

THE NAMINGS

Long starless nights when she couldn't sleep
or violent dreams of fiery swords awakened her,
the thought persisted: Why? Sweaty noons when sun
broiled skin, and blistered soles were more painful
than insect-bitten legs and arms scraped on thorns,
she wondered why. Why hadn't the serpent approached Adam?

The fruit proposition, first phrased as a question,
psychologically packaged, was more than a mere exercise
in temptation. The serpent needed knowledge. Each time
he tried to sample the coveted tree's prize for himself,
he was blown to the ground by ferocious winds.
Already well-versed in evil, he needed facts about good.
One can't conquer what one can't comprehend:
a basic principle. He watched the human pair for days,
knew when they ate and slept, knew when she left
his hand to stroll with the canine he named "wolf,"
or fill the flowered air with her lyrical laughter
at the bouncing creature he named "hare."

The serpent was amused when Adam named him "dragon."
He was convinced that Adam, made of common clay,
could be easily mastered. What he didn't know was
how soon the taster would die as God declared. If one bite
killed the man quickly, his mate he called "woman"
would be left. Alive, untainted, Eden hers alone.

She was the one the serpent feared most, the unpredictable,
the more complicated half of a superior life form.
God spent extra time making her, used bone not dust,
added nuances He hadn't used with Adam. If "woman" fell
after one taboo taste, her riddance would be welcome,
and Adam could be overcome at leisure. But if, as suspected,
the punishment were protracted, "woman" would then have time
to offer the fruit to her mate, and both would be doomed.
Yet possibly not before useful information was revealed.

The perfect solution. How interesting to learn how long
God would let them stand. How fascinating to observe
the thing God planned called "death."

Thus the serpent's leading question to "woman"
as she stepped out of a cool blue stream: "So the Lord
said you could not eat from all the garden's trees?"
She replied that they could eat from any except
the centerpiece tree. She repeated God's grave warning
not even to touch it.

The serpent moved closer, softly assuring her: "Oh, no, your life here won't end. That isn't what God meant. That tree will impart knowledge. God just wasn't sure you were ready then to know as much as He does. Now you are. See how perfect, how sweetly inviting is the fruit of this loveliest tree? Made to enjoy!"

Everything visible was beautiful. The tempter was beautiful, his lithe symmetrical body was warm and plump with evil wisdom and evil thirst hidden under gold and silver scales, opal wings, ruby eyes and iridescent patterns on its hide glowing with every color human eyes could see. Unlike the other fauna, he had a dulcet voice. Almost as melodic as God's.

Innocence without suspicion, inexperience without caution, no stores of lore to draw on, no hormones of fear. The woman took what was proffered.

The serpent was still smiling as Adam ran to her side and bit. The humans frowned at each other, disconcerted. They stumbled off to gather leaves to wear.

Afterward, she often pondered God's last visit. The shock, the shame, the expulsion. Now she dropped to the forest floor to rest. Adam picked leeches off their ankles and scratched the rash on his back. He sloshed aside the slime at the edge of a pool, cupped his hands around a drink just as she screamed at a long legless threat crawling toward her on the ground. She struck the hideous gaping head with a stone and Adam beat it dead with a branch. It was like nothing he had named back in the garden. They wondered if there were others. They hurried away.

At last the woman asked her mate, "Why did you taste the fruit? You could have refused, spared yourself."

"No, I could not. God warned us not to eat it. I could not let you suffer the consequences alone. Nor, once having you, my joy, my companion, could I bear to be alone."

(cont.)

Adam began making tools, tilling soil. The woman ground seeds between rocks, hauled water, gutted fish. They had seen an unnamed creature eat a fish, and saw a strange animal kill and consume another animal, startled at the bright crimson inside it. Were they filled with such? Were they meant to eat such? One day, hunger drove them to eat a wounded bird.

Often they wished for other humans to share their toil. They thought God had said something about reproducing them, but His voice was thunder, His eyes lightning, and His words difficult to understand that awful day.

Her lower belly ached again, and once again blood trickled down her thighs. Unlike the gush of red when Adam fell and gashed his shoulder on a jagged stone, she had no discernable wound. She swabbed with moss, hoping her predicament would pass more quickly than the first time, back in that dark vault of rock where they shivered, and were attacked by another unnamed creature-- like a combination "bird" and "rat" that swooped at them. Back where everything trembled and rumbled and part of the cave collapsed.

Within the time of Earth's first journey around the sun, memories of God's face and their first glorious home faded and they could not recall some of the names Adam gave the various life forms.

Then on a new day, Adam named his wife "Eve" for she, in her pain, bore a son, and became the mother of all humans. And the world would forever remember.