

**EVE LEARNS THE WORD *WANT***

**Poems by**

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*The Innisfree Poetry Journal*

September 2012

## Acknowledgments

<i>Free Lunch:</i>	"Adam Says: We'll Always Have Paris"
<i>The Innisfree Poetry Journal:</i>	"Bed," "Eve Is Bored," "The Tempted," "Eve's Clothes," "Locked Out," "Source of Memory," "Two Sons"
<i>Atlanta Review:</i>	"Eve Learns the Word <i>Want</i> "

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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.