

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.)