SERPENT SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT
by Kathie Collins

*God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.*

—Genesis 1:25

Male and female God created them, but

it was she who was my friend.

While he was busy naming things,

asserting dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air,

she and I moved through the garden speaking to one another.

We learned

the language of the dirt—mud *slurp, shush* of sand, *ah-h* of fertile ground;

the powers of plants that sprung from it—maize and maidenhair fern, fennel and fig tree, primrose and plum;

to love all the earth’s creeping things, even those that scared us.
We learned
the shapes of field and forest, and the terrain
of one another’s bodies—sharp ridge of teeth, forked road
of tongue, her arm’s ropy bridge
to shoulder precipice, and that soft pocket
above her clavicle in which I so often
rested my head.

We grew
up together.

We knew
each other by smell.

We understood
one another’s hungers. It was I
who saw what she needed,
I who led her to food.

And why not?

Why shouldn’t she
have the sweet fruit of knowledge,

perceive the difference
between good and evil?

Why shouldn’t she
know what it means to

be full?

We paid the price,
made our way out
together, she and I. On our own.

Neither of us looking back.