

A Garden Called Paradise
by Emilee Breanne Ward

Decadence. This was the only word that could be used to describe the garden that sprawled across the land at that time. A century ago, humanity threatened nature and plants nearly ceased to exist. A committee of 6 individuals representing every race, religion, sexuality, and ability was handpicked to solve the crisis. After their hard work, the youth a century later lived amongst the foliage in complete freedom. For the sake of simplicity, they called this place Paradise.

Paradise was not ruled by one leader but simply existed. The people in this society longed to be ungoverned and simply worked towards allowing everybody to live as they wished in harmony with nature. Harmony with nature included respecting the fae.

Enda was one of the fae that had traversed the human world all his 111 years. He was young among his people but much older and wiser than humankind. Despite this, he was eternally young in appearance which aided him in his ability to trick and deceive whom he wished. Most thought he was just a boy with straw colored hair, caramel skin, golden eyes, and a trim figure. What was most noticeable about him was his boots which started as dark brown leather at the soles and slowly faded into white eagle feathers that twisted up his calves. His own feather wings were folded tightly underneath his tunic and barely noticeable until he needed them.

On his 112th birthday, he crested the hill just outside Paradise and marveled at the greenery. The sun had just begun to rise so gold and orange light was highlighting all the tallest objects. Hundreds of trees spread out creating a canopy of leaves and vines that covered the ground to where he could not see it. Crumbling stone ruins of buildings peeked their way up through some of the foliage and along the far edge of the garden were tents made from large palm tree leaves and vines.

Enda was proud of what he had created.

Picking his way down the grassy hill, he hummed a tune to himself contentedly. A few birds trilled as if in reply and he paused to listen.

“Woo-hoo-hoo! Woo-hoo-hoo!”

A sharp smirk played at his lips as he continued his way down the hill and into the forest of foliage. He could have flown if he wished but he knew this would spoil the illusion he had crafted. While he wanted to be revered as a god, he knew he must appear approachable.

Once under the canopy of leaves, a wall of hot wet air pressed on his body. Life reverberated from every tree, rock, creek, and flowering plant creating unique music that warmed Enda’s cold heart. His eyes caught sight of movement under the Kapok Tree in the middle of the garden. He wiped sweat from his brow and approached what appeared to be a man resting in the gloom.

“Are you an angel?” The man slurred as he squinted up at Enda.

“I am, Enda. One of the fae and here to ask...are you thriving?”

As the man on the ground pulled himself to a sitting position, Enda could see he was not properly clothed and speckled in mud, blood, and leaves. His curly brown hair was matted to his head in places and his eyes were struggling to remain focused.

“Thriving?”

“Yes.” Enda purred. “Do you get to do what you want whenever you want? Do you get to experience whatever you want to experience? Are you accepted for all that you are and ever choose to be? Are you given time to seek out what’s best for you?”

The man nodded after every question and smiled faintly. “Oh, yes.” Suddenly, memory darkened his eyes and he said, “Actually, sometimes I am unhappy because my neighbor has more fruit trees than I do. He is much faster than me and was able to plant more at a time.”

Enda pinched his chin thoughtfully. “Is that so? What is your name?”

“Efraim.”

“Efraim, the pain you endure is your fault.”

Efraim’s eyes sharpened for a moment. “You lie.”

“You know I am right.” Enda knelt down and peered into the man’s disgusting face. “Take. What. You. Want.” Enda painted the air with his left hand and a sharp blade carved from stone appeared. Enda handed it to the man and closed his palm over the handle.

“What are you?” Efraim breathed.

“Just a fantasy in your hallucinations.” Enda smiled and stood up. Efraim watched him but Enda could tell by the pallor of his face that he had drugged himself. He was not long for this world. Enda turned his back on the man and continued down the familiar path through the garden. “Happy birthday to me.” He whispered with a barely concealed grin.

He climbed over roots and ducked under vines as he delved further into the garden. His keen eyes observed many sights that pleased him. Couples in love with one another, families thriving in whatever ways they wished, humanity at rest, and people indulging in every pleasure offered to them. Their voracious appetites for comfort, acceptance, and freedom were filled at every turn.

Everyone was convinced of Enda’s truth which was this: thriving meant getting everything you wanted even if it conflicted with what somebody else wanted.

When Enda felt as though he was going to burst from happiness, he reached an obvious division in the garden. The tangled vines and roots gave way to soft green grass and bent wildflowers. Live Oaks peppered the area and hung heavy with Spanish Moss. Shards of sunlight cut into the gloom and Enda grimaced in displeasure.

He went to stand at the base of one of the biggest Live Oaks and suddenly caught a glimpse of fabric rustling behind the other side of the trunk. Enda tip-toed around the corner and pushed the hanging moss out of the way to be able to see a clothed man in prayer.

“Sorry to disturb you.” Enda said with false politeness.

“If your apology was sincere, I would accept it.” The man said as he opened his eyes and stood from his kneeling position.

“I’m always sincere.” Enda hissed. He was uncomfortable with this man. He was clean, he was sober, and he was kneeling in submission to someone other than Enda himself.

“What brings you this way?” The mysterious man asked.

“I always walk the grounds of my kingdom. Are you thriving?” Enda asked, his eyes attempting to hold this man’s gaze without flinching but this man’s eyes were perceptive.

“The righteous thrive like a palm tree and grow like a cedar tree in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the Lord, they thrive in the courts of our God.” The man’s hair began to be lifted by a passing breeze and he smiled gently.

“Of course. So, there is nothing you desire?”

“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

Enda was quickly realizing that his powers of influence were not working on this human. He continued to speak about things that had not been spoken about for a long time.

“It is impossible to have true satisfaction under such tyrannical guidance. God is nothing but a dictator who wishes to see his followers in chains. Don’t you wish for true freedom?”

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”

As these words were uttered, the wind began to pick up and blow leaves across the green grassy carpet. The Spanish moss swayed back and forth creating more light in the space. Enda made the mistake of looking right into the man’s brown eyes and he could see fire there.

“Who are you?” Enda demanded.

“The one that will save my people from your slavery.”

It was then that a crack began to form on the ground between the two men. It divided them from each other and the sky darkened with stone gray clouds rolling in from the east. The wind blew the leaves out of trees and swept the forest floor clean. Enda fell to the ground from the force of the gale and struggled to stand but the mysterious man stood firm.

Managing to release his wings from their hiding place, Enda dragged himself to a sitting position and flapped furiously. He was suddenly airborne and fighting against the pellets of water falling from the

sky. In the distance, he could see a sliver of light where the storm was not raging. He soared towards it, dodging the foliage twirling in the air.

When it seemed as though he could fly no more, he found a safe place to land that was away from the eye of the storm. He stood on a precipice looking over Paradise once more and squinted through the rain. The once lush foliage was ripped apart and at the mercy of the wind.

In that moment, angry tears spilled over the cheeks of the young fae man as his hold on Paradise was torn asunder.