

Where Is Your Brother?

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They arrived when the wind forgot how to bark.

No announcement, no procession. Just the morning sun rising a breath too slow, and the elder dog—whose ears had twitched for ghosts long after they stopped coming—laying its head down and closing its eyes for good.

Cain came first.

He carried the scent of iron and woodsmoke on his skin, and a gaze that measured everything—not unkindly, but without softness. He found the granary, and the granary found breath again. Tools buried beneath years of shrugging neglect surfaced beneath his touch, their edges reborn. He fitted handles to spades the way a mason fits stones to memory—deliberate, weightful, as if repairing not just use but lineage.

No one asked him to help. He did it because it needed doing. Or perhaps because something in him twisted at the sight of clutter, of waste, of unrealized shape. The world made sense

when it yielded.

The village noticed—not with words, but with smaller alignments. The mill’s wheel no longer stuttered at the turn. The well rope came up without catching. The sun, for a handful of days, seemed to rise more honestly in the east.

Cain said little. When he did, it was like knocking on wood—not to hear the echo, but to test the grain. Not cruel. Just careful. He nodded when thanked, though his eyes stayed fixed on the horizon, as if expecting a storm the land itself had forgotten how to warn of.

They remembered his hands. Not for their strength, but for how deliberately they moved—always searching for something that might break and still be worth saving.

#

Abel was already there when they noticed him.

Not arriving. Not emerging. Just present, like the scent of wild thyme after rain or dew lingering on stones untouched by shadow. Some said he’d come from the hills. Others, from the fields. The truth moved quieter than either—and stayed behind when they tried to follow it.

He wandered where hooves had softened the earth, among the goats whose eyes held all the sorrow the world had forgotten how to say. They did not shy from him. Birds did not scatter. He walked like someone remembering the shape of walking.

He hummed. Not melodies, just syllables, curved like river bends. Children picked them up without trying, whistling them into dust as if they’d always known them.

He spoke little—not from caution, but from fullness. When he did speak, it was often to the fire, or the sky, or to no one at all. The fire did not flicker. The sky did not answer. But neither seemed to mind.

No one gave him tasks.

Yet things settled in his wake. A goat's limp vanished. A fallen marker stone stood again. A child who stammered began to speak in whole thoughts.

People noticed.

Then forgot they had noticed.

Then moved a little differently.

It wasn't favor he inspired, but ease. Like a doorway left open—not out of invitation, but because the hinge had never learned to close. No welcome sign. Just the sense you could enter without knocking.

The village bent slightly toward him.

Not in reverence but in relief.

#

The village leans before it knows it leans.

It leans the way tall grass bends toward sunlight, the way clay softens near a spring. Subtle. Unclaimed. But not without consequence.

No words of preference were spoken. No comparisons drawn. But when the children divided into pairs, Abel was never left without a hand to hold. When the fire circle filled with voices, it was his hum that shaped the rhythm. When the fig trees bore fruit weeks too early, it was beneath the spot where he often sat.

Cain felt the shift like a carpenter senses moisture in the wood - not visible, but warping every joint.

So he worked tighter.

The gate that creaked fell silent under his care. The stones he laid for the path sat flush, flush, flush; no tilt, no give. He nodded more often now, smiled a bit less. Not out of bitterness. Out

of precision.

When he passed, people nodded back. They thanked him. Some even called him *essential*.

But the wind blew warmer near Abel.

And though no one said it aloud, Cain heard it in the quiet spaces between gestures, where truth likes to linger:

One is necessary.

The other is loved.

And so the air thickened.

Not with blame.

Just weight.

#

The ovens were lit before dawn. The scent of firewood and flour hung in the mist like an old promise. Villagers came early, some for bread, others just to warm their hands against the stones and remember the shape of quiet.

Cain had been up since moonset.

He stacked kindling. Patched the crack in the far wall of the bakery shed. Aligned the firebricks without being asked. His sleeves were dusted with soot, and sweat had carved clean lines down his forearms.

The baker nodded as Cain passed the last bundle of wood.

“You’ve a good eye for balance,” he said.

Cain nodded once in return. Nothing more needed.

Then Abel arrived, trailing a goat that walked beside him without rope, its hooves whispering on stone.

He smiled. Not broadly, just as though the morning had told him something soft.

The baker turned, and without pause, tore the warmest crust from the first loaf, thick, golden, its steam still reaching for sky, and handed it to Abel.

“Here, for the road,” he said.

Abel accepted it with a bow of the head and murmured something about the morning being kind.

Cain watched.

The crust in Abel’s hand was a little too perfect. The moment too effortless.

He waited to be offered one.

He wasn’t.

Not out of malice.

Not even out of forgetting.

But out of a rhythm the village no longer questioned.

And in the corner of the bakery wall, where soot clung to the stone like old breath, a breeze stirred the ash. Then stilled.

#

Midday brought the stranger.

Dust-cloaked, sun-wrinkled, with a staff that looked older than the path beneath his feet.

His shadow bent forward as if it were scouting the earth for him.

Cain had just finished repairing a broken cart axle, his knees stiff from stone, his hands dark with oil. He was rinsing them at the communal trough when the stranger approached, his presence unannounced, but already accounted for, like a season arriving two days early.

“You keep things from falling apart,” the man said.

Not quite praise. Not quite observation. Just a truth that had settled somewhere and chosen to be spoken.

Cain nodded. “When I see something broken, I fix it.”

The stranger smiled faintly, as if something unspoken had just confirmed itself.

Then he turned his gaze toward the far hills.

“Tell me, where is the one they say listens to trees?”

Cain paused.

The water slowed between his fingers.

For a moment, even the goats beyond the ridge stopped their chewing.

“You mean Abel,” he said.

But the stranger did not reply.

He simply followed the fluttering line of goatskin flags stretched across the far ridge, raised a hand in quiet thanks, and walked on, leaving no dust where his feet had passed.

Cain stared after him for a long while.

No one had ever asked where *he* was.

And high above, the clouds gathered without shadow.

#

That evening, the old men gathered in the stone circle beside the goat pens. It was a ritual without name, older than the fences, older perhaps than the memory of why they did it. They sat on smooth stones warmed by the day, sipping goat milk from clay bowls, speaking in half-sentences and long silences that held more than words ever could.

Cain approached, arms sore from reinforcing the pen’s southern gate. A nail had bent, then snapped; he’d reset it three times until the frame sat flush. The boards no longer shifted. The goats

no longer escaped.

He greeted them.

They nodded. One slid a bowl toward him.

A boy arrived with the milk ,frothy, warm, unusually rich. One of the goats had begun producing nearly twice its yield that week. Abel had been tending them.

The eldest man raised his bowl and took a long sip. Then, to no one in particular, he said:

“The land remembers who walks gently.”

Another nodded. No one looked at Cain.

He did not speak. He drank. The milk was warm.

Overhead, the stars blinked out one by one behind a slow-moving cloud. The breeze stirred once, and for a moment, it smelled of dry rope and sheep and something faintly sweet ,like grass pressed under a barefoot step.

And though silence returned, it no longer settled evenly.

#

Cain began waking before the sun.

Not out of discipline, but because sleep no longer held him kindly.

The world stirred in faint tremors now, as if something deep beneath the soil were waiting to be asked the right question.

He worked longer than before. Not harder, just longer.

There was always one more crack to seal. One more stack to straighten. He walked paths Abel never did, fixed things no one asked him to, and wrote the names of those who forgot to thank him in the grainy corners of his memory.

He told himself he did not resent Abel.

He told himself this often.

Abel was gentle, yes. But unburdened. Cain admired that. Pitied it. Maybe envied it. He never said which out loud, not even in his thoughts.

Still...

When Abel passed, the dogs stirred in their sleep.

When Cain passed, they slept through.

One afternoon, he found an old fence beyond the eastern bluff.

It was barely standing, long ignored. Forgotten.

He could have walked by.

No one would know.

But he stopped.

Picked up the fallen slat.

Began to measure.

A boy passed, watching him work.

“Why fix it?” he asked. “No one walks this way.”

Cain didn’t look up. “That’s why.”

The boy left.

The wind returned.

Somewhere behind the hills, the goats called. The sound carried farther than it should have, echoing like a voice remembering its own shape.

And Cain stood a little too long with the hammer in his hand.

#

The offerings were not commanded.

They simply were.

Each season, when the shadows lengthened and the wind's breath turned from thirst to memory, the villagers gathered around the fallen tree. Its trunk lay split but unrotted, as if lightning had once passed through it and left behind the spine of a sleeping god.

There, in the clearing, a circle of stones held the fire that remembered every name and every forgotten act.

No bell summoned them.

No hand drew the line.

But one by one, the people came, bearing tokens:

Honeycomb wrapped in leaves.

Roots dried and bound in thread.

Old tools placed with reverence.

Songs exhaled into the smoke.

They said it helped the land remember them. Helped the seasons not pass too quickly.
Helped time feel accounted for.

Cain prepared for days.

He crushed grain with care. Roasted it with mountain herbs.
Carved a vessel from river-ash, tied it with a strand of his own hair.
He recited a blessing he had composed, hand-inked on scrap cloth, folded twice, then burned
beside the gift.

Abel came later.

No bundle in his arms. No offering in his hands.

He stepped into the circle, knelt by the flames, and whispered something that did not stir the

leaves.

He stood.

Bowed his head.

And walked away, silent as he had come.

No judgment was spoken.

But the air thinned.

The fire curled gently around Abel's absence. Cain's vessel, ornate and brittle, blackened too quickly, then collapsed inward with a sharp crack.

A child turned her head.

An elder shifted her feet.

The smoke lingered longer around the place where Abel had knelt.

Later that night, no one spoke of it.

But no one forgot.

Before dawn had faded from the village roofs—after the offerings had settled into soil—
Cain rose with a restlessness that did not wait for words.

His hands sought weight.

His thoughts sought shape.

So he walked to the edge of the stream with the axe.

Not to fell.

Not to build.

But to measure himself against something that would split without resistance.

And Abel was already there.

The white-limbed tree stood alone by the stream, older than the village, older than the fence lines, older perhaps than remembering.

Its bark peeled like parchment, revealing the pale wood beneath that never grayed with time. Children once asked if the tree was hollow, if it dreamed, if it remembered the first name ever whispered near its roots.

Cain found it that morning, when the mist still clung low and the air held no decision.

Axe in hand. Shoulders tight.

He split logs with the urgency of someone keeping time against thoughts that would not still. Each swing cracked the morning open like brittle fruit.

Abel was already there.

Seated on a smooth rock, arms resting on his knees, a lamb asleep at his feet. He didn't speak at first, just watched the arc of Cain's swing, as though it were part of the weather.

"You sit a great deal," Cain said. Not unkindly. Not kindly either.

"I do," Abel replied.

Cain swung again. The wood splintered.

"And yet they seem to think you're more useful than me."

Abel opened his eyes slowly. "Is that what they think?"

Cain didn't answer. Another swing, too fast. The blade clipped sideways. The pieces scattered, uneven.

"I mend what breaks," he said. "I build what lasts. I give of what I sweat for. But they look at you like you already belong."

The lamb stirred. Abel laid a hand on its head, pressing it gently back into sleep.

"You could sit," he said after a pause. "Just once. See what they see."

Cain's jaw tightened. "I'd rather stand."

A silence passed between them, thick, but not heavy.

Abel looked up into the branches, where light bled gently through the leaves.

"They don't see me," he said. "Not truly. They just... stop needing to."

Cain let the axe drop to his side. The weight of it became clearer the longer he held it.

"That's the problem," he muttered. "You don't even have to try."

Abel didn't reply.

Cain stayed a moment longer. The mist was lifting now, thin as breath. The axe still hung in his hand.

He left without another word.

The lamb raised its head once, as if sensing something just beyond the breeze.

And above them, the tree dropped a single, dry leaf into the water.

#

He came without a name, without a reason, without dust on his sandals.

The villagers did not ask who had invited him. None remembered doing so.

He simply appeared by the fire on the fourth night after the offerings, when the stars had drawn close enough to whisper and the air no longer smelled of ash, only breath.

He wore a cloak stitched with faded threads.

Carried a carved flute with a crack near the mouthpiece.

Smelled faintly of dried apples.

His hair was plaited with saltweed. His eyes were dusk.

He asked for nothing. No food. No warmth.

He only sat, and waited.

When the circle filled, as it often did in the cool hush of evening, he began to speak.

But he did not tell a story. He asked a question.

“If two brothers are given the same field,” he said, “and one sees the shape of things before they grow, while the other sees only what may go wrong, who tends the land better?”

There was a long pause.

A child raised her hand. “The first.”

“No,” said an old woman.

“Yes,” said a merchant.

Cain, seated at the far edge of the gathering, near the embers but not the warmth, leaned forward.

“What if one plants,” he said, “and the other only watches?”

The stranger turned to him.

“What if the watcher hears things in the soil the planter never knew to ask?”

The villagers murmured.

Some glanced toward Abel, who sat in the shadows between two low stones, humming softly to a child asleep in his lap.

Cain said nothing.

His hand tightened around his knee.

He watched the flames, but they did not dance for him.

The stranger said no more. He pulled out his flute. Placed it to his lips and let out a single note: thin, wavering, incomplete. Then packed it away and stood.

Before he left, he looked up at the stars.

“They’re listening,” he said to no one in particular.

“They always are.”

By the time the villagers turned to ask what he meant, he was already walking between the trees.

Not a single twig broke beneath his feet.

Cain stood shortly after.

He left before the circle emptied.

And this time, the silence behind him did not follow, it pushed.

#

It began like a misplaced stone in a path: small, but felt with every step.

Cain asked his first question three mornings after the storyteller left.

The weaver was adjusting the frame of her loom, her hands knotted with age but moving like reeds in water.

He stood beside her a moment before speaking.

“Is stillness the same as wisdom?”

She did not stop weaving. Her fingers moved in rhythm, though her brow twitched.

“Sometimes,” she said.

He nodded, though he did not understand her answer.

#

The next question came that afternoon.

A boy was drawing circles in the dust with a charred stick, the same spiral Abel sometimes

traced when lost in thought.

Cain crouched beside him.

“Does silence always mean depth?” he asked.

The boy squinted up.

“My grandfather is silent. He forgets things.”

Cain smiled, but the smile did not reach his eyes.

#

By the fifth day, the questions had begun to carry edges.

At the goat pens, where three elders rested in the shade, Cain leaned on the fence.

“Do goats follow anyone who walks slowly enough?

Or only those who smell like grass and mystery?”

The elders exchanged glances. One laughed, unsure if it was a joke. Another cleared his throat.

No one answered.

Later that evening, Cain found the baker scattering ash from the oven.

“If someone labors to make the fire hot, and another only warms himself by it, who owes whom?”

The baker paused, ash clinging to his fingertips.

He looked up, blinking slowly.

“The fire owes no one,” he said, and returned to his work.

#

By the seventh day, the questions had changed.

They were no longer questions. They were observations dressed for company.

“Strange how we call some men gentle when we mean they don’t threaten our stories.”

“Strange how stillness becomes a virtue when you’ve nothing to fix.”

The villagers listened.

Some nodded.

Some said nothing.

But the silence had grown different now. It had texture.

Cain saw it, how glances shifted. How conversations paused when he entered.

How some voices quieted when Abel passed, as if uncertain what they had once trusted.

It wasn’t open division. Not yet.

But doubt had become a guest. And Cain, without saying so, had learned to feed it.

#

It happened near the olive press.

Cain had been helping the younger men roll stones and clear the chute. The sun was sharp that day, and the air smelled of sweat, crushed fruit, and dust.

A small group gathered during the rest, just villagers lingering, as people do when the air thickens with things not yet spoken.

Cain was wiping his hands when he turned to a boy perched on the wall.

“Tell me,” he said, casual as questions pretend to be,
“when a man speaks little and does less, why do we call him wise?”

The boy blinked. A woman nearby chuckled, nervously.

Abel, who had just arrived with a jar of water, passed it toward the workers without

speaking.

Cain continued:

“I’ve seen silence cover fear. Laziness. Pride.

But we say nothing, because silence is polite. Isn’t it?”

Abel finally looked at him.

His face was unreadable. But his voice was steady.

“Not all silence is empty.”

Cain turned to him, and the weight of the gathering turned with him.

“But who decides what fills it?”

Abel opened his mouth to answer, then stopped.

The air waited.

Cain smiled, not cruelly, but knowingly.

That pause. That hesitation.

It spoke louder than any reply.

He let it hang, then turned back to the press.

The murmurs that followed were faint, but real.

One man said something about needing both hands and voices to make a harvest.

Two days later, at the well, Cain returned to the game.

A cluster of villagers had gathered, speaking softly, waiting their turn.

Cain stepped forward, and in that practiced tone now half-performative, said:

“A shepherd who doesn’t speak—does he lead?

Or do the sheep just wander near out of habit?”

Abel stood nearby. He had been humming. Now he stopped.

One of the older boys laughed.

“Maybe the sheep prefer the quiet.”

Cain raised a brow. Shrugged.

“Perhaps. But even silence can become noise when it expects praise.”

Abel’s shoulders shifted.

He said nothing.

He walked away before the conversation could turn toward him again.

Cain watched him go.

This time, he didn’t speak further. He didn’t need to. The seed had taken root.

And no one noticed that Cain no longer asked questions. He issued invitations.

And more and more, the villagers stayed to listen.

#

Abel stopped answering.

Not all at once. Not with defiance.

His voice withdrew like mist at morning: slowly, invisibly, until its absence was all that remained.

He still showed up; to tend the goats, to help the old woman gather nettle, to carry wood to the circle.

But when eyes turned toward him after Cain’s words, he looked elsewhere.

He began leaving earlier from gatherings. Standing farther back.

Speaking only to those who needed nothing from him.

Cain noticed.

At first, he mistook it for concession. Then, perhaps, guilt.

But the silence had changed. It no longer softened the space around Abel.

It sharpened it.

Cain spoke more.

Not louder. Just... *more*.

He gave small speeches now.

Not to the whole village, but to clusters.

By the press. Near the fig trees. Beside the well.

“Effort matters,” he said once.

“Not intention. Not aura.

If I build a wall, and another stares at it—who guards the village?”

Nods. Murmurs. A few claps.

Another day:

“Truth doesn’t wear a smile.

Sometimes it splits wood and bleeds at the fingers.”

This time, someone said,

“Like you.”

And Cain bowed his head, not in pride, in something deeper. Relief.

Still, Abel said nothing.

One evening, a child asked him directly:

“Why don’t you speak anymore when he talks?”

Abel looked at the boy for a long time.

Then said only:

“Because silence doesn’t argue.”

That night, the goats would not sleep near the fire.

And far from the village, in a gully of windless grass,
a snake shed its skin and left it coiled, unclaimed.

#

Abel did not disappear, he became less present.

He moved like wind before rain: there, but unspeaking, untouchable.

He tended what needed tending, and then moved on.

He no longer lingered near the fire. He no longer stood beneath the fig tree when others gathered.

He answered when spoken to, but not with sentences: just nods, a gesture, a look.

Some thought he was ashamed. Others said he was trying not to stir more division.

A few believed he was mourning something they could not name.

But the animals still followed him.

The goats leaned into his side when he passed. The birds did not startle from the eaves
when he climbed the orchard wall.

The silence around him had grown sacred. Or suspicious, depending on whom you asked.

#

The villagers began choosing sides without realizing it. Some offered Cain a second bowl of
stew. Others held Abel’s gaze a heartbeat longer than comfort allowed.

The old woman who sold figs began folding her arms when Cain spoke.

The younger men began repeating his turns of phrase around the work sheds, as if they had always
known them.

And Abel watched it all without speaking. Not because he had nothing to say.

But because he saw his voice becoming kindling, and did not wish to feed the fire.

#

Then came the final offering of the cycle.

The fire was smaller this time, though no one said why.

The air was dry. The sky was wide and pale.

Cain brought his gift: a woven bundle of barley and flower ash, tied with cord he'd spun himself. He placed it gently into the flame, and whispered something too quiet to catch.

The smoke rose, pale and thin.

Abel stood behind the circle. He held nothing.

He stepped forward, only halfway, and bowed.

He did not kneel. He did not speak.

And still, the fire curved inward. The flames dipped slightly toward him, as if greeting something older than fire.

Cain watched.

He said nothing. But his jaw clenched, once.

The villagers dispersed more quickly than usual. That night, even the stars kept their distance.

#

The morning rose wrong. It came without color. Without birdsong.

Even the dew seemed to hesitate.

The stream that usually mumbled its secrets through the stones now held its breath. flat and still as polished glass.

Cain noticed. He always noticed when something veered.

He stood at the edge of the granary with no purpose in his hands.

The village moved around him, but sluggishly, as if remembering a rhythm it could no longer hear.

No one spoke his name.

No one avoided him either.

They simply moved like shadows of themselves.

Cain walked. Not toward the fields. Not toward the fire circle. Not toward the granary, where his tally marks had begun to fade.

He walked toward nothing in particular. Past the goat pens. Past the second well no one used since the flood. Past the fig tree that bore nothing this year.

The ground cracked softly beneath his steps. The wind did not answer.

His fingers found a fallen branch, dry, split down the middle like an old thought.

He carried it without knowing why, tracing it along bramble edges as he passed, as though testing the limits of what still broke.

When he reached the last olive tree, the one bent low, gnarled like an elder's hand, he paused.

The land beyond it was unused. Open. Drifting.

And beneath that tree, as if waiting with the patience of something older than time, stood a child. Or something like one.

The child did not move as Cain approached.

It stood where the tree cast no shadow, though the sun was already high enough to demand one.

Its posture was neither expectant nor indifferent, simply there, like a question that had taken

shape and grown limbs.

Cain slowed, branch still in hand, now half-splintered from idle pressure.

“You’re far from the others,” he said, voice low - not out of secrecy, but uncertainty.

He hadn’t meant to speak at all.

The child blinked once. Its eyes were the color of early ash.

Not gray exactly, but memory fading.

Cain shifted his weight. The branch crackled faintly in his grip.

Then the wind moved, not across the field, but through it, as if it had been held back and now was released.

And the child asked, in a voice not young and not old:

“Where is your brother?”

No accusation.

No sadness.

Only the stillness of a question that had been waiting for the right breath to enter.

Cain opened his mouth, but the air caught behind his teeth.

His first answer was not a word but a tension in his shoulders.

Then, slowly, he said:

“He walks too lightly.

They do not see the weight I carry.

They do not know what it takes to keep things from falling.”

The child said nothing.

Not because there was nothing to say, but because the question had already passed

the place where words could meet it.

Cain took a step forward.

The child did not retreat.

For a moment, Cain thought he might kneel. Or laugh. Or crush the branch beneath his foot just to feel it break.

But he did nothing.

The wind fell quiet again.

And when he looked up, the child was gone.

No footstep. No rustle.

As if it had only been the voice of the tree learning to speak.

#

Cain remained beneath the olive tree long after the child had vanished.

He stared at the empty space it left behind, unsure whether to doubt his senses or himself.

He pressed his hand to the tree's twisted bark. Not seeking comfort, only proof.

Proof that something had happened. That someone had been there.

But the bark gave no answer. It had been shaped by too many winters to speak for just one man's doubt.

The branch in Cain's hand had splintered. He hadn't noticed it happening.

Not broken clean, but frayed, like rope pulled too long in one direction. One fiber at a time.

The question hung inside him now. Not as guilt. Not as fear. But as something unfinished.

He whispered the words again, just to hear how they sounded with no one listening:

"Where is your brother?"

No wind replied.

He took one more step beyond the tree, but his foot hesitated, not forward,
but inward, as if his body questioned the direction of his soul.

He turned back.

From this height, the village looked smaller than he remembered.

Fewer fires. Shallower color. As if the land were beginning to forget its own name.

Cain began walking toward it. Slowly.

Not because he was weary, but because he was no longer certain he was being followed.

#

That night, the kiln cracked.

No fire touched it. No hands leaned too heavily.

It simply split, a long, low sound, like stone remembering it was once sand.

Cain heard it from his tent.

He sat up, still clothed, as if he hadn't trusted the night enough to rest fully.

He walked to the kiln. Found the fracture. Placed his palm along its side. It was cold.

The sheep had moved. He saw them huddled farther than usual, clustered near the dry
streambed, their eyes catching moonlight like coins sunk beneath water.

They watched him. But they did not move closer.

He didn't try to follow.

The village fire still burned in the distance. But he could not see the smoke.

He told himself the wind had changed. That the air was thicker tonight. That it meant
nothing.

But it felt like the fire had stopped trying to signal him.

No one came for him that morning.

No requests. No small chores. No idle questions.

Even the fig woman, who once handed him fruit without words, passed by with an empty basket.

And he, who once counted the paths he had fixed, the fences he had mended, began to forget what his hands were for.

So he wandered the high pastures.

Not aimless. But not directed either.

The sky was pale. The light had a tired color to it.

The hills seemed wider, but held nothing new. As if the land was stretching to stay distant from him.

He thought of Abel.

Of the stillness. Of the glances that once favored him.

Of how his silence had grown thicker these past days.

That isn't peace, Cain told himself.

That's retreat.

That's arrogance wrapped in humility.

That's how liars speak, with their eyes lowered,
so they don't have to meet your grief.

He clenched his fists.

Not in rage. In readiness.

As if preparing to lift something heavy.

He's taken something, Cain thought.

He doesn't deserve to hold it alone.

There were no more words in him.

He did not need to be understood anymore. He needed Abel to feel it.

#

Abel sat beneath the crooked tree where the hill bent gently downward and the wind came in sideways. The branches above him curved not with age, but as if bowing toward something they could no longer see.

He held a small piece of wood in one hand, and a thin blade in the other, carving nothing into nothing. The shavings curled into the grass like forgotten words.

He did not hum. He did not frown. His body was quiet, but his hands moved.

It was not creation, it was rhythm.

Cain came into view like a shadow dragging itself over the ridge.

He walked slowly, as if each step required permission. The branch he had once carried was gone. The dust at his heels rose and settled with no one to watch it.

He stopped a few paces away.

Abel looked up.

Their eyes met, not with challenge, not with fear. Just recognition.

"Cain," Abel said.

Just the name.

He did not stand. He did not reach for anything. He only held Cain's name between them like a small piece of firelight.

And that was all it took.

Cain did not raise his hand at first. He watched Abel's fingers move, slow and careful, shaving away slivers of wood that curled like forgotten prayers.

Abel's eyes didn't leave his face, even when he said the name. Especially then.

Cain took a step closer. His breath came too loud in the space between them.

"I tried," he said.

Not loudly. Not for defense.

A thought spoken aloud because there was no room left to carry it inside.

Abel waited.

"I tried to speak their language," Cain continued.

"I tried to give.

I built what they needed before they knew they needed it."

He looked down at his hands, rough and empty.

"You...

You didn't even try.

You just... *were*."

Abel blinked once.

His face was neither pitying nor proud.

"You carry too much," he said, gently.

"But it's not what you think."

Cain flinched.

He didn't know whether it was the words or the way they didn't press, just rested between them like snow that never melted.

He looked around, not at the sky, not at the earth, but at the space where understanding might have lived if someone had lit a fire.

Then something inside him recoiled.

Not from Abel. Not from guilt. But from the possibility that Abel might be right.

His hand moved before he felt it move.

Not out of rage.

Out of a desperate, clenching need for the world to make sense again.

For silence to stop being so loud.

For presence to stop meaning more than effort.

He struck.

There was no cry. No wind tearing through. No divine scream.

Just breath leaving Abel's body.

Just the blade slipping from his hand.

Just the wood, half-shaped, falling beside him like a secret he never got to tell.

Cain stood over him, not as a victor, not as a brother.

Just as a man who had run out of things to say.

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There was no body.

Only the space where Abel had once sat, the shavings scattered in the grass like feathers lost in sleep.

The crooked tree bore no stain. The earth did not speak of what it had seen.

Cain walked away. Not hurried. Not slow.

He left as one might leave a room no longer needed, though something essential had been left behind.

The hills did not follow. The sheep did not cry. The wind did not carry his name.

The villagers whispered less in the days that followed.

The fig woman no longer set aside the sweetest fruit.

The fire still burned but with less warmth.

Children forgot the taste of stillness and learned louder games.

When Abel's absence was spoken of, it was in half-sentences, unfinished, like a story everyone knew but no longer knew how to tell.

But some nights, when the moon thinned to a blade, and the fire cracked too softly to comfort, a voice would return.

Not from the trees. Not from the elders. Not even from the wind.

A voice inside the breath of sleep itself, asking gently:

“Where is your brother?”

And Cain, wherever he wandered, through fields, through towns, through dreams, never found a way to answer.

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Author's Note

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Some say Abel vanished.

Some say Cain broke the world.

But the trees say nothing.

The fire remembers quietly.

The question still walks.

If this tale speaks, it speaks not to history, but to the soil inside us where both brothers dwell, where silence grows roots, and where the hand still hovers before it chooses.

Cain is not the villain, Abel no saint. They are conditions of the same soul, estranged by the desire to resolve what must remain in tension. If you listen carefully, this story offers no answer.

Only a chance to dwell within the question a little longer.

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the Random Atom