

# Grandmother's Tales: An Excerpt

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*The following story is one of three which Sharon Altman prepared for a Women's Studies course, "On Woman," given by Johanna Stuckey during the 1980-81 academic session at York University. In brief, the course explores the cultural and mythic bases of sex roles and women's present status in Western culture. One of the main texts in this study is, of course, the first three chapters of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible. A playwrighting student in the Faculty of Fine Arts, Sharon Altman rewrote the Adam and Eve story:*

*Grandmother spoke; her voice was clear, at first brittle, and then it became soft. She grew stronger as she told the tales. Daughter listened, Mother and Father scoffed. But soon their fears began. Grandmother the matriarch was learning to speak, leading them from house to hearth to home. And these were some of the tales she taught.*

Once, a long time ago, in a garden near the East there lived a young couple called Adam and Eve. And they were newlyweds and this was their very first farm. A landowner (very powerful) had hired them to till the land and because the garden was rich and good Adam and Eve accepted the plan. But unfortunately, you see, although they were newlyweds, this was not a paradise and Adam really was a lazy man. He liked to sleep beneath the apple tree and never did his work.

Poor Eve, things went from terrible to worse. Not only was Adam not working, but he really wasn't very nice and he always complained about the food. So there was Eve, lonely, tired, working the fields all by herself when the Snake came up and told her to rest and they sat down to talk. Well, Eve was a little happier, you see; at least now she had a friend. And the Snake did what he could to help her with the fields. He snaked water to the planted seeds and ate the stealing rats and birds. On the whole, Eve and the Snake became quite good friends.

One sunset after a hard day's work the Snake asked Eve why she had married Adam. "Oh well, he looked so good, you know; he really was very romantic." The Snake said, "Yeah, but he's not much of a mate," and slithered away. You could tell he was not impressed. Eve looked after the Snake, put down her hoe and went to find Adam. Yes, he was under the tree, fallen apples all around him, lying on a bed of weeds. "Hey, Adam," Eve said, "Wake up, I've got something to say." He snored. She poked him in the rib. He grunted and sat up. "What is it?"—"You know, you really haven't been doing your fair share around here. I've been doing all the work and you never come home at night. You just drop by to eat and complain about the food."—"Aw, come on, Eve, quit nagging," said Adam as he turned and went back to sleep.

Poor Eve, I'm sorry to say that her troubles grew even more. She went home and cried and the next morning went out to check the fields. And the landowner came to visit his fields. "What's this?" he said and thunder shook the sky. "Why, the farm is a disgrace. I could have hired a child to do the work you've done. If I don't see an improvement, you're going to have to leave this place." Eve was very frightened and ran to Adam (asleep under the apple tree). "Adam, wake up. You've got to get working. The landowner said if we don't shape up we're going to get kicked out." Adam stumbled to the fields, began to do what the Snake had done, but as they say in the vernacular, "Oy, what a klutz." He trampled

the new shoots and drowned the seeds so that they floated away. And finally Eve told Adam to get out and she sat down and cried. The Snake slid up to Eve. "Salt water isn't going to help the fields," he said, trying to make her laugh. Eve just cried even harder. "You know," said the Snake, "you're not a bad farmer yourself. You just need an . . . an equal to help you out. I think you should get rid of Adam. Find someone else."—"He, he. . ." sobbed Eve, "He said he would be my lord and protector."—"Uh-huh," said the Snake, "Listen, if there's one thing I've learned from being a snake, it's that you have to take care of yourself. No one else is going to do it for you. Come on, let's go back to the house. You need something to eat." So they went to the house. But the dinner was burnt. The Snake brought back some apples and Eve and the Snake stayed up the whole night talking about relations.

"You're right, you know," said Eve, "a marriage can't be based just on lust. Passion, friendship, and then companionship, that's the way to go. A couple has to work as equals, helping each other out." Eve threw away the apple core. By this time the sun was up and there was a knock at the door. The landlord entered. "This is insufferable. The fields are a shambles. I'm sorry, Eve, but I'm going to have to ask that you and Adam leave. Your work has not been satisfactory at all."—"But, but," Eve stuttered. She almost admitted defeat and then looked out the window and saw the garden. It was too beautiful to leave.

"You're right," she said, "the fields are a shambles, but it's not my fault. Look at my hands, look at these blisters. I've been trying to do all the work myself. Adam's not been helping me at all. If anyone should have to leave, it's Adam. I've been doing more than my share." The landlord looked shocked. The Snake began to applaud. "But you two are married; I can't kick Adam out and let you stay. You're his wife."

"I'm Eve! I'm not Adam's wife. You married us; you can divorce us too! I want a divorce." (You see, the landlord was also the minister.)

"Well," the landlord said, "I'll have to see what Adam has to say. Where is he?"

"Under the apple tree," said Eve.

"But he doesn't speak very much," said the Snake.

"What?"

"You see," the Snake slithered, "he took a bit of a fall last night. All he can do is grunt. One grunt means yes; silence means no." Eve and the Snake winked at each other. The landlord went to Adam and said, "Adam, do you want a divorce from Eve?" Adam grunted. "Eve, you've got your divorce, but you can't work the fields alone. Who will help you?"

"I will," said the Snake. And so Adam left Eden and the Snake and Eve worked the fields. And their garden grew.

*The Mother began to chuckle as the story finished. Father glared at her and she became quiet.*