists in us has to be in harmony with us; in harmony with who we are; this is who you were. But when you disobeyed and broke covenant with us, and unintentionally changed your allegiance to him; when you obeyed him and listened to him instead of us, you lost that.”

And the Father added, “The things that used to come naturally to you, for example unconditional love, peace of mind, harmony, truth, have all been lost to you now because you are no longer connected to us. Understand; these things are still in you; but no longer of your nature. You will have to work for them now. You will notice, it will be easier to be like him than us, since it is his rebellious nature you have adopted. From now on it will be easier for you to lie than to tell the truth; to hate than to love; to fight than to understand. Everything will be much harder now, even the simple act of getting what to eat, will become arduous enough that you will desire death; because, in disobeying us and listening to him, you voluntarily left our domain, and thus hindered our capacity to look after you.”

The Spirit concluded, “And if you came into our presence in such a rebellious state; so opposite to who We are, then you would die. Eternally die.”

“What does that mean, to die eternally?” Adam asked

“It means you will cease to exist.” The Son answered him.

“Like our bodies will die, cease to exist?” Adam asked again, hoping he heard it wrong, not knowing he hardly understood it still.

“No Adam,” the Father clarified for him, “all of you will die, it will be like you never existed at all; because all existence is in us. You will cease to be. Nothing opposed to us can dwell in our presence. You will be reduced to nothingness. This is why we rather cast you out; because, if you remained here, you would be forever cut off from us. You would be dead, and dead eternally. There is nothing worse than that in all of existence. You will desire to belong, to rejoin us, to become one with us as you were, and it will forever be denied you.

But out there, there is a chance. Our nature is to create not destroy; and this is a chance at re-creating you. Do you now understand?"

"Yes" they both whispered dejectedly

"But don't lose hope, where there is a will, there is a way and we have a lot of will." The Father consoled them.

At that, the 3rd person turned to Eve and declared, "You will redeem yourself."

"I will?" She asked hopefully

"Yes, you will." She assured Eve, "This time you didn't obey; but next time you will."

"I will. I promise on my life, I will."

Seeing that Eve had misunderstood, She clarified, "It will not be you. It will be one of your daughters."

Eve's face fell for a second; but then rallied up and answered, "I will make sure she is ready." The 3rd person smiled at her, and said confidently, "she will be."

And the 2nd person said to Adam, "You too will redeem yourself."

"I will do all that is required my Lord." Adam answered, "As long as you help me, help us."

The 2nd Person looked at him and answered, "That should never be in doubt."

"What shall we do now?" Adam asked

The Father looked at them to make sure they were paying attention and started, "Once you are closed off from our presence, this is what you must always do; so that you don't lose yourselves completely. Are you listening this time?"

"Yes" they answered resolutely

And He continued, "Good. In order for you to come into communion with us, so that you do not forget who you are; and in order for us to come into communion with you and remind you of who you are; a life must always be offered in your place. Do you understand?"

"No."

"This life is offered in your place because if you ever came as you are, in the nature and state of the fallen angel, which is your nature and state now, you will die – no darkness can ever enter our presence. So, in order to protect your life; a life must be offered in your stead, a sacrifice. Do you understand now?"

They nodded in acceptance, unable to even articulate it; they now understood what it meant, the amount of life they would have to take, to pay for their sin. All that life!

The Father continued, "I need you to understand, from now on, every time you come into our presence, to worship, to pray, to give thanks, to petition, to intercede, you will carry a sacrifice, as payment for your life. This is the only way you will be allowed into our presence. This is the only way for your prayer to be heard. A life taken as payment for your standing in our presence."

He looked at them to make sure they have understood. Then He continued, "This sacrifice must always be an animal; never a human life! That would greatly displease us. All human life is our life, sacrificing one to us, is like sacrificing a child to their mother. A great and terrible offense! Never do this. Do you understand?"

"Yes" they whispered.

And He continued, "We have provided for you animal life as the sacrifice. Always use animals as sacrifice, never human life. Use the animal's blood, for the life of the animal is in its blood. This is why you must never drink animal's blood, it is the life you are offering in your stead. Do you understand?"

They nodded and He continued, "Preferably sacrifice an animal without blemish as this will signify the purity of the sacrifice you have offered in place of your sin. In essence, you will be covering yourself with the animal's purity; so that your sin is covered. If you follow all this, it will show the good intention of the offering; the deep and earnest desire to return to full communion with us as you used to have. Okay?"

They nodded and He concluded, "With time, I will educate you on how to do it properly, so that you do not end up offering life to other entities, as you have very well found out, there are other things that wish to keep you lost. Teach all I have taught you to your children and their children, so they do not fall into the same trap you did."

"My Lord, pardon my presumption; but why don't you get rid of those entities?" Adam asked.

The Father looked at them for a minute before answering; "First of all, because it is not our nature to destroy. All we have created is good; even if it doesn't appear so in your judgment. Know this, there is always something you are not seeing. This is why you should always have faith in us.

And secondly, because, the justice metered out to them would be the same for you. As long as I can allow them to exist, I can also allow you to exist. I am never losing you. I will divide

myself before I can allow that to happen; I will go to hell and back before I can allow that to happen. You are mine.”

They all looked at each other in sadness, knowing it would be eons before they can come back into such communion again; with the parents and the children, sitting together and talking like this.

And the Parents told their children, “On this long journey we have undertaken; many a time you will think and say, “The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.” But “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.”

The LORD God sent them out from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which they were taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life so that they do not eat of it and get damned eternally as the fallen one, no doubt, desired, as this too is his nature; to be eternally damned and separated from his creator.

Thus started the human life.

Qayin's Hope

"I don't see why I can't use what I have."

"Because we are not meant to Son; the conditions set by our Father, your grandfather are very clear. We are not meant to."

"So he gets to use what he wants, but I don't?"

The mother sighed, "That is not the case Cain and you know it. It is not about doing what you want, it is about doing what God wants; what is right, what is appropriate."

"I thought it was about sharing with Him part of our handiwork?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then I should very well be able to share *my* handiwork not his. Don't you see mother. I think it is okay to share what I have worked hard on, just like Abel can share what he has worked hard on; so Grandfather can appreciate both of us."

"I don't think offering something is how you make your grandfather appreciate you. He would appreciate and love you whether you offered or not. And if you feel like this maybe wait to offer anything and first talk to your father about it. He may explain it better to you than I am."

He was ready to continue but he knew he would not change his mother's mind on this.

"But the first day of harvest is coming soon and that's the day for the offertory, father may not be back yet."

"Then we wait for the next first day of harvest. " She answered as she walked away, "Or do what I and your father and brother have always done, go to your brother's farm and get an animal."

A few days later...

He had wanted to, but he just couldn't. If his father had been around maybe they would have done it together. But he could not do it, it felt wrong. Why would Abel get to sacrifice from his farm and he Cain has to go to Abel and ask for an animal to sacrifice as if he didn't have his own farm? His harvest, this last season had been plentiful, he had a lot to be

grateful for and they wanted him to use his brother's fruits of labour to show gratitude? That was wrong on every level. He didn't know where that had started from but he thought it may have been because they didn't have a farmer in the family, someone as accomplished as he was. After all Grandfather had asked them to till the land too, and not just look after the animals. So didn't that mean He wanted the fruits of the land too?

Cain shook his head as he trudged up the hill with his load, thinking how his parents were trying to make His Grandfather seem like he played favoritism, wanting one thing and not the other as if they were not all His. He created it all.

He reached the top of the hill and wondered about that as well, why must we always do this from the hill top. Isn't there God at the bottom of the hill or in the valley? Don't we believe his presence is everywhere? But he knew he could not start that battle as well, maybe he would start on that when he had showed his family that it was okay to use other things for sacrifice. It wasn't about the sacrifice but the heart after all, the desire to share with God in gratitude for all he has done.

He looked over and saw that his brother was just getting started as well, their mother wasn't there though, as he had expected. She was going to wait for their father so they do it together as they had since the beginning after they left the garden.

He had heard so much about the garden; but the more of it he heard, the more it sounded like myth. Of course grandfather visiting them sounds true enough, he had spoken to Him a few times over the years; and he was used to feeling his presence all over especially on such days. It is why he had to share with Him his own fruits and yet his family didn't seem to understand it. He stopped himself from going down that path again, after all he was here to show his family.

But some of the other stories about the garden were unbelievable; they required a huge stretch of the imagination, like how his parents could talk to nature itself, that all the animals understood them and did exactly what they asked. It all seemed a bit farfetched

for him. He had always believed they used such language to show how beautiful it had been, not reality itself.

He looked over at his brother and saw that he had nearly finished setting up the altar. The stones they had both carried up here 3 years ago, when their parents had told them they were now their own men and as such had to start communing with God on their own. Their parents had helped them set up their altars and even attended each of their first sacrifices. It had been beautiful, he had felt such immense peace and joy and he had known their entire family was in attendance even though they could not see Grandfather. He had felt what his parents called the Majesty of God in that moment and wondered how it could have been like to sit on the same table with Him and eat and talk. It had left him feeling small and empty after it was over. He had looked around and seen that he was not the only one affected, his parents were even more deeply affected, he had never seen his mother so distraught, she was crying deep heart breaking sobs into their father's chest; their father trying and failing to keep his face unemotional, had tears falling freely from his eyes. That had shocked him, his father crying?! The man had always seemed like he was made from the earth itself, stable and immutable, but he was crying; he had looked at Abel and in that moment they had shared a profound moment of understanding, he had seen his very feelings reflected on his brother's face, 'what did we lose?'

He knew he could not blame his parents, it was a human thing to make mistakes, but what a mistake to make! Since then he had done everything possible to try and re-create that day; although he did feel God's presence every time since then, it had never been like that day.

He had been wondering about that when he got this idea, maybe it was because he was offering the wrong thing. And all he really needed to do was offer something from his own hands and maybe that would be the beginning. He had never shared this with anyone but he hoped to one day bring the whole family back together; to mend what was broken by his parents and maybe, just maybe this was the first step. If only his mother had listened to

him and understood what he was trying to achieve. She would have been so proud, but she had insisted on him talking to his father, and he could not do that. He was not easy to approach. His mother said, he had taken leaving the garden so hard, he rarely smiled or laughed anymore. He was a good father but he had always seemed so distant, so reserved, like someone half here, with the other half locked away somewhere.

Talking to his brother on the other hand was unacceptable; his brother would never accept, he was rule follower. Maybe in his own way he too was trying to make up for their parent's mistake, so he had decided to never question anything he had been told. He would have told Cain to do exactly as was expected. It was hard have conversation with such a person. Abel may have been his brother, but they were definitely not friends.

Cain looked over at his brother and saw that he was finished setting up, he was now loading his sacrifice upon the altar. Cain had been going slowly because he didn't want Abel to see what he was about to sacrifice. So he waited until his brother was engrossed in lighting the fire and entering communion with God before he finished up his altar.

He looked it over and it looked good, well set up, solid foundation, everything as he had been taught. He looked over at his brother and he knew he was no longer in the world, he was in communion with God, he knew that feeling, when everything else fell away and it was just you and eternity, he had been looking forward to it since the last time. He looked around knowing he was not going to see anyone but he still checked anyway, it didn't hurt to be cautious. After seeing he was alone, just as he was about to open his burlap and retrieve his offerings he felt something in him recoil. He hesitated. He noticed, his heart was feeling heavy, and in turmoil. Had it always been like this or was this happening only today. He couldn't remember. He looked again at his brother, lost to this world, joined together with the Grandfather; and he remembered why he was doing this – why should Abel be able to use what he wants and connect with God and yet he couldn't. That didn't make sense at all! And he was going to prove it, God would accept his offering too, it was

the work of his hands, the fruits of his labour, he was sharing it with Him from a place of love and desire for communion; everything was as it should be.

So he leaned down, reached into the sack and pulled out his offering, the best of his everything; his biggest Irish, sweet potatoes, yams, carrots, and so on. He had made sure he carried a bit of everything he had planted and harvested this season; not to mention the biggest of the lot, the sort that made his mom's eyes light up whenever he brought them home to her.

He had washed and dried them, but he also knew that they would not burn as well as meat and fat, so he had carried a lot more wood to make sure his fire completely burnt them. As an addition he had even added some spices, he wanted this to be the best, most beautiful offering he had ever brought. It was going to be wonderful he assured himself as he step them up.

He looked over at his brother, he was still praying; so he too stepped back from the altar. He had purified himself in the morning, and now it was time. He bowed low to the ground and prayed in thanksgiving for all the blessing and gifts God had offered him in this last season; then he asked him to accept the humble offering he had brought, *his* own handwork, made with the sweat from his brow as a sign of his love and fealty.

He then set the wood on fire and returned to his position on the ground before the altar to await his grandfather, the God of the entire universe.

Qayin's Fall

He could still remember it like yesterday, the wonderful scent as he burned up his offering. It had been perfect, everything had been set up perfectly; and yet it had not been enough. He kicked a rock in his path and although it hurt him, he savored the pain; it seemed a reflection of what was in his heart. He had been rejected. God had rejected him; rejected his offering, his work. It was as if all he did didn't matter. Isn't that what it meant? When God rejected your offering, wasn't he in essence saying what you do doesn't matter?

How could it not? He labored day and night to till the ground as He had been commanded by his parents, with the sweat of his brow he made the earth bring forth fruit; but God didn't consider it enough. That hurt more than he could put into words, WHY WASN'T HE ENOUGH, WHY WASN'T WHAT HE DID ENOUGH?

Why?!!

He felt his heart break all over again, as it had that day when he had laid down there; before his altar and waited, and waited, and waited for God and nothing. He had at first wondered whether he was missing something; had it always taken this long for God's presence to be felt? He didn't think so, but then again it had been sometime since his last offering. So maybe he was rushing things.

So he had stayed down and waited, and waited and waited, until he felt a stitch in his side. He had had to stand up then.

He had stretched a bit to get the kink out of his spine, but before kneeling back down he had looked around a bit only to see his brother still in prayer, very still, very composed. There was no doubt that God was with Abel; they were in communion. He had turned back to look at his altar and his offerings were burnt up, nothing was left but char and ash, no doubt due to fact that he had put a lot of firewood, the fire had been blistering hot. All that was left on the altar was black ash and a few leaves from the lettuce, scorched on one side.

It had taken him the better part of 5 hours, just standing there in disbelief, to finally accept that God was not coming, his offering had not been appreciated, nor accepted. He had kept there waiting and waiting and waiting; still nothing. With every hour he spent waiting, all the while seeing his brother deep in communion with God his heart had broken; the hurt had run deep.

He had just accepted that it was not going to happen, that God was not coming to him when he saw Abel begin to move, and he knew his time was up. He couldn't allow anyone to see this; anyone to know that he had been rejected; that what he considered beautiful and good was not considered appropriate and fitting for his grandfather.

He had cleared the Altar quickly and dropped everything into his sack and made sure to not leave anything to show what had happened. He had just finished cleaning up when Abel stood up too. Cain didn't know what to do; Abel looked over at him and when he saw him carrying his sack, he must have thought he too had just finished. He had started walking over; no doubt expecting as was their tradition that they would go to their parent's home for a meal together; but Cain didn't feel like any of that.

So he just waved at his brother and then walked off towards his place. He had to get rid of the evidence of his rejection and also he just didn't want to hear his brother speak of God at this moment. He didn't want to hear of how deep and how beautiful it had been, not to mention, their mother may take one look at him and know what he had done. He needed to be alone.

That had been three weeks ago; his father had come back and still he had not gone home yet. He just couldn't. He couldn't bear to see their pity and their 'I told you so'. Or even his brother's righteous indignation; because it was sure to be there, he may not say a word but it would be there in his judging eyes and calm demeanor.

Why couldn't God just accept his offering as he had Abel's? What did Abel do that he didn't? They both worked and harvested; why should one's harvest be more appealing than another's? Did God really love him more?

He had asked himself that same question over and over until he was tired of it and still he couldn't get an answer. Could it really be that it is what God preferred? That seemed so simplistic, that God had a favorite food? No way *that* was true. He would never believe that?

Because that would mean everything he believed was wrong; that God really played favoritism, and that he was meant to give the right things or do the right things in order to be favored; all that sounded dangerously close to bribery and not true relationship.

He also knew that if indeed that was who God really was, a powerful deity that needed to be appeased with the right things rather than a father yearning for communion; then everything he knew about God was false and he would never relate with such a being. Even his own father would be better than God.

That was why he knew it wasn't that; it wasn't about the sacrifice, or the type of offering he had offered.

That only left one thing, his family. If it wasn't about the heavenly family, then it definitely was about the earthly one; there must be something his parents misunderstood and they passed that on to them. It seemed a more likely scenario; they had failed in the garden and now they had taught them something wrong that was causing him especially not to commune with his God.

It wasn't his father and mother obviously, they had taught him everything he knew. That left his brother. He had known all along that there was something off about him. His tendency to do exactly as was asked had always grated on his nerves. That must all have been pretense.

Who does that? Who never questions and just obeys? Even their own parents had questioned and tried to find out for themselves. It may have caused their current problems but that showed that it was their nature to explore. And somehow Abel wanted everyone to believe that he just obeyed and never wondered. What absolute hogwash. It was all air, breath just like his name, nothing to find but pretense.

Now that he thought of it, it made absolute sense. Of course it was all an act, Abel had been working towards something from the very beginning, by appearing as the perfect son, obedient and dutiful, he was maneuvering for the one thing he could never have, becoming the heir.

Why else would he go to all the trouble of acting all perfect? Now that he understood this, it made sense that probably that day, Abel had also been pretending. Kneeling and praying for all those hours, he was probably trying to show Cain how prayerful he was. Cain laughed and he felt his heart lighten. This all made sense now.

He turned around and started heading towards Abel's farm. He needed to confront him about all this and let him know that he knew, his games, and that he would not get what he wanted. He thought of first informing his mother but rejected that thought. He couldn't trust her not to take Abel's side. "That boy can act." He said to himself laughingly. He had everyone wrapped around his finger.

"Is that what you really believe, that he has everyone wrapped around his finger except you?"

"Of course, it is the only thing that makes sense."

"The only thing that makes sense? Really?"

“Yes.” He hated when he seemed to be arguing with himself, that voice in him that made him question everything, when he had already made up his mind. Of course it is the only thing that makes sense. Abel was somehow maneuvering to take his birthright, that’s why he was acting and pretending.

“Couldn’t it also be that you are wrong and Abel who did exactly as he was told is not pretending; sseeing as you refused to sacrifice what you were specifically taught, and he did?”

“We have been over this, God cannot be so simple that he requires a specific sacrifice, that makes no logical sense at all. That somehow God prefers burnt sheep to anything else? Make that make sense to me. It makes no sense. What is reasonable is that God wants to share in all that we have worked hard on, Abel is an animal keeper, he sacrifices animals, I am a gardener I sacrifice my harvest too.”

“So how is Abel to blame?”

“He is to blame because he is acting like his way is the only right way.”

“How so Cain? How so?”

“That day of the sacrifice he obviously didn’t feel anything, there was no communion or anything but he knelt there pretending that he was with Grandfather, somehow trying to make me seem bad, like I didn’t do the right thing, judging me with his actions. He is always pretending to be perfect, righteous, obedient and all that. Obviously it’s all an act, he wants to take my birthright I know it.”

“I feel you are making a mistake Cain. You are courting danger. You are refusing to look at this clearly and if you continue in this way, you are going to do something unforgiveable. Take some time, cool off, talk to your parents, you are angry at some perceived slight, yet it may not even be the reason for your anger, he is your brother.”

‘That he is’ Cain thought, ‘that he is.’ That’s why what he was doing hurt Cain so much. They had grown up together, why wouldn’t he want him to be happy? Well he was going to talk to him. They were going to iron all this out, bring everything out into the light. Yes he would confront him and solve all this once and for all.

He set his face to go to his parents place. He knew that’s where he would be, preparing for dinner that they shared together every first day of the week.

He was certain of it.

It couldn’t be his fault; it was definitely Abel’s and he was not going to let it go until Abel accepted and took responsibility for his actions.

Why couldn’t he be just happy with what he had? Why?

The Brother's Keeper

"Have you seen your brother?"

Abel shook his head in the negative, "No I haven't, I was actually thinking of going to his place and find out if he is okay."

Their mother stood up from lighting the fire, "When did you last see him?"

Abel thought about it for a second, "Let me see..., I think the last time I saw him was..., well it was on the harvest day. Yes, I saw him at the mountain, when we were offering."

"Then it's been three weeks."

"Indeed" Abel answered, "I better go and check on him."

"Okay, I will finish up here, and if you can, convince him to come over for dinner. It has been long since we all ate together."

"Alright mother, tell father I will see him about what we discussed tomorrow morning."

"Okay. Is it about a woman?" she asked teasingly

Abel knew it was time to run off, "Leave me alone mother. It's Cain's turn." He answered as he jogged off laughing.

Their mother had been on their case about starting their own families; in her words, so that family can grow. But he knew the real reason was because she wanted some women at home. She was tired of being surrounded by men only. Abel understood that, but he was not about to be the first when he had an elder brother.

He looked ahead and saw someone coming down the path to the house, "Hello brother" he shouted at him.

Cain stopped walking when he saw who was coming towards him, "Abel, you seem happy."

"Oh you know, being with mother."

They both smiled at that. She was without a doubt their favorite person.

"What did she say?" Cain asked

Abel laughed, "Well you know, the usual, she was trying to get me a wife."

"Is that so?" Cain answered and Abel who had been looking at his feet, didn't see the anger that flashed across his face.

"So, she wants you to start a family before me?"

Abel who must have felt something in that answer looked up to search his face and instead found him smiling, he too smiled and answered, "Of course not. I told her, you brother must be sacrificed first then I will follow you many many years later." He finished laughing, but noticed his brother not taking part in it. Just looking at him with a look he could not interpret.

“Are you okay Cain? You have been away from us for some time.”

Cain continued looking at his brother for some time before answering, “Well I had some things I was dealing with; but am here now.”

“Which things? May be I can help.”

“Nothing to stress you about little brother.” He answered.

“Okay, well come on. Mother is expecting us for dinner.” Abel said and they started walking home together, then he added, “I have not seen you since offering day. How was it? Mine was beyond anything I could have expected.” He looked behind and found Cain looking at him with that look again.

“What is it Cain?” he asked

“Can you come with me a bit?” Cain asked.

“Of course, where are we going?”

“To my farm.” Cain answered

“Oh, you want to get something for us to eat for dinner? That is a good idea. We should get some jackfruit, father loves those.”

“We can get anything you want, it is after all fruits of my labour, work of my hands.”

Abel didn't have an answer to that, he just followed his brother wondering why he seemed angry with him. They used to fight a lot when they were children, but that was years back, he had thought they were actually growing close again since they each had their own work and they supported the family and each other.

They entered the gate and Abel was spell bound. It had been sometime since he last came here and the place had changed. He couldn't believe his eyes.

The fruit trees were all planted in lines and groups and they were heavy with fruit, he remembered seeing them as small trees but now, they were big trees seeming to touch the sky and yet each branch, was laden with fruits. And they were in such groups that the colors of their fruits, leaves and bark turned everything into a canvas. Abel could not believe his eyes, “Did you really mean to do all this, to make the colors jump out like that, it looks like what I have always imagined the garden looking like.”

“Of course I meant too.”

“And these too?” he asked pointing to the climbing vines that stretched from one tree to another, from one group of trees to another forming a network of delicious fruits that gave both a shade and but also a sort of guide for how to walk in the garden.

There were all kinds of climbing vines, laden with fruits too. He could see passions of different kinds, grapes of different kinds, blackberries, kiwi, some of them he didn't even know existed.

"Yes and those too." Cain answered trying and failing to hide how proud he was.

"Come, there is more to see." He told Abel as they wondered deeper into the garden. The fruit trees were forming partitions of the garden, so Abel could now see the ground in some sections tilled without a weed in sight and in others full of plants, beans, matooke, wheat, maize, different millets.

"One day, the whole world will look like this." Cain said

"It will be beautiful." Answered Abel, and he added laughingly, "Of course with some grass lands for my animals."

Cain looked at him and answered, "Of course."

Abel continued looking around and he was amazed at what his brother had achieved. "You have turned this place into the garden."

"Yes, I have." Then he turned and looked at Abel and asked, "Do you think Grandfather is proud of what I have achieved here?"

"Of course He is proud. Everyone who looks at this will be proud. You should bring mother and father here. I am sure they will be very happy."

"So you believe, Grandfather would be happy with this offering."

"Of course Grandfather would be happy, remember father said, God meant for us to build this world with Him, just like you have done here. I am certain He would be very happy..., wait what did you mean happy with this offering?"

"Exactly that. Do you think Grandfather would be happy with this offering?"

Abel turned and looked at his brother, "You mean, would God be happy if you offered Him...,these...ummm fruits and whatnot."

"Yes, these fruits and whatnot?" Cain answered back, his voice simmering with anger Abel didn't seem to hear anymore, aghast he asked his brother in a whisper, "Please Cain, tell me you did not offer these things on offering day."

"And why shouldn't I offer them, are they not the work of my hands. I thought if you saw, you would understand. But I see now I was wrong."

With horror on his face Abel said, "You did, didn't you? You offered this? This is the wrong sacrifice Abel! We need to go now and tell father. He will know what to do. How could you do this Cain? After everything our parents told us, how could you?"

“So you think your things are better than mine, your sheep and dogs and whatnot. You think they are better than mine. You think you are better than me, is that it? Do you know how much effort, time and energy I had to put into this garden to look like this? Do you know how many hours, days and weeks I have spent back bent into the ground to make sure everything looks and works like this and you have the nerve to tell me, what I do isn’t enough, isn’t good enough for you? That I have to come to you for help, so that you can show that you are better than me?” By the time he finished his voice was loud, and angry and full of malice.

“That is not what I am saying Cain?”

“Then what are you saying Abel? You think I don’t know your plan, your pretenses and all that. You think I don’t know?”

“Okay I don’t know what you are talking about, but we need to go home right now and you tell father what you did. Maybe it isn’t as bad as you think.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. I really believe so. I think Grandfather is not angry. I don’t know. Father will know what to do. But we need to go right now, father always said, when you do wrong. You must correct it and repent immediately. That God is unhappy if you do wrong and you stay away, because that means you have chosen to live in wrong. It has been just three weeks. I think that is not too long.” He finished speaking and looked at his brother. Cain seemed calm, like the anger he had shown a few minutes ago had just evaporated.

“Lead the way little brother. Take me home to confess.” He finished the last sentence with a smirk.

Abel looked at his brother; he looked okay, although there was something in his eyes that he didn’t like. Maybe he was just still angry, “Okay.” He answered and turned to head back, speaking as he walked “Don’t worry I will be with you, we shall tell them tog....”

God's Messenger

"Will you go?"

"I will."

"Then go."

He stepped out of there feeling empty and full at the same time. What an honor? What an honor?!

"Are you here?"

He looked up. He had not even seen him come. "I am here, at least for a while."

"You have been sent."

"Yes."

"Are we allowed to know?"

He looked back as if that would give him an answer. "I don't know. But if you come with me, you will know."

"Okay."

They set off together. There was no need to talk; they had been together long enough now to know what the other was thinking without needing to be told. As they stepped out of the hall, the third met them. He looked at them, saw their postures and fell in. It seemed it was going to be one of those.

Soon more and more joined them and he walked on. The others didn't know what was happening, but it must be something momentous that pulled the three elders. So they followed.

Soon enough more and more joined, and the elders increased too. They moved on either side of him as if by decision but really from tradition, three on the left, four on the right based on seniority.

He walked on and now they were joining in droves, and then multitudes. This was going to be something never before seen; only something truly momentous could pull all of them from their duties like this.

He moved on as if unaware of everyone following, wanting and waiting to know what was happening, something was happening, something big, but what?!

Soon entire hosts were there, following him, they covered every place, both on the ground and in the air.

As he reached the boundary, he changed his attire, this would be their first clue into what he was about to do.

It transformed in step with him, from the casual they all wore to the most distinguished; it seemed to melt and shimmer with the surrounding, and then his garments reformed into pearly white, flowing out like rays of the sun. One minute he was regular and in a span of minutes he was spell-bindingly majestic, in his full regalia, with flames of light, dancing on his edges as if he was made of fire itself.

Few could have managed to be near him in this state, but his siblings could. They sheltered the rest.

He moved over to the boundary and here they received their second clue, he moved to a gate; a gate that led only one place.

The gatekeeper must have been confused by the host approaching him and the one at their front, but she didn't show it, she stood up as tradition dictated and asked as tradition dictated, "And to where, oh messenger does the Will draw thee?"

He stepped to her, and bowed as tradition dictated and answered, "I carry a message. I carry a message from the King. I carry a message to a Virgin, in Nazareth. I carry a message to Mary of the lineage of David; she is to bear the Son of God."

It was like the air stilled, and then sucked out of everything. You could have heard a pin drop on earth; although they heard pins drop on earth all the time, this time they felt it drop.

And then it started like a whisper of wind and as he moved through the gates, to carry the millennia awaited message to earth; as he carried the long awaited answer to all of humanity's prayers and supplications; the refuge for the children on Adam; as he went to start the most earth-shattering avalanche, the whisper grew into a chorus as the hosts in a great seismic jubilation in one voice cried, "GLORY TO GOD ON HIGH AND PEACE TO ALL MEN OF GOOD WILL!!!" in every tongue and language and tribe of every tribe that has ever lived, giving Glory to God who was going to save his people, from the chains of sin and death.

Gabriel, in a burst of radiant speed sped off to his mission.

Velikolepnyy (Magnificant)

What am I doing?

I can't just make a 5 day journey? And to the hill country no less?

But how can I not?

How...can...I...not?

HOW CAN I NOT?

Of all the people, in all this land, why would this happen to me? How could this happen to me? Me?

I have to?

As if that was ever in doubt, she knew she was going the minute she heard the message. She had to go; she has to see for herself.

How could she miss it?

What a glorious thing this was.

What a glorious thing it was; that she was, about to witness it? What a glory...

She was over using that word.

She smiled to herself. She had been talking to herself since she started the journey. And by now she had become quiet fluent at it. The journey had been lonely at first, it had been so last minute, and her mother unfortunately couldn't escort her or even find anyone to travel with her. Her mother of course couldn't understand where the sudden desire to see her cousin came from; but she was glad nonetheless that she was going to visit her.

Her mother was all about family and Elisheba most of all; since her mother had stayed with her for some time when they were learning their midwifery.

Now that she thought of it, it was around her age that her mother went to live with Elisheba; maybe she too will learn how to assist in birthing.

Her thoughts stuttered for a moment...

That thought had sent her back to the moment.

Oh my ever loving father, I am going to be a mother! A mother!

And a mother to..., she couldn't let herself think of it; because thinking of it made it seem real, so real, was she ready for it to be real? She didn't know.

She sometimes thought it was all a dream.

"Yup definitely, it was a dream. I mean it couldn't be, that I, me, daughter of Yoachim, lowly as I am, from my background, that I could be the mother of...", she first looked around, to make sure no one could hear it, "...the mother of the Meshikha." She finished in a stage whisper, and then screamed in utter delight, laughing herself nearly off the donkey.

She had been like this since, swinging from such joy that made her scream and jump around in delight like a little girl; to suddenly coming face to face with the enormity of the path before her.

This was happening. It was useless trying to convince herself otherwise, she knew it was true. From the minute that Messenger of God came to her, she knew. But what a message it was. What a message!

She looked up and could now see the town walls. It seemed her 5 day journey was coming to an end. The Caravan she had travelled with separated from her in the morning and now here she was at the end.

What was she going to find?

Was it normal to feel both frightened and excited at the same time; to look forward to something with intense desire and yet be scared of it at the same time?

She dearly, sincerely, passionately hoped Elisheba would know what to do, or at least understand some of it.

She had not had the courage to tell her mother let alone Yosef.

Ooohhhhh Yosef! Yosef! What was she going to do about Yosef?

It was beyond her at this time. Maybe she would tell him from here. That seemed like a good plan. She could invite him here and tell him. Would he believe her? She didn't know; although, she hoped he did. It would make this easier, but if he didn't then she could just as well stay here. Her child was what was important. She would protect him with everything in her power.

She smiled at that.

She was already thinking and talking like a mother; already worried for her child. Soon it will be, my child has that rash, what can I use? Or my child doesn't want to eat. Or some other thing she had heard the young mother's complain about, or seem to complain about; but really, the way they say it, it seems like they are proud of the uniqueness.

She hoped he would love eating, she hadn't, and her mother up to now never lost an opportunity to remind her, how much she had disturbed her when it came to food. "Just you wait until you have your own, then you will see. I'll be here to remind you." Her mother would say.

She reached the gate and saw an elderly man sited by the gate, she walked to him and said, "Peace be upon you father."

He looked at her, as if trying to recognize her and then answered, "And be with you, young one. You are not from around here, are you?"

"No father, I just came in..."

"Of course, of course, I thought my mind had gone enough that I no longer recognized people. You seem to have walked a long distance. Where are you from?"

She smiled inwardly, old men were the same everywhere, "I am from Nazareth."

"Aaahh, Nazareth, our sleepy neighbors. I once nearly moved there, when was that...uhhh.... Yes, 50 years ago. I was a young man then, and Nazareth was the place to be. Then they changed and brought that Rabbi Yaakov, from the Temple. That was the beginning of your decline. I changed my mind immediately when I heard they were putting a new Rabbi. Those people from the temple know nothing about how we run things here. They always want to bring in their views from the city, which of course don't work here. Now look at your poor town. So have you come seeking a husband?"

That shocked her out of her day dream. She always seemed to zone out whenever people started telling tales of decades and decades ago. It was always about how they managed to achieve this or that because of their ingenuity. She needed to stop doing that.

Oh he had asked her a question, "No, no, I am betrothed, I have c..."

"You are betrothed? To whom? All you young people seem to jump into these things so early. How old are you? 12. I would never allow my daughter to get married at 12. She has hardly seen anything. Of course mine were very beautiful; there was nothing I could do. Suitors were coming from as far as Cana. Matter of fact all of them got married by 15. That is what happens when you are a good leader in a house. Who is your man again?"

It seemed she was going to be here a while, she thought as she answered, "His name is "Yosef bar Yacob."

"I don't know him. There simply too many new people in these areas. There was a time, we would know everyone here. But now, these Romans keep sending people to take over our land, that to produce food. Any way let me not bore you with those things. You are too young to understand. So what are you here for?"

She knew, she would have one shot at this, or else it would be another lecture, so she spoke fast, "To visit Elisheba and Zekharya; my family."

His look sharpen, as he seemed to pay more attention to her, "Family eh?! Well on your way then, you wouldn't want to keep them waiting."

"I was requesting for directions, father."

"That is easy, you go until you reach the synagogue, and it will be the big house on the left."

"Thank you, father" She answered as she moved away quickly before he could start another tale, smiling to herself.

Now that her journey was coming to an end, she was feeling the exhaustion of the last few days. It was definitely going to be memorable, people who heard of this would definitely re-tale it. How was she to become the mother of the anointed one? How? Maybe Elisheba would know.

She saw the house the old man had directed her to, and she moved into the compound. It seemed identical to her own home, another sign of the similar upbringing of the two women.

She looked around and saw no one, maybe they were inside. So she called, "Peace be upon this home. It is I, Mariam."

Elisheba came running out of the house, her face flush with excitement; for when she heard the greeting of Mariam, the baby leaped in her womb and Elisheba filled with the Holy Spirit exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

And Mariam hearing what Elisheba had said and seeing her big with child in her old age, her young heart bursting with joy at what God was really doing for them, unable to contain herself anymore, broke out in song; glorifying God for the immeasurable favor He had shown her by choosing her to be the mother of the Messiah:

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

Mariam remained with Elisheba about three months until the birth John, and then returned to her home.

Haggie the Christmas Cow

Haggie believed that at her ripe old age of 8, she had seen just about anything a cow can see. These young ones couldn't even believe half of the things she told them. Just the other day, Damien that young pumped up bull, called her a liar to her face, a liar!

Simply because she told him she had at one time lived with a bull whose fertilizing sacks had been cut off. And it was true, he was the biggest amicable animal she had ever seen. Damien apparently believed that's where his life force came from.

She had lived too long that's for sure. But she was not complaining, her human owners where more capable and caring than most. Other than that son of theirs, that boy must have been bitten by ants when he was a calf. Or else how can you explain such viciousness in something so young. She hoped she didn't live to see him begin to draw milk as his father did every morning. She could just imagine the agony he would cause. It's good she had birthed her last calf and weaned him.

'He will be a strong one, that Casius' She thought, 'just like his father; cut from the same block those two: big, black, strong and moody. Just how she liked them.' she couldn't help the shiver as she continued to chew her grass languidly.

And then, there was the other shiny humans; they looked like her owners, like regular humans; except, they were shiny somehow; like they carried a light inside themselves somehow, that made them glow. They came by too; but rarely disturbed her, or paid her any attention really, just how she liked it. That is, other than the one with the cloak with animal designs. There was something about her, she gave Haggie a sense of home. She always tapped her nose playfully.

Haggie always looked forward to her coming. But..., she looked up and saw someone coming.

‘Well, well look at that,’ she thought, “There she is, talk of an angel or think of one and she appears.” Haggie mooed happily to her neighbor.

But then Haggie noticed something unusual, her friend looked...worried? As she was wondering why her friend looked so distracted, she realized that something was different. It was not just a feel in the air. And that in itself was an understatement. She realized something had been happening; something had been building in the air for some time, she just hadn't been paying attention. "Is it a storm?" she asked herself.

It was not so much the absence of moving winds, she noticed, but the utter stillness in the air. As if everything was waiting for something, something big.

And then there was the shiny humans. She has seen some every season now and then, and of course her friend nearly every week.

But this evening they were everywhere...

A peep outside showed her, “Yup the entire hillside is filled with them. What are they doing?” Haggie wondered out loud. “It's as if they are waiting for something to happen.” she continued as she turned to Rita her neighbor, her very pregnant neighbor.

"It's me, they have come..." munch, munch, “for me, you see...."

Haggie stopped listening. She could never understand how Rita managed to make everything was about herself. Or how she could come up with the most ridiculous ideas like, the grass was green because it was her favorite color. It has been a thorn in the hoof living next to her with her constant yammering that's for sure.

But so many shiny humans had her worried, ‘nothing good comes from attention like that from humans, shiny or not. The next thing you know you are being taken out, followed by

men with very sharp knives and then you are never seen again.' She thought to herself. She had lost so many of her friends like that. Taken one morning, and never seen again. She knew her time was coming now that she was done birthing.

"Who is that?" Rita asked breaking her from her rumination and she saw a couple, an oldish man maybe in his 10s, if humans count in the same way as cows, that is how many calves one has; and a young woman more pregnant than Rita, leaning on the man heavily. They look very tired and must have been walking a long way.

"The woman must be ready to calf, she keeps holding herself like she can't wait to sit down." Haggie imparted from her many years of experience.

"I wonder what they are doing here." Rita wonders.

But it looked obvious to Haggie; they were looking for a place to rest. And this was the only place for miles.

And before long she was proven right. They entered and look as haggard as she had expected. The man immediately started organizing for her to sit, but she couldn't let him do anything alone. Haggie was wondering where she was getting the energy to stand let alone help set up a place, when she cried out for the first time.

They really were running out of time and even less to work with. He pulled a few bales of hay and she lay her cloak on top. It's dusty and a bit tattered but they didn't seem to mind. As the young woman was preparing to lie down... Haggie noticed what had been holding Rita's attention all along.

All the shiny humans had come close, very close indeed. She could literally see the light playing on their skins. They had made a circle around them; an ever growing circle of humans lanterns around the couple, they must have been in the hundreds, thousands or even more.

And she noticed something else, something gargantuan, the shiny humans all had wings! Big light wings of all shades. How had she never noticed this before? It was like looking at a thousand sunsets and sunrises at once. They are all moving them in uniform, leaving trails of light behind each flap like little streams of light.

She couldn't believe what she was seeing as more and more shiny humans appeared in the sky.

'How can they not notice them, they are everywhere.' She wondered, unable to conceive such a magnificent, breath stealing display of beauty.

The couple was completely oblivious to what was happening around them. They were setting up a birthing bed. The man looked positively out of his depth but the woman kept on encouraging him.

It did not take long. She brought forth a small human before she brings forth a baby, a plump, pink, bouncing human baby boy. Haggie had never seen one before.

However what really truly stole her breath is what happened the second after the baby was born.

All the shiny humans; all hundred and thousands of them went down, they fell prostrate on the ground!

Oh what a sight, to see such magnificent creatures lying down in worship. She soon found out, she couldn't help herself too, she found herself on her belly, breathing in the muddy scent and dung but feeling completely elated with such joy she couldn't contain it even if she tried. She was mooing without any reason why, she felt ready to positively explode out and run about as if she was a mad cow. And looking to her side, she saw Rita struggling with the same feelings as she was trying and failing to lie down with her overgrown belly and all the while mooing away as if her life depended on it.

And wonder of all wonders, all the sheep, donkeys and birds are too! What a racket they caused, the couple was befuddled; they obviously didn't know if this was normal animal behavior or not. Maybe Bethlehem animals were different? If only they knew how mixed up Haggie was about the whole thing too.

After some unknown period of time had elapsed and Haggie felt more like herself, all she could ask was, "Who is this baby?"

"And look at how oblivious the parents are." Rita added on, leaning heavily on the wall.

The man was kneeling at the woman's side, his arm supporting her from the back; both of them staring at the new born baby with such love and devotion that it brought tears to the eyes.

And then, what Haggie realized, the moment had been building up to, the baby's first cry cut out clear as a bell into the silent night; then, as if on cue, all the shiny humans sprung up into the heavens crowding the sky, trilling out something indescribable.

Haggie suddenly felt something tug at her so hard she nearly fell back down. Music, such singing that resonated with her very being, causing every fiber in her to shiver. It was like she had known this music all her days. It brought such a strong sense of being known and treasured that she knew in the most inside part of her inside self that she has ever heard such singing. She had ever been part of it... but from where? From some time... before? Before what? She couldn't remember where or when. "Was I born to such music too?" She questioned herself, "where have we been part, how do I know you?" she didn't want it to stop.

The shiny humans spread out singing in their hauntingly familiar voices across the sky and sped off in different directions, like they had the most wonderful news to spread to the whole world, someone has just been born, and everything has changed.

"Something has just happened," Rita whispered, "something... I don't know what; but, something has just happened!"

Haggie could only nod her head in acceptance. Indeed, something has.

The First Apostle

“So....”

She knew that ‘so’ she turned around and saw who it was and groaned, “Uuhhnggh, how did I know this was coming?” she continued in comic exasperation, even putting a hand on her face and shaking her head mournfully.

“What, I just came by to say hi. Can’t a mother seek out her daughter once in a while? Especially when the daughter has been hiding from her? Nearly jumping into the nearest well, each time the said daughter sees her beloved mother?”

The daughter groaned again, and asked, “You saw that?”

“Who didn’t? I have heard to answer so many questions why my own daughter would go to such lengths to avoid me. And don’t say you slipped, we all saw you jump into that well. You were lucky it’s short. ”

“Maybe I was thirsty.”

“Everyone knows it’s empty.”

“I was sheltering from the sun.”

“Oh my, that’s the best you can come up with? That is a weak excuse even for you. Next time come up with something more convincing and maybe I will let you off easy. But for now, I have you, so you tell me, how does it feel?” she asked while lifting up her eyebrows in succession, her eyes a light with the fun she was getting from this.

This was how the mother has always been; or at least how she remembers her always being; always joyful; always seeking to make others laugh and be happy, no matter how dire the situation.

She had known she was going to be teased about this from the moment she had heard the announcement. That’s why she had jumped into that well. That had been fun. It had taken her the better part of 3 hours to climb out again. And now here she was, exactly in the situation she had been trying to avoid. This one was worse than the Son. But she was not going to make it easy for her.

“What does what feel like mother?” she replied with feigned ignorance and a slight look of confusion on her face.

“Ohhh, you want to play it that way?” the mother smiled mischievously, as if she had been hoping for this and now she was going to enjoy it to the fullest.

The mother held her arm and led her to a seat nearby, and started “You didn’t hear about the announcement? Pretty big deal, it’s been the talk on everyone’s lips. Worry not, I have all the details, as the children these days say.”

She groaned again, she had gone and done this to herself, she could not blame anyone. It seemed she couldn’t help herself, she had to go and play ignorant, now she was going to have to hear it all; with all the teasing that is sure to come after.

She better save herself somehow, she thought, “Oh, I think I heard something about that.” She tried to dissuade her mother.

“Oh, no, no, no, you are not getting out of this that easy. Since you don’t know please, let me tell you.”

She groaned in defeat.

“So, last week, on 3rd of June, The Holy Roman Catholic Church’s Pontiff declared through the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, that henceforth...”and because she was determined to execute her role perfectly, she even changed her accent to fit the English Archbishop flawlessly decreeing, “The 22nd day of the month of July shall henceforth be a Feast of Mary of Magdala, commonly known as Mary Magdalene.” Mary wanted to hide but there was nowhere to go.

The mother continued flawlessly, even mimicking the cadence of the English Archbishop, “On the one hand she has the honour of being the ‘prima testis’ to the resurrection of the Lord, and on the other, ‘apostolorum apostola’ as she announced to the apostles.”

She stopped and looked at her, before adding, “At least that is how it would have gone, if they had announced it, rather than write a letter. I don’t know what it is with them and letters these days. But yeah, you have yourself a feast day now.”

“Whaaatttt?” Mary feigned more shock. Of course she had known all this, that’s why she had been hiding, that’s why she had jumped into the well; because they were going to tease her endlessly about it.

“So, from a memorial to a feast day, that’s quiet an upgrade.” The mother continued, not letting her off that easy.

“Oh my loving God.” She groaned.

“I am just sayin...Biiiiig reason to celebrate.”

“You should talk, you have 12!”

“That’s why I am saying, big reason to celebrate, I mean it took them 2000 years to get there, but hey they have... finally.

Even now hundreds upon hundreds of years after; even now after what feels like eons of joy and peace and love, she could still remember vividly herself before all this. And without knowing why, tears began flowing from her eyes, and her mother said, “oh, you went back there.” she said as she pulled her into an embrace that even prompted more tears, as it brought back even more vividly how broken she had been, how lost, how alone and how this very woman had held her in this very same way as she sobbed her heart out, her hurt and pain and anger and anguish at how unfair the world had been to her but even more than that, at how unworthy she was to receive such a grace from Christ.

She was the only child of a well to do family. And her childhood had been one of joy. Surprisingly as time went by she had even forgotten this. That she had had a very happy childhood. Of course everything started to change when her mother died in childbirth.

They had wanted a son for so long and she too had wanted a sibling, a little brother or sister. But her mother had not be able to conceive, until that one time that they all thought was the long awaited baby, unfortunately, it had been worse.

Her mother had died in childbirth and so too had her little baby brother. It was like the joy was suddenly sucked from the home. Her father had tried to be there but part of him had died with his wife and son. So it didn’t take him long, to follow them, leaving her alone, with a sizable inheritance and then the wolves had started to circle. Her uncles, distant and close all seemed to know what was best for her and to have her best interests at heart which for all of them was marrying her or marrying her off to their son. She had talked to so many elders and priests to help her out of her predicament but there seemed to be some unwritten law that they could not interfere with whatever the men in her life were trying to do.

She had been alone, and bereft; grieving her father who should have thought of this before dying off and leaving her to these men.

And that's when he had come. The first man who actually didn't seem to care about her money and inheritance; he seemed to see her. She had met him in the market and he had immediately started courting her; but she had seen enough of that to not trust anything he said.

But he had persisted, he had shown her that he truly didn't care about her wealth, he was a man from money too. What ultimately convinced her was when he organized for her to meet the 2nd highest Rabbi of the Temple; a very powerful man, who also happened to be his maternal uncle. She had known then that her problems were over; God had at last sent her a man to take care of her, to love and protect her, maybe even better than her father had.

When they met the Rabbi, he listened attentively and he seemed so genuinely angry at what had been happening in her life; and he vowed to protect her and her interests until she found the man she wanted, who could look after her and her interests. She could not remember ever being as happy as she was in that moment; maybe she had only ever been that happy when her mother had still been alive.

She had looked at this wonderful man, who had just come into her life and all but ended her troubles and she loved him, she could have signed off her inheritance to him in that moment if he had asked, but he didn't. Instead he requested to escort her home and make sure she was safe.

She remembered leaning on his arm with her whole self, feeling such relief, that at last it was all over. She didn't even need to look for a man as the Rabbi had said, she already had a man who loved her and cared for her and wanted to protect her. What else was there to look for?

She threw all caution trained in her from childhood to the wind, in that moment. She allowed him to escort her into her father's house, and when he drew her closer to himself, she hesitated only for a moment before giving in, after all this was to be her future husband; and when he lifted off her gown, she resisted a little bit more but, then his solid presence in the past months made her relax; in her mind, this man cared about her, he could never take advantage of her.

And when he drew her to the bed she hardly resisted, even when he removed his cloak, and lay down beside her. She had wanted her first time to be in her marital bed, but if this was to be it, she was okay. This was her future husband after all. And then...

The door broke! It broke with such force that all she could do was stare in shock as her uncle, the very one who had wanted her for himself rushed in. For a split second she saw an expression of such glee cross his face that her entire body chilled; and before she could be certain of what she had seen he covered it up with anger and shock.

In minutes he had the house full, all men, all his friends and screaming at her for despoiling the family name with her harlotry. She had never been called anything like that, ever before. She promptly turned to her protector, when she saw him, with a look of shame being pushed out with his clothes, she knew it was over.

Apparently they knew who he was and they couldn't have him implicated in this. What she had also not known was that he was married, and she had apparently seduced him into committing adultery all in the name of keeping her family's money all to herself.

She didn't even have what to say when they roughly yanked her out of the room, with hardly anything covering her; and they would have matched her naked all the way, if not for the woman whom she had often bought from dates, rushing into the crowd and throwing a shawl over her.

She didn't know where all the people came from, or why they hated her so much, but she was struck speechless by the hate and anger they directed towards her, that by the time she reached the Temple she was all but sure she deserved whatever was coming to her; she had shamed her father and mother, she had seduced a married man, she didn't deserve to live.

And slowly, she detached from it all. It seemed like it was someone else that they dragged into the temple courtyard and roughly pushed on the ground. She was naked, covered in mud and bruises from all the shoving and slapping.

She unemotionally heard them accuse her of adultery, to the priests. They took one look at her disheveled self and didn't need to ask. The Rabbi who had offered to protect her came in, saw her and walked out, apparently he couldn't protect her when it was his relative who had caused the trouble.

They discussed her as if she wasn't there, with her uncle telling everyone how he had offered to protect her since her father died and how she had refused, opting to bring men into her father's house; he spoke at length about how her father had left her in his hands to look after; but she and her men had stood in his way. He expressed how pained he was at

what was happening; that after much sorrow he decided to catch her and bring her so she can be guided, as if he didn't know the penalty was death.

He faked so many tears when he was told she cannot be allowed to live as she may spread her evil to other men and women of good standing, that he had others comforting him. The case was all but over and the only thing left was to take her out of the town and stone her; when a Pharisee walked in, he must have been a powerful one as everyone was jumping out of their way to explain to him what was happening.

He looked her over and seemed to come to a conclusion.

"There is this young man who is pretending to be the messiah." He spoke with dignity and authority, that everyone immediately leaned in to hear what he had to say. "We have had many of those over the years but this one seems to have accumulated quite a following. I wonder, what he would say about this?" he concluded. She saw smiles spreading over the faces of the scribes and Pharisees present, like they had just been given a great gift.

From what she could get, it seemed they had a bone to pick with this messiah but had not known how to catch him and now she was the perfect bait, a sort of kill two birds with one stone.

Suddenly she was being manhandled out of the courtyard and into another section of the temple. They seemed to know exactly where he was. She didn't care either way what happened to her, but she felt sorry for this man, who had just entered the machinations of the Pharisees.

It was common knowledge once the Pharisees spoke, the case was closed. She didn't know what he had done to them but she felt pity for him regardless. He was about to be implicated for nothing.

They reached the area and she saw a group of people listening intently to someone. They must have known something was up from the noise her accusers were making because they turned around and saw them coming with her being pushed and they immediately parted. That's when she first saw him. He was so young. She felt even sorrier for him. He looked up at them calmly and unruffled by the anger that her group possessed.

He had been sitting and now he stood up and waited, with such peace and composure that she wondered whether he understood the trouble he was in. If he was smart he would not antagonize them and simply tell them what they wanted. Or else, he was in trouble.

They reached him and one of the Pharisees came forward and said, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" she saw anger flash past his face, and then calm. He bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. She had never seen someone treat the elders so dismissively the, it was unheard of, it was not something you did if you valued your life. She paid closer attention to him, who was this man that he could treat them like little children.

They did not take kindly to that, not at all; more stepped up and asked, "Don't you have what to say, you seem to have what to say in every situation. So what would you want your followers to do? Aren't you the messiah, the great teacher?" they pestered.

She was wondering if he was ever going to say anything, when he stood up and looked at them, looked at the rocks some of the men were carrying and then he said, in the silence that had pervaded the area the minute he stood up, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

He looked again at their hands, carrying rocks and he bent down and continued to write.

You could cut the tension in the atmosphere. Everyone in that area had slowly come close to see what the drama was about; all of them had heard the young teacher's statement and now all those people were now looking at these men, with their stones, waiting to see who would be courageous enough to do so. Who among them dared to show that he had never broken the law?

The standoff wasn't long, the scribes and Pharisees were the first to drop their stones and walk away, pretending not to have just been called out. She couldn't believe, it was as if each of those people had just been judged and each had been found wanting.

She didn't want to look up and see who was left, she didn't want to see the pity or anger in the eyes of the observers, so she just listened; she heard the stones dropping and feet heading away, first a trickle then all the rest. What had just happened?

After some time, what to her felt like hours; but was probably just a few minutes, she heard footsteps approach her, she stiffened wondering what was about to happen now and then she heard his voice, gentle and calm, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

She looked around, then answered, "No one, Lord."

And he said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

He walked away, she couldn't believe it, she had been ready, unfair as it had been she had been ready to die and this young man with the kind eyes, this young teacher had saved her life, he had literally brought back her life from the gates of death, he had saved her. She stood there with those thoughts running through her mind over and over, tears flowing and more tears being made, she didn't know what to do or say or even where to go.

That's when she saw a group of women walk towards her and one of them running to her and covering her whole body. The rest encircled her as if to shelter her from the eyes of everyone and then the woman holding her whispering in her ears, "It's okay, my dear, it's okay, it is over now.

She held her close to her chest in the warmest embrace she could ever remember having. She felt like home, like love and understanding and her dams broke. She cried with such anger, such hurt and all along the woman held her whispering to her things she couldn't even remember, it was just to know that someone still saw her, and cared for, it was all she could do not to sob even louder.

After what felt like ages, she came back to herself and they were a little away from everyone; still in the bosom of the unknown woman, holding her as warmly and firmly as she had before. She peeked out and saw the other women seated nearby quiet as if waiting for and when one of them saw her looking, she smiled brightly at her and said, "Mother, you are smothering the young woman."

And then the one called mother answered snidely, "At least I can smoothen her, look at you. You are all bones and sinew." And everyone burst out laughing.

She couldn't help the smile that was on her lips when she sat up and looked at the woman who had so held her that she now felt healed and whole.

And the woman said, "You too are all bones, I have been scared that I may break one of them, let us get you something to eat. Martha some of that bread we made in the morning."

She looked around and saw, the others stealing peeks at her and a little away, a group of men, also chatting and playing and pushing amongst themselves. And then she saw him, the teacher, her savior.

“Who is he?” she managed to croak out, her throat feeling heavy and injured.

The mother looked up and saw whom she pointing at and then she saw her face light up, as she said, “Oh that one, don’t let him intimidate you as he does those elders of ours.” She finished loudly so that even the other group could hear.

And they all laughed uproariously at that.

And the teacher called back to her humorously, “Woman don’t go teaching her your rebellious nature.”

And the mother called back, “I can rebel all I want, of all these here, I am the only one who knows how you look when a hen is chasing you.” And there was even more uproarious laughter; some even falling to the ground.

And then one of the other men said, “Mother you have to tell us that story one day.”

“You just wait, when we reach Capernaum again, I’ll show you the tree I found him hiding in.” the mother answered causing more laughter.

She then turned to her and said, “That is my Son, He is the long-awaited Messiah.”

She turned and looked back at him thinking she may not know anything else; whether he is the Messiah or not, but she was certain of one thing, she was dead, now she is alive; her life was over, now it had been given back to her; he was her Messiah.” He turned and looked at her, as if hearing what she had been thinking, and smiled and nodded approvingly at her.

She quickly turned aside. She was still too ashamed about today.

“So what is your name my dear?” Mother asked.

She looked up at all the women looking at her as if waiting for her answer, she had never had a sister or brother before, but this was a perfect one to start, “I am Mary, from Magdala.”

And then there was cheering, that she didn’t understand, even the men looked over at them.

And the mother clarified for her, “I too am Mary, we were three, and now we are four; soon we shall have a whole clan of Marys.”

Then she added, “you can call me Mary, but everyone else calls me Mother for some unknown reason.” She finished with a mischievous smile.

Yes she was home.

Day One

"I'm bored."

"You are always bored."

"That's true, that's true. But today I'm more bored than usual."

"Sigh. Why, why are you more bored than usual today?"

"Because, hear me out, today is exactly like yesterday, and exactly like the day before yesterday, and exactly like the day before the day before yesterday, exactly like..."

"Okay, okay, I get it. We have a duty."

"I miss being excited, you know, back then when fights were real fights, not all this skulking around."

"I think you mean skulking around."

"What would I want a skunk for?"

"Sigh, it's not skunking, it's skulking."

"No, I am pretty sure it's skulking, you know, from their skull, that we skull in."

The desk-mate looked at him for a minute and answered, "Sometimes I wonder whether the fall did something to you."

"I hardly felt it, mate. I have a thick skull, as the humans love saying. I could break up a rock with it."

"No doubt. Well, here they come. This is going to be a very long day, so less talking and more working." And speaking under her breath, "I can't wait to get out of here. My time must be nearly up."

The desk-mate who had been swinging in his chair now settled in and put on the mask that he always wore to terrify the already terrified incomers.

"Where are these from?" she asked him.

He checked his paper. "Eurasia, then Africa, then the Americas, and we shall come back for the smaller lands."

"Alright, let them in."

They walked in looking lost, terrified, and dejected, just exactly how she wanted them. They filled in, looking around at the place that was carefully designed to make it as depressing as angelically possible. They let them mire. It had taken her time, but she had mastered it. Just let them be there, lost, depressed, and wait, without showing that you were waiting. There was always one. One who thought he was a leader.

Oh yes, here he was, she thought.

He slowly pushed through the others and approached their desk. She waited, looking at him come nearer. She could see he was emboldened by her attention. He came closer, and then he stepped out of the crowd.

She waited, with a small smile on her lips now, as if dying to be helpful. He tentatively smiled back, and then walked to her desk. She could see he was of Japanese descent; she could still remember his ancestors. They had been very communal; what fun they had with them.

He stepped up to her desk, bowed respectfully, and then—this had to be timed perfectly—just as he was about to say something, just as his mouth was opening, she signaled her desk-mate, who had been waiting for that very sign.

He stood up in one movement and gave the man such a resounding slap that the man all but lost his head. He blinked from the ground, looking affronted at the indignity. He looked to her, and she continued looking helpful, even signaling for him to stand up. And then when he was up and about to speak, bam, another one.

He now stayed a bit on the floor, wondering what he was doing wrong. He looked to her desk-mate, and he looked back with a thunderous expression, then he smiled and offered him a hand to help him up, even going all the way to standing up so he could support him properly.

She could see the man re-evaluating and coming up with another wrong assumption. He took hold of the offered arm, and her desk-mate pulled him up. He looked at her and then chose instead to talk to the helpful one. And just as he was about to ask or say something, she jumped over the desk and in one movement kicked him right in the teeth, sending him sprawling all the way back.

When he was able to sit up, completely at a loss for what he was doing wrong, he looked back at them, and now it was her desk-mate who was calling him over, but this one was one of the clever ones. He quickly walked back into the crowd, which quickly closed over him. There were some who didn't learn quickly, and they had fun with them a few rounds.

She now stood up and looked at them and said what should have been obvious from the beginning: "What you want no longer matters. What you want to say, ask, request is not important. Your desires stopped mattering when you died, in case you haven't figured it out yet. Your wishes, goals, dreams, ambitions are all MEANINGLESS right now. They will never EVER matter again. Your short, miserable life is over. All that matters NOW is what I want, and for the rest of your miserable existence, that is all that is EVER going to matter. You belong to me now. Capish? Now line up. The procedure is simple: step up to the desk, place your hand on that scroll there, answer the questions. Simple. Now come."

They fearfully made a line, but it would happen again, she knew. Someone along the way would decide to speak up for himself, and then they would have their little game again. It was how they gave themselves a break in this tedious work.

----- A few hours later -----

I guess this is it, he thought. This is where we come after all. Not that he didn't deserve it, but he had hoped. He looked around; it was the most depressing

place he had ever been in. Part of him wished his existence had ended in the world. It would have been better than to come and spend eternity here. He would willingly welcome death again right here, no matter how terrible—and he had experienced a pretty terrible one—if it meant he wouldn't live in a place like this. No one was even talking, even though there didn't seem to be anyone stopping them from doing so. He didn't feel like talking either; all he wanted was to crawl in a corner and never ever be seen again, and he was certain that was exactly what was going to happen. This is where people came to forget and be forgotten, to be told your life has been summed up and it has amounted to meaningless.

He could see ahead of him his partner in life, although that meant little to him here. He reached the desk, his right hand was placed on something, then he was asked something, he answered, and then tried to answer some more. He was briskly knocked down. That had been happening over and over; they seemed to get pleasure from making you think you had a chance, especially the boss, who looked like a woman—although that wouldn't matter here either. They all looked the same: flawless and perfect. Even himself; he could see his body was as perfect as a body could be, but that no longer mattered either. He knew this.

At the desk, the game was over, and his friend stood up. He placed his hand on the tube-like thing again, and then something materialized on the table. They got it and put it on his head like a stamp.

He looked around; he could see there were others with the same badges on their heads. And they looked different. Somehow he knew it meant they were judged, and that was their judgment. He wondered what his would be like. But he didn't need to wonder for long; he was coming up on the desk.

He walked to it, placed his hand on the tube that he could now see was a scroll, and waited. He wasn't about to make the same mistakes as the others.

The woman looked up and asked:

"Name:" "Dysmas bar Heli" he answered promptly

"Place of origin:" "Naphtali," he answered.

"Years of life:" "27."

He looked to the tube and waited; he needed to see this happening. It was the only magic he was likely to ever see again. He heard the woman comment to the man, "He is a clever one, this one."

A light ran over the tube, under his hand and out the other side, and then his badge appeared on the desk. He could see that it was all the same instrument thing: the scroll, the desk, even the place on the floor he was standing on.

The man stood up, picked up the badge, summarily stamped it on his head, and it was over.

The woman seemed to know what he wanted, so she added, "You will be rounded up at the end of this shift and taken to where you belong."

He stepped off the metallic thing, but he wanted to at least see it one more time in action, so he unobtrusively moved off to the side and continued looking at the desk, and that is when he saw him.

He felt a shiver run through his body.

There was something about him.

As if he felt his eyes on him, he looked at him and smiled—a real smile, full smile, the kind that was rare even on earth; and completely out of place here. He couldn't help himself; he smiled back. And then the man winked at him conspiratorially, as if it was a secret they were sharing.

He couldn't believe it. He continued watching him; he didn't move like the others. His head was held high, confident. In this place? It seemed like the place, the ambiance which was as stiflingly heavy as a mountain had no effect on him whatsoever. He couldn't believe what he was seeing.

It seemed he wasn't the only one who had seen him. Everyone was looking at him, once then twice, then thrice, just to be sure of what they were looking at in wonder. Like, how could he be... okay in a place like this?

And before long, he too was at the desk. People closed in; they knew something was up, they just didn't know what.

He stepped to the desk and put his hand on the scroll. The woman looked up, and she stuttered in her movements. He had not seen that happen even once. She looked to her desk-mate, but he was shaping his nails with a wicked looking dagger, waiting for the scroll to send out a judgment. She seemed to get a hold of herself, and all along the strange man had been waiting patiently.

"Name," she asked rudely, probably trying to overcompensate for her earlier stutter. He looked at her a moment and then answered: "Yeshua bar Yosef."

The woman was shaken, but the man didn't seem to be doing anything.

She rallied and asked, "Place of origin:" "Bethlehem," she whimpered. Even the desk-mate who had been absentminded looked at her and then at him. He nearly jumped from the chair. He got stuck between standing up and sitting down.

The woman asked the last question as if she dreaded the answer. "Years of life:" "33 years," he answered. And they looked to the scroll, hoping against hope that their worst fears were not about to happen.

The scroll lit up as it had been doing, then instead of spitting out a badge, it just continued, slowly lighting up some more, then the desk too started lighting up, slowly at first, then some more, then the place he was standing on too started lighting up.

The man and the woman quickly pushed off the desk as if it was burning them.

And then the man spoke, in the very same calm manner he had been using: "I cannot believe you didn't recognize me, Elanriel," he said to the woman. "We spent so much time together when this place was being built. Do you remember?" He then turned to the man and continued, "And you, Monzael, has it really been that long?"

By this time, the scroll was so bright that the entire area was lit up. The man and the woman had retreated further from the light, with burn marks showing wherever the light touched them. So they were retreating further into the darkness.

The light from the scroll now started growing up his arm, just as the floor was starting to lighting up and the desk was changing into something else.

The light going up his arm was transforming wherever it passed, leaving behind a flowing cloak that was like the light itself.

It enveloped his body, and suddenly before them was standing... A KING. There was no doubt. He was the definition of what a king is. Matter of fact, Dysmus was sure, the definition of a King was made from him and how he looked.

His hair was brilliant white. His eyes like a flame. His skin like burnished bronze. Everything about him radiated majesty and glory and power and wisdom.

His light continued growing and flowing over the floor now, wherever it passed, it transformed completely; were they were standing now the floor was like a brilliant mirror, the walls like new gold, shining brighter than any gold he had ever seen. And the roof was slowly turning into marble, white and full of life.

What he had not seen before, due to the darkness, was how breathtakingly big this place was. And now he could see the light spreading and re-creating everything to fit the glory and majesty of the one who had just taken it over.

He could see more and more and more people coming, flowing into the hall to see. He could see their eyes light up and a smile develop on their lips; they came in hundreds then thousands, some with tears, some with laughter, some reserved, some fearful, probably thinking that this maybe another game.

He turned back and found the man looking at him, with the same smile now fully regal. Dysmus was still contemplating what to do when the man, or

really now the King walked over to him and placed a hand on him and said, "Didn't I tell you, 'Today, you will be with me in paradise'?"

The man fell on his knees and bawled, holding on to the feet of the king. He bawled over everything: his failures, his sins, his unfulfilled hopes and dreams. And the king held him; he held him tightly and said, "I am your salvation. Do you believe this?"

"Yes," Dysmus answered, "YES!"

"Then stand up, for your sins are forgiven you. And from today, you belong to me."

The king supported him up, and Dysmus looked to the others and saw their eyes looking back at him with awe. He looked at himself and found he now was covered in the same light as the King.

The king looked to millions upon millions of people there and said, "I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end. I am the lamb who was slain for the forgiveness of the sins of men. Let all who believe come, and I will set them free."

Kizito Omutto's First Day

He gently kicked him and said, "Eh – eh, Kizito kimala; it is enough." Kizito still screaming opened his eyes and realised that indeed he was actually lying on bare-ground as he had been for the last 5 minutes, screaming his lungs out; not in the fire anymore.

He visibly stopped himself from continuing with the racket and slowly stood up, dusting himself, looking around in obvious disbelief. He then surreptitiously stepped closer to his older companion and asked in a loud whisper, "Kojja, twafudde; are we dead?"

The older man looked down at him bemusedly and answered, "Era twafudde; oh yes, we are very very dead."

"Eh, eh, eh Kojja, omuliiro gwokya; that fire could burn something fierce." The young man answered masking a shudder, still looking around at the new environment with a frown growing on his face.

And the uncle visibly stifled himself from bursting out in laughter by raising hands to his mouth and masking it as a bow to Jesus and Peter who had been all along standing there waiting for the two sojourners to acknowledge them.

Kizito still obviously disoriented; still looking around in disbelief, asked "Naye Kojja, mu mazima, lino lye Ggulu; is this indeed Heaven?"

The older companion at a loss on what to do in such a situation; whether to continue bowing to the King and his Vicar or answer the concerns of his young companion, in the end chose a middle way; so, he took the head of Kizito without facing away and faced him towards the awaiting dignitaries, while answering him softly, "Era lino lye ggulu, tolaba Yezu; Jesus is right there!"

That however did not stop the youngster from asking wryly, "Kati, Etooke likolaki eno mu mazima; hm, what is this matooke doing here?"

Kizito Omutto's First Day (Swahili Ed)

He gently kicked him and said, "Eh – eh, Kizito inatosha; it is enough." Kizito still screaming opened his eyes and realized that indeed he was actually lying on bare-ground as he had been for the last 5 minutes, screaming his lungs out; not in the fire anymore.

He visibly stopped himself from continuing with the racket and slowly stood up, dusting himself, looking around in obvious relief. He then surreptitiously stepped closer to his older companion and asked in a loud whisper, "Kaka mkubwa, tumekuffa; are we dead?"

The older man looked down at him bemusedly and answered, "Ndio mwanangu; we are very very dead."

"Eh, eh, eh Kaka, moto ule uliweza kuchoma sana; that fire could burn something fierce." The young man answered masking a shudder, still looking around at the new environment with a frown growing on his face.

And the uncle visibly stifled himself from bursting out in laughter by raising hands to his mouth and masking it as a bow to Jesus and Peter who had been all along standing there waiting for the two sojourners to acknowledge them.

Kizito still obviously disoriented; still looking around in disbelief, asked "Lakini... kaka, je, hii ni mbiguni kweli; is this really Heaven?"

The older companion at a loss on what to do in such a situation; whether to continue bowing to the King and his Vicar or answer the concerns of his young companion, in the end chose a middle way; so, he took the head of Kizito without facing away and faced him towards the awaiting dignitaries, while answering him softly, "Ni mbiguni, huoni Yesu; Jesus is right there!"

That however did not stop the youngster from asking wryly, "Basi, kwa kweli, hicho ndizi kinachofanywa hapa ni nini; hm, what is this Matooke doing here?"