Offspring of a Heavenly Plant

High, high up in the bright, transparent air flew an angel with a flower from the garden of paradise. The angel kissed the flower tightly, and a tiny petal tore off from it and fell to the earth. It fell in the midst of the forest onto the loose, moist soil and immediately put forth roots. Soon a new plant appeared among the forest plants.

— What is this strange sprout? — they said, and no one — not even the thistle and the nettle — wanted to have anything to do with it.

— It's some kind of garden plant! — they said and held it up to ridicule.

But it kept growing and growing, spreading its shoots in all directions.

— Where are you climbing to? — said the tall thistle, all studded with thorns. — Just look at you, all puffed up! That's not how things are done here! We're not your supports!

Winter came, the plant was covered with snow, but such a radiance emanated from its branches that the snow gleamed too, as if lit from below by the sun's rays. In spring the plant bloomed; there was nothing more lovely in the whole forest!

And then one day a professor of botany appeared — that is how he was listed in the records. He examined the plant, even tasted what it was like. No, it was definitely not known in botany, and the professor could not assign it to any class.

— It's some kind of hybrid! — he said. — I don't know it; it's not listed in the tables.

— Not listed in the tables! — chimed in the thistle and the nettle.

The big trees growing around heard what was said and also saw that the plant was not of their kind, but did not utter a single word: neither bad nor good. And it is better to keep silent if you are not distinguished by intelligence.

A poor innocent girl was passing through the forest. Her heart was pure, her mind elevated; all her possession consisted of an old Bible, but from its pages the Lord himself spoke to the girl: "If they wrong you, remember the story of Joseph; they also wanted to harm him, but God turned evil into good. If they persecute you, mock you, remember Him, the most innocent, the best of all, over whom they scoffed, whom they nailed to the cross and who nevertheless prayed: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!'"

The girl stopped before the wonderful plant; its green leaves breathed with such a sweet, life-giving fragrance, the flowers gleamed in the sun with rainbow iridescence, and from their cups flowed a marvelous melody, as if each contained an inexhaustible spring of enchanting harmonies. With reverence the girl looked at the wonderful plant of God, then bent down to look more closely at the flowers, to breathe their fragrance more deeply into herself — and her soul was enlightened, her heart became so light! How she longed to pluck at least one little flower, but she did not dare — it would have wilted so soon in her hands. And she took for herself only a green leaf, brought it home and put it in the Bible. There it lay, still so fresh, fragrant, unfading.

Yes, it lay in the Bible, and the Bible itself lay under the head of the young girl in the coffin — several weeks later the girl died. On her gentle face was frozen an expression of solemn, reverent seriousness, the only one that could be imprinted on the mortal earthly vessel of the soul at the time when the soul itself stood before the throne of the Most High.

And the wonderful plant continued to be fragrant in the forest; soon it grew and became like a tree; migratory birds flocked to it in flocks and bowed low before it; especially the swallow and the stork.

— Foreign fops! — said the thistle and the nettle. — That's not done here! Such posturing doesn't suit us!

And the black forest snails spat on the wonderful plant.

At last a swineherd came into the forest to pull up thistles and other plants, which he burned to obtain ash for himself, and he pulled up, roots and all, the wonderful plant as well. It too ended up in his bundle!

— It'll come in handy too! — said the swineherd, and the deed was done.

Meanwhile the king of that country had long been suffering from deep melancholy. He worked diligently — to no avail; they read to him the most learned, abstruse books, and also the lightest, cheerful ones — nothing helped. Then a messenger came from one of the foremost sages in the world; people turned to him for advice, and he answered through the messenger that there was one sure remedy to ease and even completely cure the sick man.

"In the king's own realm grows in the forest a plant of heavenly origin; it looks such-and-such — one cannot mistake it." Here followed a detailed description of the plant by which it was easy to recognize it. "It stays green both winter and summer; therefore let them take from it each evening a fresh little leaf and place it

on the king's forehead: then his thoughts will clear, and healthy sleep will strengthen him for the next day!"

The matter could not have been stated more clearly, and so all the doctors, with the professor of botany at their head, set off for the forest. But... where had the plant gone?

— It must have ended up in my bundle, — said the swineherd, — and long ago turned to ash. It never occurred to me that it might be needed!

— Never occurred to you! — said everyone. — O ignorance, ignorance, you know no bounds!

The swineherd had to take these words to heart; the swineherd, and no one else, — thought the others.

Not even a single leaf of the heavenly plant was found: only one had survived, and that lay in the coffin, and no one knew of it.

The king himself came to the forest to the place where the heavenly plant had grown.

— Here is where it grew! — he said melancholically. — A sacred place!

And the place was fenced with a gilded railing and guards were posted there: sentries walked day and night.

The professor of botany wrote a whole study about the heavenly plant, and for this he was entirely gilded — to his great delight. The gilding suited him and all his family very well, and this is the most joyful thing in the whole story: for not a trace of the heavenly plant remained, and the king still walked with his head hung down.

— Well, he was like that before too! — said the guard.