

The Unrecognized

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Chapter 1

Bejt Lehem slept peacefully, nestled in the hill's peak like in a pillow. The grazing land around the town was resting, too. Like every night, it needed time for relief and recreation, for the morning would again invite hungry flocks of sheep and goats. Now the animals were safe, closed in the pens and caverns.

The man lying at the entrance of one of them tried to fall asleep but yet he couldn't. Nights were still chilly thus he tidied his coat every now and then, wrapped it around his body, made sure that his long sheep-hook lay there by his side ready to use in case of an assault. He felt anxious and the longer he listened to the noises coming from inside the cave, the more the anxiety sank in his soul, fastened the pulse and made him open the eyes wide.

His sheep were uneasy. They snuggled up to each other not just for the coldness that gnawed at their naked skin for many weeks after the yearly shearing. Achim heard clearly that the animals were moving back as far inside the cave as possible like outside there was a danger lying in wait. And that's why he couldn't fall asleep - animals always knew sooner!

"Can it be a wolf?" He thought, looking down and around the gentle slope of the hill. In the bright moonlight he would easily spot the silhouette of a beast stealing up towards him. He got up, circled around the cave surveying the area keenly. On his left, among scattered boulders there grew thicket of bushes. They could be a perfect hiding-place for some beast if it wasn't for the hill dropping very steeply behind, where only a chamois could climb the wall of rock. That side was safe.

"Can't see a thing, so why the fear?" He asked himself. He lifted his eyes to the starry heavens and for the hundredth time this night, in a silent prayer he asked for sleep and protection but - like before - he didn't feel any better. On the contrary, suddenly a fearful bleating of the flock hit his ears and the patter of their hooves against the stone floor carried one message: "Something's approaching! Protect us! We are scared!"

He felt his grey hair stand on end. He darted towards the cave afraid of the impossible.

"Nothing could have gotten inside; I would have had to see that" he whispered to himself. He clutched his sheep-hook harder and strained his eyes as he approached the panicking flock. He took his steps carefully in the darkness. After a while he was relieved to realize that inside there wasn't any predator, yet the behavior of the sheep seemed to contradict that - the ones next to the back wall of the cavern huddled together as if they wanted to melt into core of the

mountain. And the ones that were outside the circle tossed chaotically. They tried to force their way inside the flock, the farther from the danger the better.

Seeing Achim they didn't calm down even for a moment, they only stared at him, begging for intervention. The man took an olive lamp out of a bushel by the wall and counted the flock in its light. No one was missing!

"Thank you, Lord," he said with a trembling voice. "But what's going on?! Dear God, what are they fearing?"

A gust of wind made him look towards the exit again. Now he felt that too: something was coming from the south, dashing towards them from the desert Negev. That was the thing his sheep must have sensed, or even seen. A man, devoid of the instinct, notices things much later or not at all.

But now the sensation hit him with all its might – the night carried Visitors, since the restless wind and the clouds of dust crashing against the side of the mountain couldn't announce a mere change of the weather. He shielded his eyes with the hand and looked into the distance. It made his flesh creep and he couldn't stop his body from trembling. Now he also cowered away like those poor sheep in the cave, as he remembered the night more than thirty years before, one haunted by similar fears. Similar but not the same! Against his will he began to compare the past with the present.

- Then the sheep had been uneasy too, but not so much frightened!

- Then he also had stood in the face of some unearthly phenomenon that would dwell in his memories till the end of his life, but that had been different, as if the sensations had come from the opposite pole of the world!

- Then he had felt fear but it had been sacred awe – now his mind was screaming, paralyzed with heightening horror not to be brightened up by even a single ray of heaven.

What would the last, most important comparison bring? If then the Messengers of the Almighty had appeared to bring the most joyous tidings a man had ever heard, who would appear now? What news would they bring?

For a moment one thought pushed all the other stimuli aside: he had forgotten the heralded One and now, years gone by, he lived his life as if nothing had ever happened. And that worst remorse: having heard the man's teachings and miracles so many times he had failed to follow the call.

"Will I be punished for that now?" He thought.

But in a flash he again focused on the night and its messengers. They were approaching closer and closer. Looking south to where the land rose steeply towards the desert Achim had an impression that the naked hills were waves driven by the infernal wind to hit Bejt Lehem and wipe it out utterly.

For one more moment he deceived himself that at last the heaven's light would disperse the darkness and its fears... And then he saw them – a dozen of pitch-black forms shot from behind the last rise, looking as if they were blurred in the air, yet still perfectly visible in the moonlight. They were dashing a few dozen cubits above the ground like a band of ravens and the closer they were, the more they grew, and after a few seconds, flying almost over his head they seemed bigger than any creature he knew. Slit with their flight the space uttered an unpleasant groan, like it suffered torment yielding to their impetus. Achim heard the protest of the night and saw the fires of their eyes piercing the darkness.

He clung to the wall of the cavern reprimanding himself for not having done it sooner. Desperately he tried to close his eyes and ears but he couldn't. He wished it was just a nightmare but surely he wasn't dreaming. Worse than the diabolic figures were their voices,

raucous, howling and inhuman. There was no time to wonder why he could hear them in the first place. The only thing he understood was the hatred spat out of their mouths and minds, so intense and overpowering that he felt like sinking into the ground, to the very sheol. When they had appeared, the bleating of sheep died, cut short. All the surroundings grew silent; no creature dared to reveal their presence before the visitors.

Achim knew he wasn't the subject of their communication but was certain the issue was a very important one. They were dashing somewhere to accomplish some task and Achim trembled at the very thought of what would happen when they finally got there - what terrifying news the capital of Judea would learn the next day?

All his thoughts and sensations lasted for less than a twinkle of an eye and the devilish squad was vanishing behind the hill in which his cavern was. In his thoughts Achim started to pray fervently but he had forgotten that in the world of the spirit a fervent prayer was like a shaft of light soaring into the sky and no demon could possibly fail to notice it. Another second passed and the man heard the raven's wings in the air again.

"They're coming back," he thought with fright. He started praying even more ardently though his tongue refused obedience. "Sh'ma Yis'ra'eil... Sh'ma Yis'ra'eil Adonai Eloheinu... Adonai echad..." He threw out frantic syllables with his hands clenched so hard that the joints cracked.

"Hold your tongue, you sheep dog". A cold voice thundered. "Your God is not helping anyone tonight anymore."

"Barukh sheim k'vod malkhuto l'olam va'ed..." Achim whispered almost weepingly. "V'ahav'ta eit Adonai Elohekha..."

"His kingdom will fall this very night, fool!" The voice of the gloomy figure was so scornful and spiteful that made the man believe utterly that except those words and the meaning thereof there was no other reality.

"... b'khol l'vav'kha uv'khol naf'sh'kha uv'khol m'odekha..." Achim felt he was melting in that hatred, yet, he didn't stop praying. Suddenly he realized that some force was pulling him out of the cave and made him face the infernal being. The sight frightened him. Apart from the eyes glowing against the black outline no other details of the demon's face could be seen but the evil he was giving off left nothing unsaid.

"I remember you, human earthworm," said the visitor boring him with the gaze. "You were standing in the same place, staring at those... those pathetic Heaveners... those jesters," he seethed with repulsion parodying their voices, "Fear not! I bring you good tidings of great joy... unto you is born a Savior... Messiah... ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes..."

Achim fell to the ground trying to screen his ears but the hateful devilish hiss kept boring his brain. The Holy Words dripping with reptile's venom sounded so horrible as if someone had ripped the heavens open, hurled them down and then set on fire.

"This day I bring you tidings on behalf of my lord, and you can tell anyone you can, that from tomorrow on not joy but despair shall be for all people, all human scum." Despite the horror Achim took his hands away from his ears, astonished by the demon's words. "Tomorrow you shall find your Messiah nailed to a Roman cross with the head wrapped in thorns... helpless as a pup," he roared and a hundred echos resounded among the valleys. "He shall be cursing you for the fate you caused him! Even now are you condemned! Remember that, you lousy sheep dog!"

The last sentences fell on Achim from above, like a bucket of filth poured out of a window onto the street when the demon eventually took off to follow his comrades. The shepherd fell to the ground deafened by the meaning of the words that still reverberated in his head. He choked

with uncontrollable sobbing. He tore the ground with bare fingers until they peeled and he couldn't calm down. He felt raped on the soul by the atrocious words, defiled in every nook and cranny of his body and mind. He still remembered the face and words of the extraordinary Nazarene whom he had listened to many a time; an utter opposite of what he had experienced a moment before. Thus he found no consolation and didn't even look for any. It started to dawn and he kept lying and sobbing...

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The demons dashed their way. They knew it all too well that the boastful words could at most impress mortals, while in fact their minds were filled with uncertainty and panic. They hated the situation they had to face whether they liked it or not. Hatred was the essence of their existence. They hated their prince as The Bearer of Light was unpredictable and despite his wisdom and might like a blindman he waded into the swamp from which he might never manage to get out. And they followed him into the swamp, which also filled them with rage. They hated one another for even the worst tyranny in the world of men was but a faint reflection of the relationships in their kingdom. The best way to have authority and esteem in the state of The Bearer of Light was to expose and ridicule other demons' failures.

They hated the *Angelos* because they were still full of peace and fed. They did not suffer that acute void and indigence which nothing could satisfy as long as the war was on. They had hated people ever since they had appeared on the world as they were repulsive hybrids – spiritual beings put inside a physical body. Besides, in compliance the plan of the *One-Who-Lives* they were intended to reach heights unattainable to them – legitimate spirits. For recent years they had hated them with peculiar doggedness for among people had appeared the Perfect Son of Man. They were utterly enraged by Him and the Father for they disobeyed the rules – unashamedly they let themselves be known by those animals bestowed with souls.

But now, hatred in their black minds gave way to fright. Eventually, the devilish crew landed near the capital of Judea, where in a small valley they were awaited by other spirits. Everywhere the visitors sensed fear and desperation.

"When will The Bearer of Light arrive?" Angry voices sounded. "He has tarried for too long! He must take the case over as it is an urgency.

"Our prince is on his way and the squadrons from the Negev are going to arrive this very night," he answered with dignity. "Has everything been prepared?"

"What do you mean 'prepared'?" Nothing has ever been properly prepared," he was answered defiantly.

"Mind your words, for it has been your responsibility since the beginning!"

"The prince would scold you for this impudence as it is not our local mission!" yelled the other demon. "It is the priority, the most important campaign of this war!" One more moment and they would have flown at their throats.

"Calm down, comrades," the messenger from the Tiberus stopped the squabble. "We know how to cope with the situation. We are not here by accident, for has any mortal endured our methods of persuasion? Should you have any doubts?"

Murmurs of anger were heard among the demons.

"You from the headquarters did untimely interfere with our dealings!" Roared the general commanding in Judea, heightening the dissension anew. "In your pride have you ignored the issue of utmost importance; the finale is not for Him solely but for our forces as well. It is the

finale for all our duchy. As He hasn't given in for the past thirty years, you should have at any cost abstained from the action that would have gotten us into a situation like this."

"And what is the situation which you fear so much?" sternly asked the commander of the squad that had come from the Negev.

"Fool! Now it is a matter of hours, not even days. Cannot you realize that He has been pursued that goal all His life!? You keep looking at Him like He was a mortal, an extraordinary one, but still a man. Have you forgotten who He is? He has been positioning His forces slowly," he described a circle with his right claw. "The troops of the *One-Who-Is* lighten all the area and even this night as I looked into the face of that carpenter's son I didn't see him intend to withdraw even an inch. He knows perfectly what fate awaits him."

The commander of the Italian legion had waited impatiently to interrupt.

"Knowing the fate is one thing and reliving it minute by minute, with no hope for delivery is completely different." He stepped forward so that everyone could see his might and rank. "Even the toughest ones lost their senses during the flogging, and that will be only the beginning. Our crosses have broken every resistance, this time it will be alike."

"And what if not?" The general didn't give up. "What will happen then? Have you thought of that?"

A tense silence fell. At last spoke the commander of the Negev squad.

"Looking at every path of the future accessible to us you will see only one thing – the look in His eyes as we drive the first nail!" He chortled cynically. "It should prove sufficient."

The local demons didn't share his optimism.

"We have looked into the future, too," said one of them with a gloomy voice. "You have forgotten to add that after that everything covers with impenetrable white mist. Even The Bearer of Light doesn't know what sight He will see when that mist recedes."

All of a sudden the darkness was torn with a white flash. The devils instinctively turned their faces away in order not to be blinded by the radiance that flooded the area. They looked at one another knowing all too well what that meant. After a while their suppositions were confirmed. A messenger from the city arrived, fast as a lightning, said something to the general and return without delay. A moment later all the gathered spirits heard the news that chilled them.

"The Profession has been made," he said with a throaty voice. "They are sentencing Him for blasphemy this very moment... Fools!"

The events were ultimately getting out of control. The ravens' band took off and flew to the capital.

Chapter 2

The bizarre eclipse had begun over half an hour before. Now almost everyone was disturbed by the strange, previously unknown semi-darkness that seemed to swallow natural daylight. Essentially. It seemed that the very nature of light had succumbed to contamination – weird change and weakening, unknown before. The phenomenon aroused fear in the crowd of the witnesses of the drama. The mutilated light displayed the entire surroundings in an ominous and dismal shade, well-fitting the repulsive act of execution.

Only an hour before, the indigo skies and bright light of the spring morning had stood in a stark contrast to the scenes of horror going on outside the city walls. A much bigger crowd then had come here looking mostly for entertainment or driven by a blood-thirsty instinct that made the eyes thirst for scenes of violence. But soon many spectators found themselves wondering whether they should have come here at all, for what they were witnessing surpassed their previous expectations and imaginations – before long, those emotionally weaker had left the hill, and soon after, the stronger ones, too, began looking around anxiously as if wanting to follow. Yet, despite the horror and nearly physical disgust they felt, they stuck on the spot and stared shamelessly with wide-opened eyes at what – which they felt with increasing clarity – was not meant for them to see. But still were they urged by an inner compulsion, as if some gloomy and bodiless beings violated their will and abused their eyes to feed on the sight of blood and suffering...

Such was their state of mind when the eclipse caught them.

It fell unexpectedly, covering the austere landscape around the hill with semi-darkness, and laid a ghastly emphasis upon the faces of the convicts. The waves of suppressed light seemed to be pulsating in a mysterious correlation with the silhouettes stretched on the crosses, as if trying to imitate the convulsions of pain they attempted to give a true-to-life depiction of what was happening in the victims' minds. It seemed that the countless photons of light had lost their swiftness in fear of their own existence, as if aware that dying was the One who had been the Messenger and Model of Light the Cause and Source of the Radiance that had shone in the vast and dark bareness of the universe ages before...

In the beginning ...

Is it worth remembering? Is it proper to relish the luxury of memories while still there rages the battle the outcome of which will determine the survival or annihilation of all things...? Of it is not worth it, then the whole struggle makes no sense either...

It is worth it, then!

The daze caused by another wave of pain had slowly passed and the thoughts began to run orderly and bright as then. In the very beginning...

For in the very beginning there was emptiness and darkness, nothingness and chill... Suddenly the silence was broken by the Voice that was both a Sound and an Impulse of energy: "Let there be..."

And there it became!

In a twinkle of an eye!

There it became, perfectly and without tarry!

There it became, summoned out of non-existence by an imperative that knew no objection!

There became what in its intricacy was to always remain undiscovered and incomprehensible.

Powerful impulses of energy flowed from the infinite oceans of the *Speaking-One's* might and got transformed, as if delicately woven into patterns and shapes, becoming pieces of an elaborate jigsaw later named matter. Having come to existence, the infinitely minute particles were immediately accelerated to reach dizzy speeds and together with others were they precisely positioned in their proper spots. Then were they restrained time and time again, their impetus tamed, and over and over were they arranged into greater and greater cascades of power and vigour. And then, hundred times were they assembled into yet superior manifestations of beauty, out of which, at last, a single atom emerged.

And then the process repeated and lasted, though it was all happening at such a dizzy speed that a casual observer would have seen but the very fact of existence out of nothing. The multitude of particles was staggering; their usefulness in building trillions of suns and entire galaxies was perfect. The absolute zero of coincidence, the utter maximum of ingenuity; power transformed into matter, matter conveying power; waving that gave birth to light and warmth; vibrations that divided the Place of the Creation into what had been created and what there was yet to come into being.

And everything was perfect – whatever there was hidden and whatever there could not remain veiled as it was the Master’s signature, clear evidence of his existence, his seal that guaranteed the lifelong reliability of the masterpiece. No more emptiness, no more impenetrable darkness. Henceforth there would always be light in millions of forms, present within a reach, ready to be used.

When the *Speaking-One* grew silent, the work had been complete, although it still hesitated whether it had already been allowed just to exist or would it rather be invited to the dance again, taught the choreography of further transformation into something even more beautiful and inconceivable. But it was the Final...

And now, millennia gone, the purposefulness of the existence of all things had been questioned by the one who was the opposite of creation and order. Even his name was an utter contradiction of the character and motivation. The Bearer of Light had now been carrying death, while the entire universe watched, speechless with dismay. The curiosity and anticipation of further events had turned into a nightmare, as the *One-Who-Is* had been challenged in the most unexpected manner. At that moment, the blasphemous atrocity had become obvious even to the biggest of sceptics and the multiple hierarchies of beings unanimously cast the verdict on The Bearer of Light. And obedient to the *Living-One* as they were, they could barely wait to execute the punishment on the Destroyer before it was too late.

But it was already too late and the universe was just paying the price for the rebellion. A ruthless fight was raging for the right to exist, and both parties of the conflict were acutely aware of that fact. What there was at stake was the survival of the order but also the authority of the *One-Who-Is* and further existence of his Son. No more was it all just about the demonstration of righteousness, justice and power or winning another battle in the war. In case of defeat at this stage, nobody and nothing would be safe, and the black, destructive flame of rebellion that had started near the *Source* eons of time before, had now gathered impetus and was utterly enraged. The only defence against that vicious force was the convict’s persistence in uncompromised righteousness and determination; persistence despite the hopeless fate, when so much had been said and done. He was aware of that fact, but so was his Adversary. The war had been going on for a long time but the assault had never been so direct and ruthless, and time was running out relentlessly.

Again there came memories, reminiscences of victories and defeats, successive battles, where the *One-Who-Is* was triumphant. But the price of success had always been high and the Adversary had no scruples and with devilish satisfaction he demanded to be paid his prize right away. His power over death was almost absolute as the Law guaranteed that. Almost absolute...

One more hour and he may snatch it with his claws forever and no-one would take it away from him. The prey would irrevocably be safe in his dungeons and there would be more and more of it.

Memories...

They give strength, they remind of the stake of the war.

Chapter 3

Adam finished his meal, set the dishes aside and looked at Cain, who was running carefree in the fields surrounding their farm, cautiously examining the lavish cornfields, patches of juicy vegetables and orchards full of fruit. Every time he looked at his son, he remembered Eve's joyous cry when the infant had left her womb. He was the One - the "Received One" - the earth's first child, the first man born of man and woman!

"As soon as he grows up to be a man, he'll surely defeat the serpent," Eve said day-dreamingly. "It's been so long since we've been driven out of Eden... I miss that place! Can you still remember seeing me for the first time?"

Adam gave his wife with a passionate look and smiled at the memory of that day. That had been their favorite subject for many years. They would often talk of the past that could again become the present.

"He's a young lad now and he's learnt a lot about the Almighty."

Many years had passed since the couple had to leave Eden and they had already begun fulfilling God's demand of harnessing and developing the environment. The beginnings were modest but nothing was chaotic; no project or undertaking had failed. The knowledge of laws governing the nature allowed people to prepare land for farming wisely and to use the forces of nature for their advantage. Adam and Eve's ranch had been steadily developing into a very efficient system and Adam's mind was full of brave and bright ideas that would result in the construction of helpful devices and vehicles in just a dozen years. Cain was born when the first circle of civilization growing among the forests was already very impressive. The boy was fascinated with farming of the land. He had a natural gift for cultivating plants and obtaining the best out of the defiant soil. Adam watched his son with pride and would more and more often say to himself that the decisive moment was drawing near: soon they would tell him the truth.

"He's all our hope. I guess it's time we told him about the Prophecy," - he said, sitting down on the doorstep next to his wife. "He's always been curious about the Garden, and when his time comes, he'll break the curse! The Cherub will go away and his sword will no longer scare us. We'll taste the fruit of the Tree of Life! I can't wait to see that happen!"

His eyes became absent. Again, his mind returned to that first day when he had seen the world devoid of the gloom brought about by the Fall.

"We'll tell him about that soon but before that I've something to tell you..." Eve embraced her husband and looked into his eyes - Cain will no longer be alone as we're expecting another child, pretty soon."

Adam did not remember any more events of that afternoon. The world became a better place and God laughed with them heartily, too. After a few months a little Abel was born and from the first moments of his life he was the parents' delight. Apparently different from Cain, he was always smiling and gentle. Together with the boy, in Adam's family a new emotion appeared - jealousy. That's how the Earth's firstborn child responded at seeing the little brother. Until then, he had been the focus of the parents. They manifested how exceptional he was for them - truly one of a kind. That was quite natural, as he was their first child - the first son of man. But as he

grew older and his understanding of things matured, the parents passed the Creator's Prophecy about the Serpent on to Cain, which started a long chain of events.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

When a young Cain heard the words of the prophecy followed by Adam's attempts at interpretation, his eyes shone with a strange glimmer that upset his father greatly. The questions he would ask them later became a subject of silent conversations between Adam and Eve, when the day was over and they were lying in the darkness, holding close to each other, thinking about what the future might hold.

"You know what he asked me today?" - Eve whispered into her husband's ear. "He asked what he would be given for defeating <the reptile>, that's how he put it, and whether he would be <king of all the earth> after the reptile had been defeated..." Eve paused for a moment, listening for some sounds in their elder's son room located in another wing of the building - "Is that a proper attitude for such a young lad?"

"It's weird, but he's asked me that, too. He was curious what he'd be given for the victory and breaking the curse," Adam said. "I didn't know how to respond. We got to do something about this kind of behavior categorically, as Cain might be developing wicked traits in his character."

"And what, if the promise is about someone else, not Cain, be it his brother or sister?" - Eve asked unexpectedly. "The Almighty did not say exactly whether it would be our firstborn or another child..."

"And what will happen, if the Promise is to come true later and it won't be us to bring about the Victor?" said Adam with a trembling voice. "I fear even to think about that, as then both of us would have lost Eden forever. No, it can't be like that! It must be Cain or one of our next children... For what will happen if years later we have to die?... I don't even know what it'll be like and I fear that tremendously, but that's what the Almighty's told us, hasn't He? 'For in the day that you eat of the fruit, you shall surely die,' and now we see the consequences... Look at the plants and animals! In Eden there was nothing thorny or venomous. And now? Every day I return from the fields with scratched hands and still watch the jungle in fear of being assaulted by some snake or a wild cat with fangs like the Cherubim's flaming sword. Every time I look at the field with one eye, the other turned to the line of the forest. When I go to work, apart from the spade I take a sharp knife with me for I'm never sure how the day's going to end. Animals are becoming our and each other's enemies. So much has changed. I used to have a great connection with them; I understood their behavior and their ways. They were friendly and trustful. Now, as I listen to the noises from the forest I sense alien voices and instincts. Soon they'll start to devour one another, though they're still getting out of each other's ways. Ezer, How long will it continue like that?..."

"I'm afraid that we shouldn't have passed the words of the Promise on to Cain. We should have waited..." she sobbed quietly. "We've made another mistake... His behavior shows that he shouldn't have learnt of that, at least not yet. And what if it's our next child and not Cain? What then?..."

Adam knew his wife was right. He regretted having talked to Cain about that at all. But it was too late and their elder son more and more displayed traits his father and mother started to fear seriously. He boasted he'd trace that 'nasty reptile' and pierce him with a spear! He made himself a long staff with an iron head and practiced his aim throwing the spear at a target

fastened to a tree... He had no idea that from a short distance he was being watched by a gloomy and foul-smelling being, which every now and then crept out from the shade to the sunlit meadow or onto a naked rock, but even then no one could possibly make out his true form. Light sank into his skin as if attracted by thick matter of the black holes hidden on the rims of galaxies. Eyes were struck by a sudden agony of sunrays and after a second, when surprised animals looked at the same spot, the strange creature had already moved far away.

A hideous and horrible chortle, mixed with a hateful hiss reverberated inside his gloomy soul. With disdain he observed the efforts of the young man, who – having hit the target – every time threw his arms up and cried defiant words out into the sky as he screened the bushes with a conceited look in the eyes.

“You’ve been hit, reptile, you’re dying this very moment!” roared the would-be hero, dancing a frenetic dance around the dead body of the imaginary foe. “Know it was me who’s slain you – the invincible Cain. Die, reptile! Perish!”

In the dimness of the jungle, the age-long enemy of life, still alive, gave out a satisfactory chortle. His shape, even in the deep shade of the thick forest surrounding him, distinguished itself with clear-cut blackness, like the cavity of a deep well against bright sand. He knew it all too well that he was the one to afford to dance a dance of victory – his victim didn’t know he had been stabbed with dagger-sharp fangs and paralyzed with reptile’s venom.

“No, you little scoundrel, it is you that have been hit,” he snarled grimly, while the scared birds took off the branches in panic and smaller animals ran away from the area never to come back. They were driven by deadly fear. They screeched and squeaked hysterically, escaping from the being whose dwelling gaped with emptiness and stench of death, hidden deep beneath the visible dimensions of the universe.

“You may not know it yet, but it is me you want to hunt down, you weakling...” obsessed with anger he moved near the border of sunshine on the meadow, though he made an effort to remain unnoticed. “I shall not bear such an insult from you, human mediocrity! You have no right to insult me!”

Now his furious voice has turned into deafening roar, which – in the material world – was manifested by a sudden trembling of the ground. Thrown out of balance by the unexpected anomaly of the gravity, Cain missed the target and ran towards the thicket angrily to find his spear, not at all concerned with the nature of the phenomenon.

The Bearer of Light was right about that one thing. People were not allowed to deride beings superior to them! They had once been given a chance to triumph over the prince of darkness and mock him for the attempts to distort the Words of God, yet they had not done that. They had believed his lie and bowed down to him, thus proved unworthy to rule over the Earth; they delivered the power to Satan’s hands. Now he raged at Cain’s cheeky words, which had no coverage of his distorted morality and attitude.

“I am the one who rules in this place and soon you will be mine as well. You already are,” he added with satisfaction. “And when you do your task, that day will go down to posterity and all the human litter will regret being created at all!”

He was piercing Cain with a hateful gaze from a distance of merely three feet, although the soon-to-be victim remained unaware of the fact. The lad only felt the air suddenly freeze in front of his face, for which he almost lost the ability to breathe. His vision grew black and silence filled his ears as if punched by a post-explosion sound wave. He didn’t clearly remember dropping his weapon and making towards home. All he knew was danger lying in wait there.

“It must’ve been some predator,” he thought with dismay. “I must be careful. I’m not destined to die in the mouth of some big cat! Not me!”

But the sensation would return obstinately in nightmares, in which it was not a beast, even the most dangerous one, hiding behind the thicket. Instead, Cain saw living darkness in an inhuman form, which was stretching its claws towards him. He couldn't escape it, and when it touched him, he felt his blood freeze in the veins... The nightmare would return every now and then until Cain eventually understood he had faced a supernatural phenomenon. He still deemed himself to be the prospective conqueror of the serpent but his wild dances on the meadow with a spear in his hand ceased. He still practiced his combat skills but after the experience, when he had almost stood at hell's door, he admitted how stupid his boasting was and he began to respect the adversary more, as he saw in him a very perilous being. So much the greater, as he deemed, would the glory and prize for the victory be.

After Abel had been born, Cain's ambitions turned into fervent heat that didn't let him look into the brother's face with peace. He tried to conceal that but the parents knew it all too well what struggle raged inside his heart. They did their best to let him feel their love and did not give him any reason to think he was treated in a manner any lesser than his brother was. They devoted him time, taught various skills and demanded that his chores were done in a conscientious way.

Fortunately, with time Cain calmed down noticeably. His attitude towards the brother saw some improvement too. He did not show any jealousy, nor did he look at Abel with grudge. He noticed that the boy had an unthreatening disposition. Throwing the spear was not attractive for him either. Even his activities once he had grown up were different from Cain's pursuits and work. Instead of torturing the muscles with farming, he took to animal husbandry. Cain liked that. He took pride in his muscles as he treated farmer's hard toil as training for the will and body. The tougher the soil, the harder the ploughing, the better – the higher were the odds for him to win the future battle with the Reptile. Apart from that, over the next dozen years or so, two little baby girls were born, Naari and Chawella.

They both were gorgeous so parents and brothers would spoil them; they cared for the sisters, showed them the world and taught how to live. The beautiful Naari, more than ten years older than her sister, would often spend time with Cain and learn from him how to cultivate the soil. She found Cain an impressive man so she took interest in the same activities he did. The time spent together, almost whole days away from parents and the other two siblings brought them closer together tremendously. They had same plans, their features of character complemented and, which weighed on their future heavily, they nurtured similar ambitions fuelled by Cain's boastful declarations of the future ruling over the earth as a reward for breaking the curse. Cain admired Naari's beauty and her slender figure; she marveled at his muscular body. They began to look at each other with growing fascination and longing for intimacy. The time of their unity was drawing near.

When, at last, Naari had fully become a woman, together with Cain they came to announce the parents that they wanted to be together like Adam and Eve, for the good and the bad. They wanted to have their own offspring. The parents, who had been watching the young couple for some time now and were expecting the situation to develop that way, looked at each other and smiled at the memory of their own past. It was another day of joy in the human family. Abel and Chawella, who were too young at that time to fully understand the significance of the moment, were also glad with their siblings' happiness. But at one moment, when Abel with the youngest sister were alone at the table, Chawella looked at him with dreamy eyes and asked:

"When I become an adult, will you want to be with me like our parents and Cain with Naari?"

Abel thought the same. As a reply he clasped his sister to his breast and said:

“If God allows us to, we’ll be together, but it’s too soon yet, so we’ll tell no one about that...”

They fitted together. They were not so impressively beautiful and strong as their older siblings, but they were distinguished by gentleness and wisdom. Those virtues were heard in their talk, in their worship of the Almighty; the interiors of their hearts shone through and illuminated their faces and surrounded their silhouettes with a characteristic aura. After that first conversation about the future they started to form a harmonious duo and slowly prepared for starting their own home and family.

Tomorrow still waited, hidden beyond the horizon, but they all trusted it would bring them but good things. Yet, across the horizon there billowed darkness and it slowly returned to Cain’s heart and thoughts.

Hostile feelings towards his brother returned like a violent wave in the most unexpected moment. When Adam with both his sons were offering a sacrifice to the Almighty, Cain noticed how intensely Abel was enjoying God’s closeness. It was showing on his face, in his whole attitude, even his peaceful, steady breath during the prayer testified of that. Undoubtedly, Abel lived his life in harmony with the Creator. Before, Cain had taken no notice of that but now the fact struck him like a thunder. He did not care so much about his relations with God because since the very beginning, in his opinion, the future had been his and Naari’s.

That day, as usual, he had finished his prayer to the Creator sooner than his father and brother... And then he discovered it.

“Why pray unendingly, if the Omniscient knows our thoughts and requests anyway,” he thought, irritated at the sight of his brother’s focused and radiant face. “Does he want to be closer to the Creator through his exaltation?” Wrath coursed through his mind like a torrential rain.

From that moment he started paying closer attention to Abel’s attitude. Sometimes he didn’t even pray but kept watching, while in his mind there appeared an unbearable thought that had almost transformed into an obsession.

“He must be closer to God than I am! Will this closeness win for him the privilege of defeating the foe?” The threat was real! The Creator acted independently and it was hard to predict who would be chosen by Him to fulfill the prophecy. It was a time for a decisive action to be taken.

Throwing a spear to practice his aim, Cain was again digesting the new information and looped in his fierce anger and jealousy harder and harder.

“It can’t be Abel. I’ll be the one to defeat the Reptile. I’m worthy and ready!” To prove his words he threw the spear so hard that the target broke in half...

It was the first time he had imagined hitting his younger brother instead of the twisting Reptile. He hissed with revengeful satisfaction and the surroundings responded to the sound exactly like they had before to the being creeping in the jungle...

That night Cain was losing sleep; He was obsessed with the thought that Abel would take his place. In his mind’s eye, he saw his younger brother walking off the altar having been entrusted by God with the mission of defeating the Dragon and saving people... He twisted and turned on his bed, then got up and left the hut. Naari, who was disturbed by her brother’s behavior, tried to appease him but he just barked at her churlishly to leave him alone... At last he sat in front of the house and fixed his eyes at the stars twinkling over the horizon.

"Why are you tormenting me, Lord?..." It was not a prayer; Cain was behaving as if he wanted to quarrel with the Creator! – "If it is me you have chosen, do not tease me! Tell me what I am to do, Lord. And if Abel is the One, why so? How can I get along with that? I have been preparing for that all my life. Answer me!" He clenched his fists and waited for the answer, but it did not come.

Having said that, how could he have expected the Lord speak to him?... More so, as despite the declared readiness to obey the will of the Creator he could no way accept the possibility of Abel winning the fame of the Redeemer... Eventually he calmed down and soon felt being overpowered by numbness of the body and spirit. He found himself in that strange state between reality and dream, where the mind receives stimuli differently...

Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake.
Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up:
It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying,
Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly: How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?

Out of the silence there came a distinct voice:

"Your face has long been expressing anger, son of Adam. Why?" – Cain had no doubts that it was God's voice. He took a deep breath: At last the Creator cared enough to listen!

"You know it all too well, Lord, what bothers me..." In that bizarre reality he heard his own words as if coming out from a deep well. "Am I the chosen One? Do not torment me – just tell me plainly whether or not I am the One!"

"Are you truly looking for the answer or are you only expecting me to confirm your ambitions to be right? Are you calling upon me to exalt you above other mortals?" Suddenly he realized that God knew everything; Cain could not even hide a quietest thought from him!

"You have given the promise, haven't you? And all my life I have been preparing to make it come true. I am ready, Lord!"

„The only thing you should have done is deeds of justice, brotherly love and to walk humbly with Me, thy God. I have announced my will very clearly but you have focused on what you deem to be the goal of life – glory and admiration of people for breaking the curse. But the curse of pride, jealousy and hatred has poisoned your mind! Cannot you notice that you have neglected all that is the most important to win fame and power?..."

Cain sat petrified.

He slowly grew aware of the cruel truth he wasn't the chosen One!... The sense of immense disappointment and frustration enraged him! – So many wasted years! Everything analyzed, planned and arranged, and now he listens to that sermon and rebuke like he was a child... But the Voice still spoke:

"You still fail to understand, Cain, that you cannot defeat the serpent in a manner other than righteousness and goodness towards me and your neighbors. Your make-believe combat skills are to no avail as you are not fighting against flesh and blood. Sin cannot be pierced with a

spear, it is invulnerable to such a weapon; it lurks beyond your sight to suddenly attack the heart and mind. It offers you the sweetness and makes you believe you cannot live without it. But it will soon turn bitter and kill you in the end..."

The Almighty's words encircled him and revealed the secrets of his thoughts and motivation:

"For you that sweetness is the dream of fame and domination over others. Cain, you can still defeat the Serpent, but the only effective weapon in this struggle is obeying my words faithfully. I assure you that once you have managed to control your emotions, the sin will flee. But should you fail to destroy it, it will destroy you!..."

Cain did not even listen to these last words. Commotion, disappointment and bitterness, hate and rage – all those emotions flooded his heart like high tide. "Right so! I'm going to prove to God and all the others how mistaken they are!"

Next morning the surface of the earth was gloomed by a bizarre twilight, accompanied by fustiness and a silent but intense moan of the wind. A weird, thin fog surged among the trees and fields. It carried an unknown scent, before which animals ran away, reeds and bushes bent down, scared. Upon the planet there descended Death. It hadn't yet touched the ground, but its arrival, foretold long before, was now a matter of moments.

That day, Adam and Eve were to lose both their beloved sons.

*

It was not just people that cried. The *Speaking-One* could not bear to watch the people's suffering. Weeping over the loss and plunged in sorrow, He sat among the trees. No ray of glory shone in Him; instead, he was wearing grey shades of grief and torment. Beside him, there rested a faithful detachment of The *Angelos*. They didn't shine with the light of glory, either. They were hushed in the face of a new phenomenon that had just entered the history of the Universe. Around there was silent wilderness; birds and insects hid away and animals decided to spend the day in their dens. Even acute hunger did not drive them out.

The *Speaking-One*, witnessing the work of the Adversary, swore that in the right time he would crush him with no mercy, although he trembled at the thought of the horrific fight to precede the victory.

- "Your time will come to an end one day!" He looked towards the neighboring hills, knowing that the Enemy was hiding right there, feasting, drunk with the victory he had just won. "There will come the day when the death you have brought here will destroy you, too..."

His hands clenched into fists with determination. One day he would face The Bearer of Light on the same earth, under the same sky, and he would prove him that never could he equal the Living God. In several thousand years, He – the Incarnated Word – as the second Adam, true and perfect Man would declare a ruthless war on the army of darkness and its commander. As a result, the shrewd serpent would be crushed. When the right time came...

Nearby was the people's house. Eve was lying before the doorstep, crushed by the weight of the tragedy that had taken place an hour before. She found no strength to stand up and just slumped to the ground. Since the morning she had had the notion of something evil to happen. She saw Cain's cross face as he was going out to a distant field with his brother. Then she heard

the echo of a scream and Adam left their home running, and after an eternity-long hour he returned holding the younger son's body on his hands. On his chest there gaped a hole pierced with the brother's spear. Eve heard her own horrible scream which she could not silence down. She kept screaming until she grew hoarse and Adam took no step towards his wife to comfort her as tenaciously he held Abel's dead body on his hands. At one moment all their expectations, visions of victory and return to Eden, talks of triumph over the enemy mixed before her eyes into gore *mélange*, out of which Abel's pale face emerged. There was no life in him. It leaked out with his blood through a horrific wound inflicted with no mercy.

Chawella heard her mother's horrible scream and rushed back home from the field only to see the unexpected end of her dreams...

She nearly lost her mind out of the grief over her brother! For many years after she still found it impossible to get over. Before, in her mind the world had not been divided into the eras before and after the banishment from Eden. She was born when the situation was slowly stabilizing and despite knowing the history of her family well, she perceived no threats lurking around. She found no interest in the elder brother's ambitions. For her the issue simply did not exist. She had the parents, her beloved Abel and the closeness of the Creator. She did not even admit any possibility that things could change for the worse. Misfortune had always been an abstract concept for her but now it had fallen all of a sudden and crushed her like a granite rock. Her banishment from Eden happened now, through what the elder brother had done. Stupefied with affliction, together with her mother she washed Abel's body, and next day Adam buried it on a nearby hill. The world had changed irreversibly.

*

Cain's spear went straight through his brother's heart. There was no quarrel, no words of explanation. They were just about to start to talk about something very important and Abel's thoughts were focused on nothing else. He was glad that mighty Cain wanted to share some news with him. Then the older brother walked off a few steps and Abel only saw that in the bushes there moved the very heart of darkness and enveloped the Cain's silhouette. He screamed, shocked by the unearthly appearance of the phantom, and then Cain bent to pick something from the ground. The last thing recorded by the mind of Adam's younger son was the sight of the spearhead dashing straight at him. He felt no pain but rapidly fell into deep darkness.

The only thing Cain was aware of was the fact that the throw was well-aimed. He stood motionless, paying no attention to the younger brother's dead body lying in the tall grass or to Naari's frightened look as she went out of the forest onto the edge of the meadow. Now she was also standing there petrified. Cain felt no emotions. As if from afar he heard a scream,

"What's happened to Abel?! What have you done to him?!"

He stood in front of her, looking towards the bushes as if watching out for somebody there. He found her question insolent.

"I've done nothing to him," he snarled. "By the way, it's none of your business! I don't care where he is and what he's doing right now..."

"But I can see him lying on the ground!... Can you hear what I'm saying to you?! What's happened to Abel?! What have you done to him?!..." The pitch of her voice was rising to a hysteric scream...

Only now did Cain seem to have noticed Abel's body lying in a pool of blood; he heard Naari's words and realized the hideousness of his deed. A tragic confession came out of his pale lips:

"It's no accident... Naari... I... wanted that... to happen. And he's dead now!... I haven't defeated the serpent but murdered my brother! I murdered him and now the Almighty's going to kill me... Surely He is!

"But I don't want to live without you, Cain," groaned Naari. "I don't want to be alone, do you understand that?!... Despite everything I'll be with you!"

He looked at her as if he did not understand her words:

"You want to be with me?... Want the same fate as me?!... You'll live with a murderer?! But when new sons and daughters of our parents are born they will seek revenge and at last they'll find us!... We'll be safe no more? Do you understand?... No more!

The girl paid no attention to what he was saying. She grabbed his hand and they both lunged forward running away in panic. They did not know where they could go but one thing was certain: they should run as far away from the parents and sister as possible! Come whatever may, they will not bring their brother back to life again, nor will they be able to live with their beloved ones after what Cain had done!...

They were forcing their way through the thicket, their legs tangled in lianas and creepers. Yet, they felt no pain of the torn skin. The only reality was fear and desire to run away as far as the edge of the world...

Suddenly they sensed the *Presence*. It descended upon them like an icy breath of justice. The voice they heard left no doubts – He already knew about everything that had happened, just like long before, in the Garden, and in harsh words the Almighty reproached Cain for his hideous deed... They both fell to the ground, and the weeping fratricide cried in despair:

"Do not kill me, oh God! I know what a hideous crime I have committed, but I do not want to die! Help me, Lord, for everyone who to meet me will want to kill me... Others will be born; they will learn of what I did and they would like to take revenge for Abel's blood... Protect me, Lord. I'm begging you, please!"

"I had warned you, son of Adam, but you disregarded it." In the Creator's voice, beside wrath, there was deep sorrow. You will not die but for the rest of your life, in your heart and on your face you will carry the stigma of your deed. Your face will dismay people and beasts. Even smiling at your children you will bear the blot of your guilt!

When they were alone, Naari noticed a change in her brother's appearance. He was still powerful and strong but his face was only half-human now. Their brother's death was not left back there, far away. It was right here, burnt in Cain's heart and manifested in his deformed face. His countenance grew wild and the eyes shone with the death of Abel.

"No matter what, I'll be with you!" She remembered her own words, spoken to her grief-stricken husband next to Abel's dead body. "At any cost," she repeated. "I don't care how you look. We'll forget what has happened. I can. Can you?..."

Cain did not respond to his wife's words. He still repeated the Creator's words:

"I shall be cursed out of this land... A fugitive and a vagabond... cursed forever..."

Naari took his face grimaced with pain into her hands and looked into his eyes.

"We'll run away together, alone you won't cope. The sense of guilt and loneliness will kill you. It'll kill me, too should I stay here without you..." Her voice sounded with bitter love and suffering. "How can I return to our parents and Chawella? You know well how they'll greet me.

They'll shun me forever. Am I supposed to be alone?! I love you and I'm ready to bear anything that happens, as long as I'm with you!"

They did not look back but ran further away, and all wild beasts hid away in the forest as they saw death showing on the man's face. They dared not to attack the two fugitives. Outside they were safe, and inside their hearts, slowly and arduously, they erased the memories of their brother and became tougher and unaffected. They would create their own world, in which no one would condemn them for anything. They would be king and queen of the earth; their ambitions would be fulfilled... Against all odds they would make their dreams come true and forget the murder...

They were running farther and farther eastwards. Eden was left way behind them. They would never go back there... They would not kill the Serpent... That task would have to be done by someone else. It was not important whatsoever for Cain. Who cared anyway? Who would in a thousand years' time?! He must take care of Naari and himself – that's what counts!

Chapter 4

The awkwardly passing minutes deepened the dusk relentlessly and as the convict lost his strength, the sunrays also grew slower and got sucked in among the hot rocks and sand surrounding the base of the cross. Unremittingly, there escalated the cruel torment of stretched sinews and muscles, conveyed as far as the back by the median nerve pierced with a thick iron nail. The plexus of that very sensitive nerve ran from the neck to the wrist and now it burnt the victim all along like fire.

The breathing, thus far a painful effort in itself, now had turned into a nightmarish struggle for every smallest portion of the hot and motionless air. The ribcage was constantly in the inbreathing position and the pressed muscles could hardly help remove waste air from the lungs. The convict tried to lift his body for a hundredth time, to which the damaged limbs and the back shredded during the *flagellum*, rubbing along the rough wood of the vertical beam, reacted with a piercing pain. It reached up to the naked hips and almost caused nausea at every attempt.

It wasn't merely a side-effect of the execution. The whole process of dying on the cross, spawned by an unearthly and dismal mind, was designed so that the precision and acuteness of the torture deprived victims of any, even momentary relief. The body position itself would be uncomfortable even without the nails driven between the joints of the feet and wrists. First, after a horrid and eternity-long fight, the strained muscles and sinews of the arms and shoulders gave in, the macabre creaking sound of which, caused by the stretch, amplified by the nails and wood of the cross was loud enough to be heard from even a few steps away. When that had happened, the effort of lifting the body to the position that enabled breathing was taken by the legs. However, that was at the cost of an unimaginable stabbing pain that attacked the heels penetrated by a nail and the whole legs positioned by the executors in a little bend – like in an attempt of squatting – with the knees pointing to the side. The pain increased and intensified until it reached the climax... then the strained body hung inertly on the nails again!...

Only the swarms of flies and other malicious creatures with their turmoil challenged the immobilized bodies and the ponderous particles of light. They stung the crucified men, stuck to the bloodied and sweaty bodies, sat on them by hundreds, ostensibly aware of their impunity.

The convict opened his eyes and looked ahead with effort, trying to see through the gloom... Although almost all of his consciousness was filled by suffering, with a tremendous willpower he was able to partly set it aside – so that, at least, he shouldn't lose the presence of mind... He analysed his feelings and suffering, bound them with his willpower and relived unremittingly second after second, while bringing back to mind what had always been the most important for him – the awareness of the Goal, toward which he had been making his way all the time, and which now was so close... The view of the dusk-covered hills around the city brought memories...

Was the earth worth it all? Oh, yes, she was! She was the *Speaking-One's* pride. Seen from a distance of hundreds of thousands of miles it was as beautiful as a jewel. Against the backdrop of the black sky, brightened up by millions of the distant stars of the Milky Way she was the *Speaking-One's* delight. She ran its own tailored course, caressed by the sun and shielded by the icy robe. Two such opposed elements like water and fire labored in harmony for the good of man. Creating matter was a joyous experience, but nothing could compare to creating the place where life would flourish or surpass the joy of creating life itself.

Life showed gratitude.

Gratitude – that word had appeared in his thoughts more and more often as if hurled at his face by the Adversary in order to break him. So that at last he should realize that it wasn't worth loving and saving the fallen creatures in the face of their evident ingratitude...

Enough! The memories weren't meant to be like that!

"Bitter pondering over human flaws is his weapon... not mine" – thought the convict.

He chose the memories of the jewel. The Planet was still a jewel, precious in his eyes for the ones who had recognized Him...

The star that sat immovably in the centre of the Earth's orbit wasn't there just to complement the perfect picture. Besides light, it also offered the energy necessary for life to survive. The *Speaking-One* had placed the jewel exactly where it could exist free of cosmic threats. It was a small safety zone, just beyond the lethal heat of the reactions proceeding incessantly in the star's core, while still out of the icy breath of the vacuum. A small but perfectly sufficient area.

He was the first to see that contrast – from afar the planet was as beautiful as a pearl among the stars, but when he approached the surface, the impression of beauty suddenly gave way to icy horror lurking in the forests and among the settlements of the inhabitants...

Having crossed the canopy of ice and the frontiers of the atmosphere, a beholder would still be amazed by the planet's beauty. It was covered by lavish vegetation in countless varieties of forms. The conditions were perfect there. The canopy of water gave protection from the lethal side-effects of the Sun's activity. The reactions that yielded light and warmth did also cast deadly hard radiation into the space, which would have – if nothing stopped it – within moments annihilated every living cell on the exposed hemisphere of the planet. But on the way of the murderous rays there were two impenetrable barriers. They were placed there on purpose, exactly the way they should be and in the perfect place.

The zone of frozen particles of water was the first and largest trap for the cruel radiation. The rays, dashing for a hundred million miles, suddenly hit the obstacle, like an infantry

onslaught confronted with stiff resistance of the defendants of a fortress. And though most of the particles managed to break through the first layers of water, some were defeated, fettered and incapable of further fight. Those that had survived were soon captured inside the deeper-lying wire entanglements and only the remains kept rushing along, oblivious of their hopeless fate. Their doom, however, was ultimately confirmed in the upper strata of the proper atmosphere, demonstrated by beautiful visual effects, when the last rays died with little flashes of light.

Thanks to that protective cloak of water the climate was balanced and the weather stable; there were no chilled mornings impatiently looking forward to the sunrise; there were no scorched or stifling afternoons longing for the cool of the evening or torrential rains attacking the ground with excess of water and causing landslides; there were no deserts mercilessly baked by the heat of the sun or dry wind.

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Threats from outer space, like pieces of cosmic debris did not pose any danger. The *Speaking-One* had placed mighty Jupiter almost 700 million miles from the Earth. The overwhelming mass of the giant worked as a vacuum cleaner for most of meteors and asteroids that dared to threaten life. Right upon entering the forbidden area they yielded to the overpowering gravity of the giant and gave up attacking the Blue Planet. They would fall into it like into an orange pillow and burned a few hundred miles under the outer surface of the clouds, standing no chance of survival. Other planets also acted like a snare for uninvited guests that could threaten the Earth with a disaster.

But the *Speaking-One* had appointed a sentinel – a cosmic hammer, Nibiru – circling on a remote orbit. Harmless from afar, in case of a rebellion he would turn to be a sword falling on the rebels' heads. Its mass was enormous. It consisted of ice-bound crystal lumps of pure iron, like a projectile crammed with shell splinters. It was accompanied by a dense cloud of relatively small but razor-sharp and heavy chondrite meteors that could unleash hell in the upper strata of any planet's atmosphere.

But it wasn't part of the plan. Its purpose was harmonious coexistence. All forms of life on the planet had for existence superb conditions. Both composition and physical properties of the atmosphere served living organisms perfectly. Due to the specific refraction of light in the crystals of the canopy, the whole firmament glowed with a gentle crimson shade of rose, which plants needed no less than water.

The *Speaking-One* had planned everything perfectly, without any defects. Varied vegetation enjoyed it lavishly, which was demonstrated by the vigor and height incomparable to nowadays'. Even simple reed was 25 cubits tall, ten times as much as now, to say nothing of trees, high as towers, strong as the rocks.

Even after the Expulsion the world was still a place where everything that had come from the Creator's hand remained in the perfect equilibrium. The earth, like the planetary system, precise and perfect, was delightful with her harmonious beauty. Green forests engraved with clean rivers, woodlands and plains surrounding colorful lakes and water cascades falling from wild mountains. The waves of the only ocean on the planet ran peacefully toward the shores, sparkling with colors in the sunshine. And at night, in moments of air stillness, water reflected the bright, almost diamond stars of the Milky Way, magnified by the icy canopy that acted like lenses. That sight was unbelievable – high above the shining galaxy, and down below its perfect reflection, so true that after a moment the sense of direction vanished and the sky became the ocean; water filled the universe, the blazing stars sank in the watery abyss and the

phosphorescing schools of fish swam in the black nothingness of the universe... When the night passed, the spectacle would go on, and the motionless water would faithfully copy the colors and patters that announced sunrise. And all of a sudden, the wakened birds couldn't guess the real direction of their flight. Where was the dawn and where the ocean?... They circled carelessly from the picture to the original, willfully carried by the illusion, although they so well knew that morning game played by light and water...

The Creator enjoyed it with them but when he looked closely at his works, he would notice with anxiety that people had learnt to reach for the forbidden. People learnt to break bonds that tied the fundamental grains of matter on dangerously low levels. Although the benefits of powers sealed by the *Speaking-One* in particles of matter were allowed for the creatures, they reached too deep, which eventually turned against the incautious explorers. The thirst for unlimited power stood in stark contrast with fallen minds and contaminated motivation. The disaster drew nearer.

They tried to break defenses protecting the mysterious genetic codes and although the Tree of Life had forever remained hidden behind the gate guarded by the being whose name people were afraid even to mention, still they decided to learn the assiduously guarded Mystery of Life. Yet, in vain. Foolish as they were, they forgot they could only admire the perfection while never being able to create anything equally ideal. Some levels of knowledge had been forever concealed from them but their new master managed to immunize them effectively against any objections or scruples.

The contamination affected almost everyone, great and small. However, after Abel's death another son was born – Seth, the Chosen One. His sons remained faithful for a long time and despite their falls they would still reflect the echo of the *Living-One's* glory. They still called upon His name and strove for obedience. As long as the sons of Cain and the sons of Seth lived on the opposite areas of the territory inhabited by the mankind, there still was a hope that the influence of evil would be balanced and the world, in basically unchanged form – would see the desirable day when the *Living-One* finally made His promise come true to kill the hideous serpent through one of sons of man.

After six days of hard but effective work there came the dear Seventh Day – it still gave rest to tired people, brought family members nearer to one another and put daily worries aside. In the peace of the Holy Day, people's dwellings and hearts were visited by the Omnipresent One and despite the barrier of sin he blessed the creatures and renewed precious relationships.

The first generations of noble Seth's sons with their conduct and work followed the *Speaking-One* in a righteous manner. For hundreds of years they drew wisdom from his works, studied the mysteries of nature and transformed the world in compliance with his intent. The intelligent and absorptive mind, healthy and beautiful body, vigor and optimism put aside most worries and problems. Every aspect of existence fascinated people and inclined them to worship the One who was the Author and Guardian. Set's descendants also learned how to use the Sun's power. The energy of wind and the rhythm of tides of the planet's only ocean pulled by the Moon's gravity were no mystery to them and soon they harnessed their hidden power.

They became builders of the Golden Age, architects of the order, which their limited descendants would fruitlessly be seeking to restore till the end of the planet's existence. Towns built by the People of Seth weren't so monumental and impressive as the diabolic architecture of their distant relatives and thanks to that a weary traveler could always find rest and hospitality there. Honesty and obedience to the *Law* gave a feeling of safety not only to indigenous residents. That climate of peace immediately spread to their guests. In the beginning they still

cultivated their union with the *Speaking-One*; they still had that fresh first love that always leads to success. Its loss opens the heart to evil. How long will they hold on to that feeling?

Chapter 5

Between the people of Seth and the other, corrupt half of the mankind, there lay a natural barrier called the Great Forest, which mercilessly devoured intruders. Literally devoured! In the wild thicket there were spots so dangerous that the horror lurking there made hair stand on end and tied the entrails into a tight knot. After the Fall animals gradually grew to despise peaceful coexistence. The creatures which in Eden were enormous but gentle, in the Great Forest turned wild and trampling the jungle with their hooves looked for potential prey. Birds and mammals had also succumbed to degradation, became violent and dangerous to people who happened to stand on their way.

A daredevil who ventured into the forest was watched by hundreds, even thousands of pairs of eyes from the very beginning. Without proper footwear one might instantly lose the leg muscles attacked by enormous insects, size of an adult's forearm... But having footwear did not guarantee safety either! Dangerous insects lurked in branches of huge plants and after an encounter with a dragon-fly, whose wingspan neared two cubits and which all of a sudden emerged in front of a wanderer like a demon from hell, ended up in a desperate evasive action followed by a fall, after which hand-sized ants took care of the individual. After a couple of minutes only a skeleton remained lying on the ground, not for long, however. Wolves didn't despise a luxury such as human marrow.

If, miraculously, a man managed to reach another level in that dreadful game for survival, the jungle had an army of professional killers and thousands of ready-made scenarios to play the deadly game with annoying bipeds. People first of all had to rely on their caution, shrewdness and experience. Slowly and with determination they managed to conquer more territories for building towns and farms, though the beginnings were tough.

The Cainites for their own reasons had been seeking to come into contact with the relatives inhabiting remote lands. They decided to organize an expedition to find the settlements of the People of Seth.

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The guardsmen weren't too gentle. Each pair escorted one prisoner and although the latter tried to resist, the soldiers' tough hands forced them into fast walk.

"And that's how it's going to end," drawled a stocky man led by the first pair as he turned towards a fair-skinned prisoner walking behind him. "Damned fate. In the end we'll die together, Doto. You've deserved it a hundred times and I only regret I can't slaughter you myself!"

"It seems that you weren't meant to," Doto replied defiantly. He's foxy face expressed satisfaction, which - in such circumstances - seemed surprising. "I've always said you won't ever get me. I'm still on top, you loser."

The provoked man tried to break free from the guardsmen's hands and attempted to dart at the other man's throat, but the captain, who walked nearby, leapt towards him at a bound and brought him to his knees with a powerful blow at the kidneys. The man howled, to which

Doto replied with a satisfactory chortle. But soon the stern officer put out the smile on his lips with a punch in the sternum. The hit was so violent that the prisoner almost stopped breathing. He grew livid and only after a few minutes did he come to his senses. The escort waited until the men were able to walk, and then proceeded.

The other ten convicts watched the scene in bleak silence. They kept wondering why, ever since they had been released from their cells, the two had been trying to devour each other alive out of hatred.

They passed a side door leading to the inner yard. They were almost sure that was their destination but the escort kept leading them along the corridor. They expected an execution at the courtyard of the fortress but instead they entered the representative section of the castle. At the sight of the lavish ornaments covering the walls and the ceiling, astonishment showed on their faces. They left the corridor and went under the high-vaulted arch over to a huge room, straight before the governor. The man dressed in a perfectly-suited uniform stood up from his throne and walked along the row of prisoners, looking each of them in the eye and scrutinizing them with a sharp gaze. He emanated with strength and awareness of the power he wielded. His bodyguards walked two steps away; they were vigilant and ready to stab the heart of anyone who dared to make any aggressive movement at their lord. But the cold self-possession showing on the governor's face turned the prisoners' rage and fear into curiosity.

"If I did not know you, Rehue, I would surely think you sneer me," he said in an indifferent tone, not looking the commanding captain's direction. The man froze at the remark, hardly stopping the hands from trembling.

"Your majesty, they are the best ones! In other circumstances I would say they are veterans. I have selected them carefully for their life-history and abilities." Now he possessed himself and spoke with cold objectiveness. "They do not look very impressive but are determined. We have been watching them for months. They are perfectly competent to accomplish the mission."

A dozen pairs of ears turned to the captain after the last sentence. Now even Doto and Nabsar looked at each other without a flash of hate in their eyes. They impatiently awaited further explanation.

"You must be wondering what has been stopping me from slitting your throats." Governor Mezza loved grading tension. He was amused by their impatience. "But the task I want you to accomplish for me is not more pleasant than an execution. However, it is your last chance and if you should manage to complete the mission, not only will I pardon you but you will spend the rest of your lousy lives in relative luxury."

A sigh of surprise passed through the row of prisoners. But some of them still kept desperate faces; they knew Mezza all too well to know that their freeing was deceptive. They anxiously waited for his words, which surely were not comforting.

"I will be concise: you are to cross the forest" at the sight of bewilderment on their faces he added with a cruel grin, "Yes, THE forest, the GREAT Forest! You will get equipment and provisions and your only task is to survive and return with information on the inhabitants on the other side! Do I make myself clear?"

The convicts took a deep breath.

"Can we refuse?" asked Nabsar.

"Yes, you can but then you will be led straight to the courtyard from this very room," he pointed at the window, "And you know what your fate will be...?"

The men's gaze followed his hand. Outside the window they could see bright sand of the castle courtyard, in the center of which there was a thick pole with chains fastened to it.

"The delinquent who still wants to stay with us, which we will find very flattering indeed, will be chained to the pole..." He took a long dagger from his belt and fiddled with it looking at the convicts one by one. "We will hand him this superb dagger. Better still, he can get anything he wants: sword, spear, axe... And then we will let our pets out of the cages... Only one of them to begin with!"

He walked to the window and signaled the attendants who stood there. One of them immediately went inside the building opposite the courtyard and soon an enormous white shape furiously threw itself at the thick bars of the cage. The bass roar of the beast stopped everyone from breathing.

"Can you see that saber-toothed tigress?... She is very hungry and furious!... We have not been feeding her for a week and taken her cubs away from her!... And for the one who manages to defend himself from her we have prepared far better attractions," he displayed his teeth in a grin. "It is a very interesting dilemma: to let oneself be killed at once or to obey one's instinct of self-preservation and put up effective defense. And I know you are perfectly capable of that. Such a tigress is nothing for you, is it?! But then it will be less pleasant, I assure you, but that is a surprise..."

He walked across the room and sat on the throne again.

"So? Does anyone want to see what will come out after the saber-toothed?"

He found the silence very satisfactory.

"Great. As everyone wants to take a walk in the jungle, the captain will hand you maps with the most convenient pre-planned route and will give you the necessary equipment."

He wanted to dismiss them, but remembered some other issue.

"Should anyone stay on the other side, he will not live for long more. Before you depart, you will be injected poison. It is very slow. For the first month the substance injected will make you stronger and faster than the soldiers from my elite detachment. You will appreciate that in the jungle. That amount of time should be sufficient for you to reach the other side and return. However, should anyone decide to stay with out dear relatives - and such temptation you will surely feel - the dark side of the drug will be revealed - it will start killing you."

He spoke so peacefully as if he were explaining how to cook his favorite dish. Then he paused for a moment, looking for something in his pocket. When at last he found it, he showed a little vial containing a transparent fluid.

"When you return, this medicine will protect you from the effects of the drug. Believe me, if - before forty days - you do not take the antidote, you will be begging every creature in the jungle, be it small or big, to be so kind as to devour you! That is a nasty drug but having taken the antidote the threat will pass instantly. Now, I won't detain you any longer!"

With a gesture he ordered the prisoners out and left through the back door to his private chambers.

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They set off early morning. They had a reputation of daredevils, which was confirmed by a high reward set on each of them. But now they felt the seriousness of the situation - they had to work together or they would not survive a day! Even Doto and Nabsar realized they had to put aside old dissensions and cooperate. It was not easy.

"How's your dear companion?" The commander's question was addressed at Nabsar. "What was all the thing about so that your anger burns that hot?" Ken-Omar did not like the behavior of the two; their hatred threatened the entire mission. He was appointed the leader of

the group – the strongest of the dozen, he used to be a marine in Mezza’s detachments but was imprisoned in the dungeons for attempting to seduce one of the ladies in the court. Before they set off, everyone obeyed his commands without any objections as he was the most experienced of them all. Even among such vile fellows he aroused immense respect. But he had to know everything about them as not to be surprised.

“I’d rather not talk about that or the old demons will wake up again,” growled Nabsar and spat with rage. “It’s just that he betrayed me and ran away with my share of the rob. I almost got killed and my woman... Mahallos’ cut-throats have been playing around with her ever since... It can’t even be called slavery. I saw her fate down there... Damned Doto!” Despair and rage aroused by the memories stopped him from speaking.

“If I come back safe and sound, which doesn’t seem so sure at all, I’ll try to rescue her. If it wasn’t for that, I wouldn’t care where I died. With money for accomplishing the mission I still stand a chance to get her back.”

Ken-Omar asked no more questions. He stopped for a while to catch up with Doto, who was walking a few steps behind.

“If Nabsar doesn’t kill you, I’ll do it as soon as you do something stupid! Understood?!”

Doto was surprised and clearly wound up but did not respond to those harsh words. He screwed up his lips and moved on fast. He would come back to that conversation later on, when convenient.

Having passed a few miles of sparse wood they stopped in front of a dense wall of shrubbery. They have arrived at the gates of green hell, one of those abysmal wild spaces where their only friends were the rays of the sun that penetrated the thicket here and there.

“Open your eyes wide!” said Ken-Omar, holding a map in his hand. “We’re walking evenly. Yelo and Halva walk ahead and Tamli in the back.” The three guys mentioned used to be trackers and knew the predators’ behavior well. They had fought against them many a time and now they were supposed to be the five senses of the expedition. The two men moved to the head of the column without any hesitation. Tamli, who had already been walking in the back raised his hand in an offhand salute and grabbed his dagger harder.

“There’s one thing you must know,” his resolute voice attracted the others’ attention. “Leave us the predators and you watch out for insects as they are hundred times more treacherous. Be careful not to trample on a nest or move some damned ant house. They can be well masked and once that nasty stuff comes out, we got a problem. That’s all.”

Those words surely did not raise their spirits but they comforted themselves with the promised reward. Besides, Meza had not lied to them – the injected drug perfectly sharpened their senses and poured fluid, invigorating fire into their veins. It was a wonderful sense of power and control over their bodies.

“Now we’re walking along the route marked, but several miles away we’ll be left with only a general direction. We’re not speaking if possible. Should anything happen, you know the sign.”

*

It was Doto’s fault. Nabsar had good intentions but his former companion misread them. During a stopover they were eating their hard tacks in silence. Major was studying the map. Doto, who had stopped eating, kneeled down on one knee to tidy the fastening of the heavy shoe. Suddenly he noticed Nabsar reaching for his belt to get a dagger and looking his direction

with noticeable strain in the eyes. The others did not see anything so he decided to take a decisive action or he would be the first to end the journey into the unknown.

It all happened very fast. Nabsar held the knife with confidence and positioned himself to make a throw when Doto, pretending not to see anything, took a little razor-sharp disc from one of the legs of his pants and in a flash threw it at the adversary with a strong move of his wrist. A short swish made everyone stand on their feet.

"You... ff... fool!" wheezed Nabsar, dropping the knife and clutching his throat. Then he fell down on the face.

Everyone stood motionless looking not at Doto but at the undergrowth right at his feet. The man could not see the object of their interest but he felt a painful prod on his thigh and realized that Nabsar had been the first to have spotted the reptile creeping towards him. Despite old accounts he had wanted to save the companion's life but his intention had been misinterpreted.

Normally, the viper's venom would have paralyzed the man and sentenced him to slow death, but the drug in Doto's veins mixed with the reptile's toxin, changed its effect and rammed the brain. The man started dancing frenetically. He saw nothing but dark-red spots filling all his vision while all acoustic sensations were strengthened. His own chaotic steps sounded in his ears like the charge of some predators' band so he lunged forward and ran away in panic. After a while he disappeared from the others' sight.

Tamli's yell woke them out of shock, "Insects! They sniffed blood! Ruuun!"

Indeed, the blood spilling lavishly from Nabsar's slashed throat formed a pool and its scent lured the ants patrolling nearby for prey. The insects immediately informed the colony and started consumption. They were extremely voracious. Their jaws worked like scissors. Soon the grass came alive, shoved aside by thousands of red killers rushing towards the corpse. They were size of a man's hand. For a moment, the rest of the detachment watched their companion body literally disappear in sight but soon they found themselves dashing through the thicket to get as far away from the preying insects as possible.

"Stop. They aren't after us anymore. They are feeding at the corpse," shouted short-breathed Ken-Omar. "We must get ourselves organized."

That very moment they heard dreadful screaming coming from the side. The Major looked at the seven men and understood that Eshba and Zaan were missing. Running fast they had noticed a thicket of lianas in front of them and trying to avoid entangling in them at full speed they had turned left.

They saw the cobwebs of she-spiders, precisely hidden from sight of potential victims when the momentum was too big for them to stop or warn the companions. Attempts to cut the web with razor-sharp knives, that would penetrate human muscles and sinews like they were made of paper proved futile against spiders' astonishing yarn. The threads produced by the she-spiders were too sticky and flexible for knives to break them. As a result, the daggers were soon covered by sticky secretion and were good for nothing. On top of that they got stuck to the victims' hands and limited their defenses.

Their companions ran fast towards them but localizing the wretches was not easy. When, eventually, they got there, they were again petrified with fear and disgust.

The she-spiders had not intended to wait any longer for their prey to use all their ideas how to break free. A few seconds after they received a signal that the cobwebs had filled, the hideous black-orange monsters would first cast a glance with a few pairs of pitch-black eyes at the victims paralyzed with fear, then disabled the wretches with venom and put them aside to the

food store. The men who arrived as rescue could only see the big spiders' abdomens disappearing in the bushes and cobwebs torn in the center.

"Big scoundrels," one of the wanderers tentatively touched the thread hanging from a branch with a stick. "I pity those bastards. A man shouldn't die like that."

Unwilling to wait for any further surprises, Ken-Omar ordered a retreat.

"Half a mile north the forest is a bit thinner," he whispered nervously. "Those are just the surprises we should be watching out for."

For the last time he looked at the thicket.

"Move it! Yelo and Halva, walk like before. And you, Tamli, watch over the others and react when they're about to do something stupid again."

*

The major bent down and examined multiple imprints covering the path. For a long while he would shove off the persistent images that had been haunting his memory for a few days. He would forget them once he returned, resting on the beach and enjoying the reward with a beautiful woman by his side... Enough! He returned to the reality and once again looked carefully at the paw imprints. They were not much smaller than human feet.

"It's wolves, indeed," he said to Tamli in an undertone, showing his appreciation. "You're really good. You heard them early enough and that saved us. It must be the same gang that attacked us near the marshland."

"We had more luck than then," commented the other man. "If we hurry, even today we have a chance to get to the river we saw yesterday from the hill. Across the river there must be the border of the jungle. Unfortunately, we don't know that for sure."

"If it wasn't for that damned fog, we could see the worst behind," hissed Ken-Omar. "It's covered the whole west bank."

Tamli could hardly breathe in the stuffiness of the afternoon.

"We got ten days to return. I feel the drug getting weak."

"That's why we must move on. We'll rest on the bank."

None of them could have foreseen that. As they were swimming across the river, the bandages on Ken-Omar's arm started to unwind slowly and water began to wash remainders of dried blood. They were tiny particles, but even that was enough.

"Did you see that flash in the water?"

Tamli slowed his motions and dived. After a while he emerged and with a peaceful voice announced that it was but a school of small fish.

"There's lots of them but they don't look dangerous."

The commander looked around the surface of water and as he saw nothing suspicious he threw his arms forward intending to cover the last stretch towards the bank.

They felt it at the same time. Something started to jerk their clothes furiously and they felt sharp pain. Panic stopped them from breathing!

"What the devil?!" howled Tamli at the sight of the shreds of his own flesh in troubled water. A moment later he understood what mistake he had made at evaluating the school of silver fish. One of them jumped out of water and clang at his cheek, biting at the body like a grind. After a while he fainted with pain not to come to his senses any more.

Two skeletons falling down to the riverbed and a spot of blood fading in the fast current of the river testified that the first expedition had ended with a failure.

Hundreds of years had passed. Adam's heart was growing heavier and heavier, his guilt bearing on his mind as he watched the growing degradation of the human race. And it was him to be blamed; he was the first line of defense; it was him that had been entrusted with so much by the Creator in return for so little – obedience. The price was not too high by any means. God had not required great self-denial or suffering. Adam would often wake at night with a scream, and then he could not fall asleep any more. He had all the same dream and he was unable to wake up before the dream had run all its way, like he was forced to relive the whole tragedy over and over again:

A fresh morning all around; the bad dream is over. It was just a nightmare, and the only reality is this wonderful birth of a brand new day. Adam wakes up likewise fresh and lively and wants to hug his beloved wife but he realizes that Ezer has gotten up before him. Sometimes, in the morning, they meet on the stream in which they bathe. Then they pick a basketful of fruit for breakfast, during which they either stay silent, awestruck by the beauty of the Garden or they talk and laugh. Now Ezer is sure waiting there for him so Adam gets up and goes through a bright tunnel of trees, along a wall of solid green, behind which there stretch colorful vast fields of flowers. Under his feet grow fine-looking plants among which a variety of creatures are buzzing, as beautiful as gems. He takes no special care not to trample on them as mysteriously their routes cross safely.

He cannot wait to see his beautiful companion illuminated by the golden sunshine, standing in emerald water. She will look at him coquettishly with a smile, invite him to spend another day in the paradise... The *Presence* has not surrounded them yet, as if the Almighty wants to leave the morning to them to strengthen their relationship, which He will bless thousand-fold later on.

But on the stream an unpleasant surprise waits for him – Ezer is not there! It's the second flash of the nightmare and he shouldn't feel that way! Never before has he had any bad dreams or unpleasant surprises. What's going on?! He shouldn't even know such feelings!

He runs through the tall grass to the coppice in the centre of the Garden. He will sure find her there and in a moment everything will be alright. Then the Creator will wipe their fears away for good and the day will run its usual, blissfully fascinating course. And at night they will be together again, alone! He felt overjoyed; it's worth living for those wonderful evenings and nights. NO, it's worth living for every single second of life. The evening may wait. The morning has so much to offer.

Then he saw her and his mind was pierced with the third, sharpest blade of darkness. He saw her in that same place as then – and back was the nightmare!

Gone was the freshness of the morning world... the green grew pale... and other hues ran down to the ground with a rusty smudge... Now he has gotten stuck in the middle of Eden as if standing in a desert of black. He's trying to run up to his spouse... who is just reaching for the fruit. But his legs are hampered by a spiral of a long and sticky scale-covered body. He wants to yell, but his larynx fails to yield a faintest sound. He wants to catch her attention by a gesture, even by the smallest movement of the body, but he finds himself paralyzed... Ezer does not

notice his presence; she picks the fruit and takes a bite... In that very moment Adam feels a stab of sharp fangs on his skin, his veins get filled with the reptile's burning venom that paralyzes his muscles. And now is he able to scream, at last, but it is a cry of a defeated man, who has just lost whatever was dear to him. But he keeps screaming, as if he is able to reverse the last minutes and avert the calamity. Then this very scream, in the real world, wakes him and Ezer, who is kneeling on the bed, stroking his head and trying to appease his mind.

When, waiting for the sunrise, he was thinking of the nightmare, he remembered that in reality it had been different. For he could have reacted that moment, he could have done something - and he did nothing. The dream was always the same and what was the worst was that it was not a warning but it mercilessly reminded him of that defeat. And in the morning, afternoon and evening, looking at human generations to follow, with his own eyes he saw what havoc that wrong decision had wrecked. Often he wondered whether there would remain one single family faithful to God through which the Creator would be able to send the Promised One to the world?

The minutes passed slowly, long as centuries. The Adversary got disturbed by the unusual self-control visible in the Convict's posture and he did not like that at all. He pushed a couple of his pitch-black servants in order to wake the inebriated legionnaires. He desperately needed some action. The soldiers were supposed to inflict the maximum pain to the Convict, whatever physical or mental suffering possible - attack Him on every level and give him no relief! They may break Him at last, they may achieve what had been impossible for all His young life.

But the Adversary found himself gravely disappointed with the Roman soldiers; they apparently deemed their work to have been done in a professional and skilled manner and now, in their opinion, they had deserved to have a rest with a decent jug of wine and a portion of roast. Besides, the apathy caused by the excess of alcohol and by the weird, gloomy scenery they were witnessing for the first time in their executioners' career proved to be irresistible.

Besides, surprisingly, all of a sudden they felt guilty. They were the proud legionaries of the invincible empire on behalf of which they committed legal homicides in all parts of the civilized world, here - in dead-alive little Judea - at the execution of the local fixated messiah they suddenly felt pangs of whatever there used to be their conscience ... But there was something unique in that Man, something they had never seen in any other convict before, something that aroused fear and respect, which suppressed their impulses of the usual soldierly churlishness. Even their tough and harsh chief officer endeavored not to look the convicts' way.

The idleness of the soldiers enraged The Bearer of Light, who had sat on his hideous throne right in front of the cross. The powerful vibrations of the dark energy that emanated from him appalled even the higher-ranked demons, legions of whom had arrived at the hill as they wanted to take revenge for all their failures and defeats.

"What have I brought you here for, wretched skunks?!" he yelled at them. "Leave those idiots alone; they are hardly conscious!" His eyes were burning with hate, "It's all taking too long! Do something or I'll send you all to the Abyss faster than He used to!..."

The memory of the humiliation they had suffered from *The Speaking-One* countless times burnt them like the fire of *Gehenna*. They hurled furious looks at Him, they clawed towards Him, but they there was hardly anything more they could do.

Suddenly, a commotion in the crowd caught their attention; the gaping spectators were making room for a group of Pharisees and Doctors of the Law led by the two high priests, who were treading with dignity. Demons started gasping with emotion: the tools were coming...

The Convict moved restlessly, knowing all too well what was going to happen now. And the men looked at Him and started provoking, cruelly offering an alternative He had been trying to push away off the weary mind with all His strength.

"Look, whom we have here," said ironically an elderly Pharisee, whose face radiated with glee he was not even trying to hide. "A great Rabbi and a powerful miracle-worker, hung upon a cross, so helpless... Always so wise, strong and confident... Well, well..." He shook his head in a mocked pity, and then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he looked up and cried, "Rabbi, we have a proposal for you: So many times have we begged you for a sign. Now there is a unique chance for you: get down from the cross and we will believe you are the Anointed One!..."

He paused, fixed his hateful gaze in the Convict's face, clearly delighted at His disgrace. The other of the newcomers, a Pharisee with a long and vulture-like nose, bent down, picked a fistful of dust from the ground and cast at the Convict and hissed:

"Hey, you that destroy the Temple and rear it up in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross!..."

The words aroused derisory laughter of his companions, and high priest Caiaphas, who had remained silent until then, addressed his father-in-law, dignified Annas, saying loudly:

"Isn't that curious that he managed to save others, yet he cannot rescue himself?" After which he turned towards the crowd standing around the cross, pointed with his outstretched hand at Yeshua and shouted, "He claims to be the Anointed One, king of Israel! Should it be true, let him come down from the cross! When we see him do that, we will surely believe in him!..."

They stood there, shaking their heads and deriding him, throwing words at him like they were stones. And they were taking delight in the sight of him and their victory over the man. At last they got him. Now he could not get away! Revenge went to their heads like strong intoxicant; they shared their opinions aloud, discussed, laughed. Two of them came up closer to the cross and one of them whispered loudly enough to be heard by those standing closer, "Rabbi, why did you venture go that far? See, what profits you've gained. Wouldn't it be better to have kept silent? But you fancied being a king..."

"And you look too poor to be our king..." added the other man.

"Rabbi", shouted yet another, "You still have a chance! Come down from the cross! Come on, don't linger!... Come down and crush your enemies!... In a moment it'll be too late"

The *Speaking-One* opened his eyes wider. The provocation turned out to be stronger than before. Now he was extremely exhausted and the perspective of quick liberation seemed much more attractive than a few hours before. The Bearer of Light sensed his hesitation and grinned at his subordinates with satisfaction.

"At last I have struck some sparks out of you, lousy sluggards," he hissed. "Do not waste the opportunity as the Lamb begins to break down. Show it to him even more clearly that it can all end in a flash... A word of his will be enough and all that human scum will turn to dust..."

"Do not count on that," said the *Speaking-One* with effort, more towards the black throne and the one who pulled the strings than towards the human puppet. "I have not come to destroy but to save them... And your time will surely come..."

The reaction to those unexpected words was a roar that none of the demons had heard before. Even such powerful creatures crouched and shrank out of fright. Now they looked

exactly like the leather wine bottles squeezed despairingly by the soldiers to get the last sip of sour wine out of them. The provocation turned against the provocateur. Enraged by the humiliation, like a lightning he flew above the city. Hate and fury flooded him like a red wave of blood. Another time he felt helpless. What blow can you deal to the one who had suffered all possible torture? How can you break someone who should actually have lost his senses long before and who still remains unbroken?

“Behold the man!” said Pilate. Then he had not paid attention to the ruler’s words at all, but now he understood the whole nature of his failure. For a long time he had not dealt with true people, whose humanity remained unspoiled by the fall. In all his deceptive activity The Bearer of Light had met only three such people, out of whom the first couple surrendered so soon that the evil angel had not remained vigilant. Despite all his intelligence he had overlooked that one essential detail... And now he stood helpless in the face of the adversary, who despite all the intricate intrigues and multiplying difficulties remained a true Man, bearing a perfect image of God. In vain had been the millennia of deception. All his methods had proved ineffective and the list of other available means gaped with emptiness.

[...]

How could this adversary be broken? It was simply impossible, but he still would not accept that conclusion. Thus what he was left with were even more insults and the taste of power over a helpless victim, but that taste had now become very dull...

The *Speaking-One* did not even look his way. Instead, he took in his weary gaze the mountains surrounding the city.

“As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people” he recited with effort. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem...”

Ages before he had whispered the same words to comfort a prophet, weary with fight. Now the same stanzas carried consolation for himself. “So shall my word... not return... void, but it shall accomplish that which I please...” he struggled to say.

The high priests and their companions were petrified, struck by the Victim’s words and shocked by his peace of mind. Suddenly they felt gazes of the people present on the hill and they realized that the crowd, which they had been able to manipulate so easily since the morning, in a mysterious way had now stood on the *Speaking-One’s* side. In the people’s eyes they read that he again deserved to be their King!...

Annas nodded his head at the servant to hand him his walking cane, turned back and started to descend from the hill, while other dignitaries, shamefaced, followed him. They felt miserable though before they had been sure that the last look at the trouble-maker would relieve them and so the problem would ultimately be solved. But now none of them was so sure of that anymore.

Walking through the last rows of spectators they almost came up against an elderly man in shepherd’s robes, who was climbing tirelessly up the steep path. Annas shoved him off with disgust – shepherds were filthy men, they stank with sheep and ritual ablutions were abstract for them. Apart from that, most of them were thieves; at least such was the opinion among the elite and those who aspired to belong to the select few.

The elderly man waited patiently until the dignitaries walked past him, although it showed clearly how impatient he was. His eyes were wide open to see above the crowd’s heads. It was Achim. Others assumed the shepherd must have been a relative of one of the convicts so out of

pity and respect for the aged man they gave way. And he had to come here; he had to see for himself something very important. When he got as far as the first row of onlookers he stopped and started to look around timidly. He did not want to move forward too much, ashamed of his appearance. He stood behind someone and that moment he saw the convict. The impression was so dreadful that his knees bent. Seeing that, the young man who stood next to him grabbed his arm and helped him stand.

"Thank you, good man," said Achim with a trembling voice. The man nodded his head and gave him a scrutinizing gaze. The shepherd looked as if he was about to faint. He stared at the figure stretched on the cross and moved his lips silently.

"Do you know that man?" asked the young man.

The shepherd did not answer as if he had not heard the question. His lips started shivering and he held on harder on the lad's strong forearm. Eventually he looked at him fearfully.

"Did he... did he say something?" He clearly wanted to ask about something else but did not know how.

"He's not been saying much as he's in terrible pain. But a moment ago he said something to the high priests; something that enraged the dignified Annas tremendously."

"To Annas?!" The old man's eyes were round as saucers. "Did he defy the High Priest?! He cursed him?!"

The lad was bewildered. „Defied? What are you talking about, old man?" He was looking intently at Achim, unable to understand what the man had meant. "I've been here since they nailed them. The other two on the sides cursed the Romans, sure they did. But I haven't heard this man insult anyone. He's a good man." He looked towards the cross and shook his head with disgust. "I don't know how he could possibly deserve such death!"

"Really, he didn't defy anyone, didn't curse?!" The shepherd simply could not believe, but for the first time a spark of joy lightened his countenance. The young man was clearly astonished by the old man's reaction but he kept silent.

"So it was all lies?!" Achim held the lad's arms and shook them vigorously. "So there's still hope. The demon was lying! Do you understand. They always tell lies."

„Are you mad, old man?! What demon?!"

But the man did not listen to him anymore. He walked up to the cross bravely, taking no notice of the spectator's surprise and fixed his gaze in the convict's face. The man reciprocated the look as if he had been long waiting for the old shepherd. He wanted to say something but he had no strength. One look was enough, a look full of peace and consolation, like balm for despairing Achim.

"He was lying, wasn't he?! He was lying for sure!" He fell down to his knees waiting for the confirmation as his life depended on that. The night before the demon's words had almost killed him.

Another look of the convict's eyes deprived Achim of any doubts. Seeing His suffering he had a lot more questions but time for answers would come later. The most important answer had been given to him: He continued to be the Messiah and all the hell's demons were not able to deny that! He got up with a radiant face and praising the Almighty he blended in with the crowd. Everyone was looking at him like he was a madman but he did not care.

The Convict for a moment looked his way – another stray sheep that had finally found his way to the pen. Then he looked at the hills behind which Bejt Lehem was. The mountains again brought him the answer and consolation. Mountains... He remembered how water would slowly recede and the face of the land took its shape.

[...]

The run of His thoughts was brutally broken by a hateful hiss that surrounded Him on all sides. The Evil was so tangible and real that its breath burnt the Victim worse than the torn back exposed to another flogging with desert sand driven by the dry and hot wind.

"... and now there's nothing you can do!" The Bearer of Light hissed the words straight at His face. "No more flying in the sky, Little Bird, no more walking on water, Rabbi!... You'll no longer sneer me!... You're mine and there's no escape from here!"

With no regard to the radiance of Glory filling the tortured Man, he nearly stuck to Him, which caused a wave of disgust course through the Victim's body.

"Just look around," he spoke hoarsely to His ear. "All that heavenly circus is only waiting to help you. They can barely hold the line, that's how eager they are to fight! And what's wrong with you? Are you blind? No pain anymore!? Come on, call them and they'll sure help you! Aren't they still obedient to your command?..."

The whisper transformed into a growl of anger that was slowly picked by other demons and around the cross there suddenly sounded a million venomous tones, seething and gurgling furiously like a hot lake of pitch, and then they rose and turned into a deafening crescendo of animal frenzy.

"Come on, your majesty!" they roared drunken with their power. Call your toy soldiers, as they are bursting with energy!"

"They are going to tear us apart... they want nothing else! Don't you too, of course you do!..."

"We're scared!... We're appalled!... Oh, how much appalled!... They're going to kill us! No, please, don't!..."

They were trying to joke, but their desperation was all too visible.

Time was running!

In the rows of the *Angelos* standing at a considerable distance away from the hill the tension was reaching the zenith. Ready and stronger than ever before they were at the end of their tether and a single command would suffice for them. His single clear would be enough word and nothing could stop the avalanche of light from washing the dense darkness away, once and for all.

But that would have been only superficial. The *Speaking-One* knew it would have been no victory but the last flicker of light to confirm that the Adversary had always been right saying that the fallen race had always deserved its fate and the demands of the *One-Who-Is* were unfeasible for those weak, naturally flawed creatures. The rescue mission would have ended with the Everlasting One's admitting His defeat and passing the power over the universe on to the being whose essence of living was the annihilation of everything and all those who had not joined the rebellion. And the *Speaking-One* would have passed away forever, for had not it been written that the wages of sin was death?

Charter 9

The work was progressing fast and the location chosen for the construction site was not a coincidence. A gentle valley allowed them to freely store the timber and semi-finished products. High-quality wood was supplied by Noah's uncle Kelad's sawmill, and resin was easily available in the nearby forests. Easy energy obtained from efficient photovoltaic cells placed on the ever-sunny slopes of the nearby hills as well as power generated by enhanced-efficiency

hydrogen turbines, hidden in frame-buildings, allowed the timber to be produced cheaply and transported quickly. Wood was plentiful.

Kelad had one undeniable advantage: he asked no unnecessary questions and did not let himself be intimidated by the gangs of scoffers who would from time to time turn up around the construction site of the "Weirdness." Business was business and Noah would pay without delay in cash and in kind. He could offer many interesting devices which made the work of the sawmill more efficient so Kelad jumped on the opportunity.

Noah's sons, still very young lads, had been prepared to carry out a great rescue operation since they were children. They were supposed to accomplish the 'mission' as Noah's uncle would call it, as he did not believe the reasons for the efforts to build the ark to be valid ones. When talking to the builders he would never say that aloud but for him the whole idea of building a ship inland was absurd. That was the only point in which he agreed with the scoffers, although he hated their behavior. Anyone could do whatever they deemed right as long as they did not embitter others' lives. He would leave all that Noah's talk about imminent disaster unnoticed, and even though, lying awake sometimes he would look at the skies with fear, the morning shower washed away not only the tiredness but also all bleak visions of annihilation...

One evening, as he was sitting with all his family at supper, summarizing the day gone by, the conversation got sidetracked to Noah.

"By the way, how did our cousin get that weird idea?" asked his elder son.

"It's funny," answered Kelad, "but he's deadly serious he personally heard God announce him that. Got it?!... When I heard it the first time I almost fell off my chair out of astonishment! Moreover, he claims to be building the ship according to the plans he received from the Almighty, who told him to prepare for an imminent cataclysm. They are supposed to survive the worst of it and then populate the world again..."

"Ah, that's why they're working and learning so diligently as if the destiny of the world depended on their skills." Kelad's wife, Allena, joined the conversation.

She knew what she was talking about. Noah's all family had for years persistently studied the laws of nature and the achievements of their advanced civilization. The women were devoting so much attention and time to everyday work as if they were soon to take part in the finals of the Theory and Practice of Everything Contest, the main prize of which was survival in any conditions. The men, in turn, were slowly turning into an efficient Universe and Vicinity Service Team. They studied astronomy and medicine and also gathered books on all areas of applied sciences. Their intelligence and successes aroused admiration and badly-hidden jealousy of their neighbors. They could obtain and properly use complex alloys of metals, produce tools and weapons; they gathered documentation and spare parts to allow them to efficiently build devices for production of energy.

"And do you know what they store in those enormous warehouses on the construction site?" asked Kelad. "Once I managed to get inside as Noah had just finished fitting the transmission for my new saw and wanted me to help him load it on the vehicle. Then I saw some instruments there, allegedly to detect natural resources, but a lot of other equipment too, designed for illumination and heating rooms."

"Maybe Noah wants to fly his mysterious vehicle to the Moon or Mars as he's been preparing so much various equipment?" joked the younger son.

Everyone burst with laughter.

"You'd better not say that to him," advised Kelad. "He's deadly serious about that. He keeps on saying that big water will flood the world and only those who board the 'Weirdness' will be saved... He keeps on trying to persuade me into believing his obsession: 'We must prepare,' he

says 'for dramatic changes of climate will come and our comfortable life will end once for all. I have enough room on the ship. Make up your minds till there's still time. I invite you and your families!' He left me flabbergasted."

This time no one laughed. In silence they studied their own thoughts. But not all of them had the same opinion on Noah's behavior and his motivation.

Chapter 11

It's been six months since the Nibiru punitive squad had crossed the orbit of the Red Planet. Mars was far enough at that time so that its gravity would not change the precise trajectory of metal missiles. They were still accelerating and smaller stones flying in a row would outstrip the main object by almost a thousand miles. It would be a few more months for them to run the whole course of the journey. They formed a long and narrow wedge, the basis of which was Nibiru with the other objects positioned forward in a sword-like shape.

At a distance of a few dozen million of miles, upon a naked peak that was part of the biggest range of mountains on the planet, Anusar was looking through the view-finder of the greatest telescope that the caste of the Anunnaki had ever built. The other copy was not ready yet and at that time the observatory was the best facility of this kind. Having put a special filter that allowed to observe the sky in the vicinity of the sun, Anusar had an impression that he had just seen a little object there.

"Its because of the tiredness," he thought and went to the adjacent room to rinse his eyes with special fluid which removed dirt and refreshed the eyesight.

For a month the work in the observatory had not been about observing the sky but support the military intelligence. They had to observe the enemy territory. The turns of duty were increased to sixteen hours a day and everyone was exhausted with the work. The observations of outer space in the vicinity of the earth were limited to merely an hour a day between main activities. Anusar was just about to finish his watch when he saw something.

He returned to the telescope and looked into the space once again. The mysterious object would remain invisible for a while but a few minutes later the astronomer saw it clearly again. He immediately started calculations. He remembered all the necessary formulas and charts and did not need to look at any scripts. Besides, the calculations were facilitated by an analogue calculator - the latest achievement of the workroom in the capital. It shortened calculations by several hours, which allowed to make fast progress in the observatory's work. It was applied in mapmaking, in surveying the land; of course, the army was the first to order a few copies.

Anusar suddenly realized that he was standing in the face of what Kelad had asked him about! He felt drops of cold sweat running down his back.

"It's impossible! How could we have left it unnoticed before?... Of course, the stupid intelligence flooded us with their tasks," he thought annoyed.

He hurried downstairs where his superior was working. Metusher was a scientist in the rank of captain employed by the army.

"Could you take a look at that, captain? I've discovered a new object and completed all the necessary calculations. The object is approaching the earth - it's something big and solid enough to pose a threat."

The experienced astronomer knew his subordinate was not a panic-monger, so he treated his words with due seriousness and they both went to the dome protecting the telescope.

"It's positioned exactly at that object" explained Anusar. "I've tried different filters but this one seems the most appropriate."

Metusher did not comment on what he could see for a few moments. Then he looked at the calculations and a moment later resumed observing the space visitor. When he turned to the subordinate his face was pale like canvas.

"Have you double-checked the calculations?" he asked, deceiving himself that Anusar had made a mistake.

"Three times at least, captain. There's no way I've been wrong. It looks like we're in big trouble..." He almost ran out of breath and forgot using the formal jargon. "We must notify the command immediately," he said with emotion.

"You're right" replied the superior. "I'll do that personally."

He left the room and almost running he started to prepare for the flight to the capital. The information was so important that he had to deliver it personally. Too many spies were watching the team of astronomers' work to take a risk and send the information in any other way.

He was not aware how true his presumptions were. Indeed, nearby the observatory an enemy detachment was hidden but their task was not to monitor the conversations of the scientists. That stage had been accomplished. The commander of the group decided that the moment was right to attack.

"Get ready," he ordered his men. "That nest of hornets must turn to ashes, so aim well!"

The soldiers did not wait for any more encouragement from their commander. He had told them that the observatory observed the sky only officially. Actually, in one of the smaller domes there was an instrument for watching their territory, together with other devices the purposes of which they could only suspect. Years of training had not been in vain. They unlocked the missile efficiently and prepared the catapult. They gave their commander a questioning look. He waited for a while and then gave an order to launch.

From the action station hidden in one of the caverns the soldiers shot a small object at a peak that was half a mile away. The detachment was camouflaged so well and positioned in such an unexpected place that the guards of the observatory realized the danger when the dashing head was only seconds away from the target.

They had managed to lift the shields no more than halfway when the missile hit the target. The roar of the explosion reached the detachment dozen seconds later but their field-glass had already shown that the task had been accomplished a hundred percent. No one could have possibly survived that inferno.

The only witnesses of the mission of the Nibiru were now buried in the smoking ruins covered by remnants of the structure and tons of scorched rocks, which the main observatory of the Anunnaki had turned into. No one was to learn about what Anusar had seen. They were left unaware till the very end.

[...]

When Nibiru¹ was crossing the Moon's orbit, nobody on the planet was looking at the sky. On the dark side, the stars still shone brightly and they seemed very close, just within a reach. The *Speaking-One* watched the condemned beings with deep sorrow. He still loved them but wherever He looked, there was wickedness and evil. How to rescue that world? Only through Noah. There was no other alternative.

On the edge of the jungle a battle was raging. *Anunnaki* and *Andakah* once again flew at their throats. The generals and princes ruthlessly drove their armies into the battle, and every now and again lethal nuclear flowers bloomed over the fighting troops. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers that ran into the combat vanished in the atomic furnace within fractions of seconds, and the others were either burning or flying away carried by powerful shock waves alongside their chargers and vehicles.

It was as if the elements had been unleashed. The sun spun round. Scorched by the incandescent heat of the weapon, the world reeled in fever. Elephants were set on fire by the heat and ran to and fro in a frenzy to seek protection from the terrible violence. The water boiled, the animals died, the enemy was mown down and the raging of the blaze made the trees collapse in rows as in a forest fire. The elephants made a fearful trumpeting and sank dead to the ground over a vast area. Horses and war chariots were burnt up and the scene looked like the aftermath of a conflagration. Thousands of chariots were destroyed, then deep silence descended on the sea. The winds, began to blow and the earth grew bright. It was a terrible sight to see. The corpses of the fallen were mutilated by the terrible heat so that they no longer looked like human beings. Never before have we seen such a ghastly weapon and never before have we heard of such a weapon. (from Mahabharata)

[...]

Shepherds in the pastures and passers-by in towns suddenly looked up! As there, high up in the sky had begun a fascinating and eerie display and the sounds of the prelude would reach the spectators' ears in a few dozen seconds. Now they only watched with bewilderment, stared endlessly at the powerful flashes of light, around which there appeared numerous fractures of the crystal canopy, perfectly visible even with a naked eye. From among the explosions there came out dashing rocks, white-hot and hurling to the surface with a breathtaking speed, drawing smudges of fire, smoke and sparks behind them... When the sound joined the vision, the spectators were able to fully embrace the raw beauty and power of the display.

Hundreds of miles around the first crater pierced by the outposts of Nibiru there appeared other messengers of destruction and the sky resembled a gigantic firework shimmering with all possible colors...

So far, nobody had stopped watching the unearthly phenomenon. The great and the small with all their senses absorbed the unusual artistry of the act of devastation, with no thought whatsoever about their safety. The sword of Nibiru bewildered and amazed, immobilized its victims and made them stare incessantly as such a thing was not to appear in the firmament during the lives of numerous generations to come.

¹ Nibiru – according to Sumerian myths, it is a giant planet with a greatly elongated orbit, whose gravity causes great cataclysms every several thousands of years. In this book it is an imaginary asteroid that is used by God to trigger off the Flood.

The appalling recurrence would take place thousands of years later and that ultimate apocalypse would be even more lethal and ghostly, when the atmosphere vanished amidst terrible roar of the elements and the bonds joining the particles of matter got unleashed, their heat to scorch the entire planet.

The chondrite meteors hit the ground before they had burnt completely in the thick atmosphere. They fell on the city and smashed the impressive works of architecture and clouds of dust sprang up into the air.

The first to collapse was the great pyramid hit by the first meteor. It penetrated the beautifully crafted, gold-plated image of a smiling sun, one hundred-ell in diameter, which decorated the entrance to the dark entrails of the structure. The cosmic missile exploded under the floor of the main sacrifice chamber. The dead bodies of a dozen victims lying on the altar, their hearts torn out, the priests dressed in black standing around as well as the hideous statues of gods, all of it suddenly blended and melted together in a blinding flash of the detonation. The pyramid fell apart instantaneously, killing passers-by with metal and stone debris within the radius of a thousand ells.

[...]

The other meteors, as if encouraged by the evidence of their effectiveness, rapidly hammered the city into smithereens.

After two minutes the mission of Nibiru's escort had been successfully accomplished, yet the true drama was to begin just now. In the emptily gaping breach of the canopy there appeared the Angel of Destruction itself, big as a mountain and unpredictable in its velocity. It went through the icy shield like it was made of paper and having hit the dense atmosphere, it exploded two miles above the surface of the Earth. As the asteroid disintegrated into hundreds of deadly fragments, the canopy trembled and began to tear down. Its fall could not be stopped by any human force – the cataclysm enraged for good.

The asteroid's task was not the annihilation of all life on the Earth. Nibiru was only the key to the abyss. The explosion had not destroyed the iron core of the cosmic messenger, which – for a fraction of second – continued its journey towards the surface and finally hit it with the power of a million missiles.

And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

The key fulfilled its duty and the abyss was soon to be opened. Hidden under a ten-mile layer of rocks were enormous reservoirs of hot water, half a mile deep, which for too long had been begging for release, exerting gigantic pressure up against the rocks. Yet, until now, the walls of the prison had held fast and water could not escape despite the persistent action of temperature and corrosive volcanic substances dissolved in water. Now the balance of power had changed dramatically. At the moment the cosmic hammer hit the ground there was unimaginable roar and blaze thousands of times stronger than the lethal Flames of Hell.² Human notions of monstrosities hidden by gods and uncontainable nature were nothing compared to the reality controlled by the One, whom they would not accept as their God till the

² The imaginary name of nuclear weapons used in pre-flood times

very end. When, at last, the Almighty smashed the earth with his powerful hand, both the great and the small saw the true representation of hell and trembled before the horror thereof. The ground hit directly by the nucleus of the Nibiru vaporized as a result of the blast, while hundreds of cubic miles of rocks located in the vicinity of the epicenter got melted and splashed around like from a steelworks crucible, changing the landscape into something like sun-scorched Venus.

The powerful gust of the shockwave was spreading quickly like lightning beyond the baked land, devastating everything that stood in its way like a gigantic display of domino blocks. Buildings were falling apart, walls and fences were disappearing, trees lay uprooted and thick bushes flattened, torn by the infernal gales. People and animals flew far away, killed by the very acceleration that turned blood into lead, tore blood vessels and crushed soft tissues of their organisms.

Still, it was not the end. After the first thunder there sounded an ominous racket as the lightning-quick drill kept blazing its trail inside the rocky crust. In response to the collision, there moaned the gigantic reservoirs of water, amplified the sound of the planet's torn crust and sent in forward at a terrible speed. A few seconds after the bass prelude, there sounded the deafening hiss of billions of tons of water boiled with the heat of the planet's interior and squeezed to the physical limits of resistance, and soon the hellish noise was joined by a whole range of sounds of the apocalyptic symphony that announced the end of the first world. The sounds filled the entire firmament, ricocheted from the remnants of the canopy that was falling apart above the heads of the doomed race.

[...]

The reverberation of the raging cataclysm, although suppressed by the thick hull of the Ark, reached the passengers' ears. The monstrous shockwave caused by the fall of the asteroid rocked the ship, putting all its joints to a hard test, and when the core of the cosmic missile tore the ground, despite the great distance the massive structure trembled with terror like it was a living creature... And then Noah and his family heard another sound – the racket of a torrential rain when the streams of water married the sky with the earth...

Then another sound reached their ears – the patter of thousands of feet and the monstrous yelling of horrified people that chilled the marrow! Hundreds of people lurked forward to climb the sides of the enormous ship; mad with fright, they banged their fists against the sides, demanded that door be opened, begged and cursed, cursed and threatened... Whole groups of people fought to get as close to the Ark as possible. They pushed one another down and away, trampled over each other. Some tried to climb the ropes and yet others attempted to axe holes in the sides... To no avail, as the tough material was impregnable to any edge! There raged a ruthless fight for survival. Nobody cared for a neighbor, brother or friend. People scratched each other's eyes, dragged one another's hair, fought with fists. They tried to keep balance but all in vain.

Part II

My Beloved,

*How will you receive me when I've arrived to visit you? It's just a moment away.
The house of my beloved Father got left behind.*

*Now it's just a radiant point at the beginning of a long tunnel.
At its end is your world – beautiful as a jewel but doomed.
For thousands of years it's been waiting for the Promise to come true – it's been waiting for Me.
I've been here so many times but now it's going to be different – for you and for Me.
The Adversary is waiting for Me, too – he's standing ready with his sword drawn.
He wants to kill Me before it's too late.
But it's Me who will crush his head – once and for all!
I promised it to you a long time ago as it's only Me who can defeat him.
I'm coming to offer a sacrifice for you, perfect and unique.
Thanks to it you will live free of fear for the future.
You don't need to prepare anything – I got all it takes.
Even the tree out of which they will make the cross I have created.
But before all that we have to get to know one another better.
I got so much to say to you.
Be vigilant, I'll arrive in a moment.*

With love

Your Yeshua

The first images he remembered showed the crude interior of their house, the parents' faces and the sunshine playing in the leaves of olives growing outside their house in Nazareth. For almost all His life He also remembered the taste of home-made yoghurt sweetened with honey as well as the flavor of the first piece of bread, that was much more intense than later.

His exploring of the world was very rich. He seemed to absorb all the stimuli more accurately than other tots. With his astute eyes he watchfully studied the smile on the mother's face or Josef's mouth entertaining his son with funny songs. With great care he examined with his hands the shape and facture of a fig fruit, one of those that his father was taking for breakfast to the nearby building site where he worked. He listened with intense attention to simple rhymes, and with even greater interest to the Psalms sung by the cantor in the synagogue.

Miriam together with her husband would often think what was so special about their son and why so different he was from peers as the circumstances of his conception and birth had been so extraordinary? In the evening, as they sat on the flat roof of their building surrounded with a low security wall, watching over their sleeping treasure, they would often stare at the pink skies and think of the peculiar prophecies. For the time being, though, the vast and colorful expanse of the sky still kept the secrets that had intertwined with their lives with an invisible thread. Even now, two years after Yeshua's birth, everything seemed to them so incompatible with their simple life that unconsciously they were awaiting the heavenly Messenger of Light to appear once again and with a forceful voice announce that there had been a mistake and the prophecy concerned an entirely different family, in a distant place and time...

[...]

The issue only appeared as simple as the *chazan* tried to present it, and the student's astute mind still needed explanation. The words about the Soon of the Almighty had been stuck in Yeshua's mind ever since Joseph had quoted the verses at home. Neither could he come to terms with the contrast between the foretold glory of Israel and its situation for the most of her history.

Now, the two seemingly separate issues blended into one and intensified the importance and difficulty of the whole subject matter. Thus he kept asking:

“Rabbi, David says that Yahweh speaks to his Lord about his enemies fall under him. Who is the Lord, then?... In another Psalm you can read that, too.”

The boy asked the teacher to hand the scroll down to him and swiftly opened it on another passage. For his age of eleven he was already very proficient in searching the scrolls. He was able to find the needed verses among the densely written lines devoid of any punctuation.

Thy throne, oh God, is for ever, and ever,
The sceptre of thy Kingdom is a Wright sceptre
Thou loves righteousness and hatest wickedness
Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee
With The oil of gladness above thy fellows

“Can we say about Israel that they hated unrighteousness, as so often they had transgressed the commandments of *The One-Who-Is*? Now we are under Rome’s rule. If Israel were faithful, we would not be have been punished with this calamity” – Yeshua continued. “And Yahweh Himself addresses him ‘God’. Why would He address a man in that way, not to mention the unfaithful people, Rabbi?”

Zebadia remained silent.

He could not deny that the verse recently quoted by Yeshua together with the others posed a great complexity for interpretation and they inevitably led to the conclusions, coming to which seemed blasphemous to a righteous and faithful Jew, who declared his love to *The One* twice a day through the ardent words of *Shema Israel*. That truth was confessed in the morning, noon and evening, in joy and danger, in youth and on the deathbed: “Hear, oh Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone...”

“*Could that be other way?... NO, that cannot be thought of that way!*” Yet, he recalled the words of Isaiah:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
And the government shall be upon his shoulder:
And his names shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor
The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace

Would he be able to try to explain the verse if Yeshua asked about it? And one day he would, that was for sure.

“Through these words the Living-One calls us to remain faithful and await the Messiah. When He comes, He will defeat the enemy and then He will teach us the perfect faithfulness.” That was all he could say, but the subject had not been exhausted at all.

Indeed, Yeshua asked no more questions but he was not satisfied with the *chazan’s* explanations, either. Upon coming home, having done all his chores, he resumed musing over the verses he had read earlier. He could not focus on nothing else and finally, making sure his mother did not need any more help, he went up to the hill nearby and in the silence of the late afternoon he sank in thoughts.

Not only did he remember the verses but he also prayed to the *Living-One* for the revelation of the truth he deemed to be so important. He did not know why he cared about it so much. The

whole reality around him had ceased to exist. In His mind, among the thicket of questions, there still shone the prophecies:

“Thou art my Son, This day I have begotten Thee...”;

„What is his name, and what is his son’s name?...“;

„The virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel – God with us...“;

„For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given ...“;

„Wonderful, Counsellor“,

„The mighty God“,

„The everlasting Father“,

„The Prince of Peace“ ...

[...]

His young mind could not find the answer to the burning questions, but somewhere beyond the rational thinking, beyond the frontiers of human cognition there awaited the *Answer*. It was there for him. Yeshua had nearly reached it, nearly felt it – though not seen – the reality so dazzlingly bright and inaccessible that human eyes would rather burn to ashes than convey even the remotest echo of its radiance. From the position of a human being it was impossible to ascend to those endless and shining spaces, luring with their beauty like diamond beaches, since the *Beginning of beginnings* washed with the waves of light and colors. They existed right where between the opening and the fulfillment of the world’s history there passed not even a single moment, as the very definition of a moment lost its sense. Above all powers, above the crowns of kings and the greatest of emperors, above the undiscovered frontiers of nature and all that belonged to the material universe, above all wisdom, high above the summits of the noble ways of human knowledge and dreams – the beloved *Answer* awaited. It was that very realm to which the Spirit of the Almighty had raised the One, for whom it had been the eternal Home and Kingdom. Although the awareness of the truth and the Identity had for a short time been hidden from the Word in the labyrinths connecting the Throne with the mysterious processes of the Incarnation, now He had been given the understanding of why He had longed so deeply for this Reality – a time had had to have passed before He was able to bear that Revelation and continue to live with the consequences thereof.

[...]

There came the moment of fulfillment and suddenly Yeshua was amazed with the knowledge of the source of His own existence, as for the second time He heard that same ardent declaration of the King of Ages:

“Thou art my Son, I have begotten Thee!”

And it was impossible to affirm whether that meaning was conveyed by words, thoughts or the waves of the white light?... Instantaneously the magnitude of the message hushed all the other voices sounding before the Throne for the glory of the *Living-One!* At once, all the Seraphs and Cherubs grew silent... In one moment, the myriads of myriads of *The Angelos* bowed upon the sudden appearance of their Creator. He was standing there in the form of a young Son of Man, intimidated, although He was the one to arouse shyness in the beings He had once called to existence. In one moment he understood why for so many years He had asked Himself all those unusual questions. The *Answer* had invited him there: on the wings of a light dawn it had brought Him to the Father’s Throne, who looked as He had before – and He breathed with the same feelings and delight over the Only Begotten Son. The one of whom the whole fatherhood in heaven and on the earth was named, with love looked upon the Son, who was His perfect reflection and the fulfillment of all the needs and hopes of the Almighty.

Chapter 27

Yeshua was woken out of thoughtfulness by smiling Joseph, who shook the son's arm.

"Are you still with us?" he was looking at him with incredulity.

"You dozed off in such a moment?... Can't be... maybe you feel sick or something?" He was troubled by a strange expression on Yeshua's face.

"No father. It's alright. I was just deep in thought"

Every one was now standing around the table, ready to sing vigorously the Hallel – joyous psalms to praise the might of El Elyon, which were supposed to "blow up the roofs of the houses" with their energy. The neighborhood resounded with enthusiastic voices praising Yahweh. A moment later they were joined by Nahum's household.

When Israel went out of Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange language;
Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.
The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back.
The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs.
What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest?
thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?
Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs?
Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob;
Which turned the rock into a standing water,
the flint into a fountain of waters.

Yeshua sang together with them all. Before, they had eaten the lamb with unleavened bread, sipped bitter herbs; they had drunk red wine from cups. It was like in all the houses in Jerusalem. Yahweh rejoiced as He received glory from His nation, but especially from the Only Righteous One among the fallen – His Only Begotten Son, still hidden from the world and from the Enemy's vigilant gaze. Yeshua was celebrating Passover with his closest family far from the center of the capital. He was the one who once had guarded the multitudes escaping from the Egyptian slavery, it was him that had allowed the impatient Angel of Destruction to slaughter the firstborn of Egypt. He would become the perfect Lamb, tormented by his own nation, and his blood smeared on the rough wood of the cross would be the redemption and salvation for many stray sheep of Israel as well as for people for all the doomed world. Yet, he still was a young lad, who would only become Bar Mycwa in a few months.

As the seder feast had drawn to an end and everyone sat at the table, deep in thought, Yeshua went outside to have some meditation and prayer in solitude. Night was all around. The light of lamps did not shine outside the houses but the moon appeared in the sky to illuminate the tiled roofs of Jerusalem's buildings with silver luminosity. North of Nahum's house there towered the Temple Hill. The walls surrounding the Sanctuary were three times as high as the city's buildings. The sight was very impressive. The Sanctuary seemed even more powerful in the moonlight, which made the golden tops of the Temple shimmer like diamonds. High up in the sky the stars shone as brightly. They were well visible despite the domination of the moon's silver disc. The scenery looked strangely familiar... Yeshua once again looked at the Antonia fortress and suddenly he experienced a revelation – the four strong corner towers descending

towards the ground with a slight slant so much resembled the buildings in Thebes, the capital of Egypt. The same moonlight, the same constellations shining against navy blue firmament. In a distance were the shapes of the great pyramids, powerful temples and the dismal necropolis – the city of the dead lurking in the moonlight like a stone monster. The vision returned and its significance weakened young Yeshua's knees, who felt like Daniel once had. He did not fall only because the powerful hands of the Archangelos sustained and strengthened him.

That was the night, Night of Passover, foretold by the mouth of the Holy One of Israel. The Father moved His mighty right hand and upon that sign the heavens opened.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

The perspective had changed: no longer was he a young son of man but the powerful Son of the Highest One, His Word. He had descended on the Father's command to personally watch over the liberation of His chosen nation from the Egyptian jail. Suddenly the night was brightened by the Heaven's golden radiance and the powerful hosts of The Angelos noiselessly surrounded the province of Goshen with tight lines and drew their shining swords. The sight of the heavenly warriors was vigilant and focused. Their Chief in Command stood in the center of Thebes and looked at the lofty buildings and the dead statues – of those pretenders for divinity worshipped by the stupefied people of Egypt. In the Valley of Kings soared obelisks densely covered with inscriptions of victories of the rulers and blasphemous sculptures of deities. Far away, in the north, there lifted the impressive pyramids. In the moonlight they seemed so majestic but now their pride rang with pathetic emptiness in the face of the *Speaking-One's* power. In the palace sat Thutmose III. His silhouette and look still expressed fierce impudence. He had turned down the last chance to save himself and the country. He had sentenced to death his relatives as well as hundreds of thousands of other subjects, old, young and children, but he still had not realized the truth of the terrible consequences. Yet, he felt that outside the palace the power appeared, the echo of which he had sensed before in Moses – the messenger of Yahweh. Now, upon the land of pharaohs there had descended the Son of the Almighty to meet out the punishment foretold by the mouth of his faithful servant. The air in Thebes pulsed with peculiar bass sound. Its frequency could not be heard but the body and mind was able to receive it clearly. The ghostly rumble aroused a strange fear, undefined dismay. It came from the boundless universe, but the foundation of the earth, hidden deep inside, responded to that tone with due respect. Sand and rocks trembled in reply to the call. Thutmose could not walk up to the window; he knew that at that moment he had no control over the events. He was no more a divine pharaoh but a mere mortal and all his spiritual allies had turned against him. Where were Ra, Osiris and Isis? Where was their might?! They had flinched instead of standing up for their

worshippers. The attitude of priests sneaking along corridors of the palace expressed helplessness and fear of the powers unknown to them. It reflected the painful humiliation of the spiritual leaders of Egypt that moved human puppets to their undoing. The *Speaking-One* left Thutmose to his own thoughts and moved to Goshen. The province was on the alert, and so were its inhabitants. The invisible Heavenly Messenger again yearned for fellowship with the beloved people and wanted to participate in the preparations. All the doorsteps and door-frames ran with blood of the lambs that were hurriedly baked over fire. They were about to have that last meal in the land of their oppressors, ready to depart, their loins girded, shoes on the feet. Little and older children watched their parents, curious about the weird atmosphere in the homes. The packed baggage sat at the door; amidst various utensils and clothes there glistened gold and silver objects lent to them unexpectedly by their Egyptian neighbors. For the first time had they seen so much gold. It was modest remuneration for the centuries of hard toil, incommensurable with the merits Egypt owed to Joseph in the days of the famine. In return they tasted the bitterness of tears and still felt the pain inflicted by the supervisors' whips. The last year was the worst; they had worked harder than they possibly could, without any relief, as if the gods of Egypt had wanted to suppress in them any hope for liberation and to sow the seeds of hatred towards Yahweh's messenger. At first they would not believe their fate could change but slowly the veil fell off their eyes and they noticed how faithful God of Avraham was. When they trusted Him, the plagues started to afflict Egyptians only. Around the pharaoh's land withered but they would return to their homes safe and sound. They had not lost any cow or sheep, no ear of corn had gotten wasted in the fields; the sun had shone incessantly in the sky and their bodies had been vibrant, fertile and healthy.

Now the slavery was about to end but they were afraid what the future held for them. That night was awe-inspiring, that is what they could say. They sensed history being made outside, they were aware their God worked, whom they would soon get to know better. Obedient to His commands they had sprinkled the door-frames with blood of the lambs and shut the door tight. At night there would arrive the Destroyer, the appalling Abaddon – the Angel of Annihilation dwelling in the unexplored black abyss. They did not fear for their own lives but weird trembling sank in their bodies at the thought of the visitor carrying death to the firstborn of Egypt. Moses' words were full of horror:

For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.

Would they hear the footsteps of Yahweh's messenger? Would Abaddon start to bang at their doors and paralyze them with icy fright?... At the dawn they let go of those fears. They felt comfort – the holy presence of HaShem was with them and guarded the peace of their hearts and minds.

The *Speaking-One* saw that all the families had managed to get ready for the Passover and had obeyed their God's commands. There was no house which the Destroyer had the right to claim; there was no family trembling in fear of Yahweh's wrath. The Son of the *Living-One* accepted their sacrifice and strengthened His people. That night no one would be struck by any evil; they would all see the morning and depart safely.

Midnight was coming. A gloomy host approached the *Speaking-One*. How different were they from the bright The Angelos. The space around their Commander started to wave and

sluggishly filled with icy fumes of the abyss. There approached the one who frightened and murdered – the Angel of the Abyss in his own person, and with them arrived the cohort of vicious spirits. For ages he had changed names, ruled in various lands to the undoing of his subject, oblivious of his true nature. Once beautiful and perfect, the Son of the Morning, the Bearer of Light, now he shone with matt luster of annihilation, like he was a moving statue sculpted in a lump of iron. For countless ages, the former glory of the Creator had transformed inside him into the glow of death. His stern face expressed an impatient intent of action. The appearance of the demons that stood behind him resembled his own form – all of them with menacing and austere faces, which expressed cruelty and malice. They stopped a few steps away from the *Speaking-One*, trembling in the face of His holiness and power. Only their infernal commander showed no respect. He came up near Him and spoke with a loud voice:

“Hail, Master. We are meeting again,” he spoke with an indefinite expression on his face. “You have called me, so here I am. Ready to act as I always am.” He put his hand on the handle of his sword and kept looking at his Creator defiantly.

“Ready to act, as you always are,” repeated the *Speaking-One*. “Always, where there is death and destruction. It is your mission. You know what task you are to accomplish.”

“I know it perfectly. First we will go through Goshen; I must make sure they have a right to live...” He turned towards his squad and made a sign at them. The *Speaking-One* was walking beside the death squad. He was at peace and full of love for His people. The Destroyer was looking at Israelites’ houses with a scrutinizing look, hoping that there, too, he would be allowed to strike, but as he passed by subsequent households the grimace of rage intensified on his countenance. He had no right to those people! None of them!... The scent of the Passover lamb irritated him. It aroused weird notions and he found them hard to define. The sacrifice posed a threat though he did not know what the cause of those bizarre sensations was. His demons were following him obediently – they tried not to look at the *Speaking-One*. He frightened them.

“Have you made sure they are not your people, Son of the Morning?” The last words sounded with power of authority, to which the addressee reacted with a rapid movement of the head. “None of them will be struck by your sword. You have no right to them!”

“For the time being, indeed, I do not, Son of the *Living-One*, but that is but a matter of time.” The riposte was severe. The *Speaking-One* knew that the Destroyer would take his toll among the people.

“As there is nothing for you to seek here, go and fulfill your duty, Son of the Darkness!” This time there were no euphemisms or camouflaged implications.

As he heard his true name, Abaddon did not want to listen to the Holy One’s words. He turned back and moved with his host towards the Valley of Kings. That was where the mission should begin. The first one to fall would be one of Thutmose’s III grandsons – the pharaoh would at last be rewarded for his faithful service. He had gained so little and would lose almost everything – a splendid deal, close to an ideal. The coin with which the abyss paid her servants sounded like funeral bells. It did not ring with a merry melody of gold – its voice was lament and moaning. Hell opened its treasure chest and started to lavishly scatter them all over Egypt. The payback time for the years of maltreatment, for the death of thousands of infants, for ungodly adoration given to statues, which could not speak with their mouth, see with their eyes or hear with their ears. For a hundredth, a thousandth time in the history of the planet the squadrons of the Bearer of Light took their gory toll and took delight in the effects of their work. It was them that had begun the work of destruction and now they would crown it.

There was not a single household in Egypt that one of the messengers of death did not visit. Their swords stabbed the sleeping ones, they took lives of those who were spending an intoxicating night with their beloved ones, who for some reasons went outside the house, wandered along the road, guarded palaces and temples. For a fraction of a second they felt acute chill and saw a ghastly shape, black as the depth of the universe, and then they died. The survivors had to part with those who accompanied them – children, spouses, parents. Dead were guardsmen, priests and even the firstborn of cattle. It came with a weird, wailing hum of the wind, which woke all Egypt and made them watch their beloved ones die.

Thutmose heard his daughter's-in-law scream and a moment later he was in her chamber. She was holding the body of little Imhoshet – the firstborn hung inertly and his face was pale as chalk. His mother was unable to speak a word. Death had fallen so unexpectedly that Nephheres thought she was still dreaming. Thutmose grew faint and needed to sit down on the cold base of the chamber. Had he known how dreadful that last plague was going to be! He still heard those words:

...for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.

And now he had seen that power and cursed the day when he had denied obedience to God of Moses. It did not matter now what would happen next. Till the end of the world the people would curse his reign. Thutmose III – The One Who Plunged Egypt in the Shadow of Death! Nephheres' scream had alarmed the guards, who now turned up, led by Ahmotes. The captain threw a quick gaze around the room looking for enemy, but a moment later he understood what had happened. His gaze rested on the pharaoh. Seeing no reaction of the old man he left and gave orders to search the entire palace. After a while the soldiers returned with bad news. Ahmotes ran out of the palace and mounted his horse. He had to make sure whether his house, too, had been visited by death. In a moment he would find out he belonged to those lucky ones who had bid their firstborn ones farewell long before. His eldest son had died crushed by the wheels of a chariot at Megiddo, when the horses found themselves within the range of Canaanites' arrows. His wife was safe, although next morning she would have to bury her eldest brother. The night echoed with lament and moans of the ones that had got left behind. In every house lights had gone on and people ran confusedly there and fro, looking for the reason of sudden demises; they kneeled with their fists clenched towards the stars; they lay motionlessly on the dead bodies of their beloved, whispering despairing words of the last good-bye.

Egypt descended to hell, swallowed as one.

*

In the land of Goshen the doors of the houses were still shut. Towards the province a detachment of riders was approaching at full speed and behind them rose a dense cloud of dust. After an hour they got to Moses and Aaron's house and having explained something briefly they took them inside the chariots. Thutmose did not wait for the Habiru, crushed by the burden of disgrace and misery. In his name the men were greeted by the pharaoh's governor. Standing in front of the palace he imparted the will of the ruler to them:

“At dawn you are to depart! Each and every one of you! And beg your God for our sake. We wish He would not be angry with us. These are the words of Thutmose III, the divine pharaoh.”

The last words were almost whispered. He did not wait for the reply but immediately went inside the palace accompanied by guardsmen. The brothers looked at each other. The night was drawing to an end and it was high time they had departed. The chariot took them back.

*

Over the desert Shur it was dawning. The moon had disappeared beyond the horizon to illuminate faraway lands, so much happier than Egypt, while the sun was drawing towards the horizon. In an hour's time it would get to the Nile delta. It was not the gold face of Ra, unaware of having lost thousands of his subjects. Now his name was but an empty sound, just like the names of the other deities. The Son of the *Living-One* had executed judgment against all the gods of Egypt and now here they were – trampled in the dust of the desert, helpless!

The *Speaking-One* was standing amidst His nation and the holy breeze of the Spirit was streaming His hair and stroking the face. His silhouette was aglow with the triumph he had won in the power of His Father. The eyes shone with the holy fire of justice.

In the province of Goshen there began the exodus – under the watchful look of the mighty *Angelos*, hundreds of thousands of people were leaving their houses. They took the area in their gaze for the last time, shut the door and knelt in the circles of their families to thank *El Elohe Israel* for making it through the night, for surviving the years of affliction. They begged for a safe passage for themselves and their herds, for getting securely to their destination. Their black silhouettes stood out clearly against the light rocks and sand. They were joined by plenty of foreigners, who were able to objectively evaluate the assets of both the nations. With all clarity they noticed the contrast between the tawdriness of the gods of Egypt and the holy *El Elohe Israel*, invincible even in the foreign land, which he had brought about too ruin and thrown at His feet. The choice was simple – the gods of Egypt had disillusioned them and did not deserve even a grain of pity, while their future could be secured only by *El Shadday*. He did not thrust away those who wanted Him to be their King.

Slowly, the roads in the entire province filled with groups of wayfarers. A wide river of people was forming, strengthened by small streams flowing out of settlements and little towns, which merged into larger tributaries. The children of Israel were moving forward like a strong current, led towards freedom by the Conqueror of Egypt coming in the name of Yahweh.

And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

The rows of the *Angelos* were slowly preparing for leaving their posts. The mighty warriors were still watching over the numerous groups leaving their households, but when the last of them had stepped onto their road to freedom, the hosts regrouped and stood on the sides of the long and wide southbound column of Israelites. On every side they were safe.

This is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.

At some moment, not far away from the head of the column, a bright flame came into view and soared skywards instantly to almost touch the stars and then it widened at the base and moved... All of a sudden, three million of human silhouettes froze. So far they had been feeling

His Presence and now their eyes saw the wonder they had never seen before. The column of white fire dazzled but did not blind; it towered majestically and pulsed like it lived its own life. Suddenly its color turned gold although at the comparison the earthly metal would have looked like a dirty lump of copper. It was the quintessence of the gold color, the matchless ideal carrying warmth and comfort, representing the Throne of Glory and Might itself. None of the three million people inquired the reason for this unexpected spectacle in the desert just like they did not wonder why they had left Goshen and where they were heading. They stood with their eyes fixed on the unearthly phenomenon and desired for nothing else but stand and look, look and admire!... The years of punishing toil seemed to them like a short while and the unbearable memory of the oppressors' heavy boots crushing them to the ground had gotten light as a feather! They would have keenly gone through that once again as long as they had been given the opportunity to experience that magnificent revelation once more.

[...]

The sun was about to rise. Yeshua ben Joseph for the last time looked at the dawn and slowly returned to the reality. Around was the panorama of the Holy City plunged in silence. It was time to go back inside and have some sleep. The night of the vigil had come to an end.

[...]

During another Passover He saw one more confirmation of his fate. Again He entered uncle Nahum's house, sensed the atmosphere of the festival and... he saw the body of the lamb being prepared for roasting by the women!

He was shocked as never before had He paid any attention to one detail: the lamb's body was cross-stretched and one of the elements of the wooden grill went through it bottom to head, while the other was arranged crosswise the animal's back to tie its limbs onto it. It was a usual part of preparations of the dishes for the Passover supper; such prepared lamb was put on fire. And that was how the body of the perfect Lamb was to be prepared for the sacrifice one day! When He had realized that, He had to go outside the building, like on that memorable night when the Spirit of the Almighty had carried him to Egypt. This time all his body trembled out of fear and terror. He sang the Hallel for the glory of his Father but doing that He felt so powerful emotions that He often had to turn his face away so that the family could not see how pale it was even in the candlelight, to burn with the fire of sadness and fear a moment later.

Then He could more and more often notice the signs that announced successive miles of his journey through the world to the Hill of a skull. When, like every morning, He entered his workshop and took the tools to work, his gaze would always fall on a heavy hammer and a bucket of thick iron nails that perfectly joined the wooden elements of house structures He helped to build. He knew it all too well what other purpose they served; He had seen it on the road to Jerusalem, heard reports of witnesses of other executions. Slowly He got to know the details of his last hours as a Son of Man. They haunted him in the dreams, they fell on his mind in the middle of a sunny day, when He put his tools aside and reached for a bottle of cool water to quench his thirst, when He carefully put aside skeins of thorns as He widened the fence in the neighbor's vineyard.

He often remembered Joseph's words; "Remember son, only faithfulness and trust, without them there's no welfare..."

The price of faithfulness in the face of death was very high but He was willing to pay that price. The awareness of the goal gave meaning to the path He was soon to begin to walk. The

goal was not just suffering and death. It was not the end of Isaiah's song. A joyous crown was awaiting him:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

"That world must be saved!" - how many times had He repeated those words?...

They first emerged at the surface of his consciousness when Eve was reaching for the forbidden fruit. Then they became the main theme of his existence. They resounded in the heavens when He was talking to his Father and now He brought them to the very lowland, to the enemy's ground, out of whose claws the mankind had to be rescued. He would save that world, at least its most valuable tissue. They would be few, like the crew of the Ark, but like Noah and his family they would go forth onto the new, perfect land and inherit it for ever.

Now the aim of his discussions with the Father and the study of the Scripture would be the strategy, the rescue plan for the fallen ones. Before, only individuals could be led along as the nation had been too resistant. Now the time had come for a new solution, which nobody had ever considered before. All the prophets were near the solution of that riddle but their time was too distant from the fulfillment of the words they wrote. He was the one to dictate them the prophecies, even the most dramatic ones. Now, standing on the other side of Heaven, anew He realized their meaning, as if He opened a letter from the past, the author and addressee was himself. He knew He had to understand the message before He could proclaim it to the others. Now the whole meaning of the message had become clear to him so He would do everything it took to pass it on to people. Would they be able to recognize him?

[...]

The sound of thunder heralding the coming of the eternal division between people was also the gong to begin the last act of the drama. The Bearer of Light looked towards the cross, deluding himself that it had not been yet lost, that still he could win. Again he tried to intervene but at that moment it was impossible to get near the Convict - the Ultimate Atonement was being executed and *The-One-Who-Is* admitted no one near the Holy of Holies which the hill had become. The Almighty was looking into the face of the High Priest-Sacrifice and accepted his perfection. But the completion of the ritual required one more, the most important element...

The *Speaking-One* opened his weary eyes and with the utmost fear expected his fate. All his life He would avoid sin, He had fought it by conscious keeping the way of the righteousness and obedience. It was true, He had never disdained sinners and on the Father's behalf He had accepted them the way they were but always on such an occasion the most important sentence had been spoken, which had determined the terms of the Covenant:

"I do not condemn you, go and sin no more!"

Now, the rules of the fight against this age-long enemy required that, despite the disgust, He should take upon himself all people's transgressions beginning with Adam until the last man to believe before the end of the time of grace!...

He knew it all too well what it would involve and now He was being reminded of that all: Eve's lustful eyes as she had reached for the fruit and her husband's passive curiosity as he stood aside... Again He had to watch the countless murders, frauds and lies; He smelled the stench of fornication and the filthy breath of rapists, violating their victims in the darkness. He could not avoid contact with guilt of the most corrupt villains and perverts, who had left behind burning villages, impaled or hanged bodies in their last convulsions. And He took them upon himself for the criminals had taken the chance and often in the last moment begged forgiveness. And they received it – as the gift of grace and for free. There was not a sin too hideous for the *Living-One* as not to be forgiven in the face of repentance and an honest confession. They were blood-scarlet and fetid like latrine, lethal like poison – and the *Only Sinless One* took them all to destroy forever and crush, erase them once and for all.

All of a sudden The Bearer of Light realized that the foundations of his impregnable fortress were shaking. He could do nothing about that as even He found the horror of the phenomenon overpowering. He stood there and watched the thousands of years of scheming and deception of the Elect Ones disappear from space without a trace...

The sins crept from the underground like black vipers, got from beneath sand and rocks like vermin and attracted by the power of the first promise slid along towards the cross, and then stuck to the Convict and sank into his veins to burn forever in the blood of the covenant.

Some tore off the ocean bed and emerged to the surface to rise and rush with black storm clouds straight to the Hill of a Skull. On the way they were joined by hateful words and glances that had been floating under the sky for ages. They seethed over the Convict's head and with whips of hot wind they burnt him painfully, and then were they gone, soaked up by the power of sinlessness.

Like humid sticky fog there appeared sins of hideous thoughts, negative emotions and malicious accusations. For years, a human mind was able to feed on hatred and thirst for revenge, nourish hurt and lustfulness. Yeshua took it upon himself, absorbed with effort and... overcame! There was nothing to be left! Absolutely nothing, as the Promise guaranteed:

For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Even the depth of the cosmos had born witness against the wretched humanity. The images of transgressions had from the very beginning been rushing into the Universe carried by rays of light, and always there was a point in outer space from which every act of disobedience could be seen to identify the culprit. Now the treacherous beams of photons turned into strings stretched to the limits and it was impossible to draw them out any more. For a twinkle of an eye they would stay motionless amidst eternal darkness to move swishing back a moment later and there was no force to stop them! With their last effort they flogged the Victim with a million blows and at last the cosmos lost the basis to testify against those who had entrusted their destiny to the *Living-One*.

The darkness had grown even thicker and the face of the Convict reflected the horrendous effort of the combat within...

But He was victorious and the outcome of the battle was forejudged!

Seeing the strife of their Hetman, the Hosts of Heaven drew their swords, rested on them and kneeled down to honor the One Who Sat on the Throne. And then, like one man, they turned their bright countenances towards the cross and saluted Him. In a moment they would have to depart and they could not comprehend why they had to leave their Creator alone. But they dared not to question that – the Redemption was being performed under the eyes of the Universe like a perfectly written, thrilling drama...

[...]

The longest day was drawing to the end. The hill was almost deserted now. Only the closest ones of the Convict remained there, waiting for the moment of death. Tormented, unable to watch Him suffer. Their eyes dry of any tear. But what else were they left to do?! They prayed for a quick end, unaware as they were of what was happening in the sphere of the spirit.

The last events slid before Yeshua's eyes like a film.

"Has everything been done?... Can He let go at last?..."

The answer came flying like a vulture and descended down with smaller and smaller circles:

"Not yet! He still could not close His eyes!"

He stirred restlessly and looked up. He saw not even a trace of the wonderful radiance emanating from the Throne; gone were the Hosts of Heaven and over his head there were just seething skies sculpted in cold lead.

"What's happened?!... How come this echoing emptiness?!... Why all of a sudden was He alone?!"

The addiction to power of death must have been very strong and for his adversary to lose that power felt bad, but what could equal the touch of the *Presence*? Was there anything sweeter than the fellowship with the Father, which had always accompanied the Only Begotten Son. And now He did not feel that!... He was miserably alone!!! He was terrified, overburdened by the weight of the world's sin...

He looked around helplessly. Would the memories relieve him this time? Again He reached back to that moment on the hill in Nazareth when high above the universe He had heard the Holy One's words:

"Thou art my Son, I have begotten Thee!"

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

The tone of his own voice pierced his heart to the deepest. He experienced that separation from the Father which people had always lived in. Yeshua looked down at his body – it was matt-grey and sticky with filth.

The Father would not abide that – His perfect Son was now the manifestation of deceit and nastiness; He represented rapists and murderers, traitors and adulterers. All of the world's filth had rested on his body. There was not a sin that the *Living-One* could not see on the body of His Only Begotten Son. They were all there and the holiness of Yahweh allowed no contact with filthiness!

The figure of the Convict bent down under the crash of the Heaven's Gates being shut! He was alone...