

"And then," she said, taking hold of the tab poking out of the side of the page. "He banished them."

The boy in her lap waved a hand as she pulled the tab, and the section of paper slid in the slot on the page and the two furless beings disappeared.

"Bye bye," he said.

She smile at her son as she caught his furred hand before he placed it on the page. She normally didn't mind if he accidentally scratched something with his growling claws, but this book was old, bought by her great grandmother, who handed it down to her grandmother, then her mother and now her. She was always very careful with it.

His hand tucked out of the way she turned the thick page. This one showed rolling hills with animals sitting on their haunches among the flowers.

"Then," she continued, "God looked around at his garden, and he wondered who would take care of it. He had planned for man and woman to look after it, but they had failed, giving in to temptation." She took hold of the tab at the bottom of this page. "He looked at the animals, and he told them, 'rise'." She pulled and each piece of paper showing a sitting animal flipped up to reveal that same animal, but now standing on two legs.

He smiled and clapped his hands, then pointed to an orange figure with black stripes on the page. "That's me!"

She smiled again. "Yes, Patrick, that's us, the tiger. God gave us fingers so we could grasp tools." she wiggled her fingers before him, the light catching in her orange and black fur, making it shimmer. "He gave us words so we could talk to each other."

"But not the snake," the young boy said firmly.

"No, not the snake or his brethren. For his betrayal of God's plan for man and woman, they will forever crawl on their bellies, or walk on all four. They will never know the joy of running after a kite in the tall grass, or of holding a Popsicle."

Patrick giggled.

"Mommy, why aren't we there anymore?"

"We'll get to that, Patrick." She turned the page.

This one showed the people of God tending the trees, the flowers. She slid the tab across the top of the page, making the sun and moon chase each other.

"for days and nights we took care of the garden. We did as God told us, taking care of it all, but staying away from the sacred tree." She pointed to the lone tree on the right

side of the page, green with red dots among it's foliage. "That's the tree man and woman were suppose to stay away from, but snake convinced them that God was wrong to keep them away from it, that they had a right to it, that is why they were banished."

"Did the snake try with us?"

"Oh yes," she indicated a black wiggles here and there, among the grass. "But we knew better. We'd seen what happened to man and woman, we remembered Snake's part in it, so we didn't listen to him. But..."

She turned the page, and this one showed the tree, drawn with enough detailed they could tell the fruit within its branches were apples. The people stood around it. "In time, while we remembered what had happened to man and woman, we began to question why it had happened. Snake whispered to us, like he had whispered to man and woman, but we knew better than to just listen to him. Instead we asked God."

A quick pull on a tab and they were looking above the tree instead at it. "God, we asked, why do you not want us to eat of this tree?"

"God answered us. 'This tree contains knowledge that is not suited for my garden.' 'And if we eat of it?' we asked, 'will you banish us like you did man and woman?' 'I would have to,' he answered, 'With that knowledge within you, you would no longer be suited to remain here.'

Another page, and this one looked like the one of the people taking care of the garden. She slid the tab along the bottom of the page, and people moved back and forth among the flowers.

"We went back to taking care of the garden, but we talked, We asked ourself if we wanted to stay, or if we wanted to know what the tree had to offer. We didn't have those talk in secret like Snake said, we talked as we worked, before God. We weren't afraid of him knowing that we talked. Over time, our curiosity grew stronger and stronger until..."

She turned the page, another one of the tree with them standing around it.

"We asked God to eat the fruit. We wouldn't do what man and woman had done, go behind his back. If we did this, it would be with his blessing. When God answered us, he sounded sad. 'yes, you can, but you will have to leave. There will be no returning from this.'" She pulled a tab and they reached for the tree. "We understood, and we accepted the consequences." She turned the page to reveal a blank one. "And this, Patrick, is how we left the garden of Eden."

Her son looked at the empty page and placed a hand on it. "God said we can't go back." Sorrow tainted his voice.

"Yes, but he changed his mind later, and he send his son to earth to show us how to find our way back to it, so now if we live as he wants us, we will go back."

He was thoughtful for a long moment. "Mommy," he finally said. "If God made us people, why are there still animals around?"

She smiled, proud of her son's curiosity, but always a little apprehensive. He as too young to learn of God's anger. "That's a story for another day," She told him. "Now it's time for you to go to bed."

"Do I have to?" he whined.

"Yes, you do." She lifted the book so he could climb down her lap. "You go get ready and I'll tuck you in."

She watched him head head to the bathroom, dragging his feet and sighing theatrically. She put the book back on the shelf, and looked at the picture of her and Kevin on the one below. She looked in the bathroom's direction and couldn't shake a moment of dread.

"Please God," she prayed, "I know that what I did wasn't right, I broke my word, but I ask again, like I do each night. Protect Patrick from them. I did it, not just because I wanted a child, but because I had to protect him. Whatever the consequences, make me pay them, not Patrick. Amen."

She stood and went to knock in the bathroom door, to make sure her son wasn't procrastinating.