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# *The Garden of Eden*

by

# Hans Christian Andersen

(from *Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories* [1930], translated by M. R. James)

There was once a King's son. Nobody ever had so many or such pretty books as he: everything that ever happened in the world was there for him to read. About every nation and every country he could get information. But of where the Garden of Eden was to be found there was not a word; and that was exactly the thing he thought about most.

His grandmother had told him when he was still quite little, just going to begin attending school, that every flower in the Garden of Eden was the sweetest of cakes, and the pistils the finest of wine. On one flower was written History, on another Geography or Tables: you need only eat a cake and you knew your lesson. The more you ate the more Geography or History or Tables you took in.

He believed it at the time, but as he got to be a bigger boy and learned more and became so much cleverer, he understood that there must be quite a different sort of beauty in the Garden of Eden.

"Oh, why did Eve pluck from the Tree of Knowledge? Why did Adam eat of the forbidden fruit? If it had been I, it would not have happened; sin would never have come into the world." So he said then, and still he said it, when he was seventeen years old. The Garden of Eden took up the whole of his thoughts.

One day he went out into the forest: alone, for that pleased him best.

Evening came on, the clouds drew together, there was such a storm of rain, as if the whole sky were one single sluice out of which the water was rushing: it was as dark as it would be in the deepest well at night. Sometimes he slipped on the wet grass, sometimes he fell down over bare stones that jutted out of the rocky surface. Everything was drenched: there was not a dry thread on the unhappy Prince. He had to clamber over great blocks of stone where the water oozed out of the deep moss. He was ready to faint, when he heard a strange rushing sound, and saw in front of him a large cave, lit up within. In the middle of it blazed a fire at which you could have roasted a deer, and indeed that was what was happening. A magnificent stag with tall antlers was stuck on a spit and was turning slowly round between two rough-hewn pine-trunks. An elderly woman, tall and strong, like a man in disguise, was sitting by the fire throwing log after log into it.

"Just you come a bit nearer," said she. "Sit down by the fire and get your clothes dry." "There's an awful draught here," said the Prince, as he sat down on the floor. "It'll be worse yet when my sons come home," said the woman. "This is the cave of the winds you're in, and my sons are the four winds of the world. Can you understand that?"

"Where are your sons?" asked the Prince.

"Why, it's no use answering when people ask stupid questions," said the woman. "My sons are on their own: they're playing bowls with the clouds in the big room upstairs," and she pointed up in the air.

"Oh, ah!" said the Prince. "Well, you talk rather sharp and you're not so gentle as the ladies I generally see about me." "Ah, they've nothing else to do; I've got to be sharp if I'm to keep my sons in order. But I can do it, though they've stiff necks of their own. Do you see those four sacks hanging on the wall? They're as frightened of them as you used to be of the birch-rod behind the looking-glass. I can double the boys up, I can tell you, and into the bag they go! We make no bones about it. There they stay and don't come out to play till I think proper. But here we have one of them."

It was the North Wind, who came in with a freezing blast. Big hailstones fell and hopped on the floor and snowflakes came floating all round. He was dressed in bearskin breeches and coat, and a sealskin hat was pulled down over his ears: long icicles hung on his beard, and one hailstone after another slid down from his coat collar. "Don't go near the fire at once," said the Prince, "you might easily get frostbite in your face and hands if you do!"

"Frostbite!" said the North Wind, and laughed out loud. "Frostbite! Why, that's what I like best! And what sort of a shrimp may you be? How do you come into the cave of the winds?" "He's my guest," said the old lady, "and if you're not

satisfied with that explanation, you can go into the bag. Now you know my decision."

Well, that had its effect, and the North Wind told them where he had come from and where he had been for nigh upon a whole month. "I come from the Polar sea," he said; "I've been on Behring Island with the Russian whalers. I sat and slept at the helm when they set sail from the North Cape, and every now and then, when I woke up a little, the petrel flew about my legs. That's a funny bird; it gives one quick flap of its wings, and then keeps them spread out without moving them, and gets way enough."

"Don't make such a long story of it," said the mother of the winds. "And so you got to Behring Island, did you?"

"It's beautiful! There's a floor to dance on as flat as a plate. Half-thawed snow and moss, sharp rocks and skeletons of whales and white bears lying about. They looked like the arm- and leg-bones of giants, with a mouldy green on them. You'd think the sun had never shone on them. I blew at the mist a little, so as to get a sight of the shelter; it was a house built of wreck-wood and covered with whale-hides, the fleshy side was outward, red and green all over: on the roof a live white bear sat growling. I went to the beach and looked at the bird's nests and the unfledged young, screaming and gaping. I blew down into their thousand windpipes and taught them to keep their mouths still. Down below the whales were wallowing like live guts or great worms with pigs' heads and teeth an ell long."

"You tell your tale well, my boy!" said his mother; "my mouth waters to listen to you."

"Then the hunt began. The harpoon was planted in the heart of the whale and made the steaming jet of blood spurt up like a fountain over the ice. Then I too thought of my own game. I blew hard and made my sailing ships, the icebergs as tall as cliffs, freeze the boats right in. Whew! how they did squeak and scream! But I screamed louder. The dead whales, the chests and the tackle, they had to turn them out on the ice. I shook snowflakes over them and left them drifting southward in the frozen-in craft, with their prey, to taste salt water. They'll never come back to Behring Island."

"So you've done mischief!" said the mother of the winds. "How much good I've done let the others tell," said he. "But here we have my brother from the west. I like him best of the lot. He has a smack of the sea and a blessed coolness about him."

"Is that the little Zephyr?" asked the Prince.

"Yes, certainly it's the Zephyr," said the old lady, "but he isn't very little now. In old days he was a pretty boy, but that's past and over."

He looked like a wild man, but he had a slouch hat to prevent his being hurt: in his hand he held a mahogany club, cut in the mahogany forests of America. He couldn't do with a smaller one.

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

"From the wildernesses of the forest," he said, "where the thorny lianas make a fence from one tree to the next, where the water snake lies in the wet growth and human beings seem not to be wanted."

"How did you employ yourself there?" "I looked at the deep river, where it was dashing down from the rocks and turning into spray to carry the rainbow. I saw the wild buffalo try to swim the river, but the stream hurried him down with it, drifting with a flock of wild ducks which flew up in the air when they came to the waterfall; but the buffalo had to go down it. I liked that, and I blew such a gale that the oldest trees sailed off and turned to chips." "And didn't you get anything else done?" the old lady asked. "I turned somersaults over the savannahs, I patted the wild horses and shook down coco-nuts. Yes, yes, I've plenty of stories to tell, but one mustn't tell everything one knows. You know that well enough, old lady!" And with that he kissed his mother so hard she nearly went over backwards! He was a regular wild boy.

Next came the South Wind with a turban and a floating Bedouin's cloak.

"Precious cold in here," said he, throwing logs on the fire. "One can easily tell that North Wind got here first."

"It's hot enough here to roast a white bear," said North Wind. "White bear yourself!" said South Wind.

"Do you want to be stuffed in the bag?" asked the old lady; "sit yourself down on the stone there and tell where you've been."

"In Africa, Mother," he answered. "I was with the Hottentots, lion hunting in Kaffir land. What grass does grow on the plains there, green as an olive! The gnu capered about and the ostrich ran races with me, but I am quicker on my legs. I got to the desert, the yellow sand that looks like the sea-bottom. There I met a caravan: they'd killed their last camel to get some water to drink, but it was only a little they got. The sun was burning them overhead and the sand roasting them underfoot. The desert stretched away without a bound. Then I rolled in the loose fine sand and whirled it up into great pillars—that was a dance! You should have seen how the dromedary stood still and the merchant pulled his kaftan over his head. He threw himself down before me as if before Allah, his God. They are buried now. There's a pyramid of sand piled over them all, but when I blow it away, the sun will bleach the white bones, and the travellers will see there have been men there before them: else you wouldn't believe it in the desert."

"So then you've done nothing but mischief!" said his mother. "March into the bag!" And before he knew it she had South Wind by the body and into the bag, which wallowed round about the floor till she sat on it, and it had to be quiet.

"A lively lot of boys you've got!" said the Prince, "They surely are," she said. "Oh, I can tame 'em. Here we have the fourth."

It was East Wind, dressed like a Chinaman.

"Oh, you come from that quarter, do you?" said his mother. "I thought you'd been to the Garden of Eden."

"I'm going to fly there first thing in the morning," said East Wind. "To-morrow, it'll be a hundred years since I was there. I've come now from China, where I danced round the porcelain towers and made all the bells ring. In the street below the officials were being beaten: bamboo sticks were being used up on their shoulders, and they were men of the first to the ninth class. They kept crying, 'Many thanks, my fatherly benefactor'; but they didn't really mean it. And I rang the bells and sang: 'Tsing, Tsang, Tsu'."

"You're a mischievous boy," said the old lady; "it's a good thing you're going to the Garden of Eden to-morrow; it always improves your manners a bit. Mind you take a good drink of the well of wisdom and bring a little bottle full for me."

"I will," said East Wind. "But what have you stuck my brother from the South into the bag for? Out with him, he must tell me about the Phoenix bird. The Princess in the Garden of Eden always wants to hear about that bird when I pay her a visit every hundred years. Open the bag, do, and you'll be my darling mother, and I'll make you a present of two pockets full of tea, quite green and fresh, that I picked on the spot." "Well then, for the tea's sake, and because you are my pet boy, I will open the bag." So she did, and South Wind crawled out, but looked very sheepish because the strange Prince had seen it. "There's a palm leaf for you, for the Princess," said South Wind; "that leaf was given me by the old Phoenix bird, the only one there was in the world; he's scratched on it with his beak the account of his whole life, the hundred years he lived: now she can read it for herself. I saw how the Phoenix bird himself set fire to his nest and sat there and was burned up like a Hindu's wife. How the dry branches did crackle, and what a smoke and perfume there was! At last it all flamed up in a blaze, and the old Phoenix bird burned to ashes. But his egg lay red hot in the fire, and then burst with a loud report, and the young one flew out; and now he is Regent over all the birds and the only Phoenix in the world. He's bitten a hole in the palm leaf I gave you, and that is his greeting to the Princess."

"Now let's have something to eat," said the mother of the winds; so they all sat down to eat the roasted stag, and the Prince sat by East Wind; and so they soon became good friends.

"Now do just tell me," said the Prince, "what sort of a Princess is that who is so much talked about here, and where is the Garden of Eden?"

"Ho, ho!" said East Wind, "if you want to go there, why, fly there with me to-morrow. Only I must tell you this, there hasn't been a mortal there since Adam and Eve. You know about them from your Bible History."

"Of course," said the Prince.

"When they were driven out, the Garden of Eden sank down into the earth, but it kept its warm sunshine and its soft air, and all its beauty. The Queen of the Fairies lives there, and there lies the Island of Happiness, where death never comes, and it is delightful to be. You put yourself on my back to-morrow and I'll take you with me: I think it can be done. But now you mustn't talk any more, for I want to go to sleep."

So they all of them went to sleep.

Early in the morning the Prince woke up, and was not a little startled at finding he was already high up above the clouds. He was sitting on East Wind's back, who was holding him very trustily. They were so high up in the sky that woods and fields, rivers and lakes, looked as they would on a large coloured map of the country.

"Good morning," said East Wind. "You might as well have slept a bit longer, for there isn't much to look at in this flat country beneath us, unless you care to count the churches: they show up like blocks of chalk down there on the green board." It was the fields and meadows that he called the green board.

"It was very uncivil of me not to say good-bye to your mother and your brothers," said the Prince. "Oh, when one's asleep one stands excused," said East Wind; and thereupon they flew on yet faster: you could hear the going in the tops of the woods, when they flew over them, every bough and leaf rustled: you could hear it on the sea and on the lakes, for where they flew the waves rolled higher and the great ships bowed deep in the water like swimming swans.

Towards evening, when it grew dark, it was very amusing to see the big towns. Lights burned below them, now here, now there: it was just as when one has burnt a bit of paper and sees all the little sparks, which are children coming out of school. The Prince clapped his hands, but East Wind begged him to stop that and hold tight instead, or he might easily fall down and be left hanging on a church steeple.

Swift flew the eagle in the dark forest, but swifter flew East Wind. The Cossack on his little horse coursed over the Steppes, but far swifter was the pace the Prince went.

"Now you can see the Himalayas," said East Wind, "they're the highest mountains in Asia: we shall soon get to the Garden of Eden now." And then they wheeled further to the southward, and soon there came a perfume of spices and flowers. The fig and the pomegranate grew wild, and on the wild vines were red and blue clusters. Here they both alighted and stretched themselves on the soft grass where the flowers nodded to the wind as if to say: "Welcome back again."

"Are we in the Garden of Eden now?" asked the Prince. "No, of course not," replied East Wind, "but we shall soon be there now. Do you see that wall of rocks and that big cave where the creepers hang down like great green curtains? That's what we have to go through. Wrap yourself up in your cloak: the sun is burning hot here, but a step further on and it's icy cold. A bird that flits past the cave has one wing out here in the warm summer, and the other inside in the cold of winter." "So that's the way to the Garden of Eden, is it?" asked the Prince. Then they entered the cave. Hoo, how icy cold it was! But that didn't last long. East Wind spread out his wings and they shone like the brightest flame. Why, what a cave it was! The great masses of stone from which water dripped hung above them in the strangest shapes: here it was so narrow that they had to crawl on their hands and knees, here it stretched above them seemingly as high as the open air. Elsewhere were places like funeral chapels, with silent organ pipes and banners turned to stone.

"We seem to be going by the path of Death to the Garden of Eden," said the Prince, but East Wind answered not a word, only pointed ahead, and there the most beautiful blue light flashed out to meet them. The masses of stone overhead became more and more like a mist, which finally was as light as a white cloud in the moonlight. And now they were in the most delightful soft air, cool as on a mountain-top, fragrant as among the roses of a valley.

There flowed a stream, clear as the air itself, and the fishes in it were like silver and gold. Eels of purple-red hue that flashed like blue sparks at every bend of their bodies, played about in the water below, and the broad water-lily leaves had the colours of the rainbow, while the flower itself glowed with burning yellow-red, nourished by the water, as oil keeps a lamp ever burning. A bridge of marble, firm but so artfully and finely carved as if it were of filigree and beads of glass, led over the stream to the Island of Happiness, where the Garden of Eden blossomed.

East Wind took the Prince in his arms and bore him across, and there the flowers and leaves sang him the sweetest songs of his childhood, but so overwhelmingly lovely were they as no human voice can sing the like here.

Were those palm trees or gigantic water plants that grew there? Trees so full of sap and so large the Prince had never yet seen. The strangest creeping plants hung down in long wreaths like those you find painted in gold and colours in the margins of the old service books, or twining themselves about the initial letters. There were the quaintest blendings of birds, flowers and tendrils. Close by in the grass stood a flock of peacocks with their radiant tails spread out. Yes, it really was so! Yet no, when the Prince touched them he found they were not animals but plants; they were the great dock leaves which here shone like the beautiful tail of the peacock. The lion and the tiger darted like lithe cats through the green thicket that smelt like the blossom of the olive, and the lion and the tiger were tame; the wild wood-pigeon shining

like the fairest of pearls fluttered the lion's mane with its wings, and the antelope, that elsewhere is so timid, stood still and nodded its head, as if it too would like to join in the play.

Now came forth the Fairy of Eden: her dress shone like the sun, and her face was kind as that of a happy mother rejoicing over her child. Young and fair was she, and beautiful girls, each with a shining star in her hair, followed her.

East Wind gave her the written leaf from the Phoenix, and her eyes sparkled with pleasure: she took the Prince's hand and led him into the palace where the walls were of the colour of the most splendid tulip-petals when held against the sunlight. The very roof was one great shining flower, and the more one gazed up into it the deeper seemed its cup. The Prince walked over to a window and looked through one of the panes, and there he beheld the Tree of Knowledge with the serpent and Adam and Eve standing close by. "Were they not driven out?" he asked. The Fairy smiled and showed him that on every pane time had burnt in its picture, but not so as one is used to see it; no, there was life in it, the leaves of the trees moved, the people came and went as they do in a looking-glass. He looked through another pane, and there was Jacob's dream, where the ladder reached into heaven and the angels with their broad wings hovered up and down. Everything that has happened in the world lived and moved in these panes of glass; such skilful painting only time could have imprinted.

The Fairy smiled and led him into a hall, great and high, whose walls seemed to be of transparent imagery, each face more lovely than the last. Here were millions of happy ones, who laughed and sang so that their voices flowed together into a single melody. Those at the top were so tiny that they seemed smaller than the least rosebud that is drawn like a dot on the paper. And in the midst of the hall stood a mighty tree with hanging boughs. Lovely golden apples, large and small, hung like oranges among the green leaves. This was the Tree of Knowledge of whose fruit Adam and Eve had eaten. From every leaf dripped a bright-red dewdrop: it seemed as if the tree were weeping tears of blood.

"Now let us take the boat," said the Fairy, "there we shall enjoy the coolness of the heaving water. The boat swings, yet does not leave its place, but all the countries of the world glide along before our eyes." And it was marvellous to see how the whole shore moved. There were the high Swiss Alps, the clouds and the dark pine forests: the sound of the horn came deep and melancholy, and the yodel of the shepherd rose sweet from the valley. Again, the banyan trees bowed their long hanging branches over the boat. Coal-black swans swam in the water, and the strangest beasts and flowers showed themselves on the brink. It was New Holland, the fifth continent of the world, that glided by, showing its blue mountains far away. One heard the song of the priests and watched the wild men dance to the sound of drums and pipes of bone. The Pyramids of Egypt, piercing the clouds, fallen pillars and Sphinxes half-buried in the sand, slid by. The northern lights blazed above the craters of the North—a show of fireworks such as none could equal. The Prince was at the height of happiness—he beheld a hundredfold more than we are telling of here. "And can I stay here always?" he asked.

"That depends on yourself," said the Fairy. "If you do not, like Adam, let yourself be tempted to do the forbidden thing, you can stay here always."

"I shall not touch the apples on the Tree of Knowledge," said the Prince, "there are thousands of fruits here as fair as they."

"Test yourself, and if you are not strong enough, then go with East Wind who brought you: he is to fly back now, and will not come again for a hundred years. That time will pass by you in this place as if it were only a hundred hours, but even that is a long time for temptation and for sin. Every evening when I part from you I must call to you, 'come with me'. I must beckon with this hand to you; but stay where you are, do not come with me, for at every step your longing will become stronger: you will come to the hall where the Tree of Knowledge grows: I shall sleep beneath its fragrant hanging boughs: you will bend over me, and I must smile: but if you imprint a kiss on my mouth, Eden will sink deep into the earth, and be lost to you. The keen wind of the desert will howl around you, the cold rain will drip from your hair. Sorrow and trouble will be your lot."

"I shall stay here," said the Prince: and East Wind kissed his brow and said, "Be strong, and we shall meet here again in a hundred years. Farewell! Farewell!" So East Wind spread his mighty wings: they shone like ripe corn in harvest or the northern lights in the depth of winter. Farewell! Farewell! rang out from the flowers and trees. Storks and pelicans flew in long rows like a fluttering ribbon, and followed him to the boundaries of the garden.

"Now our dances begin," said the Fairy. "At the end of them, when I shall dance with you, you will see, as the sun sinks,

that I beckon to you: you will hear me call to you, 'Come with me', but do it not. For a hundred years I must repeat it every evening, and every time that moment passes by, you will gain more strength, and at last you will heed it no more. To-night is the first time; now I have warned you."

So the Fairy led him into a great hall of transparent white lilies, in each of which the yellow pistil was a pure gold harp that rang with the note of strings and flute. Beautiful girls, lissom and slim, clad in billowy silk, that showed their lovely limbs, swayed in the dance and sang how sweet was life, how they would never die, and the Garden of Eden would ever bloom.

The sun went down; all heaven was pure gold, that gave the lilies the hue of the fairest roses, and the Prince drank of the foaming wine that the maidens brought, and felt such happiness as never before. He saw the further wall of the hall opened, and how the Tree of Knowledge stood forth in a brightness that blinded his eyes. The song that came from it was soft and lovely as his mother's voice, as if she were singing, "My child, my darling child!"

Then the Fairy beckoned and called lovingly, "Follow me! Follow me!" and he rushed towards her, forgetting his promise, forgetting it all on that first evening, as she beckoned and smiled. The perfume, the spicy perfume about him grew stronger, the harps rang yet more beautifully, and it seemed as if the millions of smiling heads in the hall where the tree grew nodded and sang: "Man should know all things. Mankind is the lord of the world." It was no longer tears of blood that were falling from the leaves of the Tree of Knowledge, he thought—they were red sparkling stars. "Follow me! Follow me!" said the thrilling notes, and at every step the Prince's cheeks burned hotter and his blood coursed quicker. "I must," he said, "it is no sin, it cannot be! Why not follow beauty and joy? I will see her asleep; nothing is lost, if only I do not kiss her, and I will not, I am strong, I have a firm will."

The Fairy let fall her radiant robe, thrust the branches aside, and the next moment was hidden among them.

"Not yet have I transgressed," said the Prince, "nor will I," and he too pushed the branches aside. There she was, asleep already, beautiful, as only the Fairy of the Garden of Eden can be. She smiled in her dreams, and he bent over her and saw tears trickling between her eyelashes.

"Dost thou weep for me?" he whispered. "Weep not, thou loveliest of women. Now at last I feel the happiness of Paradise, streaming through my blood and through my thoughts. I feel in my mortal limbs the might of a cherub, and immortal life. Let eternal night come on! One moment like this is wealth enough." He kissed the tear from her eye, his mouth touched hers.

A clap of thunder sounded out, deep and terrible, such as none had ever heard. All about him fell in ruin. The beautiful Fairy, the flowering Eden sank, sank deep, deep—the Prince saw it sink into black night; far, far away it sparkled like a little shining star. A deathly chill ran through his limbs: he closed his eyes and long he lay as dead.

The cold rain fell on his face, the keen wind blew about his head, and consciousness came to him again. "What have I done?" he sighed. "I have sinned like Adam, sinned so that Eden is sunk deep down below." He opened his eyes: far off he still saw the star that sparkled like the sunken Eden. It was the morning star in the heaven.

He rose. There he was in the great forest, hard by the cave of the winds, and the mother of the winds was sitting beside him. Wrathful she looked, and raised her arm on high.

"Already, the first evening!" said she. "Well, I expected it. If you were my boy, you should go into the bag at once."

"He must go there," said Death: a mighty ancient he was, with a scythe in his hand, and great black wings. "He must be laid in the coffin, but not now. I shall but mark him and let him wander yet about the world for a season and atone for his sin, and grow good and yet better. One day I shall come, when he least looks for it; I shall put him into the black coffin and set it on my head and fly up towards the star. There also does the Garden of Eden bloom, and if he is good and dutiful he can enter it then: but if his thoughts are evil and his heart still full of sin, he will sink with the coffin, deeper than Eden sank, and only each thousandth year shall I bring him back again, either to sink deeper yet, or to dwell in the Star, the Star that sparkles overhead."

Transcriber's Note:

Changed "Now do just tell me", to "now do just tell me,"—moved the comma inside the quote marks.

[End of *The Garden of Eden* by Hans Christian Andersen, from *Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories*, translated by M. R. James]