WHO KILLED CAIN?

Natalie Ashanin

A Play in One Act—Two Scenes

Place: The wilderness, outside the Garden of Eden
Time: About twenty years after the expulsion
Cast: Adam - middle-aged, irritable, showing signs of strain
Eve—middle-aged, loving but careworn
Abel—16 years old, placid in nature, easy going, helpful, lovable
Cain—18 years old, rebellious, moody, introspective

They are dressed in skins, or roughly woven cloth. Adam and Eve should have a shawl or stole which can be pulled over the head when required. As the scene opens we see a rude hut, or perhaps the opening of a cave to the left, with primitive tools outside it—a basket, a hoe, a hollowed out stone for grinding grain etc. A little to the right of center back is a rude stone altar. In the background are mountains, with a large volcano guarding a pass between them. As the scene opens, Adam is sitting outside the hut, shaping flints.

SCENE I

ADAM: Cain! Where are you Cain? I need more flints. Why isn’t that child around when you need him—Cain!
EVE: (coming out of hut) He’s probably down by the brook. He spends a lot of time there.
ADAM: Doing what? Dreaming! Utterly useless, that’s what he is. He doesn’t do a thing unless I tell him—over and over. Downright lazy, that’s what he is.
EVE: Now Adam, calm down. He’s alright. He’s just trying to figure things out. It’s a hard life we lead and...
ADAM: And whose fault is that?
EVE: That's right, blame me... it was all my fault—and I did it all for you.
ADAM: For me? Now see here...
EVE: Yes, for you! Casting eyes at the tree and always wondering why we couldn't touch it, then complaining you were bored with the same old menu. What was I to think? I thought it would please you.
ADAM: Now see here, I may have wondered, but I never would have gone near it, so don't try to excuse yourself by blaming me!
EVE: But once I picked it, you ate it, didn't you? You didn't have any qualms then, did you? So don't put all the blame on me!
(Enter ABEL with a shepherd's crook in one hand, a pair of dead rabbits in the other)
ABEL: Imma, look what I have for you! I snared two rabbits for supper.
EVE: (taking the rabbits, at first with delight, then as she looks at them, with sorrow) Oh, thank you Abel. They will make a nice stew. Oh, the poor dears! I remember how sweet they were in the Garden. It doesn't seem fair somehow that He should punish them along with us. The poor innocents, they didn't do anything. And all the other animals, pushed out along with us. It doesn't seem right somehow.
ADAM: (takes the rabbits from her and puts them on a rock outside the hut. He puts his arm around EVE to comfort her) I don't know why He did it, Eve, but all creation was in our care, and when we failed, it failed with us. As we suffer, so do all created things, dying and bleeding to support our life.
ABEL: Then if we ever redeem ourselves we redeem them too—right Aba?
ADAM: (beams proudly at Abel) That's right son! (he sighs) But can we ever redeem ourselves? It will be a long, long process and I fear that left to ourselves, we never will be able to do it.
ABEL: Then is there no hope - for us, and for them?
ADAM: (looking toward the mountain) I don't know... I think... I feel... something tells me He means to help... but there is a long struggle ahead, Abel. For us - for you and me, the Garden is lost. Perhaps someday, for your sons' sons' sons... (shakes his head) I don't know, Abel, I just don't know!
(Cain saunters in, examining a rock)
ADAM: Oh, there you are Cain. Didn’t you hear me calling you? What’s that you have?
CAIN: A rock—look, see how pretty it is with all the colors in it. I found it down by the brook.
ADAM: (exasperated) A rock indeed! And can we eat it? You are the most useless thing! Your brother brought us some rabbits for supper and you, you bring a rock! You’re supposed to provide us with grain and vegetables. Where are they?
CAIN: (sullenly, throwing the rock on the ground) Nothing’s ripe yet.
ADAM: What about the grain in the plot on the other side of the brook?
CAIN: That’s for sacrifice. Do you want to eat that? I’ll get it.
ADAM: Don’t be insolent! Go and find something in the woods - there must be berries or nuts or something! (He picks up the rabbits) I’ll go and skin these for you, Eve. (Exit Adam)
CAIN: Why does he have to get so mad at me? I can’t do anything to suit him!
EVE: (soothingly) Don’t get upset, Cain. It’s just that your father has so many worries and he needs all the help he can get. You could help him more.
CAIN: Well, he always shouts at me - never at him (he indicates Abel) Perfect little Abel-boy can’t do anything wrong!
ABEL: Oh lay off, Cain. You know you provoke him on purpose.
CAIN: I do not - but he makes me mad! I wish he’d leave me alone.
EVE: Now boys, there’s no need to squabble. Cain, I think I saw some greens in your garden that looked about ready. Go on and get some of those and I’ll fix a nice salad to go with those rabbits.
CAIN: Oh, alright! (Exit Cain)
EVE: (sitting down and grinding some grain) I declare, I’m at my wits’ end. Everytime your father and Cain get together, they fly at each other. I don’t know what to do.
ABEL: It’s because they’re really so much alike. Cain really wants Aba to like him—he really does—that’s why he gets so upset when Aba gets mad at him.
EVE: You’re a smart boy, Abel - and a good one. I know it must seem sometimes, like I’m always taking Cain’s part, but I have to. Your father doesn’t understand Cain at all, so I must. Somebody has to love him and believe in him. Your father is closer to you, and that’s fine Abel, but don’t forget I love you too. It’s just that Cain needs me more.
ABEL: (gives her a hug) I know, Imma, I know. Cain’s alright, really he is, but Aba should lay off him a bit. But Cain does get him mad.
EVE: I know, I know!
ABEL: We have a nice lot of lambs this year. It won’t be hard to find a perfect one for the sacrifice.
EVE: That’s fine. You’re a good herdsman, Abel. Our flocks have grown. (She gets up and starts to make a fire)
ABEL: Shall I get you some wood for the fire?
EVE: Would you? That’s a dear! There’s lots of kindling lying around, but I could use a few larger logs.
ABEL: I’ll get you some - be back in a minute! (Exit Abel) (Eve starts to pick up kindling around the yard. When she reaches the back right of the stage she suddenly drops the kindling and screams)
EVE: Adam! Cain! Come quick, Abel - it’s back, the horrible thing is back, oh come quick! (Adam, Cain and Abel rush in)
ADAM, CAIN, ABEL: What’s the matter, what is it, where...
EVE: (pointing) There, by the bush, on the ground, see there it goes...
ADAM: The snake! Quick, kill it!
CAIN: (grabs the hoe and attacks the snake—Adam and Abel join in) There, get it . . . hurry . . . watch out . . .
ALL: No, it got away . . . there it is . . . get it . . . quick there, no here, watch out, it’s striking . . .
ADAM: Oh, it got away!
ABEL: (comforting EVE) It’s alright, Imma, it’s gone, it won’t bother you again. It was only a snake.
EVE: Only a snake! If only it were! It’s evil, Abel, it’s evil.
CAIN: It was just a small one, don’t be so frightened.
EVE: I wished you’d killed it. It’s a bad omen, I know. Evil is coming again!
CAIN: It was only a snake, Imma. We chased it away. Don’t carry on so!
EVE: (frightened) No, no it wasn’t “only” a snake. I know...it was the other one, the Dark One, the Troublemaker, oh it’s evil, I tell you, it’s evil! Oh Adam, I’m afraid!
(Adam puts his arms around her protectively. Cain and Abel stare at each other, uncomprehending)

Curtain
Early morning, a few days later. A thin spume of smoke is issuing from the mountain. Cain is sitting on the ground, a sheaf of grain is next to him. He is staring moodily at the volcano.

(Eve comes out and starts to set out breakfast. She gets a skin of milk and pours it into rough bowls. She takes some dates out of a basket and arranges them on a mat which serves as their table.)

EVE: What are you looking at, Cain?

CAIN: There - where He is. He must know we're going to sacrifice. He's showing His sign on the mountain.

EVE: (straightens up and looks toward the mountain) Oh, He knows everything.

CAIN: Have you ever tried to go back there - to the Garden, I mean. Are you sure you can't go back?

EVE: (bitterly) Oh, we tried. We were lost at first, didn't know how to do anything, so we tried to go back, to beg for another chance, but it was no use. There's a fiery stream, like a sword, across the valley. It's impossible to get through.

CAIN: So what did you do then?

EVE: We learned.

CAIN: What did you learn?

EVE: Everything - how to do everything, grow grain, make spears, weave cloth, hunt. We had to survive. (sighs) You can't imagine the despair we felt! You and Abel have it easy. We can teach you. You don't have to go through what we did.

(Adam and Abel enter, carrying skins of water)

ADAM: Cain! What are you doing mooning around? Why aren't you getting ready for the sacrifice?

CAIN: I was watching the hills - look, there's smoke on the mountain. That's His sign isn't it?

ADAM: (looks toward the mountain) Yes, He's there.

ABEL: Is it He who speaks when the mountain rumbles?

ADAM: Sometimes. He is there - and everywhere. His voice - His voice is like thunder...other times, it's like a whisper. You can hear it there, right inside you.

CAIN: But Aba, who is He? Why does He have such power?

ADAM: Do not question! He is what He is. Everything that is is His and is subject to Him.
CAIN: But why....
ADAM: (getting angry) You ask too many questions! Seek not to understand the unknowable. Accept.
CAIN: How can I just accept? I must know!
ADAM: You fool! Have you no fear?
EVE: Adam, be patient. Cain does not know Him as we do, as we did, back there. He can’t understand the awe, the terror...
ABEL: And love, Imma, you said there was love... 
EVE: That was before...before we had to leave. Afterwards, it was different.
ADAM: But He stayed with us Eve. He showed us how to survive. Whenever, desperate, I called to Him, He came. Without Him we should have perished here in the wilderness. He must love us in spite of everything.
CAIN: Then why did He punish us all? It’s unfair! Why should we suffer, Abel and I, and all because of what she did. And you didn’t stop her! But we weren’t even born! He’s a tyrant!
ADAM: You blasphemer! Be quiet!
CAIN: Why should I? I have a right to know. You two have lost paradise for me, and you want me to be quiet and accept!
EVE: You know how it happened Cain. I’ve told you often enough. As for what He is, He will in time reveal Himself to you - as much as you can bear, that is. Now go and get the rest of your offering. That sheaf is too small.
CAIN: I have another. I’ll get it. (Exit Cain)
ABEL: Shall I get the lamb now, Imma?
EVE: Yes, go on. We must start before it gets too late. (Exit Abel)
ADAM: (sits down and helps himself to some food) You’re too soft on Cain, Eve. You must make him do his share of the work. Abel and I had to bring all the water by ourselves.
EVE: Cain’s a thinker. He wonders all the time.
ADAM: A lot of good wondering will do him! I wish I could understand him, but somehow I can never get close to him.
EVE: Have you tried listening to him?
ADAM: Humph! Listen to him? Why doesn’t he ever listen? Everytime I start talking to him he gets that faraway look in his eyes, as if he’s saying “ho-hum, there he goes again!” Ask him to do something, and he’s got a hundred different excuses why he can’t. Abel now, is a different story. He’s always willing to help, always around
when you need him. Never complains. Why he's a joy to have around!

EVE: They're different.
ADAM: They certainly are! If I wasn't the only man around, I'd wonder... (Enter Abel, a lamb slung around his shoulders. He is running away from Cain who is pursuing him. Abel runs to Eve and cowers next to her.)

CAIN: (furious) You... you, it's all your fault! You did it on purpose!
You always spoil things for me... .

ABEL: Honest, Cain, I didn't. They just got out of the pen. I couldn't help it.

CAIN: You didn't lock them up - it's all your fault!

ADAM: Calm down Cain. What happened?

CAIN: (trying to hit Abel) His... sheepl His damned sheep got into the grain and ate it. They ate my sheaf for the sacrifice! (He tries to hit Abel again, but Eve fends him off)

ADAM: Stop it! That's enough. You must have been careless and left the sheaf lying about.

CAIN: I did not! You always stick up for him!
EVE: Well, the harm's done. We can't delay any longer. Let's start the sacrifice. Cain, your one sheaf will have to do. It isn't your fault you have no more.

(They rise and stand before the altar. They prostrate themselves, then rise and raise their hands over their heads. Abel steps forward and places the lamb on the altar. Adam takes a branch from the fire and lights the wood on the altar. The smoke rises upward.)

ALL: All praise to Him who accepts our offer! Selah!

(They bow).

ADAM: Cain, your turn now.

(Cain places his sheaf on the altar. Adam lights the wood again. Instead of rising, the smoke billows down around the bottom of the altar. Everyone coughs and chokes)

ADAM: He does not accept it!

(Cain steps forward. He raises his face and a clenched fist to heaven and cries out:)

CAIN: Why not? Isn't it enough for you? I'm not to blame if Abel's sheep ate your grain. Why don't you take it out on him! What's wrong with my offering that you reject it? (There is a long pause. The mountain rumbles. Cain listens) No! I am not unjust to my
brother . . . Am I my brother's keeper, that I should be concerned with what he does? The fault is his! (He listens again, then suddenly, enraged, he pounces on Abel) You . . . it's always you! Aba loves you best and now He . . . He too favors you! You always spoil it for me! (They scuffle) I hate you! (Cain picks up a rock and hits Abel with it. Abel sinks to the ground and is still.)

EVE: What have you done!

ADAM: (runs to Abel) Abel...Abel, my son, speak to me! Abel! (He raises a grief-sticken face) He's dead! Abel's dead!

EVE: (runs to look, then covers her face with her veil and rocks back and forth, wailing) Oh Abel, Abel my son, the joy of my life!

ADAM: (advances on the horrified Cain) You good-for-nothing, you wretch! You've killed your brother! Murderer!

CAIN: No! No! I didn't mean to do it! I was angry, but I loved him! (sobs, hides his face in his arms)

(Eve pulls Adam away from Cain)

EVE: Oh Adam, what are we to do? (She goes to Cain and tries to comfort him, but he throws her off and prostrates himself before the altar)

CAIN: Oh, Thou who art All in All, what shall I do? What can I do? How shall I expiate my crime?

(The stage is darkened a little and from the volcano there comes a low rumble. Cain rises on his knees and raises his arms imploringly, then bows his head.)

CAIN: No! Let me die! Let me wash out my sin with my blood, but do not send me away - alone - where all will be against me. Slay me - right here! (bows his head) (sobs) According to Thy will be it done, I will go. (He rises. Somehow, he seems older, his face riven with grief. There is a remote look in his eyes.)

Imma—Aba—I must go.

EVE: Where, Cain where?

CAIN: Away ... there, beyond the desert. He wills it. I must seek my expiation, there - away from you. I know not what awaits me, but I cannot stay here. I must forever be an exile and a wanderer on the face of the earth.

EVE: (anguished) But I have lost one child - must I lose the other as well? Stay Cain. Work out your salvation by being doubly our son!

CAIN: I cannot. See, look upon my face. His mark is upon me and I am condemned to be a vagabond. It is His judgment.

ADAM: (somberly) He must go Eve. There is no other way. His
brother’s blood cries out from the ground. It is forever between us. He must go!
(Cain takes Abel’s crook. Eve hurriedly packs up the remains of the breakfast in a cloth which she gives to him. He slings a water skin over his shoulder, then goes to center stage.)

CAIN: (speaks to heaven) I acknowledge my guilt and accept Thy will. Thou hast set thy mark upon me and from Thy face shall I be hid. I go to... whatever awaits me.
(He turns, looks longingly at his parents) Aba, Aba I... I love you!
(He turns and runs from the stage)

(A long pause)
EVE: (sobbing) You have killed them! You have killed my children!
ADAM: (trying to comfort her) Cain killed Abel, Eve, but he is alive.
EVE: (Throwing off Adam and confronting him) Alive? You call going off alone into the wilderness alive? He’s just as dead to me as Abel is - and you killed him!
ADAM: I killed him?
EVE: Yes, you! You with your favoritism. You never even tried to understand him. He wanted your love so much, but all you ever saw was Abel. It was his jealousy of the love you had for Abel which drove him into his rage!
ADAM: Am I responsible for his being jealous? Abel was good and sweet. Cain was...is...difficult. He never did what he was supposed to. His killing Abel only proves it!
EVE: No, oh no, Adam! Oh, Adam, you don’t understand. It was your love he wanted. You had so much for Abel, but so little for him!
ADAM: And you, you made it up by spoiling him, always taking his part. Cain could do no wrong. You were always defending him. You still are!
EVE: You never understood him. He was a seeker. He questioned. It was hard for him to accept what happened to us, our life here.
ADAM: And why? Because you filled his head with tales of how glorious it used to be.
EVE: Abel heard the same tales.
ADAM: But you should have seen the effect they were having on Cain. They made him discontented. It wasn’t my love for Abel, but your blindness to Cain’s faults which killed him.
EVE: No! I had to love Cain, for you had so little for him. I had to make it up. You left me the difficult one and took the loveable one for yourself. It was easy to love Abel.
ADAM: I loved them both!
EVE: And so did I... and now we've lost them both! (sobs)
ADAM: How did it happen? How did things come about to end this way?
EVE: Who really killed Abel? Who killed Cain?
(They look at one another. The stage gradually becomes darker while the volcano is lit up with a red glow. Wind blows. The volcano begins to erupt)
ADAM: No! Oh no, no! (He covers his head with his prayer shawl and sinks to the ground) Oh NO!
(Eve stares at him, then understanding comes to her and she gives a piercing shriek and drops to the ground, covering her head. They cower on the ground as the volcano rumbles and the winds blow.)
CURTAIN.

SHY

John D. Wilson, Jr.

I sit alone in mute contemplation,
Thoughts of her, captive within consciousness,
While passion lingers on into oblivion,
Her love was captured by capriciousness.

I look upon remembrances of her caress,
Oblique as they are few and far-between,
As fading spirits; I am deserved of less,
Eros' fields, I am not content to glean.

I alone remain, without having seen,
Romance was not to occupy my time,
Distant, yet alluring; she is quite keen,
Not allowing me the pleasure most sublime.

Yet alone I sit, silent thought submerged,
Within the realm, my hope shall not be purged.