

*Those who walk towards the truth
Walk alone
No one can be
another's travelling companion.*

Christian Morgenstern (1871-1914)

They were born on a farm with an orchard of great fruit trees, around the middle of the last century. Their mother had a couple of miscarriages before she could hold a pregnancy. She became very heavy and the doctor thought to feel two little heads.... Thus two girls were born within the hour. They screamed as loudly as each other, but the resemblance stopped there...

Their father was standing there quietly, he still had his hat on his head. In the tension he forgot to take it off – until the second baby was born. Then he took it off to thank God.

Her father was a quiet, considerate man. From early morning until late in the evening he worked in the garden, but he loved the girls above all. If he stood on top of a ladder to pluck apples and he heard a child's voice, he came down off his ladder cautiously and lifted the girl high up in the air. He was a devout man, steeped with a deep, old fashioned faith. To be absent on Sunday from Holy Mass was a cardinal sin, and so one he did not commit. Like a good Catholic, he did not read the holy scripture, but let himself be taught from the gospel that was read aloud on Sundays. In everything he endeavoured to be moderate, except in his

love for his wife and daughters. When his father became a widower, he took him into his house....

He was a quiet man, but he saw and heard everything. To him life was a great prayer, filled with concern. With softness he plucked his apples and cherries, with softness he put them in buckets and chests. With softness he judged his fellow man.

A bit further off was another farm, also with fruit trees, and with a family with six children. The girls went playing there often and were astonished how *different* everything was there. The farmer never plucked his own fruit, but had seasonal fruitpickers to do it. He walked around in his overalls and wooden shoes like their father, a hat on his head. And just like their father, he was in church every Sunday in a decent suit and prayed the Lord's Prayer. But for lunch on that same Sunday he had personally wrung a chicken's or a rabbit's neck the day before. And if the guard-dog got ill he killed it with his old military gun. When the children had been naughty, they got a beating with the carpet-beater, which hung threateningly on a hook in the scullery. She, the youngest of the twins, always became a little nauseous if she looked at it, and also when she ran into the farmer, although he was always very friendly to her. Often she could not eat in the evening and her father looked at her, concerned. One night, when she was going to bed, he asked her:

‘What's wrong, my child, what's the matter with you?’

It was never hard to explain to him what you were feeling.

‘I get sick when I’m at the neighbours. I am afraid of that father, he’s so harsh and rough. You would never kill our chickens or rabbits to eat them... I find it so scary!’

He sat on the rim of her bed; her sister was still washing herself. She did not want *her* to hear it! She would laugh at her! But father caressed her hair softly and said:

‘It is nature, sweet child. It is very normal that a farmer butchers his animals, it is his profession.’

‘He’s a fruit farmer, just like you are. You would never do that!’

‘Perhaps that’s weakness... I simply can’t do it. I attach myself too much to the animals – let them just live and die. I can’t do it. But you can’t judge him for that. He has a lot of mouths to feed; he has many worries.’

‘But... I also find it scary that the children are beaten. That isn’t allowed, is it?!

You aren’t allowed to kick and hit, even if you are a father?’

‘He must keep six of those rascals quiet; that’s something different from two good girls. Come, say a prayer and go to sleep.’

She got out of her bed to say her evening prayer on her knees.

With the same patience he waited until her sister said her prayer and was lying under the sheets. Then he kissed them and left the room. She did not understand it very well. How could something be good and bad at the same time? She still felt not right.

‘I’ve heard you talking to dad!’ whispered her sister mockingly. ‘You’re a scaredy-cat! Tomorrow I’m going to tell eve-

rybody! That you're scared of farmer Erens. We'll all laugh at you!'

She turned over to her side. Her nausea was gone. She said out loud:

'Go ahead! Farmer Erens likes me far more than he likes you. Watch out that he doesn't catch you!'

She might be good and shy – she was not afraid of her sister, never. She always tried to domineer because she was not even an hour older than her. She liked to do all kinds of things that were not allowed – and *she* had to play along with that. 'Do as I tell you to, I'm the oldest.' But she was never intimidated by her. She only played along when she wanted to, and otherwise simply did not.

'Goodnight' sounded the little voice of the oldest to make it up to her.

'Till tomorrow.' She said.

After school she looked for her father, who was working in the garden.

'Dad, how can something be good *and* bad at the same time?'

He put his shovel down and sat with her on a tree stump.

'What do you mean, child?'

His blue eyes looked at her gently. She had never seen him angry, or irritated.

'I compare farmer Erens to you. A man should be like you. You're the best fruit farmer in the whole world and you're good to everything that lives. But you don't object to farmer Erens killing animals and hurting children.'

'Should I really object to that? Do you think that?'

She thought about it for a little while and shook her head.

‘You never object to anything.’

He chuckled.

‘Rotten apples and cherries!’

‘Is farmer Erens not a ‘rotten’ man?’

‘I understand that he is the way he is, child. If you understand, it isn’t necessary to approve or object to something.’

‘Aren’t you scared of him?’

‘I get on well with him. Very well. It’s nature, child. He’s closer to nature than I am.’

‘Is there no good and bad in nature, then?’

‘Well...’ said father, uncertain. ‘You’re asking me something there. I don’t believe there is, no. You can’t blame a lion for devouring his prey. Farmer Erens is a farmer, he’s grown up like that, he acts the way he is. Sometimes he’s friendly, sometimes he’s angry. And butchering animals is part of his being farmer. You must look at that in a different way.’

‘But he hurts his children!’

‘For some children there’s no harm in that.’

‘We’re bad sometimes too!’ She thought about her sister, who liked to do everything that God has forbidden.

Father smiled at her, shaking his head.

‘Dear child, I cannot do it! I can’t raise my hand against a living being. But neither can I judge a fellow man.’ He got up and kissed her on her head.’ So, and now I’m going to start working again!’

She walked inside, to her mother. She was a large, red cheeked, pleasant lady, who wore an apron. She was always

busy washing, ironing, cooking, baking, making jam, bottling fruit and more. She was a happy woman, because she was surrounded with love.

She sat at the kitchen table to watch her mother peeling potatoes.

‘Mother? Is father an ordinary man?’

She burst into a cordial laugh.

‘Ordinary? No, definitely not.’

‘Why not?’

Mother became serious. She put her peeler down and wiped her hands on her apron.

‘Your father... is a distinguished man, who happens to be born as a farmer. Perhaps it should be like this. Simple, good and gentle, that’s your father. There is no other like him, child, remember that well. No other. And your mother knows that, I’ve been living with him for a long time already.’

‘But... if there’s no other like him – isn’t he very lonely then?’

‘Saintly people are always lonely... they are misunderstood by everyone, but they understand everyone else.’

‘Is father saintly?’

‘I think he is, child. But I’m not the pope, am I? It’s just a feeling....’

Satisfied, she got up and walked outside, looking for her sister to play with.

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She, the eldest of the twins, had the same memories of