

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

One Million Sold in the Series!

BAD
GIRLS
of the
BIBLE

AND WHAT WE
CAN LEARN *from* THEM



Praise for
Bad Girls of the Bible

“Liz takes—with humility and humor—the evangelical message and puts it in a lens that anybody can look through. A truly remarkable accomplishment.”

—RELIGION & ETHICS NEWSWEEKLY

“The entertainment value of the book is obvious, but the take-home extra is the Bible study. Who but Liz Curtis Higgs could so creatively reveal God’s compassion, unconditional love, and mercy through such ‘Bad Girls’ in scripture?”

—CAROL KENT
speaker and author of *Becoming a Woman of Excellence*

“A fresh concept—looking at what women have done wrong to figure out how we can live right. The conversational style and friendly, relational, upbeat tone (so true to Liz) are wonderful—sassy and yet challenging and inspirational. And the questions are top-notch!”

—RAMONA CRAMER TUCKER
former editor, *Today’s Christian Woman*

“Liz has brought a blended format of fiction, biblical commentary, and thought-provoking questions to each of these characters. I love the way she slips modern-day flesh on biblical truth.”

—DARLENE HEPLER
former director of women’s ministries, Church
of the Open Door, Elyria, Ohio

“Bad Girls of the Bible is not only a hoot to read, it is full of serious warnings about shaky choices and serious encouragement to take God’s way for our own good.”

—GLORIA GAITHER
author, speaker, and lyricist

“I love Liz’s work! She entertains while teaching and leaves me with points to ponder long after. Her insights are fresh and exciting and will draw readers back into the Word.”

—FRANCINE RIVERS
best-selling author of *Redeeming Love*

“I loved the down-to-earth realism. Instead of an airbrushed, plastic feel, *Bad Girls of the Bible* jumps off the pages with fresh, relevant, and engaging applications.”

—BECKY MOLTUMYR
Brookside Church, Omaha, Nebraska

“In her creative, fun-loving way, Liz retells the stories of the Bible. She delivers a knockout punch of conviction as she clearly illustrates the lessons of Scripture.”

—LORNA DUECK
former co-host of *100 Huntley Street*

BAD
GIRLS
of the
BIBLE

OTHER BOOKS BY LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

NONFICTION

Really Bad Girls of the Bible

Unveiling Mary Magdalene

Slightly Bad Girls of the Bible

Rise and Shine

Embrace Grace

My Heart's in the Lowlands

The Girl's Still Got It

HISTORICAL FICTION

Thorn in My Heart

Fair Is the Rose

Whence Came a Prince

Grace in Thine Eyes

Here Burns My Candle

Mine Is the Night

A Wreath of Snow

CONTEMPORARY FICTION

Mixed Signals

Bookends

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The Pumpkin Patch Parable

The Parable of the Lily

The Sunflower Parable

The Pine Tree Parable

Go Away, Dark Night

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

BAD
GIRLS
of the
BIBLE

AND WHAT WE
CAN LEARN *from* THEM



WATERBROOK
P R E S S

BAD GIRLS OF THE BIBLE
PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS
12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

The contemporary story in each chapter is fiction. The characters and events are fictional and are not intended to parallel exactly the biblical story.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. Scripture quotations marked (AMP) are taken from the Amplified Bible. Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked (TAB) are taken from The Anchor Bible. Copyright © 1964 by Doubleday. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked (CEV) are taken from the Contemporary English Version. Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked (ICB) are taken from the International Children's Bible®. Copyright © 1986, 1988, 1999 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (MSG) are taken from The Message by Eugene H. Peterson. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (nasb) are taken from the New American Standard Bible®. © Copyright The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

“Beautiful to Me” by Don Francisco © 1981 New Spring Publishing Inc. (ASCAP)
(a div. of Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing Inc.) All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Trade Paperback ISBN: 978-0-307-73197-5

eBook ISBN: 978-1-57856-971-7

Copyright © 1999, 2007 by Liz Curtis Higgs

Discussion Questions and Study Guide copyright © 2013 by Liz Curtis Higgs

Cover design by Kelly L. Howard

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

WATERBROOK and its deer colophon are registered trademarks of Random House Inc.

The Library of Congress has catalogued the original edition as follows:

Higgs, Liz Curtis.

Bad girls of the Bible: and what we can learn from them / Liz Curtis Higgs. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 1-57856-125-6 (pbk.)

1. Women in the Bible. 2. Bible Commentaries. 3. Christian women—Religious life. I. Title.

BS575.H54 1999

220.9'2'082—dc21

99-21782

CIP

Printed in the United States of America

2013—First Revised Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

SPECIAL SALES

Most WaterBrook Multnomah books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please e-mail SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookMultnomah.com or call 1-800-603-7051

Excerpted from *Bad Girls of the Bible* by Liz Curtis Higgs Copyright © 1999, 2007 by Liz Curtis Higgs. Excerpted by permission of WaterBrook Press, a division of Random House, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this excerpt may be reproduced or reprinted without permission in writing from the publisher.

ALWAYS AND FOREVER,
To my brilliant husband, Bill Higgs, Ph.D.,
who has extended more grace to this Former Bad Girl
than she ever imagined possible.
I love you with all my heart.



Contents

Introduction: Turn Signal	1
One: All About Evie	
Eve: <i>The First Bad Girl</i>	9
Two: Bored to Distraction	
Potiphar's Wife: <i>Bad to the Bone</i>	41
Three: Pillar of the Community	
Lot's Wife: <i>Bad for a Moment</i>	59
Four: Dying for a Drink	
The Woman at the Well: <i>Bad for a Season,</i> <i>but Not Forever</i>	84
Five: The First Cut Is the Deepest	
Delilah: <i>Bad to the Bone</i>	106
Six: Generous to a Fault	
Sapphira: <i>Bad for a Moment</i>	127
Seven: Knockin' on Heaven's Door	
Rahab: <i>Bad for a Season, but Not Forever</i>	147
Eight: Friends in Low Places	
Jezebel: <i>Bad to the Bone</i>	169
Nine: Out of Step	
Michal: <i>Bad for a Moment</i>	191
Ten: I Beg Your Pardon	
The Sinful Woman: <i>Bad for a Season,</i> <i>but Not Forever</i>	214
Conclusion: From Bad to Verse	237
Bad Girls Gone Jazz	239
Discussion Questions	241
Study Guide	245
Notes	263
Acknowledgments	269

Turn Signal

*And when she was good
She was very, very good,
But when she was bad she was horrid.*

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Ruthie never saw it coming. His fist flashed toward her so fast she couldn't duck or turn away in time.

"Nooo!" Her cry echoed off the windshield of the Pontiac but went no further. Who would hear her in this parking lot anyway? With trash cans and alley cats for neighbors, she could hardly expect some hero in a white Ford Mustang to drive by and rescue her, not at this late hour.

Hayden was leaning inside the open car window now, rubbing his knuckles as if to say, "There's more where that came from." As if she hadn't figured that out. As if she wasn't watching his every move.

Ruthie was nineteen, but she was nobody's fool.

Except Hayden's.

She stared at the dashboard, feeling her cheek swell as the pain inched around her eye, along her nose, toward her temple. In her whole life no one had ever deliberately hit her. Even as a child, she hadn't been spanked at home or paddled in school.

She was a *good* girl. National Honor Society. State chorus. Editor in chief of her small-town high-school newspaper.

Nobody ever needed to hit Ruthie, for any reason.

So much for that claim to fame. She'd been hit now, and hard. Slowly, hoping Hayden wouldn't notice, she moved her jaw back and forth, grateful it *could* move.

He snorted, obviously disgusted with her. “I didn’t break anything. But I could have. Now slide over or get out.”

Not much choice there.

The time for making choices was behind her—that was clear. Weeks ago she’d chosen to spend that Thursday night at the Village Nightclub, knowing the kind of men who went there. And the kind of women. *Women like me.* She’d chosen to drag Hayden home with her because he was the right size and the right age and in the right state of mind: drunk. Too drunk to care whether or not she had a pretty face.

Her face wasn’t pretty now, of that Ruthie was certain.

And her choices were nil. If she got out of the car, he might hit her again. If she stayed in the car, he might drive like a maniac and wrap her new Pontiac around a telephone pole, with them in it.

Her new car. The one he routinely borrowed without asking. The one they’d been arguing about, right up until he parked his fist in her face.

She moved across the seat toward the passenger side, sliding her keys out of the ignition as she did so, feeling her head begin to throb. *Don’t let me pass out! Please... Somebody. Anybody.* Resting her hand on the door handle, then carefully wrapping her fingers around it, she waited for her chance. As Hayden moved into the driver’s seat and dug in his pockets for his keys, she took a deep breath, then shoved the door open, nearly falling out on the gravel-strewn pavement.

“Get in the car, Ruthie!” Hayden’s bark was deadly.

She felt him grab for her and miss. “He-e-elp...” It was such a pitiful cry, like a kitten needing milk. Straightening awkwardly to her feet, Ruthie slammed the car door just as Hayden reached for her again. Judging by his curses, she’d unintentionally jammed his fingers in the process.

Maybe not so unintentionally.

She had one goal now: to locate her apartment key among the dozen on the ring she held in her trembling hands. Stumbling toward her security door as she heard the car door open, she found the key at last and forced it in the lock. *C’mon, c’mon!*

When the deadbolt turned, she fell through the entrance with a sob of relief, then turned to bolt the door behind her. But she was too late. He'd already wedged his leg in the doorway and was muscling his way inside. Her heart sank through the linoleum floor, and the taste of dread filled her mouth.

Hayden was taller, wider, older, stronger. And meaner, so much meaner. Why hadn't she seen that? Tasted it in his kisses that first night, discovered it in his eyes that first morning?

His hatred for her was a living thing, rolling off him in waves.

"Don't you understand?" His chest was heaving, but not from the effort—from the anger. "That Pontiac is mine. You're mine. This apartment is mine. Nothing you do or say is gonna change that, Ruthie." With one hand he slammed the door with a noisy bang.

With the other hand he reached in his jacket and pulled out a gun.

Her heart thudded to a stop at the sight of it.

His cold smile told her all she needed to know.

"Upstairs." He waved the ugly black revolver at the staircase that led to her second-floor apartment. *Her* apartment. *Hers!* She'd scrimped and saved to have her own place. For what? So this...this...

It was no use. She started up the steps, doing her best not to trip, not to cry, not to let him see that he was tearing apart everything that made her Ruthie, step by awful step...



Define Bad . . .

Few of us made it our ambition in life to be a Bad Girl. Ruthie wasn't bad; she was abused. But after several years of making bad choices—dating Hayden among them—she'd given up on ever being good.

Some of us stumbled through a rebellious youth or wandered into an addictive habit or walked down the aisle with the wrong guy for all the wrong reasons. Perhaps our sense of self was so skewed we decided we

weren't worthy of goodness or figured we'd gone too far to ever find the road home or concluded we enjoyed our favorite vice so much we weren't about to give it up—no way, no how.

There are some women who even wear badness like a badge of courage. As Tallulah Bankhead put it, "If I had to live my life over again, I'd make the same mistakes, only sooner."

What labels a woman as "bad" hasn't changed since Eve. All the usual suspects are there: disobedience, lust, denial, greed, anger, lying, adultery, laziness, cruelty, selfishness, idolatry.

Badness—in other words, *sin*—doesn't have to be that dramatic. It can be something on the sidelines: an unkind word, a whisper of gossip, a neglected request, an unrepentant attitude, an intentionally forgotten event.

Ouch.

It all boils down to a heart that's hardened against God—however temporary the condition, however isolated the tough spot.

To that extent, we've all been Bad Girls.

And to a woman, we long to be Good Girls.

I have trouble learning, though, from women who get it all right. I spend my energy comparing, falling short, and asking myself, *How do they do that?* It's discouraging, even maddening. It also doesn't get me one step closer to God.

So, for a season, I thought we'd look at women who got a lot wrong. I must admit I went into these stories with a bit of pride between my teeth and soon found my jaw hanging slack at the similarities in these women and me.

How is it possible, Lord? I love you, love your Word, love your people... How can I see so much of myself in these sleazy women?

Ah, sisters. Our sins may be a surprise to us, but they are no surprise to the Lord.

For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD,
and he examines all his paths. *Proverbs 5:21*

Come, then, and meet our counterparts—for good and for bad.
My introduction to these ten Bad Girls of the Bible began many years

ago when I prepared a series of messages about famous women in Scripture for a national Christian convention. For a girl who loves to have fun, I found it the “meatiest” stuff I’d ever tackled. I savored every juicy minute of time spent studying the Bible and reading various commentaries. Not to mention examining my own life in juxtaposition with theirs.

Oops. Big mistake there. Ruth was so faithful. Esther was so courageous. Mary was so innocent. I was so none-of-the-above.

Then I happened upon Jezebel, and something inside me clicked. I identified with her pushy personality, I understood her need for control, I empathized with her angry outbursts...and I was aghast when I got to her gruesome ending.

She was a Bad Girl, all right, but boy did she teach me what *not* to do in my marriage! It was then the seeds for this book were planted in my heart. These stories are in God’s Word for his good purpose—and for ours.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. *2 Timothy 3:16*

Where to begin? With the *First Bad Girl*: Eve. Of course. Badness had to start somewhere.

Next, I found three women who were *Bad to the Bone*: Potiphar’s wife, Delilah, and Jezebel. These were women of whom not a single kind word was recorded. Women who had a pattern of sinning, with no evidence of remorse or a desire to change, who sinned with gusto from bad beginning to bitter end. Because they were made in the image of God, as we were, these Bad Girls weren’t truly rotten to the core. They just behaved that way—and very convincingly!

Another three women were *Bad for a Moment*. Lot’s wife, Sapphira, and Michal were three good...uh...bad examples of women who made one colossal blooper—one big, life-changing mistake that was such a bell ringer it was recorded for posterity, chiming across the centuries. These three women were, by all appearances, believers in the one true God at the start, but when forced to make a choice, they each chose disastrously.

Finally, my favorite women—those who were *Bad for a Season, but Not*

Forever: Rahab, the Woman at the Well, and the Sinful Woman who anointed Jesus' feet with her tears. Yes, they all had plenty of sin in their past, but they also were willing to change and be changed. What a joy to watch their encounters with God redeem them for eternity!

Because I love writing fiction, and because I wanted to make these women come alive for all of us, I've opened each chapter with a contemporary, fictional retelling of the biblical story that follows. The names have been changed to protect the guilty, but you'll spot their stories right away.

You might identify yourself in these narratives too...I certainly did. The same weaknesses, the same temptations, the same choices, and some of the same sorry results. Thanks to the tale of Lila from Dallas, Delilah will never again be a mere flannelboard cutout figure to me. And Lottie from Spirit Lake made me look at my beloved farmhouse in a whole new light, bless her misguided heart—and mine.

May these fictional stories speak to you as well.

Without missing a beat, we'll jump right into a verse-by-verse look at the real woman's story as it appears in the *New International Version* of the Bible, with plenty of "Lizzie style" commentary to keep you smiling as you learn what made that particular Bad Girl tick. Don't faint when you see footnotes—a research paper this isn't! But I believe in handling the Word of God with great care, so I studied more than fifty commentaries from the last two hundred years, along with ten different translations of the Scriptures.

Funny: The older scholars blamed the women for everything and painted the men as heroes. The newer writers blamed the men for everything and described the women as victims and the men as jerks. The truth lies somewhere in the middle, so that's what I aimed for: balance. And truth.

As writer Elisabeth Elliot phrased it, "The fact that I am a woman does not make me a different kind of Christian, but the fact that I am a Christian does make me a different kind of woman."¹

Here's something you may not know about me, even if you've read many of my books: My incredible husband, Bill, has a Ph.D. in Old Testament languages. The man not only reads the *Biblia Hebraica*, he understands it. He combed through my manuscript for errors—in translation, in inter-

pretation, in application. You can breathe easier, girlfriend, knowing I'm not alone on this project!

You aren't alone either. That's the point of *Bad Girls of the Bible*. I want you to know, categorically and absolutely, that whatever your story is, you are not alone. There are lessons here for all of us; each chapter ends with four of them. In the back of the book you'll find a short list of Discussion Questions for book clubs and a longer Study Guide for more in-depth, chapter-by-chapter Bible study.

I had four kinds of readers in mind while I wrote: (1) Former Bad Girls who have given up their old lives for new ones in Christ and are struggling to figure out how and where they "fit" in God's family; (2) Temporary Bad Girls who grew up in the church, put aside their devotion to God at some point, and now fear they can't ever be truly forgiven; (3) Veteran Good Girls who want to grow in understanding and compassion for the women around them who weren't "cradle Christians"; and (4) Aspiring Good Girls who keep thinking there must be something *more* to life but aren't sure where to look.

This is the place, dear ones. Join in.

Find out what a twenty-first-century woman who loves God can learn from an ancient Egyptian temptress who did not: *plenty!*

All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean...

As it is with the good man,
so with the sinner. *Ecclesiastes 9:2*

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. *2 Corinthians 5:10*

In closing, a reminder that each chapter opens with fiction. Except this one. Ruthie is me. That's a small slice of my own early life as a Bad Girl, and, yes, it was very hard to write.

It got so much worse before it got better. Only a few trusted souls on

this earth know how bad. Jesus knows. He knows every inch of my heart. He knows how bad I was, am now, and will be, before I leave behind this transient shell and go on to undeserved glory.

Here's the good news: He loves us anyway.

He loves us so much he will put people in our paths to lead us to him, just as he did for me—for Ruthie—decades ago. After years in the wilderness, I found myself at the end of my proverbial rope, so despondent I was willing to swing from that noose by my own stiff neck—anything to end the pain of disappointment and shame.

In my pursuit of earthly, fleshly pleasures—the whole sex, drugs, and rock-'n'-roll experience that many of us sampled—I discovered a sad truth: Fun and joy are not the same thing at all. Fun is temporary at best; it's risky, even dangerous, at worst. Joy, on the other hand, was a mystery I couldn't seem to decipher.

Oh, girlfriend! When I think of the shallow relationships, the misspent dollars, the wasted years, I can taste that bitter despair all over again. I was a woman without hope—a Bad Girl by choice and by circumstance—convinced that if I could just find the “right man,” he would save me from my sorrows.

One wintry day in 1982 I met that “right man”—a man of sorrows—who willingly had given his life to set me free. *Me!* Sinful, disobedient, rebellious Ruth Elizabeth. My friends Tim and Evelyn, who'd shared their hearts, their hugs, and their lives with me, now shared the truth with me: I was a sinner in need of a Savior.

Finally I understood the depth of my badness and the breadth of God's goodness and so embraced his gift of grace with both hands. Yes, I was *Bad for a Season, but Not Forever*.

And my, oh my, have I found real joy!

With the courage of Rahab, the humility of the Sinful Woman, and the curiosity of the Woman at the Well, let's press on, my sisters, and see what good news our Lord might have waiting for us within these pages.

I promise I'll be with you every step of the way.

All About Evie

*Man has his will—
but woman has her way.*

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

When she was young—and she seemed always to be young—Evelyn Whitebloom was convinced her father’s garden covered the whole earth. If there were boundaries, she couldn’t see them. Only endless garden plots carved into a thick carpet of fescue so green that on a wind-whipped day in Savannah, when the humidity lifted like a thick curtain, the intense hue of the lawn stung her pale blue eyes to the point of tears.

It was the only time she cried, and even then it wasn’t truly weeping. Whatever for? Her life was too heavenly for anything but the brightest of smiles.

Her first memories were of walking with her father through row after row of mulberry trees covered with purplish black fruit. In no time she would be nose-to-chin purple, which delighted her father immensely. Although their home was one of the most venerable in the Historic District, where the wide expanse of Forsyth Park served as their front lawn, it was here in the garden, surrounded by her father’s floral handiwork, that Evelyn spent most of her waking hours.

The Garden—he said it as if it were on the Register and needed capitalizing—was her father’s pride and joy, eclipsed only by his love for his daughter. He demonstrated his love in infinite ways, not the least of which was his concern for her welfare.

“You may do this and this but not that,” he often commanded. Evelyn teased her father that he treated her with such care one might deduce he’d made her by hand himself. If that were true, he’d assured her, then she was

fashioned from pure ivory taken from the single finest animal in God's kingdom.

There were few things in life that mattered more to Evelyn than her father's love. In truth, she couldn't think of any others.

He'd designed his garden to please her, of that she was certain. Fragrant jasmine tickled her nose. Brilliant blue hydrangeas and saucy pink mandevillas tantalized her eyes. Trees heavy with pears and peaches, apricots and plums filled her mouth with their juicy, sweet fruit most months of the year. Stately ferns, taller than she, waved at her when the occasional soft breeze blew in from the Atlantic, eighteen miles to the east. Hosta skirted the borders of smaller garden squares, and wisteria spread its graceful tendrils along low brick walls, dividing the immense green space into manageable quarters, which converged at the centerpiece of the garden: the gazebo.

Not that she'd ever truly *seen* the gazebo. No one had. Ever. It was surrounded by a towering stand of live oaks, older than time and dripping with a heavy curtain of Spanish moss, smothering the whole gazebo in a gray-green shroud. Whatever the appeal had once been, the gazebo was to be avoided at all costs. Hadn't her father said so? Yes, indeed he had, numerous times. The only reason a young person would go there, he cautioned her, would be to look for trouble. The "trouble" was not described. He said only that she would be ruined. In fact, "dead to him" was how he'd phrased it, which made her shudder at the very thought.

"Because I've asked you not to" was the only explanation he ever offered. She loved him, adored him. Obeying him was effortless then. Only last week she'd overheard him making it clear to her beau, Adam Mann, that under no circumstances was he to step inside the gazebo—not alone, and especially not with his daughter, Evie.

Evie. Her father's favorite term of endearment for her.

Of late, Adam had tentatively begun to call her that too, which thrilled her. They were betrothed, were they not? Friends giggled at her old-fashioned name for it. "Where's the diamond?" they wanted to know. Not yet, not until they were officially engaged. That would come tonight at her debutante ball.

The ball! She jumped to her feet, startled. Here she'd sat, lollygagging on a stone bench in the garden, with her formal entrance into Savannah society mere hours away. *Move, child!* Hurrying across the spongy grass toward the enclosed porch that stretched the length of the house, she caught another glimpse of the moss-draped garden centerpiece, then quickly turned away.

Why would anyone want to venture inside the gazebo anyway? It had none of the lilting fragrances or eye-popping colors or luscious flavors that the rest of the garden offered in abundance. *Silly old gazebo.* If her father wanted her to keep her distance, she would do so. Adam, too.

Hours later, in her ivy-and-lilac-papered bedroom, her grass-stained chinos and sun-faded blouse had given way to the dress of her dreams. Not her wedding gown, not yet, but it might as well have been. Hooking the last tiny button at her neck, she held her breath and turned toward the full-length mirror.

Ohhh... The dress was breathtaking.

It was white moiré silk, the purest white her seamstress could find, to match Evelyn's pale, creamy skin and shoulder-length blond hair. Carefully tailored to her slender form, the simple gown would shimmer in the radiance of her father's chandeliers hanging like twin suns in the ballroom downstairs.

Other girls celebrated their debuts at museums and private clubs around the Historic District. Theirs were larger events with longer guest lists. Evelyn's would be a small but exclusive gathering. Savannah's finest in white tie and tails, gathered under the gabled roof of the wealthiest man for counties round—some said in all of Georgia. They'd dance properly and nibble divinely on low-country fare of exceeding good taste.

Absolutely none of that mattered one whit to Evelyn.

The man who was responsible for her very life would present her on his arm to the world at large and to one very special person in particular: Adam Mann. He was the brightest son Savannah had ever produced—an exceptional student, inundated with scholarships. Adam Mann, with his tall, athletic body and blond good looks, never failed to capture the eye of every woman in the room.

But he had eyes only for Evelyn Whitebloom. And she for him.

There was no one else and never had been since her very first glimpse of his manly face, bronzed from years spent in the sun producing prize-winning gardenias for the family nursery business. It was one of their shared interests that made them perfectly suited for each other.

Their mutual love for all things outdoors extended to the animal world as well. He was always naming her pets, which were legion. He knew all the best places to watch for creatures in their natural habitats, from woodland deer to box turtles. When they strolled hand in hand through the verdant squares of Savannah—Monterey and Liberty and Telfair and Oglethorpe—they both sensed a permanence about their relationship, mirrored in her father's approving eyes.

Adam was her best friend, the older brother she had never had, and her future husband—all rolled into one. In mere minutes she would see him in his white tails and fall in love with him all over again. He was everything good, everything pure, everything right.

And he was hers alone.

Smoothing her skirt for the umpteenth time, she stepped into a brand-new pair of silk dancing flats—white, again—grabbed a tiny purse that held nothing but her hopes for the future and one pink comb, and walked as serenely as she could down the long hall toward the staircase.

Her father waited at the top.

Adam waited at the bottom.

In the foyer the harpist waited for her father's signal that his daughter had arrived and the music could begin.

The chandeliers glowed. And she, Evelyn, glowed as well, inside and out. She could feel it, a sense of joy-bathed tranquillity, as she slipped her arm inside her father's. "Daddy," she whispered, not daring to say more. The look of love and pride shining in his eyes was too much to bear, it blessed her so.

They eased down the wide, curving steps in tandem, his large, black dress shoes next to her tiny white flats, while the harp music swirled around them and a roomful of friends and supporters lifted their

sparkling glasses in her direction. The only thing she could take in, though, was Adam standing at the foot of the staircase, blue eyes locked with hers, straight white teeth in an ear-to-ear smile.

There was only one word for it all: *Paradise*.

Within moments her presentation to society was complete, their engagement was announced with a flourish from the harpist, and the evening's festivities had officially commenced.

Evelyn and Adam were ushered to the center of the ballroom floor, barely connecting at shoulder and waist as they whirled around the polished hardwood in graceful circles. Other couples were dancing as well, though they held each other more firmly and seemed to touch more, Evelyn noticed. Whatever that entailed, it was not for her, not for Adam.

She'd heard some of the words her friends called her when they thought she wasn't paying attention—"innocent" and "naive" and "virgin." Those words meant nothing to her.

In a very short time—because her father didn't believe in lengthy engagements—she was to be Adam's bride. She had in fact practiced writing her name that morning. *Mrs. Mann. Mrs. Mann.* How lovely it had looked in wispy letters drawn on heavy Crane stationery. *Mrs. Adam Mann.*

Her new name. It couldn't happen too quickly to suit her.

After several dances and many congratulations, what Evelyn needed—very quickly—was fresh air. The room had already grown stuffy with an abundance of guests and sterling silver warming trays filled with delicacies, not one of which she'd tasted.

Adam promised to join her momentarily, by way of the punch bowl. "May I bring you something to eat, Evie? Are you hungry?"

"Famished!" She flashed him a grateful smile, then wove her way through the crowded ballroom, carefully avoiding toes and elbows, her eyes trained on the tall French doors, her blessed means of escape.

Dear Adam. He'd bring her the perfect thing, knowing her appetite was as small as her waist. Fresh strawberries in light cream, no doubt. She opened both doors, then pulled them shut behind her, inhaling a deep breath of fragrant evening air as she surveyed the gardens yet again.

Twilight bathed the flowers with an ethereal glow, painting the sky with the same pale lavender as the impatiens clustered in the marble pots at her feet. Cautious to keep her pristine shoes safely on the flagstones and off the grass, now damp with evening dew, she tiptoed past a stretch of delicate white dogwood trees until she found her favorite stone bench, clean and dry, as if it had been readied just for her and her pure white gown.

She dropped onto it with a sigh of contentment.

“Psst!”

Evelyn whirled around at the low-pitched hiss. “Adam?” It was pointless to say his name. Her fiancé was too straightforward to play such games. And this *was* a game; she didn’t spy a soul in the garden, even when her unseen visitor hissed again.

“Psst! Here, Evelyn.”

At least he knew her name. She turned left, then right, then left again, only to find herself nose-to-boutonniere with a man dressed in the most elegant evening clothes imaginable. Not white tails though—black. A sleek black tuxedo with a silvery gray vest, cravat, and dress gloves, crowned with a black silk hat, silhouetted against the first twinkling stars of the evening.

She leaned back, either to get a better look at him or to put a bit of distance between them; she wasn’t sure which. He sat down, rather too closely she thought, and let her have her look. It was hard to tell his age, though it appeared he’d been around for a season or two. Not young, but definitely not old. Thirty perhaps. His hair and eyes were as black as his attire, striking against the stark whiteness of his dress shirt and the pale hue of his complexion. Beneath the surface of his skin the shadowy hint of a beard accented his firm jaw line.

The only man she’d ever found handsome was Adam.

This man looked nothing like Adam.

Yet she could not deny he was arrestingly attractive.

“Who are you?” She blurted it out, without any evidence of her debutante manners, then dropped her chin, feeling her cheeks grow warm. “Sorry. This is...well...I live here, so—”

“So you thought you had a right to ask.” He tipped her chin up with one long finger. “And you do.” His smile reminded her of one she’d seen in a photograph of a quite large, quite ferocious Bengal tiger that had polished off its unsuspecting Indian trainer for dinner mere seconds earlier. Or so the caption had explained.

“So, your name is—”

“Devin.” His voice was low and smooth, with no remnant of a hiss. “It’s a Gaelic name, from the old country. It means *serp*—ah, that is, *servant*.” He shrugged. “Or *poet*. Take your pick.”

What she wanted to pick was a safe spot, like her father’s arms, and run there. And where was Adam? She gulped, uncertain of her emotions for the first time in memory. “Are you...from Savannah then, Devin?”

“Yes and no.” The smile had returned. “You could say I’m from all over this part of the world. Tell me, Evie—you don’t mind if I call you that, do you?—Evie, did your father really say you must never sit under any tree in the garden?”

She laughed, something like relief in her nervous trill. “No, silly! I may sit under any tree in the garden I care to. But Daddy did say I am not to sit under the live oak trees that circle the gazebo in the middle of the garden. He *did* say that.” She diverted her eyes, an unaccustomed wave of shyness washing over her. “I’m not even to *touch* that gazebo,” she added softly, “or I’ll be...ruined!”

Devin let out a less-than-gentlemanly snort. “Ruined?”

“Ruined.” She nodded emphatically. “Cut off without a cent. At least, I...well, I think that’s what Daddy meant.”

His laughter rolled across the lawn like tenpins on a bowling green. “Surely not! Your father loves you, child. He wouldn’t dream of treating his only daughter in such a cruel manner.”

He inched closer and slipped his arm behind her. When his gloved fingertips barely touched the small of her back, she flinched. They were inexplicably hot! If not for her gown, they might have singed her skin.

“Evie...you did say I might call you Evie, yes?”

She nodded, stunned. Her tongue suddenly felt dry and thick, as if she

couldn't form words even if her life depended on it. Which for some very odd reason she thought it might.

One word kept sticking in her throat. *No...no!*

"The truth is, your sainted father knows something you don't."

She raised her eyebrows, still speechless. What could Devin possibly be talking about? Her father loved her, utterly and completely. There was nothing she needed to know that he hadn't revealed to her, nothing she desired that he hadn't provided.

A beautiful home. A perfect husband-to-be. A lovely garden.

Granted, that garden had a mysterious gazebo she couldn't explore no matter how much she might want to. But she didn't want to, did she? Well...did she?

"The minute you step inside that gazebo, dear girl, you'll make an eye-opening discovery—something your father knows all about, but you do not. Not yet."

She found her voice at last and rose to her feet. "No! I mean...he does? Oh! I don't? I...uh, that is..." It came out in one long, nonsensical phrase. What sort of man was this Devin, who could turn her thoughts inside out and tie her words up in knots she hadn't a prayer of ever untangling?

He stood as well, waiting patiently for her to gather her wits about her, it seemed. His smile didn't alter one inch. The fingers on her back returned, more insistent than ever, as if invisibly propelling her forward. Had she and Devin moved? It appeared they had, but in which direction? Her beloved garden was looking less familiar by the minute as the last rays of the sun cast long shadows across the lawn.

He hadn't taken his black eyes off her for a single moment since they'd met. Those eyes were full of knowing—a knowledge that made her pulse quicken. It was the only logical explanation for the strange sensations she was feeling in the pit of her stomach.

Perhaps if Devin shared this knowledge with her she could tell Adam as well. It would mean a special bond between them, a secret between husband and wife. *Yes!* That would please her father, wouldn't it? For her and for Adam to know everything that he knew?

She simply had to ask. “Wh-what will I discover in the gazebo?”
“Something delicious.”

Delicious! Well, she *was* hungry. Adam had gone to find something healthy for her to nibble on. Now this Devin said *he* had something for her, waiting in the gazebo. Perhaps he’d gone to a great deal of trouble to prepare it. Devin didn’t strike her as a man who did anything on a whim. She couldn’t risk appearing impolite or unappreciative, not tonight of all nights.

“Something delicious, you say, in the gazebo? Is it fruit?”

He smiled his tiger smile. “It’s every bit as sweet as fruit.”

Ah, sweet! Yes, she’d enjoy that. *How nice.* But sweet things were usually fattening. “Does it have many calories?”

His voice was magnolia-petal smooth. “No calories at all.”

Perfect! “But...how can something be good for me if my father says it’s not to be touched?”

“That’s exactly what we’ve come to the gazebo to find out, Evie.”

They were there!

She hadn’t realized they’d been walking in slow, deliberate steps toward the heart of the garden. A host of unfamiliar emotions, without names or adequate descriptions, surged through her. There wasn’t time to sort it all out, not now when she was so close to making the discovery that Devin had promised. Only a curtain of Spanish moss separated her from the gazebo. She could almost touch the wooden supports, nestled in the arms of the live oaks that surrounded the ancient gazebo with an eternal embrace.

Why had it seemed so frightening from a distance? Close up it appeared cozy and inviting. Devin brushed aside the veil of moss, giving her an even better view of the verdant bower that awaited her mere inches away.

Her first surprise: It wasn’t an elevated gazebo at all. It was sunken! And looked as if it had resided there since time began. *How enchanting!* Devin went down the three steps first, leading to the patterned brick floor of the gazebo. The bricks appeared slippery under his feet, and she wondered for a fleeting moment if they might soil her white silk shoes.

“Take my hand, Evie.” He offered it with a gallant flourish. “You’re quite safe with me.”

She was grateful for her long, white gloves because his hand felt hot, almost feverish. “Don’t let me fall!” she cautioned. “Daddy will skin me alive if I tear this dress.” *Daddy*. Something tugged at the edge of her conscience, a feeling she’d never experienced in her lifetime and hoped she never would again.

Before she could stop him, Devin had captured both her gloved hands in his. They were standing face to face, making it difficult to get a proper look at the gazebo itself, the very thing she’d come to explore. There was no sign of food, of that she was certain. Not a table or chair, only lichen-covered wooden benches skirting the dim interior.

In a word, it was disappointing.

She noticed the fetid air around her growing darker as the shadowy corners of the gazebo faded to black. Oddly, the temperature was creeping up. Savannah flirted with temperatures near the eighties in April, but this felt even warmer than that, almost subtropical.

In the gloomy interior the only thing she could see clearly was Devin’s face. For a reason she couldn’t begin to grasp, he was looking more handsome by the second.

One of her many first-time sensations had a name: apprehension. A desire to go forward, all the while longing to pull back.

She should not be there.

She wanted to be there.

She *was* there.

This newfound apprehension tickled the hairs on the back of her neck. “What exactly did you want to show me, Devin?”

Expectancy hung heavily in the air. She sensed the weight of it pressing her down, down through the bricks, through the ground, to the darkest center of the earth.

She held her breath. Everything in the garden did too; she was sure of it.

Devin bent toward her, his eyelids slowly falling until his black eyes became beguiling slits that filled her senses to the brim.

She gasped when his lips touched hers.

It lasted only a second, whatever it was, but it tasted as sweet as the nectar from an acre of honeysuckle on a hot summer night. Every one of her senses blossomed with possibilities. So warm! So tender! So sweet!

He watched her as she struggled to put a name to it all. “That was a kiss, Evelyn. Aren’t you glad you listened to me and stepped inside the gazebo?”

The gazebo! Oh, she’d truly done it, the one thing her father had asked her never to do. Still...nothing had happened, had it? She was alive and breathing; in fact, she felt wonderful, from the top of her blond head to her silk-covered toes. Although a quick glance down confirmed her earlier worry: Her once-pristine shoes were a muddy brown.

Oh, but a *kiss*, he’d called it. It *was* delicious, much better than plain old fruit. It was over so fast though. Would she remember enough to share her luscious discovery with Adam?

Adam! She really hadn’t considered what *he* might think of her exploring the gazebo. That emotion she’d never wanted to feel again washed over her a second time. If she were inventing words, she would call it *guilt*. As if on cue, Adam’s voice called out to her from the garden.

“Evie!” He sounded far away yet very close. “Evie!” The mossy curtain was swept aside to reveal her fiancé, dressed in pure white and utter shock. “Evie! You know you’re not supposed to be here!”

She blinked, speechless for a moment, glancing around her in a daze. Devin was gone. *Wait*. Perhaps that was Devin lurking in the shadows. It didn’t matter. Adam was there. *Dear Adam*. She had so much to show him.

With a peculiar sense of urgency, she stretched out a gloved arm to her betrothed. “Come! See what I’ve discovered, darling man. It’s quite...ah, delectable.”

He was beside her in a heartbeat, concern creasing his forehead. “Delectable? What are you talking about?”

“Taste and see for yourself.” She half closed her eyes, just as Devin had, and pressed her lips against Adam’s mouth, still agape. When she opened

her eyes fully again, Evelyn gazed deep into Adam's wide, blue ones and spied something she'd never seen before. Love, yes, and trust, but more than that: She caught a wary look of vulnerability.

He seemed unable to speak, unable to breathe.

Ohhh! She realized in an instant he would never be able to resist her. The power she had over him overwhelmed her. She kissed him again, longer this time. A boldness seared through her veins, making her tingle to the tips of her soiled toes. She slipped one slim finger under Adam's neat bow tie, undoing it in seconds, then began unbuttoning his dress shirt, amazed that the tiny buttons gave way so easily.

After only three buttons she had to stop and catch her breath. What was happening to her? She and Adam had gone swimming all last summer in their bathing suits and thought nothing of it. Suddenly his bare neck was the most dazzling thing she'd ever laid eyes on! It was all she could do to keep from pressing her lips there. When she gazed up into his darkening eyes, she realized that Devin's "knowing" was starting to grow in Adam, clearly matching her own.

The faintest of breezes stirred the moss hanging over the gazebo entrance when a deep voice rang through the garden.

It was her father!

"Adam!" He was looking for them. "Where are you, Adam?"

Oh, Daddy.

Panic—had she ever felt that before?—had her fumbling with the buttons on Adam's shirt. The same ones that, moments earlier, had opened so quickly, now refused to respond to her trembling fingers.

"Where are you?" Her father was mere steps away from them.

The trembling in her hands turned to shaking all over. Her face was on fire. Was she ill? Had she caught whatever fever Devin had, with just one kiss? Her stomach felt queasy. When Adam stared down at her, she noticed his face was a startling red. The guilt she'd sensed for the first time only moments ago was now mirrored in her fiancé's own tear-tinged eyes.

“Oh, Evie...” Adam’s whispered words seemed to stick in his throat. “When your father finds us, beloved, there’ll be Hell to pay. Are you ready?”

She swallowed hard and tasted something like fear. “Y-yes.”

Reluctance written all over his face, Adam turned toward the steps that led back to the garden. “Down here, sir...”



High Noon in the Garden of Good and Evil: Eve

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. *Genesis 2:15*

Thirty years ago Joni Mitchell wrote, “We’ve got to get ourselves back to the garden.” Quite right, woman, but Woodstock isn’t back far enough. Not thirty years but thirty *centuries* is more like it. Forty. Fifty. Waaaay back, all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

Eden is often translated as “delight” or, by way of a Persian word, “paradise.” This wasn’t some haphazard wildflower garden; it was a carefully designed and beautifully executed park of trees featuring cedars, cypresses, and figs, “the kind only planned by great kings.”¹

Such gardens don’t maintain themselves; that was Adam’s job. Even before the Fall, he was given the task of caring for the garden. It was far from hard labor though—remember, no weeds, no thistles, no thorns, no frost, no floods, no irrigation, no grub worms, and no “wascally wabbit” eating Adam’s best carrots.

Adam was called to work, but it was a cushy gig.

The first man had everything a human needed to be happy in this garden of God’s: water, food, warmth, shelter, and all-natural-fiber clothing...well, that came later. When God created Adam, he surrounded him with beauty that engaged all his given senses: shapes and colors for his eyes, fragrant flowers for his nose, a thousand textures for his hands to examine, the music of rushing streams to fill his ears, and endless tastes to try, all over the garden.

Okay...*almost* all over.

And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” *Genesis 2:16-17*

There you are. A simple commandment. Not ten of them, just one: “Thou shalt not eat.” (Personally I wish the very first edict from God hadn’t involved dieting, don’t you? If only he’d said, “You must not eat anything with less than four hundred calories.” Now *there* is a commandment I could live with.)

Knowledge is good, but it was the intimate “knowing” of evil that was dangerous. Like any good parent, our heavenly Father built a hedge around his child in order to protect the young man’s innocence and to keep him from learning things he didn’t need to know.

Adam was obedient, but he was also lonely. Ask an only child, and he’ll tell you it’s mighty quiet in the playroom all by yourself.

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” *Genesis 2:18*

Immediately after giving Adam his look-but-don’t-touch edict, the Lord announced that his charge needed company. To keep Adam’s mind off the forbidden tree? To help with the gardening? Or simply in response to Adam’s very human longing for companionship?

One commentator voted for that last option: “Solitude is not good; man is created for sociability.”² Even those of us who cherish our quiet moments alone get stir-crazy eventually. When I’m holed up in my writing loft, I last about six hours before I wander downstairs or hit the Internet to check my e-mail. It’s a God-given drive, this need to connect with other humans. People who have only a little of that drive are called “loners.” People with even less are labeled “hermits.” People with none are put in straitjackets.

“People who need people” have God to thank for it.

First, though, God tried pets. Not just cats, dogs, and yellow canaries but a whole beastly bunch of animals. Adam named them all, antelope to zebra, yet no matter how he tried to fellowship with God's furry and feathered creatures, there were too many of those basic irreconcilable differences.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. *Genesis 2:20*

“Suitable” is elsewhere translated “comparable” (NKJV) and “right for him” (ICB). God was looking not for a good fit but rather a perfect fit. This wasn't *The Dating Game*; it was *The Match Game*, with one and only one correct answer. And “helper” by no means suggested a lowly servant. It meant an equal, a collaborator, a “suitable partner” (CEV).³

This partner had to be as valuable as Adam, as worthy of living in God's glorious Garden of Eden, as equally created in God's image, and yet...different. Adam was made from the dust of the earth. His partner (truth be told) was made of finer stuff.

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. *Genesis 2:21*

(Say, two favorite movie titles in one verse: *While You Were Sleeping* and *Adam's Rib!*)

Why a “deep sleep”? So that Adam wouldn't feel the pain of the Lord's amazing-but-anesthetic-free operation, and so Adam wouldn't see the mystery of creation.

Why the man's rib? Perhaps because when it comes to the human skeletal structure, one rib isn't exactly a load-bearing wall. Plus, from an emotional standpoint, God wisely chose the bone nearest the man's heart as a gentle reminder to keep his helpmate close by his side—physically, emotionally, spiritually.

Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. *Genesis 2:22*

Oh the majesty of that moment when God brought the crown of his creation to the one for whom she was designed!

Girls, you *know* she was a dish. She skipped childhood completely, so no chickenpox scars. No adolescence meant no blemishes marred her lovely face either. No genetic anomalies from weird Aunt Jane, nor did she inherit her mother's flat feet. God did everything perfectly, including carving a woman out of bone (a *real* hard-body look) with ideal proportions.

She was also sinless. Her personality would have been utterly delightful. In *Paradise Lost* Milton wrote of her, "Grace was in all her steps, heaven in her eye, / In every gesture dignity and love."⁴ Other writers in other centuries have called her "the best flower of the garden" and "Heaven's best, last gift."

Since she was the premiere edition and the only woman around, she didn't need to worry about competition from supermodels or centerfolds or the woman sitting next to her in church four sizes smaller than she. The first female was the very definition of womanly beauty. No one was taller, thinner, younger, or prettier. She was *it!*

I know what you're thinking: *Why did she blow this?* How could a woman with all this going for her ruin her life so completely?

Women do it every day. Men do too. We all throw away perfectly wonderful lives because our foolish, sinful appetites take us places we should not go.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Things were still rosy in Eden.

The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called 'woman,'

for she was taken out of man." *Genesis 2:23*

One look at God's gift to man and Adam got positively poetic. "There is no doubt but Adam is saying, 'This woman, first, last, and always!'"⁵

In other words, "Ooh, baby. You got it right this time, Lord."

By no means was she to be Adam's "girl toy." She was created to be his partner for life.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. *Genesis 2:24*

Marriage was instituted on the spot and ordained by God, "not as a civil contract but as a divine institution."⁶ One man, one woman, one flesh. We need never doubt what God's perfect will is on this issue. One mate for life. How it behooves us to choose wisely!

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.
Genesis 2:25

I don't know any practicing nudists, but I suspect more than one has pointed to this verse as justification for throwing caution and their clothes to the wind. Sorry, but that bird won't fly. This is a BF scene—Before the Fall. And there were only the two people, *and* they were married. When they rejoined their bones and flesh in sexual union, it was wholesome and natural, utterly enjoyable, and without embarrassment, shame, or hiding anything from each other.

Ah, but paradise was about to be lost.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. *Genesis 3:1*

Make no mistake, it was a snake. A real, live, cold-bellied serpent—one of the animals God had created as part of his "Let's Find Adam a Friend" project. Satan isn't mentioned by name in this passage, but his slimy style was all over this snake-skinned charmer.

Various translations call the wild creature "subtle" (AMP), "cunning" (NKJV), the "shrewdest" (NLT), the "most clever" (ICB), and the "sliest" (TAB).⁷ An animal ready-made for Satan's uses then. No doubt attractive to look at, with some colorful pattern on his sleek skin. He chose his words with care and saved his venom for later, showing the woman only

his lightning-fast tongue but not his lethal fangs. As Shakespeare reminded us in *King Lear*, “The prince of darkness is a gentleman.”

One word of comfort, sisters: The snake was a *he*, not an *it*, and definitely not a *she*.

He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” *Genesis 3:1*

Why Eve and not Adam? I wonder. Was she in the wrong place at the wrong time, or did the serpent go looking for her? And why, oh, why didn’t she realize that if none of the other animals talked, this one shouldn’t have either?

How I long for more information! Ah well. As Christopher Guest said in *The Princess Bride*, “Let’s just start with what we have.” What we have is one gullible gal and one sly serpent. When the devil comes a-tempting, he seldom goes in for group conversions. He waits until we’re alone, then spins his web of deceit.

The only question I *don’t* have is, “Why didn’t she go find Adam and discuss all this with him first?” Get a grip. She knew he’d talk her out of it. A married woman knows better than to ask her husband a question like, “Shall I buy this outrageously expensive linen suit from Lord & Taylor?” She can bank on a negative response. It’s the same reason women order stuff from catalogs and hope the UPS truck pulls up on a safe day.

Besides, we don’t know where Adam was at this point. We left him back at the close of the last chapter, naked and not ashamed. Maybe he was taking a shower. In any case, the serpent was bending the woman’s ear. She who will be called Eve by story’s end makes (at my count) not just *one* colossal blooper but a *plethora* of mistakes, beginning with one that every child is cautioned against from the cradle: Don’t talk to strangers!

Satan isn’t called the Father of Lies for nothing. He opened his cozy chat with the woman using a deliberate lie—misquoting God, even putting words in the Lord’s mouth. Satan has been doing that for millennia, sisters, and he’s devilishly good at it. For that reason, whenever I hear a line of Scrip-

ture used to make a point—even by a well-meaning speaker or teacher—I go back to the Bible and see what the verse actually says in context.

By twisting the Lord's decree, Satan also tossed out one of the big stumbling blocks he still uses with great success today—making God look less than fair, kind, or loving. When tragedy strikes—a precious child is killed in an accident or a young mother dies of cancer—Satan tempts our faith with the same sort of opening line: “Would a good God allow *that*?”

Cunning doesn't begin to describe this wily serpent.

Author Jean Kerr, of *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* fame, shared a story about her son, Christopher, who'd been cast as Adam in his first-grade play and was less than enthusiastic about the role.

“Why, that's wonderful, that's the *lead!*” his mother assured him.

“Yeah,” he replied gloomily, “but the *snake* has all the lines.”⁸

Satan is full of lines, all right. He reeled in the first lady like an unsuspecting trout.

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden...” *Genesis 3:2*

She meant well by correcting the serpent, but again, dialoguing with the creature to begin with was her first mistake.

“Like a theologian, she analyzes the serpent's arguments; like a lawyer, she enters into debate,”⁹ goes one analysis of this scene. Plenty of theologians and lawyers have been made fools of by Satan. Whether we're innocent as doves or highly educated, the fact is, when Satan talks, the wise woman turns her back at the opening hiss and heads for the hills.

Naive Eve-to-be, however, tried to correct the serpent's misquote and instead made one of her own:

“...but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” *Genesis 3:3*

Notice her second mistake: She added to the Word of God. The Lord never told her to “not touch it,” just not to *eat* of the fruit. When we exaggerate

God's Word, which literally means "to enlarge beyond the truth," we sow seeds of doubt in the minds of others—*Did God really say that other thing?*—and in our own mind—*Maybe God's words need my help.*

The crafty serpent didn't draw attention to her verbal blunder. The woman was already doing such a good job of deceiving herself, his assistance was hardly needed. Instead he picked the dire consequence of sin—death—and turned it upside down.

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. *Genesis 3:4*

So far, this might have sounded like good news to her. It does to us. When Jesus said, "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die,"¹⁰ that was the best news in town. Still is.

What's the difference? Jesus prefaced that statement by saying, "I am the resurrection and the life,"¹¹ but the serpent made no such claim or promise. He didn't offer the woman life, let alone life after death; the serpent offered the woman *knowledge*—a knowledge which led to death. That was God's promise too, but the woman's eyes were no longer on God; they were on herself—another grave error.

"For God knows that when you eat of it..." *Genesis 3:5*

The serpent subtly shifted the conversation away from the Word of God and toward the desires of man, all the while invoking God's name. Not "God said" though; now it's "God *knows.*" Notice that the serpent left himself out of the discussion entirely. He always does. We never hear about how our actions will benefit him or his evil kingdom; he brings up only *our* perceived benefits.

In the Garden of Eden, he reminded Eve of two appetizing promises. First:

"...your eyes will be opened..." *Genesis 3:5*

Can't you hear our sweet girl now? "Gee, I didn't know my eyes were closed. Is there more of this lovely world to see? Am I missing something

good?” It’s easy to criticize her, but the fact is, her purity and innocence break my heart.

How well I remember, when I was truly “sweet sixteen and never been kissed,” hooking up with a woman who was two years older than I was and infinitely more experienced in life. My eyes would literally open wider when I’d listen to her stories of sexual adventures that my virginal eyes had never even envisioned, let alone seen.

Oh, if only I’d known the Lord then and known where else to look! The two blind men by the side of the road outside Jericho knew exactly where to turn: “Lord, we want our eyes to be opened.”¹² When Jesus did so, they rose and followed him. But the woman in the garden wasn’t asking *God* to open her eyes. She thought this tasty-looking *fruit* was going to pop open her peepers.

Boy, did it ever.

The serpent added sugar to the fruit with the second promise:

“...and you will be like God...” *Genesis 3:5*

Satan still peddles this one today with great success. Most of the false philosophies and religions making the rounds have this lie at their heart: *You are God*. People are easily misled by semantics: “Why invite Jesus to live in your heart, when god already resides in all of us?” goes the sales pitch. (Note the small *g*.)

Since the woman pictured the Father of Creation as all-good, all-loving, and all-knowing—which he is, of course, but he’s also all-powerful—she must have convinced herself that being like God was a grand idea.

“...knowing good and evil.” *Genesis 3:5*

I doubt she even heard the “good and evil” part, especially since she was an innocent and wouldn’t have known the difference. To her way of thinking, since life was all *good*, maybe *evil* was even better, right?

Let’s face it, *that* bit of tripe sells well these days. Surfed the Internet lately?

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree... *Genesis 3:6*

The tree that had been in the middle of everything yet obediently avoided—for how long we don't know—suddenly, that tree was *it*. The all-consuming, gotta-have-it thing. Like a child of Christmas past who put only *one* item on her wish list—Cabbage Patch Doll, Tickle-Me Elmo, Beanie Baby—Eve had a fixation about that tree.

She stopped looking to God for the truth.

She stopped looking to her husband for shared counsel.

She stopped looking at the good, wholesome fruit already available to her.

She even stopped looking to the serpent for direction.

Notice: *The serpent never said another word*. He didn't have to. His temptation was complete. The seeds of his deception had fallen on fertile ground. Now he stood back and watched the fruit fall from the tree into the willing woman's hands.

As Ralph Hodgson wrote: "Oh, had our simple Eve / Seen through the make-believe!"¹³

The problem here involved taking her eyes off what was good and acceptable, and putting them on what she *knew*, absolutely, to be forbidden.

Didn't that fruit look tasty though?

...was good for food... *Genesis 3:6*

The witty Lord Byron once said, "Since Eve ate apples, much depends on dinner." True, but let's set the record straight on one thing: It was not an apple, Granny Smith or otherwise. Apples grow in Washington State, not in Mesopotamia. Historians have suggested three more likely suspects for the forbidden fruit: pomegranates, apricots, or figs.¹⁴

Personally I think it was Godiva chocolate.

Whatever the fruit, it appealed to her fleshly appetite. It made her mouth water and her stomach grumble and her taste buds stand up and pay attention. If she wasn't hungry before, she was now.

Bakeries that pump the aroma of freshly baked cinnamon rolls into the mall have utilized this old trick for years. So has Satan. Eve's mistake was listening to her stomach, not her heart.

...and pleasing to the eye... *Genesis 3:6*

At first blush this seems a higher plane: the aesthetics of the situation. Instead of the base appetites of the flesh, she indulged in an intellectual appreciation of the fruit's artistic appeal. It was indeed attractive, a beautifully designed piece of fruit.

Of course it was—God made it!

But pleasing to the eye isn't the same as pleasing to God. Did God plant this lovely tree in the garden for the very purpose of testing the obedience and faithfulness of his created beings? No doubt in my mind whatsoever. The woman's test grade was a C- at this point, with a tough essay question coming up.

When my son, Matthew, was in first grade, his teacher used a tamer version of the tree of knowledge to teach her students right from wrong. On the wall in the back of the classroom was a floor-to-ceiling, construction-paper apple tree. It didn't look good to eat, but it *was* pleasing to the eye. Each child had an apple with his or her name neatly printed on it, dangling from the tree for every small eye to see.

When—not *if*—a child misbehaved in class, the apple fell into a basket at the bottom and lived there the rest of the day. Ugh. Serious peer pressure for a six-year-old. The next morning all was forgiven, and back on the tree went the apple. (Sir Isaac Newton would have argued about the gravity of such an object lesson, but it worked for the kids.)

It also made it easy for parents to do a quick obedience check: "Did your apple stay on the tree?" I'd ask Matthew.

Day after day, week after week, his answer was the same. "Yes, Mama." Until that fateful day months into the semester when he jumped into the car with tears rolling down his round cheeks.

"Let me guess, honey. Your apple fell down today, right?"

“Uh-huh.” He nodded dejectedly, then hiccuped. “Sorry, Mama.”

Oh, that sin nature. It was born in the garden, beneath the spreading leaves of an attractive fruit tree where a woman saw something so pretty she convinced herself it had no power to wreak destruction in her life.

...and also desirable for gaining wisdom... *Genesis 3:6*

Tasty as the fruit promised to be, it was the *fruit* of eating the fruit that really whetted the woman’s appetite—the wisdom, the knowledge. Her ego longed to be equal with God, to have that much understanding and creativity and power.

Where was Solomon when we needed him to remind her that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge”?¹⁵ The book of Proverbs was eons away—but God and his Word were not. They were right there in the garden, walking with the two of them. If she desired wisdom, all she needed to do was ask, as Solomon did, and God would no doubt have given her all she could handle.

But our girl Eve wanted a shortcut to wisdom. We all do. One commentary phrased it this way: “With rationalization and justification Eve was soon in rebellion against God.”¹⁶ This translation of the verse says it all: “The woman was convinced” (NLT).

...she took some... *Genesis 3:6*

Everything stands in the balance right here. Touching it isn’t tasting it—not yet. How often do we reach out for something we know to be wrong while our conscience is screaming, *No! Stop! You know better!*

Bet that happened to Eve, too.

Yes, she was innocent, but she also had one important piece of wisdom already tucked in the folds of her gray matter: God had said, “Don’t eat of the tree.” She knew that much to be fact.

Then why did she take the fruit?

Oh, the ink that’s been spilled on that subject! One Bible scholar found her courageous: “It must have taken great daring to sin for the first

time.”¹⁷ I have sympathy for the woman, but sorry, I can’t see awarding her a Medal of Valor for being the first Good Girl to go Bad. Others have chalked up Eve’s actions to “curiosity” and “ambition.”

When those qualities—courage, curiosity, ambition—are aimed toward a lofty goal such as exploring a new mission field, they’re admirable. But this woman had already demonstrated her goals and motivation, none of which honored God: “I’d enjoy the taste; I like the look of it; I’ll be like God.”

She could have quit, let go of the fruit, run the other way.

But she didn’t. It was her last chance to remain innocent. At this point, no matter how noisy her conscience, the woman pressed on, perhaps assuring herself, “Hey, I’m not dead yet! Might as well take a bite.”

...and ate it. *Genesis 3:6*

Incredible. And devastating. The entire axis of human history rotated on six words: “She took some and ate it.” In the original Hebrew, it is only three words: *wattiqqach mippiryō watto’cal*.

The fall of man. No high drama, no lightning bolts, no John Williams musical score full of kettledrums and trumpet blasts. Just the soft, juicy sound of the woman’s teeth piercing the skin of the forbidden fruit. Milton wrote, “Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate. Earth felt the wound.”¹⁸

Hang your head, O ancient sister. You had no one to blame but yourself. Not a dysfunctional childhood, not a husband who led you astray, not abject hunger, not poverty, nor need of any kind. You couldn’t even blame that serpent, though I’m sure the thought crossed your mind.

Speaking of which, where *was* the serpent, since he didn’t offer an “attagirl”? Was he celebrating his victory in silence? Were the fallen angels rejoicing in some distant region?

And where was Adam during—? *Oh*. Look who showed up.

She also gave some to her husband, who was with her... *Genesis 3:6*

The ten translations I studied all include the notion of Adam’s standing next to her. None of them indicate when he arrived—whether it was

early in the temptation scene, at midpoint, or after the fatal bite. If he'd been there, might he have tried to stop her? Would she have listened? Or would he have let her try it first, like an official food taster for the king?

We don't know and never will know, this side of heaven.

We know enough though. We know that not one word of protest or hesitation on Adam's part is recorded in Scripture.

...and he ate it. *Genesis 3:6*

It took the craftiest creature around to tempt the woman. All it took for the woman to tempt Adam was a question, posed with her eyes and extended hand: "Wanna bite?"

When Adam ate of the fruit as well, he became her partner in sin, even as he was in marriage; that is to say, they were equals. The woman took the rap for going first, but they both ended up in a prison of their own making.

Without the woman to offer him a bite, would Adam have tasted the fruit of that tree? Absolutely. Man is no less a sinner than woman just because he went second instead of first down the path of destruction. We are *all* sinners in need of a Savior. But, to be fair, because she offered her husband the fruit instead of doing the right thing and trying to talk him out of it, Eve adds another mistake to her growing list.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened... *Genesis 3:7*

Interesting. God told them they would die, but the serpent told them their eyes would be opened. The serpent was still victorious. For the moment.

...and they realized they were naked... *Genesis 3:7*

This wasn't "Oh, boy!" This was "Oh, *no!*" To appear before the Lord naked was a major faux pas, and the Israelites who first heard this story would have known that. Even being naked with one another was embarrassing. As Mark Twain observed, "Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to."

...so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. *Genesis 3:7*

To my way of thinking, this is proof that the forbidden fruit couldn't possibly have been a fig. Reach for a leaf from the one tree that spelled your doom? Talk about your dead giveaway!

Those leafy outfits resembled aprons, covering the bottom half of their naked bodies. A bit like hula skirts, perhaps, but with more coverage, since fig leaves are wider. Ah, but those figgy "puttings" couldn't hide their sin. Few things successfully do.

When I was a not-so-sweet-anymore seventeen-year-old, curled up in an overstuffed chair in my bedroom one summer evening, I was reading a book and—horrors!—smoking a cigarette. A major no-no. *Huge*. I heard my father coming up the steps and, in a panic, put out the cigarette, then tossed the whole ashtray out the window and sprayed perfume around me like a mad woman.

The one who was mad was my dad. "Have you been smoking in here?"

"Uh...gee, not exactly, Daddy."

"Then what exactly *have* you been doing?"

Sewing fig leaves, that's what.

I didn't get away with it. Neither did the two in the Garden of Eden.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day... *Genesis 3:8*

"Late in the afternoon a breeze began to blow" (CEV), but for the first couple, it was an ill wind. They heard the footsteps of God, their creator and friend. They'd enjoyed a fellowship with him we can only begin to imagine. But sin had repercussions, and separation from God was the worst of all. For the first time, those fatherly footsteps struck terror in their hearts.

"You will surely die," he'd said.

He was a God who kept his promises.

Now fallen Adam, who had named every animal in the garden, had to find a name for what they did: *sin*. A name for what they felt: *shame*. A name for the consequences: *separation*.

...and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.
Genesis 3:8

We delay the inevitable when we hide, but still we do it. Silly. Sad. And sinful.

But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" *Genesis 3:9*

God didn't call out to both of them, "Hey, where are you two love-birds?" He held Adam accountable first. To Adam's credit, the man responded immediately with three true statements:

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." *Genesis 3:10*

Before we pat Adam on the back for honesty, though, remember that when confronted with our sins, we often do the same thing: point out what we did right, or what was true, in the desperate hope it will minimize or divert attention from the ugly things we did wrong.

God saw right through that fig leaf.

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked?" *Genesis 3:11*

We aren't smart enough to figure this stuff out ourselves, and God knows it. Knew it then, knows it now.

One wonders if perhaps a bit of fruity pulp was stuck between Adam's teeth.

"Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" *Genesis 3:11*

It doesn't get any more direct than that. God asked a legitimate question about obedience, which produced one very circumspect answer.

The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” *Genesis 3:12*

Three more statements from Adam. Two were totally true and without guile—she gave him the fruit and, yes, he ate it—but oh, that first response! Adam shifted the blame for his sin as far away from himself as possible. First toward “the woman”—he didn’t even call her his wife, his beloved, his partner. Their separation from God had already led to a rift between them, a hairline fracture in the “bone of his bones.”

But he didn’t blame only “the woman.” No, the one whom “you put here with me,” Adam insisted. Oh, there’s a novel idea. Blame the *Lord*. Adam was suggesting that left to his own devices, he’d never have eaten that awful fruit. It was her fault or God’s fault. Not his fault.

(My own husband, Bill, thinks Adam would’ve been too distracted by the woman’s charms even to *notice* the tree.)

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” *Genesis 3:13*

It was the woman’s turn. She didn’t distinguish herself either. “Eve has always been a convenient peg on which men hung unflattering theories about women.”¹⁹ I’ll point out it was a man who said that and not recently—1941. But the fact is, she followed her husband’s example of not taking responsibility for one’s actions and shifted blame faster than the late comedian Flip Wilson’s Geraldine character could wail, “The devil made me do it!”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” *Genesis 3:13*

Her final mistake here was the classic of them all: “The snake tricked me” (CEV).

Why do we think we can get away with that “blame the serpent” stuff, when we who have the power of Christ living in us are told, “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world”?²⁰ Satan may be cunning, crafty, and clever, but he is in no way equal with God.

In my own efforts to be blame-free, I've hidden behind that cloven-hoofed character more than once. I heeded Martin Luther's advice from 1521—"be a sinner and let your sins be strong"—without embracing the whole of it—"but let your trust in Christ be stronger." Before I had any relationship with God, I took singular pleasure in wearing a T-shirt that proclaimed, "Lead me not into temptation... I can find it myself." I was, as one writer eloquently described Eve after the Fall, "a changed being—a rebel—a sinner."²¹

Yes, I was. Yes, I am.

Eve was a rib, a woman, a wife, and a sinner. Finally the dear soul got a real name.

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother
of all the living. *Genesis 3:20*

When her firstborn, Cain, arrived—ooh, long story there!—Eve did not forget the Lord but acknowledged God's hand on her womb:

She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."
Genesis 4:1

Indeed, much later in Eve's life (you won't believe how much—like decades later), she gave birth to Seth, who stands in the lineage of Christ. Through her offspring, that old serpent would eventually be crushed forever.

Eve is unique among the Bad Girls of the Bible.

If she had been *Bad to the Bone*, she would have made the *serpent* eat the fruit, chopped the forbidden tree down to size, and charged Adam some serious coin for the privilege of enjoying her favors.

If she had been *Bad for a Moment*, she would have changed how she fixed fruit salad, not changed the course of human history.

If she had been *Bad for a Season, but Not Forever* she would have reveled in her sin for a long time, looking for more trees to nibble on, before she was invited to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Life—the Son of God.

She was instead the first woman God ever created. A one-of-a-kind Bad Girl.

When she was perfect, beautiful, and innocent, I found no toehold where I could connect with Eve.

When she was tempted by her flesh, humbled by her sin, and redeemed by her God, I could sing out, “Oh, sister Eve! Can we talk?”

What Lessons Can We Learn from Eve?

Don't get into a debate with Satan—get out!

We can't stop the Adversary from whispering in our ears, but we can refuse to listen, and we can definitely refuse to respond. No arguing, no debating! Like Eve, we'll come out the loser. Let's stand and resist. “Just Say No.” If he doesn't flee, we can take off running for the safety of the Lord's arms.

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. *James 4:7*

Know God's Word so you won't be fooled.

When the serpents in our lives say, “Did God really say...?” let's be the first on our block to declare, “No, God did not!” Because Eve didn't remember the words of God's *one* commandment accurately, she left herself wide open for temptation to rush in. Studying, even memorizing, verses from the Bible gives us the strength to say no because we *know*.

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. *Psalms 119:11*

Watch out for the Big Three.

Women are physical, emotional, and spiritual in nature, and all three areas have their weak spots. In Eve's case, the serpent sank his fangs into all three, by appealing to her physical appetite for food, her emotional appreciation of beauty, and her spiritual desire to be like God. Satan uses exactly the same tactics today. He's not creative in the least, just persistent. By

identifying our weaknesses in all three areas, then arming ourselves with biblical defense methods, we can keep from experiencing our own daily (hourly!) reenactment of the Fall.

For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

1 John 2:16

Let's avoid the blame game.

As one of six kids, I remember shouting at a very young age, “Not me! Not me!” Shifting blame is practically an American pastime. So whom shall we blame for our proclivity to sin? Our mothers? Our grandmothers? Wanna go all the way back to Eve? Or take a page from Adam’s diary and blame God—“It’s your fault, Lord. You made me this way!” No. God gave us his Spirit to empower us, his Word to strengthen us, and his Son to catch us when we fall. We have no one to blame but ourselves when we choose to sin. And no one to thank but our Creator when he chooses to save us from our sins...again.

Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! *Romans 7:24-25*



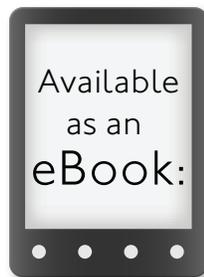
WATERBROOK MULTNOMAH
PUBLISHING GROUP
A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC.

Want to keep reading? You've got options:

Purchase a copy direct from the publisher or from your favorite retailer:

BUY NOW

Download a copy for your eReader and keep reading right away:



amazonkindle

Google
books

iBooks

nook
by Barnes & Noble

And More...