

# Jesus in Eden

*by* Stephen Stark

So, Adam says, Check out my snake, which is something he does a lot and which so far Eve has not done, except to look at him and wonder how a man can be so self-absorbed, which makes her irritable. And but even so, each time he says it, she gets more curious.

Of course, it isn't a snake. It's a part of him, but it does seem to have moods. Like now for example it's standing up and waving (because he is not holding it), which really isn't standing, but compared to other times, when it just lies against the fruit that hangs behind it.

Eve is eating a plum. The plum is cold and how it got cold is sort of a mystery, but there are mysteries everywhere and the cold juice on her face doesn't really incline her to worry much about mysteries.

Maybe, Eve says. The pit of the plum and her teeth together make a scraping noise. I'm eating a peach, she says, just to see if he even notices at all.

Jesus Christ, Eve, Adam says. Just touch it. He is whining, the most impatient man in the world.

She looks at him quizzically. What does that mean?, she says.

Put your hand on it. Touch it. Kiss it. No biting, though.

No, the other thing you said.

Jesus Christ? I don't know. It has a good sound. Jesus Christ. The dental fricative, the sibilance. It's a good thing to say.

She looks at her plum and then at Adam, who is squeezing the snake

and closing his eyes. She is trying to think of how long it has been that they have been here, the two of them. But there is no time. It's a kind of purgatory. Adam moves his fist, the fist which is holding the snake, and she has to admit that as strange a thing as it is it has a certain appeal. The color of the top of it almost the color of the skin of her plum.

After a bit — but who really knows how long it could be — Adam walks away, bored, the snake moody.

In the evening (this same day, or another; they are all the same), at twilight, she finds him in a glade. He is talking to a goat, which even though it has a beard like Adam's and could pass for wise-looking, is as stupid as a post. They are talking about the sunrises and sunsets and what it means. Or Adam is. The goat is just chewing.

What does it all *mean?*, Adam says, in the same sort of whine that came out of him before, when he wanted her to touch the snake.

The goat, of course, says nothing, which more or less sums it up for Eve.

In actual fact, she is not without her own curiosity, her own feelings. She is not like Adam, but a corollary. She does not know what this means, but it is the thing that comes into her mind sometimes when she is sleeping or near sleep, and she thinks of Adam and his snake — a one-eyed thing, stubby and strung with veins. It is at these times when she might be "touching herself" — the phrase, when she says it growing odd little wings that mean something that she does not understand. Corollary.

She surprises him when she comes into the glade.

Oh, he says.

I'll touch it, she says.

She has no idea how long it has taken her to make this decision. A million years? Minutes? This seems like something she should know, but it is another mystery.

He seems surprised, perhaps even wary. A thousand years of asking and a thousand years (or more, or less, there is no way to tell), and finally she is sufficiently bored.

Do to it what you did to the plum, he says. But no biting. Because even if she said no, he still has eternity. She gives him a long and appraising look.

What would it hurt?, she wonders. Really. How was it really that different from the plum, except that she would not bite it.

Okay, but on one condition, she says.

What?

You touch the place where mine would be if I had one.

Again, he looks surprised, and she is annoyed, because all of this eternity that they have been together in this changeless place and not once, apparently, has he even thought that it all might not be about him — but then he cuts the thought short when he says, I've thought about it.

You have?

I think about it, he says, abashed and not looking at her. What is this new look? I look at you. It's what makes the snake stand up.

Hmmm, Eve says. I didn't know you were interested, but the way he has said it gives her a sense of wild tenderness toward this man who is the only man in the world, the only other person in the world.

And so it is with this great tenderness in her heart that she kneels down and pops the plum of it into her mouth. It hasn't the sweetness of the fruit, but there is another kind of sweetness that is the other's corollary. Adam makes noises and the noises make her stop.

Don't stop, he says.

You're not touching me, she says.

When he does touch her, she is surprised at his own tenderness. She did not think that he could be gentle. Or gentle-not-gentle in this way, which is actually indescribable and also a corollary. She did not think a hand could be hungry, and it makes her blind for a moment.

For all of its rigidity, it is really rather soft.

What if?, Adam starts to say, but of course we know how this ends. She is thinking the same thing.

He is sitting in a soft place and she knee-walks over his legs and begins to sit on his lap.

Oh, Jesus Christ, she says. Oh God, he says, and that is when the rain comes.

