

# Eve

By David Alan Armstrong

"Eve."

The woman turned at the unfamiliar voice. "Adam, is that you? "

A tall man stood on a low hillock. "Of course not. Adam is off planting tulips, ever the industrious one, never satisfied with the garden the way it is."

Eve considered the stranger—taller than her companion, thicker in the chest, hairier arms and legs, an odd patch of woven leaves drawn across his waist. It reached almost to his knees.

"How do you know my name?"

The man chuckled. "I've been watching you."

Eve shivered. "Who are you?"

"A neighbor."

"We have no neighbors. We're alone."

The man stepped closer. "Oh? Well, here I am."

Eve searched his face. "You're not supposed to be here."

A deep laugh rumbled in his chest. "That's what we thought when we first arrived."

"We?"

"My woman and I. We camp with others on the far side of the mountain. We came many winters ago."

"Winter?"

He smiled, his eyes bright with humor. "You just arrived. You haven't seen the seasons yet. When winter comes, you'll know. Much different from this spring."

"Others?"

"People, like me, like you."

"What are you doing here?"

The man's smile broadened. "Talking to you."

"I mean, why are you *here*? We were told we are alone, that we are the first."

The man nodded. "Yes, my woman and I were told the same. Then the others found us. We all were told a similar story. We all thought we were the first."

"But God said—"

The man's smile dimmed. "Ah, god. The creator. He told you he created this world just for you?"

"Yes."

"So he said to my woman and me so long ago. He told us all that story."

"It's true. He's God. He cannot lie."

"If he is supreme, he can do what he wants, including lie, if it suits him."

Darkness settled over Eve's thoughts. A heaviness pressed upon her chest. "I don't believe that."

The man shrugged. "Believe what you want. What else did your god tell you?"

Eve recalled the strong, deep voice, barely above a whisper, reaching from the heavens into her soul. "Stay in the garden. Take care of it. Be happy." Remembering the words lifted her spirit.

"Yes, the same 'commandments' he gave us."

The emphasis on 'commandments' did not sound sincere. Gloominess tugged at Eve's heart.

"Did your god mention fruit?"

Eve glanced at the tree at the far side of the clearing, its trunk gnarled and twisted, effulgent with dark green leaves waving in the gentle breeze, purple fruits dangling from drooping boughs. "Yes."

The man followed her gaze. "We had such a tree. Have you tasted the fruit?"

Eve fixed the visitor with a hard stare. "Of course not. God told us we would die."

He returned her stare, his features stern. "Another lie. You won't die."

"But God said—"

He chuckled, the smile curling his lips. His eyes remained fixed and hard. "Always with 'God said.' Don't you see? Nothing he says is true."

"How do you know?"

"Isn't it obvious? It doesn't make sense. The creator supposedly plants a tree in the garden and then tells you not to eat its fruit. '*You'll die*,' he says."

Eve furrowed her brow. "But God said—"

"Stop it!" The man's face darkened, his mouth drawing into a tight line. "There's no god. He didn't create you. He didn't plant this garden for you. You're not the only people on this world. That tree won't hurt you any more than any other. It's just a tree."

"Have you eaten its fruit?"

The man gazed at the tree. "I chopped it down for firewood in the first winter."

Eve considered the laden branches. "It looks attractive. I like the fragrance of the blossoms."

"No accounting for taste. A man in our camp claims a couple ate the fruit."

"Did they die?"

"No, but they were taken away."

"Where did they go?"

"No one knows. But there are stories of others who have eaten the fruit and disappeared."

"But why—"

The man tossed his head back and laughed. "Don't you see? It is a test."

"A test?"

“Yes, to see who is weak and who is strong. The caretaker wants only weak people on this world. If you fear the tree, you are weak. If you are strong enough to disobey, he takes you away.”

Eve’s eyes shifted between the man and the tree. “Oh, I had not thought of it like that.”

“It’s the only explanation. He lies, and he wants to rule over people who believe his lies.”

“That’s terrible. Have you tried to escape?”

“My whole clan has tried. The caretaker tracks us wherever we go. There is no hiding from him.”

Eve drew in a determined breath. “Well, I’m not going to hide, and I’m not going to obey. I’ll show him who’s strong!”

The man’s friendly smile returned. “Yes, that’s the spirit. You show him you won’t stand for his tyranny.” He put a finger to his lips. “But go get your man first. You should do this together.”

Eve nodded. “Yes, we’ll do this together.”

“That’s good. But hurry. The day grows late.” He hooked his thumbs in the waistband of the thatched leaves covering his loins. “Oh, and grab some fig leaves on your way back.”

“Fig leaves?”

“Trust me.” His smile grew wide. Mirth danced in his eyes. “You’ll want them.”

Eve rose. “You’ll be here when we return?”

“Yes. I’ll pick the two biggest fruits and have them ready for you.”

The woman strode away but then turned. “Wait, I did not ask your name.”

The man raised his chin. “My name is Adam. My wife’s name is Eve. The caretaker has no imagination. We are all called Adam and Eve. But my friends call me Lucifer.”