

Adam's Dream

I'll be damned if I know how it all started. I don't remember anything beyond a few days back. Nothing at all. All I know is everything is lovely all the time, except I'm lonely. There isn't another person in the world. I was thinking that when I lay down on the grass and went to sleep.

When I woke up, I wasn't the only one there anymore. A woman sat on the grass and looked at me. I looked at her for a long time before I moved. Then I started to sit up, but my side hurt, and I had to lie down and turn part way over and get up slowly.

I said, "Where did you come from?"

"I don't know. I don't remember anything before I woke on the ground at sunrise."

"You certainly are a welcome sight."

She took my hand, and we walked down the hill to the river. I showed her what we could eat, and we ate. I said, "This one kind of fruit, we may not eat, nor even touch, for if we do, we will die. This is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

"What does that mean, the knowledge of good and evil?"

"I don't know. I don't have knowledge of good and evil, so I can't define it for you. Nor for myself. Come on. I'll show you the garden and the animals that live here. These are deer, and these are giraffes. I've named all of them. This one is lion."

We wandered through the garden all of that day and part of the next, and I told her the names of all the animals as we encountered them.

I couldn't think of her just as "the woman." I asked her, "What's your name?"

"Name? I guess I don't know. I don't even know what name means."

"A name is what you call something. He told me to name everything. We'll call you Eve."

"Eve? Eve. OK. Eve, because evening descends upon us now."

The afternoon of the next day, we again walked to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I said, "This one is called serpent."

He leaned against the tree and said, "Has the Lord God told you you may not eat of the fruit of this tree?"

I said, "Yes."

Eve said, "Yes. He has told Adam. Adam says the Lord God said that. It is the most beautiful tree. It rests my eyes to look at it."

"He has lied to you."

"He has?"

"Who has?"

"If you eat of the fruit of this tree, you will not die. That is a lie." The serpent picked a fruit and bit into it and chewed slowly and swallowed. He did it again and again, until he held only the center part of the fruit. That part, he threw away, off into the grass. He licked his lips and rubbed his stomach and said, "Yum. Delicious. Would I eat it if it would kill me? It is a lie. He told you that because He knows when you eat this fruit, your eyes will be opened, and you will be as gods, knowing good and evil."

Eve said, "I wonder about it. It's very beautiful." I knew she reached to pick it without really thinking about what she was doing. She simply responded to the beauty that was so pickably there in front of her eyes. I tried to stop her, but by the time I grabbed her arm, she had picked the fruit.

I started to strike it from her hand, but she said, "No, Adam. Wait. I already have it. I am touching it. If it will kill me, then I am dead. Didn't He say it would kill us if we ate it or even touched it? Isn't that what He said? That's what you told me. Now relax. If I'm to die, I've already done it, and anything you do can't stop it. Let's wait a while and see. I feel fine so far. Not sick or anything."

The serpent said, "You won't. I tell you, it's a lie from the very beginning. It will open your eyes. Listen to me. What is there for you here? What's your future? Doesn't it get a little bland living here every day?"

"Bland? No."

"Doesn't it get boring? I know it gets boring."

"No, it doesn't get boring."

But Eve said, "Bland? Boring? Uh, well, I've only been here a few days. I haven't even seen everything, yet."

I don't know if the serpent really heard her. She spoke softly, looking all around as she spoke.

The serpent said, "I'll tell you another thing. What's over those hills up there, beyond the garden? What about a few days' journey down the river? What about floating down the river on something you made yourself, a raft or a boat, and seeing what's down there?"

I said, "We're supposed to stay in the garden."

"Supposed to. Supposed to. You don't want to open your eyes. You just want to spend every day like the last one,

nothing much happening, do a little gardening, watch the sun set again. Every day pretty much like the last. You're not beginning to fulfill your potential."

I said, "You sure can talk. Makes my head spin."

Eve spoke up, "While he was rattling on, I've been holding this fruit, and I'm still not dead."

"Eve." But again I moved too slowly, and she bit into it, pushed me away, and chewed it and swallowed it.

"Oh man. That is good. Oh my. The other fruit is good, delicious, but this one is even better. Oh Adam. Let me get you one."

I looked at her, and she looked at me. I felt a sense of closeness and completeness between us, bone of one bone, flesh of one flesh, that filled my mind. Whatever comes of eating the fruit will come to us both together. She picked a fruit for me.

I took the fruit from her and ate it. Eve was right; it was really good. I swallowed the last bite and stood in a reverie of delight.

The serpent walked from under the limbs of the tree and stood in the sunlight with us. "See, didn't I tell you? Any time you want to know the truth about something just look me up. I'll be around. Listen, I got other things to do, so I have to run. See you later, and welcome aboard."

He took off up the hill like he wanted out of there quick, and that helped make me nervous, as my thoughts started catching up with my actions. "Eve, oh, I wish we'd taken the time to think it out better."

"Hush. Don't ruin everything in confusion. Just relax." She hugged me and held me close. I took comfort from her and relaxed a little.

Then I got nervous again. I said, "Ummm. You know, Eve, we shouldn't be standing against each other naked like this. It starts emotions and thoughts that I don't know how to deal with. You feel so good against me, and I'm more aware of the differences between us, more aware of the conjunction of our physical selves. Ummm, more aware of our physical selves."

Eve said, "I guess I really hadn't stopped to think that we were. That we are. Physical selves, I mean. Yes, I know what you mean. I feel a great physical warmth for you, a need, different from before. I wonder if this is something we are to see that we haven't seen."

"Oh. Well. Excuse me. I have to stand away from you. This has never happened to me before. If this is part of what we have that we aren't supposed to have, then we can't hold each other like that right out in the open. The difference between the way we used to hug and the way we do now would be obvious."

Eve said, "Oh my. It is obvious, but why are you so nervous about it? Is that uncomfortable?"

"No. No. It's just, ... I don't know. Well, one thing, I said I wouldn't. Now that I've had some time to think about it, I remember I said that, and I meant it at the time. Now that I'm more aware of this physical attraction, I keep looking at you and getting more emotional than I can be and still think out what we're going to do now. It makes me nervous to be around you so close. I think we should cover our nakedness."

"Adam, what are you thinking of? What's to be so nervous about? That's handsome the way it is now. It's standing up at attention, I like the difference. Oh my goodness, it feels alive. I mean, alive on its own, even. I like to feel it."

"Look Eve, stand back a minute. I have to think. We're in violation. How about just working with me and not arguing about it? Look. These big leaves. If we just tied them around, they would cover up what's happening to me, cover us. Get a couple of them, and these vines will work to tie them."

I remembered my feelings of that day a thousand times afterward, the unreasoning panic that sent me stumbling through the afternoon. I remembered thinking one way and then doing something entirely different, terrified and sorry to depths I didn't know I had, and yet, bursting with joy and loving the joy and brilliance and loving that the brilliance also lights up Eve, and the feeling that her existence blended with mine into joy.

Each time I remembered, I thought how much better it would have been if I could have slowed things down and had time to think it through before the happenings of the day overwhelmed me or even, afterward, enough time to see, to think through what had happened to us and was happening and would happen.

2:

I thought of it when I lay in an icy ditch with a bullet in my guts. I was sure I'd bleed to death before daylight. I wasn't bleeding fast, but what there was, I couldn't stop or even slow down.

Somebody moved in brush the other side of the road. I didn't know if it was my people or the enemy patrol out to finish off the wounded and collect weapons.

3:

I'll be damned if I can sort it out, even though I remember all of it as clearly as yesterday.

He looked for us and found us even though I hid in thick foliage and dragged Eve along with me and shushed her up. When He found us, He got really mad.

Eve said, "Why don't you tell Him to stuff it, Adam? We don't have to take this. Let's jump him. There's two of us and only one of him."

"Eve, for Christ's sake, slow down. Wasn't it your impetuosity that got us here in the first place? He's powerful. It would be suicide."

I didn't think we'd get out of it alive, He was that angry. Several times, He made like He was just going to rub us out and be done with it, but He checked that impulse and just ran us out of the garden, cursed us soundly, and posted guards to make sure we didn't get back in.

Phew. Wow. We stood there and breathed for a while. Hello world. Big world. At least I'm not panic-stricken every slow second, the way I was.

So, He found out; He knows all about it. That part's done with.

I said, "You know what? The serpent was right. We are still alive. We're still alive."

Eve didn't say anything. She turned to face me and put her arms around me. I really liked what we did together then, though memories and uncertainties about was He watching tried to break through joy and broke through in force when the intensity of our contact reached a peak and then subsided into sleep that became mixed dreams of intense pleasure and intense fear.

It was a long time before we saw the serpent again. We were so busy digging thistles and thorns, trying to scratch a living out of the earth, we didn't have any time to seek company.

In the days we lived through then, Eve said several times, "I want to see that serpent again." I couldn't tell, each time, if she wanted to thank him or kill him. I didn't know either what I'd do if we met him again, and any time I did know, it wasn't consistent, maybe one time I'd kill him if I could, and another time I might say, "Hail fellow. well-met." and even then go ahead and try to kill him.

I couldn't see where having knowledge of good and evil elevated us to anything near a god-like condition. In fact, I still didn't thoroughly understand what that meant, the knowledge of good and evil. I wasn't sure what would be good and what would be evil. He had told me stuff that, some of it didn't seem to make sense. And things the serpent said seemed to be right one time and not the next time when I thought about it.

Sometimes nothing seemed to make sense, and another time.

it did. It got so painful to try to sort things out, most of the time, I just tried not to think about it, just live each moment as it came along.

Eve, she was bitter about the way we lived, some of the time. I couldn't blame her. It was a hard row to hoe, scratching the ground for a living, going hungry sometimes, with pain and travail.

But we stood together and watched the sun set over the place we'd stopped and built a shelter. We scratched in the ground to try to grow some crops so we'd have food to eat.

We knew it was our place, and we knew we had a future. We lived our way into that future together.

We had children. Our children had children, and they had children. Our fields and herds spread over the earth. Material increase went well for us, so well that other tribes began to try to take what we owned away from us.

We armed ourselves to defend ourselves and to defend what we owned. All the arming and fighting took more and more of our time. Our children, most of them, carried weapons for their defense. Sometimes we found it hard to take care of our crops and animals, there was so much fighting going on. Sometimes the fighting destroyed some of our crops and animals and people.

I don't know where other tribes came from. I've been working hard, trying to meet our needs for food, for shelter, for some sense of security into the future, and I haven't had time to study the meaning of everything, to figure out where everything came from.

The serpent came over the ridge and talked to us just after sunrise one morning. He stayed at least thirty feet away from us. I thought he stayed where he could run away fast if he needed to. He said, "Looks like about three-hundred troops against you over there."

"Yeah. Maybe so. Quite a few, anyway. A bunch."

"How many you got up here?"

"About forty. I got runners on their way to get help."

"Call this one a massacre, once they get started, huh? What did the old General say?"

"He said He would take care of us."

"Oh good. That's good. I'm glad to hear that. It eases my mind about whether or not you'll be alive tomorrow. Probably He'll do better by you than He did when He kicked you out of the garden. What's He going to use to deal with three-hundred hale and hearty warriors? Did He show you one soldier, one shield, one anything? Maybe He'll bring up the guards He has at the garden gates. Did you ever look at those guards up close?

Did you ever try them out to see if they really would keep you out of the garden? I didn't think so. So it's just this dab of troops and maybe Him?"

"What else is there?"

"I can give you a technological advantage. Springfield thirty-ought sixes. Never used. Made for World War Two, but never uncrated. Surplus. And two thousand rounds of ammunition. I can get it here muy pronto. Make a hell of a mess out of three-hundred troops with swords and spears."

"What's the price?"

"Oh, don't worry about that. We'll make it sort of a loan, because you'll need something more modern later on. You can use these and trade them in on something, and we'll keep a revolving account going."

"No. I already said I'd do it His way."

"They're starting to move. Here come the chariots. Look at them move into formation. They do it with such precision. Nothing sloppy about that outfit. Well, Adam, been nice knowing you. Have a good forever."

"By the time you got everything here, it would be too late anyway."

"The instant you say the word, they're in your hands, ready to fire."

One thing about the serpent, when he promises something, he comes through with it. No equivocation, no need to figure things out.

It was there as soon as I said "Yes. Then do it."

4:

I think I've stopped bleeding. I'm awake again, listening. Cold. Killing cold is the only sound I hear.

What the hell happened? I think the answer is trying to come into my mind. My coat has frozen to the ground. I shouldn't have let that happen. I should have kept moving. Rifles fire from up in the rocks. Damn Indians.

A machine gun tattoos the night from up at the top of the ridge.

Damn enemies of my people.

Damn krauts.

Damn slopes.

Damn Chinks

Damn Iraqis.

Damn Russians.

Damn Iranians.

Damn communists.

Damn enemies of the people.

It changes faster than I can think about it.

I'm trying to pray, cause I'm almost sure I'll be rocking in God's arms by this time tomorrow.

Damn them savage Indians.

Where the hell did they get rifles? I hear their horses moving as dawn begins to break.

5:

The serpent said, "It's a lie. I tell you, it's a lie and the father of all lies." I know what he meant. I think I do. So cold, and I can't even turn over. What kind of god is that? What kind of god leaves us to die alone and cold and forsaken? Why has my god forsaken me?

When the bullet hit me, I didn't understand at first. I thought it was part of the brush I'd been fighting my way through, the goddamned, son-of-a-bitching brush sprang back and whacked me in the side. Too hard for brush. Knocked me down. Couldn't get up. Couldn't gather my strength, my balance.

I realized what happened because of all the blood. Because I slumped and fell off my horse, and I couldn't stand up and walk anymore. I got up to my knees and then fell and rolled into the ditch.

Indian horses galloped up the ridge and their riders whooped and hollered.

I need help. Where the hell is Custer? Where the hell is Reno? I began to realize the extremity of my situation.

Suddenly, everything the world is means nothing at all. This war, the jet coming in low over the ridge and already gone, the helicopter above the western horizon, ungainly but deadly, the tank lumbering up the ridge, destroying everything in front of it. Now, everything that was anything at all means nothing to me, everything that was back home, Eve and the kids, any god, any promise of something to come, everything they tell us we're fighting for, nothing, nothing, nothing.

I prayed, "Goddamned, filthy, mother-fucking sons of bitches. Shit-eating, lying, filthy bastards, killing, destroying sons, daughters. wives, me."

I couldn't remember who I was cussing. "Everyone who got me here. Me. Just me. That's all I can see. Everybody. I don't know. Bankers. Politicians. Leaders. Movers of men. Responsible people. Responseless people. All the folk, even. Didn't we all do it? Goddamn, goddamn."

I ain't staying. Bleed to death, bullshit. I pulled my knife and cut material that had frozen down free so I could move. A lot of

the ice was frozen blood.

God damn. God damn. Excuse me, excuse me, I keep ... , I'm trying to pray, but I keep talking the way I've learned to talk. What I mean to say is, God help me. God help me. I'm so weak I could float away. God, God, God.

Two of them stand in front of me. I think one of them is the serpent.

It's so damned dark. Now it's starting to snow. The other one I think is Jahweh, Jehovah, the Lord God, our father which art in heaven, hallowed..., standing in the falling snow, standing in the falling snow, looking at me, talking to me.

He becomes two, one evolving. Or my understanding is twained and evolving. All the entities standing in front of me speak urgently to me, but they're all talking at once, and I can't sort it out. Behind them and around them, the busyness of the world, the cacophony of competition among humankind, the cacophony of warfare drowns everything they attempt to tell me.

Flowers bloom around me in morning sunshine. Their myriad, brilliant colors evolve to complexly interdeveloped tones of music. Their distinct and multitudinous odors knit up and highlight the intricately beautiful structure of tones and colors reaching toward clouds dissipating into blue sky.

I was halfway down the mountain when the sky lightened to blue. I no longer had any idea who I was or what I was trying to do when they found me. I only knew I was going to keep going down the mountain.

"Hey buddy, come on. Just ease down here, cause we gonna carry you outa here. Ease up now. You made it." He wiped the sweat from my forehead and dribbled water between my lips.

I understood everything that had happened from the very beginning. I knew I understood it. Damned if I didn't. From the freewheeling everything of morphine-soaked delirium, I pulled up knowledge that had always been in my mind, but never before in my consciousness, always before blocked by all the busyness of living, the habits of my perceptions.

What I had thought was God was limited by the limitations of my own intellect. Caught in cultural references, limitations of perception.

Total obedience would have meant being freed from all limiting references. As with Abraham, who thought God said, "Sacrifice your son," and when he committed himself to obedience, realized God had said, "Obey me, and I will lead you to what you have not yet imagined, and your son will carry on your seed."

If I could hang onto new understandings and carry them

through delirium. I tucked them into my saddlebags and strapped them on tight and mounted. The mare reared, pranced on her hind legs and hit the ground running. Every terrifying dream I had ever dreamed, every fear that had ever blocked my mind rose up in the mist, and we galloped them all down into the dark night and left them far behind.

In the morning light of the day following the cessation of delirium, I opened the saddlebags and found everything wilted, gone to dust, unreadable. I threw the saddlebags to the ground in anger.

"B.S. to this," I said. I worked to cut myself free of the material. This is my blood. This is my flesh. Frozen like a rock. I cut again and again. I was so cold, I could cut into my own flesh and not know I was doing it. The thought, the certainty that I had been cutting away my own flesh made me vomit up the air and fog I had eaten for meals for three days.

6:

I opened my eyes to bright lights, white walls, Eve's face, with mascara on her eyelashes and shiny stick on her lips. I said, "Hello. Are you a nurse and I'm in the hospital, or an angel, and I'm in heaven?"

"I'm an angel of a nurse in a heavenly hospital."

"What's your name?"

"Eve."

"You're joking. Do you know my name?"

"Oh, Adam, stop playing dumb. Listen. He said He'd give it all back to us if we want it, the garden, the innocence. Just go back to me and you and the animals and Him, without even a memory of all this."

"Wow. That just absolutely floors me. You mean this, everything there is, all these billions of people, just gone, wiped out, never was?"

"I guess so. I think so. He said, so what? He said the bulk of them fight and fornicate, cheat, lie, and kill, and they don't have time for much else anyway. They're all going to blow themselves to hell very soon anyway. They're doing it now. They're absolutely in the process."

Hammering, hammering on the white door of the white room. From beyond the door, he hollers, "It is a lie. Let me in."

"Open the door, Eve, before he breaks it down."

"Thank you. It's a lie, I tell you. How do you like my outfit? I passed as a lab technician to get in here. I had to kill that guy and take his uniform, fun stuff. When are you going to listen to me? It's a lie."

“What is a lie?”

“Almost everything you’ve been told so far. There is a solution. There is a way out of this. All this is possibility, one way it can go. In reality, you’re still up on the side of the mountain, bleeding to death in a ditch. Even that and before that is possibility, not absolutely decided, for finality, if you understand my meaning. Yet.

“You can choose. Material or Spirit. Or another way. A better way yet. Choose me, and you don’t have to make any further choices. You’re not wounded and dying. All your problems are solved. The world under your thumb. Kingdoms to rule. Peace on earth. No more hunger. No more war. No more disease. Simple. Simply worship me. Recognize me as the force that rules this material kingdom.

“His way. Well, look around you. Since you refuse me as the force that rules this world, there is no coherence; everything falls apart; the center cannot hold. I can bring you anything you need to rule the world in peace and order.”

“I remember. Now I remember. You are a lie.”

“Finally, you get one thing right in your mind. Hot dog. Maybe it hasn’t been for nothing after all. Now. See how far we can go. Any question will do; just keep it flowing. Who am I?”

“You are the liar. The father of all lies.”

“Yes. What else?”

“You very existence is a lie.”

“A star by your name. Keep going. Don’t get lazy.”

“So is the rest of it. The garden. Adam. Eve. God created everything, including humankind, created male and female in one instant, in His perfect image. He saw everything He had made was good, blessed it, and rested. All finished. Lacking nothing.

“Adam and Eve and the garden, all that was after the fact. I made it up because I couldn’t not be in control, even if thistles and thorns was all I controlled, even if this, myself and the world destroyed was what it finally came to. I never have been cast out of the garden. There never was a garden, or the garden is everything.”

This is all nothing. It is all nothing, a dream when I have just waked.

I will wake with understanding radiating to me and from me like sunshine.

If I understand, what does that achieve? How in hell could I ever get there, where I could have been, from where I am? How responsible am I for not understanding if I was created not understanding? How responsible am I for refusing to accept that anyone, anything other than myself could be in control, if that is

all I was capable of understanding? For Christ's sake, doesn't everyone see that Adam is not Abraham? Damn Abraham for the fool he was. This is his seed upon the world, destroying all life, all existence.

I cut the rest of the material free and rise to my feet. The sky shines with colors above the mountain where the sun will rise. I walk straight up the mountain. Fire-fights rage down both sides of the ridge. A jet tops the ridge, ejects flame into trees of the forest. roars above and away. Flame boils and roars on the earth behind it.

I know nothing. That is the only revelation I can find. I'm sure of that now. I'm also sure that I can't figure it out by myself. I give up. My mind can do nothing at all for me. I'm a fool for allowing myself to be carried along in the currents of the world that brought me here, now.

The sun rises, orange in smoke above the mountain.

Savages circle on horses, send arrows of fire to burn Adam out of cover. Napalm in profusion from above. Union troops burn the landscape they ride through. Jets fly just above the earth. Drones deliver destruction. crawl on the earth, fly in the air, swim in the water.

Adam climbs a burning tree. At the top of the tree, he climbs out onto the sky and climbs higher and higher. His wound, opened again by his exertion, bleeds freely. The rags that had been his trousers burn, but the flesh of his legs is frozen, and he doesn't feel the heat yet.

He climbs higher. His body blazes, bright as a star, and dissipates to smoke. Smoke and clouds dissipate to blue sky. On the earth below, fire and smoke coil through the garden greenery.