

## The Day the Animals Lost Their Voices

The day broke with a riot of soft color in the sky and a gentle breeze blowing through the treetops. A golden shaft of light fell on the clearing where a man and woman were waking from sleep. The animals lying at their feet were also rousing up, because they were always curious about what the man and woman were doing.

The cat got up and stretched luxuriously before licking the nose of the woman. “What will you do today, my Eve? I want to come with you,” said the cat.

“I don’t know yet. I just woke up, so I need to ask our Father what plans He has for me today.”

“Yes, yes, I know, you do that every day,” replied the cat. “But do you think we could wander over to the field just over the hill? I like that high rock that gets the sun all day. It’s so warm, and there’s a ledge just right for me to look out over the whole field.”

“Well, let’s ask our Father if that’s okay with Him.” With that, Eve bowed her head and became very still, as if listening intently. After a moment, she looked up at the cat and said, “Yes, in fact I need to pick the fruit from the trees and bushes in that field.” She stretched and looked up at the man who had been rummaging through a basket full of fruit and nuts getting breakfast together.

A cheetah stalked up to the couple and said, “Oh my Adam, today is such a lovely day, and I feel like running. Will you run with me?”

“After I eat breakfast, my friend,” replied the man.

“Just don’t eat too much to weigh you down, or I’ll run rings around you!” laughed the cheetah.

Adam and Eve sat down to eat, with the warm sun shining down on them. As they ate, other birds and animals came over to pay their morning respects. First the dog came and rested his head on Eve’s knee, patiently waiting for a tasty morsel. Then some squirrels and chipmunks, eyeing the nuts, cherries, and figs with great interest, waiting until the humans offered them some breakfast. A lion came up, munching contentedly on a large mouthful of grass. He stretched luxuriously, purring loudly, and then came over to sit by Adam.

“May I keep you company, my Adam?” asked the lion.

“I’d like that,” replied Adam. He put his arm around the lion’s neck and sank his hands in the soft, dense mane.

Just then an ox lumbered up. “My Adam, I want to help you today,” he offered.

“I’d like that, my friend. I’m ready now. Come on, everyone, and let’s get to work!”

“But you’ll have to catch me first” laughed the cheetah; and with that, he sped off. Adam took off after him, laughing just as hard as the cheetah. He ran like a gazelle, with grace, speed, and power. The cheetah ran in circles around Adam, making little barking sounds of joy.

Eve watched, smiling to see Adam and the cheetah enjoying their run. “All right, feline, let’s go get started picking fruit” she said to the cat, and playfully scratched the cat on the root of her tail. The cat stropped Eve’s leg and purred loudly. She picked up an empty basket, and they set off for the field.

When Eve and the cat arrived, they could see Adam and the cheetah both grinning from ear to ear. The lion and ox had followed at their own pace, and they were just walking up to the others.

Adam and the ox went over toward the east side of the field to see if the blackberries were ripe, while Eve went over to the fruit trees on the west side of the field. The cat ambled over to the rock to perch high up in the sun and turned so that she could see what Eve was doing.

Eve went to a pear tree and began picking. The fruit was a mellow gold, with an aroma that was mouthwatering. Suddenly, from up in the branches above, she heard a hissing sound. She looked up and saw a beautifully marked snake

“What do you do here, oh Eve?” he asked.

“I’m just picking the fruit of these trees as our Father told me to this morning,” she answered.

“Yesss, these pears are beautiful, aren’t they,” said the snake. “But I have a quesssstion for you, oh Eve. Has our Father ever told you to pick the fruit of the tree which sssssits in the middle of the garden?”

“No, He hasn’t,” she said.

“Welllll, why not? If you think these pears are beautiful, you should sssee the fruit that grows on this tree!” offered the snake.

“But our Father told us never to pick that fruit. He said that we would die the day we picked its fruit,” replied Eve.

“Oh, did He really sssssay that?” questioned the snake, uncoiling himself comfortably.

“Yes, He did,” stated Eve firmly. “And I have no desire to do something He said not to do”.

“Ahhh, but why do you think He told you not to?” hissed the snake. “He only forbids it because this fruit would give you wissssdom like His, and He does not want that. He wants to control you and make you His sssssservants.”

“Why would He do such a thing?” questioned Eve. “He loves us. I can’t believe that He would do something to make us slaves”.

Just then Adam walked up. He stood silently, listening to the conversation.

“Oh, but He doesssss. He only wantsssss to control you. He doesn’t want you to ever think for yourssself,” sneered the snake.

Eve looked puzzled. She knew that she always asked the Father what to do, and then did what He said to do. It was just the natural thing to do, and she hadn’t thought about doing anything else. But the things the snake was saying made her feel confused, and she suddenly began to have doubts that she’d never had before.

“Jussst come with me, Eve, and I’ll show you the wonderful tree. If you pick and eat its fruit, you’ll be wisssssse above all of usssss,” enticed the snake.

Almost hypnotically, Eve said “Lead on, and show me the tree. I’ll just have a look at it. It can’t hurt just to have a look.”

The snake slithered down from the tree and started off in the direction of a large tree just to the west of the field. When the cat saw Eve walking away, she climbed down from the rock and scampered after Eve. Adam saw Eve leave and followed her, accompanied by the cheetah, the lion, and the ox.

After a few moments they arrived at the tree, and it was indeed a stately tree. The fruit was large, succulent, and had an aroma that made you hungry just to smell it.

“Sssssee how beautiful it isssss, Eve,” hissed the snake. “Just take one piece of fruit. It will only take one bite to make you wissssse, so wissssse; and then you can give ssssome to Adam to make him wissssse alssssso”.

She looked at the fruit for several minutes, thinking, pondering what she should do. Was it really true that the Father was only trying to control them and make them servants? And would this fruit really give them wisdom and the ability to decide things for themselves? If that was

true, maybe they wouldn't need their Father so much. Maybe when they asked Him questions they were only bothering Him. She didn't know what to think or do anymore. She sat down on the ground, head in her hands, as she tried to make sense of it all.

Then, after what seemed like an eternity (although it was really only a few minutes), Eve got up, and reached a trembling hand up to the tree to pick a low hanging fruit. She held it in her hand, looking at it; and the longer she looked at it, the more she wanted to take a bite.

All this while, Adam had been sitting near her, listening in silence to the conversation between Eve and the snake. As he continued to watch, he saw her take one last look at the fruit in her hand, pluck it from the tree, and take a quick bite. She chewed thoughtfully, enjoying the sweet taste of the fruit. She appeared to be waiting, and after a few moments looked over at Adam.

"I thought that our Father said that if we ate any of this tree's fruit that we would die. Look, I'm still here and I feel fine. And the fruit is delicious. Here, take a taste of it for yourself, my husband". She held out the fruit to Adam. He looked at it and took a bite, enjoying its sweet taste. They looked at each other, not knowing what to make of this. They were still alive after eating the fruit.

After a few minutes, though, something strange happened. The fruit had been so sweet, but now it left a bitter aftertaste in their mouths. Their stomachs felt uneasy, a sensation they had never experienced before.

They looked at each other, and for the first time felt embarrassed.

"Adam, we're naked!" gasped Eve. Her face turned red, and she began to cry.

"Fig leaves are large. Maybe we can use them to make some sort of covering," suggested Adam. He led them back toward the edge of the field where the fig tree stood. As they walked the animals joined them.

"What is wrong, my Eve?" asked the cat.

"Oh feline, we've just realized that we're naked!" sobbed Eve.

"But what has changed? Why does that make a difference?" asked the cat.

"I don't know, but it does. We must make coverings for ourselves."

"My Adam, how will you run wearing fig leaves? Won't they fall off?" asked the cheetah.

"I guess I'll be running more slowly from now on" said Adam.

When they had arrived at the fig tree they picked the largest leaves and wove their stems together to make aprons for themselves. At first it seemed to work, with some minor annoyance when they wanted to move one way and the apron didn't quite follow them. But as the day wore on, the leaves started to dry out, and their aprons became scratchy. The worst part of it all was the sick feelings in their hearts, which they had never felt before - guilt, regret, shame, and a thousand other horrible sensations. They had always looked forward to evening, but now they dreaded its coming. The Father would come down for their daily walk, and what would they say to Him now?

"We must find a place to hide," said Adam. "We can't present ourselves to the Father like this. I feel so embarrassed".

"Me too," agreed Eve. "Oh, how I wish I hadn't listened to the snake. I never want to pick any more of that fruit. It just makes me sick".

They passed the early afternoon deep in a thicket of trees. Eventually, evening came, ushered in by a cool, refreshing breeze. Then suddenly, they heard His voice.

"Adam, where are you?"

They both winced and settled deeper into the thicket, hoping their Father wouldn't find them.

“Adam, where are you?” The voice sounded heavy with longing, and with something else they didn’t know how to describe.

Finally, Adam called out “I was naked, so I hid myself from you”.

“Who told you that?” asked the LORD. “Did you eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden? The one, the only one, I told you to leave alone?”

Adam didn’t know what to say. He looked at Eve, with a mixture of fear and anger in his face. “Eve ate it, and gave me some. It’s her fault!” he snapped.

“But the snake told me the fruit was good to eat and would make us wise like You!” she protested. “He lied to me!”

The LORD spoke to the snake, which was draped over the limb of a tree. “Because you did this, you will be cursed, the lowest of all animals. You will slither along on your belly, eating dirt. The woman and all her children will hate you. Her offspring will crush your head, and you’ll bruise his heel.”

The LORD turned His attention to Eve. “Childbirth will be painful for you because of this. Your greatest desire will be to please your husband, and he will have authority over you.”

Finally, He spoke to Adam. “Because you listened to Eve and ate from the tree I told you to leave alone, the ground will be cursed. You will have to struggle to get enough to eat. Thorns, thistles, and weeds will grow all too easily. This will be your life until you die and return to the ground from which you were taken.”

Adam and Eve clutched each other and began to cry. The snake slithered away, hissing.

After a few moments, they heard the voice of the LORD. “Look, I’ve made coverings for you,” He said gently. “Here, put them on.”

They let go of each other and wiped their eyes. They looked and saw two furry robes. Then they realized the robes were made of animal skins. They picked them up gingerly, not knowing what to think or feel.

“But Father, these are animal skins!” exclaimed Eve.

“Yes, my child, I know.”

“But the animals are our friends!” protested Adam. “How can we wear our friends?”

“Things will be very different now. Most of the animals will fear you. And my children, I can’t let you stay here in the garden any longer. You must leave, now. You must go and work the ground to get your food.”

“Why must we leave?” protested Eve.

“If I let you stay here, you might eat the fruit of the Tree of Life, and then live forever. That can no longer be, since you know evil as well as good. You would live forever, doing endless evil.”

They began to cry again.

“Come, you must leave,” said the LORD.

With heavy hearts Adam and Eve made their way to the east side of the garden. Many of the animals walked with them.

“Oh my Adam, what does this mean?” implored the cheetah.

Adam looked at the cheetah mournfully. “I think it may mean we’ll never run together again, my friend.” He looked away to hide his tears.

The cheetah wailed. As the wail ended, his voice began to change.

“My Aaaaa-dam! My Aaaaa-dam! AAAAAArrrgh!” he snarled.

The dog ran up to the two people. “I want to go with you-ip, yip, yip, yip.”

The lion, walking nearby, yelled, “Don’t go, Aaaaa-dam! AAAAAOR!” He ended with an angry snarl. Then he saw a sheep, and growled malevolently.

“This is baaaaad!” bleated the sheep in terror.

Quick as lightning, the lion pounced on the sheep. In horror Adam and Eve watched the lion take the sheep by the neck in his jaws. The sheep cried out piteously, and then was silent. The lion turned away, carrying the sheep in his jaws. The cheetah ran after the lion, and latched on to the sheep’s trailing leg.

They couldn’t watch any longer. Their friends were killing each other.

The cat walking beside Eve looked up at the woman. “Eve, mew, mew, meow” she wailed.

“I can’t understand them anymore, husband,” lamented Eve. “What’s happening?”

“I think they’ve lost their voices, beloved,” he replied.

“You mean they’ll never speak to us again?”

“At least not in the way we’re used to.”

Many of the animals walked alongside Adam and Eve, now making unintelligible sounds. The cat still walked around Eve’s feet, almost close enough to trip her; and the dog loped alongside Adam, constantly looking up at him. Every little bit he barked, but to the people, it was all just so much noise. They couldn’t understand what their friends were saying anymore.

Finally they reached the eastern edge of the garden. There were angels there, along with a flaming sword. One of the angels said, “We are placed here, at the command of the Highest One, to block your way if you attempt to return.”

Adam and Eve took one last look behind them at their former home. The view was dim as angry clouds masked the sunset. They walked away from the garden clutching each other as the tears fell. Nothing would ever be the same. They felt isolated from their Father as well as their animal friends.

Eve looked at Adam, drying her eyes on the back of her hand. “What do you think our Father meant when he said my offspring would crush the serpent’s head, and that the serpent would bruise my offspring’s heel?”

“I don’t know exactly, but I think He means that somehow, through one of your children, the effects of the serpent’s deceit will be broken. But it will come at a cost, and all creation will groan until that day,” he said.

“Maybe then we will be able to fellowship with our Father as we’ve been used to. And maybe the animals will speak to us again,” said Eve hopefully.

They plodded on into the dark night before them. Suddenly, the dog howled forlornly.

Adam put his hand on the dog’s head. “Yes, my friend, I feel the same way too.”