

A FABLE FOR OUR TIMES:

In the beginning the unexpurgated version

God created – in careful order – first the cosmos, the stars and the sun; then the earth - the sea and the land; fish and flying birds; grasses, flowers and trees; creeping bugs and creatures that walked on all fours; creatures which ate green things followed by those which ate flesh – and then **he** created a man. Oh, and later a woman too – an afterthought – to be a companion for the man in his solitary task of mowing the lawns and picking the fruits of the Elysian Fields of Eden.

God, the supreme mechanic, surveyed **his** creation through **his** third eye and saw that it was good. Everything that **he** had made sprang fully formed from **his** mouth, for **he** had spoken and it was so. The life that **he** breathed into everything lived on as in-breath and out-breath, in a constant flow from his immeasurable lungs. Thus the seasons of Spring and Summer were carried on the out-breath, while Autumn and Winter drew back on the in-breath. Days followed nights which followed days. And living creatures just 'were'. They grazed and excreted in an exact bodily balance which maintained perpetual life. Indeed a death was an event to be marvelled at. It would occasionally happen when one of the larger animals, let's say the lion, 'accidentally' caught and devoured one of the less aggressive types which crossed its path. But no-one got upset, not even the creature at the receiving end, for by morning a fully-grown replica would have appeared in its place. By this process **God** gained casual employment, doing what **he** did best – namely creating, while the man and the woman kept the place tidy and soaked up the sun in silent and mutual appreciation of all that had been done. And the laws of this universe were carved on tablets of onyx, immutable, locked in **God's** safe for copyright reasons, far from the prying eyes of younger brother Lucifer who was known to be a somewhat unpredictable joker in the halls of Nirvana.

This happy state of affairs might have lasted for a very long time, indeed for ever if you press the point. But the best-laid plans of mice and immortals rarely run true and this is what happened in the case of the Garden of Eden. For the fact of the matter is that **God** had foolishly (I speak post-historically) incorporated an Achilles Heel in **his** creation – the Tree of Knowledge - whose fruit **he** declared should never be eaten. This tree was a piece of monumental risk-taking if ever there was one, for within its fruit **God** placed the seeds of the knowledge of good and evil – in other words, the freedom to choose. Now such choice was a taken-for-granted aspect of **Godness**. Why **he** chose to encode it in an attractive fruit on a tree placed right in the heart of **his** creation is a question that you will have to put directly to **him**. **He** must have known that the temptation to eat of the fruit would sorely try **his** two upstanding immortals – the man and the woman. After all, they had carte blanche permission to eat everything else! So **God**, in **his** ineffable way, is a bit of a teaser – what's new?

The story of what followed is well known, but sadly inaccurate. Hence my decision, based upon the most impeccable of research, to put the record straight.

The man – Adam – was won't to take himself off for long walks through the garden, always trying to find new sights and always being somewhat disappointed that everywhere looked much the same as everywhere else. He'd complain about this to Eve – his helpmate – but she wasn't much interested. She preferred to stay in her own patch cultivating her organic investments and soaking up the sun. It should be noted, in passing, that it only ever rained between moon-up and moon-down in Eden, and never actually on **God's** two special creatures.

Now it happened that 'Eve's Place' as she liked to call it, was right next door to the Tree of Knowledge whose branches hung invitingly lower and lower with fruit which grew ever heavier since it was neither ever picked nor even pecked. The effect of this was to cast an unwanted shadow across her prize rhubarb plant for much of the day, a fact which considerably irritated Eve since there was little else about which to complain. On one day – I cannot tell you precisely which one since each day was effectively the same as every other – she was lying around as usual when 'plop', a fruit from the Tree of Knowledge obeyed the laws of gravity and fell right in the middle of the rhubarb. As if on cue, several others followed and Eve was forced to rouse herself and confront the situation. Not being stupid, she soon worked out that the tree's essential problem rested in the sheer weight that it increasingly had to bear. She reasoned that if she relieved the tree of as much fruit as she could carry, not only would fruit no longer threaten her rhubarb, but also it would raise the branch sufficiently to allow the sun to warm her vulnerable and much loved plant. Now Eve was nothing if not decisive when she wanted to be, and before long she had three baskets full of the bright purplish fruits. Pleased with herself but exhausted from her efforts, she sat back down and regarded the evidence of her unaccustomed labour.

It was in this position that Adam found her when he returned from his walkabout. Being a rather law-abiding, not to say pedantic individual, he was horrified at what Eve had done in his absence.

"What will we do now?" he queried, scratching his golden locks. "If **God** finds out that we have plucked fruit from the one tree in all of creation which has been expressly barred to us, **he**'ll fly into a temper even worse than the last one when I 'accidentally' diverted one of his streams to create a pool for you to swim in."

They both remembered the incident – there had been a hell of a din and rain had poured on them like there was no tomorrow. Even the thought made them both shiver. **God** might be very clever but **he** was also extremely jealous of anyone else making real decisions in what **he** still regarded as **his** own domain. However, Eve was not going to be so easily put off.

"Well I was only tidying up the place", she asserted, "which is only what **he** goes on about at our regular garden management meetings ..." She paused for effect as a thought suddenly struck her "... and anyway, **he** need never know!"

Eve glanced sideways at Adam as if to check that he had taken this in. Then she continued - “**he**’ll never know, if we eat up all of the ‘fallen’ fruit, core and everything.”

Adam was taken aback by the audacity of Eve’s solution. She always seemed to have an answer, and yet the stakes were exceptionally high in this case. At the same time he was exceedingly hungry after his walk and the thought of not having to gather any additional food for supper appealed to him, despite his misgivings.

“Well I dunno,” he mused, “what if we can’t manage it all?”

But Eve had already made the decision and was beginning to feel a quite dizzying sense of empowerment. She turned dismissively from Adam, picked up the first fruit which came to hand and took a large bite.

There was a long silence....

Eve closed her eyes for what seemed an age before emitting a low moan, the sound of which sent a shiver down Adam’s spine. Slowly she opened her eyes and gazed at Adam in a most unsettling way that he had never experienced before. He stood mesmerised. It was as if the world had stopped. Deep inside him something, he knew not what, stirred.

“Come onnn” purred Eve, in a vocal register so low that he hardly caught the words. “You bite it toooo” The words trailed off and a languorous arm proffered him the fruit. Adam bent and sank his teeth into its purple flesh.

What happened next was something that neither of them could recall with any clarity after the event. The evidence is that they finished the three baskets of fruit before being overcome by flatulence and sleep - a sleep in which they both apparently experienced the same dream. In this synchronistic hallucination they felt a new sensation - one of flashing lights, groans and moans as if from primordial depths, and a kind of rhythmic merging into oneness which left them exhausted and tangled together in each other’s arms.

When Adam opened his eyes the garden lay under a morning haze, a smudged grey-green laced with sparkling crystals of dew. Eve basked beside him, her eyes still closed but a smile twitching the corners of her mouth. He did not try to wake her but closed his own eyes once more and listened to the calls of the turtle doves echoing in the rapturous air.

Not that this little scene remained rapturous for very long. The lovers – for this is what the fruit had seeded – were rudely awakened by a thunderous noise which shook the ground on which they lay. In an instant the sky clouded over as if a chain-mail curtain had fallen across the land. A fearsome wind whipped the tops of the nearest trees and a deluge of hailstones banged against the unlucky couple. Within seconds they were soaked, frozen and huddled together under what was left of the broken and uprooted Tree of Knowledge.

Then **God** spoke.

Well, for the record **he** was beside himself, and, not to put too fine a point on it, the words were shouted. Something to the effect that **he** was not to be trifled with, that **he** was a jealous **God** and that **he'd** had it up to here with ungrateful creations. Furthermore, this was the end of the road (a concept quite beyond the hapless pair who'd not got beyond leaving a few footprints in the mud), they must fend for themselves from now on, and that **he, God**, was going somewhere else to play in future!

At this point everything suddenly went very quiet and there was a long collective sigh from all of creation. Then, as if the whirring cogs of time itself had clicked into place, everything began to happen at once. Bees buzzed, the stallion nuzzled the mare, the sow snuffled around the boar, the lion and the lioness roared their longing for each other, and the whole of life celebrated their unexpected freedom.

Nine months to the day later, and after much pain, Eve was delivered of healthy twins – a girl and a boy. By this time Adam had a regular job ploughing the earth in order to grow sufficient food for the little family. In the evening, the couple would sit out under the stars on their homestead's front porch, fondly holding hands and contemplating infinity. Occasionally they even mused what **God** might be doing with **himself** on the other side of creation but not for long.

And that is the story of how time began and love came into the world.

But what, I hear you ask, about the serpent? Well, that's another story of Godfolk. Suffice it to say that **God** could never get it into **his** head that **his** creation was capable of getting out of hand of its own accord. **He** has never forgiven Lucifer for being his irrepressible younger brother and has always referred to him as "that snake in the grass". The rest I leave to your imagination.

But if you believe in serpents that talk, then you'll believe anything!

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