

Writers in the New Cuba

An Anthology Edited by
J. M. Cohen

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For Marcia, María Rosa and Chiki and all those at the *Casa de las Américas* who made me feel not an official visitor but a private guest.

Introduction

Except one or two poems, everything in this book has been written since 1959, the year of the Cuban revolution. And with no exceptions at all, everything has been chosen for its literary merit, not for the light it may throw on political events or conditions. If in the aggregate these stories and poems draw a rough picture of present-day Cuba, it is because the majority of the writers are realists who have lived through the Batista régime, the guerilla risings, the seizure of power, the defeat of the Yankee-backed invaders at the Bay of Pigs, and are living through the present stringencies imposed by the Yankee blockade. Some stories are set in exile; for many intellectuals were forced to leave Cuba during the dictatorship of the late fifties. But all the writers represented now live in Cuba, or hold diplomatic posts abroad. I have drawn nothing from the expatriates since my purpose is to represent those who have said *Yes* to the new state of things.

Cuban writing has been less independent of foreign influence than that of the larger Latin American republics. Gaining its freedom from Spain only at the end of the last century, Cuba quickly fell under the dominance of the United States, which absorbed almost the whole of its trade, provided all its capital, employed directly or indirectly the great majority of its professional men, and interfered blatantly in its politics. The United States also controlled the higher education of the Cuban middle class, who sent their sons and daughters either to American schools in the island or to colleges in America itself. English became a privileged language, and there was a danger that Spanish might soon deteriorate into a local patois. The average poor 'native' soon had the distinction of being illiterate in two languages.

With education at this low level, a highly cultivated movement of literary resistance arose, basing itself on what was

specifically Cuban – or at least Caribbean – in the island's heritage. This *criollismo* – the *criollo* is the native-born citizen of white blood – has strong parallels with that of the River Plate countries, whose idealization of the *gaucho*, or traditional cattle-rancher, marks a similar desire to find a myth that will express the past and point to the future of a still uncrystallized nation.

Criollism is at its purest in the gaucho stories of the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges, and his essay on the tradition of gaucho poetry, and in the gaucho novel of Ricardo Güiraldes, *Don Segundo Sombra*.* In Cuba its principal organ was the magazine *Orígenes*, edited from 1944 to 1957 by the poet José Lezama Lima. His own hermetic poetry, the Havana poems of Eliseo Diego – which have affinities with the Buenos Aires poems of Borges's youth – and the novels of Alejo Carpentier† with their involved style and far-reaching symbolisms, represent the best of this movement which, despite its local patriotism, remained strongly European in its affinities. Resistance to gringo non-culture produced an exaggerated reliance on the most traditional European models. Lezama's poetry, despite its local imagery, derives in essence from Mallarmé, Valéry, Rilke, Eliot and the Spanish baroque. Carpentier's subjects are American, but his style is highly artificial, and his references to music, art and travel are often recondite. The movement found a very small public both at home or abroad. Its influence, however, has affected all the younger Cuban writers, especially the poets. If the work of Retamar, Jamis and others represented in this anthology has an economy difficult to find in other Latin American countries, they owe it to the discipline of Lezama and his group, whose technical authority they acknowledge even while rejecting their hermeticism.

Parallel with *criollism*, there grew up in Cuba, as in other West Indian countries, during the thirties and forties, a negro

* Transl., Penguin, 1948.

† Transl., *The Lost Steps and Explosion in a Cathedral* (Gollancz, 1956 and 1962).

poetry, which drew on the other heritage of the native population, the myths and memories of the old slaves and their descendants. Afro-Cubanism is more strongly based than *criollism*, since it relates to the folk-lore of a larger proportion of the island's inhabitants. Its manner is direct and non-hermetic. The Afro-Cuban poetry of Nicolás Guillén, written in the thirties, is catchy in rhythm and socialist in content. He uses negro folk-lore in a way that recalls Lorca's use of the gypsy myths of Andalusia. But such picturesqueness quickly leads to vulgarity. Guillén's example started a sentimental fashion which swept the Caribbean, producing a type of debased negro spiritual. Afro-Cubanism, though representing the true folk-culture of Cuba which still survives in the pagan rituals of the *Palo de monte* and *Santería*, soon became a white man's gimmick. Only in Guillén's collections of the thirties – and in some Brazilian writers – did it give rise to genuine poetry.

Guillén, Lezama Lima and Carpentier are the older writers of contemporary Cuba. *Criollism* is dead, but is valued for its achievement in keeping literary Spanish alive. The legacy of Afro-Cubanism can be seen in the imagery of Pablo Armando Fernández and some young poets. Other poets reflect their reading of various non-Spanish masters: T.S. Eliot, Apollinaire, and the Peruvian César Vallejo in particular. Yet in Cuba alone of Spanish-American countries are the writers aware of what is being written in Spain.

The chief interest, however, among younger writers and the newly educated is in the 'modern classics' which have been printed in large editions since the revolution. The abiding influence of Kafka can be seen in more than one story in this book. But the Cuban short story, till now the island's favourite literary form, belongs in the United States tradition that originated with O' Henry. The subjects are Cuban or, as in the case of two stories included in this book, illustrate the mutual incomprehensions of Cuban and gringo. Despite the blockade, Cubans are far less anti-gringo than Mexicans, for example, who

are subject to continuous but less direct pressures from the North. Having expelled their exploiting neighbours, Cubans freely admire and imitate their writers. Some, like Calvert Casey, Humberto Arenal and Antón Arrufat are more or less bilingual, having spent some years in the United States.

Cuban writing has however some completely un-American characteristics. The vein of black fantasy present in Virgilio Piñera's pre-revolutionary *Cuentos fríos* and represented here by his uncanny recent story 'The Dragée' reappears in the gnomic 'Growth of the Plant' of the very young writer Ana María Simo. The stage too has its own charade-like qualities nurtured in the popular cabarets and night-clubs and represented in this book by Abelardo Estorino's one-act play, *Cain's Mangoes*.

The short stories continue the line of pre-revolutionary writing. Those published after 1958 in the weekly *Lunes de Revolución* and in the post-revolutionary *Bohemia* follow the tradition inaugurated by the original *Bohemia* earlier in the century. The poetry on the other hand divides into two; the civilized reflections of the former exiles, Heberto Padilla, Fernández Retamar and Fayad Jamis, and the more concentrated lyrics beginning with Pablo Armando Fernández' *Libro de los héroes*, from which his poems in this book are taken, and continued by such younger men as Rolando Rigali and Domingo Alfonso, who seem to have established closer links with the poets of Spanish America from Vallejo to the Argentinian Juan Gelman than with Europe or the United States. This book concludes with extracts from Fidel Castro's Words to the Intellectuals in June 1961. When I visited Cuba at the beginning of 1965, its liberal pronouncements were certainly being honoured. A very wide variety of works was being published by the state-sponsored publishing houses, and a number of non-revolutionary writers were collaborating in official activities in the spirit of Castro's invitation in that speech. Communist-Puritanism is of course active in petty persecution of so-called Beats and non-conforming students in

the universities and art schools. It is however, on the whole, kept in check by the solid liberalism of the Writers' Union, presided over by the liberal Communist Nicolás Guillén and by the liberals of the Casa de las Américas, whose work corresponds to that of the British Council in this country. Certainly when I was their guest, I met people of very different viewpoints, united only by their preference for Cuban independence under Castro to any kind of foreign dominance. In adjudging the prizes annually awarded by international committees invited by the Casa de las Américas, we were strongly enjoined by Haydée Santamaría, the head of that organization, to make our awards on literary merit alone; which we certainly did. And I have rigidly adhered to the same standards in choosing the stories, play and poems that make up this book. If, as I hope, it presents a picture of contemporary Cuba, it is not because I have looked for 'typical' material, but because a very vigorous generation of Cuban writers is responding, individually, to a very exciting phase of the country's history.

J. M. C.

January 1966

On reading the proofs of this introduction I note that several events have occurred in the interval since its writing which might cause me to modify some of my judgements. I would observe in general that, in a situation still greatly affected by the pressures of blockade, the liberal cultural group is finding it harder to defend itself against the rigid party men whose prejudices against uncommitted writing, aestheticism, homosexuality etc. have made the lives of some of the younger writers increasingly difficult. One can only hope that this tendency will soon be reversed.

March, 1967.

winding staircase, women cooking lunch, putting the tablecloth on the table, somewhat startled, waving to him undecidedly.

The stairs stood in front of him, one after another. He went up drying his tears. He switched on the light with the twenty-five watt bulb in it. She was sitting down; she was surprised and rubbed her eyes. She got up, in the middle of the room, which he now saw again, and opened her arms. In her arms, in everything, in himself, he felt something firm, absurd and obstinate, that would not be destroyed.

He went to his corner and began opening the cases and setting the boxes out.

Translated by J.G. Brotherston

Cain's Mangoes

A Play in One Act

ABELARDO ESTORINO

'And the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.'

The scene: a hemicycle of columns supporting a glass dome. They are tall, thin, iron columns with plant-like capitals in the form of branches with leaves and fruit. They are pierced at dome height to give the effect of an iron and glass forest. Between the columns stand screens in the same style, which convert the set into an Art Nouveau terrace. In the centre a huge dried serpent writhes round a tree-column. On the right a wooden chair with turned arms and legs; on the left a desk on which lies a fat dictionary. An oil painting of Adam and Eve (in the style of Cranach). Pot palms.

The characters are in early XXth century dress: hats, starched collars, boots. The boys in knee-breeches.

ADAM: 45, with a fat paunch and thick moustache. Grandiloquent.
EVE: 30, who has learnt everything from the serpent.

CAIN: 17.

ABEL: 16.

[CAIN rushes in (hair flapping on his forehead, shirt open) looking behind him to make sure he is not being followed. He carries a basket of mangoes, which he places on the ground. He sits in the chair. He has the 'jawbone of an ass' in his hand, which he twangs impatiently. He looks at the basket, then at the serpent, gets up and puts the basket down in front of it.]

CAIN: Are you going to speak? [He turns back to the place where he came in, looks outside, returns to the serpent, and goes down on his knees.] Speak! You needn't be afraid of speaking to me. I am like you, like what Mamma said you were. I'm sure of that. She won't know. Nobody will know because I shan't tell anybody. It'll stay a secret between you and me.

We'll share it, and we'll laugh over it together when we're alone. [*Goes back to the door and looks outside.*] They're a long time. They must have stayed talking at the gate, the way they do every Sunday. Then they'll bring the carriage back the long way round, as usual; their Sunday drive. Sunday's the day for the drive, the day of rest, and chicken and rice. Speak to me, please! Please speak to me because I must know. And I've got nobody to ask. Nobody except you, and I'm counting on you. I know you spoke once. It's because of you I was born. Sometimes I feel you're my true father. Where should I be if it hadn't been for you? You spoke and persuaded Mamma and you handed her the fruit. Mamma says you did. She says her legs went weak when you spoke to her, and told her the things they could do. Then her legs went weak again when she was with Papa, and then I was born. Wasn't that because you made her tremble, and taught her that trembling was very nice . . . wasn't that how I came to be born? You don't trust me. You stay up there, looking and looking at me. You look as though you have something to tell me, but you don't speak. I must know now. I need to more than ever. If only you knew what has happened. I shan't forgive them. I shan't forgive them for that. I won't be what they want me to be, not even if they turn me to stone. Say something. Tell me how I can beat them. I can't bear them any more, with their time-tables, exact to the second although they never kept to them; and their polite speeches in public and their foul talk when they're alone; their *Good mornings* and their fruit cocktails and their tamarind ices. [*Making a face at the serpent*] What about your famous subtlety that made you so wise? If you don't speak, I'll slice you into bits.

[*Abel appears between the columns. He hides behind one and spies on Cain. Overhearing his last words, he comes up to him laughing.*]

ABEL: At it again, eh? You're wasting your time.

CAIN: One more word from you and I'll crack your bonce with this [*flourishing the 'jawbone of an ass'*].

ABEL [*laughing*]: I'll tell Papa.

CAIN [*mocking*]: I'll tell Papa.

ABEL [*threateningly*]: You see if I don't tell him.

CAIN: You dare, and I'll tell him you came with me right up to the gate. I'll tell him that, I swear.

ABEL: Don't swear vain oaths.

CAIN: I'll swear any number of times that we both threw stones at the cherubim.

ABEL: It was you.

CAIN: Who handed me the stones?

ABEL: But I never threw any.

CAIN: No cowardly custard! But you'd have liked to.

[*The sound of horses' hooves and noise of a carriage. CAIN runs to the door.*]

CAIN: Don't say you've seen me, or you'll be sorry.

[*ABEL thumbs through the dictionary. Enter ADAM and EVE. She is wearing a large hat with a veil. She takes it off.*]

EVE: I can't think why I put on my new hat, seeing there's no one to admire me in it. Really . . .

ADAM [*to ABEL*]: Where's your brother?

ABEL [*about to answer when he hears the twang of the jawbone*]: I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?

ADAM [*to EVE*]: Let me tell you something, Eve. Those are his brother's words. Cain's putting ideas of disobedience into Abel's head. [*He stops thoughtfully and turns to the dictionary*] Put into the head, put . . . Is that a correct phrase? Let me see. [*Thumbs through the dictionary*] Pustule, pustulous, puszta, put. Put. Middle English. To move a thing so as to place it in some situation. Excellent! [*Remembers something*] No, inculcate's better. . . . Inculcate ideas of disobedience.

EVE [*going over to a plant*]: Just look at this palm, Adam. Do you remember the one I planted in Paradise? Look how it's drooping. Abel, fetch me the watering-can.

ABEL: Yes, Mamma [*goes out*].

ADAM: Leave that palm alone and listen to me.

EVE: Just a minute while I water it. I forgot it this morning, and if I leave it till afterwards . . .

ADAM: It's you that's responsible for this whole epidemic of disobedience.

EVE: Oh, it's very easy to put the blame on me. But isn't Cain your son as well as mine?

ADAM: But it's you who spoilt him.

EVE: It was you who insisted he must be a farmer. You see the result. Who knows what he may learn when he's alone there in the fields!

ADAM: What on earth can he learn in the fields? There's nobody around for thousands of miles.

[ABEL returns with the watering-can.]

EVE: If a person wants to learn, he'll always find a way.

ADAM: Or start up a conversation with the serpents perhaps.

EVE: Don't talk like that in front of the child.

ADAM: They're not such children any more, I'm afraid. Look what his big brother's been doing. Where can he have got to?

EVE: He's hanging around somewhere.

ADAM: And where's this somewhere, eh? Doesn't he know that this is the day of rest? Doesn't he know he ought to be at home with his parents? Who does he think he is?

EVE: Don't shout in front of the boys. You teach them bad manners, and then you complain. What'll the neighbours think?

ADAM: What neighbours?

EVE: The cherubim at the post. They always keep their ears open, and then they go telling tales to the Lord.

ADAM: What'll they say? I try hard to bring my sons up to be obedient and trustworthy. And that boy's rude to me in front of the Lord. The first-born, who ought to set an example . . .

EVE: The poor boy was . . . [looking upwards and speaking very quietly] was quite right.

ADAM: Now you're defending him.

EVE: I'm not defending him. I know that he should have been more respectful, but . . .

ADAM: The Lord said to me that if we behave ourselves and work hard, and don't argue, and forget what that reptile taught you, he'll let us move to another farm.

EVE [excited]: Will he give us Paradise again?

ADAM: No, the farm on the other side.

EVE [disappointed]: Oh, the plants used to do so well there. Here, never mind how much I water them . . .

ADAM: Put those ideas out of your head. Did you see how angry he was? Thundering and darting fire from his eyes. I'm not surprised.

EVE: It'll pass. When he was angry with us, he came with a fiery sword and all that thunder, and afterwards. . . All he did was leave us this [points at the serpent] here, to remind us of our hour of misfortune.

ADAM: But he drove us out from there. And now I have to work from dawn till sunset, and give him his offering every Sunday. And all for making friends with someone you shouldn't. Didn't I tell you you were demeaning yourself, that she wasn't a suitable person? You'd only to see her creeping on the ground to know she was low class.

EVE: How could you expect me to believe you? You have so many prejudices.

ADAM: I've never had prejudices. But you've got to recognize that a serpent's a serpent, and know how to keep your place.

EVE: If it hadn't been for that serpent we should be alone in the world, staring at one another and boring ourselves to death.

ADAM [to ABEL]: Haven't you got anything to do, boy?

ABEL: Yes, Papa. I'll go and have a look at the ewe that lambed yesterday. Such pretty lambs. There were three of them. The first's a bit feeble, but the others . . . they're ever so pretty. I must go and see they've got water, because last night, I think . . .

ADAM: Yes, yes, do that. Always do what you should.

[ABEL goes out.]

Who's the one who starts talking about forbidden subjects in front of the boys? It'll make them lose their respect for us later on. I've no doubt that one of them or their sons or their grandsons or somebody will sit down one of these days and write the story of how you got round me, tempting me with that little apple. And when people start writing they say what comes into their heads. They don't consult anybody, and they have no respect for the most private family secrets.

EVE: I don't think Abel would ever think of writing. He's too busy with the sheep and goats.

ADAM: Yes, he's a very good worker, luckily. But what about the first-born? He wants to know about everything. He goes up to the gates of Paradise and asks questions of the cherubim on guard. Twice already they've had to drive him off with the points of their flaming swords. He's taken to staring at the animals and observing their habits. Yesterday he came and told me that the bees are better organized than we are. He talks of nothing but learning and learning.

EVE: He annoys you, because he's like me. Abel talks the hind leg off a donkey and it doesn't bother you a bit. But whatever his brother does, you start shouting to high heaven, so that the Lord shall appear and judge the situation.

ADAM: The Lord can do that. He has experience.

EVE: Experience? [*Almost in a whisper*] What experience can he have, Adam, seeing that he only finished making the world yesterday?

ADAM: I'm very grateful to him, anyhow.

EVE: Because you're a great flapjack.

ADAM: Flapjack, flapjack, [*looks in the dictionary*] Flapjack, noun, dialect term for large ear. Type of pancake. I can't see any relationship. I don't understand your word.

EVE: But I know perfectly well what I mean to say. I can use language in a new way.

ADAM: This language, this language of yours will make you famous.

EVE [*enthusiastically*]: Do you think so? [*Making a grimace*]

No, no. But this picture now, perhaps it might make me famous.

ADAM: It's time we put it away. The boys are quite grown-up now, and your nakedness might excite them.

EVE: Jealous?

ADAM: Why should I be? You're not much like that now.

EVE: Oh, no? Would you like to make a comparison? [*Begins to undo her dress. A thunderbolt falls.*]

ADAM: You see? [*He runs up to her and does up her buttons*] You're so thoughtless! You know very well that's what annoys him most.

EVE: But how do things stand? Are we free or aren't we?

ADAM: We're free within certain laws. And there's a law against nudism.

EVE: You made that law. He never said anything. But as soon as you'd eaten the apple you put on a loincloth, and you've worn one ever since. So he's got used to seeing you like that and turned it into a law. Ever since then, we've been wearing more and more clothes. Imagine what it's like for me. I'm stifled in this collar.

ADAM: Listen who's talking. You love finery.

EVE: Yes, but not to be covered in it. And goodness knows how we're going to settle the problem of the boys. They've got ears that reach down to . . . here. We shall have to get them married as soon as we possibly can.

ADAM: And where are we to find the wives? I won't give another rib, not one.

EVE: Shall I have to make the sacrifice?

ADAM: You'd love to, but it's out of the question. This problem of their marriage will remain unsolved for a long time.

EVE: But we shall have to think of something. What can we possibly do? [*Pause*] I'd better finish getting the lunch, or you'll start moaning afterwards that the chicken isn't tender. Why don't you bring in a jug of cold water for the table?

ADAM: You know very well that we mustn't work today.

EVE: But it wouldn't be the end of the world, just to bring in a small jug of water.

[A roll of thunder.]

ADAM: You see.

EVE: When'll he go and take his siesta so that we can be free to talk? He's unbearable these days. His hearing's as sharp as a blind man's. That's why he overheard the poor boy.

ADAM: Wouldn't it occur to that boy to come home?

EVE: Why don't you go and look for him? You know how sensitive he is, poor boy. He'll be crying his eyes out in some corner.

ADAM: Crying with anger you mean. I've never known a boy with such pride.

EVE: Find him and comfort him. Tell him the Lord will forgive him.

ADAM: You know very well that he won't forgive him.

EVE: But one lie. . . [Looks upwards] All right, tell him the truth. Tell him he won't forgive him, and that he'll have to give him a bigger offering next Sunday. But comfort him. [Calls] Abel!

[Enter ABEL.]

Go with your father.

ABEL: So long, old girl.

EVE [as they were going out]: Oh, Adam, just a minute! If you find any of those little seeds you brought in the other day . . . What did you say they were called?

ADAM: Red pepper.

EVE: That's it. If you find any, bring some for me. It did you a lot of good, actually. You seem to need it at your age.

[They go out.]

[Eve takes off her boots. She goes up to a mirror to see if she has any wrinkles under her eyes. She lets down her hair, opens the collar of her dress and looks at herself in delight, with her hands on her waist. Satisfied with what she sees, she goes indoors humming, and comes out again with a mortar in which she begins to pound something. The rhythm of the mortar is in waltz-time. She notices this.]

EVE: Tum-ti-ti, tum-ti-ti, this is nice. [She begins to hum a tune to this rhythm. She gets up and dances.] This is nice, I shall teach it to Adam when he comes back.

[But CAIN appears and stops entranced at the sight of her dancing. He goes over to her, takes her by the waist and they dance together. Apotheosis of the waltz. EVE falls into the chair, laughing, CAIN at her feet.]

CAIN [excitedly, pointing at the picture]: Are you still like that?

EVE [coquettishly]: What ideas you do have!

CAIN: I wish I'd know you then, in that place.

EVE: You were born after we moved.

CAIN: You ought never to have moved. I like that place.

EVE: I liked it too, but they drove us out.

CAIN: Can't we go back?

EVE: You know very well they've put a guard on the gate.

CAIN: I know a place where the fence is broken. I went in once, when I was a boy.

EVE [laughing]: And aren't you a boy any more?

CAIN: We might go in one day, if you like. Probably they haven't repaired it. We'll go alone, you and I, and no one will find out. And you could take me to the place where that tree is, where you talked to her [meaning the serpent].

EVE: Who told you I talked to her?

CAIN: I heard once.

EVE: Those are things you shouldn't know.

CAIN: I don't require a feeding-bottle.

EVE: Nor red pepper either.

CAIN: What?

EVE: Nothing, nothing. How did you find out?

CAIN: What about?

EVE: About my conversation with her.

CAIN: It was that night when he was so angry.

EVE: Who? Papa?

CAIN: No, the Lord. He was angry because you and Papa had gone running out in the rain. Don't you remember? I saw you running out there naked. I was standing at the window in

my room, and I saw you. You were all pretty and shining, with your wet hair! I watched you running, and thought I'd run out there with you too, when I was grown-up, out in the rain. Then he came, the old bore. He thundered a lot, and said it was indecent for a woman with two sons and a house to look after to run about like that at night.

EVE: I've never done it since. There are so many things I don't do.

CAIN: He made you cry. I was very cross. Why should he have to make you cry for just being silly and running out in the rain?

EVE: But we were naked.

CAIN: So what? Weren't you always naked when you lived there?

EVE: That was different. *There* I wasn't ashamed. It was your father who taught me to be modest, as he calls it. And he gave me that leaf which I'm wearing in the picture.

CAIN: I couldn't sleep that night. I went to your room and heard you and Papa talking. You were talking about her. And you told him it was her idea too that you should run about naked. Then you talked about the first time and the apple and all that.

EVE: Did you tell Abel about this?

CAIN: No, he's not interested. He only thinks about his sheep. Sometimes I ask him to come out with me, to come out at night and see the stars. But he doesn't come. You can see them better in the fields. I'm getting to know them. I see the way they move . . .

EVE: When we lived over there, I sometimes felt I could touch them with my fingers.

CAIN: What was it like there?

EVE [*leans back in the chair and clasps her arms above her head*]: I had the porch full of flower-pots. I hung them from the roof and the plants grew down to the ground. It was a good life. It was never too hot. I don't remember having sweated even once. Of course I didn't wear so many clothes. Your father and I used

to walk about for hours and hours. [EVE takes CAIN by the hand, and they begin to walk round the tree-column] What fruit! The mangoes were so sweet we might have called them ambrosia. But we hadn't a good dictionary then. The nights were clear . . . we used to sleep on the grass . . .

CAIN: And the fruit. What did it taste like?

[*They stop beside the serpent*]

EVE: That day I felt a bit bored. We knew all the animals and the birds and the trees. There was no room for surprises. Suddenly a breeze began to blow and ruffled Adam's hair over his forehead.

[EVE strokes CAIN's hair. The sound of a flute is heard. EVE puts out her hand, as if reaching for the fruit and giving it to CAIN. Both raise their hands to their mouths, and remain face to face. They gaze at one another for a little. The music stops.]

CAIN: That's why I want to go there. I want to go in and see it all. I want to live there like you did, and eat the fruit . . .

EVE: Don't think of it. Perhaps I only remember it as so beautiful because we don't live there any more. After all, it was a bit boring. We've learnt one or two very amusing things since then.

CAIN: I want to taste the fruit.

EVE: No, that would lead to a lot of complications for me.

CAIN: I can't think of anything else. Sometimes I come and speak to her (the serpent) but she takes no notice of me. I dream about her. She comes up to my bed and whispers in my ear. She tells me the way to go in, she shows me a secret gate, and gives me a weapon to get rid of the cherubim. She tells me how to build a house under the apple-tree. I see it all very clearly in my dreams, and I'm happy. But when I wake, I don't remember where the secret gate is, or what weapons I can use to get rid of the cherubim. All I've got left is a very vague feeling that I was happy. Then I understand.

EVE: You dream too much.

CAIN: I dream of you too, like that, the way you are in the picture.

EVE: Don't dream about that, you're getting quite thin.
 CAIN: But I do. I dream about it almost every night.
 EVE: You can't, you mustn't dream about that.
 CAIN: I've no command over my dreams.
 EVE: There must be something that could be done to prevent it.
 CAIN: No one can take away my dreams.
 EVE: I shall talk to your father.
 CAIN: These are secrets, between you and me. If Father gets to know he'll tell the Lord, and he'll demand offerings. He's always demanding, and then when I take him my mangoes he doesn't accept them. He wants lambs, white lambs, tender lambs, fat lambs, all fleecy. He wants their heads cut off, so that he can dip his hands in the blood.
 EVE: Indubitably, as your father would say, you've grown too fast. These dreams must be stopped.
 CAIN: Why does he need all those lambs to be killed. What harm have they done him? Why didn't my mangoes please him?
 ADAM [*entering with ABEL*]: Because you didn't rejoice in the act of giving. That is the indubitable answer.
 CAIN: It's a lie.
 EVE: That's not a polite word.
 CAIN: It's untrue, I mean. What I give, I give from the heart.
 ADAM: That's not enough. He's your creator. You owe him obedience and humility. And you must obey him because it's your duty.
 EVE: And it's my duty to get the lunch.
 ADAM: He gave us this land and he has the right to make demands.
 EVE: I demand that Cain help me to get the lunch.
 ADAM: Don't interrupt. This is too serious a matter.
 [*EVE goes out.*]
 He makes demands because he makes demands on himself.
 CAIN: He doesn't work.
 ADAM: That's no business of yours. He's the owner, he doesn't have to.

CAIN: Then let him make the angels work.
 ADAM: Haven't I told you a thousand times that angels can't work!
 CAIN: Why not if they're better than us?
 ADAM: They have a lot to do. Do you imagine it's an easy thing to make thousands of harps, and give singing lessons and choir practices? Do you want the hymns of praise to be sung out of tune?
 CAIN: If they're out of tune they needn't sing.
 ADAM: Listen to me carefully, my boy, and don't twist what I say. The angels aren't out of tune. It would never occur to me to say such a thing. But they have to practise.
 CAIN: I don't like the hymns they sing.
 ADAM: And since when were you a music critic? Why don't you attend to your own affairs and keep quiet?
 CAIN: The offering I took him was as good as Abel's. Why didn't it please him?
 ADAM: He has the right to choose.
 CAIN: I brought him the best I had.
 ADAM: He knows what he wants.
 CAIN: Those mangoes were good enough to eat skin and all.
 ADAM: He knows what he can eat.
 CAIN: And he scorned me.
 ADAM: He knows what he's doing.
 CAIN: And so do I.
 ADAM: Oh, that's a blasphemy! Are you going to compare yourself with him?
 CAIN: I know very well what I want too.
 ADAM: Well, you do what he wants so long as you live in this house.
 CAIN: I don't have to obey anybody. Mamma spoke to her and . . .
 ADAM: Who told you that? [*shouting*] Eve, Eve! . . . As if I didn't know!
 [*EVE appears.*]
 Didn't I tell you you talked too much?

EVE: Prejudice against my sex. [*Goes out.*]

CAIN: She didn't tell me anything. I found out.

ADAM: How?

CAIN: I heard.

ADAM: Always listening behind doors.

CAIN: What do you expect? Do you want me to be an idiot like my brother?

ABEL: You see, Papa? He's always insulting me.

ADAM [*to ABEL*]: Be quiet. [*To CAIN*]: I only wish you were like your brother, who has obtained the favour of the Lord, and by his goodness brings us blessings. We like order. I like order and tranquility, to eat at the proper times, and take carbon biscuits for my wind, and not have a lot of fusses. That's my aspiration, and I won't have you spending your life asking idle questions. Great is your iniquity - and your envy and your lies.

CAIN: No. You were longing to eat of the fruit, but you hadn't the courage. Mamma had to come and persuade you. You never have the courage for anything, you always wait to be told what you ought to do.

ADAM [*very proudly*]: And then I do it well.

CAIN: And what merit has that?

ADAM: Why shouldn't it have merit? When you receive orders, the work is always important. If you were a shoemaker and somebody ordered a pair of shoes, wouldn't you be proud if the customer was satisfied?

CAIN: No, I should be satisfied if I'd invented something for the feet less uncomfortable than shoes. Sandals, for instance.

ADAM [*scandalized*]: Sandals? This boy will exhaust my patience. You are very ill-behaved, anyone can see that. And this convinces me that your offering wasn't made in the proper spirit. Why did you get cross? Why did you insult him and shout at him?

CAIN: Because I didn't understand his attitude.

ADAM: *We* have never tried to understand it. Isn't that so, Abel?

ABEL: Yes, Papa.

CAIN: I can't obey without knowing why I'm obeying.

ADAM: Come here, my boy. I'm trying not to lose my temper.

Now what is it that you want to understand?

CAIN: I want to understand . . . everything.

ADAM: He is the Omnipotent, Lord and owner of the lands and waters, of every moon and breeze. Can you in your littleness try to understand a being like that? He doesn't need your understanding.

CAIN: Then what did he create me for?

ADAM: He needs your offerings. Oh, and your praises too. You understand that, don't you, Abel?

ABEL: Yes, Papa.

ADAM: You see? He understands. He's no idiot.

CAIN: Right. We'll accept the situation: I attend to the fields, he attends to the animals. He offers his lambs, I offer my mangoes. But why doesn't *he* accept them?

ADAM: I don't know.

CAIN: And have I got to be content with that answer?

ADAM: We are all content. He has given us the farm and . . .

CAIN: He expelled you from Paradise.

ADAM: Because I committed an error.

CAIN [*shouting*]: And I consider it was no error.

ADAM: Don't shout at me. I will not have anyone raising his voice in this house. [*Restraining himself.*] It is an error to disobey one who gives you everything.

CAIN: It's humiliating to bow down before one who gives you everything.

ADAM: You are too young. No, no, it can't be a question of youth. What on earth *is* happening to you? Look at your brother. He's much younger than you are but more sensible. Gain the favour of the Lord, and you will have everything you want.

CAIN: I want Paradise and I won't be content with less.

ADAM: Then you'll be unfortunate. You'll always be fighting against the rest who aren't interested in Paradise, but in

lambs and mangoes. I'm your father and I want you to have a quiet life. And I offer you the way of getting it: go on cultivating your mangoes, try and produce a bigger crop each year, and go on offering them to him. When he finds them acceptable, you'll feel proud. Then you'll have his favour. Abel has the comfort of knowing that he's accepted, and his gaze is tender and peaceful. Look at his eyes. Look at his eyes and you'll see that he lives at peace, like his flocks. You question the serpent, to find out what you shouldn't know.

CAIN: Who told you that?

ADAM: Your brother, who is a good son. He knows that it's bad for you to rebel uselessly against what everyone considers right.

CAIN [*to ABEL*]: I'll crack your bonce.

ADAM: What did you say? Look that word up in the dictionary, and read me out what it means.

CAIN: What word?

ADAM: Bonce. You're probably using some vulgarism that I don't understand.

CAIN [*flicking back the pages of the dictionary*]: Bore, [*looks at ADAM*] Boon, [*looks upwards*] Boob, [*looks at ABEL*] Bone-setter, bone, bondsman, bondage, bond . . .

ADAM: Go on, go on. Don't take so much time.

CAIN: Bond, bonchief, bonce. Bonce: a large marble, a game played with such marbles [*mumbles the rest of the phrase*]. Vulgar and figuratively, the head, being of that shape. To crack the bonce; to break someone's skull.

ADAM: All right. But don't use that word again, even though it does appear in the dictionary. Your brother has fulfilled his duty and will continue to fulfil it. . . . Isn't that so, Abel?

ABEL: Yes, Papa.

ADAM: You don't always have to say the same thing, Abel. Use your head. Here is the dictionary, you can employ other phrases: certainly, naturally, of course. Look for synonyms and you'll avoid monotony. [*Pause.*] Cain my son, observe that I am not angry. But promise me to change your ways.

From now on be a man, and give up these little adolescent rebellions which will only lead to disaster. The Lord has said: He who disobeys shall be driven out, he shall be a wanderer and a stranger on the earth. Is that the life you want? To wander alone about the world? Forget these ideas, and you'll attain serenity, you'll see. No, don't answer me now. Reflect and you'll see that I'm right. Fathers are always right. Now let's wash our hands and go in to lunch.

[CAIN and ABEL, *left alone, look at one another. Cain picks up the jawbone of the ass from the ground and approaches ABEL. ABEL retreats talking as he does so, CAIN does not listen to him but comes gradually nearer.*]

ABEL: Don't you dare. Don't imagine I'm frightened. Papa's on my side, the Lord's on my side. I won't budge from here, I'm not afraid, not in the least afraid. [*He shrieks in terror, and runs behind the furniture, pursued by CAIN. ADAM's voice can be heard, asking, 'What's going on?' CAIN grasps ABEL by the neck. ABEL answers: 'He gave me a bash with the chair'. CAIN lets him go.*]

CAIN: Why did you tell him everything?

ABEL: It suits me to have him on my side. Do you think you'll gain anything by always being in opposition?

CAIN: I've got to be in opposition. I'm out for perfection.

ABEL: There you are. Everybody speaks evil of you, and they're right. It's too tiresome, this desire for the absolute. You don't know how to live your life. You insist on talking to the serpent who has been excommunicated. You want to enter Paradise, which is forbidden to us. You want him to accept your mangoes, as if they were strawberries or peaches.

CAIN: I'm as proud of my mangoes as you are of your sheep.

ABEL [*unable to restrain a guffaw*]: Do you imagine I like sheep? I loathe them. There's nothing I dislike so much as the sound of their constant bleating: baa . . . baa . . . baa . . . all the blessed day. But I know how to live my life. He wants lambs on Sundays. I take them to him, and after that he leaves me in peace. [*Pause.*] Look me in the eyes. What do you see?

[ABEL approaches and steps in front of him.] What do you see?

CAIN: I see Cain.

ABEL: Now look here. [Imitating ADAM] Abel has the comfort of knowing that he is accepted. His gaze is tender and peaceful. Papa wants me to be noble? I pretend to be noble, it costs me nothing. You have to learn how to wait. When Papa's old and can't look after the farm, I shall take his place. And then . . . I'll never look at another sheep for the rest of my life!

CAIN: Are you speaking seriously?

ABEL: I've never been more serious.

CAIN [looking upwards]: Aren't you afraid he may hear you?

ABEL [taking a watch from his pocket]: He's taking his siesta, I know his habits very well. [ABEL puts his hand on CAIN's shoulder.] I don't want to have arguments with you. What's more, if you'll help me, if you'll stop putting banana skins down for me to trip on, we'll share the power between us.

CAIN [retreating]: I'm not interested in power.

ABEL: Think of it, though. A posh carriage drawn by six horses, two-bob cigars after lunch, all your desires, even the most fantastic – let's say for a gold piss-pot – have the force of law. Think it over.

CAIN: What have I got to do?

ABEL: Go and say you're sorry. Bring him more mangoes, cast down your eyes when they're refused, tear your clothes in the desert, and cry out that your heart is breaking with repentance. Only you know your own thoughts. They'll say your gaze is tender and peaceful. Come with me, we'll find some more mangoes and take them to him. He'll forgive you, and then you'll have that freedom you talk about, because he'll forget you and leave you in peace in your corner. Come on, make up your mind. It's a question of telling a little lie. It's nothing. Tell Papa we're going to the grove to pick some more mangoes. We'll take a big sack and put them here on the altar. They'll stop watching you after that, and you and I will manage the farm.

CAIN: Wait for me in the grove while I go and beg Papa's pardon.

ABEL: Shake.

CAIN: Later. [Walks about, and stops, looking at the serpent.]

ABEL: She won't speak. They cut her tongue out after the apple 'affair'. She knew too much. [ABEL goes out.]

EVE [inside]: Lunch is on the table. [She looks out.] Where's Abel? [Seeing CAIN deep in thought] What's the matter, boy?

CAIN: I wanted to be a shepherd. The baaing of sheep doesn't bother me, quite the opposite. I've always liked wandering about and running in the fields. But Papa and the Lord insisted that I should till the soil.

EVE: I should have liked to be an opera singer. And here I am spending my days in the kitchen.

CAIN: It's a very good life, they told me. You'll see the plants growing, you'll witness the miracle of the seed growing into a tree, the flower into a fruit. There was something mysterious in all that, which pleased me. It wasn't what I wanted, I'd rather have seen the sheep mating under a tree. But all right, I accepted.

EVE: You mustn't be bitter. It's not worth it.

CAIN: And he didn't accept my mangoes. [Picking one from the basket] What doesn't he like about this mango? Isn't it a pretty colour? It smells so good, it would attract millions of butterflies.

EVE: And it's so sweet that you could spend hours sucking it.

CAIN: And the bees would make the sweetest honey in the market from it. Why doesn't he accept it? I had to ask him. I said: Give me a reason why you won't accept it, and I'll go away satisfied. He didn't answer. He's too proud to answer. All he did was thunder.

EVE: As he always does. So stupid! And in a place where there are no lightning conductors.

CAIN: Have I got to go on accepting thunder as an answer to every question? No, I want answers, not thunder. They

accept everything, Papa and Abel. He has told us how to till the soil, how to tend cattle, how to sing him praises.

EVE: How to dress, and comb our hair, and powder our faces.

CAIN: How to open our eyes in the morning and shut them at night. And they accept his dictation, without changing so much as a comma.

EVE: It's because your father's afraid of losing the farm.

CAIN: Afraid of thunder, of a universal flood . . . and of goodness knows what else. I am poisoned, they say. Full of iniquity.

EVE: Take no notice of them, they talk a lot of nonsense.

CAIN: Iniquity. That's a new word they've discovered, a word to mark me out. I seem to be condemned to have a mark set on me.

EVE: Turn a deaf ear to their stupidity. If you knew the things they said about me when I ate the apple! Unpublishable.

CAIN: They abuse me, I've heard them. They say I'm getting dubious, devious, malicious, dangerous, that my conduct is not propitious.

EVE: They give me the willies.

CAIN: Yes, they're so nauseatingly sweet. Abel's lamb is so good, so plump, his fat pleased the Lord, as Abel told me. Well, I don't mind if he did enjoy it. But my mangoes? Wasn't it unjust of him to despise my mangoes?

EVE: Oh, you're attaching too much importance to this business of the mangoes, my son.

[CAIN begins to walk up and down, twanging his jawbone.]

Sit down, you make me nervous with that instrument.

CAIN: And Abel is unjust too. He doesn't argue and say: If you don't accept his mangoes, you can't accept my lamb either. Oh no, he keeps quiet. He doesn't say it's unjust.

EVE: He's a nervous boy.

CAIN: He keeps quiet and he always will keep quiet.

EVE: That's how we brought him up.

CAIN: He'll never raise his voice to protest against injustice.

EVE: It's because he doesn't know about these things.

CAIN: All he knows is how to say, Yes, yes, yes. And if he knew English, he'd say *yes, yes, yes*.

EVE [*nervous*]: What are you thinking?

CAIN: Abel is unjust and his sons will be unjust.

EVE [*more nervous*]: Let's go in, the chicken and rice are getting cold.

CAIN: And I'm here because I have felt injustice hanging over me, and I must oppose injustice.

EVE [*unable to conceal her anxiety*]: The bananas are fried to a turn.

CAIN: And at this moment Abel is injustice.

EVE [*shouts*]: Adam! [*She runs inside.*]

CAIN: I shall be a wanderer and a stranger on the earth. It doesn't matter. [*To the serpent*] I'm going to show them that I'm capable of doing something unexpected, something they've never told me to do. Give me back my mangoes, I've no need of your words now. Words don't interest me. I'm going to do something they never taught me, and I don't care what name they give to it. They can keep their words, and the dictionary.

[*He goes out. The twanging of the jawbone is heard; the rhythm grows faster and louder. The voices of ADAM and EVE are heard very far away; they are calling ABEL. A cry from ABEL. Silence. Barking of dogs, neighing of horses, roaring of lions. ADAM crosses the stage and goes to the dictionary. He is beginning to turn the pages when EVE comes in from the other side.*]

EVE: What is it?

ADAM: Cain . . . [*finding the word*] has committed a crime.

CURTAIN

Translated by J. M. Cohen