

The Good Book

Historical voice comparison. The author has selected C's panoramic irreverence, with A's emotional restraint and natural bantering camaraderie. B's forced dialogue is not the adopted model. The treatments below remain the original comparison set; their invented mechanisms are not automatically accepted world rules.

Three voice treatments

These original draft treatments were prepared for Shawn Wolfgang Michael Baker to compare and correct. Treatment C was subsequently selected as the foundation for the manuscript voice, with the refinements described above. The scene expands the departure from Eden with invented characters, procedures, and time effects; those additions are not claims about the source text or historical tradition.

All three versions hold the central events constant. Eve seeks passage for herself and an injured Adam without surrendering their names. The gatekeeper's orders conflict. Time at the gate costs them time outside. Their passage preserves their names but forfeits the Garden's provision; the record acknowledges coercion. They leave with an injury, one divided fruit, and an altered relationship.

Read for the voice you would want to live with across a novel. You can choose one treatment, combine particular features, or mark lines that sound wrong.

A — Intimate and restrained

The Exit Fee

The blood from Adam's heel had reached the edge of the lowest step. Eve watched it gather against a grain in the stone. It waited there, darkening, until another drop gave it enough weight to fall.

The keeper turned a page.

Behind him the garden was still green. The branches moved although there was no wind on this side of the gate. Eve could see the place where they used to sit in the afternoon. Someone had swept the fallen leaves into a neat pile.

"Your names," the keeper said.

"Eve. Adam."

"For surrender."

She looked away from the trees.

"What happens if we surrender them?"

"Your needs remain entered in the provision of the Garden." He touched the edge of the page with one finger. The finger was bandaged. Under the linen, something had burned through to a yellow shine. "Food. Shelter. Such protection as may be extended beyond the boundary."

"And our names?"

"May be assigned again."

Adam moved behind her. His breath caught. She put a hand back without looking and found his wrist.

"Assigned by whom?" she asked.

The keeper glanced towards the light above the trees.

There it was. The space at the end of a question where someone else ought to have been standing.

A bell sounded inside the gate. Its note barely outlasted her breath. Beyond the steps, the shadow of a bare tree moved the length of Adam's foot. His blood had dried on the dust. The wound was still open.

"How long?" Eve asked.

"An hour outside."

"For that?"

"The clocks disagree here."

She felt his wrist stiffen in her hand.

The keeper laid his injured finger on one sentence, then another.

"No person shall leave the Garden. No disobedient person shall remain within it. I require an entry that satisfies both."

Eve looked at the two lines. How could they obey the first without breaking the second? How could they be punished for going and punished for staying? She had expected anger. She had expected something immense enough to hate. Instead there was a tired creature with a wound in his hand, asking her to make the impossible fit on a page.

"Who gave you those orders?"

"They bear the same authority."

"That wasn't what I asked."

For a moment he met her eyes.

The bell sounded again.

Adam lowered himself to the step. Eve knelt beside him. The cut had come from the broken bowl on the path; she had seen him step backwards onto it when the light descended. She folded the cleanest part of her hem against his heel. There was not enough cloth to cover the wound and leave the garment whole. She tore it.

"Give them mine," he whispered.

She tightened the knot. "And tomorrow, when they call you something you cannot bear?"

"Tomorrow we might be warm."

She sat back. He was cold already. She could see the small shivers he was trying to hide.

"I want that too," she said.

At the desk, beneath the crowded instructions, was an unused line.

Eve stood and pointed to it. "What goes there?"

"Departure without provision."

"Then enter us there."

"There will be no allotment. No appointed shelter. No return under the old protection."

She looked beyond the gate. Nothing waited for them that she knew how to name. The ground was hard and the trees were far apart. She did not know whether the dark would contain somewhere to sleep.

"You call that a choice?"

The keeper's injured hand trembled above the page.

"I call it the remaining line."

She took the pen. Beside her name she wrote that they were leaving under threat. The keeper watched. Then he drew his own mark beneath her words.

The gate opened. It made a small sound, almost ordinary.

Outside, Eve cut their last fruit with the broken edge of the bowl. She gave Adam half and kept half.

He stared at the portion in his hand before eating it slowly, as though that might make it last.

She put his arm across her shoulders. He was heavier than she remembered. Every step pulled at the torn cloth around his heel.

"I don't know where to go," he said.

"Neither do I."

He stopped trying to lead her.

They went down the slope together. Behind them the bell rang once more, and they had no hour left to give it.

B — Intimate and irreverent

The Exit Fee

Adam was bleeding on the step. The keeper of the gate had noticed this and moved his ledger six inches to the left.

Eve admired the efficiency. A problem had occurred. Something had been done. The problem remained, but the book was safe.

"Your names," he said.

"Eve. Adam."

"For surrender."

"You should lead with that part."

Behind the desk, the garden carried on being beautiful. Sunlight lay on the little patch of grass where they used to sit. Someone had tidied the leaves. Apparently their expulsion had been inconvenient for the groundskeepers.

The keeper lifted a bandaged finger to the page. Something yellow showed through the linen. Eve had seen the same colour where a branch burned from the inside.

"Surrendered names remain eligible for provision. Food, shelter, protection beyond the boundary, subject to availability."

"Whose availability?"

"The provision's."

"Right. Obviously. Wouldn't want to promise food and discover you've run out of the concept."

Adam made a sound behind her. It might have been a laugh. It ended badly.

She reached back and found his wrist.

"What happens to our names?"

"They may be reassigned."

"To us?"

"As required."

What if they called obedience love? What if they called hunger gratitude? What if she woke tomorrow in some appointed shelter and discovered that Eve had been an administrative error? Warm. Fed. Filed correctly. What the fuck would be left to thank them with?

A bell sounded inside the gate. One note. One breath.

Outside, the shadow of a dead tree slid across the ground. Adam's blood dried in the dust.

"An hour," the keeper said when he saw her looking. "The clocks disagree at the boundary."

"Do we get it back?"

He did not answer.

Of course they didn't. Even the time had terms.

He showed her two instructions. No person shall leave the Garden. No disobedient person shall remain within it.

Eve read them twice. They did not improve.

"So we can't stay and we can't go."

"The entry must satisfy both."

"Have you considered asking whoever wrote them to come down here and satisfy themselves?"

His eyes flicked towards the light above the trees.

She looked at his hand again.

The bell sounded.

Adam sat. There was no grace in it. His legs had finished negotiating. Eve knelt and pressed her hem against the cut in his heel. The broken bowl on the path had done that, when he stepped backwards from the descending light. All the wonders in the garden, and it had come down to a man standing on crockery.

She tore the cloth and tied it tight.

"Give them mine," he said.

She pulled the knot too hard. He flinched.

"Sorry." She loosened it. "And when they call you something you hate?"

"Maybe they'll call me indoors."

She nearly laughed. Then she saw how badly he was shaking.

"I want indoors," she said. "I want all of it. Don't mistake me for someone enjoying this."

There was an empty line at the foot of the page. She pointed to it.

"That one."

"Departure without provision."

"With our names?"

"With your names. Without allotment, appointed shelter, or return under the old protection."

Beyond the steps, the earth looked painfully large. She had no idea how to make a roof. She knew that roofs existed. Her qualifications ended there.

"That's extortion."

The keeper looked down at the ledger. "There isn't a column for it."

"There's a margin."

She took the pen. Eve. Adam. Departing under threat. She pressed hard enough to score the sheet beneath.

The keeper's injured finger hovered over the words. For one sick moment she thought he would rub them out.

He signed beneath them.

The gate opened without ceremony. No announcement. No explanation of where the hell they were meant to sleep.

Outside, Eve used a shard of the broken bowl to divide their last fruit. Adam took his half. Neither of them suggested saving it. Hunger had become wonderfully clear on the subject of later.

She pulled his arm over her shoulders. He tried to step ahead and almost fell.

"I don't know where to go," he said.

"Good. Neither do I. We can stop pretending you do."

He looked at her. Then he let her take some of his weight.

They started down the slope. Every step hurt him. Every step cost her. Their names were still their own, and neither name knew how to build a fucking roof.

C — Panoramic and irreverent

The Exit Fee

The first difficulty with expelling people from paradise was persuading paradise that people could leave.

At the eastern gate a keeper had been given two instructions. No person shall leave the Garden. No disobedient person shall remain within it. Both bore the same authority. Neither mentioned what to do when a person became disobedient while continuing to occupy space.

Eve and Adam were occupying the lowest step. Adam was bleeding on it.

The keeper moved his ledger out of range.

"Your names," he said.

Eve gave them.

"For surrender," he added.

She became very still. Behind him the trees moved in their comfortable wind. Someone had gathered the fallen leaves from the place where she and Adam used to sit. Paradise was already recovering from their presence.

"Explain surrender."

The keeper turned a page with a bandaged finger. Yellow light showed through the wrapping, the colour of something burning where it could not be reached.

Surrendered names, he explained, remained eligible for the Garden's provision. Food. Appointed shelter. Protection beyond the boundary, subject to availability. The names themselves could subsequently be reassigned as required.

"By whom?" Eve asked.

The keeper glanced towards the light above the trees.

This was the trouble with a chain of authority. Follow it far enough and, sooner or later, somebody looked up.

A bell sounded within the gate. Its note lasted one breath. Outside, the shadow of a bare tree advanced across the dust, and the small dark pool beneath Adam's foot dried at its edges.

"An hour," said the keeper. "The clocks disagree here."

It was an economical arrangement. Those making the decision spent a moment. Those waiting for it spent their lives in larger instalments.

Eve held Adam's wrist. He was trying to stand without leaning on her, which might have been pride or might simply have been a man who had not yet learned how to need help.

She read the two instructions.

"We can't remain. We can't depart."

"The record must satisfy both."

"What happens if it doesn't?"

The keeper lowered his damaged hand.

There are questions whose answers have already been supplied. Eve looked from the linen to the light above the trees. She did not ask him again.

The bell sounded.

Adam sat abruptly. Eve knelt to bind his heel. The wound came from the bowl broken on the path: when the light descended, he had stepped backwards onto a shard. No grand adversary had been necessary. Crockery had found an opening.

There was not enough clean cloth. She tore her hem to make enough.

"Give them mine," Adam said.

"And when they give it back wrong?"

"We might have somewhere to sleep."

That was a reasonable thing to want. Warmth was reasonable. Food was reasonable. A world could become very cruel by offering reasonable things on terms nobody should have to accept.

Eve finished the knot. "I want somewhere to sleep too."

Then she stood.

Below the keeper's instructions lay a line with nothing entered against it. She put a finger on the blank space.

Departure without provision. Their names would remain theirs. There would be no allotment, no appointed shelter, no return under the old protection.

Beyond the gate was an expanse of hard earth and widely separated trees. None of it suggested a bed. Adam shivered on the step.

"You call that consent?" Eve asked.

The keeper looked at the empty line.

"I call it what remains."

She took the pen and wrote their names. In the margin she added that they departed under threat. The words were small. They did not heal Adam's foot or make the waiting hours return. They were nevertheless there.

The keeper signed beneath them with his injured hand.

The gate opened. After so much difficulty, its hinges made an almost insulting little noise.

Outside, Eve divided the last fruit with a shard from the broken bowl. Adam took half. She kept half. They ate before moving on, because their bodies had developed opinions and would now be expressing them regularly.

She put his arm across her shoulders.

"I don't know where to go," Adam said.

"Neither do I."

He stopped trying to walk ahead. They made it down the first stretch of the slope together, slowly, with his weight between them.

Behind them, paradise rang its bell. Ahead of them, nobody had made the beds.

Your reading notes

1. Which treatment sounds closest to something you would actually write?
2. Where do questions deepen the thought, and where do they become repetitive?
3. Which jokes, imperatives, or profane turns feel forced?
4. Does the humour strengthen the scene's loneliness, anger, and care?
5. Would you keep this distance from the character across a whole novel?

You can answer with a letter and a few corrections. Selecting a treatment establishes a working prose baseline; it does not lock every invented detail of this calibration scene into the series.