

EVE LEARNS THE WORD *WANT*

Poems by

Ann B. Knox

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Disclaimer

We know the bizarre circumstances of Eve's arrival:
the garden, the arranged marriage, orders defied,
bankruptcy, foreclosure, murder, family troubles.

This isn't a biography but scenes, caught
moments from a life—rumors, buzz, hearsay—
unreliable as memory. And I am not Eve.

(There's always suspicion the teller speaks of herself.
But what do I know of perfection, of nothing to press
against, nothing to want and I never talked with God.)

Prime sources are scant but gossip abounds,
the tabloids hint of Adam's dalliance—a blurred
photo, two figures naked on the beach.

Word got round but they were excused. It was Eve's
defiance to God that shocked; of the fuss that followed,
judgment is still split down the center.

We note only snippets of her history but look
close, as at an image thrown on a lake surface,
and hope to catch beneath the restless shimmer

a gleam, not vindication, of Eve's choice,
but opening beyond judgment to gratitude for her gift—
knowledge of ourselves, our choices, our joys, our lies.

Eve Wakes

Eve opened her eyes to fringed light,
an in-breath of sky and close by,
a green arc speckled with tiny opals,
(later she learned, *grass-blade, dew*).

She touched her face but did not know
it was her face, that the hand was hers
and that she was a self, a me.

She sat looking down the stretch of her legs
to amazing toes that moved, curling
into turf—springy, damp, warm.

Sweetness stirred the air and drawn
to the source, Eve reached out.
Ouch. A red bead rose on her thumb,
she licked it, tasting salt and iron.

She needed a way to learn about this place,
to separate flower from thorn, taste from touch,
but who could she ask, who would answer?

It was God who answered: *Mother of the World,*
this is a start, look around, you have this whole
garden—creatures, trees, a still pond,
and close by, you'll find a surprise.

Hearing a rustle, Eve turned. A being
stood watching her, its shape
the same as her shape, only different.

Hello. Are you another me?
I am me, you are you.
Excuse me, you have it wrong, I am me.
We'll start again.
I am Adam, you are Eve.
Okay, okay, have it your way.
I will, God said I would.
Oh? Then why didn't he . . . ?
Hush, everything here is perfect.
Come, I'll show you round.

His hand closed on hers.

Look, that's a wren, there a beetle and this
is a pussy willow.

He picks a twig and tickles her neck with the tiny paws.

Eve laughs. *How do you know the names?*

That's my job description, Namer.

Eve touches a red mark on his ribs.

What do you call this?

Watch it. I'm tender there.

Tender?

You know, soft, vulnerable, it might hurt.

If everything's perfect, what's hurt?

Hurt?

Adam shakes his head staring at a tree
with branches bent by the weight of green fruit.

I don't yet know.

The Source of Memory

Adam woke from sleep and found her
watching him. They looked in silence
not yet knowing fear, surprise or even how
to shape a question or address the other.

He picked a fig and handed it to Eve.
She felt its weight, the skin's roughness,
the soft give to her touch and when she bit
a sweet tide startled her tongue.

Later they sat together under a carob tree
and Adam told her what he'd done since morning:
he'd walked the river bank naming
seven species of moss and made up the word
current for how water moved downstream.

Eve watched ants crawl from a tiny hole.
*Where do they come from? How is it that
we're here?* Adam paused, reaching
for a plausible answer but found nothing,
only the day's events. So he made up a story.

God, he said, *God made us*. And he went on
to create creation. She remembers that night, back
before work began, before hunger, cold,
before knowing she'd been a blank. But

if the mind knows only from experience,
where did sweet come from, or wonder, or sorrow and
how come Adam could invent God?

Against the Grain

If Adam is good, she must be good:
after all, she came from him, from the place
where his ripple-mark ribs melt into
the pleasing give of his belly.

And the garden is good, everything
freely given—figs, eggs, milk.
She picks a plum, taut skinned,
blue-frosted, its flesh opens sweet
on her tongue, but it's the tart
afterbite that enhances her pleasure.

Like that squabble with Adam—
he tugged her hair, she tweaked
his thigh, he pushed and they fell
among the leaves laughing, tussling.

Then a strange bird perched in a tree
and Adam named it cormorant, but as it
flew off, a darkness stirred in Eve's chest.

She needs a word for this counter, this
running against, for the *not*, the *un*,
the *Dis*—disquiet, discomfort, disagree.

Without a reversal she has no way
to shape meaning for what seems
missing, but if here all is perfect,
what is she reaching for?

Eve's Questions, Adam's Lists

When God spoke, Adam listened:
He meted out tasks, laid down
expectations, defined prohibitions.

Adam related all this to Eve
and showed her his check-lists:
Animals, Birds, Flowers, Stones.

What about bats, animals with wings?

I'll make adjustments.

What about creatures that come at night,
hover and are gone?

Dreams. I'll deal with them later, right now

I have muscles to name and bones.

What if something doesn't fit your list?

I'll invent a new category.

Like wheels, hip-hop, black holes?

Like them, whatever they are.

Names are fine, but aren't there things
you can't say?

I can say anything.

But do you know?

Woman, stop your silly questions.

With her finger, Eve circles his nipple.

Can you say how this feels?

And this?

And this?

Restless

Another perfect morning.
Eve peels an orange
chucks the spiral over her shoulder

rinses her hands in the brook
then wanders along the path
swatting grass heads, scuffing moss.

There's a gnaw in her, she wants
something to press against,
a way to test herself. Here

all is given and that's fine
but not enough, though
Adam seems content.

Eve can't think what's missing
so she makes up stories:
storms or no rain for months,

earth parched, fruit refusing
to ripen, the cow's milk dries,
Adam breaks a leg.

There must be something
that runs counter, something
other than perfect days.

What was this *knowledge*
God talked about, this
don't touch and what's
so sacred about an apple?

Eve Learns the Word *Want*

Eve wandered in the garden inventing words,
walk, hum, smell, laugh, tease.

She plucked a maidenhair fern, touched
a snap-dragon's tongue to hers and watched
a caterpillar hump across a leaf, then idly
toed the garter-snake coiled beneath a tree.

It drew back, hissing, a red thread
flickered and Eve bent closer, not sure
what the snake knew. He poured himself
from his nest exposing tamped leaves and, half-
covered by matted grass, **Victoria's Secret**.
Eve frowned. Pick it up, he smiled,

you might learn something. On the slick page
her finger, tracing leg, thigh and long
curve, stopped at a fringe of black gentians.
She looked down to her own moss-brown tuft,
Ah, Eve reached for a hand-shaped leaf
to cover her mound, bluebells for her nipples.

Nice, the snake said, *Adam will like that.*
A pleasing heat troubled Eve's belly. But Adam
was out naming birds, stones, trees, things.
She waited, savoring the unaccustomed stir.

Let Adam notice and uncover her curves, let
him want her. *Want*. She shaped the word,
felt it flow from the hollow of her mouth
and a vacancy unknown before entered her.

Later, after the gate was closed and memory
of the place faded, after the babies, the barns
and sheep-paddocks, even after the new double-wide
and a week in Vegas, nothing was quite satisfactory.

Eve is Bored then Tempted

Eve watches a sparrow tweak oats
from piled horse dung, she fiddles
with a pebble, picks a twig to clean her nails
then buffs them against her thigh. What now?

Yesterday Adam brought her a plum, its meat
pink and grainy, but he went off again
to confirm a new specie of lepidoptera.

Sure, she's learned a lot these past months
even to count a month and that past means
gone, but what was before, she can't imagine.
Nothing, no childhood, no teddy bear,
no sister to squabble with. A blank.

When she asked Adam, he went on
and on about a void, about separating night and day,
land and water. Nothing useful, nothing
about family or the collective unconscious.

Oh, well, as Adam says, one step at a time,
still, she can play with the pups, invent a game,
stories, even make up a best friend.

I'll be that friend.

The voice came from a striped creature
she had not seen hidden among the leaves.

Good, someone to talk with. And it was good,
the old story: —snake oil merchant,
lonely farm wife—they chat and he opens
a whole world she hadn't imagined.

And she felt a stir, definitely a stir, if only
to suggest an unnamed something beyond
Adam's tidy bailiwick and who knows
he might change, might wonder about wants,
motives, function of the id. But how to change?

The snake nods toward a tree heavy with fruit.

Why not?

The words echo in the empty
silo of Eve's history. *Why not?*

Cleopatra, Emma Bovary, Hester Prynne,
we all make choices, aren't we human?

She reaches for the fruit, plump
and firm, it drops neat in her palm,
she breathes in the heady scent,
her teeth break the skin, flesh

quickens her tongue and new knowing
spreads, rioting through her body—

Molly Bloom's enormous *Yes*.

Locked Out

The landlord claimed they broke the lease
then threw them out, but all she did
was make friends with the guy.

Okay, so he was a dealer, but a real
charmer, lithe, elegant as Fred Astaire.
All he did was roll a joint,
show her how to breathe in and hold.

Ahhh, not bad. Adam must try this stuff.

She finds him sorting shells—
mollusk, bivalves, gastropods.
C'mon handsome. (He is handsome,
nice pecs, chunky calves, not bad.)

Try this, she waves the joint.
Eve, you shouldn't.
Well, I have and it's great.
Look, you're messing up my classification.
C'mon. Mess up your mind,
one toke, you'll love it.

He brushes sand off his knees,
takes the joint gingerly, breathes in
and stands a moment utterly still, then,
Ahhh.

Eve giggles.

I know something else you don't.
C'mon. I'll show you in the hayloft.

Fred Astaire, leaning against the tree,
twirls his cane, smiles and slides away.

Eve Sees Adam Anew

In the garden she knew little of want, nothing
of desire, things were provided, they simply were—
snails, a cherry tree, her reflection in the pond,
Adam to laugh with or curl beside in sleep.

Outside that first night, all changed.
They built a fire and sat close. Light
flickered on Adam's face, he touched her
and her belly hollowed with want. She leaned

against the slope of him, her body answering
the need of his body. Afterwards they lay apart
his hand touching her slick skin and she,
falling away, becoming a single self again.

From the woods an owl called, the note drew
out and out melting to silence. Eve waited,
listening for an answer but none came and she knew
this is how it would be, each creature alone.

"Not Me, The Snake"

How swift Eve's first excuse, how simple
to pass blame on, and for a moment, relief swept her,
but it was she who chose to disobey and like a slug
touched by salt, something in her writhed and shriveled.

Later, she perfected alibis. They billowed like smoke
blurring truth, even from herself—why she was late,
or failed to pay a bill or stand up for a friend.
Ignoring shame, she grew easy with reasons,

but as tainted sludge drops to the river bed,
shame lay inert until some shift of current
roiled the heavy sand to stain the stream.

What could she do with that ugly surge—tidy
her kitchen spices, clear trash from the cellar
or hold still and be aware of the river's press
as sullied water moves downstream? Yes,

she did wrong. That was long ago but it changed
all that flowed after, even now, as she recycles
bundled magazines, her gesture fails to erase
the fact she had been the cause and nothing
can stop the creep of silt toward the sea.

Clothes

The Lord God made coats of skin, and clothed them

The leaves were my idea
but when Adam brought burdock
the fabric proved brittle.

Try the fig tree. That tough tissue
held my bindweed stitches but
the aprons weren't much to look at.

Then after the big blowup, God
made us coats from animal skins
that, with a few adjustments,
hung in graceful folds.

Fur was a good idea
and it was nice of God to dress us
considering His recent outburst.
But I know something about that.

Today—weather lousy, kids indoors
squabbling, horsing around, then
they break a bowl—the one
Adam carved for me from curly maple.

Out, I yell, Out.

On the porch, the children, silent,
chastened, stare at the rain.
I turn back for their slickers.
Here, take these.
The girl buttons hers askew.
Ach! I squat, set it to rights
and pull the hood over her pale hair.

I'm still mad but something
gives way, not forgiveness exactly,
but a letting go, an *oh well*.

I turn them round fitly clothed
and with a small shove
set them off into the wet world.

Adam Says We'll Always Have Paris

Comforting to say, but in truth, we have only
what's here at hand, this coffee mug with its image
of Old Faithful (and that was disappointing, the spout
puny, the children cranky and we were arguing).

But Paris? Back then in that small hotel off Vavin
the concierge didn't ask for passports, our room
had a window opening to tiled roofs, I was thrilled
by the brass bed, your lithe body and being desired.

That lost era we call Our Garden. We'd walk
home together in low light, stopping
in the park to listen as a choir sang evensong
and we'd float over the church in a lapis sky.

Each day something new—cobblestone patterns,
a mosque, posters on pissoirs, the bird market.
I bought espadrilles, armfuls of dahlias and flirted
with a guy who lounged in the Luxembourg.
I let him buy me an anise. That was my undoing. I blamed
the fellow but knew it was I who'd made the choice.

How fast I learned to lie, even to myself. Strange
now to recall that time before, the bland grace
of not knowing, not yet having done wrong.

What I Miss about the Garden

I miss the figs—blue-sheened, palm-sized,
plump. No fruit here measures up,
and the scents—jasmine, melon, warm earth—
and long afternoons when we'd lie in tall grass
watching birds cross the cloud-mounded sky.

I miss our guileless games, our teasing, unsullied
by shadowy undertones. Things were as they were—
Adam tucked a flower in my hair, I slapped
his wrist, we laughed and tumbled together among the ferns.
Afterwards when we sat by the lake edge at sundown
we had nothing to forgive ourselves or each other.

It was an odd thought of God's—to impose
shame on what gives pleasure but as punishment
it proved effective—we chastise ourselves and guilt
eats inward. Yet I don't regret my choice.

After we left I and I knew Adam in a new way,
he called my nether parts, *pudenda* and I realized then
they were private and plucked a wide-fingered leaf.

When the gate clanged closed behind us, I saw
Adam was beautiful, other, and that we were
separate and I was a self, my self.

Eve Loses Her Dog

He was here this morning. She watched from the porch
as he ran unseen through thigh-high grass
stirring a curved trail—a rabbit, or perhaps
for pure pleasure of parting green stems,
breaking his own path. Eve recalls

the cornfield's private world, a surround of rustle,
blue slashed overhead, the stockade of stalks
and a compelling pull of rows drawing her on,
then sudden panic: Which way out?

She'd pressed back alarm and followed a furrow,
for miles it seemed before she broke out to sun,
a stone wall and in the distance, the house: safety.

She calls, calls, calls and imagines the dog,
belly seed-flecked, ears raked forward, running,
following the tug of her voice. He does not come.

She sets out kibble, water bowl, props
the door ajar and sleeps fitfully, waiting
for a familiar click across the floor but wakes
to silence, to the slow spill of absence,

harsh as when her eldest left. (Marked
as outcast, as vagabond, where was he now?)
The long ache for her second son still
hollows a cave even after decades, after
the other children and this thousand-acre farm.

Odd how one loss weaves with another
braiding, gathering stems into a wreath of sorrow.
From the doorway she looks across the hayfield
to woods, the edge of hills, the limitless sky.

Child Rearing

I knew nothing, had no one to warn me about pain
or how to hold my breath and push. From animals I'd learned
to bite the cord and offer breast. Adam
brought me a fleece then went back to his shearing.

The child suckled, slept and when he learned to walk
was into everything. He was a handful, that Cain.
I kept a close eye on him but when Abel was born,
as a mare rejects her yearling, I pushed my firstborn away.

I didn't know better, I'd entered the world
full blown, without loss or separation
and had no Spock or Brazelton as guide. Cain's
fury scared me, but my new child waked

the familiar rush—tender, fierce, protective.
Odd how that gets lost in the rubble of dailiness
yet resurges undiminished with each new birth.

After that first awful death, I did the best I could
with the other children, but it was not enough.
It never is. Look what's happened since—
lies, wars, bloodstained hands—
and they're all my children. What did I do wrong?

Sure, I let the kids pelt each other with apples,
duel with water-spraying Uzis, but failed
to counter their father's talk about dominion over,
about logic and order, I should have known rhetoric
feeds on itself, grows fat and wants more.

Instead I squatted by the brook to show the kids
how grain by grain sand builds a narrow bar, I thought
they'd learn about looking and letting things be.

But it didn't stave off their hunger for having. Still,
I hope a great grandson might look from his corner office
as pigeons bank past the window, their wings glinting
in late light, and for a moment know the flash
of bronze and recognize a surge of pure seeing.

Jealousy

With only herself and Adam there was no cause
though she noted how he stood arms crossed
when she played with the fox cubs and once,
as she nuzzled a kit, he spun abruptly away.

That night he sloped off testy and silent
to record a sub-specie of wren and Eve's evening
stretched long and empty ahead. She watched

how his arm embraced the ledger, how he moved his pen,
slow, attentive to each word and suddenly
a coal glowed in Eve's belly, flared into fury
with his lists, his books, his hand caressing the page,
his mind and attention wholly elsewhere.

The burn seared her with new knowing—so this
is why Adam turned morose—he'd unstoppered
a secret corroder that scars what it touches.
But the same caustic seed is embedded in us all
and about Cain, Eve can't plead ignorance.

Two Sons

She knew there'd be trouble when God honored
Abel's flock over Cain's heaped grain.

Fieldwork is rougher than keeping kine and Cain
had filled the corn-cribs for his brother's herd.

She'd watched how he scythed the rye in angry arcs
and as he tilled the field, he'd shout and whack the oxen.

Abel would stop to scratch a hog's back, not Cain,
even his own dog gave him wide berth.

How could two sons be so different
and was her love for both the same?

With her firstborn she'd learned mothering from animals
so when Abel came, she knew what to expect,

besides he was a smiler, a nestler and wanted to please.
Cain carried a wind around him and sometimes

he frightened her and fear gave an odd twist
to love as if to love him was a debt, an owing.

Later, after the horror, a slow subsiding began,
Abel's absence gentled and dimmed, but Cain,

the thought of Cain ripped her like a cry in the night:
Why, why, why?

First Daughter

Adam lifted her, blood-streaked,
hair matted, wet.
Daughter, he whispered, *daughter*,
then cut the cord.

She was on her own now
in his hands, their bond made.

For an instant
my rise of delight stilled,
the babe was no longer
mine alone, Adam was first
to cradle her head, to know
her breathing body.

He held her for our sons to see.
Gently, he said, *gently*.

I was glad when he took the boys
off to the river, glad
to have my daughter to myself,
to know this girl child
and how I might have looked
had I been born.

We'll learn to be mother and daughter,
I'll teach her to sing, plant a garden,
cook, and together we'll laugh
at our difference from men
and she'll teach me about childhood,
how a girl becomes a woman.

And All the Days that Adam Lived

were nine hundred and thirty years and he died.

No word about Eve after Seth's conception,
only *Adam begot sons and daughters*
but it was Eve carried them, birthed them,
fed them and paced under the stars to quiet a crying babe.

There's nothing written of family life—the long table,
big-boned boys laughing, quarrelsome,
girls swinging between titters and pouts, Adam
pounding for silence, no mention of Eve's
endless packed lunches, laundry, mending
or cheerful evenings of hunt-the-thimble.

After her child rearing years, Eve's days
slowed, she'd sit on the porch looking out
at her children's farms patching the valley:
Seth's wheat fields and clustered silos,
a grandson's house with the herd of Black Angus
and in the dale, her daughter's chicken farm.

Others crossed the mountains to further valleys.
And Cain, her firstborn, wanders forever, only
God knows where he wanders. For him no
crops flourish. He'd loosed his anger and allowed
his raised pitchfork to complete its downward arc.

Eve, too, made a choice, one that forced
all who followed to choose their own paths
and face whatever rough work followed.

Eve Considers Death

The first time a pink ribbon floated in a puddle—
an earthworm, flabby, unmoving. *Dead*,
Adam said, *gone*. But what, what's gone?

Later a mole, limp velvet in the cat's mouth
and when Adam pulled a trout twisting to the bank,
it stilled as shining speckles faded to gray.
Later the first frost blackened her bright geraniums.

Then Abel. She found him in the barley field,
his hair matted, wet. Had he come from the river?
No. His hand still held his sheep crook.
He slept. *No*. A fly crawled on his face,
a red flower behind his ear widened,
melting into earth. *No. No. Not ours, not mine.*

Afterwards, the long absence—the house silent,
his sheepdog fretful, alert for a high whistle,
Eve searched empty rooms for some accounting.

Even now, as her knobbed fingers tug
taut a mending thread, she wonders what
went, what left the flower, the trout,
her son's beautiful body and what of them
would be when she was gone?

Bed

Adam goes upstairs first, taking his time,
everything takes time these days,
his feet thump each step then pause.

Eve imagines him, hand on the banister,
not wanting to admit uncertain balance
or short breath, then he starts up again.

Eve pats the dog, checks his water bowl,
locks the back door and runs a finger
across the jars of pickles she'd made that day.

At the bedroom threshold she pauses to note
Adam's steady breath, the Appalachian ridge of him,
old and worn down now, like herself.

Under the quilt Eve lets her body loosen,
as the bed takes her weight, her hips ease
into the give and old aches surface. With time

she's accustomed herself to a twinge of arthritis, the heart's
odd rhythm, the sear of a critical word
or a friend's silence. These pains, no longer sharp,

have weathered like bedrock, rough edges smoothed
and blanketed. Eve unfastens from the day's tasks—
wrinkled gherkins, armfuls of shirts from the line—

and reaches across the rift to Adam. Her hand
rests on the parallel crest, shaped from the same rock,
the same upheavals, seasons, storms, losses

but each has eroded in its own way—a wrinkle
gave way to a rivulet, an outcrop held firm,
now this new landscape: two bodies at rest.