

Paradise Garden

Once upon a time there lived a prince; no one possessed as many fine books as he did; in them he could read about everything under the sun, about all lands and peoples, and everything was depicted therein with wonderful pictures. About only one thing was not a single word said: where the Garden of Eden lay, and this was precisely what interested the prince most of all.

When he was still a child and had just begun learning his alphabet, his grandmother told him that every flower in the Garden of Eden was a sweet little cake, and the stamens were filled with the finest wine; in some flowers lay history, in others geography or the multiplication table; one needed only to eat such a flower-cake, and the lesson was learned all by itself. The more cakes someone ate, the more they learned of history, geography, and arithmetic!

At that time the prince still believed all such tales, but as he grew older, studied, and became wiser, he began to understand that the Garden of Eden must hold quite different delights.

"Oh, why did Eve heed the serpent! Why did Adam taste the forbidden fruit! Had I been in their place, this would never have happened, sin would never have entered the world!"

Thus he spoke many times, and repeated the same now, when he was already seventeen years old; the Garden of Eden filled all his thoughts.

One day he went into the forest all alone—he very much loved to walk by himself. It was toward evening; clouds rushed up, and such rain poured down as though the sky were one solid dam suddenly breached, from which all the water gushed forth at once; darkness fell such as occurs only at night at the bottom of the deepest well. The prince now slid over wet grass, now stumbled upon bare stones protruding from the rocky soil; water streamed off him in rivulets; not a dry thread remained on him. Again and again he had to climb over huge boulders covered with moss, from which water oozed. He was nearly collapsing from exhaustion when suddenly he heard a strange whistling sound and saw before him a large illuminated cave. In the middle of the cave a fire had been kindled, large enough to roast an entire deer, and indeed that was exactly what was happening: upon a spit fixed between two felled pine trees, an enormous deer with great branching antlers was roasting. By the fire sat an elderly woman, so sturdy and tall she seemed like a man in disguise, and she kept throwing log after log onto the flames.

"Come in," she said. "Sit by the fire and dry yourself."

"There is a dreadful draft here," said the prince, seating himself near the fire.

"Just wait until my sons return; it will be even worse!" answered the woman. "You are in the Cave of the Winds; my four sons are the winds. Do you understand?"

"And where are your sons?"

"Foolish questions are not easily answered!" said the woman. "My sons do not walk on leading strings! They are surely playing tag with the clouds up there in the great hall!"

And she pointed her finger toward the sky.

"Is that so!" said the prince. "You express yourself rather sharply, unlike the ladies of my circle to whom I am accustomed."

"Well, they likely have nothing else to do! But I must be sharp and stern if I wish to keep my sons in obedience! And I hold them firmly in hand, stubborn-headed though they are! Do you see those four sacks hanging on the wall? My sons fear them just as you once feared the bundle of switches tucked behind the mirror! I bend them double and stuff them into a sack without any ceremony! There they sit until I take pity on them! But here comes one already!"

It was the North Wind. He brought into the cave a freezing cold; a blizzard arose, and hail skipped across the ground. He wore bear-skin trousers and a jacket; upon his ears hung a cap made of seal skin; icicles dangled from his beard, and hailstones rolled down from the collar of his jacket.

"Do not approach the fire all at once!" said the prince. "You will freeze your face and hands!"

"Freeze!" laughed the North Wind loudly. "Freeze! In my opinion, there is nothing better than frost in all the world! And what sort of sourpuss are you? How did you find your way into the Cave of the Winds?"

"He is my guest!" said the old woman. "And if that explanation does not suffice for you, you may go straight into the sack! Understand?"

The threat worked, and the North Wind recounted whence he had come and where he had spent nearly a whole month.

"I came straight from the Arctic Ocean!" he said. "I was on Bear Island, hunting walruses with Russian sealers. I sat and slept at the helm as they departed from Nordkapp; waking from time to time, I saw storm petrels scurrying beneath my

feet. Most amusing birds! They flap their wings once, then spread them wide and thus remain suspended in the air for a long, long time!"

"Could you not be briefer!" said his mother. "So, you were on Bear Island; what then?"

"Yes, I was. It is marvelous there! Such a floor for dancing! Smooth and level as a plate! Everywhere loose snow mixed with moss, sharp stones, and skeletons of walruses and polar bears covered with green mold—just like the bones of giants! The sun, truly, seems never to peek there at all. I blew gently and dispersed the fog to examine some shed; it turned out to be a dwelling built from shipwreck debris and covered with walrus hides turned inside out; atop the roof sat a polar bear, growling. Then I went to the shore, saw bird nests there, and within them naked chicks; they chirped and opened their beaks wide; so I simply blew into those countless throats—I daresay they quickly learned not to gaze with mouths agape! Right by the sea played creatures resembling living intestines or giant worms with pigs' heads and yard-long tusks—the walruses!"

"You tell a splendid tale, my son!" said his mother. "Simply makes one's mouth water to listen!"

"Well, then the hunt began! Once they drive a harpoon into a walrus's chest, blood spurts forth like a fountain onto the ice! Then I decided to amuse myself too; I started my own music and commanded my ships—the icebergs—to crush the hunters' boats. Oh! What whistling and shouting ensued, yet none could out-whistle me! They were forced to throw the slain walruses, crates, and gear onto the ice floes! And I shook down upon them a whole heap of snowflakes and drove their ice-bound vessels southward—let them sip some salty water! They shall not return to Bear Island!"

"So you caused quite a bit of mischief!" said his mother.

"Let others speak of my good deeds!" he replied. "But here comes my brother from the west! I love him best of all: he smells of the sea and breathes a blessed coolness."

"So this is little Zephyr?" asked the prince.

"Zephyr he is, yet not so little!" said the old woman. "In olden times he was indeed a handsome lad, but now he is different!"

The West Wind looked like a savage; upon his head was a soft, thick cap designed to protect against blows and bruises, and in his hand he held a club of redwood hewn in the American forests; he would accept no other.

"Where have you been?" his mother asked him.

"In virgin forests, where entire fences of thorny lianas hang between the trees, and huge venomous snakes lie in the damp grass, and where, it seems, there is no need whatsoever for man!" he answered.

"What did you do there?"

"I watched a great, deep river plunge from a cliff, how its spray rose toward the clouds, serving as support for the rainbow. I watched a wild buffalo swim across the river; the current swept him along, and he floated downstream together with a flock of wild ducks, but those took flight just before the waterfall, while the buffalo had to tumble headfirst; this pleased me, so I stirred up such a storm that ancient trees floated upon the water and turned into splinters."

"And that is all?" asked the old woman.

"Also I tumbled in the savannas, stroked wild horses, and tore open coconuts! Oh, I have much to tell, but one cannot say everything one knows. That is how it is, old mother!"

And he kissed his mother so vigorously that she nearly toppled backward; such an unruly fellow he was.

Then arrived the South Wind, wearing a turban and a flowing Bedouin cloak.

"What a chill you have here!" he said, tossing more wood onto the fire. "Clearly the North Wind arrived first!"

"It is so hot here one could roast a polar bear!" retorted the other.

"You yourself are a polar bear!" said the South Wind.

"What, do you wish to go into the sack?" asked the old woman. "Sit down here on this stone and tell us whence you come."

"From Africa, mother, from the land of the Kaffirs!" answered the South Wind. "I hunted lions with the Hottentots! What grass grows there upon the plains! A wonderful olive color!"

How many antelopes and ostriches there were! The antelopes danced, and the ostriches raced with me, but I was faster than them on foot! I reached even the yellow sands of the desert—it resembles the sea floor. There I overtook a caravan. The people had slaughtered their last camel to draw water for drinking from its stomach, yet few of them managed to quench their thirst! The sun baked them from above, while the sand roasted them from below. There seemed no end to the

boundless desert! But I began rolling in the fine, soft sand and whirling it into huge pillars; what a dance ensued! You should have seen how the dromedaries huddled together in a heap, and how the merchant threw his hood over his head and fell prostrate before me, just as before his Allah. Now they are all buried beneath a high pyramid of sand. Should I ever feel like sweeping it away, the sun will bleach their bones, and other travelers will at least see that people once were here, for otherwise, looking upon the bare desert, one would hardly believe it!

"So you did nothing but evil!" said the mother. "Off into the bag with you!"

And before the South Wind could recover, the mother grabbed him by the belt and stuffed him into the bag; he tried rolling about inside it on the floor, but she sat down on top of him, forcing him to lie still.

"Lively sons you have!" said the prince.

"Not bad!" she replied. "But I know how to handle them! And here comes the fourth!"

This was the East Wind, dressed as a Chinese man.

"Ah, you come from there!" said the mother. "I thought you had been in the Garden of Eden."

"I shall fly there tomorrow!" said the East Wind. "Tomorrow marks exactly one hundred years since I last visited! Just now I came straight from China, where I danced upon the porcelain tower until all the little bells jingled! Down in the streets, officials were being punished; bamboo canes whistled across their shoulders, and these were all mandarins from the first to the ninth degree! They cried out, 'Many thanks to you, father and benefactor!' though inwardly they thought something quite different. Meanwhile, I rang the bells and sang along: 'Tzing, tzang, tzu!'"

"You rascal!" said the old woman. "I am glad you are setting off tomorrow for the Garden of Eden; that journey always does you much good. Drink there from the Fountain of Wisdom, and scoop up a full bottle of its water for me as well!"

"Very well," said the East Wind. "But why did you put brother South into the bag? Let him out! He will tell me about the Phoenix bird, whom the princess of the Garden of Eden keeps asking about. Untie the bag, dear, beloved mama, and I will give you two whole pockets full of fresh green tea, plucked straight from the bush!"

"Well, for the sake of the tea, and because you are my favorite, so be it—I shall untie it!"

And she untied the bag; the South Wind crawled out looking like a drowned chicken: no wonder, since a foreign prince had witnessed his punishment.

"Here is a palm leaf for your princess!" he said to the East Wind. "I received it from the old Phoenix bird, the only one in the world; she traced upon it with her beak the history of her hundred-year earthly life. Now the princess may read everything she wishes to know. Before my very eyes, the Phoenix bird set fire to her own nest and was engulfed in flames like an Indian widow! How the dry branches crackled, what smoke and fragrance rose from them! Finally, the flame consumed everything, and the old Phoenix turned to ash, but the egg she had laid, burning within the fire like an ember, suddenly burst with a loud crack, and from it flew forth a young Phoenix. He pecked a hole in this palm leaf: this is his greeting to the princess!"

"Well, now it is time for us to refresh ourselves a little!" said the mother of the winds.

Everyone sat down and began eating the venison. The prince sat beside the East Wind, and they soon became friends.

"Tell me," asked the prince of his neighbor, "who is this princess you spoke so much about, and where lies the Garden of Eden?"

"Oh ho!" said the East Wind. "If you wish to visit it, let us fly there together tomorrow! But I must inform you that since the days of Adam and Eve, not a single human soul has set foot there! As for what happened to them, surely you already know?"

"I do!" said the prince.

"After they were expelled," continued the East Wind, "the Garden of Eden sank into the earth, yet its former splendor remains; the sun still shines there, and the air is filled with extraordinary freshness and fragrance! Now it is inhabited by the Queen of Fairies. There also lies the wonderfully beautiful Island of Bliss, which Death never visits! Tomorrow, mount upon my back, and I shall carry you thither. I believe this can be accomplished. But say no more now; I wish to sleep!"

And everyone fell asleep.

At dawn the prince awoke, and immediately felt terrified: he found himself already flying high, high among the clouds! He sat upon the back of the East Wind, who

held him faithfully, yet the prince remained afraid: they soared so high above the earth that forests, fields, rivers, and seas appeared as though painted upon a vast colored map.

"Good morning," said the East Wind to the prince. "You might still have slept; there is nothing worth seeing yet. Unless you intend to count churches! Do you see how many there are? They stand like chalk dots upon a green slate!"

By "green slate" he meant the fields and meadows.

"How rude of me not to take leave of your mother and brothers!" said the prince.

"One must excuse a sleepy person!" said the East Wind, and they flew even faster; this was evident from how the treetops roared beneath them, how the sea waves rose, and how ships plunged deeply into them breast-first, like swans.

Toward evening, when darkness fell, it was very amusing to watch the great cities, where lights flickered here and there—it seemed as though tiny sparks were running across ignited paper, like children rushing home from school. Watching this spectacle, the prince clapped his hands, but the East Wind begged him to behave more quietly and hold on tighter—for it would not be difficult to fall and hang suspended upon some church spire.

Swiftly and lightly flew the wild eagle on its mighty wings, yet the East Wind flew even more lightly, even faster; across the plain a Cossack galloped like a whirlwind on his small horse, but how could he hope to catch up with the prince!

"Well, here are the Himalayas for you!" said the East Wind. "This is the highest mountain range in Asia; soon we shall reach the Garden of Eden!"

They turned southward, and immediately a strong spicy aroma and the fragrance of flowers filled the air. Date palms, pomegranates, and grapevines bearing blue and red berries grew here. The East Wind descended with the prince to the ground, and both lay down to rest in the soft grass, where countless flowers nodded their heads to them, as if saying, "Welcome!"

"Are we already in the Garden of Eden?" asked the prince.

"Not at all!" replied the East Wind. "But we shall soon arrive there! Do you see that sheer cliff, like a wall, and within it a large cave, above whose entrance grapevines hang down like a green curtain? We must pass through this cave! Wrap yourself well in your cloak: here the sun burns fiercely, but one step further—and cold will seize us. A bird flying past the cave feels summer warmth on one wing and winter chill on the other!"

"So this is the road to the Garden of Eden!" said the prince.

And they entered the cave. Brr... how cold it became! Fortunately, not for long.

The East Wind spread his wings, and from them radiated light, as from a bright flame. No, what a cave it was! Above the travelers' heads hung enormous stone masses of the most fantastical shapes, from which water dripped. Sometimes the passage narrowed so much that they had to crawl on their bellies; at other times the cave vaults rose again to unreachable heights, and the travelers walked as if in open freedom under the sky. The cave resembled some gigantic tomb with silent organ pipes and banners carved from stone.

"We are walking the road of death toward the Garden of Eden!" said the prince, but the East Wind answered not a word and pointed ahead with his hand: toward them streamed a wonderful blue light; the stone masses gradually grew sparse, melted, and transformed into some kind of mist. The mist became increasingly transparent until finally it resembled a fluffy white cloud through which the moon shines. Here they emerged into the open air—wonderful, gentle air, fresh as on a mountain peak and fragrant as in a valley of roses.

There flowed a river; its water rivaled in transparency

with the very air. And in the river swam golden and silver fish, while purple-red eels sparkled with blue sparks at every movement; enormous water-lily leaves were variegated with all the colors of the rainbow, and their cups burned with yellow-red flame, sustained by pure water just as a lamp's flame is sustained by oil. Across the river was thrown a marble bridge of such delicate and skillful workmanship that it seemed made of lace and beads; the bridge led to the Island of Bliss, upon which stood the Garden of Paradise itself.

The East Wind took the prince in his arms and carried him across the bridge. Flowers and leaves sang wonderful songs which the prince had heard even in childhood, but now they sounded with such marvelous music as no human voice can convey.

And what is this? Palm trees or giant ferns? Never before had the prince seen such juicy, mighty trees. Exotic creeping plants entwined them, hung down, interlaced, and formed the most fantastical garlands shimmering at the edges with gold and bright colors; such garlands one might find only in the headpieces and initial letters of ancient books. Here were bright flowers, and birds, and the most intricate flourishes. In the grass sat an entire flock of peacocks, gleaming with fanned-out tails.

Peacocks, indeed? Of course peacocks! Or rather, no: the prince touched them, and it turned out they were not birds at all, but plants—huge bushes of burdock shining with the brightest colors! Among the green fragrant bushes leaped lions and tigers like supple cats; the bushes smelled of olives, and the beasts were completely tame; a wild forest dove, with a pearly sheen on its feathers, fluttered its wings against the lion's mane, while an antelope, usually so timid and fearful, stood beside them nodding its head, as if to say that it too would not mind playing with them.

But then the fairy herself appeared; her garments shone like the sun, and her face radiated such tenderness and welcoming smile as the face of a mother rejoicing over her child. She was young and wondrously beautiful; around her stood lovely maidens with glittering stars in their hair.

The East Wind handed her the message from the Phoenix bird, and the fairy's eyes sparkled with joy. She took the prince by the hand and led him into her castle; the castle walls resembled tulip petals held against the sun, and the ceiling was a brilliant flower overturned with its cup downward, growing deeper the longer one gazed into it. The prince approached one of the windows, looked into the glass, and it seemed to him that he saw the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; in its branches hid a serpent, and nearby stood Adam and Eve.

"Have they not been expelled?" asked the prince.

The fairy smiled and explained to him that upon each pane of glass Time had etched an indelible picture illuminated by life: the leaves of the tree moved, and the people stirred—just as happens with reflections in a mirror! The prince went to another window and saw upon the glass Jacob's dream: a ladder descended from heaven, and angels with great wings upon their backs ascended and descended it. Yes, everything that ever was or happened in the world still lived and moved upon the castle's windowpanes; only Time could etch such miraculous pictures with its indelible graver.

Smiling, the fairy led the prince into a vast, lofty hall with walls made of transparent paintings—from which everywhere peeked heads, each more lovely than the next. These were hosts of blessed spirits; they smiled and sang; their voices merged into one marvelous harmony; the highest among them were smaller than rosebuds if drawn upon paper as tiny dots. In the middle of this hall stood a mighty tree covered with foliage in which sparkled large and small golden apples like oranges. This was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, whose fruits Adam and Eve once tasted. From every leaf dripped shining red dew—the tree seemed to weep bloody tears.

"Now let us board the boat!" said the fairy. "Such a feast awaits us there, it is a wonder! Imagine, the boat merely rocks upon the waves but does not move, while all the countries of the world pass by themselves!"

And indeed, it was a stunning sight: the boat stood still, while the shores moved! Presently appeared the high snowy Alps with clouds and dark pine forests upon their summits; a horn sounded long and mournfully, and the resonant song of a mountain shepherd rang out. Then long, supple banana leaves hung over the boat; flocks of swans black as coal floated by; most amazing animals and flowers appeared, and in the distance rose blue mountains; this was New Holland, the fifth part of the world. Then came the singing of priests, and to the sounds of drums and bone flutes crowds of savages whirled in a frenzied dance. Past floated Egyptian pyramids soaring to the clouds, toppled columns, and sphinxes half-buried in sand. Then extinct volcanoes of the north were lit by the aurora borealis. Yes, who could arrange such fireworks? The prince was beside himself with delight: after all, he saw a hundred times more than we recount here.

"And may I remain here forever?" he asked.

"That depends on yourself!" answered the fairy. "If you do not strive for what is forbidden, as your forefather Adam did, then you may stay here eternally!"

"I shall not touch the fruits of the knowledge of good and evil!" said the prince.

"There are thousands of other beautiful fruits here!"

"Test yourself, and if the struggle seems too heavy for you, fly back with the East Wind, who will return here again in a hundred years! A hundred years will pass for you like a hundred hours, but that is quite a long time when it comes to struggling with sinful temptation. Each evening, when I take leave of you, I shall call to you: 'To me, to me!' I shall beckon you with my hand, but do not stir from your place, do not go at my call; with each step the longing within you will grow stronger and finally draw you into that hall where stands the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. I shall sleep beneath its fragrant luxuriant branches, and you will lean down to look at me more closely; I will smile at you, and you will kiss me... Then the Garden of Paradise will sink even deeper into the earth and be lost to you forever. A piercing wind will chill you to the bone, cold rain will soak your head; sorrow and calamity will be your lot!"

"I shall stay!" said the prince.

The East Wind kissed the prince upon the forehead and said:

"Be steadfast, and we shall meet again in a hundred years! Farewell, farewell!"

And the East Wind spread his great wings, which flashed like lightning in the darkness of an autumn night or like the northern lights in the gloom of a polar winter.

"Farewell! Farewell!" sang all the flowers and trees. Flocks of storks and pelicans flew forth like fluttering ribbons to escort the East Wind to the boundaries of the garden.

"Now the dances shall begin!" said the fairy. "But at sunset, while dancing with you, I shall begin to beckon you with my hand and call: 'To me! To me!' Do not heed me! For a hundred years, each evening the same thing will repeat, but day by day you will grow stronger and stronger, and in the end you will cease even to notice my call. This evening you must endure the first trial! Now you are warned!"

And the fairy led him into a spacious hall made of white translucent lilies with tiny golden harps playing by themselves instead of stamens. Lovely slender maidens in transparent garments swept into an airy dance and sang of the joys and bliss of immortal life in the eternally blooming Garden of Paradise.

But then the sun set, the sky blazed like molten gold, and a rosy glow fell upon the lilies. The prince drank the foaming wine offered him by the maidens and felt a surge of unspeakable bliss. Suddenly the rear wall of the hall opened, and the prince saw the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil surrounded by dazzling radiance; from behind the tree drifted a quiet, caressing song; he fancied he heard his mother's voice singing: "My child! My dear, beloved child!"

And the fairy began to beckon him with her hand and call in a tender voice: "To me, to me!" He moved toward her, forgetting his promise on the very first evening! And she continued to beckon him and smile... The spicy fragrance diffused in the air grew ever stronger; the harps sounded ever sweeter; it seemed as though the blessed spirits themselves sang in chorus: "All must be known! All must be experienced! Man is the king of nature!" It seemed to the prince that from the tree no longer dripped

more blood, but red glittering starlets fell instead. "To me! To me!" sang an airy melody, and with each step the prince's cheeks flushed hotter, while his blood surged ever more strongly.

"I must go!" he said. "There is no sin in this, nor can there be! Why flee from beauty and delight? I shall only gaze upon her, look at her as she sleeps! I will not kiss her! I am firm enough and shall master myself!"

The fairy's shimmering cloak slipped from her shoulders; she parted the tree's branches and in an instant vanished behind them.

"I have not yet broken my promise!" said the prince. "And I do not wish to break it!"

With these words he parted the branches... The fairy slept, as lovely as only a fairy of the Earthly Paradise can be. A smile played upon her lips, yet teardrops trembled on her long lashes.

"You weep because of me?" he whispered. "Do not weep, enchanting fairy! Only now have I understood heavenly bliss; it flows like fire through my blood, ignites my thoughts, I feel unearthly strength and power throughout my entire being!... Let eternal night descend upon me afterward—one such moment is dearer than all the world!"

And he kissed the tears trembling on her lashes; his lips touched hers.

A terrible clap of thunder rang out, such as no one had ever heard before, and everything blurred before the prince's eyes; the fairy vanished, the blooming Earthly Paradise sank deep into the earth. The prince saw it disappearing into the darkness of impenetrable night, until nothing remained of it but a tiny starlet glimmering in the distance. A mortal chill bound his limbs, his eyes closed, and he fell as though dead.

Cold rain wet his face, a sharp wind iced his head, and he came to himself.

"What have I done!" he sighed. "I have broken my vow, like Adam, and now the Earthly Paradise has sunk deep into the earth!"

He opened his eyes; far away the starlet still flickered, the last trace of the vanished paradise. It was the morning star shining in the sky.

The prince rose; he was again in that same forest, by the Cave of the Winds; beside him sat the Mother of the Winds. She looked angrily at him and menacingly raised her hand.

"On the very first evening!" she said. "Just as I thought! Yes, had you been my son, you would now be sitting in the sack!"

"He will yet end up there!" said Death—a sturdy old man with a scythe in his hand and great black wings upon his back. "And he will lie down in a coffin, though not just yet. I shall merely mark him and give him time to wander across the wide world and redeem his sin through good deeds! Then I shall come for him at the hour when he least expects me, pack him into a black coffin, set it upon my head, and carry him away to yonder star, where too blooms the Earthly Paradise; if he proves kind and pious, he shall enter therein, but if his thoughts and heart remain

filled with sin, the coffin shall sink with him even deeper than the Earthly Paradise sank. Yet every thousand years I shall come for him, so that he may sink still deeper, or else remain forever upon the radiant heavenly star!"