

his wings blew away with the last of the leaves into the fierce blue autumn sky.

Adam and Eve stood midstage under a painted apple tree. Serpent, painted with scales, oozed from behind the tree, offered Eve an apple, and as she refused, followed her around the Garden. With slither, enticing gestures, Serpent persuaded Eve to accept the fruit. Eve took one bite, danced with delight, clapped her hands, patted her stomach . . .

Elenor narrowed her eyes, shutting out everything but the stage, seeing the scene before her as a painting. The tree separated the stage into halves now, Serpent and Eve on one side, Adam, alone and forlorn, on the other.

Eve reached out a hand to Adam, offering him the apple; Adam stepped across the stage to Serpent's side, took the apple, and bit it. A shout of glee went up from the devils. From heaven, an angel waved a golden sword at Adam and Eve. Wailing, they fled the Garden.

Elenor sighed and rubbed her eyes. "I knew it," she remarked, as the curtains closed. But what remained in her mind was the tilt of Eve's wrist as she held out the apple to Adam, and the kicked-dog curve of Adam's back as he and Eve slunk from the Garden.

When the curtains opened again, plants and

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branches were gone. The middle stage, between heaven and hell, was strewn with rocks. Two brothers, Cain and Abel, bent side by side, planting. They stretched tall to quarrel, shouted, and fell to fighting. In the heat of anger, Cain took a rock and bashed Abel. Abel stiffened and crashed to the ground. He bucked, writhed, and died. Cain froze, his arms held high, his face distorted by horror.

The avenging angel bore down on Cain, chasing him away.

Elenor watched Cain's huddled form leave the stage and make its way, limping and hurrying, through the audience. Some of the crowd booed him as he passed.

Moved and somehow angry, Elenor wiped away tears with the flat of her hands. She hated Eve, with her combination of womanly wiles and dissatisfaction. She hated Eve for wanting more than she had. But Elenor was curious, too. She would have tasted the apple, just to know . . .

"Why did God punish Cain?" she asked. "The moment he saw Abel was dead, Cain was desolate." Father Gregory opened one eye. "Expiation," he said.

"What is that?" asked Elenor. "I forget."

"Expiation," Gregory repeated. "It means that he needed to put the sin outside himself, to get

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