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H.B. MOORE

a novel

EVE

IN THE BEGINNING

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EVE: IN THE BEGINNING, a Novel by H.B. Moore

For my mother, Gayle Brown, a noble daughter of Eve.

Author's Note

I've been writing historical novels based on scriptural characters for many years. When I decided to look for a female heroine in the Bible for my next subject, it seemed to make sense to write about Eve, our first mother. Through researching Eve and Adam, I became impressed with their noble characters and their difficult and brave choices. This novelization is not meant to represent any specific religious organization or religious doctrine. The plot points are a compilation of various theories with added fictional elements and do not necessarily represent my personal religious beliefs.

There are yet many unknowns about the life that our first parents led in the Garden of Eden. I believe that one day our questions will be answered, yet the purpose of this story is not to answer those questions, or even speculate on new possibilities. I wrote this story to bring to life an incredible man and woman who sacrificed immortality to start the human race ... A man and woman I esteem as my first parents and will be eternally grateful for.

Chapter 1

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

“We can’t live like this forever,” I say.

“Yes, we can.” Adam’s fingertips brush my bare arm.

We are lying on our backs, looking up at the golden-green leaves that filter just enough of the sun’s rays to make the air only a warm, fragrant whisper around us.

A quiet afternoon in our unending days of tranquility.

I close my eyes as Adam’s fingers stray along my arm, moving down to my wrist, until his long fingers interlace with mine.

Serenity.

I tell myself that I want nothing more than to lie in the cool grass next to Adam, surrounded by sweet flowers while listening to the melody of the nearby stream.

I could stay here forever with him. And perhaps we have. Time moves forward, yet it never seems to move at all. The garden never changes. Even the fruits stay the same, never growing old. We never change.

I don’t desire to change anything ... not really. But the thoughts press against my mind – thoughts that have been more and more frequent over the past moon – until I have to speak again. “Do you really want to stay here forever?” I say. “I mean the garden is lovely, but ...” My thought hangs in the air between us.

Adam rolls over onto his side and tugs my hand to his lips, pressing his mouth on my knuckles. This captures my attention. He smiles when I look at him, his eyes changing with the light – first green, then darker. His hair is nearly black today, although I know out of the shade it will glow bronze – a bronze that extends to his skin, matching the color of my own. Our bodies are different though, as must be between a man and a woman, and I’ve been curious more than once to know why.

Everything with Adam has always been mysterious.

This is why I find myself thinking more and more about what it would be like to *know*.

I get lost in Adam’s gaze for a moment, forgetting my questions, although I’ve heard his answers many times. Of how Elohim commanded Adam not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Of how we may freely eat the fruit of any tree, except for that one.

In fact, Adam refuses to even go near the tree of knowledge of good and evil. When we are in the center of the garden, he passes by it quickly on the path and will delay only if I persist. Most of the time, I visit the tree alone.

“Eve, you’re frowning,” Adam says in his low voice.

I love his voice – its deep richness vibrates through my body. He is the only man I know, the only man I ever see, but I can't imagine any other creature ever sounding this beautiful.

"You're not listening." I hold his gaze so he knows I'm serious.

It doesn't change the smile on his face. He tightens his fingers around mine, and I feel the heat radiating between our palms. "I always listen to you."

To test him, I say, "Come with me to visit the tree."

He pulls away and sits up. He's not looking at me now, nor is he smiling. "Nothing will change," he says in a quiet voice.

Despite his words, hope blossoms in my chest. "I know." Adam is determined and stubborn, but I can be more so, though I know when to push and when not to.

I stand and hold out my hand. He grasps it in his, flesh to flesh, and I am grateful he is making this exception as he stands tall next to me. He leads me through the garden, and we pass tree after tree and thick bushes of flowers, weaving our way as our bare feet tread on the soft undergrowth and warm earth path. The scents reach out to me one by one, full and fragrant, some sweet, others sharp, until they blend together and are carried away by a breeze. We cross a sloping meadow, where the sun touches our bare skin from head to foot.

The leaves rattle around us, moved by the breeze that blows my hair against my cheek. Adam reaches over and brushes the long strands of honey brown from my face, his touch gentle and tender. I smile up at him, and he squeezes my hand.

Today he is indulging me. Today perfection will outdo itself.

The walk is not far, but it seems to take a while since Adam is in no hurry. He doesn't spend as much time in this part of the garden – past the two rivers, over the hill of crimson flowers, and next to the grove that contains the tree of life – as I do. But it isn't the tree of life that I want to see today.

We both slow at the same time. It's still a good distance – a safe distance. The tree of knowledge stands by itself, as if it's somehow cast off by the other trees that grow close together, protecting each other.

Something hitches in my chest, matching the lonely feeling I sense from the tree, though I am not alone. Adam has always been with me, but I understand what it is to feel apart.

As far as I know, I am the only woman on the earth, and although my Adam is the only earthly man, our heavenly visitors are male as well. More questions.

The tree of knowledge shimmers in the sun, perhaps acknowledging our approach. Its branches of dark leaves and its pale, swollen fruit remind me of arms and hands and seem to beckon us, but I know we won't get too close.

We start walking again, and I feel the reluctant pressure in Adam's grip. Birds scatter as we near, flying to other trees not far from us. A few of the birds flutter back toward the tree of knowledge, and I wonder at their feasting.

Do they acquire knowledge as they peck at the fruit, or is the warning for only humans?

For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

My heart pounds as we walk closer to the tree. The breeze captures the scent of the tree's fruit and steers it our way. The sweetness is powerful, stronger than that of other trees. Adam doesn't seem to be swayed by the scent. He releases me and lowers himself to the ground. I know this is as far as he'll go; the finality in his eyes says it all.

I hesitate. Should I sit by Adam and ask him my questions? Or should I walk toward the tree to get a better look at the oval fruit that's the same shape as my palm? I wonder what it would feel like to touch the tree's bark – not the fruit, of course – but the rich bark.

Today I choose to sit by Adam, if only to show him my gratitude for his leniency.

His arm goes around my shoulder as I lean against him. He smells like the grass and the dark earth. My Adam. My loving Adam who has chosen to live with me forever.

Chapter 2

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

Genesis 1:2

“You will be my wife,” Adam told me when I’d first awakened on the day my spirit gave life to my body. “We’re in the Garden of Eden, created by Elohim.” He had stared at me with those gold-green eyes, and my chest had expanded with what I soon understood to be love.

“What is a wife?” I asked.

“What a woman is called when she is joined together as a help meet to a man.”

I had looked into his eyes then and seen gentleness, kindness.

“I will be your husband,” he said.

I remember that I didn’t want him to stop talking in that deep voice of his. “I am yours, and you are mine?” I whispered, touching his face. He smiled then, and I had my first taste of what my life was to be in Eden.

In those early days after Elohim joined Adam and me as husband and wife, I watched Adam closely, and he watched me. We never left each other’s side, each of us fascinated with the other – walking, talking, eating, sleeping. Each moment was a marvel.

We spent many moments – days – exploring the garden, hand in hand.

“Are there any other men or women outside the garden?” I asked one day, and that was when the first shadow crossed Adam’s face.

I open my eyes to gentle tapping on my shoulder.

“Eve? The sun is setting.”

Adam is stretched out in the grass, his gaze on me. We had fallen asleep, watching the tree of knowledge. Violet shadows have gathered, deepening the greens and browns of the grove and darkening the earth beneath. The western sky is nearly indigo, framing the final streaks of orange.

I reluctantly stand, the scent of grass lingering on my skin. “Can we come again tomorrow?”

He sighs and threads his fingers through his hair. “I don’t think we should be spending much time by that tree. It’s forbidden, and being close to it can’t be what Elohim wants for us.”

He is right, of course, but there are other things that are right as well. Something expands in my mind, then flees just before I can comprehend it. Something about another commandment Elohim gave us. Adam turns away from the setting sun, and I glance once again at the tree.

It has changed in the twilight. The once-welcoming arm-like branches seem dark and cold. The dense leaves mask the fruit, no longer offering sweet appeal, its fragrance still and heavy. Just

as I turn to follow Adam, something moves near the trunk. The shape is too large to be a deer. I pause, staring through the dimness, but the shape is gone as quickly as it appeared.

Perhaps it's a reflection of the trunk in the fading light – or it's nothing at all.

“Adam, look,” I say. “Behind the tree.”

But he is already looking as if he too had seen it. He squints in the dimming light. I can feel his nervousness as my heart trips. Anything to do with the tree of knowledge makes him wary.

“Something was there,” I whisper.

He stares for a long moment, and just when I think he might venture closer to inspect the surroundings, he shakes his head. “There's nothing.” His gaze – stern – meets mine. “I don't like being close to the tree at nightfall.”

As if we might wander closer and accidentally eat the fruit in our sleep? I don't say it. I have pushed him enough for the day.

“Let's go,” he says, and I nod.

But my heart still races as I slip my hand into Adam's. The shadow was not like that of a beast but more like that of a human. A man or a woman, I'm not sure. What if, I wonder – what if we are *not* alone in the garden? Curiosity creeps into my breast, curiosity about more than Elohim's warnings. I don't tell Adam about these new thoughts because I, like Adam, don't want anything in the garden to change what is between Adam and me.

And if there is another human in the garden, things will definitely change.

I cling to Adam as we make our way up the slope. If he notices my tighter grip, he says nothing. The moon is a sliver tonight, making travel difficult, and I stumble twice. By the time we reach our sleeping alcove, I'm perspiring, and my breath is heavy. Tonight, for once, I don't want to talk.

Chapter 3

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

Genesis 1:5

Adam waited until Eve's breathing evened before he quietly sat up. He studied her in the near-darkness, assuring himself that she was truly asleep. She looked peaceful as she slept, her hair curling around her shoulders and along her neck, her eyelashes and lips still ... as if she weren't capable of construing all the probing questions she asked when awake.

He moved a strand of hair that rested against her cheek. Her skin was smooth and warm beneath his touch, but she didn't stir. Her incessant questions must have truly worn her out today.

Normally, Adam would smile to himself and brush off her persistence. But not tonight. Though he'd told Eve he hadn't seen anything under the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he'd *felt* something — a presence? He wasn't sure.

Unease formed in his stomach. He wanted to gather Eve in his arms, promise that he could always protect her, and purge the heaviness that seeped through him.

Instead he closed his hands into fists. He didn't want to disturb his wife. She might have more questions, and he didn't know if he could continue to deny what he'd felt back at the tree of knowledge. And he couldn't give her the answers she wanted.

He gave up on sleeping — again. He reluctantly left Eve's side, and their sleeping alcove, and perched on a nearby boulder that overlooked a tangle of flowering bushes. The scent of the blooms floated around him, and he breathed in deeply, wishing he could regain the peace of the previous afternoon — before Eve asked to visit the tree.

Eve hadn't been with him in the very beginning. She had been created after he was, and although he'd told her all of Elohim's instructions, Adam felt she should have heard them firsthand.

Yet she had seen and heard Elohim nearly as much as he had now. So why did she persist with questions and ideas when they both knew Elohim provided everything for them here in the garden? They needed nothing more, wanted for nothing. At least Adam wanted for nothing, for the most part.

It was complicated. No, *Eve* was complicated — more than he could have ever imagined. When Elohim had told Adam that he'd be given a wife, Adam hadn't known exactly what to expect.

But when he first saw Eve and those clear blue-green eyes of hers, he couldn't imagine a time before she came into his life. What had he done before she was created? Who had he been before he had a wife? Things seemed to hold significance only when Eve was with him.

And that's why when Eve felt restless, something he couldn't describe churned deep inside him.

It was as if she was saying to him, "This is not enough. *You* are not enough."

Adam let out a frustrated sigh and rubbed his arms. The air held a slight chill, not so cold so as to send him back to Eve's side but sufficient to make him miss her.

He climbed off the rock and walked the perimeter of the small settlement that he and Eve had organized. There wasn't too much of a difference between their place of habitat and the rest of the garden, except for the paths they had formed. They'd also created areas where they'd grouped rocks and arranged canopies of branches to create places to sit during the mists. Their sleeping alcove provided plenty of shelter from mist or sun, and they needed to refresh the bed of leaves only every few days.

As Adam moved along the paths, he listened for any unusual sounds, but, as always, the night sounds were familiar: the rustling of leaves, the low call of an owl. He circled the alcove where Eve lay, knowing that if he joined her, he'd probably wake her in his restlessness. It was better for only one of them to be tired the next morning. He fully realized he could sleep during the morning, yet he didn't want to leave his wife unattended — not even for a short time.

It wasn't that he didn't trust her or that he feared that she wouldn't tell him every thought or action, but he couldn't stand the thought of being without her. The garden held only one danger — the tree of knowledge of good and evil — and it was that one thing he didn't trust. He didn't like that Eve wanted to visit it so often.

Especially now. Especially with what he thought he sensed earlier.

What did she gain by watching a tree? It grew like the others and produced fruit on a regular basis. Birds and small animals seemed to spend no more time there than at other trees, yet Eve remained fascinated.

Was it because of the unknown — death?

"We'll never die," Adam had told Eve on more than one occasion, "if we follow Elohim's commandments."

But the warning didn't seem to create the same feeling in her as it did in him. Adam slowed his step as he neared the alcove again. He edged closer until he could see his wife sleeping. It was too dark to make out her features clearly, but he was satisfied she still slept unharmed.

Yet ... why should she be harmed? There was nothing or no one here that could harm her.

The feelings that coursed through him weren't new, but they were stronger than he'd ever remembered. He'd do anything to protect her, even if it meant telling her a final *no*.

Adam breathed out, the idea washing over him, bringing greater comfort. That's what he'd have to do: forbid her to visit the tree. It was the only way to ensure her protection. And he meant to protect her — forever. He wouldn't let her die.

Chapter 4

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

Genesis 1:6

Adam is curled up next to me when I wake. He usually stirs easily, but this morning he is heavy in sleep.

I move away from him carefully so as not to wake him. I normally wait until he has gone to wash in the pond before I walk to my stone wall. At the back of the alcove, where I've hung woven leaves to keep the space cool on hot days, I've begun to scratch marks in the stone.

One mark for each time the sun rises.

It's the only way I can keep track of the days.

"How long will we live here?" I asked Adam once.

"Forever."

"How long is forever?" I said.

"Forever will never end," he answered, as if it were obvious.

I thought about his words and wondered if there was a way to count forever. But tracking the number of days and nights with my fingers did not work. Did forever have an end? If there was a beginning – the day that Adam was created – then there must be an end.

Even if we don't die.

I move quietly to the back wall as Adam's breathing fills the silent spaces. With a broken rock that I keep tucked in a corner, I scratch a line about the length of my finger. I look over the many lines I have drawn. They reach from the ground to my waist now, spanning the width of me twice over. I replace the rock and return to the front of the alcove.

Another day toward forever is marked.

Adam's face looks tired, and I decide to let him sleep while I refresh myself. I walk to the pond that branches off the nearby river and wade into it, soaking myself in its delicious coolness. I drink my fill of the water, then wet my hair. Water drips down my back as I walk to the closest tree and gather the fruit. Adam is always hungry when he wakes, whereas I can wait to eat until the sun is halfway up the sky.

But this morning I want to nourish myself for a long walk.

Adam doesn't know it yet, but I want to visit the borders. On the way, I can check on the cattle, and if the mist has cleared past the borders, I might be able to catch a glimpse of what's beyond the garden.

Returning to the alcove, I find Adam just waking up, but I wait until we are preparing to set off for the herb gardens before I speak. "Where are you working today?"

He looks up as he places a stone tool into a basket I have woven from long grasses. "I'll be overturning the soil between the patches of herbs in the north garden."

It's something he can do by himself. "I plan to visit the cattle," I say.

He lifts the basket and straightens, facing me. His gaze is sharp. "I don't want to be separated. We'll go together to the north garden. You can help me till the ground, or you can gather herbs." Elohim has given him the task of keeping the garden and tending to the herbs. I spend most of my time with the animals unless Adam needs my help.

I wait, but he offers no other explanation.

"I haven't visited the cattle for a number of days," I say.

"We can visit them together, *later*," he says.

I have never heard his voice this hard. I don't like it. But I think if I follow him today, he'll be more willing to go to the borders tomorrow. "All right."

He grasps my hand and leads the way, nearly tugging me along. Something is bothering him. My heart pounds as I realize I must be right: he did see something by the tree of knowledge of good and evil yesterday. What was it? *Who* was it?

Perhaps Adam is correct; we should not be separated.

Yet, I still want to visit the borders, and I don't want to wait until tomorrow or another day. It has been a while since we've been there. Adam didn't like my many questions the last time we went, and we haven't been back since. I want to push through the thick trees and look out at what's on the other side. Any time I've gone with Adam, it's been too difficult to decipher anything in the mist.

I glance at him, wondering how much I should press. His bronze complexion looks sallow in the morning light. "You're tired this morning," I say.

Adam stops, as if remembering that I'm at his side, and looks at me, then past me. "I slept little last night."

"Were you dreaming?" I ask.

He shakes his head, and we continue walking, more slowly now. I don't remember Adam having trouble sleeping before. If he has, he has not told me. I am the one who sometimes wakes in the middle of the night, unable to shut out my intruding questions.

The north gardens teem with activity. Bees fly among the flowering herbs that grow on the small hill leading up to a tangle of vines. I've tried to tame the vines before, but I give up when the sun grows too hot. Colorful insects hop from plant to plant, and birds chirp in a chorus of song. I hum without thinking about it, imitating the birds' sounds.

Despite all the activity, a few deer doze in the shade near a grouping of trees. I cross to them and stroke their short, sleek fur. They barely stir, cracking their eyes open only to see who approaches. "You are lazy ones today."

The deer I am stroking blinks its eyes open for a moment, and I wonder what it's thinking. It has been in the garden as long as we have, maybe even longer. All of the animals have been. They don't die either.

I can't help but glance toward the borders. We aren't too far from them, and I can see the top of the line of trees. The morning sky is clear, and I wonder if there is mist beyond the borders today. Adam says he has never seen beyond the borders without mist.

I sense Adam watching me, and I turn to see him smiling. I wave, grateful his melancholy has left. He's told me many times he loves to see me with the animals.

He doesn't want anything to happen to me, I think. And of course I don't want anything to happen to him, to us, or to any of the animals in the garden. I don't want any of us to die, but I still think he is too cautious. There is no one but us in the garden, and it's always been that way and always will be, as long as we follow Elohim's commandments.

Adam bends over and turns the rich earth with a stone tool, and I think of Elohim's commandments to us. Some of them were given before I was created, and although Adam has repeated them many times, I can't always keep them straight.

I walk over to Adam and stand near him; I am his shade from the sun.

"Which commandments were given *before* I was created?" I ask him.

Even though his face is turned down, I see his lips quirk. "The commandment about the tree," he says in a patient voice. I have that commandment memorized.

"And the ones after I was created?"

Adam straightens, squinting in the sun. He's perspiring, and he wipes his forehead with the back of his hand. I think I might help him do the tilling, but there is no hurry to get the work done. There never is.

"Be fruitful and multiply," he says. His memory is flawless. "And replenish the earth and subdue it."

I nod. I know those ones, but I can't remember the exact order. "Are the commandments for the animals as well?"

"They are."

The sun is rapidly warming the garden. I look back at the lazing deer. "They aren't following the commandments," I say.

Adam chuckles. "They aren't doing much of anything today."

I look up at Adam. "What does *subdue* mean?"

"Just as we're doing now." He waves a hand at the flourishing herbs. "Caring for the plants."

He is right, but we aren't really doing that much. I wonder if we are *subduing* anything. The plants grow whether we tend to them or not. The sun and the mist do the majority of the work.

"Let's walk to the river and get a drink," Adam says.

"Can we continue to the border?" I ask. "Just for a short while? There is no mist today."

Adam is silent, but he puts an arm around my shoulder. Even though it's too hot to be touching much, I let his arm remain. Soon enough we step into the cooler shade of the trees. The river on the northern end runs deep and wide. Both of us like to swim like the river fish.

Adam splashes me as we step into the river, and I laugh and dive under the water. I come up near him and tug him in with me. He swallows a mouthful of water and surfaces with a sputter. I quickly swim toward the opposite bank before he can dunk me.

But Adam is faster than I am, and he easily overtakes me. I scream as he pulls me beneath the water again, and I manage to wriggle away. I stay underwater as long as possible, letting the current carry me along the bank. When I resurface, Adam is dozens of paces upstream.

At first I think he's laughing. Then I realize he is calling out to me. He dives into the river and swims toward me. I wade onto the bank and sit down, waiting for him to arrive, my toes dipped into the water.

I can't read Adam's expression when he rises out of the water, but he is by my side in an instant. "You shouldn't have gone this far without me," he says, still breathless from swimming.

"The current is fast," I say with a shrug of my shoulder.

"Eve," he says, his tone serious.

I sigh and look over at him. "Just tell me what's wrong, Adam. Why are you behaving like this? What are you worried about?"

He runs a hand through his soaking hair, and water droplets fall onto his shoulders. He is stalling, and I wonder why he has to think about talking to me.

"Has Elohim told you something?" I press.

"No," he says quickly. "Elohim hasn't visited me without your knowledge."

It's been at least one moon cycle since Elohim has appeared. I brush off beads of water clinging to the hairs on his arm. "Why can't you tell me?"

"I can," he says, but his voice is reluctant. "It's just that I'm not sure of what I saw – if it was anything."

"By the tree?" I ask in a quiet voice.

He nods.

Then he did see something too. We are silent for a moment.

When I reach for his hand, I say, "We should explore the garden, see if there are any changes."

Adam meets my gaze and squeezes my hand. "You really want to go to the borders, don't you?"

I hide a smile. "Only if it would make you feel better."

"It might," he says, and I can see the smile in his eyes. He pulls me to my feet, and we start walking toward the second river. My heart pounds in anticipation. The sky is clear blue, and there is no wind. It's a perfect day to see into the wilderness beyond.

"Do you think we'll be able to catch a glimpse of the sea?" I ask. One of our blessings from Elohim is that Adam and I have dominion over the fish of the sea. But in the garden, there are only rivers.

Adam chuckles. "Perhaps. Or perhaps not."

"What kinds of fish do you think are in the sea?"

"They are probably much like the ones in the rivers," he says, his voice ever patient.

I hear the cattle before I see them. They are scattered quite far from one another today, lowing quietly when not feeding on grass. Adam and I walk among them, stroking their backs and talking to them as if they could reply.

I love spending time with the gentle cattle, but I'm more interested in visiting the borders today. The grass grows higher near the line of trees, and as Adam and I walk through the trees, I relish the cool shade. My hair is still damp from the river. The birds stop their chattering as Adam and I pass by, and I wonder if they have ever been past the borders. Do the birds follow Elohim's commandments as well?

Adam and I stop at the low stone wall that Adam built before I was created. It circles the entire Garden of Eden and has never been crossed by either of us. "There is nothing out there for us," Adam has told me many times.

I place both hands atop the rock wall, which reaches to my waist. There is no mist today, just as I had believed. The sun is stark, and it illuminates the rocky ground that slopes away from us. I look as far as I can see in all directions and see nothing but dirt and rocks in a vast plain.

"Where are the plants? The herbs?" I ask.

Adam is staring past the rock wall as well. "I don't see any. They must grow farther out."

In the distance, a dark form swells against the sky. "What's over there?" I ask, pointing.

"It's too far away to know, but it's probably a hill," he says. "A very large hill."

Shielding my eyes, I stare at the looming form and try to estimate how high it is; it is much higher than the hills in the garden. I turn to Adam. "Do you think the sea is out there?"

"It must be," he says in a slow voice. He too is staring at the large hill.

"How are we supposed to have dominion over the fish of the sea if we have never been to the sea?" I ask.

Adam leans against the wall, his back to the wilderness. He doesn't seem to have the fascination that I do. "We still have dominion over them, even if we aren't there," he says.

It makes sense, yet it doesn't.

"Do the fish of the sea multiply?" I ask.

"I don't know, Eve," Adam says with a sigh. "We can ask Elohim on the seventh day during our worship. Perhaps he'll visit us."

My heart stutters at the thought of asking Elohim my questions; it's much easier to ask Adam. One part of me is curious to know what Elohim might say; the other part is reluctant to voice any of my curiosity. But I don't want to wait until the seventh day. "The animals in the garden don't multiply," I say in a stubborn voice. "And neither do we."

Adam straightens, pushing away from the wall. "They also don't die," he says, staring at me. "You don't want the animals to die, do you?"

Of course I don't. I think of the cattle and the deer. Even the birds are innocent in their flying. I look away from Adam. I don't like the sternness of his gaze.

"Sometimes I wonder. That's all." I run my hand along the rough stone wall. "I wonder if we're meant to keep some commandments and not others."

"What do you mean?" Adam says, but I hear the sharpness in his voice. He knows what I mean.

I fold my arms and look out at the wilderness. It's not nearly as interesting as I thought it might be. The mists made it intriguing. With the mists gone and the sun revealing only long

stretches of rocky dirt, I don't want to leave the garden any more than Adam does. Yet I wonder if there is more ... beyond what our lives are now ... and whether it can be found outside the garden.

I walk away from the wall, back toward the cattle. Adam follows me, but neither of us speaks.

Chapter 5

And God called the firmament Heaven.

Genesis 1:8

On the seventh day, we walk to the altar. Each seventh day, we rest from our labors, just as the gods did when they created the earth and the heavens. Adam has told me the story of the creation many times, a story he learned from Elohim. On the seventh day, we don't tend to the garden or the animals. We spend the day in worship and thanksgiving to our maker. We never know if he'll appear and give us more counsel; it seems that every few moons Elohim visits us.

I wonder what Elohim will see in me if he visits today. I slept little last night, thinking of the commandments that Elohim gave us – specifically the command to multiply and replenish the earth and how it will be through my body that children will come forth.

We are not keeping that commandment. Why does that not bother Adam? He knows the commandments and blessings so well. How could he not be troubled about this one?

The altar Adam has built stands in a lush field just east of our dwelling place and near the east gate. Adam once examined the garden, before I was created, and walked the length of it several times to determine where he wanted the altar. There are few trees near the east gate where Elohim enters the garden, and the grass grows low and thick.

Adam kneels at the altar of rough stones. I clasp my hands together, closing my eyes as he begins to pray. "Blessed is the seventh day. Sanctify this day that Elohim rested from his creation."

His prayers are ones I've heard many times; they're always the same prayers, ones he learned from Elohim. After Adam is finished, we both wait, but the heavens are silent today. Elohim won't be visiting us. My questions will go another day, or many days, without being answered.

Adam meets my gaze as he rises from the altar. A day of rest stretches before us, and I'm not ready to return to our dwelling. We are already halfway to the tree ...

When Adam reaches my side, I say, "Do you think the birds know that it's the seventh day?"

Adam shakes his head. "I don't think they understand the passage of time."

"Do you?" I ask.

His brows draw together, and he faces me, placing his hands on each side of my face. "So many questions, Eve."

I nod slightly, but I don't draw back. I hold his gaze steady. "How long have we been in the garden?"

Adam releases me and lets out a sigh. "I don't know exactly."

"Hundreds of days? Thousands?"

"Most likely thousands."

I agree, but I don't tell him so. I have hundreds of marks on my stone wall, marks made only since I've been tracking the days.

“How many more days will we break Elohim’s commandments?” I ask. I have deliberately irritated Adam; this I know. But I have not slept, and I find it hard to contain my thoughts.

His hands fall away from my face, and I feel the coolness between us like a sudden breeze. “Why do you persist?” he says, his underlying tone thick with impatience.

“Why can’t you answer my question?”

Adam’s face stills, and I step back. Perhaps I have gone too far now.

“Elohim gave us the garden for us to live in,” he says. “He didn’t send us here to die. If so, what would be the point of creating us?”

“So that we can multiply and replenish the earth.”

“Yes, and that time will come.”

“When, Adam?” I ask, my words spitting out of my mouth. “In another thousand days? Look around us. Nothing ever changes. Nothing ever dies, or grows, or multiplies.”

Adam’s expression is one of disbelief – disbelief at the way I am speaking to him.

There is a horrible twisting in my stomach, but I continue, “And how are we to multiply and replenish this earth? Can you tell me that?”

He opens his mouth, then shuts it. Finally, he says, “We would have to become mortal.”

I want the twisting in my stomach to stop, but I must clarify to fully understand. “We would have to bleed?” I ask.

“Yes,” he says. “Without blood, we remain immortal. We can live forever and never die.”

I stay quiet for a moment as his words settle over me. “And until I bleed, children won’t come forth, and if children don’t come forth, we are not following all of Elohim’s commandments.”

Adam knows I am speaking true. But he turns away, his fists clenched.

My head pounds, but he must hear this – all of this. “You have been given as much knowledge as I have been given,” I say in a quiet voice. “Just think on it. If you can answer my questions, then I’ll stop asking them.”

“You want to bleed?” His voice is low and quiet. “To do so, your body will have to change. Introducing blood into your body means that you’ll also face death. This is what Elohim has taught.” When Adam looks at me, his eyes are vivid green against his dark red complexion. “And the only way to do that is to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Is the price worth it just to know all the answers to your questions?”

My heart thunders in my ears. “I don’t know,” I say. “I don’t want to die, and I don’t want to leave the garden.”

Adam’s face returns to an almost-normal color. “Then why won’t you ask your questions to Elohim?”

I swallow against my tight throat. “What if he thinks I’m not grateful for the blessings we’ve already been given?”

Adam exhales, and he steps forward. The calm is back in his expression. “I will ask him for you.”

I nod. It’s the only solution I can think of. Adam’s hand grasps mine, and I let him slide his fingers between mine.

“Let’s go see the tree,” I whisper. “Let’s make sure nothing has been changed or altered – to know that we are truly alone in the garden.”

“Eve, I don’t want us to visit the tree anymore.” Adam’s gaze finds mine. “And I don’t want you going alone to visit the tree.” His breathing slows. “Not ever again.”

I stay very still. “Why?”

“It has been forbidden.”

“To eat of the fruit,” I say. “It has not been forbidden to visit the tree or to see it from afar.” I release his hand. “There might be something changed or something that lets us know if our worries are justified.” The brown specks in Adam’s green eyes darken. His lips are drawn tight.

His hand falls to his side, and he clenches it. “The risk is not worth it. I forbid you to visit the tree, Eve.”

“You are forbidding me?” I stare at him until he looks away. His tight jaw tells me he does not like what he is saying, but it also tells me he’s more determined than ever.

Before I can think better of it, I say, “You are not Elohim.”

His eyes narrow, and I regret my words. But he knows that I must say what I think.

“I am your husband,” he says in a slow voice.

My eyes burn, and I’m hot inside; I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I say the first thing I think of. “And I am your wife.”

His eyes widen for an instant. He reaches for my hand, but I don’t want him to touch me. I want to visit the tree, even if just from afar, to see if there has been any change. I want to know how long we’ll be in the garden. I want to know if Adam and I will be the only people here forever. I want to know how we are supposed to keep two commandments that are completely opposite.

I step back, away from Adam’s reach.

“Eve ...” Adam says, his tone imploring.

I shake my head because I don’t trust my voice. And then I turn and run.