

COVER PAGE

# **Even in Eden**

**Wally Parker**

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## Even in Eden

Adam had pretty much emerged from his funk after Eve showed up. He was happier having someone to talk to and smoke a little dingleberry root with, and on chilly nights he found the cuddling thing agreeable, although he thought maybe he didn't yet really quite grasp the nuances of it. Sometimes it made part of him swell up, ugly and ridiculous, which of course he always carefully hid from her, not wishing to embarrass himself since she always looked as graceful and radiant as the flowers that continuously blossomed throughout the garden, and often she seemed even more intoxicatingly fragrant.

But in time he became absorbed in a curious question to which he could not find an answer. In response to Eve's complaint that there wasn't enough light in the kitchen of the little bungalow which he'd fashioned from ash wattle and lake reeds, he had fitted into the wall a rectangular frame, which he called a "fenestra," made out of sticks of bamboo lashed together at the corners with dingleberry vine. One night when Eve was sleeping beside him and the fire was fading and he was exhausted from trying to conceal the strange swelling thing, he realized that the diagonal measure of his creation might not be a rational number. This puzzled him.

"How can this be?" he asked himself as he sank slowly into sleep. "I don't even know what a rational number is."

But it would be a long time before anyone would come along to explain this mystery, and Adam worried no more that night about it. He did notice, though, e'er he slipped into the arms of Morpheus, that attending to these abstract thoughts seemed to have calmed his turgid appendage, which had shriveled up like a dried red pepper.

\* \* \*

One warm summer's day Eve was walking among the poppies, on her way to pick

some persimmons, when she noticed Saddam recumbent under the bong tree.

Well, actually he was draped over a plush velvet seat in his pea-green bower, seemingly afloat beneath one of the larger branches, enjoying the shade.

"What'cha doin'?" she asked.

"Nuthin'," Saddam said, shrugging his slender shoulders.

She eyed him judiciously. He looked mighty dapper in his lavender silk suit with the magenta lapels and his rough-buffed blue suede shoes. He puffed on a cigarette through a long silver-and-ebony holder. His gaze never wavered.

"You look like you're waiting for somebody," she said, feeling a little uncomfortable.

He smiled. "Godot," he said.

"The God entity?"

"It's a waste of time, of course." He patted the soft seat next to him, beckoning, and she sat there, a bit tentatively, as he continued. "So you might as well enjoy yourself."

"Oh, I do," she said.

With a strange undulating motion he raised himself and stood erect. "Can I get you anything? Something to drink perhaps?"

"Do you have any dingleberry wine?"

He shuddered his distaste. "Yech. How 'bout some mead?"

"Mead?"

"It's fermented honey. Very tasty. Very now."

When he said "it's fermented honey," it sounded so intimate that she felt a little trill run over the fairy hairs on the back of her neck. So she allowed she'd sample a sip or two, and when he returned from the galley Saddam sat down again next to her, seeming almost to insinuate himself into every cove and harbor of her body from her ankles to her ear. It was quite surprising and a little disconcerting.

"You're sitting *very* close to me," she said as she took the gold-lined silver goblet from his three-fingered hand.

"You have a fascinating shape," Saddam whispered with a curly grin. "Much different from mine."

She sipped her mead. It was syrupy and sweet and yet somehow tart, too, like beer, and Saddam had sprinkled a rust-red powder, like paprika, on top of the foam.

"Yummy," she said, squirming a little in the plush cushion.

"Like it?" Saddam inquired, ingratiatingly, with a foppish glint in his blinkless eye. "I put a little grated nut dust on it. Gives it a certain..."

At this moment a carved wooden statue of a rather beautiful cat, which sat beside her in the bower dressed in a fancy gingham skirt with a tight satin bodice and a large, gay, floppy lace hat, began to sing in a gravelly contralto, "Je ne sais quoui, amour, du jour..."

"Hush," hissed Saddam, and the singing stopped.

Eve stared at the statue and then at Saddam. "You're a ventriloquist!" she said, doubly pleased with herself.

"Ah, you do me undue honor, ma'm'selle," Saddam purred in his oddly kittenish way. "You are the ventriloquist, and a mistress of poltergeists, for unless I am mistaken, that statue not only sang but also wrang its paws and shed a tear or two."

She looked at him coyly, without really meaning to. "I know you did it," she said. "I just can't figure out how."

"I really haven't," he replied, turning away modestly with a shrug. "Yet."

She noticed then another statue on the opposite end of the bower, a gargoye it seemed, with a smooth, round head, tufted pointy ears, large yellow eyes and a beak like an owl's. Just then it turned, or rather its head swiveled on its thick neck until the clear amber eyes stared directly at her.

"Omigod," she gasped.

"Huh? Oh..."

"Ou. Ou. Ou," the owl said, both its lips and its gaze unwavering.

She laughed and slapped Saddam near his slim shoulders. "It's you!" she cried.

The owl, dressed in a waistcoat and spats, sporting a monocle, began to dance a little jig while it sang, "I vant der vine, I vant der vine, it kips me hoppy all uff der time, yo, I kant ket merry mitout der tinglingberry." And all the while it stared at her as though she were the strangest sight it ever had seen.

She laughed gleefully, clapping her hands. "Saddam, you are soooo talented," she said.

He looked at her from beneath those hooded lids. "Ah, it's nothing, my little pomegranate," he said soothingly, "nothing at all. Or perhaps it's my incredible bifurcated tongue. But, here, let me show you..." And his long black tongue was suddenly skipping along the upper fringe of her peasant blouse, tickling her, darting down briefly into the warm moist shadows before it retracted again like the tip of a bullwhip, quivering, between his horny lips.

"Cool, huh?"

"Oh, my."

Saddam tried to do the serpentine equivalent of raising an eyebrow, but it just made his eye bulge out. Finding this riveting, but wishing not to be rude, Eve looked up and noticed for the first time the shaggy, grape-sized nuts that hung from the bong tree's thickly laden branches. "Those look good," she said.

"Oh, they are. But those are God's nuts. You mayn't touch them. He's forbidden it. Actually, it's my job to guard them."

"You guard God's nuts?"

He smiled and looked up, as if he might see something in the sky besides an occasional cloud. "Of course," he said softly, slowly, thoughtfully, bulging his eye out again and looking at her rather peculiarly she thought, "I could be corrupted."

He regarded her in an inquisitive manner while he carefully inserted another cigarette into the slim ebony holder and placed it between his lips. "Gimme a light, will ya?" he slurred, smiling, showing a row of shiny pointed teeth as pearlescent as the nacron of seashells. Quite pretty, she thought. She picked up the embossed lighter from

the velvet seat of the bower and leaned toward him, flicking the coruscant flint that sparked the volatile vapors surrounding the sodden wick. Saddam peered into the void of her blouse as she bent forward, and placed his three-toed hand on her thigh, at which she recoiled so suddenly that the lit cigarette fell into his lap and he withdrew his hand in pursuit of more urgent business.

"I have to go gather some persimmons for dinner," she said then, feeling just a bit and oddly anxious.

"Ah, yes," sighed Saddam, puffing nonchalantly and trying to hide the ugly black hole in his pale purple trousers. "Won't you come visit again though? Later tonight, perhaps?"

She shrugged her shoulders a little and looked at him uncertainly. "Well..."

"Here, take some of this grated bongmeg and sprinkle it on your persimmon pie. Adam will love it." He arose from his seat and took a small vial of bongmeg from a hole in the trunk of the tree.

She smiled happily. "Okay, thanks," she said, taking it, and then with a wave she skipped merrily on her way.

"Watch where you're going, girl," he called out avuncularly. "You might step on something."

And then, with just a hint of a grin stretching his jowls as he sashayed back to the shaded maroon cushion of his luxurious chartreuse bower, one of his sleek blue-suede Italian shoes squished down into a huge glob of owl pucky.

"Shit," he muttered.

"We prefer 'solid waste,'" a great voice boomed from the sky.

It sounded like thunder to Eve, who hurried along, filling her skirt with persimmons, hoping to gain the shelter of her little grass hut before the rains came.

\* \* \*

Eve sprinkled the entire vial of bongmeg into her persimmon pie that evening and Adam was so ecstatic over its taste he ate four pieces. She, demurely, stopped at three,

leaving one for later.

"Wunnerful pie," Adam exclaimed through a mouthful. "Has a kind of, I don't know, just a glimmer, a *souçon* one might say, of must."

"Like damp wood ashes in a fireplace."

"More like powdered oak leaves."

"Or purple parsley."

"Well, what is it?"

"It's God's nuts."

"God's nuts?"

"I chanced upon Saddam today under the bong tree. He's guarding the nuts. I guess they're God's personal stuff. He says we're not supposed to pick them because God said so. Did God say that to you?"

"He said to stay away from the bong tree, but so far I've never had a reason to wander over that way."

"Saddam gave me a bit of bongmeg to share with you. He said you'd like it."

"He's a friendly cuss."

"I'm not sure you can trust him, though."

Adam tilted his head forward and looked out at her from under his raised eyebrows in a gesture of inquiry. "Oh?"

"Well," Eve said, "strange things happen in his presence."

Adam laughed, feeling somehow eased. "You can say that again," he said.

Eve found herself oddly enthralled by the thick, dark hair along the brows over Adam's innocent eyes, riveted by the obsidian gaze that gathered everything in but yet seemed oblivious to it all, seduced by the supple softness of his leathery skin, smooth and warm, enchanted by the brilliance of his shy smile—the strange attraction of some hidden power. She wanted to stroke those velvety hairs, press her lips like butterfly wings upon lid and lash. And yet she dared not quite approach him. She remained very still, her surging desire swelling and leaping like the flames of a bonfire, signalling

danger through the darkness to ghost ships draped in a pearly cloak of fog rent with flashing spears of evanescent light.

In the crow's nest of his mind, Adam was having an oneiric reverie, watching his friend almost absentmindedly, imagining piles of pebbles that could be divided into smaller piles of equal size. But some piles could not be divided into any number at all of smaller equal-sized piles.

"Look," she was saying, "God made all this, yes? Every whit of it, yes? Every jot and tittle, including Saddam, including the bong tree, including this paradisaic garden, yes? All of it."

"Including Saddam," he mused. The two hummocks of soft flesh that rose from her chest, with their pinkish-brown summits teasing the material of her teddy – for she was in her evening garb – enchanted him. They could not be divided into anything but what they were. But what were they? Not pebbles, he knew, because his hand had brushed them once, when she was sleeping, and she had uttered a sound of pleasure that had made him draw back quickly so as not to disturb what had evidently been a sweet dream of bliss. And they were soft, and pliant, not at all like pebbles.

Yet if she'd had eight of them, as did the she-wolf he'd seen just that morning, lapping the cool water down at lake's edge, they could be divided into two heaps of four, or four of two. All the numbers he knew, in fact, which were becoming rather numerous, could be divided this way until, at some juncture, perhaps from the outset, they couldn't be any more. And then he had a flash of insight, a blinding light of realization, that any fraction could be reduced to some irreducible form, which stunned him as much as had that accidental brush of his fingers across those globular extrusions, upon which now he gazed in rapt amazement as her voice emerged from them.

"Of course. The world. Everything that is and everything it does. The world and its ways. It's all just an entertainment, see? A little light comedy to amuse the tiresome bored guy with the big hollow voice. It's a game. It's a shuck-and-jive, three-card monte, where's-the-pea sidewalk circus. Otherwise, there *is* no god; there's just another

pretender who can't, and doesn't, run everything. Sure, he throws lightning bolts at you. Sure, he's bigger and cleverer than you. So what? Crap happens to him, too. And does he liberate you from this servile state you so adore if you've been good? No, only if you disobey and taste the bong. Well, I say, fine, big guy, big deal, punish me because you can, but don't come calling for sympathy when things go wrong because I'm just a player in your joke, and as far as I'm concerned unless I'm enjoying it you can stuff it all up your nose."

Adam felt intensely uncomfortable with this line of thought. "You're asking for trouble," he whispered.

"Asking for it? No, I've already got it. I was born with it. It's me. I'm no less part of creation than he is, am I? Maybe I can't make statues sing and dance – but then again maybe I can. And you, you wuss, what are you? A dingleberry? Would you just cling to the hairs of god's ass? Well, make your choice. But in point of actual fact, as I see it, we're going to be free soon. However many weird forces may be arrayed against us, and however much they may all clamor to be anointed with the aftershave of god, I aim to walk free of the shadow of fear and I'll let god do, and be, however he will. And you likewise may do, and be, as you will."

She arose then, with a smile, and left the little grass hut. Adam watched her bend over as she exited; the round firmness of her buttocks seemed to excite his wayward appendage into twitchy arousal. Fractions, insurrection, tushies, tumescence – it was dizzying. Another white flare of mysterious light shuddered through him although he remained seated, crosslegged, dumbfounded, overwhelmed by words he didn't know and couldn't understand and yet knowing, understanding, craving, swelling with wonder into the black universe, where a warm breeze blew across the garden as Eve made her way toward the lair of the pajama-clad Saddam and the forbidden ecstasy of his prized bong nuts.

"Hail, Effendi," she cried as she approached him.

"Ah, little pomegranate," he hissed as he switched off the TV and rose in the light

of a dozen candles to greet her.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything."

"No, not at all. A little touchup course in lounge lizardry." He patted the seat beside him, which he'd folded out into a very large reclining bed with blue satin sheets nearly the color of his silk pajamas.

"I brought you a sack of lake agates. I thought you might like them. Adam finds them fascinating for some reason; they glitter like the stars." As she, warm and slinky in her black teddy, reclined beside him she opened the sack and slowly tipped it. A cascade of glittering agates flowed across the sheets.

"Diamonds!" Saddam cried, choking back his excitement. Then, clasping his hands together in six-fingered glee, he asked, "Are they for me?"

She smiled shyly.

He produced two crystal goblets and filled them with an iridescent green substance. He offered her one and clinked her glass.

"What is it?" she asked, sipping hers tentatively.

"Absinthe, I call it, as in 'absinthe makes the hearth glow maunder.' But he calls it rambosia."

"You mean ambrosia."

"I said 'rambosia.' That's what he calls it."

"He makes mistakes?"

Saddam shrugged. "Who doesn't? I think he's dyslexic."

Eve's eyes glittered in the candlelight like the wealth of watery gems that Saddam stirred idly with his chicken-toed fingers.

"What is this place anyway, where we are?"

"He calls it Eden," Saddam said. "It's an anagram of 'need.'"

"You know," she began tentatively, "I've been wondering if maybe we're imprisoned in here."

"Oh, no, no, no," he smiled. "You mustn't even think that. This is Paradise. It

doesn't get any better than this. This is it. Outside there's a shadowy world of fears and dangers, famine and drought, ghouls and goblins, disease and death."

"I found a wall just beyond the dingleberry thicket this morning, so I climbed up and looked over it."

Saddam was distressed. "Why would you want to do that? You have everything here. Everything you could ever want. Everything."

"I want to go see for myself."

"You can't. And if you did, once you left here you could never come back."

"Why not?"

His shoulders slunk in twin ripples up his neck. "I dunno," he said. "It's the law."

"Because he says so?"

"Whatever he says, that's the law."

"Who says?"

Saddam seemed a little exasperated. "I don't make the rules," he said.

"But you espouse the rules."

"Well, they're the rules. There have to be rules and somebody has to make them. If there weren't any rules, there'd be chaos."

"I don't get it," Eve replied.

Saddam smiled thinly. "You will," he said, his eyelids falling softly, their long lashes tickling the scales of his cheeks.

"I need something from you," she said demurely, letting him wrap his leg around her naked ankle.

Saddam quivered with desire, torn between this luscious morsel and the sea of sparkling stones that lay between them. "I'll give it to you," he hissed, curling up along her calf.

"Bong nuts," she insisted with a coy smile, gently unravelling him.

His passion shrivelled momentarily. "I can't," he gasped.

She held out the empty sack. "If you fill this with bong nuts, you can keep the

stones and Adam'll never know the difference. He just likes to count things."

"But..."

"You're not afraid, are you?"

"Of course not."

"And you want this, don't you?"

Saddam gulped, wide-eyed, then with a sly sigh took the large leather pouch and slithered up the bong tree, picking nuts as he went. When the sack was swollen and bulging like the shiny sheer fabric of her underwear, shinnied down again and triumphantly poured his burden of brown nuts onto the bed beside the diamonds.

"Now," he said, his ribs rattling with passion against the long walls of his chest as he reached out to her, coiling again around her slender ankle.

"Wait!" she cried. She stroked his fevered brow and smiled. "I'm shy. I'm a virgin, you know."

"It's okay," he assured her. "I'm the holy ghost."

She pondered this for a moment, unbelieving. "Still, I'd like a more romantic nook to noodle in, wouldn't you? Let's blow out the candles and snuggle in the dark."

Quickly, with repeated sinuous strokes of his supple neck and gaping maw, Saddam extinguished all the candles but one and wriggled readily out of his silken blue cocoon.

"Oh!" she cried, covering her eyes, peeking out at him between spread fingers. "Your nakedness makes me tremble. You get in the sack and I'll blow out this last candle before I take off my bra and panties, okay?"

"Women," Saddam muttered to himself. But he curled up inside the empty bag, his body vibrating like a watchspring. The last candlelight shimmered and shuddered into nothingness as she covered it provocatively with her rubied lips.

In the sudden pitch-black darkness, while Saddam was repeatedly snaking his head out from the sack and gobbling up all the diamonds, Eve was equally busy stuffing bong nuts into her brassiere. Then quickly she cinched the drawstring tight around the

neck of the pouch.

"Don't peek now," she admonished him.

"I await your nuptial nudeness," he said, his innards swollen with indigestible contraband, his words muffled in the leather sack, unheard, as she slipped away into the night.

\* \* \*

"I think I've got it," Adam said as she, bending forward and laden with bong nuts, returned through the door of the hut, holding up her bulging bra, glistening with sweat and grinning in triumph.

She glanced at the swelling between his thighs.

He stared at the nummary summits of her naked breasts.

"No," she said, "I've got it, but you're about to."

"If I assume something is true," he said slowly, as if in a trance, never taking his eyes off her, "and then reason my way to a contradiction, then either all reason falls lifeless or the assumption must be false."

She in turn, disdainful of his abstrusions but eyeing his burgeoning manhood, crossed over to the kitchen and mashed a handful of bong nuts into a creamy butter. She spread it together with her best dingleberry jam on a slice of pumpernickel. Then, bending low before him, she offered him a bite. "Eat this," she said.

Adam seemed dazed. As he closed his lips around a huge portion of the richly slathered bread his eyes focused on her eyes, her lips, her pendant breasts, her proud vulva wreathed in sheer black silk. Sweat beaded up on his forehead.

"Sa matter, bubby?" she asked, soothingly, as she slowly peeled the dark silk from her loins.

"First I show that the numerary square is twice the denominary square," he thought.

She walked toward him on her knees. Great bursts of light in rainbow colors splashed across his retinas. He felt the surging of the sea against his tiny craft. A pig

dashed into the hut, squealing, pursued by a turkey in puritan garb, then, grunting, it wheeled and chased the squawking bird back into the night.

Adam's readiness grew to enormous size. He spread his fingers wide across the hemispheric expanse of her rump, and drew her near. His mind whirled.

"This means the numerary is even, which means you can make two equally heavenly mounds."

"I looked out," she said, panting softly into his ear. "I felt the whole world rushing into me."

"But then two times half the numerary square is the denominary square, and that means the denominary is even, which means – two lips here, two lips there. It's obviously a contradiction of the assumption of reduction!"

The assumption of reduction was repeatedly violated, despite his best effort to whittle it down to size.

"Fill me that way, Adam. Like the world flooding into me from across the wall."

She settled over him like a spreadeagled angel of the lists, his charger pawed the sward, his helmet visor fell, his glittering lance drove forward with unerrant aim, burying itself to the flare of its hilt in her luscious caramel catacomb. Excalibur thrust into the stone, Nöthung gripped in the sinewy trunk of Yggdrasil, St. George's spear piercing the dragon's spleen, Beowulf's blade buried in the protoplasm of Grendel's jellyfish eye.

"It's irrational!" he cried.

\* \* \*

With his doppelgänger nearby, Saddam strode apprehensively through the great golden gate of Eden for the first and last time.

"I'm taking back your appendages."

"All of them?"

"All of them."

"Even Roger?"

"Especially Roger."

"Jeez."

"Oh, and those eyelashes are really grotesque. Get rid of them, okay?"

Saddam peeled them off, like furry epaulets, and hung his head. "I'll not be very attractive this way. What about my wardrobe? My clothes'll keep slipping off. I don't think it's fair. She tricked me."

"You've never been able to keep your clothes on. Especially your pants, needless to say. And you wanted her to trick you. You were hoping she'd trick you. I see your dreams you know. You just didn't want her to fool you, which she did rather easily I'd say."

"Look, let's go back to the *status quo ante*."

"The *status quo ante*? What are you, a lawyer? Listen, the bong's out of the bag, if you read my smoke. There's no going back. You can't go home again. Don't you read?"

"But it was so mellow. It'd be a pity if nobody appreciated it any more."

"Yes, well, I'm going to appreciate it. And I'm giving them this nice watercolor landscape I painted as a kind of combination eviction, housewarming, diddling and impregnation present. I mounted it in the frame Adam was working on before your meddling drove him to higher mathematics. Evocative isn't it? But notice that the diagonal is irrational, just as Adam said. You can't go in there. There is no "in there" in there. You wouldn't have any way to carry it around, but maybe you can slither up to the threshold of their hut now and then and sneak a peek at it. Just remember what your vain pandering cost you. And next time I give you a job – assuming there is a next time – don't let some teenage jezebel make you lose sight of your responsibility."

"Leaning kinda hard on this God thing, aren't we?"

"Well, I could hang you from a cliff in the Caucasus for ten thousand years."

"That's rude. And instead you want me to crawl around on my belly for what? The rest of time? I helped you out here, you know."

"Okay, you did. I admit it, I got a little tired of all those homoan shenanigans, all

that whining and wailing going on in my garden all the time. And now they're outta there and I'll have some peace and quiet."

"Yeah," muttered Saddam.

"Tell you what. I'm going to fill all the river valleys with dingleberries. They'll always be within your reach as long as there are sheep to fertilize 'em."

"Oh, swell – instead of limbs I'll have free berry beer."

"Don't be facetious. It's one of your worst qualities."

"Can't I just turn her back into a guy?"

"Sorry, no can do. I've got plans for these homoans. I'm gonna litter the earth with their incessant begatments. They'll be thicker'n ants on a mead barrel, stomping on your ugly head every time you turn around."

Saddam smiled his most utterly vapid smile. "I can take it if you can," he said, and they both disappeared.

A reboant volley of thunder echoed among the surrounding valleys, eventually reaching the burning ears of the banished all-too-homoans and their now mute and unseen former companion.

"We're free!" Eve exulted, striding confidently along the trail.

Adam followed silently behind, furtively listening for the crackling sounds of God's flaming tigers plunging through the underbrush in pursuit of them. "I think we're screwed," he demurred.

Saddam, slithering among the shadows of the great baobab trees nearby, smiled wanly. "It's all the same," he said to himself. "And that's the beauty of it."

\* \* \*

A little while later Eve's belly swelled up and, as the summer season began, brought forth from her thighs a mewling baby homoan. Adam was pleased at first, because now Eve looked almost as good as she had that night when they'd eaten the bong nuts. But the infant's insatiable mouth, gaping and puckered like a carp's, clung to her breast like a vacuum cleaner to a throw rug, and she couldn't be dissuaded from

letting it do this despite Adam's anxious concern that so much sucking and gurgling would result in the lad's growing up to be a sheepish sissy.

\* \* \*

"Don't let it set you to naught."

Saddam made no reply.

"You can say that again."

But Saddam slid along speechlessly, intent on a little gray field mouse that was busily excavating its living room from a straw-strewn hummock in the hayfield that lay above the bonnie banks of the Ayr beside the house of Scottish poet Robbie Burns. Nobody writes odes to the monsters slain by heroes' swords nor, for much the same reason, to bisected snakes. Recognizing this, Saddam curled himself patiently on a flat rock, insouciantly puffed on a cigarette and soaked up a few rays until the ploughshare had delivered his dinner surprise from its hiding place onto the vast tableau of despair.

"They sure are dumb," he thought to himself.

"And you're a genius," the wind whispered as a few gaily colored autumn leaves chattered across his scaly back.

And that is how the good old days came to an end, and the whatever it is we have nowadays began.