

The Garden of Paradise

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There was once a king's son, no one had so many beautiful books as he. In them he could read of everything that had ever happened in this world, and he could see it all pictured in fine illustrations. He could find out about every race of people and every country, but there was not a single word about where to find the Garden of Paradise, and this, just this, was the very thing that he thought most about.

When he was still very young and was about to start his schooling, his grandmother had told him that each flower in the Garden of Paradise was made of the sweetest cake, and that the pistils were bottles full of finest wine. On one sort of flower, she told, history was written, on another geography, or multiplication tables, so that one only had to eat cake to know one's lesson, and the more one ate, the more history, geography, or arithmetic one would know.

At the time he believed her, but when the boy grew older and more learned and much wiser, he knew that the glories of the Garden of Paradise must be of a very different sort.

"Oh, why did Eve have to pick fruit from the tree of knowledge, and why did Adam eat what was forbidden him? Now if it had only been I, that would never have happened, and sin would never have come into the world." He said it then, and when he was seventeen he said it still. The Garden of Paradise was always in his thoughts.

He went walking in the woods one day. He walked alone, for this was his favorite amusement. Evening came on, the clouds gathered, and the rain poured down as if the sky were all one big floodgate from which the water plunged. It was as dark as it would be at night in the deepest well. He kept slipping on the wet grass, and tripping over the stones that stuck out of the rocky soil. Everything was soaking wet, and at length the poor Prince didn't have a dry stitch to his back. He had to scramble over great boulders where the water trickled from the wet moss. He had almost fainted, when he heard a strange puffing and saw a huge cave ahead of him. It was brightly lit, for inside the cave burned a fire so large that it could have roasted a stag. And this was actually being done. A magnificent deer, antlers and all, had been stuck on a spit, and was being slowly turned between the rough-hewn trunks of two pine trees. An elderly woman, so burly and strong that she might have been taken for a man in disguise, sat by the fire and threw log after log upon it.

"You can come nearer," she said. "Sit down by the fire and let your clothes dry."

"There's an awful draft here," the Prince remarked, as he seated himself on the ground.

"It will be still worse when my sons get home," the woman told him. "You are in the cave of the winds, and my sons are the four winds of the world. Do I make myself clear?"

"Where are your sons?" the Prince asked.

"Such a stupid question is hard to answer," the woman told him. "My sons go their own ways, playing ball with the clouds in that great hall. "And she pointed up toward the sky.

"Really!" said the Prince. "I notice that you have a rather forceful way of speaking, and are not as gentle as the women I usually see around me."

"I suppose they have nothing better to do. I have to be harsh to control those sons of mine. I manage to do it, for all that they are an obstinate lot. See the four sacks that hang there on the wall! They dread those as much as you used to dread the switch that was kept behind the mirror for you. I can fold the boys right up, let me tell you, and pop them straight into the bag. We don't mince matters. There they stay. They aren't allowed to roam around again until I see fit to let them. But here comes one of them."

It was the North Wind who came hurtling in, with a cold blast of snowflakes that swirled about him and great hailstones that rattled on the floor. He was wearing a bear-skin coat and trousers; a seal-skin cap was pulled over his ears; long icicles hung from his beard; and hailstone after hailstone fell from the collar of his coat.

"Don't go right up to the fire so quickly," the Prince warned him. "Your face and hands might get frostbite."

"Frostbite!" the North Wind laughed his loudest. "Frostbite! Why, frost is my chief delight. But what sort of 'longleg' are you? How do you come to be in the cave of the winds?"

"He is here as my guest," the old woman intervened. "And if that explanation doesn't suit you, into the sack you go. Do I make myself clear?"

She made herself clear enough. The North Wind now talked of whence he had come, and where he had traveled for almost a month.

"I come from the Arctic Sea," he told them. "I have been on Bear Island with the Russian walrus hunters. I lay beside the helm, and slept as they sailed from the North Cape. When I awoke from time to time the storm bird circled about my knees. There's an odd bird for you! He gives a quick flap of his wings, and then holds them perfectly still and rushes along at full speed."

"Don't be so long-winded," his mother told him. "So you came to Bear Island?"

"It's a wonderful place! There's a dancing floor for you, as flat as a platter! The surface of the island is all half-melted snow, little patches of moss, and outcropping rocks. Scattered about are the bones of whales and polar bears, colored a moldy green, and looking like the arms and legs of some giant.

"You'd have thought that the sun never shone there. I blew the fog away a bit, so that the house could be seen. It was a hut built of wreckage and covered with walrus skins, the fleshy side turned outward, and smeared with reds and greens. A love polar bear sat growling on the roof of it.

"I went to the shore and looked at bird nests, and when I saw the featherless nestlings shrieking, with their beaks wide open, I blew down into their thousand throats. That taught them to shut their mouths. Further along, great walruses were wallowing about like monstrous maggots, with pigs' heads, and tusks a yard long."

"How well you do tell a story, my son," the old woman said. "My mouth waters when I hear you!"

"The hunt began. The harpoon was hurled into the walrus's breast, and a streaming blood stream spurted across the ice like a fountain. This reminded me of my own sport. I blew my sailing ships, those towering icebergs, against the boats until their timbers cracked. Ho! how the crew whistled and shouted. But I outwhistled them all. Overboard on the ice they had to throw their dead walruses, their tackle, and even their sea chests. I shrouded them in snow, and let them drift south with their broken boats and their booty alongside, for a taste of the open sea. They won't ever come back to Bear Island." "That was a wicked thing to do," said the mother of the winds.

"I'll let others tell of my good deeds," he said. "But here comes my brother from the west. I like him best of all. He has a seafaring air about him, and carries a refreshing touch of coolness wherever he goes."

"Is that little Zephyr?" the Prince asked.

"Of course it's Zephyr," the old woman replied, "but he's not little. He was a nice boy once, but that was years ago."

He looked like a savage, except that he wore a broad-rimmed hat to shield his face. In his

hand he carried a mahogany bludgeon, cut in the mahogany forests of America. Nothing less would do!

"Where have you come from?" his mother asked.

"I come from the forest wilderness," he said, "where the thorny vines make a fence between every tree, where the water snake lurks in the wet grass, and where people seem unnecessary."

"What were you doing there?"

"I gazed into the deepest of rivers, and saw how it rushed through the rapids and threw up a cloud of spray large enough to hold the rainbow. I saw a wild buffalo wading in the river, but it swept him away. He swam with a flock of wild ducks, that flew up when the river went over a waterfall. But the buffalo had to plunge down it. That amused me so much that I blew up a storm, which broke age-old trees into splinters."

"Haven't you done anything else?" the old woman asked him.

"I turned somersaults across the plains, stroked the wild horses, and shook cocoanuts down from the palm trees. Yes indeed, I have tales worth telling, but one shouldn't tell all he knows. Isn't that right, old lady?" Then he gave her such a kiss that it nearly knocked her over backward. He was certainly a wild young fellow.

Then the South Wind arrived, in a turban and a Bedouin's billowing robe.

"It's dreadfully cold in here," he cried, and threw more wood on the fire. "I can tell that the North Wind got here before me."

"It's hot enough to roast a polar bear here," the North Wind protested.

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

"Do you want to be put into the sack?" the old woman asked. "Sit down on that stone over there and tell me where you have been."

"In Africa, dear Mother," said he. "I have been hunting the lion with Hottentots in Kaffirland. What fine grass grows there on the plains. It is as green as an olive. There danced the gnu, and the ostrich raced with me, but I am fleeter than he is. I went into the desert where the yellow sand is like the bottom of the sea. I met with a caravan, where they were killing their last camel to get drinking water, but it was little enough they got. The sun blazed overhead and the sand scorched underfoot. The desert was unending.

"I rolled in the fine loose sand and whirled it aloft in great columns. What a dance that was! You ought to have seen how despondently the dromedaries hunched up, and how the trader pulled his burnoose over his head. He threw himself down before me as he would before Allah, his god. Now they are buried, with a pyramid of sand rising over them all. When some day I blow it away, the sun will bleach their bones white, and travelers will see that men have been there before them. Otherwise no one would believe it, there in the desert."

"So you have done nothing but wickedness!" cried his mother. "Into the sack with you!" And before he was aware of it, she picked the South Wind up bodily and thrust him into the bag. He thrashed about on the floor until she sat down on the sack. That kept him quiet.

"Those are boisterous sons you have," said the Prince.

"Indeed they are," she agreed, "but I know how to keep them in order. Here comes the fourth one."

This was the East Wind. He was dressed as a Chinaman.

"So that's where you've been!" said his mother. "I thought you had gone to the Garden of

Paradise."

"I won't fly there until tomorrow," the East Wind said. "Tomorrow it will be exactly a hundred years since I was there. I am just home from China, where I danced around the porcelain tower until all the bells jangled. Officials of state were being whipped through the streets. Bamboo sticks were broken across their shoulders, though they were people of importance, from the first to the ninth degree. They howled, 'Thank you so much, my father and protector,' but they didn't mean it. And I went about clanging the bells and sang, 'Tsing, tsang, tsu!' "

"You are too saucy," the old woman told him. "It's a lucky thing that you'll be off to the Garden of Paradise tomorrow, for it always has a good influence on you. Remember to drink deep out of the fountain of wisdom and bring back a little bottleful for me."

"I'll do that," said the East Wind. "But why have you popped my brother from the south into the sack? Let's have him out. He must tell me about the phoenix bird, because the Princess in the Garden of Paradise always asks me about that bird when I drop in on her every hundred years. Open up my sack, like my own sweet mother, and I'll give you two pockets full of tea as green and fresh as it was when I picked it off the bush."

"Well-for the sake of the tea, and because you are my pet, I'll open the sack."

She opened it up, and the South Wind crawled out. But he looked very glum, because the Prince, who was a stranger, had seen him humbled.

"Here's a palm-leaf fan for the Princess," the South Wind said. "It was given to me by the old phoenix, who was the only one of his kind in the world. On it he scratched with his beak a history of the hundred years that he lived, so she can read it herself. I watched the phoenix bird set fire to her nest, and sat there while she burned to death, just like a Hindoo widow. What a crackling there was of dry twigs, what smoke, and what a smell of smoldering! Finally it all burst into flames, and the old phoenix was reduced to ashes, but her egg lay white-hot in the blaze. With a great bang it broke open, and the young phoenix flew out of it. Now he is the ruler over all the birds, and he is the only phoenix bird in all the world. As his greetings to the Princess, he thrust a hole in the palm leaf I am giving you."

"Let's have a bite to eat," said the mother of the winds.

As they sat down to eat the roast stag, the Prince took a place beside the East Wind, and they soon became fast friends.

"Tell me," said the Prince, "who is this Princess you've been talking so much about, and just where is the Garden of Eden?"

"Ah, ha!" said the East Wind. "Would you like to go there? Then fly with me tomorrow. I must warn you, though, no man has been there since Adam and Eve. You have read about them in the Bible?"

"Surely," the Prince said.

"After they were driven out, the Garden of Paradise sank deep into the earth, but it kept its warm sunlight, its refreshing air, and all of its glories. The queen of the fairies lives there on the Island of the Blessed, where death never comes and where there is everlasting happiness. Sit on my back tomorrow and I shall take you with me. I think it can be managed. But now let's stop talking, for I want to sleep."

And then they all went to sleep. When the Prince awoke the next morning, it came as no small surprise to find himself high over the clouds. He was seated on the back of the East Wind, who carefully held him safe. They were so far up in the sky that all the woods, fields, rivers, and lakes looked as if they were printed on a map spread beneath them.

"Good morning," said the East Wind. "You might just as well sleep a little longer. There's

nothing very interesting in this flat land beneath us, unless you care to count churches. They stand out like chalk marks upon the green board."

What he called "the green board" was all the fields and pastures.

"It was not very polite of me to leave without bidding your mother and brothers farewell," the Prince said.

"That's excusable, when you leave in your sleep," the East Wind told him, as they flew on faster than ever.

One could hear it in the tree tops. All the leaves and branches rustled as they swept over the forest, and when they crossed over lakes or over seas the waves rose high, and tall ships bent low to the water as if they were drifting swans.

As darkness gathered that evening, it was pleasant to see the great cities with their lights twinkling here and spreading there, just as when you burn a piece of paper and the sparks fly one after another. At this sight the Prince clapped his hands in delight, but the East Wind advised him to stop it and hold on tight, or he might fall and find himself stuck upon a church steeple.

The eagle in the dark forest flew lightly, but the East Wind flew more lightly still. The Cossack on his pony sped swiftly across the steppes, but the Prince sped still more swiftly.

"Now," said the East Wind, "you can view the Himalayas, the highest mountains in Asia. And soon we shall reach the Garden of paradise."

They turned southward, where the air was sweet with flowers and spice. Figs and pomegranates grew wild, and on untended vines grew red and blue clusters of grapes. They came down here, and both of them stretched out on the soft grass, where flowers nodded in the breeze as if to say: "Welcome back."

"Are we now in the Garden of Paradise?" the Prince asked.

"Oh, no!" said the East Wind. "But we shall come to it soon. Do you see that rocky cliff, and the big cave, where the vines hang in a wide curtain of greenery? That's the way we go. Wrap your coat well about you. Here the sun is scorching hot, but a few steps and it is as cold as ice. The bird that flies at the mouth of the cave has one wing in summery and the other in wintry air."

"So this is the way to the Garden of Paradise," said the Prince, as they entered the cave.

Brer-r-r! how frosty it was there, but not for long. The East Wind spread his wings, and they shone like the brightest flames. But what a cave that was! Huge masses of rock, from which water was trickling, hung in fantastic shapes above them. Sometimes the cave was so narrow that they had to crawl on their hands and knees, sometimes so vast that it seemed that they were under the open sky. The cave resembled a series of funeral chapels, with mute organ pipes and banners turned to stone.

"We are going to the Garden of Paradise through the gates of death, are we not?" the Prince asked.

The East Wind answered not a word, but pointed to a lovely blue light that shone ahead of them. The masses of stone over their heads grew more and more misty, and at last they looked up at a clear white cloud in the moonlight. The air became delightfully clement, as fresh as it is in the hills, and as sweetly scented as it is among the roses that bloom in the valley.

The river which flowed there was clear as the air itself, and the fish in it were like silver and gold. Purple eels, that at every turn threw off blue sparks, frolicked about in the water, and the large leaves of the aquatic flowers gleamed in all of the rainbow's colors. The

flowers themselves were like a bright orange flame, which fed on the water just as a lamplight is fed by oil.

A strong marble bridge, made so delicately and artistically that it looked as if it consisted of lace and glass pearls, led across the water to the Island of the Blessed, where the Garden of Paradise bloomed.

The East Wind swept the Prince up in his arms and carried him across to the island, where the petals and leaves sang all the lovely old songs of his childhood, but far, far sweeter than any human voice could sing. Were these palm trees that grew there, or immense water plants? Such vast and verdant trees the Prince had never seen before. The most marvelous climbing vines hung in garlands such as are to be seen only in old illuminated church books, painted in gold and bright colors in the margins or twined about the initial letters. Here was the oddest assortment of birds, flowers, and twisting vines.

On the grass near-by, with their brilliantly starred tails spread wide, was a flock of peacocks. Or so they seemed, but when the Prince touched them he found that these were not birds. They were plants. They were large burdock leaves that were as resplendent as a peacock's train. Lions and tigers leaped about, as lithe as cats, in the green shrubbery which the olive blossoms made so fragrant. The lions and tigers were quite tame, for the wild wood pigeon, which glistened like a lovely pearl, brushed the lion's mane with her wings, and the timid antelopes stood by and tossed their heads as if they would like to join in their play.

Then the fairy of the garden came to meet them. Her garments were as bright as the sun, and her face was as cheerful as that of a happy mother who is well pleased with her child. She was so young and lovely, and the other pretty maidens who followed her each wore a shining star in their hair. When the East Wind gave her the palm-leaf message from the phoenix, her eyes sparkled with pleasure.

She took the Prince by his hand and led him into her palace, where the walls had the color of a perfect tulip petal held up to the sun. The ceiling was made of one great shining flower, and the longer one looked up the deeper did the cup of it seem to be. The Prince went to the window. As he glanced out through one of the panes he saw the Tree of Knowledge, with the serpent, and Adam and Eve standing under it.

"Weren't they driven out?" he asked.

The fairy smilingly explained to him that Time had glazed a picture in each pane, but that these were not the usual sort of pictures. No, they had life in them. The leaves quivered on the trees, and the people came and went as in a mirror.

He looked through another pane and there was Jacob's dream, with the ladder that went up to Heaven, and the great angels climbing up and down. Yes, all that ever there was in the world lived on, and moved across these panes of glass. Only Time could glaze such artistic paintings so well.

The fairy smiled and led him on into a vast and lofty hall, with walls that seemed transparent. On the walls were portraits, each fairer than the one before. These were millions of blessed souls, a happy choir which sang in perfect harmony. The uppermost faces appeared to be smaller than the tiniest rosebud drawn as a single dot in a picture. In the center of the hall grew a large tree, with luxuriantly hanging branches. Golden apples large and small hung like oranges among the leaves. This was the Tree of Knowledge, of which Adam and Eve had tasted. A sparkling red drop of dew hung from each leaf, as if the Tree were weeping tears of blood.

"Now let us get into the boat," the fairy proposed. "There we will have some refreshments on the heaving water. Though the rocking boat stays in one place, we shall see all the lands in the world glide by."

It was marvelous how the whole shore moved. Now the high snow-capped Alps went past, with their clouds and dark evergreen trees. The Alpine horn was heard, deep and melancholy, and the shepherds yodeled gaily in the valley. But soon the boat was overhung by the long arching branches of banana trees. Jet-black swans went swimming by, and the queerest animals and plants were to be seen along the banks. This was new Holland and the fifth quarter of the globe that glided past, with its blue hills in the distance. They heard the songs of the priests and saw the savages dance to the sound of drums, and trumpets of bone. The cloud-tipped pyramids of Egypt, the fallen columns, and sphinxes half buried in the sands, swept by. The Northern Lights blazed over the glaciers around the Pole, in a display of fireworks that no one could imitate. The Prince saw a hundred times more than we can tell, and he was completely happy.

"May I always stay here?" he asked.

"That is up to you," the fairy told him. "Unless, as Adam did, you let yourself be tempted and do what is forbidden, you may stay here always."

"I won't touch the fruit on the Tree of Knowledge," the Prince declared. "Here are thousands of other fruits that are just as attractive."

"Look into your heart, and, if you have not strength enough, go back with the East Wind who brought you here. He is leaving soon, and will not return for a hundred years, which you will spend as quickly here as if they were a hundred hours.

"But that is a long time to resist the temptation to sin. When I leave you every evening, I shall have to call, 'Come with me,' and hold out my hands to you. But you must stay behind. Do not follow me, or your desire will grow with every step. You will come into the hall where the Tree of Knowledge grows. I sleep under the arch of its sweet-smelling branches. If you lean over me I shall have to smile, but if you kiss me on the mouth this Paradise will vanish deep into the earth, and you will lose it. The cutting winds of the wasteland will blow about you, the cold rain will drip from your hair, and sorrow and toil will be your destiny."

"I shall stay," the Prince said.

The East Wind kissed his forehead. "Be strong," he said, "and in a hundred years we shall meet here again. Farewell! farewell!" Then the East Wind spread his tremendous wings that flashed like lightning seen at harvest time or like the Northern Lights in the winter cold.

"Farewell! farewell!" the leaves and trees echoed the sound, as the storks and the pelicans flew with him to the end of the garden, in lines that were like ribbons streaming through the air.

"Now we will start our dances," the fairy said. "When I have danced the last dance with you at sundown, you will see me hold out my hands to you, and hear me call. 'Come with me.' But do not come. Every evening for a hundred years, I shall have to repeat this. Every time that you resist, your strength will grow, and at last you will not even think of yielding to temptation. This evening is the first time, so take warning!"

And the fairy led him into a large hall of white, transparent lilies. The yellow stamens of each flower formed a small golden harp, which vibrated to the music of strings and flutes. The loveliest maidens, floating and slender, came dancing by, clad in such airy gauze that one could see how perfectly shaped they were. They sang of the happiness of life—they who would never die—and they sang that the Garden of Paradise would forever bloom.

The sun went down. The sky turned to shining gold, and in its light the lilies took on the color of the loveliest roses. The Prince drank the sparkling wine that the maidens offered him, and felt happier than he had ever been. He watched the background of the hall thrown open, and the Tree of Knowledge standing in a splendor which blinded his eyes. The song from the tree was as soft and lovely as his dear mother's voice, and it was as if

she were saying, "My child, my dearest child."

The fairy then held out her hands to him and called most sweetly:

"Follow me! Oh, follow me!"

Forgetting his promise-forgetting everything, on the very first evening that she held out her hands and smiled-he ran toward her. The fragrant air around him became even more sweet, the music of the harps sounded even more lovely, and it seemed as though the millions of happy faces in the hall where the Tree grew nodded to him and sang, "One must know all there is to know, for man is the lord of the earth." And it seemed to him that the drops that fell from the Tree of Knowledge were no longer tears of blood, but red and shining stars.

"Follow me! Follow me!" the quivering voice still called, and at every step that the Prince took his cheeks flushed warmer and his pulse beat faster.

"I cannot help it," he said. "This is no sin. It cannot be wicked to follow beauty and happiness. I must see her sleeping. No harm will be done if only I keep myself from kissing her. And I will not kiss her, for I am strong. I have a determined will."

The fairy threw off her bright robe, parted the boughs, and was instantly hidden within them.

"I have not sinned yet," said the Prince, "and I shall not!"

He pushed the branches aside. There she lay, already asleep. Lovely as only the fairy of the Garden of Paradise can be, she smiled in her sleep, but as he leaned over her he saw tears trembling between her lashes.

"Do you weep for me?" he whispered. "Do not weep, my splendid maiden. Not until now have I known the bliss of Paradise. It runs through my veins and through all my thoughts. I feel the strength of an angel, and the strength of eternal life in my mortal body. Let eternal night come over me. One moment such as this is worth it all." He kissed away the tears from her eyes, and then his lips had touched her mouth.

Thunder roared, louder and more terrible than any thunder ever heard before, and everything crashed! The lovely fairy and the blossoming Paradise dropped away, deeper and deeper. The Prince saw it disappear into the dark night. Like a small shining star it twinkled in the distance. A deathly chill shook his body. He closed his eyes and for a long time he lay as if he were dead.

The cold rain fell in his face, and the cutting wind blew about his head. Consciousness returned to him.

"What have I done?" he gasped. "Like Adam, I have sinned-sinned so unforgivably that Paradise has dropped away, deep in the earth."

He opened his eyes and he still saw the star far away, the star that twinkled like the Paradise he had lost-it was the morning star in the sky. He rose and found himself in the forest, not far from the cave of the winds. The mother of the winds sat beside him. She looked at him angrily and raised her finger.

"The very first evening!" she said. "I thought that was the way it would be. If you were my son, into the sack you would certainly go."

"Indeed he shall go there!" said Death, a vigorous old man with a scythe in his hand, and long black wings. "Yes, he shall be put in a coffin, but not quite yet. Now I shall only mark him. For a while I'll let him walk the earth to atone for his sins and grow better. But I'll be back some day. Some day, when he least expects me, I shall put him in a black coffin, lift it on my head, and fly upward to the star. There too blooms the Garden of Paradise, and if he is a good and pious man he will be allowed to enter it. But if his thoughts are bad, and

his heart is still full of sin, he will sink down deeper with his coffin than Paradise sank. Only once in a thousand years shall I go to see whether he must sink still lower, or may reach the star-that bright star away up there."