

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 bled more 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
it tried to sample the coveted tree's prize for itself,
it was blown to the ground by ferocious winds.
Already well-versed in evil, it needed facts about good.
One can't conquer what one can't comprehend:
a basic principle. It 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 breeze with her lyrical laughter
at the bouncing creature he named Hare.

The serpent was amused when Adam named it Dragon.
It was convinced that Adam, made of common clay,
could be easily mastered. What it didn't know was
how soon the taster would die as God declared. If
a 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 more
complicated, unpredictable half of a superior life form.
God spent extra time making her, used bone, not dust,
added nuances He hadn't bestowed on 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.