

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.