

DEYAB FAHAD AL-TAEI

NOVEL

THE VALLEY OF SPIRITS

TRANSLATED FROM ARABIC BY
DEYAB FAHAD AL-TAEI



DEYAB FAHAD AL-TAEI

NOVEL

THE VALLEY OF SPIRITS

TRANSLATED FROM ARABIC BY
DEYAB FAHAD AL-TAEI



The Valley of Spirits

Novel

Deyab Fahad Al-Taei

The novel is translated from Arabic

Zoetermeer -Nederland

2024

Chapter One

The yellow bus zoomed down the street, emitting a mix of sounds. Laughter, screams, and singing filled the air. A girl peered out from the window, gazing at the still-closed shopfronts. The driver shouted, "Don't stick your head out! Close the window!" She nervously shut the window, her face tinged with anger as she crossed her arms over her chest.

He contemplated jumping onto the bus, but from which side? He remembered he could enter through any closed window. He had sent hundreds of children's spirits to the valley; it was a routine task he had become accustomed to. He hadn't thought to object. The list contained the address and time. He could be in hundreds of places simultaneously, sending thousands of souls across the world to the valley.

At the back of the bus, the girl felt a cold gust of air sweep across her neck, causing her to shiver and adjust her braid. She glanced around nervously. The windows were closed, and her friend dozed off, battling sleep. She told her they had stayed up late for her older brother's tenth birthday. They usually arrived in a white car driven by a chauffeur, the color of the coffee her mother drank all day. She reassured herself that everything was fine.

He didn't smile as he observed the girl's anxiety, sensing her fidgeting with her braid. He resumed listening to his colleagues' singing. The night passed, the dawn broke, and the birds chirped. One of the girls sang "Noono" in a childish tone, prompting the others to join in. They stopped singing, then clapped playfully. He had to send their spirits to the valley, except for one who had to stay behind. This time, her name and specifications weren't on the list. Would he choose who stayed? Such a choice hadn't confronted him before, and thus he felt perplexed and uncertain. Was it a test? Or had there been an error in the list (of course, unintended)? What would he do? He looked out at the street the bus was speeding down. On the sidewalk, a beggar leaned against a

lamppost, wearing a thick military coat whose color was fading. His name was at the bottom of the list, with the time glowing brightly. It was seven ten. It was already seven thirty. He had been occupied with the children. "I seek forgiveness, my Lord, and I repent to You." The bus swerved as the driver lost control, hitting the lamppost. The beggar's bones crushed beneath the bus's wheels as it overturned, crashing into a fabric shop before an explosion rang out. Flames erupted. The girl was lifted and thrown from the window onto the street. A woman stopped her car in a hurry and rushed to inspect the girl. She told the traffic officer that she was still alive, but she didn't suggest taking her to the hospital.

The traffic officer looked at her with silent reproach, but he understood her reluctance to participate in the girl's rescue operation; she wouldn't easily escape scrutiny during the investigation.

"The Mighty," said the one with the white wings, seated on the chair of judgment, "he must not ponder the matter, for the decision is made even before the process of preparing the valley begins."

The butterflies in the valley were competing to create a joyful atmosphere, flying in circles around each other, rarely colliding. However, this did not prevent the discomfort of small butterflies that came to the valley before understanding their surroundings. They had been transported in their first year of life. Once, it was suggested to relocate them to another valley to avoid potential dangers, but the owner of the chair did not respond. It was understood that he had

exceeded what was permissible, so he apologized and returned to the ground, visibly embarrassed.

I must say, I have a firm grip on the earthly universe, but I do not possess prior knowledge of whose souls I will transfer to the valley. I read the lists handed to me just one day before. How do I operate in this seemingly vast space? And how do I manage to transport souls from distant regions at the same moment? Well, one might refer to the incident of transferring Bilqis's throne from Yemen to Jerusalem; it took but a moment, measurable in a fraction of a second... It is this ability that "The Mighty" has granted me.

Sometimes, I stop and observe people in their fervor, crowding to board transportation or standing in long lines to watch a show in the cinema or theater. This might not take more than a fraction of a second, but it's enough to give me a picture of human behavior in the earthly universe. Those of us who were close to "The Mighty" couldn't imagine how Adam and Eve's descendants would behave after being expelled from paradise. Nor could we envision how long their lives would last. But "The Mighty" explained everything clearly to us and chose me to transport their souls to the valley. We had never heard of the valley before. Hence, I dared to ask, "What is the valley, and where is it located?" I felt proud to be chosen to control the entire earthly universe. I even thought that, if our ages were determined, I would also be the one to transport souls to the valley. However, the continued succession of ages created confusion in my mind.

Even now, I think we will not cease to exist. Rare are the times when I visit the valley for artistic reasons related to a mistake in transferring a soul not mentioned in the list. But the similarity of names confuses me, for we lived centuries before Adam descended to earth, knowing each other not by names but by forms.

Once, the friend of the prophets, as we call him, asked me, "How do I find people when I transport their souls to the valley?" There was a hint of concern in his tone, but I brushed it off and said, "Few of them are confused or overwhelmed by painful despair, but most of them do not notice. I had become accustomed to the task so much that it proceeded smoothly." I still remember the first soul I carried to the valley, the soul of Adam's son, Abel, who was killed by his brother Cain. When I released him into the valley, he was alone, his movements betraying fear and bewilderment as he sensed his insignificance against the vastness of the valley. He sought refuge under the giant tree, hiding in the shade of its lush green leaves. Adam was sad, perhaps feeling the consequences of his disobedience to "The Mighty's" commands and the repercussions it would have on his offspring. This was the second time I saw him, the first being the day "The Mighty" presented him to us while reciting all the names with confidence and defiance. On that day, the one responsible for storms, rain, and floods whispered in my ear, "I don't think he will be at peace for long... He doesn't know what awaits him." And when he felt that "The Mighty" heard him, he bowed his head and looked at his feet. The third time I saw Adam was when I transferred his soul to the

valley, where a few butterflies for his children's souls surrounded him. Interestingly, Satan stood not far away, looking at me arrogantly, as if mocking me, for he had won the bet for the second time. I had been one of the opponents of Satan's decision not to prostrate to Adam as commanded by "The Mighty." Eve stood broken, her tears frozen, perhaps out of regret or because she would remain alone in the earthly universe after her children dispersed. She wasn't old, as she retained her vitality. At the moment of Adam's death, she seemed to have shrunk, giving an impression of defeat. She stood erect, as if disbelieving that Adam had left her forever. Hence, she did not participate in filling the grave with soil. Abel and his sons, along with three of his daughters, were heaping soil onto the body. Abel attended to bid farewell to his parents, deciding to leave the mountain where he dwelt to seek a safer refuge after the packs of wolves that roamed around the cave at night had multiplied. He considered what was happening a form of punishment for what he had done to his brother. His mother didn't speak to him, but she didn't banish him either; instead, she hugged her daughters. When he left, his mother crouched in a corner of the mud room and closed her eyes, perhaps to contemplate what the future would bring or perhaps what she had gone through. When I visited her again to transport her soul to the valley, she had diminished, her clothes worn, sitting surrendered, exhausted by sorrow and loneliness. When I released her butterfly, it fluttered joyfully but did not recognize Adam.

I noticed that when I carried a woman's soul to the valley, her butterfly wings fluttered rapidly, but she didn't protest or taunt, while most men's souls remained with their butterfly wings steady, only to dart swiftly upon reaching the valley, surveying the area before settling on the giant tree. In the valley, souls do not converse with each other, hence a deep silence prevails. The absolute silence does not disturb the gentle movements of their wings as their sensors explore the place.

I never thought about the fate awaiting these vast numbers of souls and how it will end. Certainly, they will not remain immortal in this way. When I asked Michael about it, he said he knew nothing, being responsible for rain and vegetation in the earthly universe, and the valley is not part of it! He paused for a moment and continued, "Nor is it part of the heavenly universe." Some of my colleagues are tasked with a one-time job across time; Raphael will blow the trumpet on the Day of Resurrection, while Ridwan guards the gates of paradise, awaiting the trumpet to open the door for those entering paradise. I asked him, "But where do the prophets and the righteous reside now, since paradise has not yet been opened and it is waiting for the trumpet?" He looked at me with absolute certainty and said, "They are in the kingdom of God." His answer dispelled the occasional confusion I faced.

The friend of the prophets said that such questions I sometimes reveal are dangerous because they stem from my interaction with the people of the earthly universe, who raise

doubt as a path to truth, while we present certainty as a path to truth. I fell silent reluctantly.

Satan was listening attentively, hoping to find someone who supports his beliefs, but I thought he would surely fail because

"To hasten the transfer of souls to the valley, Satan watches over us with a spirit of vigilance. Initially, our tasks were not as diverse as they are today, so we used to meet on our way to work.

Satan said, 'What you're doing is merely routine work, lacking any enjoyment... Look at my work... It's engaging, diverse, and carries themes of challenge and capability.'

I didn't respond, as engaging in such conversation might lead to convictions I don't desire. Speaking of South Africa, I noticed that the souls' butterflies there were predominantly yellow, while those from Northern Europe had wings of a blend of two colors, green and red. As for the Middle East, the edges of their wings tended towards a color closer to sand... I didn't inquire about this contrast, but I deduced it was for ease of distinction between groups. I missed pointing out that the butterflies of Chinese origin were less mobile, as if carrying something that slowed their movements.

As for me, time holds no importance, and it remains merely markers imposed by the succession of night and day. My colleagues and I do not sleep, and the changing climate through the seasons means nothing to us. When I see earthly beings retiring to bed at night due to fatigue or sleepiness, I

thank (the Almighty) for not making us like them, as they are often full of complaints and boredom simultaneously.

Once, during one of our rare encounters, I asked Ridwan, 'Don't you feel bored waiting at the gates of paradise until the trumpet is blown?' He replied, 'No... waiting is a pleasure.'

After the invention of the computer, whose development I followed closely, I will be delighted when (the Almighty) permits me to carry Gates' soul to the valley. I found that my colleagues and I work in the same manner as the computer. We are programmed according to (the Almighty's) will.

Before Adam and Eve descended to earth, we were surrounded by an atmosphere filled with silence. We, the seven elders, surrounded (the Almighty) at the foot of His throne, while Satan sat enthroned, rarely leaving his place, and (the friend of the prophets) often smiled, reflecting a deep sense of joy on his face. We exchanged no conversation except what was necessary, nor did we raise our eyes to (the Almighty). We were engulfed in total stillness. When our work began after tasks were assigned to us, we dispersed to carry out our duties.

The first time I descended to the earthly realm, I noticed it was completely different from where we were. Animals were fighting among themselves, creating loud noises, and I couldn't find any justification for the fighting because the earthly realm is vast enough for everyone! There were birds of various colors flying through the nearby skies, flaunting

their wings, waiting for some insects to emerge from their burrows. Butterflies, in particular, were delicate, moving lightly and gracefully as they circled wildflowers before perching on branches, gently gazing at them before flying off into the forest.

One evening, while we were gathered with (the Almighty), Ridwan asked me, 'You bring butterflies to the valley... do they behave similarly when you transport them?'

I said, 'Generally, yes, but very few, perhaps a few dozen, are initially confused, then they become aggressive, trying to escape. And because they can't, they start spinning rapidly and erratically, until exhaustion weighs them down, and they settle, submitting. And when I release them into the valley, they hurriedly search for an extreme branch to hide under its leaves.'

'Are their owners affected during human wars?'

'No... their owners are among the great tyrants of the earthly realm... Have you heard of Ivan the Terrible, Genghis Khan, or Hitler?... They're all of that ilk.'

We didn't continue the conversation, as (the Almighty) arrived."

When he returned to the Valley of Spirits, the children's spirits had joined the valley's inhabitants, where everything was colorful butterflies. He thought people made death a nightmare, leading to misery, and propagated cruel tortures in the darkness of the grave. When he asked his colleagues,

accused of accounting for the dead, they smiled silently. That's how people created fear to atone for their mistakes.

When he climbed to the top of the mountain overlooking the valley, hundreds of millions of butterflies followed his flight, fluttering around a tree with hundreds of branches in all directions, some stretching for miles, vibrant with greenery. At first, he felt the immense effort he exerted, crossing the boundaries of the earthly universe every minute to facilitate the passage of souls to the valley, feeling a sense of greatness as he considered that his task had no end, unlike his colleagues whose tasks had ended years ago. That's why they were attached to the large chair lists without any practical tasks.

He never wondered if the souls he brought to the valley were content with this transition, but this implied dissent that would anger the Almighty sitting on the chair, and he shouldn't let such thoughts bother him. He found no difficulties in his work; he had been given everything to facilitate his tasks under all circumstances. He faced no challenges, even when the composition of societies changed, and different empires emerged, including religious ones, and armies grew in number and variety of weapons, and the lists became notebooks with hundreds of pages, and the colorful butterflies increased in the valley. He still found joy in his work because he never had a moment of idleness, but he remembered that occasionally, and at intervals, he faced

difficulties when transferring the souls of some individuals
close to him to the valley

Chapter Two

Time is crucial in the earthly realm, where people's lives are organized around its divisions. The alternation of light and darkness is also utilized, and after millions of years, humankind has condensed time and space, turning the earthly universe into a small village. Relationships have become direct through virtual networks called the internet. Little did anyone realize that all these achievements, realized

through the efforts of thousands of inventors and adventurers, would be subject to change. The entity that will change it is imperceptible to the naked eye, moving faster than internet news, multiplying my workload, and turning the new village into distant, isolated islands, each closed off from the others. Its news circulates in every council, sparking unprecedented debates on Earth. Scientists are left with the task of developing technological advancements to counter this entity. Here, I must apologize for using human terms I've grown accustomed to hearing.

For the first time, my work branches not on the level of distant geographical regions but on the level of the entire earthly universe and in closely proximate geographical areas. In wars, millions may die, their souls carried to the valley, but the widest area affected was at the continental level, or in a confined region spanning hundreds of square miles, as happened in World War II, for instance.

It occurred to me that this entity might be the creation of the Almighty, as only He could accomplish such a great feat. It turned out I was mistaken; it was a human creation that leaked outside due to human error. The officials tasked with accounting for souls in the valley asked, "How will humans adapt to such horrendous tortures? Can they be absolved of the sins they committed?" The one in charge of water and plants replied, "The sins were committed before they were subjected to them, so their accountability remains." Ridwan said, "The Almighty decides that; we see only half of the scene, while He sees it all." With that, the conversation

ended. Such dialogues are rare and might not occur except sporadically, with intervals stretching hundreds of years.

I was on a small Italian island, one of the volcanic islands rarely inhabited by humans, to take the soul of a boy whose name was at the end of the list I received early in the morning. I had to meet the boy because that was the customary way to receive souls; he had to be presented before me.

The boy I sought abruptly left home, leaving his mother alone. She was an elderly woman, slow-moving and struggled to gather fruit from scattered trees. The boy used to provide them with food from the sea—fish, eels, and mussels. When I asked her about him, she hesitated to speak with me. After my insistence, she said, "He did it."

"Who?" I asked.

"The devil he conversed with every evening by the tree."

"Are there devils on the island?"

"There weren't, but Mount Volcano expelled one of them. I saw him emerging from amidst the flames and molten rocks, flying over the fiery stream rushing to the sea, then heading towards my son, who was fishing. I saw them talking, and my son was laughing, something he hadn't done since last summer. The devil was a handsome, playful youth, which terrified me. I called out to him, but he didn't respond. In the evening, my son showed me his extraordinary ability through magical acts. He showed me another world teeming with activity, crowded streets, and beautiful girls. He said he

wouldn't tire of fishing anymore because he could command the fish to leave the sea and come to the shores for him to catch. His friend taught him all that."

"But how did you know it was the devil? Aren't the offspring of Iblis supposed to dwell in the volcanoes?"

"No, you're mistaken. Iblis is of fire, so his offspring inhabit the fire and are capable of teaching humans magic, including black magic. Every Christian has read this in the Bible."

The Apostle Paul expelled a filthy demon from a servant girl, a demon that had bestowed upon her the gift of divination. Through this demon, Asia made profit.

"Yes, you speak the truth," I thought, pondering that perhaps Satan had sent one of his offspring to toy with her, while the Almighty tested her, as happened when Adam was presented to us and we were asked about the names. So, Satan, his son, and the boy were testing my abilities. I was not confused, but I feared delaying my other duties. Perhaps this was precisely what Satan intended, to show me that he could toy with me.

The boy dove deep into the sea, heading towards the volcano, when I transformed into a small fish. The fish fell to the bottom of the sea. I took the soul of the boy and carried it out, sending it to the valley as a sad butterfly, unable to flutter its wings.

Satan smiled as if joking with a friend, while his son gnashed his teeth because he had failed in his father's task. The mother looked at her sad hands, not asking me where he was. She seemed convinced that the sea had swallowed him

and that Satan had called him. The sea seemed indifferent to all that had happened, its rapid waves crashing against the rocks along the shore and around the island, while ancient trees, their origins unknown, cast dense shadows over the island.

I felt satisfied with what I had done. I had thwarted Satan's plans and one of his sons from exploiting the boy, who had dreamed of crossing the sea to conquer Sicily first and then crossing to Italy to restore Roman glory, as he had read in a history book. All great events begin with a dream, Satan thought, and that's why he wanted to seize the boy, by suggesting to him that his dreams were achievable if he cooperated with him.

When news of the mass deaths spread across the entire earthly universe, we, the seven elders, felt a shared sense that this might be a sign from the Almighty of the impending hour.

Azrael prepared and examined the images to be ready for the first blow, which would give me the opportunity to transport the remaining souls to the valley. Then, the second blow would follow to return all butterflies to their original state, to begin the reckoning.

Meanwhile, Ridwan tested the gates of heaven and lubricated them with oil extracted from the olives of the Holy House to ensure smooth opening and closing. In contrast, Satan had gathered his sons and grandchildren to discuss the situation. One of his grandchildren, a demon very interested in studying laws and their diversity, as well as the first hearings in

international legal cases, stood in the midst of the gathering, requesting his grandfather's time to discuss family matters based on divine custom due to the absence of written law in this area. Satan stopped talking, and everyone listened, as for the first time, the issue of the relationship between the Almighty and Satan's family was raised in this manner.

The young demon interested in the law said, "Our father asked the Almighty to grant him until the second blow in the images, but the Almighty did not agree to that and determined that we would remain at the first blow in the images. Here we must stop... In any case, there must be a balance between the parties to the conflict, and here we find that the Almighty made the decision alone, and what our father asked for goes to the heart of the matter, which is the result on which agreement was reached... How will we know that our father and we, his family, have achieved what we said to the Almighty, that we will succeed in our work if the account is not made and the high percentage that responded to our temptations and what we decorated for the inhabitants of the earthly universe is recognized?" The demons applauded the young demon, but Satan raised his hand.

"Let everyone hear," he said. "We must return to our work, for life on the earthly universe continues. Corona will stop, and therefore, complete destruction will not be on his hands. As for this little one who showed us a side we had neglected, I invite him to my office. We need to deepen this serious study."

Before challenging the Almighty, Satan was the ruling president over the entire universe under the Almighty's presidency. Hence, he could be present in more than one place at a time and thus could eavesdrop on what transpired between the Friend of the Prophets and Ridwan.

The challenge wasn't just about COVID-19; it was a result of what was going on in his mind, and thus manifested in his behavior. He found within himself the potential to be like the Almighty.

"Ascend to the heavens. Raise your throne above the stars of God. Sit on the mountain of assembly. Ascend above the heights of the clouds. Become like the Most High."

We were all subject to the absolute authority of Satan, and it was clear that the Almighty was showing him special attention, as he was keen to demonstrate his absolute obedience to the Almighty. We were eager to show our commitment to respect and reverence him. He was pleased with this obedience and respect. Whenever a topic arose in conversation, he would initiate it and eloquently conclude it.

We angels do not marry or reproduce, but Satan managed to overcome this obstacle. It wasn't clear whether his wife was from the lower jinn or from the extinct race of demons. No one, not even the angels, dared to speak of it. He was also keen not to involve his daughters in his work and relied only on males. I once heard one of the younger angels mocking this, saying that Satan's reluctance to involve his daughters

was because he feared for their reputation. Although I have brought the earthly universe to life thousands of times, I have never encountered any of his daughters; I always see his sons.

In reality, we never reached a definitive conclusion on this matter, and what I say does not go beyond my perception. The Almighty never hinted at it. Satan's children were adept at evasion and deception, as well as the ability to appear in different forms. Perhaps this was by the command of the Almighty to give Satan space for freedom in his work as part of the justice of the wager.

I was preoccupied with humans killing each other. Although it is a predetermined path, sometimes it goes beyond that. When authorities arrest someone and then take them to a dark dungeon and mutilate them, I find it unnecessary. However, it is evident that this action repeats and directly correlates with the decline in thinking and the inability to find a suitable alternative to obtain information or "interrogate" the detainee. This happens and has happened in all corners of the earthly universe.

Said the friend of the prophets: "Remember, humanity is a killer species."

"But they are also a prophetic species."

"True, but the earthly universe is governed by the laws of possession."

"Among the blessings of the Almighty upon us is that we are without offspring."

"Is this out of our perfection or fear of sin?"

"Perhaps both."

It never occurred to me to have children because it requires a desire for another gender to fulfill the task of procreation. Sometimes I hear discussions among some people about our gender as angels, mentioning that there is no gender among us because gender is a vital need for the survival of humans and tangible creatures on Earth, as their lives are short and they die. As for us, our lives are eternal until the end of the universe, and we have no need for gender and reproduction. I don't deny that the idea of procreation intrigued me, but I felt embarrassed to admit it to my colleagues and kept it out of my mind because the Almighty can know the secrets of our souls. In practical terms, we must anticipate death, and I will face a problem in transferring the souls of the angels and their elders to the valley... Then who will transport my soul if I perish?

The inhabitants of the earthly universe did not leave us alone. Some claimed we were females, and others said we were daughters of God. Some even elevated us to the rank of the Almighty and worshipped us, but the Almighty defended himself and mandated worship for Himself alone.

I was at the Frankfurt Book Fair, where I had the task of transporting two butterflies to the valley and their owners

from the exhibition workers. As I wandered, I overheard a heated discussion between two individuals speaking different languages, yet they continued to listen to each other. The conversation revolved around feelings and emotions and how they varied due to social and environmental standards. I listened to the conversation, which I heard for the first time, and I was impressed by the enthusiasm of the speakers. But after sending the butterflies to the valley, I sat in the deserted exhibition hall, which had closed its doors... Why do we not possess these feelings? Our lives continue without any fluctuations coloring our periods of existence, which we call existence, to include pleasure that adds some change and excitement to this existence. But I soon abandoned all of this as I received a new list, with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi at the top. When I received his soul butterfly, it was distressed, trying to find a way to escape. When I blew on it, it calmed down; the air I blew towards it carried both the scent and the heat of a sharp flame, first freezing it, then altering its behavior until it surrendered. Its face, distorted by a bullet that pierced its right jaw, wasn't relaxed; it seemed tense, as if it hated to die in this way.

The thoughts that sometimes occur to me make me feel tired... Is this the beginning of human emotions? Azrael said to me, "Well, because of your work with humans, you are haunted by such thoughts, but what about me? I have no work other than worship, yet similar thoughts plague me, and I ask myself, where am I heading?"

I said to him, "Should we consult the friend of the prophets?"

He quickly replied, "No... no."

I didn't respond because I received a list of 800 names in three different locations in the earthly universe, a mixture of American soldiers, Afghan civilians, and children. The first was at the airport in Afghanistan, the second in Iraq, where three soldiers and a farmer watched the attack on the soldiers, and the third in Turkey and Greece, where floods and storms destroyed different areas... I heard that some humans returned to talk about the expectation that Azrael would blow in the trumpets, and then the Hour would come, forgetting that such disasters that befall the earthly universe are repeated, indicating a physical malfunction in the relationship between the earthly universe and the planets that make up the galaxy of this universe.

I remember that Satan, before being expelled from the kingdom of the Almighty, once spoke to us about the universe's inclusivity, saying that the Almighty had established the relationships of this universe with all its galaxies and planets on the basis of highly precise physical equations. We heard this for the first time, and we were captivated as we listened attentively. What we know is within the limits imposed by the Almighty, and we did not know.

Furthermore, Satan, who was with the Almighty while the world was being created, was well-versed in all religious travels, stating that physics explains the movement of the

galaxies and planets and accurately calculates their speed to ensure they do not collide, as the speed at which they move grants them immense destructive power, posing a disaster for all galaxies.

During my work in the earthly universe, I became acquainted with many fields of knowledge that humans had managed to master. Different cognitive concepts began to form in my mind. However, I avoided mixing with humans, as the two kings Harut and Marut did, whom the Almighty sent to Babylon. They taught people magic in exchange for money and influence, despite warning the learners that this magic was harmful. We lost track of them, and they never returned to us. But news of their ability to separate a wife from her husband through magic reached me during religious travels. Babylon wasn't unfamiliar to me as it was a city characterized by its cosmopolitan nature, housing beings from all earthly nations. It was the capital of the ancient world. The interest in magic there was attributed to the spread of Jews throughout all social strata. They were the ones who promoted magic. Moses' staff, which devoured the snakes of Pharaoh's magicians in Egypt, was considered the highest form of magic, even though it was by the command of the Almighty. The Jewish magicians' stalls were full of women, in particular. One of the strangest encounters I had was when I received the soul of one of the senior magicians and an officer in the Babylonian army and sent them to the valley. The magician gave a junior officer in the Babylonian army an incantation that enabled him to obtain advanced ranks in the army. The next day, an anonymous letter reached the

officer's superior, accusing him of conspiring with the enemy. The officer was summoned, and upon searching him, the incantation written in Hebrew was found. When translated, it contained prayers to the God of Judah for the destruction of Babylon, the death of the Babylonian emperor, and the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. The Jewish magician and the Babylonian officer were both executed.

These thoughts wearied me, and I tried to push them away from my mind. Sometimes, I saw Satan deliberately obstructing my path, so I sought refuge in God and busied myself with my work.

Chapter three

My conviction grew that accustoming myself to human behaviour made me desire to emulate them. However, I ruled out any role for Lucifer, his offspring, or his descendants in this, because we have immunity from the Almighty. Nevertheless, some of these human habits or activities intrigued me. When I explained this to Israfil, he said I needed to reconsider my thoughts, and he wasn't prepared to offer more advice because he didn't find the subject suitable for our angelic status.

I asked him if I could request permission from the Almighty to grant me leave, as inhabitants of Earth do when they go on trips to seaside beaches, climb mountains, or explore deserts. During these trips, they leave work worries behind and indulge in a kind of freedom in their behavior. The serious ones among them attend music concerts, theaters, or book exhibitions. Israfil couldn't grasp the image I found fascinating enough to discuss in detail.

The setting was a street overlooking the Andaman coast connected to the Indian Ocean. I arrived a few minutes early. The list included 567 names from different nationalities, some came for tourism, and others were passing through to the open ocean towards Asia. I was waiting on a stone seat, overseeing the minutes until I could start my work. The woman sitting next to me had just turned eighty, she said, "You don't seem to be from around here?"

She was looking directly into my eyes.

I said, "No."

"And you're not European?"

"I'm from another world."

She smiled and then closed her eyes. "May I guess?"

"Sure."

"Alright, may I hold your hand?"

I stared at the old woman, she seemed genuine and sincere. For a moment, I doubted she was one of Lucifer's children; they had the ability to appear in any form they desired... I extended my hand.

"Do you feel like you're in an odd state of health?"

"How?"

"No warmth in your body."

"Didn't I tell you I'm from another world...!"

"Alright, young man from another world, can you do me a favor?"

"Under your command."

"I want ice cream, and as you can see, the cart selling it is surrounded by a group of young people exchanging bad jokes that I don't want to hear."

She handed me a five-dollar bill, and I approached the cart. A guy wearing colorful swimming shorts said, "Birds love the Andaman coast!"

Another guy at the back of the cart said, "Of course, where there are birds, there are birds."

The first guy said, "But our bird doesn't recognize age differences."

I knew they were making fun of me, but I didn't react. The first guy said, "Indeed, in His creations, there are signs."

The girl standing behind the cart, serving the customers their orders, said, "He doesn't know English, so don't bother."

I said to her, "I understand everything they said, but they're ignorant, and I won't dignify them with a response."

She didn't respond.

The woman said, "Thank you," as she took the ice cream cone from me.

One of the guys approached us, "Can I capture this camaraderie... firstly... I'll take a commemorative picture of you two, it might be amazing on the internet."

He raised his phone to take the picture...

He said, "Strange!! You don't appear on the phone's screen. Can you allow me to change your place?"

I didn't respond; the woman sarcastically said, "The picture is in the photographer's imagination, and your imagination is sick."

My appointment was approaching, so I settled the bill and hurriedly left.

The events at the end of the group were diverse, in various regions stretching from Greece to Algeria to New York and even to Mexico... earthquakes, hurricanes, and fires, and all these things constantly recur. Harut asked before descending to earth to practice magic in Babylon: "What would happen if Adam didn't descend to earth?"

He hesitated for a moment then said, "His offspring would be immortal like us."

"Meaning there would be no work for us, no death... and therefore no butterflies, no Valley of Souls, no prophets, and Gabriel remains friendless."

Harut interrupted, "And there would be no need for Israfil to blow in the trumpets, and certainly Rizwan would have no work at the gates of paradise... The matter seemed to me closer to humor than to an alternative or parallel vision of creating the earthly universe."

I said, "My problem is... how did Satan manage to whisper to Eve while he was on earth and she was in heaven... and the meteors didn't allow him to ascend?"

He didn't answer me...

When I look back at the thousands of years that have passed, I find myself in a tired dream, as repeating the same task millions of times creates a state of boredom, and if it weren't for (the Almighty) granting us the ability to endure and overcome hardships, I and my angel colleagues would have been in an enviable situation... True, some excitement happens occasionally, but it is transient... When Al-Khidr killed the boy who hosted him and Moses his family, his name was not on the list, surely (the Almighty) knows what will happen, but perhaps He decided that Al-Khidr understands his dissatisfaction with the decision to kill... That's why I didn't send his butterfly to the valley and maybe it's now hovering around Al-Khidr, who doesn't know how to get rid of

it, (the friend of the prophets) said that he cannot express an opinion on such issues.

On the way from Mexico, I received the list, which consisted mostly of Corona victims and its location extended across the earthly universe, its time intertwined and converging in a way that represents a cross-linked network. I thought it appropriate now to have assistants. Satan, who was hovering around me, said, "You are the only one working, I really pity you!"

"Just stay away from me and everything will be better. Besides, your bet with (the Almighty) was about Adam's offspring, and as you know, I'm not from his offspring."

"Because I know that, I'm trying to sympathize with you, my dear Azrael."

"And I don't want this sympathy... I can overcome obstacles without your intervention."

I still feel a bit of awe towards Satan, as he was my leader and the mediator for millions of years. In the calculations of the earthly universe, I responded to him in a manner between anger and courtesy, and he understood that, which is why he did not assign any of his children or grandchildren to confront me.

As he walked away, he said, "You are the only one I can talk to because you work like me in the earthly universe. As for the others, they are attached to the throne, and I am prohibited from ascending to heaven, and my children are chased by the meteors if they try to ascend to heaven."

"But why do they try to ascend?"

"Curiosity... They know there's no work for them in heaven with the angels!"

I noticed that he was speaking convincingly about the life he had chosen. He left me accompanied by one of his grandchildren and didn't look back. Everyone in the earthly universe, from the beginning until the blowing in the trumpets, will undergo an audit, and then their fate will be decided, except for Satan and his offspring. The decision to judge him was made by (the Almighty) from the first day he was expelled from heaven. He knows that, but he didn't show any regret. He is engrossed in tempting the inhabitants of the earthly universe, as if he is indulging in a hobby he loves. I asked myself if addiction to something breeds desire for it? For example, I used to send butterflies to the valley, but sometimes I feel that the task I'm doing doesn't satisfy me.

What caught my attention in the inhabitants of the earthly universe is their acts of laughter and crying... Sometimes I pass by a group of young people laughing loudly in a bar or at a cafe corner.

Some of them cried for their deceased loved ones... It was a thought that lingered for years... And finally, I learned that laughter is a feeling of joy while crying is a feeling of sadness... This seems obvious now, but at the time, it puzzled me greatly and caused me much confusion, because we angels do not experience such emotions. I have never

witnessed any of us going through that... Our daily lives are a fixed pattern, and what distinguishes me is that I have mingled with the inhabitants of the earthly universe, and I do not believe that Satan and his offspring differ from us.

I had mentioned to the "Friend of the Prophets" my need for assistants, and that conversation was just a mention; I did not ask him to speak to the "Almighty", but I was surprised when he hurriedly summoned me.

He said, "The Almighty commands you to choose from the angels the number of assistants you desire."

I felt satisfied, but it wasn't like the feeling of the inhabitants of the earthly universe (joy).

"Thank you... Will you help me in the selection process, because as you know, it's been a long time since I've seen any of them due to my work in the earthly universe."

He said, "I will nominate some for you, but how many do you want?"

"Six... for the six continents."

When I saw them standing before me with humility, I felt the weight of the responsibility we undertake in the earthly universe. None of them asked about the nature of their task because the "Friend of the Prophets" had already explained it. I told them that they would work in my name, and each of them was Azrael. Then I assigned each of them to a continent and immediately requested them to start working... It was a new experience for me and would give me the opportunity to focus on monitoring the affairs of humans in the earthly universe without specifying what I wanted from this monitoring. It didn't occur to me that the "Almighty" had chosen another role for me; I had grown accustomed to my work.

I spent two days with each of the angel assistants monitoring their performance and reactions while they worked. After that, I followed them from a distance. This allowed me the opportunity to observe the behavior of humans in the earthly universe on one hand, and the behavior of the angels working with me on the other. I noticed that the angels do not suffer from reactions because they do not possess human feelings, nor do they feel remorse. When I conversed with them, I found that they were surprised by the behaviors of the inhabitants of the earthly universe, where they kill each other and excel in inventing means of destruction. They were not even aware that these are descendants of Adam because they did not know that he and his wife were expelled from paradise. I must also mention that when the "Almighty"

presented Adam, the presentation was limited to the group of seven closest to the throne of the "Almighty", with Satan at the head, and with us were Harut and Marut before they succumbed to temptation in Babylon.

The "Friend of the Prophets" told me that what happens in the earthly universe is within the plan of the "Almighty", for the Prophet Muhammad had been informed, "And if God had not repelled some people by others, the earth would have been corrupted." He also informed me that Jeremiah had told his people, "And if they do not listen, then I will uproot that nation, uprooting and destroying it, says the Lord."

What was going on in my mind, I tried to push it away, but working with the earthly universe for millions of years had an effect on my thoughts. I don't want to follow the path of Satan or Harut and Marut... the "Almighty" is watching me... I know that.

The increase in the population of the earthly universe and the diversity and advancement of technology on land, sea, and air have raised the number of those exposed to accidents, and large numbers of butterflies began to reach the valley every moment.... Surely the "Almighty" has a vision of what is happening because it simply happens by His will, and He had warned Adam and his offspring that they would be held accountable for their deeds in their lives, whether by the

temptation of Satan or by their own volition.... I saw, everywhere, those who commit sins for millions of years, and I attributed it to Satan and the devils, believing that they were doing their job with supreme skill. As the number of sinners increased... But now, I think differently; may Allah curse the evil thoughts that creep into my mind. I felt lost, and my path seemed endless... And only then did I realize that I had started to think like the inhabitants of the earthly universe, and the beginnings or precursors of emotions began to form in me, and of course, that worried me.

Chapter Four

I knew I had to be more focused in my thoughts because I felt myself slipping slowly but steadily. Continuously, I attributed this to my interactions with the inhabitants of Earth, and as I began to regain my sense of awareness, I found that Satan had a role in this state.

He looked at me with anticipation - when I was the chief of angels and closest to the throne, you were closest to me.

I did not want to... what he said was true, but what did he aim to achieve by reaffirming it now?

Continued: Please answer an important question for me...
When we were created (by the Almighty), weren't we asked to prostrate only to Him?

I nodded affirmatively... and I remained cautious about engaging directly in dialogue with him as I was wary of being drawn into something I did not desire.

He said: Why then do you think we were asked to prostrate to Adam?

I replied: He knows best, and we have only what He commands us.

He said: You fail to grasp the wisdom of the Almighty here!
How so?

He was testing us so that we wouldn't forget, or neglect.

I didn't respond to him... I was thinking.

But he expelled you from heaven and did not confront us.

Who said he expelled me! He decided to create a balance between good and evil... between sin and righteousness... so he chose me to represent the side of sin... and at that moment, I pondered deeply... I was wrong, for I found it easy and straightforward, and fewer than the inhabitants of Earth were the ones who are innocent... I mean those whose temptation sometimes escapes me.

We do not understand the wisdom of the Almighty... but the three major religions on Earth claim otherwise.

Notice, my dear Azrael, that these religions do not even agree on (the Almighty), each attributing to him human characteristics closer to what they perceive in order to promote their concepts, for Judaism says that God created humans in his image... and he is the God of Israel, Christianity sees him as the Father of Jesus Christ, and the Son in the image of his Father, and in Islam, their prophet is the beloved of God... as if (the Almighty) possesses feelings of love and hate, from this, I say, O Azrael: If these religions do not agree on the attribute of (the Almighty) whom they worship, do they agree on Satan whom they hate!

I had to end this dialogue that would not lead to any conclusion.

I said: Well... keep your thoughts to yourself because I have to leave for Indonesia, he smiled as his eyes darted cunningly.

I had taken on the guise of a young, poor man but with a certain charm and a hint of authority... the grand celebration in Papua had begun in the city streets where hundreds of dancers in colorful traditional attire were performing a dance that blended pagan heritage with the Dutch colonial era and Islam.

A man in his mid-sixties stood beside me, holding a stick with an ivory handle, observing the festivities with interest, then suddenly turned to me.

Are you European?

He said in English tinged with an Indonesian accent.

Yes

How do you find this collection of folk dances?

I wanted to interact with the inhabitants of Earth, but not about folk dancing, as I generally believed its origins were pagan rituals.

There's an element of strangeness in it.

True... It seems you're knowledgeable about the origins of folk dancing... If you have some time, I can share some interesting details with you, if you find it entertaining!

I don't think it's necessary, as I know its origins are pagan.

The man placed the stick between his thighs and clapped his palms.

Wonderful... You've impressed me... Shall I invite you for some coffee?

A wide, cheerful smile spread across his face.

And he continued: It's on me...

There was a joyful tone in his voice that I hadn't noticed among earthly beings, and in his eyes, there was a familiar gaze. The café we entered was situated at the corner of an alley branching off from the main street. The door emitted the aroma of coffee, and inside, a few people were smoking and sipping large cups of coffee. Everyone turned towards my companion with welcoming looks, and some waved their hands in greeting. The warm welcome was an expressive indication of his personality and his position within the relaxed group. Soft rhythmic music flowed as if from a medieval setting, a sound I had heard specifically in cafes and

bars in Rome. The waiter hurried towards us to lead us to a table set for two with a tablecloth embroidered with threads dominated by the colours yellow and blue, depicting three birds about to land on the ground.

My companion said: I'm Ebyan.

He extended his hand towards me.

And I'm Az...

When I placed my hand in his, his face changed, and the muscles of his cheeks twitched slightly.

Your hand is cold as ice!

Yes, I'm a bit tired.

I think it's best we go to a doctor. Fortunately, my son works at a clinic in the parallel street.

I don't think I need a doctor. This is a condition I go through when my sleep is irregular, and as you know, the climate in Jakarta has changed a lot for me.

A light rain began to fall. The drops were small but consistent, and the street started to glisten as the rain mingled with the remnants of dust.

He said: We call October the month of rain... Soon the drops will grow bigger and chase each other, forming a barrier at the curb... Rain heralds good fortune... Our ancestors used to pray for it, and in some remote villages, they would offer sacrifices to the gods, selecting a member of the village to be the blood that would flow as an incentive for rain.

The music spreading in the café created an atmosphere of joy as the rain fell and darkness enveloped the street, and the imaginations of those fleeing from the wetness laughed.

Ebyan said, "What do you do?"

The question caught me off guard. "What do I do?"

Nothing.

He wasn't surprised.

So you're one of the fortunate unemployed.

No... But my work is nothing.

What do you mean? Isn't it strange for someone to do nothing?

Forget about me... What do you do?

I create joy and dig into memory... That's completely opposite to you... I do everything... I write folk songs, teach dance, and write entertaining stories. Our people are kind, joyful, and literate. That's how I earn a lot.

A woman began to sing with a soft but deep and joyous voice, sitting with two men, in front of them three bottles of beer, one of which remained untouched

Abian said, "Let a lady from the Indonesian islands and the princess of Arab music, in the eighteen thousand uninhabited islands, let the birds there listen to your enchanting singing."

The woman smiled, standing up and lifting strands of her hair. She was tall, dark-skinned with wide eyes that held their own magic, casting their shadows like black kohl, yet subtly,

hinting at her emergence from the enchanting depths of Indonesian history.

"I wrote this song for her and made its melody light and rhythmic," Abian continued.

"Are you happy with what you do?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"And your family?"

"I've been married for forty-five years. My eldest son is a successful doctor, and my daughter Kartika is studying law in the Netherlands... This is the source of my happiness. Let me just enjoy singing; it takes me back to the youthful days filled with movement and passion."

The singer approached our table, swaying to the danceable tune but with elegant grace and a captivating calmness. She nodded at me in greeting and then reached out to Abian, pulling him up to dance with her.

Abian moved lightly, swaying to the music, while she bent with agility, indicating her expertise in dancing and singing, with a talent for conveying suggestive movements.

Abian turned to me and gestured for me to dance.

"I'm tired; maybe you can take over for me to rest," he said.

A joyful feeling crept into me, but I quickly apologized. I didn't want to overstep, realizing that I was no longer myself; a sense of humanity and desires I didn't know I had had enveloped me.

"Friend of the prophets," whispered a voice, "we will be humans together, and you must contemplate yourself. Beware of the fate of Harut and Marut (the mighty), which allows you to seize your destiny."

Abian said, "I'm glad you're here. Would you accompany me to my home? It's nearby."

The house we entered was small but elegant, differing from the surrounding houses. The large threshold in front of the door seemed like a bridge connecting the street to the house. The architect who designed the facade and the prominent upper part above the door was skilled and imaginative. The dark colour of the front facade distinguished it from the rest of the houses, and the design of the door, windows, and reflective glass was a marvellous architectural work.

In the living room, we were greeted by a lady with delicate features, a lively smile, and a friendly gaze. She wore a shirt patterned with local flowers, long sleeves, a knee-length black skirt, and casual home slippers matching the color of the shirt.

Abian introduced her, "My wife, Mika."

I bowed politely.

"I'm Azaddin," I said.

She didn't look up at me but turned inside, and we followed her. The living room was cozy, with a large painting extending across the right side of the wall.

The painting originally belonged to the visual artist Sutomo and was preserved in the presidential palace in Jakarta. I glimpsed it the day I was taking a stroll in Soeharto Park... The painting depicted a profile of the multi-talented artist (Riesbovo) ... The planning was precise, indicating the professionalism and skill of the artist who drew it.

When Abian noticed me staring at the painting, he asked, "Have you seen it before?"

"It's the replica... no... but I've seen the original in Jakarta, and I'm truly amazed by the craftsmanship of the artist who created it in this way."

He looked at me in astonishment.

His wife said, "Please, continue the conversation at the table."

he said it fluently in Dutch.

Abian added, "My wife invites us to the table."

"Yes, I understand... I also speak Dutch."

Exclaimed with admiration: "What a pleasant breeze brought you to us! Do you know, I haven't met an intellectual for more than thirty years? The last time was with Dubreuil at a café near the Concorde. He was astonishing with his enchanting encyclopedic analyses. And today, with you... who are you?"

His wife said softly: "Let your question be answered by the conversation."

He said, "I forgot to tell you that Mika is a poet and used to teach modern Indonesian literature at Jakarta University. She is retired now, but she insists on listening to Indonesian women's poetry every evening when I'm at home... She is biased towards her own gender."

I felt that this atmosphere, filled with understanding, intimacy, and simplicity, was something I had never experienced before. We, at the throne, do not have such a framework for our lives... We do not eat or leave waste behind. There is an atmosphere of reverence, humility, and silence... We cannot find anything to talk about in terms of feelings or emotions colored by what the speakers reveal through their eyes...

I said, "Could I hear some of your poetry, madam?"

At that moment, she began to recite her poetry in a warm voice tinged with tenderness, making me listen with closed eyes... Dubreuil raised a glass of white wine.

Whispered (Friend of the Prophets): "Beware, you are at the beginning of temptation."

I said, "Please forget about that."

Satan was not in the house; I was listening to words of love in Dutch, delicate and enchanting, and I thought that poetry was also a temptation but a preferred one as it doesn't carry the weight of sin.

When she stopped reciting, I said, "Madam, your poetry was incredibly beautiful, and your voice added a fascinating charm to it."

Now, I am convinced that I am on the path to becoming one of the earthly beings; I have begun to feel reactions towards what they call human feelings or emotions, and (the Almighty) will give me this opportunity.

The experience of Harut and Marut was a failure because they did not pay attention to the aspects that serve the human being they dealt with, and they used their abilities and skills to create discord and destroy the foundations of human relationships, just as Satan and his clan do. I remembered the experience of the two angels who descended upon the people of Lot; their contact with the inhabitants of the earthly world was very short, and therefore their experience is not considered.

I said to Dubreuil, "I must ask for permission because I feel tired from a day full of events... The celebration ended early because of the rain."

He handed me a copy of his wife's poetry collection and accompanied me to the door... He seemed to be thinking deeply, and I guessed it was about me, as he was not convinced that I was a writer of any importance in my country.

At the door, he said, "Forgive me... I didn't know which country you are from?"

I said smiling, "From Germany."

He shook his head and turned to his wife, "That explains the encyclopedic culture. You are from the land of Hegel, Marx, Goethe, and Nietzsche... Yes, it doesn't surprise me."

I said, "Perhaps, as I have read all of them and memorized Goethe's poetry."

The sky was clear, sparkling with stars shining steadily; I felt immense happiness as I walked on the asphalt while cars raced on the main street, sometimes splashing the remaining rainwater on the sidewalk and the illuminated facades of the shops.

And now, Azrael, what will you do? Where will you go and how will you act? You have no experience in dealing with the inhabitants of the earthly world, and the passing relationship with Dubreuil and his wife is not a foundation to build upon.

On the sidewalk, there was a man wrapped in an Arab cloak, pretending to wait for a taxi, but when I approached him, he surprised me:

"Finally, you descended to the earth... Just remember, you are now human, while I am still a banished king."

"What do you mean?"

"I am the strongest... and remember your friend Harut and Marut."

"The difference is, I know what I want and I know your power perfectly."

"We shall see!"

Chapter Five

I was in Cairo, and I decided to witness the Egyptians' vibrant celebrations during Ramadan nights. I found myself drawn to such celebrations, where people express joy, transcending their daily struggles. As the fear of COVID-19 receded, lights sparkled like stars in the sky, decorative lanterns hung above doors, and colorful fabrics adorned tables and chairs throughout the city. The festive atmosphere echoed like a pulse in every street and alley.

Whispers (Friend of the Prophets): You wander until your last hour as an angel, you are now a human of the earthly realm, and you must manage your affairs. You won't be able to communicate with me or the other angels afterward; this is the will of the Almighty.

Though I felt some confusion and hesitation, the bustle outside the Hussein Shrine building captured all my attention. I sat on a wooden chair in a café at the street corner, amidst the bustling crowd. Voices overlapped amid dense smoke filling the café's space. Some sang, oblivious to others. The songs were of Sufi poetry, typically starting with clear warmth and passion.

A woman entered wearing a black galabeya with short sleeves, despite the slightly chilly weather. Her disheveled hair suggested neglect despite its short cut, indicating she might be over sixty, having endured many trials. She reached out her hand, and I handed her a dollar. Joy spread across her weathered face as she emitted a long cry that drew the attention of the crowd. A customer, intoxicated by the hookah's fumes, staggered to his feet, gesturing to attract attention.

"Greet with me the most famous dancer in the streets of Haram," he exclaimed, "Not in every Cairo street where they perform all seasons. The dancer who shone thirty years ago."

He pulled out a ten-pound note from his pocket, inviting her to take it. She ran towards him, jingling with excitement, "Greetings to the great mayor!

She shouted, shaking amidst the crowd as she grabbed the note. The man, with thick mustaches covering his mouth, said, "These who don't know you, how could they appreciate folk dancing?"

The woman stood in the middle of the café, tying a patron's scarf around her waist. The man said, "Not here, on the foreigners' table."

He gestured towards me. "Do as he says," she replied.

As she approached, I told her, "I don't agree to have you dance on my table."

Confusion filled her eyes. "I'll kiss your hand if you make a deal with the mayor because he's killing me."

The man approached me, "Not in your mood, you're a guest and a stranger. As the saying goes, 'Oh stranger, be eloquent.'"

"But I haven't done anything, and you're attacking me without reason," I protested.

"I said you'll dance on this table," he insisted.

The woman interjected, "Sir, you go inside, and let the mayor sit where you are."

"No... with you dancing and the foreigner watching, you'll be the center of attention for all Hussein's visitors," he argued.

The man grabbed my collar and shook me forcefully. He was muscular, accustomed to engaging in physical confrontations. I managed to break free and pushed him back. All café patrons stood, awaiting the inevitable outcome of the impending fight, but any

Some of them didn't intervene to resolve the conflict. Three police officers entered, and one of them blew a whistle

loudly, silencing everyone. The man addressed the policeman who seemed to be in charge of the group.

He said: "Your Excellency, the foreigner attacked me, and everyone in the café can testify... Look."

I felt astonished as I saw a trickle of blood running down his cheek... I remained silent.

The officer said: "Everyone, to the police station... Walk in front of us."

A policeman grabbed my wrist and pulled me to the front of the procession heading to the nearby police station. Along the way, the crowd accompanying us grew, and the mayor raised his blood-stained hand to show it to the onlookers as we made our way to the station.

Entering the station required climbing three concrete steps, and at the door stood a policeman who paid no attention to us, appearing like a statue placed for decoration. The officer instructed me, the mayor, the woman, and two café customers to wait silently in the inner courtyard, threatening us with vulgar language if we spoke out of turn. Then he entered the duty officer's room as he had informed us, and after a while, he came out and ordered me:

"Enter... You must surrender everything you have, including your watch and mobile phone, to the policeman sitting at the desk in the courtyard corner with a wooden barrier in front of him."

The officer was a young man with the rank of captain, and his eyes held a considerable amount of contempt, noticeable in

their circular movements, as if they were hunting prey. His face was even paler than the people who filled the cafes and restaurants of the Hussein neighbourhood.

"What is your nationality?" he asked, not inquiring about my name, as nationality governed treatment, and names meant nothing.

"I am American," I replied.

"What is an American gentleman doing in a working-class neighbourhood?"

"I am attracted to the distinctive characteristics of working-class neighbourhoods."

"Alright, give me your passport."

"I don't have it with me... It's at the reception desk in the hotel."

"Ask the reception to confirm that for me."

In truth, I didn't have my passport with me. I had used my last opportunity to travel to Cairo. His cunning eyes detected my lie.

"Listen, I don't want to engage in a dialogue with you... Inform the station clerk that you handed him two hundred and nine dollars... waive half of it, close the matter, and go back to your hotel, whatever it is."

I thought it was an official extortion operation under the Egyptian flag by a state official. I was as astonished as a

principled citizen who had not yet been acquainted with pragmatism, so I refused.

The officer didn't comment. The prosecutor, the drug user, and the station clerk were summoned to record their statements. The officer first asked him about his name, age, and address, then proceeded to listen to his complaint... After he signed the complaint, the officer ordered the clerk, who was recording the statements, to send it to the forensic medicine to assess the damage caused to him by my attack. He then turned towards me.

"We will start by hearing your statement later," he said, nodding towards the woman who confirmed the incident according to the mayor's statement, adding that she begged me to relent, but I persisted in insulting and mocking the mayor. Then I punched him in the right cheek, causing bleeding.

The officer said to me: "You will be held until Saturday, the day after tomorrow, because today is Thursday. You will be charged with assaulting an Egyptian citizen and causing damage and injury to his face, in addition to not having any documents identifying you... Who knows, you might be an Israeli spy... The investigation will reveal that."

The policeman took me from the officer's room, holding my arms tightly. We walked through a dimly lit corridor to the detention room. Occasionally, I glanced at the cells in the detention room or the cells of detainees and prisons in various parts of the world, but what distinguishes those in the countries where

Controlled by either authoritarian groups or individuals, particularly in European countries, the first represents a model of debauchery, oppression, and monopolization as well. Where one or more dominate by agreement with the administration to sell certain goods or secure protection for young detainees. So, when the cell door opened and the time had passed midnight, I wasn't surprised to find most inmates smoking, some staring blankly and bewildered at the ceiling. The cell smelled musty, and the inmates wore dirty jalabiyas. The cell may not accommodate more than fifteen inmates, but there were more than forty-five, some standing against the wall. The policeman said: "This is how it is during Ramadan because of the increasing numbers roaming the Al-Hussein district, providing opportunities for thieves, pickpockets, and harassers."

I didn't respond because I understood that.

When I entered, everyone stopped in surprise, and one of the drug addicts screamed, waving his hand towards me.

"The foreigner is with us."

I stood there, feeling like a strange bird in a crow's cage. At the end of the cell, there was a young man, perhaps no more than twenty-two, crouching in the corner, fear and panic evident in his eyes, as if he expected to be struck at any moment. Most of those present seemed to be professional thieves, securing drug purchases... A tall, stern-faced man approached me.

He said: "You're Shakoosh... and I'm in charge of the system here."

When I extended my hand to shake his, he ignored it and said: "Where are you from? You won't be Egyptian."

"True... I'm American."

He raised his hands above his head and addressed the inmates: "The Prophet's prayer is better... payment will be in dollars, and tonight you'll eat kebabs from Farhat's."

I felt embarrassed as I didn't have a single dollar. To indicate this, I slipped my hand into my trouser pocket, feeling a shiver as I touched banknotes... he did it. I pulled out a handful from my left pocket and tried to give him some, but he grabbed all that I pulled out before I could.

"You don't need it here, foreigner, and Allah will provide for you tomorrow, don't worry about it, it's all arranged."

He turned to the inmates.

"It's not just dinner but also breakfast tomorrow, as Friday is blessed."

One of the inmates said, "Shakoosh, I crave shakshuka eggs, halloumi cheese, and fifty-fifty tea."

"You order... now all your requests are fulfilled."

I headed inside, looking for a place to sit as I felt tired.

He turned towards me: "Foreigner... you're my personal guest, and if there's no place, I'll lay my eyes for you. You're a guest for me and all the inmates, so you're a prince here."

Despite the flattery, I felt some joy. He led me to a colorful rug with three cushions and said, "Rest here until Saturday."

He brought me some strong black tea. I told him I didn't drink it that way. He slapped his forehead and called out, "You're a lover... fresh light tea for the foreigner."

He turned to me: "Because I liked you, I imagined you're from Upper Egypt! Oh, the feeling of brotherhood and solidarity."

I was about to finish the tea I enjoyed when the policeman arrived, banging the iron door with the huge key he carried, trying to get attention, then calling my name.

"Jacob Fisherman."

Shakoosh said: "He's calling you... maybe news from the American embassy."

When I stood before the officer, he asked me to sit.

"Do you smoke?"

Okay... It seems you haven't handed over all your dollars. Where did you hide them?

I didn't hide anything; I genuinely didn't know I had that amount.

I'll believe you... You seem like an earnest man. Do you know that I haven't sent the lawsuit file yet? I've been wondering what would prompt a respectable man like you to claim to be in a hotel that doesn't have his name on the guest list, without a passport or any identification documents. How did

you enter Egypt? How did you arrive at Hussein district? And what are the reasons for sitting in a local café? Believe me, these questions and more have been running through my mind. Finally, I came to the conclusion that you'll leave the investigating judge's office as soon as the American embassy is contacted... So, to spare you the bitterness of spending two nights in a place where only God knows what you'll face, I invite you to pay \$2000, and you'll find yourself in the hotel you requested with my private car. I thought practically and agreed. I paid the amount. That's how people slip into sin; necessity drives them. I placed the money in the drawer, took the military cap, and told the janitor I'd be absent for half an hour on duty. When he left me at a small isolated hotel after informing them that I was coming on his behalf and that my passport was with him, I had absorbed the first human lesson and felt sorry for the waste of people's rights because authority cares about money more than justice. I felt anxious inside because I was slipping into a path unsure of where it would lead me. I spent my nights... And in the morning, I found myself again in Hussein district. I went to Farhat's restaurant and ordered a Shakshouka and kebab for forty people, sending the order to the police station in Hussein district and calling the person who would deliver it, giving him a ten-dollar tip for the delivery. The restaurant manager looked at me with surprise but didn't comment. He handed me the Egyptian pound currency. I went to wander in the market full of traditional clothes, feeling hungry, so I returned to the restaurant. The delivery guy welcomed me cheerfully. "They prayed for your long life and success... Do you want

anything?" "Yes, I'd like a special Shakshouka dish." "As you wish." He led me to a table overlooking the street, began to wipe it, and told the nearby waiter, "Shakshouka for the gentleman and a cup of tea without sugar." I didn't comment. I said, "I want a hot bread loaf." "Sure." He approached me cautiously and whispered, "Sir, if you need currency exchange, I can get you a good rate... The scoundrels in the market exploit tourists." I pulled out a hundred-dollar bill. "I need this only now." He put it in his pocket and said to the waiter, "If the gentleman needs me, I'll be back in five minutes, a quick errand." As I sat at the table in front of me, a girl in her twenties with precise and harmonious features and a young man, perhaps over thirty, were speaking softly and smiling, with sips of tea, the girl's voice began to rise. "I'm tired... This is the third year, and you keep making excuses to postpone." "My dear, you know that my job requires me to travel for long periods, and I can't leave it now because what I get from it will provide us with a comfortable life. And then, I'll return to work in Cairo... Who knows, maybe in this restaurant."

n the name of God, this is the last chance... And now I have to leave because my classes start at eleven, and the principal is strict.

I'll stay for a while and then leave to Port Said where the ship docks... We'll keep in touch. Do you want anything from Pennsylvania?

Take care.

The girl left angrily, grinding her teeth. After crossing the street to the other side, she hailed a taxi. The young man was sitting across from me.

I said, "May I join you at your table or would you prefer to join me?"

Yes... Why?

I have a job offer for you that might ease the difficulties you're facing.

He got up from his chair, holding his tea cup, and sat beside me.

I'm listening.

It won't take much of your time... I heard you talking about your job on the ship departing to Pennsylvania. What is your job on the ship?

I'm the chef... But what do you mean?

I'm an American, but without a passport, and I'm considering arranging a smuggling trip.

Strange... Why such an unsafe manoeuvre... You can contact the American consulate, and they can arrange a passport or even a transit visa for you!

The matter is somewhat complicated.

Who guarantees that you're sincere and not trying to involve me in matters beyond illegal travel?

I have nothing to prove my sincerity except what I want to offer you... I'll pay you ten thousand dollars now and five thousand in Pennsylvania.

He took a large sip from his tea, which seemed cold, and looked out at the passers-by on the street, rubbing his head.

The matter needs study. What do you think if we meet after Dhuhr prayer at the door of Sayyidna Al-Hussein?

I have no objection... And here are a thousand dollars to help you make a decision.

I spent some time wandering the nearby alleys and sat in three cafes listening to various conversations. The women accompanying their husbands or those who came in groups to visit Al-Hussein spoke loudly, leaving no topic untouched, discussing household matters, children, neighbour problems, Trump jokes, and Turkish series. I entered the shrine of Al-Hussein and toured some sections where scholars from Al-Azhar gave open lectures, some in Quran interpretation, some in language or in the Sunnah. A sheikh in his forties caught my interest; he had a remarkable ability to mix serious talk with humor, quick and surprising jokes as if they were spontaneous... I sat on the mat in the last three rows in front of him... And while he was talking about the marriage of the Prophet to Zainab bint Jahsh... he paused, directing his gaze towards me, and asked, "Sir, which country are you from?"

America.

The honorable name.

Jacob Fisherman.

Meaning you're a Christian... Well, I'll allow you to stay on the condition that you entertain us with a joke about the respectable Trump.

Although Trump himself is a joke, I'll tell you an Egyptian joke I heard in one of the cafes in Al-Hussein neighborhood...

Trump wanted to use the elevator to his office, and the elevator attendant was a new employee. Trump asked, "Kid, which floor are you going to?" The kid replied, "Going to heaven, sir, I'm a good kid."

The sheikh laughed and said, "Alright, let's continue the subject."

At the door of Al-Hussein Mosque, precisely at two o'clock, my companion arrived. We sat in a small restaurant.

What's your name?

Jacob Fischerman.

I'm Gamal Al-Alexandri... I have a better offer than what you requested, to travel by ship... I have a trustworthy friend who can provide you with an American passport with an exit visa from an American airport and an entry visa to Cairo.

Does he have samples that can be inspected?

The sample you inspect is your passport. If you're not convinced, you pay five hundred dollars, and if you accept it, you pay fifteen thousand to him and ten thousand to me.

He provided the personal information as requested by the owner and five hundred dollars. The next day, we went together to a village about forty kilometers away from Cairo.

We walked along the Nile, passing through green agricultural areas along the asphalt strip, feeling the coolness of spring creeping in. We didn't exchange conversation... He turned the car onto a dirt side road... A small village immersed in deep silence, the house we were heading to was made of mud and old bricks, with roofs of corrugated iron covered with straw mats mixed with mud to withstand the winter rains... We were greeted by a dark-skinned man with narrow red eyes, warmly welcoming us, saying, "Does our guest understand Arabic?"

Yes.

Okay... Welcome, sir.

I thanked him, and he led us into a semi-dark room with no windows, with gray clouds passing outside. He asked, "What kind of tea would you like?"

My companion said, "Regular, no sugar."

He sat at a rickety table and pulled out a brown leather wallet, opened it carefully, and took out the American passport and handed it to me.

I said, "Can I inspect it outside?"

He didn't respond but stood up. At the door, there was a fourteen-year-old girl with black braids carrying three cups of tea, one of them noticeably darker in color.

"My daughter, Samah," he smiled, then continued, "I named her Samah to forgive Allah and time, as her mother died during childbirth... I, the poor servant, forgive Allah because it

was His will, and I forgive time because I lost a dear person from my heart!"

I felt embarrassed and somewhat responsible; I had taken her butterfly on a summer morning.

I examined the passport; its craftsmanship was astounding, and the man was a craftsman to an unbelievable extent; his work couldn't be described without seeing it.

I remained silent, handed him the amount, and in the car, I gave my companion ten thousand dollars as requested, but I wanted to confront him.

I said, "I know you asked me to hand you the amount in the car because you would take your commission of five thousand dollars from it."

He stopped the car engine and looked at me in astonishment, then smiled and resumed driving slowly, allowing me to enjoy the relaxed March sun, which flooded the road with golden rays shimmering on the raindrops on the trees and palms along the street.

Chapter Six

At Cairo Airport, everything went smoothly. The passport officer tried to be lighthearted. Handing me back my passport after stamping it with a firm thud, he said, "Tell Biden to leave us alone." He said it in Arabic, thinking I wouldn't understand. I replied, "Thank you," deliberately using broken Arabic. He glanced at me in surprise. As I left, he didn't follow me, thinking I thanked him for stamping my passport.

On the plane, there was an Egyptian man in his sixties sitting next to me. He kept talking about the university where he worked and the quality of education there. I felt tempted to join for a master's degree. I mentioned that I knew the university well, noting that its administration was somewhat strict due to its Catholic affiliation. He told me he criticized the university because he was Orthodox and had been teaching there for ten years. I got engrossed in reading the EgyptAir magazine.

I pondered that it hadn't been a week since I transitioned to being human on Earth, yet circumstances led me to commit two sins. How about an ordinary person facing immense pressure to make a living for decades? How many mistakes would they make?

The man beside me asked to move to empty seats at the back to sleep. I started watching the TV screen in front of me. The flight attendant asked if she could sit next to me. I nodded affirmatively. After she removed her hat and sat down, she asked, "Will you continue after New York?" It seemed like we had a prior conversation. I said, "Maybe, but after a week." She replied, "We might meet."

I didn't respond, just looked at her. She said, "Nice to meet you. I'm Mary, but my friends call me Ree Ree." It seemed fitting to compliment her spontaneity.

"My name is Jacob, but since I have no friends, no one spoils me by changing my name," I said, trying to find a bridge for conversation.

She said, "Consider me your first friend. Do you like the name GG?"

"Thank you. You're kind," I replied.

"Do you know, I feel like I've known you for a long time, maybe in elementary or high school?" she said.

"Many people I meet feel like they've seen me before. There's something about my features that suggests that," I replied.

"I stood with a friend at the door welcoming passengers. I said, 'I know this young man,' but couldn't remember. We're all children of Eve and Adam. Sometimes, we see someone who reminds us of someone we knew and parted ways with."

"Anyway, if you have time in New York, I usually hang out at Bossa Nova Cafe in Brooklyn. Shall I give you the address?"

"No need. I know it. I attended the memorial concert for guitarist Antonio Jobim in 1994. I happened to pass by the street and was drawn to the celebration."

"Wonderful! That means you're a guitar enthusiast, which I adore. I'm delighted we have something in common. I'll consider this the beginning of a friendship."

"Why not?"

Mary, as she pulled her suitcase with a bright smile lighting up her face while her cheeks tinted with a light blush. When the officer received my passport and browsed through it, a frown creased his face.

"What's your address?" he asked.

"1281 Myrtle Avenue - Brooklyn," I replied.

He seemed perplexed, but he stamped the passport and handed it back to me hesitantly. I sat in the café near the exit, pondering the immigration officer's demeanor at JFK Airport. I ordered a large espresso, smiling as I thought I was acting just like any earthling man – preoccupied with how others perceive me and noticing a woman's admiration for a

masculine spirit. Finally, I ordered coffee to help me focus on my thoughts.

The plump black waitress asked, "Anything else, sir?" I shook my head.

A woman walked in with a Doberman, muzzled to prevent it from attacking anyone as it was quick to anger and untrustworthy. The dog stopped near my table, refusing to move and glared at me angrily, mixed with fear. It didn't respond to the woman's command to move.

She scolded, "What did you do to my dog? Please, ask him to move."

Some customers and passersby looked at me with surprise as the stubborn dog remained unmoved.

I stood up and patted its head. It seemed to surrender and appeared comfortable with my touch. I told it, "Be polite and go with the lady."

It lowered its head and moved slowly. A few young girls with a group of boys came to watch airport scenes for their school project. They started clapping as the boys and their teacher smiled.

The black waitress said, "Sir, your coffee is on the house."

Animals are said to sense changes in nature more accurately than scientific monitoring devices... perhaps it's what made the dog recognize that I was an extraterrestrial visitor!

The driver, waiting to pick up another passenger, asked, "Where would you like to go?"

He was tall, recently shaved his head, making his skull shiny. He politely bent to open the door. When he sat behind the wheel, he adjusted the mirror to have me in view.

"Yes," I said.

"Alright, I don't have an address, but I want a small, quiet, and clean hotel."

"Well, sir, it's a bit far from the center of New York."

"That's fine."

"And due to the services it offers, the rates aren't cheap... may I ask which country you're from?"

"As for the rates, I won't dwell on the matter. But I'm from Egypt."

"Wow."

"Have you ever visited?"

"No, I haven't left New York... Do you know, sir, I see the whole world in it... every neighborhood has its own traditions and customs, and different people. When I find time, I choose a neighbourhood to explore."

He looked at me in the mirror as if he were watching the impact of his words on me. I began to suspect he might be from security, trying to lure me in, but I found he was just talkative.

"I see the hotel is far," I said.

"In fact, it's no more than twenty-five kilometers away, but the streets are congested, causing delays... This is New York, and you have to get used to it."

As we exited the...

A side street filled with lush greenery illuminated by the dazzling rays of electric lights spilled over, veered to the right of the street, and came to a halt.

"Before we reach the hotel, I'd like to introduce myself, for you are no longer what you were... You are now a resident of the Earthly universe... and they, as you know, possess limited talents... All they have today, we knew before them."

I didn't want to say I knew him... I waited, looking at him perplexed... What does he want? And for what purpose is he offering me help? I wanted to live my experience freely and face my problems and seek solutions for them. It's true that I lack the experience that a human gains since understanding their place in life, but I have a vision accumulated over hundreds of thousands of years and millions of visits to the Earthly universe.

"Alright, I've figured it out... I feel a certain fondness towards you as I was your leader for a long period of time, and I know everything about you, as I believe you know me well. Trust me, I don't want to seduce you. It's a matter of ethical commitment or according to the situation we're in..."

"I don't wish to continue the dialogue. Please get me to the hotel and leave me alone, and don't let your boys follow me."

He smiled and said, "Ah, you've changed your tone. Anyway, you're without identity and don't have much money left. One of my sons is a personal friend of the mafia boss in New York and the East Coast, and he can get you a fake ID and find you a job to lead a normal life and continue your experience... Who knows, maybe you'll benefit from it."

"Thank you, I will continue my life with my knowledge and with the resources bestowed upon me by the Almighty."

"I won't argue with you... Think first about what I'm offering you, and remember secondly that those who relied on the Almighty, their fate was death."

He turned towards the steering wheel and continued driving.

I spent the morning lounging on a comfortable couch, sipping pomegranate juice and indulging in a slice of cake flavored with custard. In the afternoon, I went out to buy some books, and in the bestseller advertisements, I found many of them either delving into the lives of people with extraordinary talents or.....

You're speaking about murder, mutilation, and revenge, interpreting them as attempts at compensation, escape, and seeking refuge in dreams that transport individuals to another reality where they experience triumphs over terrifying forces, leaving them in a state of ecstasy. You thought that escape isn't just through drugs or the deception of charlatans but also through literature.

You visited three magazines and paid their price before returning to the hotel. The receptionist asked, "Will you be dining with us?"

"After a while, I'll go to Fifth Avenue, and I might be late in Brooklyn. Please arrange a taxi for me at four o'clock, please."

"Sure."

On Fifth Avenue, you observed how the upper class behaves, what they buy. The large shops were owned by Jews, generally skilled at customer exploration and convincing abilities. Conversely, drug dealers, blue pill peddlers, various types of knives, and counterfeit perfumes were found at street corners, mostly with dark-skinned individuals. You sat in an Eastern café on one of the side streets. In front of the café, there was a skating rink usually frequented by teenagers. Near the door, a few young men were trying to sell hallucinogenic pills. The waiter looked at me and said as he placed the coffee in front of me,

"Does the gentleman need anything else?"

"No."

"If you need company, I can invite the girl with the boyish haircut by the window."

"Thank you, but I have an appointment and will leave soon."

He left me and returned with some orders for the customers. What should I do? How will I manage my life? Which direction am I heading? I have no official papers, no educational certificate, nor any work experience certificate. Surely, I

won't involve myself in any unlawful activities or step into the door of sin again. It's enough that I committed three sins in my first month. I decided to leave the search for answers until tomorrow and go to the Bosa Nova Sveik club. In my mind, perhaps I'll meet Mary. I told the taxi driver, whom I stopped after four cars passed by, to ensure I wouldn't get involved with the devil again.

"Marty Avenue, Brooklyn, please."

He didn't turn towards me, drove about three hundred meters, then turned around. A loud explosion echoed on Fifth Street, and immediately, the sky opened its doors, pouring down torrents of water with such force that visibility became impossible. The driver stopped by the curb and firmly closed the doors.

"Strength and glory to Jesus."

He made the sign of the Trinity, closing his eyes in devotion. The tumult of rain penetrated the call to prayer from a nearby mosque. I asked myself if anyone would attend. On ordinary days, they enter places of worship, thinking about their concerns while worshipping.

"We're surely heading towards the end!!!" the driver said without turning to me.

I lifted my gaze to the sky covered with dark clouds, pouring rain as if it were a connected stream. Throughout my earthly existence, I couldn't look towards the sky because I always had work even until the twentieth second. Today, the sky moved away, and the canvas of creation (of the Almighty)

disappeared. I longed to see the stars crossing the universe like a connected fiery ribbon.

The rain eased, and the driver moved towards Brooklyn. The building was adorned with hundreds of colored lights, and about ten meters wide, a glass facade revealed six shelves displaying distinguished sets of alcoholic beverages illuminated by dazzling lights, catching the attention of passersby. Music was playing from the main door, a soft melody by Rilke's Day. This was an exception because the club usually played for the musicians who worked there.

The rain stopped, and the rain umbrellas were folded. The street appeared clean, gleaming under the electric lights, and the faces of passersby appeared more relaxed, despite the frequent natural upheavals during stormy weather, humanity feels weak, or rather discovers its weakness, resorting to

"At the entrance of the club, two individuals stood, each on one side, scrutinizing the incoming guests and inspecting them for fear of carrying firearms. The corridor leading to the lounge was dimly lit with glass, and on either side of the corridor hung pictures of the man who inaugurated the club, followed by a collection of images of the top musicians who performed at the parties for over fifty years. On the right side were pictures of the female singers participating in the daily concert.

As I opened the inner door, I was surprised by the spaciousness of the hall, the number of dancers, and the prevailing noise. It was clear that they did not remember 'Al-Qadir,' far from their prophets; they were immersed in

passionate emotions. I thought Satan had an easy task, and perhaps sin was a relative matter, or truth was obscured by an invisible plastic barrier... I collided with a girl rushing with two drinks in hand, causing her to stumble and spill the drink on her blue satin dress. She stood in front of me, annoyed, and cursed obscenely.

I said, 'Madam, I apologize and offer my apologies. I'll buy you a new drink and compensate you for the dress.'

She shook her head, pouting her lips.

'No need for that. It seems I was in a hurry.'

'Alright, let me compensate for the drink.'

'Follow me,' she said with a firm tone, as if accustomed to giving orders.

I said to the counter man, 'Give the lady what she wants.'

'Seven dollars and seventy-five cents.'

The hall was adorned with colourful lights flashing in a way that excited the dancers. Their hands waved high, but irregularly, indicating that each of them responded differently to the loud and rhythmic melody. What was happening was a painting of organized chaos... How could I expect to see Mary! Three demons were trembling with ecstasy as they looked at the strange painting...

I said to Satan, 'Isn't chasing the sons of Adam enough for you?'

'The bet is still on! May I give you some advice?'

'No...' I said firmly.

'Well, it's your right not to trust me, but I actually want to make it easier for you to find Mary. You think I'm happy with this bet. You know it was by 'Al-Qadir's' command. Then tell me, how is the bet balanced with 'Al-Qadir's' revenge on all those who trust me? He destroys their cities and annihilates their crops in this world, before the blowing in the pictures, the people of Lot, Aad, and Thamud. Do you see justice in this?'

'I don't want this dialogue because it's simply sterile. Leave my sight.'

'I'll leave, and you'll continue to be consumed by confusion.'

The loud jazz music stopped, and the high-pitched horn refrain ceased. A young man stood on stage, looking cheerful as he waved his hands to draw the attention of the dancers. Everyone turned towards him.

'My friends, my wonderful New York youth, tonight we will all share in paying tribute and pride to the greatest musicians who worked in our club and elevated the level of songs and performance through their musical compositions on the creative guitar of Roberto Paulo de Aquino, who passed away twenty-one years ago today. On this occasion, the club's band will play his famous piece 'Refreshing Breezes'... What we hope for... our wonderful youth is to listen quietly in honor of this memory... Believe me, we won't take more than five minutes from you.'

Chapter Seven

What advice would Satan give me to facilitate meeting Mary in this crowded and bustling atmosphere? If Satan can know, then this means he still possesses special advantages that belong to the angels who were tasked by the Almighty with various missions. How does Satan, the accursed one, possess such abilities? Satan married, had children, and filled the earthly realms with his offspring. How was this possible?

What I know from my time in heaven is that we do not marry because there are no females among us, and we do not feel any desire for sex in the first place... We do not procreate for this reason. We are as we are for millions of years. Finally, can I marry? Almighty, help me. Why am I preoccupied with such matters and leave the thought of Mary behind? A simple

yet important idea crossed my mind. Why do I find myself compelled to search for Mary? Isn't this a sense of sexuality?

I found her!!! The only place everyone goes to is the bar because the club doesn't offer table service, and everyone has to buy directly. I stood at the bar and ordered a glass of white wine. The bartender counted ten types for me. I said, "Sweet Bordeaux," because I heard a quiet-looking man order it with a steady voice... I held the glass in my hand and watched those approaching the bar.

"J.J.! Unbelievable!" It was a feminine voice tinged with joy, a face filled with bright shadows of happiness.

"Hey, Mary."

"You didn't forget my name... How delightful."

I extended my hand to shake hers, but she rushed towards me and hugged me. I felt the warmth of her body. The bartender winked at me from behind the bar as if to say, "Your patience paid off."

"Do you have anyone with you?"

"No, I was waiting for you."

"Alright... come with me to continue our conversation. I'm with three of my friends and a colleague of mine."

They were in one of the corners of the lounge where tables were arranged in a semi-circle with three rows. The girls were drinking beer from large glasses while the guy with them was having a drink I didn't recognize. They introduced me as a

friend, and I pulled a chair from the adjacent table after getting permission from the group occupying it. I still had the glass of white wine in my hand.

The guy asked me, "What do you do?"

"I haven't decided yet."

Everyone turned to me with some surprise.

Mary said, "It means he hasn't found a suitable job since leaving his job at Delta Airlines."

A white lie to save myself... She sat with her legs crossed and straightened up elegantly while her speech was formal in tone and delivery, like a piano strike with a steady sound layer, indicating her confidence.

The guy, who seemed tipsy, perhaps due to the drink he was having, said, "Do you know this place or did you just come by chance?"

One of the girls exclaimed in surprise, "Why?"

The guy said, "Because its serious, formal, and lofty atmosphere doesn't match the place designed for fun, and the loud Bossa Nova music requires young people fired up with enthusiasm."

A second girl scoffed openly, "Like you!!"

The guy realized he had put himself in an embarrassing situation and busied himself by raising his glass to his lips.

"In fact, I was acquainted with the musician Bill Caberto, and I used to come to the club to listen to him. We developed a friendship, and I wrote about his role in developing this Brazilian music to spread in the United States."

Mary said, "Let's drink to the elite of Samba."

Everyone raised their glasses.

We had a light dinner, and at the end of the evening, we asked for separate bills. Understanding the agreement, I told Maria, "I'll take care of both of our bills."

The club closes at 4 am. Outside, New York's autumn unfolds its palette of harmonious colours, with trees shedding their leaves and standing bare along the streets of Brooklyn. A refreshing breeze stirs the fallen leaves on the broad sidewalks, creating a delightful rustle that stirs emotions.

Maria said, "Do you believe that autumn is the season of love in New York? I light the fireplace and look out onto the streets, feeling a sense of warmth and nostalgia. I feel like I need someone to share love with."

I replied, "The sight really captivated me."

"I have to take a taxi because I'm leaving for Malaysia at 10 pm, where I'll spend three nights before returning. I'll come from the airport to your hotel, no need for a phone number. If you're not there, I'll wait for you."

"I'll be waiting for you."

She leaned in and kissed my cheek. I felt completely taken aback, and I could feel the warmth of the kiss inflame my cheeks deliciously. I didn't speak as she opened the taxi door.

"We'll meet again after three nights."

"Safe travels."

I decided to take a walk... The sky was covered with dark, heavy clouds moving slowly northward, and the gentle breeze ceased, leaving the trees' yellowed leaves silent. I hailed a taxi and quickly got in.

When I opened my hotel room door, a comforting warmth greeted me. I took off my jacket and decided to relax for a while. It was 9 am. I dozed off fully clothed... I dreamed of Malaysia, bustling streets, and dozens of restaurants emitting various smells. Maria was enjoying sushi in her aristocratic seat. She handed me a glass of mint-infused water. I washed my face and put on my jacket.

I told the receptionist, "I'll be absent for three days."

"Will you settle the bill?"

"Yes... but let the room remain reserved... I love the view of your garden."

I quickly drank a cup of coffee. At the W office, I booked a seat to Malaysia on the 10 pm flight, in business class.

"Tonight, sir," the receptionist asked.

"Yes."

I returned to the hotel feeling happy and content. I packed a small bag and sat watching TV in the lounge.

Maria stood with her colleague at the airplane entrance, welcoming passengers. She seemed surprised... "Are you traveling with us?" she asked.

"Yes, to Malaysia for three nights," I replied. Her smile widened.

"Let me show you your seat."

She approached to indicate the designated seat on my boarding pass and then returned to her position beside her colleague. They exchanged whispers and then assumed an official demeanour as they greeted the passengers.

A collective singing of a popular American song erupted, accompanied by applause. It was a group of New York high school students on a school trip to Malaysia. Our flight was going to be lively.

Maria came to me several times, but she couldn't sit as all seats were taken. After 3 am, a deep calm settled over the plane. The students were tired from their chatter and movement, and the rest of the passengers fell asleep after a few cans of beer.

"When I closed my eyes, the thought of loving Mary crossed my mind... This strange feeling was delightful and refreshing at the same time... It's a reality that fills my emotions... But... Yes, where will it take me? I am both reality and illusion at the same time... It is said that truth is absolute, but I believe truth is limited. I am now human, that's a fact, but what if

Mary asked me about my date of birth... Or if the priest asked me while writing the marriage certificate... Should I say perhaps ten million or fifteen million years ago? What is my personal history? We angels have no history as the centuries pass by themselves, and we don't record anything because, simply put, we don't write... And by the way, there's no library of knowledge in heaven; angels have no limits to their characters as I now see among earthly beings. That's why I feel a lingering confusion, but that didn't stop me from planting a quick kiss on Mary's cheek as she bid me farewell at the passports.

Our meeting was at the Amu Café, where Mary advised me. It's in the Chinatown district and close to one of the important tourist streets.

Mary was wearing a short skirt and a short red jacket; she looked like a fashion model that appears on the covers of colourful women's magazines.

As she settled into a newly refurbished plush seat, she smiled tenderly at me.

I said, 'Last night was exhausting, did you sleep well?'

'Yes, but why did you come to Kuala Lumpur?'

There was a hint of a mischievous smile on her face and a hint of self-assuredness and admiration.

'Well... since you've started the conversation this way. Tomorrow is your birthday, and I don't want to miss the

opportunity to celebrate it with you... It will be dull to celebrate upon return.'

The surprise astonished her as it was far from her expectations. Perhaps she was expecting me to say that I missed her, and that's why I followed her.

'You amaze me. I must confess, your behavior exceeds all expectations. Such an act has never happened to me before.'

'Is this behavior acceptable or do you find it excessive?'

'It's surprising, and I can only admit that it astonished me. In short, it's wonderful and beyond the expectations of any woman.'

'Well then, before we order anything, let me present you with this gift for your birthday.'

She handed me a gold necklace with a heart pendant, in the center of which was a piece of red agate.

'You've truly embarrassed me... but how did you know I like agate...'

Then she added, 'Before this, how did you know my birthday?'

'Through Facebook.'

'But how did you know my full name?'

'You forget that you wear your company badge with your full name on your chest.'

She was trying to put the necklace around her neck, and as I attempted to help, she lifted her red hair from her neck,

which looked like a rare piece of art... and as I touched her skin, I felt a beautiful slight tremor... these are human emotions!

As we sipped our coffee and watched the passersby, I noticed she was lost in thought, evident from her unfocused gaze; she was thinking about something.

'Yes.'

I said softly.

'We are rushing into our relationship, and that's why I need to clarify my situation to you. You don't know everything about me, and the appearance you liked has surrounded my life with various difficulties...'

I didn't interrupt her.

'I am the daughter of a retired anaesthesiologist, and my mother was a professor at New York University specializing in Greek literature, and she passed away two years ago. I have a brother in the US Air Force. As for me, I graduated from a prestigious institute for hotel management, and I aspired to be the manager of a five-star hotel in New York, but I failed. I've been married twice.'

The first marriage ended shortly after my graduation. My husband and I disagreed on having children, and when I became pregnant, he asked for an abortion. Being Catholic, I refused, leading to heated arguments and debates at home. Our disagreements escalated to the point where I hurriedly left the living room and went upstairs to the bedroom on the second floor. At the sixth step of the wooden staircase, my

nervousness and agitation caused me to stumble. And so, the child and the marriage were lost.

The second husband was one of my fellow hosts, of Palestinian descent. When I met him, he seemed to be a civilized person. When he proposed, I agreed. However, after a week of honeymoon, I began to discover that despite being American and educated at an American university, he came to the United States with his Christian family at the age of three, but he still carried the genes of an Eastern man. These genes began to manifest more in his behavior and in his dealings with me, until we separated... Thus, you see, I am a woman with a difficult past.

She smiled and looked at me: "And what about your history?"

"I have never been married or had children."

She tapped me on the shoulder, considering my answer playful banter. Should I tell her that I have no history, not even knowing my own birthday? Throughout my life, from the moment her mother Eve and her father Adam came into the earthly universe until today, there have been no significant events, just sending butterflies to the Valley of Souls. Perhaps she will flee, and her nights will turn into terrifying nightmares when she remembers shaking hands with Azrael and sitting with him. Or she might go crazy when her colleagues start mocking her.

"And now, do you think a shared relationship can be maintained?"

"To be honest, it's difficult to give an answer right now. Why don't we leave it to circumstances? We may find something in common that helps build a relationship."

"Alright... You don't know Kuala Lumpur, so I'll take you to some areas that you might like."

"Okay."

Chapter Eight

Returning to New York wasn't exhausting; in the business class cabin, there was no one but me, so Mary found the opportunity to sit next to me. My relationship with her wasn't a secret anymore as the flight crew somehow knew we had a special connection. Even the pilot came to greet me, the man who traveled to Malaysia to attend his girlfriend's birthday party. It was thrilling, but it left me puzzled because I had no experience with human motives, feelings, and the fluctuations of these emotions. In the sky, we were in a state of absolute calmness, all of us mere entities, while humans were independent beings, at least when they wandered away

from the eyes of authority and security devices. In the sky, the Almighty who created us without personality was unconcerned with monitoring us, unlike on Earth where every individual had their own motives and aspirations, constrained in their public behavior by the extent of the authorities' ability to control them.

"You seem preoccupied beyond the aircraft space," Mary said. "Sometimes, certain thoughts consume me."

"May I be frank? Sometimes, you seem to walk in contradictory ways," she continued.

"How so?"

"I observed you advancing towards the plane, thinking you were the most romantically inclined person in the world, yet when I was near you, I wished to hear you speak about your longings or at least about the two days we spent in Kuala Lumpur in utmost happiness. But I find you distant to a degree I cannot fathom."

There was surprise and reproach in her voice.

"Really... what you're saying is true... I am preoccupied beyond you," I replied.

"I understand in art and in flying, and perhaps even in love, but I fail when it comes to engaging in a conversation about philosophy."

"There's no philosophy here, just reality... I'm trying to explain to you how preoccupied I am with you," she said, leaning towards us. "Would you like a couple of beers?"

"Thank you... I need a double espresso," Mary said.

"I'll have tea, please."

The flight attendant whispered in Mary's ear: "Lovers need a wake-up call..."

When Mary began to doze off, resting her head on my shoulder, I caught a whiff of a light yet refreshing fragrance. A delightful drowsiness engulfed me, a sensation I hadn't felt in millions of years spent in the sky or when I transported butterflies to the Valley of Souls. Suddenly, the plane shook violently as it descended. The flight attendant announced a routine air pocket, and we were instructed to fasten our seat belts. Mary woke up in a panic, then stood up to go to the back of the plane to check on the situation. Passengers seemed scared, and I heard women repeating prayers and invoking Jesus Christ for help. I couldn't help but smile; humans were so weak, resorting to religion and invoking their faith in times of need...

Mary returned with a glass of water. "Perhaps you need water to calm your nerves since we've passed the air pocket."

"I don't need it; I wasn't worried."

She didn't comment and sat, crossing her arms over her chest, while I felt an underlying sense of anxiety within her. I had never experienced such scenes because my angelic colleagues didn't reveal their faces, voices, or hand movements, no signs or indications of what they harbored deep inside them. The scene was constant there for millions of years. However, here on Earth, it was ever-changing,

humans might act as if they were in a play, wearing disguises and colorful masks. I felt that observing others on Earth was both entertaining and useful in understanding how to deal with them if carefully analyzed. I believed Mary's suffering was justified, and I needed to sort out our relationship.

The quietness, the rhythmic sound of the plane, and the darkness all aided a pleasant numbness creeping into my body, and my eyes grew heavy with an irresistible drowsiness... Mary was trying on a wedding dress; it was long, revealing a waist with prominent curves, while the neckline hugged her chest tightly.

Returning to New York wasn't exhausting; in the business class cabin, there was no one but me, so Mary found the opportunity to sit next to me. My relationship with her wasn't a secret anymore as the flight crew somehow knew we had a special connection. Even the pilot came to greet me, the man who traveled to Malaysia to attend his girlfriend's birthday party. It was thrilling, but it left me puzzled because I had no experience with human motives, feelings, and the fluctuations of these emotions. In the sky, we were in a state of absolute calmness, all of us mere entities, while humans were independent beings, at least when they wandered away from the eyes of authority and security devices. In the sky, the Almighty who created us without personality was unconcerned with monitoring us, unlike on Earth where every individual had their own motives and aspirations, constrained in their public behavior by the extent of the authorities' ability to control them.

"You seem preoccupied beyond the aircraft space," Mary said. "Sometimes, certain thoughts consume me."

"May I be frank? Sometimes, you seem to walk in contradictory ways," she continued.

"How so?"

"I observed you advancing towards the plane, thinking you were the most romantically inclined person in the world, yet when I was near you, I wished to hear you speak about your longings or at least about the two days we spent in Kuala Lumpur in utmost happiness. But I find you distant to a degree I cannot fathom."

There was surprise and reproach in her voice.

"Really... what you're saying is true... I am preoccupied beyond you," I replied.

"I understand in art and in flying, and perhaps even in love, but I fail when it comes to engaging in a conversation about philosophy."

"There's no philosophy here, just reality... I'm trying to explain to you how preoccupied I am with you," she said, leaning towards us. "Would you like a couple of beers?"

"Thank you... I need a double espresso," Mary said.

"I'll have tea, please."

The flight attendant whispered in Mary's ear: "Lovers need a wake-up call..."

When Mary began to doze off, resting her head on my shoulder, I caught a whiff of a light yet refreshing fragrance. A delightful drowsiness engulfed me, a sensation I hadn't felt in millions of years spent in the sky or when I transported butterflies to the Valley of Souls. Suddenly, the plane shook violently as it descended. The flight attendant announced a routine air pocket, and we were instructed to fasten our seat belts. Mary woke up in a panic, then stood up to go to the back of the plane to check on the situation. Passengers seemed scared, and I heard women repeating prayers and invoking Jesus Christ for help. I couldn't help but smile; humans were so weak, resorting to religion and invoking their faith in times of need...

Mary returned with a glass of water. "Perhaps you need water to calm your nerves since we've passed the air pocket."

"I don't need it; I wasn't worried."

She didn't comment and sat, crossing her arms over her chest, while I felt an underlying sense of anxiety within her. I had never experienced such scenes because my angelic colleagues didn't reveal their faces, voices, or hand movements, no signs or indications of what they harbored deep inside them. The scene was constant there for millions of years. However, here on Earth, it was ever-changing, humans might act as if they were in a play, wearing disguises and colorful masks. I felt that observing others on Earth was both entertaining and useful in understanding how to deal with them if carefully analyzed. I believed Mary's suffering was justified, and I needed to sort out our relationship.

The quietness, the rhythmic sound of the plane, and the darkness all aided a pleasant numbness creeping into my body, and my eyes grew heavy with an irresistible drowsiness... Mary was trying on a wedding dress; it was long, revealing a waist with prominent curves, while the neckline hugged her chest tightly.

I hope you appreciate the seriousness of your situation. It could be referred to investigation and then to criminal court, which usually issues heavy sentences for such matters. However, if you speak with me honestly and disclose the party that aided you, I will work on returning you to Malaysia where you will face the prescribed legal penalties.

Satan said, "Will you come with me?"

"To where?"

"Perhaps to one of the public parks in New York or to one of the five-star hotels. Don't worry, I won't force you into anything against your human beliefs because your role as an angel is over."

Once again, I found myself under the pressure of harsh circumstances. I felt compassion for humanity on Earth as it was caught in a whirlwind of pressures beyond its control.

"Alright, but how will we leave?"

"That's my task."

The power went out throughout the airport, and alarm sirens signaled danger... As we were leaving, one of the passengers spoke to the person sitting to his right.

"Cyberattack on the airport, all departing flights have been halted, and incoming flights are being diverted to airports in New Jersey and Pennsylvania."

"Do they know when it will end?"

"Yes... in three hours."

I only know what has been ingrained through my observations of the behaviour of the inhabitants of Earth! Knowledge is a cumulative process that takes time. Since becoming human, I have encountered obstacles, meaning a lack of cumulative knowledge. And now, how will I confront Satan having been abandoned by (the Almighty)?

Satan said, "Mary will forget... and her colleague who saw you and the policewoman leading you to the investigation may think you've been deported to Malaysia."

I pondered the troubles I caused, some due to my ignorance, and some imposed by circumstances. Here lies the irony: I exchanged a life devoid of feelings or emotions for one with everything I desired, yet it is not subject to my control or desire... What people on Earth endure may vary in form, but it does not differ in essence from what we endure. Both of us are creations of (the Almighty) and both of us have problems that cannot be solved... Can humans avoid their fate?

Satan said, "I am not offering you assistance out of kindness. I just pity you. (The Almighty) has left you. Don't you see we are both victims of His will!"

At the entrance of the luxurious hotel, we were warmly greeted by the security guards in their formal attire, and when Satan approached, they bowed respectfully.

"Would you care to step inside, sir?"

I felt like laughing; he had already entered... The hotel was magnificent and luxurious. I had visited it more than once to collect butterflies, but I never paid attention. It seems as a human, I have different reactions. I was impressed by the grandeur of the spacious lobby with its plush chairs and silk-covered cushions embroidered with wildflowers. The guests seemed relaxed in their seating and even in their conversation; they chose their words in a way that didn't make me feel comfortable.

When we sat down, a girl in her early thirties with a boyish haircut and earrings hanging halfway down her neck stood in front of us to wipe the table before taking orders. When she bent down, her neckline plunged slightly.

"What will you have, sir?"

The conversation was directed at Satan as if he was ordering for himself only, and that bothered me.

"A Martini on the rocks, and for the gentleman..."

He turned to me questioningly.

"Fresh juice."

"Juice what?"

Let it be a cocktail, but please, no ice," she said. As the waitress left, she turned to me. "I know all your struggles. You

need an ID, a driver's license, a permanent address... Oh, and an experience certificate... That's what I need to know." Bud smiled and continued, "Sending butterflies to the valley won't be enough. I kneeled and reached into his jacket pocket to pull out a sealed gray envelope. "Here's everything you need. As for the experience certificate, it depends on what you want." He placed the envelope on the table, perhaps expecting my refusal. A young man approached us, murmuring in a coded language. He shook his head twice and left. "Kids always need the wisdom of the elders... They're facing a problem in Cambodia," I remained silent. He said, "Will you take the envelope?" "I haven't decided yet." "By the way, I noticed you chose a Jewish name (Jacob Fischerman), so I followed you and chose your mother's name (Sarah)." "It's okay." "Did you choose the name for personal reasons?" "No... A child playing in the hotel courtyard, his mother called him Jacob, and it reminded me when the broker asked me about the name he chose for the passport. As for Fischerman, it was the name of another person whose butterfly I transferred to the valley." A person accompanied by two girls, medium height, with a tinge of tan, wearing a honey-colored suit, with a shining face, the French paint still visible, approached us. He was pleased as he politely bowed. "We're honored by your presence, Your Eminence." "Thank you, Mr. Smith." "Has our staff served you well, Your Eminence?" "Yes... And I want to mention that they have exceptional customer service skills." "That's kind of you, and I'm pleased to hear it from you specifically. The two girls will be at your disposal, as well as your friend, Jacob Fischerman, one of my

closest friends in the past, and now." Satan introduced him as the hotel manager, an important figure to him due to his wide-ranging connections with most management officials in New York and the affluent women, winking to give it a special meaning. "He offers services with utmost secrecy." He occupied himself by raising his glass to sip from it and leaned closer to me. "I'm curious. You chose to leave the sky and come down to earth for the experience, but what I see is that you don't belong to the earthly realm or to the heavens. In other words, you're half human and half angel. In any case, (the Almighty) has decreed to deprive you of the honor of bearing his throne with the eight angels on the day Israfil blows the trumpet." "Experience requires events, and knowledge requires time, and I'm between the two, and certainly I'll choose the lifestyle I live... Don't worry... I'm determined not to follow the path of Harut and Marut, so don't bother with me." "But may I occasionally check on you?" "You're already checking in without permission. What's with this humility?" He smiled and placed his palm over mine. "I'll come when you're in dire need of getting out of such situations." When we left, it was raining. "Would you like me to take you somewhere?"

It's more like a still scene inhabited by deep silence.

The driver opened the car door as the two girls and my bodyguards bid me farewell. I paused momentarily as each of them handed me a handful of ten-dollar bills.

I continued my journey after buying an umbrella from a vendor at the traffic light. I entered the first restaurant that advertised Italian cuisine.

I had tuna pasta with a large cup of tea, then I opened the envelope... Inside were all new documents containing all the details and data about Jacob Fisherman, son of Sarah Abraham, born on 12/10/1981 in Austin, Texas.

I closed the envelope... I felt relieved as I am now an American citizen, and I have to search for job opportunities as my resources are about to deplete.

A young woman in her twenties stopped me at the restaurant's door, her face beaming with a childish smile.

"Professor Jacob," she says, "my grandfather forgot to give you this card."

She handed me the card and turned to disappear into the street corner before I could thank her.

When I examined the card, I found it to be a bank account number... I didn't want to know the balance from the ATM in the hotel wall, so I hailed a taxi to the hotel and relaxed with my eyes closed, feeling grateful for some time to myself... The rain tempted me, as when it rains, there's no judgment.

And as I wake up, I feel comfort and reassurance.

The devil smiled as he drove me out of the airport.

"Don't fear any police pursuit, I've destroyed all the data related to your arrival, and here's your passport which I advise you to tear up."

I thought Harut and Marut's mission was easier in Babylon; there were no stored data about the residents. To know the language of the country you live in and claim to be from a remote enough city to make you a citizen. How will I manage my ID card, driver's license, certificates, and work experience? And what study am I talking about when I haven't attended any school?

Chapter Nine

"Rain down on them manna for food, and gave them the heaven's grain." This was at the bottom of a picture on the first page of the (Communitarian) magazine. The picture depicted a group of angels in the form of children with open wings. The text meant that we eat manna and grain, which is from one of the Psalms. However, the author, a Jewish rabbi, did not mention whether we eat the grain raw or cooked, nor did he specify where the grain is cooked or whether we consume it in groups or in our homes.

The inhabitants of the earthly realm occupy themselves with defining our identity as angels, and the clergy try to bring the image closer to them to convince them that they are close to heaven. They explain to them what we eat... telling them that we eat manna and grain because these are the dreams of humans. Some preferred to make the matter ambiguous, so they said in the words of the angels (I have food to eat that you do not know about, my food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work). I do not know why they are preoccupied with our food? Perhaps because they cannot imagine creatures (the Almighty) except in their own image. I closed my eyes and began to feel sleepy when the phone rang at my bedside.

"Mrs. Mary wants to talk to you... Shall I transfer her to you?"

"Yes."

"Hi, Gigi."

"Hi, Mary. Are you home?"

"Yes... But what happened to you? Why were you taken for questioning? My colleague saw you with the policewoman entering the airport investigation officer's room."

"Nothing serious, and when I see you, I'll explain the circumstances."

"I'm sorry, I don't think we can meet before next week because I'm flying to Brussels tonight."

"Alright, call me when you're back."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

I didn't feel comfortable; I had a vague feeling that she was hesitant to agree to the meeting. Perhaps she is afraid of the consequences of my meeting with the airport investigator and does not want to be associated with a suspect or accused person. She is an employee and keen on her job, and these days it is not easy to find suitable work.

I decided to go back to sleep; it would distract me from thinking... I turned off the light, and the room plunged into darkness. I got up to open the curtain of the window overlooking the street to let some light into the room because I hate darkness as it allows thoughts to expand without boundaries. It is also the curtain of sin, and Christ said when the Jews arrested him (This is your hour and the power of darkness). I bumped into the small table, causing the water jug and glass to fall to the ground, making a complex sound as it repeated with the glass jar rolling and hitting the wall. In the sky, light was the sign of life, and it never disappeared from our places for millions of years. I hurriedly put on my clothes and had the feeling inside me to try riding the subway... I must watch to learn. I didn't mean to go to a specific destination; the people who would ride the subway were returning home. What impressions might appear on their faces?

I boarded Metro line 6; I didn't realize it was going to Brooklyn where Bossa Nova Club was. The carriage was crowded, so I had to stand leaning against the iron pole. A clergyman entered, carrying a bunch of colorful pamphlets,

and began distributing them to the seated passengers without asking for permission. A black woman, bulky with a brown turban on her head, seemed annoyed as her facial features appeared contracted and aggressive. She threw the colourful pamphlet from her lap and shouted,

"You... who asked you for these antics?"

"Let the name of the Lord be glorified in heaven."

He bent down to pick up the pamphlet; the woman grabbed it by his hair, so he slapped her with his hand, and his head turned red. The carriage buzzed with laughter to varying degrees; some smiled at the irony. The man stood up and retrieved the black wig that added to his handsomeness and affected his Listeners watched as stray strands of hair moved across his forehead and cheeks.

The woman said, "You're blackmailing us in the name of the Lord... Go to hell."

The metro stopped at its final station. As I exited the station, I faced the giant Brooklyn Bridge. Midway across the bridge, a girl stood on the fence, her hair fluttering in the wind, her beige coat spread open like wings. When she threw herself into the river, traffic halted. At her spot, bystanders gathered, exchanging conversation about the devil who drove her. Looking over the river and its surroundings, no demons were present. A twenty-year-old girl explained, "She's my roommate... The police visited her thrice in the past two weeks, accusing her of inciting civil disobedience... I don't know what disobedience they're talking about; she's been

unemployed for two years and resorts to stealing her drinks from nearby stores."

No one commented. A man walked indifferently, buttoning his brown jacket and raising the collar of his black shirt. I asked him, "Why didn't anyone intervene?"

He turned to me, examining: "If people interfered in suicide cases, New York would come to a standstill!"

He seemed determined, with a broken look in his eyes, as if afraid of something. I said to him, "Would you accept my invitation for coffee after the bridge?"

He looked at me sceptically. "How can I have coffee when I haven't eaten anything since yesterday afternoon?"

"Alright, we can have some food, but coffee is a must."

I wanted to joke with him, to extend the bridges of trust between us.

"Okay," he said.

I thought he'd thank me, or at least acknowledge my kindness. He walked silently beside me. The late October air felt cold as the East River flowed cautiously, as if fearing a storm announcing the beginning of climate change in New York. We headed towards Manhattan. At the end of the bridge's approaches on the right side, Café Lorbacki overlooked the river directly. The café offered light meals of hot dogs and cheese sandwiches. When we entered, warmth enveloped us, and the aroma of coffee spread through the air, inducing relaxation. We sat by the window overlooking

the river, which received heavy rain as thousands of successive waves collided and broke, tinting the water with a greenish hue, revealing nature's resilience and fierceness even when it made no loud noise. We finished the sandwiches without him looking at me or noticing the blonde waitress as she bent down to pick up the empty plate, causing the medallion attached to her gold necklace to chime softly.

"Are you a communist?" he surprised me with the question, but I composed myself and replied, "No."

I wanted to jest with him, "I'm an angel."

"A man with your tender feelings can't be an angel," he said.

"Strange... angels are known for their mercy."

"No... angels either destroy human life because they work with the Almighty to punish sinners for his commands, or they drag sinners into hell."

"They saved the Children of Israel when they fled Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, and they raised Jesus when the Jews decided to execute him."

"Yes, they intervene for the prophets, not the poor."

"If you hate angels, do you love Satan?"

"No... I love Karl Marx!... He was always with the poor."

"Karl Marx just once!"

He adjusted his posture and looked directly into my eyes as he removed the worn-out black hoodie, saying, "You can't love Marx halfway." I felt there was a story behind the man; he wasn't as he appeared. Hunger and poverty had made him homeless.

"I fell in love with Marx during my final year of studying economics," I confessed. "I was discussing wealth distribution with my professor, and after he explained the subject to me, he advised me to read a simplified summary of 'Das Kapital.' From that moment, my love for Marx began, and it cost me a lot... I advise you not to fall for him."

"Thank you... I almost got myself into trouble, but I got off the bus at the first stop," I replied.

"You did the right thing... Thank you, but I must leave," the blonde waitress said, handing me my second cup of coffee.

"Do you know Professor Culbert?" she asked.

"No... do you?" I inquired.

"Yes, he taught me in high school five years ago before he got arrested."

"Why?"

"He was inciting students to protest under the pretext of the corruption of the capitalist system. We didn't hear from him for two years, then he reappeared as if he had lost much of his memory... We tried to help him through a small student organization, but we were prevented by the school

administration first, who asked us to stay away from him, then by the police."

I stepped out onto the street, which seemed quiet as the clouds parted in the New York sky. Everything looked clean, giving a sense of the pleasure of life despite the chilliness. In the sky, seasons didn't change, nor did rain visit us. We didn't have the abundance of clothing that humans usually wear, rushing to catch transportation or slide into their cars. We didn't need it, as we found ourselves as we were.

A taxi stopped to take me to the subway station, line 6. There were only a few people, mostly drunk, looking out through the window at the passing streetlights. When I got off the subway, I had to walk through a dimly lit, deserted street, about five hundred meters long.

Two Africans, both in their thirties, stopped me. The first stood in front of me, and the second lagged a couple of steps behind, making me guess they were about to attack me.

"Sir, do you have a match for my cigarette?" the first asked.

"No... I don't smoke," I replied.

"You're lying... you're mocking us because we're Africans."

"I'm a foreigner too."

I noticed the one behind me bending down, and I figured the other would push me to fall and they would rob me. I jumped back, surprising them, and they composed themselves, pulling out knives.

"No trouble... empty your pockets and don't resist, it might cost you your life," one of them warned.

A car approached, and we stepped back. The car, with two policemen inside, arrived.

"Did they try to harm you?" the driver asked, pointing at them.

"No, they were asking about an address I don't know," I replied.

"Alright... we'll be in the area, be careful because it's not safe," he warned.

"Thank you."

As the police car left, the two Africans approached me.

"We owe you, sir. Can we take you to your destination?"

Thank you, the hotel is close ... until we meet again.

Goodbye, and goodnight.

In heaven, we don't face such situations (security is stable) because (the Almighty) is the absolute ruler and knows what is before us and what is behind us. Surely we cannot overlook that. In New York, where local government is based on law, human rights, and democracy, the situation is completely different. But what if Hitler or Stalin were in power in the world? How would security be in the streets? Such a scenario would be terrifying, and life on Earth does not allow for it due to the diversity of temperaments and beliefs. It's different.

Also, what's different is that we don't divide into nations, tribes, or even countries, each possessing its own, however opposing, ideology. In heaven, we don't accept differences, and that's why Satan was expelled despite being the closest to (the Almighty).

Perhaps the irony lies in the fact that each of us is governed by the authority of (the Almighty), but the difference lies in the extent of freedom granted to the inhabitants of the Earth to choose their path in life (and We guided him), or (And if it displeases you to worship, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will worship); as for us, we have no choice, and in fact, this is the essence of what the inhabitants of Earth suffer from wars and conflicts for control and exploitation, while we live in peace, I mean for me when I was an angel.

I know I resorted to an illogical comparison, but I tried to bring the image closer to understanding the impact of the hegemonic system on the behavior of the governed in heaven or on Earth.

When I entered the hotel, the receptionist girl was still in her high chair amidst complete silence, the bright lights seemed to affirm her presence. When she handed me the room key, I noticed traces of tears in her eyes, hesitated to inquire, but I said:

"Hope nothing unfortunate happened to you?"

She answered in a deep voice revealing a sad event: "Nothing happened!"

But she was suppressing.

"Sorry for asking, but your condition seems uneasy."

"Nothing, it's just my last night with you... I've been fired from my job."

"Why?"

"Lack of customers due to COVID and strict travel measures and the decline in tourism. With my job, I struggle with accumulating debts. How will I face life, with children and an ailing father... Sorry, sir."

In heaven, we don't have these problems because (the Almighty) takes care of all the requirements, and even though they are few, He defined them from the beginning when we were created... The angelic society is filled with tranquility and peace.

Chapter Ten

I was looking out for the dawn as it slowly advanced through the space facing my room window. The trees appeared as sad and silent ghosts, and as visibility increased, the rain-scented breeze moved them as if they were just waking up, trying to gain flexibility in response to the air.

The reception girl said on the phone, "Sir, would you prefer breakfast in your room or would you come down to the lounge?"

"I'll come down to the lounge."

"Any special requests?"

"No, thank you... the buffet is fine."

In the lounge, there were three people: two ladies and a coloured young man. The young man was talking about what he had seen during the war.

The blonde girl with a braid pulled over her chest said, "The war in Vietnam?"

The young man and the second lady were surprised.

"The war in Vietnam ended in 1975, and I was born in 1969 and was still in elementary school."

"Sorry, that's what came to my mind as there was a movie about that war on TV last night."

"No, I was in Iraq in 2003, in the tank battalion that entered Baghdad."

I got busy with breakfast... I was in Iraq too, but on a different mission... hundreds were falling, and I collected their souls' butterflies and sent them daily to the valley. I witnessed thousands of combat operations over the past years, most of them for reasons ranging from utter triviality, as if it were part of human nature, whether out of vanity, dominance, or

control, or even for fabricated reasons, sometimes for no reason at all. Such things didn't happen in the heavens; angels are in eternal peace. And even when the heavens renew their appearance, they hurl their weights onto the earth, dying stars and burning meteors all distributed across the earthly universe. We haven't heard in millions of years of a star falling from the sky or a meteor striking an angel gathering. It's noteworthy that none of the prophets was sent to the angels; they were all on the earthly plane while the two universes, the universe of angels in the heavens and the universe of the earth, are creations of the Almighty.

On the table was a New York Star newspaper, a free newspaper. I decided to entertain myself with it as I sipped my second cup of coffee. In the job vacancies section, a factory for household equipment and appliances was looking for marketers with experience and practice, along with certification from their previous job.

The ad intrigued me to apply for the job. I went back to my room and on the computer, I made my experience certificate and searched for a book on marketing and business methods. I contacted the company. A girl answered with a bored and monotonous voice, saying that I should ensure to bring all the required documents and my appointment for the interview was today at 4:00 pm. She asked if I knew the address... I said yes. She mentioned I should be present at the company headquarters ten minutes before the appointment, and being five minutes late would cancel the interview, and I wouldn't get another appointment...

And now, I'll embark on a new experience... I'll know what they think of me as a human from the earthly universe. I watched several interviews and studied the impressions reflected on the faces of the interview committee... one of them was exceedingly flattering, asking unexpected questions, while another was preoccupied with tinkering with a keychain or looking away deliberately indifferent. The woman sitting in the middle gave the impression of being the decisive figure in the committee's decisions. Her short hair was dyed with a faint platinum colour, her wide eyes harbouring a scrutinizing and questioning gaze. I sat on a metal chair without armrests with a sponge seat on it. The room was crowded with pictures of dozens of household appliances produced by the company and distributed for direct sale to housewives or through distribution centers scattered on the main streets of New York, and pictures of women receiving their orders, smiling.

Upon acknowledging the quality of the company producing kitchen appliances and equipment that assist them in the kitchen or on the dining table, the woman with platinum blonde hair glanced towards me and said, "Why are Jewish salesmen distinguished by their high persuasion abilities during their home visits?"

Satan stood beside me, which surprised me. "Why are you here?" I asked.

"I wanted to see how you would handle your first test as a conscientious citizen looking for honest work. By the way, the question is biased but serves two purposes: first, to indicate

the proficiency of Jews, of which she is one, and second, to reassure you that she knows you're Jewish, so don't worry because you'll get the job."

"Thank you for the clarification, but I don't need it. Could you leave me alone?"

I was keen not to look at him so as not to attract the attention of the committee, indicating that I was preoccupied with him.

"Because, madam, they possess patience," said the man to the left of the lady, struggling to loosen the purple necktie tightening around his thick neck.

"Brilliant," she replied.

The man fiddling with the keychain stopped. "Do you know Chinese?"

"Yes... I am proficient in Chinese, Russian, German, French, as well as Arabic and English," I replied.

The lady with the faded platinum hair said, "Could you translate the first four lines of this page?"

Before her lay a book discussing the company's products in ten languages, and the page she presented was in Chinese.

Satan smiled and handed me the English translation. When they read it, their three mouths fell open.

The man with the keys asked, "Are you married?"

"No," I replied.

The bald man with the regularly round head asked, "Which university did you attend?"

"Georgetown."

Satan said, "Keep lying, and you'll find yourself affiliated with my team."

"That won't happen."

"We'll see."

He tapped my shoulder, and I felt as if a cool breeze had touched my entire body.

"Don't be afraid," the woman said, shaking her head, causing her faded platinum hair to move like a disconnected piece of a cloud during a sunless hour. "Allow us to confer for five minutes."

The three withdrew through a corridor illuminated by lamps on either side, then disappeared around the corner.

I sat gazing at the various household appliance pictures and observed the forced smiles of presumed housewives who were supposed to admire those devices with creatively worded populist phrases to affirm the credibility of the situation.

A girl wearing a plastic helmet on her head approached. "Mr. Jacob, the CEO would like to meet you."

I followed her. The room was opulent, with its six-meter-wide window revealing a forest of cypress and oak trees. On the wooden table were a few ChatGPT

Elegant files and a picture of the manager's wife embracing a child with thick golden hair, smiling with sheer happiness. On

both sides stood committee members, the lady with platinum blonde hair to the left, and the two gentlemen to the right.

"Please, Mr. Jacob, have a seat... Can I get you anything?"

"No, thank you."

The general manager sat down and nodded for the three to do the same. Satan stood beside the chair he occupied, wondering why he involved himself in matters that didn't concern him. "Well, you could say it's a sense of camaraderie... Don't grimace, lest it be interpreted as dissatisfaction with this summons... You could say it's my feeling that you're the only one I can consider an old friend. Remember, I accompanied you for millions of years before Mr. (Adam) graced us... And as they say, familiarity breeds contempt."

"Mr. Jacob... I've just learned that you are fully proficient in Chinese... This is of interest to me and the board because we haven't found anyone trustworthy who speaks Chinese fluently."

The man with the keys appeared uneasy, fidgeting with his keys in his pocket, while his blue eyes flickered with signs of cunning. The other man seemed thoughtful, trying to reach a specific decision. As for the woman with the platinum blonde hair, she seemed to conceal her joy until she announced her approval of what the general manager proposed. Satan looked at me like a wise man trusting in his decisions, while I found this experience to be a new experiment, discovering a

side of the behavior of Earth's citizens when they work to secure their interests.

"I offer you a job with us in the general management."

"But what exactly would my job entail?"

"Well... You know several languages, and we deal with different countries, holding meetings for dialogue and discussion to sell our products or to sell knowledge and semi-manufactured goods. We need to know what they're thinking, meaning obtaining information about their thoughts... During these dialogues, they speak their language, and having someone who knows that language helps us with this."

"Doesn't this border on spying on others?"

The general manager smiled. I guessed he found me naive in business matters.

"Of course not... It's about having prior knowledge! And if you agree, you'll be hired immediately because you'll accompany our delegation to China, where we have big plans for collaboration. Your presence will help us, provided they don't find out that you're proficient in Chinese. Do you have any commitments that would prevent you from doing so?"

Satan listened attentively. Now the real game began, and we would see to what extent an American citizen could be cunning.

He said that calmly and slowly.

The general manager turned to the woman: "Stella, would you mind turning off the TV, please?"

The TV was silent but displaying a series of statistical numbers about the increase in crime in three American cities.

"I think the man needs practical training," said the man fiddling with his keychain.

I guessed he wanted me to be under his direct management as a precautionary measure.

"We'll consider that later," said the general manager.

He turned to me: "What's your decision?"

"I'm happy to work with you, and there's nothing preventing me from traveling with the delegation to China."

Satan smiled and winked: "I won't accompany you to China. Trump needs to correct his course, and I'll join his group of advisors. His impetuosity and disregard for the complex relationships in the Middle East led to his downfall and the failure of his projects."

"Do you think I'm interested?"

"No... but I must inform you of some of my plans," said the general manager.

"Now, what do you think?"

"I agree to work according to what you've proposed."

"Alright, you can wait with the secretary until your appointment is finalized and your salary is determined... By

the way, your initial salary will be eight thousand dollars per month, and we'll provide you with a company car, covering all its expenses... I mean fuel and maintenance... Is it suitable for you to start tomorrow?"

"Yes, it's suitable."

"Prepare yourself for an intensive training session for a week... You may not practically need it, but to ensure you're familiar with your duties... Best of luck."

The secretary, in her thirties, was elegant but not extravagant, with a practical smile on her lips as if to say, "You're welcome as a guest, but remember our time is precious." She asked me for coffee, and I said without sugar or milk. Her smile widened.

"It seems you're keen on not increasing expenses."

"That didn't cross my mind. I usually drink my coffee black."

"I hope you'll have pleasant days with us."

Such compliments have no place in our celestial realm, nor do we consume coffee... I will speak about our daily practices later. On the secretary's right was a quote from Isaiah written in blue ink on a golden base with a silver frame ("This coal has touched your lips; your guilt is removed, and your sin is atoned for.") Where do I stand... With Christianity, but which church? Or with Judaism, but which Jewish sect? Or with Islam, also which Islam, Shia or Sunni? Among angels... there are no differences or sects, and usually all religions invoke angels in their conflicts, with some claiming that a team of angels fought alongside them against enemies... But I've

never heard from any of the angels that they fought in the earthly realm. When I asked the Prophet's friend about it, he said he hadn't heard of such a thing. Satan could indirectly collaborate with his followers as an intelligence source, but he and his clan did not directly participate in any battles between parties on the earthly realm.

The secretary, reading the appointment order from the company, said, "Jacob Fushman, can you believe I find him consistent... I'm glad to be the first to congratulate you on joining our company."

"Thank you, ma'am."

As if she were trying to convey to me her happiness that a new Jew is joining the company.

She handed me the appointment order: "When you come tomorrow, you'll find your office waiting for you."

As I walked out, a young man dressed in the company's service attire approached me. "Sir, I'm the designated driver to work with you... Would you like to come with me?"

When we reached the small and elegant Ford car, he said, "Sir, I forgot to inform you that you're not obligated to have me work with you... I mean, you can drive it yourself. The general manager's secretary informed me."

"Thank you... Maybe I'll decide that tomorrow."

The absent Satan communicated with me through mysterious gambits, and perhaps the mystery I couldn't decipher was

due to the methods he devised to diversify human capabilities and their self-realization.

When I entered the hotel, the new receptionist handed me an invitation card from Mary, inviting me to her engagement party at the hotel... I didn't finish reading the invitation, feeling that Mary was harsh to the extent that it drove her to this act without realizing she was hurting my feelings... In my room, I settled into the conviction that I had become a human on the earthly realm, but this transformation still mingled with remnants of angelic purity.

In New York, as in major American cities, people kill each other sometimes without convincing justifications; it's enough that you don't please the killer or you've caused a disturbance to his mood.

And I wondered if I would lose the remnants of purity from the time of the angels.

Chapter Eleven

I have been to China tens of thousands of times, sending butterflies to the Valley of Souls, but I never paid attention or

even thought about the people who inhabit this land. The souls I carried with their butterflies left me no chance; the wars that occurred dozens of times a year were ruthless, with fighters showing no compassion or mercy. Young men were killed, the elderly left to starve, and women enslaved to work as concubines, servants, or farm laborers. In the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, I sent over eleven million Chinese butterflies and four million Japanese butterflies to the Valley of Souls. It was terrifying days. I even asked the "Friend of Prophets" why the Almighty didn't regulate human fertility so that births occur every ten years to control population growth instead of pushing them to fight and corrupt the earth. He answered that he had no knowledge and couldn't provide an answer in the wisdom of the Almighty.

Our delegation consisted of four people and a secretary to record the minutes. The General Manager preferred not to watch TV recordings or listen to "chatter" in meetings. The delegation was led by the Assistant General Manager, who was notably silent and lacked any facial expressions revealing his inner thoughts. When answering a query, he gave clear but concise responses in a few words. On the plane, he read a book wrapped in coloured paper. When he left for the restroom, the man still fiddling with his keys whispered to us (Crime and Punishment).

The Assistant General Manager was of Pakistani origin and had completed his Ph.D. in advanced mathematics. As we left the plane at Shanghai Airport and before entering the airport

lounge, he approached me and whispered, "Your mission has begun." He instructed me to stick with our Chinese escort and ensure I communicated with him in English.

Our Chinese escort, upon entering the lounge, was a young man always smiling but with a hint of cunningness in his eyes learned from directives he received from his superiors. He didn't settle for small talk about the weather in Shanghai or our itinerary; his eyes roamed in all directions.

After passport control and visa checks, we were thoroughly inspected with a professional gaze. I guessed he was, or still is, working for one of the Chinese intelligence agencies. In the VIP room, we were received by the Executive Director of Haier Company. Accompanying him was a petite, delicate Chinese lady. The man fiddling with his keys marveled at how this lady could walk on the street in moderate winds!

I accompanied the delegation as the Public Relations Manager, a title indicated beside my name in the booklet directed to Haier Company. I thought this lady's butterfly might not withstand the transfer to the Valley of Souls, but I was deeply puzzled when she started speaking. Her voice was strong and clear, her pronunciation distinct, like the flow of water from an artificial waterfall surrounded by complete tranquility.

We exchanged pleasantries and handed the Chinese escort a program that included discussion times and visits to some factories owned by the Chinese company and some tourist attractions. The program was precise and suitable for us, as confirmed by the head of the delegation.

What caught my attention was the disciplined organization in all the factories we visited, and even in the company headquarters in Qingdao. The workers and employees moved quietly, and there was an overall atmosphere of seriousness and responsibility. In the streets, however, things were somewhat different; young people behaved with an undisciplined spirit, some imitating Hollywood trends in hairstyles or clothing, but it didn't reach the point of chaos.

On the third day, while wandering in one of the research and development centers, I saw the butterfly carrier in Asia. A calf jumped into the center from a window overlooking a small garden of rare, colourful, and diverse flowers. I felt a pulsation... Someone would die... I stopped studying the plan I was browsing and watched the members. A young engineer fell, and everyone moved towards him to help or transfer him to the hospital. I said, "It's over..." Everyone looked at me in surprise as I didn't approach him or feel his pulse, so how did I decide his death... The butterfly carrier hurriedly left...

Satan said: "I saw you were upset... Isn't that what you were doing?"

The first meeting was held to discuss what our company could offer in terms of finance and technical expertise, emphasizing innovation. During the meeting, the Chinese delegation members didn't engage in verbal exchanges; instead, they passed notes to draw the attention of the delegation leader to specific points. One of those notes contained three points that I could see. I took similar action and wrote down what was being discussed. The notes were

related to our liquidity issues, the competition we were facing, and our capabilities in innovation. The writer concluded by requesting sternness from us to secure favourable terms for them, highlighting the importance of the American market to them. Negotiations were tough, but we finally reached an acceptable agreement.

In the evening, we were invited to a diverse cultural event. Generally, the Chinese women seemed more interested in their hairstyles than their evening attire, and the girl I danced with was talking about her passion for life in the West, dreaming of working in Hong Kong. The next day, we had a free tour. What astonished me was that the state was present even in the smallest streets, and the organization was carefully planned in the streets, storefronts, and in buying and selling operations. A man, gazing at me with surprise, said, "Here is the future of the world... the city is like a beehive serving the queen." We were in the sky, experiencing complete tranquillity. People here knew that work meant survival, while we were without work except for a few assigned but deferred tasks. The woman with dull platinum hair said, "How can the government secure daily bread!"

The head of the delegation said, "Your presence was important with us."

The man fiddling with his keys said, "You'll find your promotion waiting as soon as we start working together."

I thought about the receptionist at the hotel who had been laid off... I'll make her my secretary if the promotion comes through. She was quiet, beautiful, and in need of work. And

maybe I felt some mysterious sympathy towards her. When I got off the metro at Jijiatun Park, it was noon. I headed to the lake where elegant cafes were clustered around, engulfed in enchanting tranquility. As I settled into a plush seat and before I could sip my coffee, a well-dressed man in his fifties with meticulously styled hair and dark gray clothing approached me, saying, "May I see your passport, sir?"

The request surprised me, and I felt that the state of relaxation and enjoyment of the place had abruptly fled.

"My passport is at the hotel, I'm here with an American delegation hosted by Haier company," I said.

"Do you have the contact number of the person accompanying the Haier delegation?" he asked.

"No, but I have a business card of an engineer at the company who was with us last night at a party hosted by Haier," I replied.

The engineer was from the development and innovation department, a young woman of Muslim origin but an active member of the Communist Party. When she arrived, she smiled while her hair strands swayed on the sides of her round white face. She wore a thick white coat with faux fur around her neck, her small slightly upturned nose red from the cold. She greeted the young man who welcomed her warmly as if he knew her. "Yes, Mr. Jacob is one of the members of the American delegation our company is hosting," she said. The young man apologized politely but

requested that I not leave my passport at the hotel. He stepped back two steps and paused, looking at me intently.

"Please don't deal directly in dollars... make sure to convert them officially to yen," she said. The engineer still smiled, giving me a feeling that she would keep smiling even while asleep. When I apologized to her, she said that what happened was common with Chinese visitors. I invited her to sit, so she pulled out a chair and relaxed, removing her gloves. She asked for Chinese tea and a piece of caramel cake.

"Okay, I'll reimburse you some money," she said.

"Don't worry about it... we pay three times the amount we pay here in America," I replied.

"I won't insist," she said, sipping the fragrant hot steamy tea.

"Do you have knowledge of the Chinese language?" she asked.

Here's the English translation of the provided text:

"No... but why? I placed the tea cup on the table and struggled to be cheerful.

"Despite the cold, the parks are crowded... Do you know that the Chinese are obsessed with innovation? We are the largest suppliers of electric wine cellars to the American market."

"I said I don't know Chinese except for some labels that are closer to abstract drawings."

She smiled: "Well... let's leave the subject of the Chinese language... it was passing."

I asked for another cup of Chinese tea.

She said: "This speeds up decrypting abstract drawings into letters."

"Maybe... but it needs a few years."

She looked directly into my eyes, I thought she was trying to telepathize with me... I remembered Mary who got married.

Satan said: "You're learning fast."

Three girls entered the glass lounge holding hands, wearing jeans and heavy wool sweaters covering their necks while their thick hair hung over their shoulders, they were singing (Van Buren) and dancing.

"This is the new generation... Imagine that China exports clothes to world markets but some insist on buying imported clothes."

"Some are trying to stand out from others."

I thought to myself, didn't I insist on standing out from the angels?

She said: "Really... would you like to join me for coffee at my apartment?"

I insisted on paying the bill. Her apartment was on the twenty-first floor, it was clear that the engineer had a refined artistic touch, the lemon color dominated the contents of the apartment consisting of a spacious bedroom, above the bed a replica painting of Kandinsky with its characteristic triangles, and by the TV a bust of Aphrodite and above the windowsill a statue of Buddha while satin curtains hung.

The seat was comfortable where I sat as she prepared coffee in an open kitchen, Satan said it was a rare opportunity...

The engineer said: "With milk?"

I said no... I like my coffee bitter.

I said: "May I ask a question?"

"Yes."

She sat across from me, crossed her legs, and placed the coffee cup on the table, Satan said she was waiting for you to take the first step... I said you go far.

"What I find ironic is that you declare yourself Muslim and at the same time a member of the Chinese Communist Party."

"I combine heritage values with social justice values."

Satan said: "You both go far!"

I said, "And you're the kind one who wants us to meet!"

He said: "Things have their ends."

I continued: "My upbringing may be different, and I often face this question, and my comrades in the organization I belong to treat me with respect. With this fusion, China has become a rapidly developing country. Did you know that our company was a small obscure company forty years ago? And now it is one of the leading companies in the world, so you come from America to cooperate with it. By the way, may I make an observation?"

"Sure."

"We noticed that you have sufficient knowledge of the Chinese language."

I tried to object.

Your note is appreciated. You were the only one who followed our conversation with care and focus, always trying to read what our delegation members wrote and pass it on to the head of the delegation. I didn't comment; heavy rain and storm-like winds began, causing the broad window to shake and darkness to intensify.

'How can I leave?' I asked.

'If the weather doesn't improve, I can arrange a place for you to spend the night here,' he replied.

Satan stood at the entrance of the hall, smiling. 'I think what you're lacking to become a human is your sense of being male!' I asked him why he insisted on accompanying me. 'Isn't there anyone else on Earth for you to be concerned about?' He closed his eyes and said, 'When Harut and Marut were in Babylon, I was with them. They were more important than anyone on Earth, and as I expected, their influence on the people of Babylon extended to the world. Visitors and travelers spread magic across the world.' I told him, 'How arrogant you are... Magic has been present since the confrontation between Pharaoh's sorcerers and Moses in the gardens of the Pharaoh's palace.' He agreed, 'That's true, but the Babylonian magic that spread occupied people's minds, from the person lighting the lamps at night to the woman

leading the imperial armies, was a treasure for me. Anyway, think of yourself as a man in the presence of a woman.'

The engineer arranged a place for me to sleep in the hall, and when she returned, I told her, 'I've decided to leave.' She didn't object and said, 'You won't find a taxi; I'll call the company to send a car.' Satan remarked, 'You failed in your first test as a man on Earth; some angelic qualities are still stuck with you.' The high humidity and rising temperature outside were exhausting. When I got into the car, I felt a deep relief as the driver turned on the air conditioning. Maybe it would take longer for the natural instincts of Earth's inhabitants to grow within me; humans need millions of years to domesticate their instincts, but I noticed that some couldn't manage that. The desire to possess what others have or the savagery in possessing the opposite sex hadn't been domesticated yet. The driver in Chinese said, 'Today is scary...' I asked in English, 'Why?' He didn't respond.

The man fiddling with his keys said, 'Tonight, we have an invitation to a Chopin music party.' We were having breakfast... I said, 'And during the day?' He sarcastically replied, 'You can go out with the design engineer.' I didn't comment, but I realized that my incidental relationship with the engineer had become a topic of ridicule among the delegation members, and that bothered me. This is how things go on Earth, where a complete subject can be formed from a passing signal or a relationship that happens by chance. In the heavens, such a thing wasn't possible; the Almighty could see intentions and what was in the minds of

angels, so they worked hard to maintain their pure sincerity and transparent spirit, through which everything could be seen. Satan said, 'We were infiltrators, but I hadn't thought of not bowing to Adam so that the Almighty wouldn't find out about it. I declared it at the last moment, and that's why the Almighty was harsh in His speech with me.'

The woman with platinum blonde hair asked, 'Do you like Chopin?' To avoid embarrassment, I said, 'Yes, I lean towards classical music.' 'I adore Chopin, you can't imagine how amazing he is, especially when he plays the dreamy piece on the piano.' 'A romantic dream...' I said that to engage in conversation and in a way that could be interpreted positively. She looked at me with admiration.

After two hours of quiet and dreamy music, we decided to go with our hosts to a Chinese bar. They arranged a place for us in the back of the crowded hall. The mixed and diverse Chinese language was so intense and quiet that it sounded like indistinct noise. The table, set for eleven people, included the engineer and three of her colleagues, the assistant general manager of Haier company, four members of our delegation, and two people from the American consulate in Shanghai. A Chinese man approached us, over sixty, short, plump, wearing a long black jacket. He was a notable exception among the Chinese I had seen, with thick, balding hair. He was drunk, drinking directly from a bottle of Baijiu. We noticed him.

'You damn American, I have a suggestion for you.'

'Yes, I'd be happy to hear it.'

'Cut off the lady's nose next to you, then split it between you two. Do you know what the result will be?'

'What will it be?'

'The most beautiful noses in the world, suitable for a French magazine cover.'

The man fiddling with his keys said, 'A brilliant idea, achieving American-Chinese participation in the structure of existence.' One of the consulate employees said, 'You're making progress in China.' Satan said, 'You're approaching the starting line.' The assistant general manager smiled for the first time since the first day we climbed the stairs of the plane at New York Airport."

Chapter Twelve

As we stepped into the American aircraft that would take us to New York, my mind wandered to Mary. I had anticipated

seeing her at the entrance, welcoming passengers with her radiant smile and sparkling eyes that exuded warmth, filling the hearts of those she greeted with reassurance. However, she wasn't there. Instead, a tall, athletic-looking employee stood at the entrance, accepting congratulations from admirers. His welcoming smile barely reached the corners of his mouth, and he clasped his hands as if awaiting relief from a protocol duty. Beside him stood a short, blonde girl with a broad face, clear blue eyes, and blonde hair pulled back tightly. She was cheerful, attempting to infuse her welcoming words with a dose of genuine affection.

Upon checking in with the airline desk for our return seat reservations, we were informed that there were only two seats available in business class due to prior bookings, and we were offered those for the assistant to the general manager and the lady with platinum blonde hair. My colleague and I were asked to book seats in economy class, along with the man fumbling with his keys and the secretary. The plane was full. On the right side were the three of us, with two women from Kuwait and Muscat behind us. They turned out to be businesswomen, as I later discovered, but they spoke loudly.

After the plane took off, a flight attendant approached with the refreshment cart. It was Mary, but she seemed different, tired, with traces of fatigue and lack of sleep evident on her face. She wore the airline cap low over her weary eyebrows, showing no surprise at my presence.

"What would the gentleman like?" she asked.

I looked at her in surprise.

"The gentleman, Jacob?" she clarified.

The man fumbling with his keys replied, "Even the flight attendants."

"I'll have milk," I said.

"I know you're upset with me... we'll talk later," she said.

After seven hours of flight, the noise in the plane subsided as most passengers slept, while those remaining watched television in front of them.

Mary said, "You can come to the back of the plane where the galley is."

Her voice was mechanical, lacking the musical resonance I was accustomed to. She continued, "Second chances come to you lucky with women. I spent decades looking for a woman until I found my current wife. I'm glad she's not from my rival Adam's family; she comes from a conservative family among my friends... I forgot to tell you she's from the Jinn!"

"How are you?" Mary asked.

"I'm fine, but what about you? You've changed a lot," I replied.

"Yes... I got married in a hurry. We met at the Nova lounge you know, and two days later, we got married... and from the first week, I found out he was cheating on me... This is the third marriage that failed for me... When I confronted him, he started treating me with extreme harshness, so I preferred to increase my flying hours to be away from home."

"Why didn't you ask for a divorce?"

"It's not that easy, we're Catholics."

The plane began to shake, and most of the passengers woke up. The captain announced to return to the seats and fasten the seat belts because we were passing through a low-pressure zone.

The two Arab women were speaking loudly, then they started reading the Quran for reassurance. When the plane stabilized, they started a conversation about old Egyptian jokes. The Kuwaiti woman said, "When I was little, my father used to pamper me and call me 'Bezza.' I used to hear a loud ring to the word and feel happy. He also called my sister, who is a year and a half younger (Lira). She was white, plump, behaved with coquetry, and was close to our father... When I grew up, I learned from my schoolmates that the Bezza was an Ottoman coin circulated in Kuwait, made of cheap metal, rusty quickly, and represented the lowest value in the Ottoman currency pyramid, while the Lira was made of gold."

The Omani woman said, "I'm lucky to be the only girl among four boys."

I felt drowsy... in a group where strong drugs were being used, I found myself feeling strange, leaning aside, looking towards them bitterly. Human life is difficult, and humans possess an aggressive nature that laws barely contain... Gathering butterflies to the Valley of Souls seems more thrilling, and in the society of angels, there is no such pursuit of wealth or power, and there are no airplanes... We were

moving from one place to another without counting time, and the air turbulence didn't bother us. I heard cries for help and prayers in twenty languages to (the Almighty) to save them from the plane crash. It was between wakefulness and sleep. The man fiddling with his keys gripped the seat supports tightly and said, "How can you sleep?" I said, "Sleep overcame me."

"The situation is serious."

The two Arab businesswomen were swearing by Muhammad's sake, while an Iranian sheikh invoked Hussein and a black American called on Jesus to save him, as his pregnant wife awaited their first child. The man beside me was grinding his teeth and increasing the pressure on the seat supports. I didn't feel any fear or anticipation of what might happen because there were no angels carrying butterflies... "We will cross the storm," I said to the man beside me, while the fear diminished the muscles in his face. He said, "How do you know that?" I said, "My intuition never fails."

The plane ceased to sway, and the Kuwaiti started to pray, and everyone behind me clapped, their frayed nerves relaxed, and Mary started distributing drinks to confirm the plane's survival from disaster. Human life is always threatened, and remembering (the Almighty) and those close to him completely controls their minds according to the severity of the impending danger. But they quickly return to their daily problems when the danger fades, and then Satan and his tribe become active. In moments of danger, they disappear completely because they don't find any space in

minds they can inhabit. They rush out but remain vigilant. We were in the sky, feeling no danger, so (the Almighty) was with us, and we didn't need to call on him. There are no intermediaries among us. Life for the inhabitants of the earthly universe is filled with anxiety, tension, and fear. We in the sky do not have black holes or these sharp weather fluctuations. We don't have daily matters that ignite us, and Satan and his tribe have no place among us. In the earthly universe, I noticed that they have hundreds of sites where they move, but we have no exploitation because we are all equal before (the Almighty). Therefore, we have no strategic analysts among us, and none of the angels have thought of conducting field or statistical research. We don't know Adam Smith or Marx, and we don't need Freud or Pavlov. Our lives are different. I mean my life in the past. It's amusing to mention that we don't mourn any angels because we don't die. We've surrounded the throne since (the Almighty) thought of who would accompany his loneliness. But it seems that creating Adam has changed the calculations and disrupted the steady equation. Therefore, in my estimation (speaking now as a news analyst on satellite channels), (the Almighty) swore to punish the wrongdoers among humans and didn't even hint at the angels. The inhabitants of the earthly universe are talkative by nature and talk about the details of their lives with the first passerby they meet on the subway or in the gambling halls or sports arenas. We maintain silence and feel tranquility... And now I miss my former life! When I was in Hussein's neighborhood drinking bitter black tea, the waiter, who wore a colorless jalabiya and

carefully wrapped a piece of cloth around his head, cursed Trump as he placed the tea in front of me.

"A gangster, he doesn't understand global politics."

The television was showing a match between Egypt's Al-Ahly and Monterrey, with the Egyptian team lost on the field while the Mexican team dominated the game. The Chinese waitress, who served the tea, was hit on the edge of the table I was sitting at, and she screamed, "God is great, they're just running around! The mistake is with the coach who didn't train them on an intelligent game plan... The attack should shift to the left side, and someone should distract the goalkeeper." A young man smoking shisha and looking at the passersby in the nearby square said, "A rematch a few years ago shattered the morale of Al-Ahly, who will play tomorrow against Zamalek."

I thought... Well, Trump left himself and shifted from international politics to Egyptian internal affairs. Maybe the conversation became more rational. I remember that we didn't know Trump or the Ahly football team, and we hadn't heard of Messi and Barcelona! We, who live in the Kingdom of (the Almighty), are safer and more peaceful. When I look at the world of planet Earth, I find it filled with armed conflicts, where politics, personal interests, and sexual issues play a fundamental role in these conflicts. And as modern technologies evolve, the methods of killing diversify. I felt frustrated as I reviewed the images of destruction caused by humans. The man fiddling with his keys says, "This is the will of (the Almighty)," and I was surprised by that. How can (the

Almighty) have two wills, one on earth and the other in heaven? And if so, then how can the inhabitants of planet Earth have freedom? I told him it's the people's choice for their destinies.

As we entered JFK Airport a little after one in the afternoon, the main hall was crowded with travelers, voices in various languages echoed, some flowing swiftly while an African language sounded closer to screaming. In the Kingdom of (the Almighty), we used to speak in whispers; the overall silence inhabited our souls. For the first time, I wonder how I convinced myself to be human? Can an angel become human? How will the world face the new era after shaping its behavior over millions of years to live for a few decades and confront the new world? On planet Earth, you need different values to manage conflict amidst the demands of new life.

In an area where a small, bright green tree stood, Paula White was praying for the Lord to help Trump win the upcoming elections as she spoke to her... I was fifteen when the Lord spoke to me, and the second time was yesterday. I tell you, He told me that Trump would return to lead us to victory. The prophecy became closer to reality after Jerusalem returned to Israel. Moments passed as she gazed steadfastly at the small audience around her. She raised her hand and shouted, "Who returned Jerusalem to Israel?"

An old woman wearing a fur coat and a brown scarf (Dear Trump), said White. "Yes, it's a sign." The man fiddling with his keys said, "I can't stay with you; you can enjoy watching

White's ability to address the audience. As for me, my wife and child are waiting for me."

I don't know why religious men haven't portrayed (the Almighty) in all its diversity as one of their leaders who has supernatural abilities. He talks to them while angry, joyful, and walks in their temples. He may raise them to protect them from evil. Surely it's a limited conception. (The Almighty) hasn't shown itself to us who surround His throne, but we know He's busy balancing the cosmos, including planet Earth. He doesn't need Trump to introduce Him to planet Earth as a harbinger of the end of life. The word (the Almighty) shakes the foundations of the cosmos, and Trump or any religious man, no matter how important, is just a mortal being, and the signs of (the Almighty) are performed directly for the whole world to see.

Approaching me was the woman with platinum blonde hair, speaking softly, "Can I take you to your accommodation? The driver is waiting, and White's talk seems endless." She was from the Catholic Church, which didn't care about White's activities, perhaps considering them frivolous, aiming to exploit the simplicity of Christians to boost her million-dollar balances in American banks. The woman with platinum blonde hair said gently, "What's your address in Manhattan?"

At the entrance of Manhattan Street, the driver stopped to inform us that the road was closed to prevent protesters from reaching the Bank of America branch. Trump used to say, "The criminal leftists are working to destroy America." I

said, "You might be late because of me; my apartment is nearby, and I can reach it in ten minutes."

I left the car after bidding farewell to the lady and thanking the driver. I walked along the sidewalk, avoiding the noisy crowds and evading the police, who were sneaking into the heart of the protests to disperse them. I passed the Bank of America after the police requested to search my small bag, and the ticket helped me.

I have a private party tonight (for intimacy), and I would be delighted if you could attend if you have no other commitments.

I can attend with appreciation for your invitation... Please provide me with the address and the appropriate time.

I wrote what you requested on a small piece of paper,
I am pleased to attend.

I saw the corners of her mouth relax as she seemed to express satisfaction, as she was somewhat tense at the beginning of our conversation.

You can go to the CEO's office.

The CEO's office is located on the ninth floor of the company-owned building, a large luxurious room adorned with a large painting that was a high-quality traditional copy of Dali's painting "The Temptation of Saint Anthony." I had seen the original painting the day I received a Dali butterfly; true, Dali mocked the saint in his painting, but the painter who copied it exaggerated a little in highlighting the misery that

enveloped the saint as he sat crouched by a withered tree trunk, as if he felt overwhelming humiliation, with a pig lying submissive next to him. Also, there was an intentional effort to give nature around the saint power and a dominant presence. Acquiring particularly copied paintings reveals a lot about the emotions and tendencies of the person who owns them, as he sees them daily in his office or home, and they must mean something in detail that lies within his psyche.

He welcomed me warmly; he was tall, and I thought maybe he was a basketball player in one of the first-class clubs in his youth.

What would you like to drink?

Nothing, sir.

No compliments... You have provided a great service to the company by revealing Haier's independence in dealing with us at a time when we thought they had several options. Therefore, we would have accepted harsh conditions if you hadn't completely changed the situation.

That was the purpose of my mission with the delegation, and I fulfilled my duty.

True... Your behaviour was exemplary... Your ID card states that you were born and studied in Texas, but believe me, I doubt that, as your behaviour is more akin to the people of Raleigh... By the way, it's my city, I'm from North Carolina.

Thank you, sir, you truly embarrass me.

Anyway... It has been decided to contract with you for five years with a 10% incentive bonus and an apartment... Are you in a relationship... I mean, do you have a girlfriend living with you?

No... I'm single.

Excellent... Mrs. Comet will take care of your matters for you. I am always pleased to meet you.

Mrs. Comet lifted a strand of her faded platinum hair, then placed her glasses on the table in front of her, appearing relaxed, with shades of joy spreading across her face.

I hope your meeting with the CEO was satisfactory.

Actually, it was comfortable.

Please don't forget our appointment tonight.... Oh, I forgot, here's a copy of the administrative order to increase your salary and grant you a 10% bonus incentive and the keys to the apartment. When you decide to move, let me know so I can send someone to help you, and it's best to visit the apartment to check if anything is needed regarding furniture and decor.

Thank you, I will do that... Allow me to go to my office.

For the first time, she accompanied me to the door.

In the hallway, there was a young man smiling quietly as if he were waiting for me.

He said: The boss sends his regards and apologizes for suffering from a sudden illness.

It's okay, but excuse me, I have urgent work.

He asked me to let you know that Mrs. Comet is busy with you.

As I closed the door behind me, I thought of the devil experiencing a sudden illness.

In heaven, we didn't know illness... None of the angels ever fell ill, and that's why we don't have doctors or medical clinics. But life on Earth is burdened with diseases and epidemics due to environmental pollution. We don't have subways, trains, cars, factories emitting gases, or planes emitting carbon dioxide. Our environment is completely pure.

Chapter Thirteen.

The morning that engulfed New York in a flood of lazy sunbeams rising into a clear dark blue sky at the end of November was peculiar. The crowds filling the wide sidewalks seemed less prepared to reach their destinations, and on the relaxed faces, there was a satisfaction not seen on any other day. At traffic lights, car drivers exchanged smiles accompanied by playful gestures, while children hurriedly raced to enter their schools. Secretly, I thought it was a day of global joy.

Mrs. Comett said, "This is a special day. After work, we'll go to Prospect Park. Sitting by the lake will be enjoyable. My father used to take us on weekend vacations in the summer... in winter...!!! That would be a significant sign... we'll just go home to get the bottle of wine I've been saving for my birthday."

She looked at me tenderly. I continued, "You'll be with me."

In my office, I was preparing a report on the sales volume development based on the joint plan with Haier company. I was examining the growth volume in each branch individually and in each product... During the year, we opened sixty branches in the United States and fifteen branches in Europe... I was putting the numbers in statistical tables and colorful, diverse charts to have a greater and clearer impact when read. Quickly, I found that I had great capabilities in developing and diversifying statistics and including more information presented in a way that ensures the viewer's quick comprehension of what I wanted to present. The clock had already passed twelve minutes when one of the cafeteria workers entered my room. The company had designated it for employees to have drinks and some meat and cheese sandwiches during the half-hour lunch break.

"Sir, Mrs. Comett asked me to remind you of the lunch break."

When I lifted my head from the sales table, a loud explosion sounded as if it had been dropped from the sky to the ground. The cafeteria worker rushed to hit the wall and then rebounded to the door as the girls' screams in the cafeteria

echoed, closer to sharp howls, and dozens of employees rushed downstairs to the shelter underground, staggering in my place then I stood up to open the curtains. Heavy black clouds piled up in the sky gap in front of me as if rising from the depths of the bay guarded by the French statue, which appeared before me indistinctly. A loud wave of thunder and lightning began, then the sky covered its entire open space on the ground with cascading rivers of rain that completely obscured the vision, and cars honked continuously as if the city were under attack... The girls were running aimlessly between the six floors of the building using the stairs after the elevators stopped and the electricity went out.

The design manager in the company, struggling to control her breath, said, "What's happening? Is there another attack?"

It was clear that the memories of the World Trade Center were still alive.

"No, it's (Almighty) attack. It must have tired you," said the man fiddling with his keys.

There were several employees around me... I was calm, watching the sky.

"Everything will end in two hours."

Everyone looked at me in surprise.

"I read weather news via the Russian moon."

The design manager said, "I will go on Sunday to St. Peter's Church in Brooklyn and light three candles for the Lord."

Mrs. Comett said, "I will go to Prospect Lake, sit behind the glass, watch the small boats and seagulls, and sip Algerian wine."

The design manager drew a cross sign and said, "Comett, in the name of Jesus Christ, do not speak in this provocative tone."

Comett said, "Everyone to their work."

She said it in a commanding tone.

When everyone left, Mrs. Comett said, "Come to my office."

The rain still pounding against the windows overlooking the empty street now devoid of cars, producing a sound resembling distant gunfire. Drivers stopped honking their horns, and I felt the building trembling as it faced the terrifying thunder emanating from the sky like a serious warning. Until the black clouds passed over the city, what would happen?

In the Kingdom of the Almighty, we never experienced thunder, lightning, or rain. The Throne (of the Almighty) covered the sky and everything that happened, existing in the lower layers of the earthly cosmos.

Komait said, "Were you serious when you said that everything will end after three hours?"

"Yes, madam... but I said it would end after two hours."

"You amaze me... your knowledge knows no bounds, as if you come from another planet!"

I joked, "From the Japanese planet."

She said seriously, "Perhaps, but your appearance doesn't fit the Japanese model. If you were a believer, you might say you're from heaven, perhaps even from the angels of heaven. Even the meteorological department didn't reassure citizens about the end of this storm with the accuracy you specified!"

"But they did announce that a dangerous change would occur."

"True, meteorologists settled the debate about the intervention of the Almighty in moving rain and storms from one place to another."

"I've learned about that..."

"You'll remain in the grey area," said Satan, "the Almighty watches over the earthly cosmos and the laws of physics He has set govern the movement of natural phenomena."

"We are still under the influence of the event, and I have received hundreds of messages talking about what's happening as the precursor to the end of life... It's the Apocalypse... Some were calling for prayers or going to church for repentance. The pastor at the Church of the Mother announced that Judgment Day is at hand."

"I read a research paper on ancient history that deals with the same topic, where crowds rushed to the temples to offer sacrifices (to the Almighty) as if they were on their way to Judgment Day, even thieves, murderers, and prostitutes were seeking forgiveness and declaring repentance, but as soon as the storm ended, they returned to their old ways."

"And what's your opinion?"

"Natural phenomena explain nothing because they are transient and irrational."

"I didn't understand... Anyway, the general manager is calling us."

At five o'clock, the winds stopped, then the rain lessened until it stopped completely, but New York's streets were rivers flowing swiftly. Municipal measures were swift and decisive; the rivers began to dispose of the water, making the asphalt streets gleam under the flow of electric lights that had been cut off from the city during the storm. I was on my way home when traffic stopped. There was a gathering of pedestrians standing in the middle of 28th Street, crowded around a tall black pastor waving his arms. He was wearing a cassock, and when he raised his arms, he looked like he was about to fly. A woman who was dragging a child forcefully said... "He's crazy, calling people to cleanse themselves of their sins because the news has reached us of the great Judgment Day."

A driver left his car and stood smoking, his heavily flushed cheeks indicating the amount of wine he had drunk. He uttered a vulgar curse. The black pastor stood in the middle of the street from Broadway causing traffic congestion. The crowd grew as some women cried, but what happened later was extremely strange. A small group began singing hymns, entreating the Almighty and dancing on their urine to gospel music. Clapping their hands and stomping their feet on the ground, the unified sound resonated with the guitar tunes

under the clear sky, evoking mixed emotions. Suddenly, police sirens blared from dozens of cars that surrounded the gathering, blocking off branches of 28th Street up to the entrance of Times Square, then began dispersing the assembly. The groups that were singing lifted the pastor onto their shoulders and moved to the broad sidewalk on the right side. The cars started moving as white drivers waved thanks to the police.

Satan said, "The event will occupy them for a week, then they will forget Judgment Day and even the Almighty... Why don't you go to the Bossa Nova club? You might find entertainment instead of loneliness."

"Which planet did you come from?"

"From my mother's womb."

Considered it a joke, they laughed. They felt they were leaning towards seriousness and acting spontaneously.

David asked, "Are you going to dance?"

"No... it's still early."

"Are you waiting for someone?" She turned towards me.

"No."

"It's strange for someone to be alone in a place like Nova."

"What happened today is what pushed me to mingle with the youth."

"And what happened?... We are exposed to hurricanes and storms, and often (Ida) visits us. It's the act of nature and the

difference in atmospheric pressure zones, or are you thinking like the ministers of evil, that it's divine punishment?"

"No, but don't you feel like it's deliberate? I mean, there's a force coordinating it."

"What coordination? This has been happening even before history. I think you believe (if God doesn't exist, everything is permissible)."

"Exactly, just as if there were no state, chaos would reign and take us back to the Middle Ages. Power is authority!"

The crowd intensified, and loud jazz music began to fill the hall until there was no space left for conversation between two people at one table. The loud volume was part of an attempt to inject activity, excitement, and descent into the empty square in the middle of the hall for dancing. Those dancing at their tables were because the dance floor was crowded. Raised hands waved with the noisy melody while empty bottles piled up on the tables.

"I hope you'll excuse us for leaving you alone," David said, taking Susan's hand in a theatrical gesture that made her smile wryly.

In a nightclub like Bossa Nova, you're completely isolated from the world. Your world without windows, and the noise blocks out other sounds except for whispers of demons. Although faint, they pour into your ears, and this world turns into a reality of possible desires. I found that the colorful lighting and constant movement played a role in igniting the excitement, which rose to a frenzy after the fourth round.

When they returned, they were exhausted. The fast dances were marked by violent movements. Thick smoke began to rise in the hall, then flames ignited, spreading rapidly to take hold of the wooden tables. There were frantic screams from some whose clothes caught fire, and everyone rushed towards the door like drowning people trying to grab onto each other or push each other back. When the fire reached the bar, alcohol bottles began to explode, expanding the flames' reach, increasing the panic and frenzy. The crowd became a blind force pushing forward, uncaring of who fell; no one bothered to even jump over those who fell but trampled them as they ran.

David lifted his girlfriend and rushed to the window adjacent to the crowded door with the force of a professional sprinter, breaking the glass with his shoulder, tearing his pants at the legs, and opening more than one blood fountain. Many imitated him, but some managed to keep themselves under control and used chairs to break the glass.

Neither the Devil nor any of his children had anything to do with the fire, nor could it be imagined that the Almighty had ordered it. Eight butterflies were hastily sent to the Valley of Souls. I had retreated to the end of the hall, observing the state of hysterical anxiety. When the fire truck arrived, the hall was an iron structure with black walls. I had removed my jacket and tie, which surprised the firefighters and police officers who entered the hall, according to the young police officer who claimed I still had my tie tightly fastened.

"Do you have any idea how the fire started?"

"No," I replied.

The head of the firefighting team said, "We'll find out after examining the place."

The young officer said, "Perhaps his answer will help us as it is coherent. I thought coherence might be a charge in such incidents. It's the earthly universe, and the police officers in it either act according to mood or out of a desire to find a ready-made suspect. When I tried to leave, the officer ordered me to write down my address and phone number as they might need me later. He said, 'Perhaps... who knows.' I laughed to myself and muttered, 'Yes, who knows.'"

Chapter Fourteen

As I began to contemplate while driving to my workplace, comparing the two lives I've lived—the first spanning millions of years and the other not yet surpassing a year and a half—I realized this was the beginning of tumultuous feelings that could lead to regret. The boredom I currently feel, I've also experienced in the kingdom of the Lord. Does life in any form or place inevitably lead to boredom? But is the alternative a short life filled with movement, diversity, and happiness? How would that be? In the kingdom of the Lord, there is an invisible world far from knowledge, but in the visible universe, the world is visible, knowledge is limitless, and curiosity is endless.

When I greeted Mrs. Comet as I passed by her open door, she said, "Jacob, put your briefcase in your office and come in."

I didn't respond; I expected she had new ideas related to designs or production that she wanted to discuss with me. I left my handbag on the desk and closed my office door.

Two individuals sat casually on the side couch, both dressed elegantly with an official demeanor, catching my attention with their shiny shoes.

Comet gestured towards the chair adjacent to her desk and said, "Please, have a seat."

She continued, "These gentlemen have come to meet you, and due to the sensitivity of the matter, I'll leave you with them."

Without introducing me to them, I understood that the matter had nothing to do with work, hence the preference for secrecy. The conversation was to remain within the realm of confidential information exchange. I felt somewhat perplexed by the ambiguity I faced.

They were relaxed; one, a slightly overweight man in his late fifties, with a few white hairs remaining on his temples, had narrow eyes that hinted at a cunning nature, honed by his experience in dealing with others. The other, tall and athletic, obviously maintained his high physical fitness through continuous training. His indifferent gaze, however, revealed a tendency towards violence.

"Please, sit, Mr. Jacob," the bald man said.

As I sat down, they both scrutinized me.

"I'll get straight to the point," baldy said. "I'll present you with a proposal. If you agree in principle, we'll meet in my office to discuss the details. If you decline, it's as if you never met us."

"That's fine, but shouldn't I know who you both are?" I asked.

"Certainly... we're from the External Relations Department of the Central Intelligence Agency, but there's no need for names at this stage."

"I see," I replied.

"Alright, the proposal is to invite you to join the agency because your profile matches our needs."

"Does the company management here know about this?"

The bald man hesitated for a moment, then said, "Well... yes. The CEO of the company was a former head of technical departments at the agency before retiring and joining the company."

"I understand. I'll need to consider this."

"How long will it take?" he asked.

"Two days."

"Then we'll await your response on this number," he said, handing me a neatly folded colored piece of paper, and they stood up to leave.

"I'll be happy to work with you," said the athletic man, shaking my hand and winking at me.

"May the Almighty guide us towards what's good," said the bald one as they left.

I returned to my seat, torn between surprise and tension. Mrs. Comet entered, but she didn't allude to the unexpected meeting.

"The final design for the multi-purpose women's kitchen assistant machine will be with you by twelve. Please conduct practical tests five times, as well as approve the proposed colours."

"Yes... I said it casually while still under the pressure of confused thoughts. Despite my certainty that she knew it, I left for my office while Mrs. Comit busied herself browsing through some papers. In the realm of the Lord, we didn't have intelligence agencies or espionage; the Almighty was aware of everything. A strange question popped into my mind: Did the Almighty know what would happen to me on Earth? I dismissed it, but shadows of doubt continued to gather in my mind, causing disturbance in my thoughts.

In the apartment's hall that evening, Satan sat lost in deep thought, not noticing my cautious entrance, or perhaps pretending not to.

"I pity you, for you will tire greatly," he remarked.

"That's not your concern," I replied.

"But it is, indeed," he insisted.

"And why were you busy before my arrival?" I asked.

He adjusted his posture and smiled. "It's remarkably odd. Humans used to make their own gods a few thousand years ago, but today, they make their own demons. It doesn't concern you, and now you'll be one of the guardians of American national security."

"I haven't given my consent yet," I reminded him.

"You will... you'll be the first angel to work in international intelligence."

"Don't mock, especially in my house."

"Alright... do you need information about your meeting?"

"No."

"I'm not seeking to ensure your success; I merely suggest."

"It will be an illicit act."

"Are you serious... Didn't the Almighty teach Adam all the names when we presented ourselves for the debate with him?"

"I don't discuss the actions of the Almighty."

"Expressing opinions is exercising freedom."

"You enjoy absolute freedom while what I've observed on Earth is that they're confined by apparent and hidden constraints, in what they call the unconscious."

"I hope you'll be cautious; attempting may lead to unforeseen errors."

"Thank you... I'll keep your advice in mind."

"One more thing, do you think the Almighty agreed for you to descend to Earth because you desired it? From what I know, as I've been adhering to his throne for millions of years, I doubt it."

He fell silent, gazing at the city illuminated by thousands of electric lights, resembling a carnival while we hung above it on the twenty-eighth floor.

He continued without turning towards me. "He wanted to see how the life of angels would be if they were allowed to live like humans, and you were the most suitable for this experiment. Earth will witness a tremendous transformation in its course of life; technological advancement will multiply many times over since angels possess boundless imagination and intellectual capabilities, making contemporary technology mere child's play."

Heavy rain began to pelt against the apartment's windows, and on the street, pedestrians formed a strange tableau with their colourful umbrellas, hurrying along at varying speeds. Some rushed past, overtaking others, while some strolled leisurely, seemingly enjoying themselves. The cars nearing the sidewalk splashed pedestrians with water flowing swiftly alongside the curb into the drains.

"That's how life will be in its fixed framework but dynamic within, changing every moment. This is the result of the presence of angels and humans on Earth. The Almighty will continue to watch over them or... I say 'or'... move on to other galaxies and leave Earth to its fate."

Mysterious, I didn't comment on his words as I began to feel afraid. I noticed myself thinking like a human on Earth, terrified of the unknown.

In the company, Mrs. Comet said as I greeted her good morning, "Any news?"

"About what?" I asked.

"Your visitors yesterday."

"I'll call them after I check my email."

She didn't comment. I went to my office. The designs lacked a clearer aesthetic touch. I made adjustments to the proposed colors and reviewed the advertisement accompanying the image display. When I lifted the phone, I had already decided to agree...

In the compound surrounded by heavily guarded walls, comprising a group of buildings some rising over thirty stories, the soldier at the giant iron gate asked me about my destination. When I told him I had an appointment, he asked me to enter a small room where a smiling and cheerful-looking woman in her thirties was sitting. She was tying her long blond hair in a ponytail, swinging it as she asked me about the direction I had been given for the appointment. I told her it was from External Relations. She took a long notepad, glanced at me, and said, "Yes, lovely, you're right on time for the appointment." I asked a soldier who was sitting against the wall to accompany me to Building 22, 7th floor, Room 11. As he walked ahead of me, he seemed like a robot, not turning, stiff in his posture, advancing with military steps

like a soldier in a parade. We took an elevator to the seventh floor. He stepped aside at Room 11 and gestured for me to knock on the door. A colourful rough-looking woman opened the door and said, "Come in." She pointed to a brown sofa made of rough wool fabric. I sat down... Silence prevailed as if it inhabited the place. She didn't ask me anything. Less than two minutes later, a young athletic man emerged from a door at the back of the room with a mysterious smile. When I followed him, I felt like I was performing rituals for a secret group that used magic in its daily activities. We crossed a corridor with high walls, then entered a rectangular hall with completely bare walls painted in dark grey. Behind a table were four chairs with high backs, and more than five meters away, a wooden chair with a seat made of cotton fabric matching the wall colour.

The athletic young man said, "You can sit on the chair and review the file on the seat for five minutes. After that, the interview committee members will join you."

He left me alone. I felt like I was in a secret religious ritual deliberately instilling awe to prepare for the surrender that comes under the influence of a form of hypnotism. The file on the seat, with its dead yellow color, reminded me of the scrolls of recipes in the markets of Babylon, as Harut said. I recalled an American series about the agency, in which the director reveals that everyone is under surveillance through hundreds of cameras planted in every corner, and perhaps agency employees inside their office headquarters are under more surveillance than any American citizen. The file

contained a single printed sheet with twenty lines, each containing information about my personality... name... birth... parents' names... education... movements... my visits to the Bousa Nova club... my relationship with Mari... In short, everything I've done since I entered New York and obtained the official documents identifying me.

A man in his seventies entered. His gaze was sharp, his nose hooked, his white hair cut short. He raised his hand in greeting, as if practicing a habit he was accustomed to. Two people entered behind him, one in civilian blue clothes and the other holding a high rank in the Marine Corps. He was tall, bald, and wore nothing on his head, but on his chest were several insignias indicating he had fought many battles. The three sat down while the fourth did not arrive, and the chair remained empty.

The older man said, "All right, Mr. Jacob, have you read the file?"

"Yes, sir."

"There are some gaps in the file that you will be asked to provide clear answers to later."

Silence filled the room as he looked at me intently. "So, do you agree to join the agency?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Why?"

I sensed deliberate evasion in this inquiry. "Because you asked," I said. "It never occurred to me to join the agency."

When your men approached me, I was initially surprised and requested time to consider the offer. So, I suggest you ask them why they chose me."

"Ah," he muttered, rubbing his hands together as he glanced toward the tall civilian man. The three whispered something to each other before deciding to leave. The young athlete entered and said, "Alright, may I accompany you?"

I left the yellow file on the chair and followed him. He knocked on a wooden door with golden handles and then opened it. Inside was the bald man I had met at the company. He gestured for me to sit and then picked up the phone. His eyebrows furrowed, and he replaced the receiver.

"What would you like to drink... or if you agree, we could celebrate in the cafeteria for a new member joining the agency."

The young athlete stood up excitedly and embraced me. "Allow me to be the first to welcome you... My name is Stewart Van Der."

The bald man left his chair and came forward to shake my hand. "I'm William Raoul, Deputy Head of the External Relations Department."

In the spacious and brightly lit cafeteria, the vibrant chairs and colorful tables exuded joy, while the glass wall surrounding it allowed us to enjoy the sight of rain pushing dark clouds to the ground. Satan sat relaxed, sipping juice as if waiting for me.

"Well, you're now part of the agency. What do you think about collaborating on a project together?" he asked.

"Absolutely not."

"Is working with me worse than working in the agency?"

"The agency is a government institution, while working with you goes against the Lord's will."

He smirked cunningly. "And the agency operates according to the Ten Commandments!! ... Don't you think you're beginning the path of hypocrisy?"

"Why don't you leave me alone? You have the earthly realm before you. What prompts you to pursue me?"

"Perhaps the first prize that ends the bet with the Almighty."

In the cafeteria, there were over fifty employees. Raoul stood up, raising his hand, asking everyone to listen.

"We are now celebrating a new member... a unique and distinguished member who speaks twenty languages fluently and has the ability to learn any language within days if immersed in it. He also has the ability to devise numerous scenarios for any case we may encounter. Please welcome Mr. Jacob Fisherman..."

Everyone applauded, raising their glasses. I felt a bit embarrassed as Satan stood up, smiling, and disappeared behind the rain curtain enveloping New York.

When I returned to my apartment, I didn't turn on the light. I lay on my couch in the middle of the living room, pondering what Satan had said... Why did I accept so hastily? What tasks would I be assigned?

I felt confused... I drank a sharp Mexican beverage from a bottle and emptied two small glasses consecutively. I opened the window... The rain had stopped, and the sky was filled with twinkling stars. The moon was absent, while the cold breeze crossed 28th Street, spreading through Manhattan and towards the sea guarded by the Statue of Liberty, proudly declaring that Europe protects America.

As I lay on my bed, I couldn't sleep. In the Lord's realm, we didn't sleep, nor did we know what it meant. For hundreds of years, I worked without feeling tired or ever thinking of sleep. Now, drowsiness gripped my eyes, but the swirling thoughts in my mind forced me to wake up. I felt a headache creeping in... and numbness on both sides.

How do I revoke my agreement to work in the agency? What if they see my withdrawal as a challenge?

I stepped out into the nearly deserted street. A taxi driver stopped by me.

"Would you like to go somewhere?" he asked.

"Thank you. I'd like to stroll around the neighborhood," I replied.

He mentioned he had a place to spend the rest of the night, an offer I would not forget... university girls like me, he said.

"Thank you," I said.

With a hint of sharpness, he asked, "Are you like me? That can be arranged too."

I moved to the other side of the street, hearing him curse obscenely.

When I returned to my apartment, I decided to contact the "Friend of the Prophets." I was under pressure, with confused feelings and blind confusion making it difficult to focus and make the right decision.

He didn't respond, worsening my situation. As dawn slowly approached over New York, buildings that once appeared as ghosts crowded narrow streets now looked meticulously designed, and buildings with diverse shapes relaxed in their spaces. I stood by the open window, sipping the morning chill, looking at the sky as dawn left it confidently, pushing winter laziness away with the sun.

I heard the "Friend of the Prophets" say, "You have a choice to return or to stay?"

"I'll return," I said hastily and firmly.

"The Almighty was watching your experience, and we were all looking forward to what would happen to you."

"A lot has happened, and I testify that human life is not what we were created for. It's more complicated than I imagined."

"This day will rise again. Do you have connections with others?"

"No."

"We'll meet tonight under the throne of the Almighty."