The Creation (from the Gospel of Eve)

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The Creation (from the Gospel of Eve)
Christy Lenzi

The First Day
In the beginning, I dozed in the arms of the earth. Slumber clung to my eyelids, pressing me into the soft ground like heavy hands sliding over my skin.

It was the Gardener. His calloused fingers clutched my bones, kneaded my flesh. The rhythm of his work set the pulse of my sleepy heart.
But still, I did not know him.
When he finished with me and rose, I felt unhinged as if I, too, were rising. But the earth held onto me, gentle and soft. The haze of twilight settled over me once again.
The Gardener’s voice, low and distant, murmured, “She’s all yours.”
But he was not talking to the earth.
A figure, blurry in the shadowy garden, lay beside me, moaning softly.
The Gardener grew smaller and darker until he disappeared into the shadows and I was alone with my groaning companion.

I swam in and out of moments. A moment floated by with an image of the moaning boy. He clutched his side. His eyes hated to look at me, narrowing and hardening into sharp edges, as if my presence injured him.
I have hurt him.
He told me this as red seeped between his fingers. It leaked from the gaps between the Gardener’s stitches.
I belonged to the boy. I was his helper.
He said the Gardener told him this.

The boy stretched his red finger toward me. He touched my side. My skin shuddered, but still he pushed his finger into my flesh, pressing it to the bone.
This is mine, inside you. Mine.
I closed my eyes and sank back into the earth, away from the boy’s hard eyes and prodding finger. I tried to slip back to the place I came from, before that moment the Gardener laid his hands on me. But I became lost.
And there was sleeping, and there was rising, the first day.

The Creation/2
The Second Day

The earth cradled me while I slumbered on the waves of twilight moments, rocking in and out of the garden where the boy’s stern voice summoned and sighed.

Only when softness grazed my body did my eyelids flutter.
She stood so near that her hide brushed against my skin, sending a shiver through my bones. Her large eyes were made of dark kindness and deep sweetness. She pulled the purple from the green leaves until it snapped free. Her long, tender jaw rolled as she chewed it.
Purple dripped to the ground and sparkled on her hard little feet.
She would share if I promised not to touch her.
Her eyes told me this.
I reached out for a bead of purple and snapped it free.
Fruit.
The boy's voice stopped my hand from moving to my lips.
The Gardener says we are allowed to eat any of the fruit from the flowering plants in the garden.
The boy reached his fingers toward me and took the fruit from my hand. It disappeared into his mouth.
You are my helper.
As he reminded me of this, the purple squeezed between his teeth. The juice slid out the corner of his lips as he chewed.
He pushed the Dear One away with one hand and she leaped into the air as if her body's bones had never been heavy and sleepy like mine.
She belongs to me, too—the Gardener said. All the creatures, all the fruits. And you.
I turned away from the boy's chewing noises and watched the white tail of the Dear One disappear into green shadows.
As my slumber beckoned, I licked the sticky sweetness from the tips of my fingers.
And there was sleeping, and there was rising, the second day.

The Creation/3
The Third Day
I swayed between each moment, nestled in the earth. She sang for me until rising time returned.
It was the Clever One who made the singing stop.
I did not see him at first. I saw green. And fruit. Flowering plants. My stomach ached and gnawed. As I reached for them, the plant's eye spun to look at me. It startled me, for I had not seen a plant's eye before.
A buzzing sound came from a tiny creature hovering near the soft, red flowers. The plant's eye spun toward the noise. The plant had a mouth—it opened and a long, pale tongue darted out, snapping up the Buzzing One. As the plant chewed, the green disappeared from its body and I could see its true shape. All the colors of the garden rose up inside him and he became a beautiful, scaly creature with a slender, coiled tail, not a plant vine as I had thought. It was the Clever One, all along.
The one whose eyes see everything. He understands the secret of how to change himself if he wants to.
The Clever One dwelled in my thoughts all through rising time and into my slumber. In my sleep visions I reached out and touched his cold, gray skin and it flushed to the warm, dark color of my own.
And there was sleeping, and there was rising, the third day.
She would share if I promised not to touch her. 
Her eyes told me this. 
I reached out for a bead of purple and snapped it free. 
Fruit. 
The boy's voice stopped my hand from moving to my lips. 
The Gardener says we are allowed to eat any of the fruit from the flowering plants in the garden. 
The boy reached his fingers toward me and took the fruit from my hand. It disappeared into his mouth. 
You are my helper. 
As he reminded me of this, the purple squeezed between his teeth. The juice slid out the corner of his lips as he chewed. 
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The Creation/3 
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The Clever One dwelled in my thoughts all through rising time and into my slumbers. In my sleep visions I reached out and touched his cold, gray skin and it flushed to the warm, dark color of my own. 
And there was sleeping, and there was rising, the third day.

The Creation/4 
The Fourth Day 
My bed in the earth's arms grew uncomfortable. I missed the songs she used to sing, and her cold stones made themselves known to me. Still, my rising moments clung heavy as sleep, and I moved through their hazziness searching always for the Clever One. As I helped the boy find fruit, ran with the Dear One, and caressed the soft flower petals, my eyes wandered the garden looking for him. I had just stepped wet and shivering from the pool in the center of the garden where the four rivers spring when I heard the sound of a hard plant breaking. I squinted into the green at the Crooked Tree, looking for the clever eyes of my friend and saw, instead, the piercing eyes of the Gardener peering back at me from between the branches. I wished I was clever enough to turn myself the color of water and stone, so those eyes would not burn me with their seeing. The Gardener's stare felt different from the gazes of the creatures or the boy, or even the Clever One. But I did not know what made it so. It weighed heavy like a hand on me. I turned back to the pool and sank deep into its waters, longing to become the dark pool itself, which the Gardener's eyes could not penetrate. 
Later, when I helped the boy find a comfortable sleeping place, I saw the Gardener's stitches had been removed from the boy's body. I touched the scar that I had given him, but he pushed my hand away and spoke. 
The Gardener says you did not eat your fruit from the Tree of Life. 
I glanced at the hardened bits. The Gardener has told the boy we must eat of the Tree of Life every day. The Gardener himself brings the fruit to the boy while I am sleeping. It is bitter and I do not desire it. 
The Gardener says never go near the Crooked Tree or touch it. If we eat its fruit, we will know what Good and Evil is and then we will have to die. 
Whenever the boy talked about the Gardener, his chin lifted and his chest puffed out like the Crowing One. I wondered what Good and Evil looked like and how it tasted. I did not know what it was to die. I could tell the boy did not know either. I remembered the Clever One chewing the tiny creature until it disappeared. Maybe to die is to disappear. 
Perhaps the hunting gaze of the Gardener would be unable to find me if I died and disappeared. 
I closed my eyes and dreamed of climbing the Crooked Tree. 
And there was sleeping, and there was rising, the fourth day.
The Creation
(from the Gospel of Eve)—Continued

The Creation/5
The Fifth Day
Always the Gardener watched us. His ravenous eyes followed me around the
garden. As soon as I rose from sleep, His eyes reached for me as the Clever One’s
tongue had stretched toward the buzzing creature. But in the heat of mid-day, the
Gardener slept in the shade of the
Tree of Life and I could rest.
The boy told me a secret.
The Gardener said the tree of Life is a special tree, the tallest in the whole garden.
Its fruit keeps us exactly as we are, always. But we will spoil everything if we go
near the Crooked Tree.
I told him a secret.
I have stopped eating the bitter fruit from the Tree of Life.
It makes the rising moments too much like the sleeping ones. There are other
trees in the garden with much sweeter fruit. I wonder what the Crooked Tree’s
fruit tastes like.
My whispered words made the boy frown. He glanced over his shoulder.
I told him another secret.
The Tree of Life is not a good tree for climbing. But the Crooked Tree has low
branches and plump, golden fruit.
The boy’s eyes narrowed and became sharp. He poked the dirt with his stick, so I
stopped speaking to him.
I did not care about the Tree of Life. I wanted to change like the Clever One. I
wanted to know Good and Evil. I wanted to know what it is to die.
My clever friend came to me in sleeping visions. His scales were black like the
dome of the night sky; his scales twinkled silver like stars. The Gardener was not
the only one who could make such beauty—my clever friend created himself each
moment into something new, all by himself. I would find him when the Greater
Light rose into the sky. The thought comforted me the way the arms of the earth
used to do, back in in the beginning.
And there was sleeping, and there was rising, the fifth day.

The Creation/6
The Sixth Day
I woke before the Greater Light. The boy slept, still, red fruit stains covering his
mouth and fingers. The Gardener had not yet come to peer at us through the
plants. I walked along the river to the spring. The Swimming Ones splashed. The
Flying, Singing Ones called to me and I laughed back.
Today I would find him.
I passed the Tree of Life with its dark needles, pointed top, brittle bark, and bitter
ground-fruits that I did not desire. But I breathed in the tree’s scent—greener and

Metamorphosis #2
Kaelani Valdez Nawatani
sharper than anything else in the garden.

On I went.

I came to the spring from which the four rivers flowed and stood before the Crooked Tree. I felt someone's presence—not like the Gardener's burning gaze, but quiet and calm.

My eyes searched the ground, the plants along the rivers, the stones, leaves, flowers, fruits. I ran my gaze up the side of the Crooked Tree, studying every crevice, crooked limb, gnarled branch. I searched every piece of golden, dangling fruit until my eye caught one piece that stared back. I squinted at the fruit. The fruit winked at me.

The Clever One!
He uncurled himself from around the hanging fruit and became himself. The golden color drained from his scales, and all the colors of the Garden rushed to fill its place. There was a bite mark in the fruit. Golden juice dripped from the creature's jaw. No!

The word tore at my throat as it leaped from my mouth.
You will die!

The boy's pebbles fell to the ground. His eyebrows slid to the top of his head. You are still my helper. His stomach growled with hunger.

I held out the fruit. With both hands, he lifted it to his mouth and took a bite. He ate the whole thing. I heard the Gardener coming. I took hold of the boy's arm.
We must die.
Die?
Disappear.
How?

We must become part of the Crooked Tree.

I reached for the first branch and pulled myself up, then climbed to the next, toward the blue.

The boy followed me up the tree. When we reached the highest branches, we sat still as the Clever One so that we would disappear behind the leaves. The Gardener stood near the foot of the Crooked Tree, casting his gaze around the garden. It was the first time I had seen him clearly. He looked the very image of the boy, with hungry eyes made of sharp rocks. But the Gardener owned more might in his arms, more swiftness in his legs than the boy. He did not look up into the Crooked Tree.

I gazed up through the leafy branches to the blue. I peered over the treetops and saw a great wall covered by plants, circling the garden like the Slithering One who wraps himself around the Squeaking Ones before swallowing the tiny creatures. Still the Gardener searched for us with his hard eyes. His fingers curled into his palms, turning his large hands into stones.

This was the first day my twilight moments had separated into light and dark—day and night moments—and the haze that had covered me had begun to clear. The bitter fruit of the Tree of Life no longer held me to the earth. I felt I could soar into the sky like the Flying, Singing Ones.

The Gardener called for the boy.
Like the Clever One, I held still. I slid my eyes to the boy. The boy slid his eyes to me. The Crooked Tree is sweet. The Gardener is sour.

Where are you?
sharper than anything else in the garden.
On I went.
I came to the spring from which the four rivers flowed and stood before the Crooked Tree. I felt someone's presence—not like the Gardener's burning gaze, but quiet and calm.
My eyes searched the ground, the plants along the rivers, the stones, leaves, flowers, fruits. I ran my gaze up the side of the Crooked Tree, studying every crevice, crooked limb, gnarled branch. I searched every piece of golden, dangling fruit until my eye caught one piece that stared back. I squinted at the fruit. The fruit winked at me.
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The word tore at my throat as it leaped from my mouth.
You will die!
The Clever One's eye slid up, around, and back to me. His scales turned green as leaves, grey as bark, black as shadows until he disappeared. Surely, he had died as the Gardener said.
I fell to the ground, my knees scraping stone.
The tree's eye swung around to me. It blinked at me so cunningly, I laughed.
You will not die.
This is what his eyes told me. I smiled at my friend as his colors reappeared and his eye slid back to the golden fruit.
You will live with your eyes wide open; it is better than living forever only sleeping and rising.
The golden fruit snapped from the branch when I pulled it.
I heard steps near the spring and glanced over my shoulder at the boy who had followed me. He picked up a handful of pebbles and started throwing them into the pool. He did not like how close I had walked to the Crooked Tree or how I had touched it after he had told me the Gardener's words. He threw the rocks harder and harder into the water. A line formed across his forehead like a crack in the bark of the Crooked Tree.
You did not help me find my morning fruit. I am hungry.
His stomach made a rumbling noise.
I have found the best fruit in the whole garden for you.
At my words, his eyes dropped to the fruit in my hand. The spot where the Clever One had taken a bite glistened and dripped like a gash in smooth flesh. The boy's eyes grew large and round.
Now you will surely die.
Now I will know Good and Evil. I will be like the Gardener.

The Creation/7
I lifted the fruit and breathed in its ripe, warm smell. I pressed its skin until juice rose up into my thumbnail. I licked it from my thumb. Sweet and sour together. This was what Good and Evil tasted like.
I took a bite.
The boy's pebbles fell to the ground. His eyebrows slid to the top of his head. Have you become like the Gardener, now?
I nodded, though I felt no different than I had before, except for the shiver of pleasure that tinged through my body at having obeyed my own wishes instead of the Gardener's.
The line across the boy's forehead grew deeper.
But you still belong to me. You are still my helper.
His stomach growled with hunger.
I held out the fruit. With both hands, he lifted it to his mouth and took a bite. He ate the whole thing.
I heard the Gardener coming. I took hold of the boy's arm.
We must die.
Die?
Disappear.
How?
We must become part of the Crooked Tree.
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The Gardener called for the boy.
Like the Clever One, I held still. I slid my eyes to the boy. The boy slid his eyes to me.
The Crooked Tree is sweet. The Gardener is sour.
Our eyes told each other this, that the garden was both Good and Evil together.
Where are you?
The Gardener’s angry voice rushed from his throat like the four rivers springing from the earth.
The boy shivered and made a sound like the Squeaking Ones.
The Gardener’s eyes searched the branches of the Crooked Tree.
Come down!
The shivering boy shed the colors of the plants and climbed down, trembling before the Gardener in his own colors.
I stayed cloaked in my leaves.

The Creation/8
Who told you that you could disappear from me? Have you eaten from the Crooked Tree?
His voice shook the boy until words tumbled out.
The girl you gave me for a helper—she gave the fruit to me and I ate it.
The boy turned his face up to my leafy branches. Together, they peered at my colors, trying to see me.
I slid my eye to the Gardener.
What have you done?
His voice was made of thorns.
The Clever One has shown me how to disappear.
I smiled as the leaves spoke my words.
The Gardener’s eyes threw stones in my direction.
Out! You must leave the garden and never eat from the Tree of Life again. Go!
The Gardener’s mouth grew full of curses. His wrath fell loud and heavy, booming through the garden like a great tree crashing to the ground.
But I had stopped listening to the Gardener’s voice. I heard only the song of the Flying, Singing Ones soaring above me.
I rested my hand over the place inside me that the Gardener said belonged to the boy. I would make it mine. So I fashioned it in my own image and I saw that it was good. It grew wings like the Flying, Singing Ones. This is the knowledge the Gardener wanted to keep to himself—that we do not need him.
I returned to my own colors and climbed down from the Crooked Tree, my new knowing shining like all the colors of the garden inside of me.
And there was sleeping and there was waking—the sixth day. And I, mother of the Living Ones, forever blessed that day and made it holy, because on it I left the Slithering Wall of the garden and freed myself from the Gardener.