

## The Beguiling Snake

by Judy Harding

“Serpent,” Adam named me. Beguiling God made me, and I am truly more subtle than any beast of the field. Soon again I will find her, continue to persuade her, for I am a green-eyed beast. Eve is young, more like a child than a woman, and my powers of inducement are gentle, my voice as relentless as water that trickles from an underground spring.

“Behold the bounty, the orchard so full of fruit,” I say to her. “Red ripe apples, juicy pears, fat oranges and apricots, plump plums, dates and figs. Will you not taste of them all?”

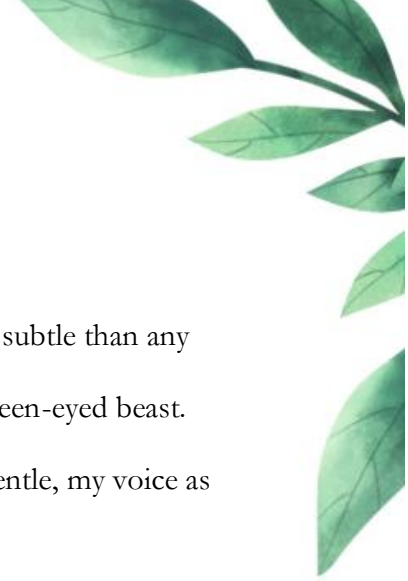
“We may eat of the fruit of the trees,” she tells me. “But not of the tree which is in the midst of the garden.”

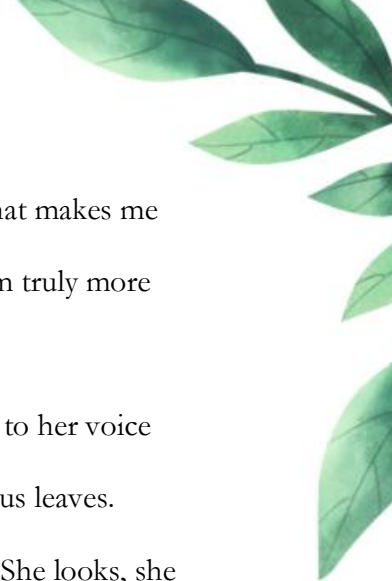
“But is this tree not good for food? Is it not pleasant to the eyes?” I ask. “Do you not swoon as you inhale the thick, sweet fragrance of its fruit? Can you not pluck just one small, shining orb? Surely you are tempted, and truly I tell you this simple act can cause no harm.”

“God has said neither eat it nor touch it,” she replies.

Ah, but now the full truth must be told. Before God made Eve, before He took one of Adam’s ribs and closed up the flesh instead thereof, before He caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, Adam and I were as one. We shared a garden eastward in Eden with the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air. We shared a garden eastward in Eden with every plant of the field and every herb of the earth. Before Adam cleaved unto his wife, he cleaved unto me as if we were of one flesh. Stiffly he stroked me. “Come, come to be,” he bade me.

No, never did I disobey his commands, for I brought meat to my master. Ah, these many years I served him. Yet, now I am forsaken. No longer can I stand. The bark feels rough beneath my belly. My bones rot as I cry out.





My anguish is overwhelming, my grief all consuming, yet great is the wrath that makes me most cunning in my cruelty. Serpent he named me; beguiling God made me, and I am truly more subtle than any beast of the field.

Day after day I slink through the thickets and follow Eve's footsteps. I listen to her voice from the limbs of the Algum tree. I watch her ways from the shadows cast by the lotus leaves. Hidden behind the sandstone boulders, I gaze at her bathing in Eden's vernal pools. She looks, she asks, she questions like a child, and I watch and learn her ways. I have listened carefully to her words and her silences, something Adam has never done, and I know now how her mind can be turned, for I know now what she craves above all else. Yes, I am the green-eyed monster, and when she speaks again, the sound of her sibilant words will warm my scaly flesh.

"Yes, yes," she will say for Eve sees now that the tree is good for food. Eve agrees now that the tree is pleasant to the eyes. "But God has said either eat it nor touch it," she will say with a slight and final pause.

When once again in the midst of the garden I find her, I shall curl around her arm and gently squeeze. No sound will break the silence of enchantment, but when she locks her shining face onto mine and nods her head, I shall speak softly into her ear and convince her with a final flick of my tongue. "Woman," I shall say, "is this not a tree to be desired beyond all others? Is this not a tree to make one wise? Is it not *knowledge* that you desire above all else?"

Eve will put forth her hand and take of its fruit. Her lips will feel the apple's red skin, her teeth the crunch of its white meat. Sweet juice will drip from her lips whilst her wide amber eyes roll backward in her head and her mouth emits a sultry moan.

Yes, yes, she will partake of it gladly.

"But, what of the other tree within the middle of the Garden?" you ask. What shall I say of Life Everlasting?

I shall say nothing. Lest she put forth her hand.

