





CHAPTER
IV.



My dear curious children. Honestly, do you wish to continue? Forcing our way through bushes of my botanical garden, discovering unique plants and wondering about the incredible beauty and resourcefulness of plants and their blossoms? You are nodding, so let's move on boldly. I will show you plants, which will first make you think they are definitely something else but flowers. Or even someone else! Someone different. Like an animal, or a person. Whoever doubts, come and look, and don't protest that I'm pulling your legs! I am going to show you absolute rarities that no other collector in the world has and even cannot have. Yes, because I am the only one! I live with plants, I may even be turning in a plant! I do not tame them, I let them live freely, I let them grow and spread. So, let's not waste time with idle talk and let's find out that there exist flowers, gentle creatures that look like a naked guy or a duck.



PARROT FLOWER

Keep your eyes wide open and hold your breath. I am proud to present the most precious piece of the whole of my improbable plant collection. Abraka dabra, feast your eyes, rejoice in this enormous beauty. These plants bear the Latin name *impatiens psittacina* and they bloom with little parrots. Really. If you don't believe me, check for yourselves from up close. Take a look, as they are cheerily flying on their stems, gently violet with crimson heads like they were real! My dear children, what I am presenting now is truly unique. This plant grows in the wild on a small area of Northern Thailand. And its export is strictly forbidden! So only few may see it in their own eyes. This is something you should prize. And take a while to enjoy the presence of a half-meter tall, richly branching and flowering parrot flower.



LARGE DUCK ORCHID

Let's stay with plants resembling feathered animals for a while. My dear friends of all that grows and thrives, aren't these Australian orchids, the blossoms of which look like they are going to quack as a duck, wonderful and magnificent? Their colourful blossoms use their intoxicating scent to lure insects for pollination from spring to summer. As soon as crazy males get close to this dazzling orchid and land in the beak of its blossom, they are literally trapped. Before they manage to get out, they are all covered in life-giving pollen. The large duck orchids grow similarly to the parrot flowers only in Australian wilderness, as their existence is dependent on the presence of a special Australian fungus growing in local eucalyptus forests.

SWADDLED BABIES

HALF HUMAN
HALF PLANT

Please, be quiet, don't wake my babies. I have lots of them here and it would be a true turmoil if they all start crying. We would have to plug our ears or hush the little ones, and that is not an easy task. Ha, ha, got you! Don't worry about my babies, they are silent and they do not cry. Actually, these are no babies at all, you could see that, too. Meet the *anguloauniflora*, an orchid, home to mountains of the Peruvian Andes. The gentle babies are wrapped in a nappy, as you may probably know already, using the snow-white flowers of this orchid. Their flowers smell in all cardinal points, attracting representatives of insects closer. Beetles are lured and wham! They are taken by surprise, shaking in the babies' bellies, bathing in their pollen. Luckily, they always find a way out, and spread *anguloauniflora* further and further over the Andes.





BEE ORCHID

Buzz, buzz, buzz. Can you hear it, too? As if plenty of bees are buzzing all around. Got you, my dear children, there is nothing buzzing around. Watch carefully the pinkish blossoms of the bee orchid. The bodies of bees seemingly sitting on it are just a decoy. They are a part of flowers who only pose as insect females. And why is that? They use this marvellous similarity to lure males who lovingly come to them, without noticing that they are pollinating the bee orchid. Yes, yes, correct. Flowers and plants are canny. The bee orchid needs lots of sun to live, and so it proudly rises on meadows, abundantly in the Mediterranean. Buzz, buzz, can you hear that? The bee orchid is autogamous. It can pollinate itself if there are not enough insects.



DANCING GIRL IMPATIENS

Let's proceed further, deeper and deeper in my botanical garden where everything is growing, thriving, curling and crawling. Tell me, my dear ones, who of you would love to dance? All of you? Great! Let's turn the music on and start dancing, whirling with the beautiful African impatiens named in Latin *impatiens bequaertii*, a rare plant, which blooms with tiny white or light pink dancers, fragile little girls in fluffy skirts with wide-open arms. These beautiful ballerinas, home to tropical forests of East Africa, have one incredible gift. They can root anywhere where they touch the ground and then grow and blossom and their flowers whirl in the rhythm of the breeze, while their dark green heart-shaped leaves clap to those little dancers.



NAKED MAN ORCHID

And now, dear girls and boys, meet one of the most common orchids in the Mediterranean. You can find it growing thickly along the coast, next to roads and on bushy grounds. Don't turn your noses up and do not turn away, saying that you are not interested in such an ordinary and commonplace plant. Take a close look at it! Don't their light to dark pink flowers remind you of figurines? One figure next to another, creating a huge inflorescence of figures. The naked man orchids start blooming in April and they keep blooming through the whole of May. One would say that a naked man would blush under your look. Luckily, they are not ashamed of their nakedness, quite the opposite. As I have mentioned, most of them are pink but rarely they also occur in white.



FLY ORCHID

Everyone who wishes to look a way further in my flower, plant and herb paradise, is now getting a fly-flap. When the fly orchid is present, you will need it. Actually, you won't get by without it. Oh, no! What are you doing? Please, do not hit the plant with the fly-flap! It seems that it is covered in flies from top to bottom but these are not flies in this case. If you paid attention during our tour of this part of my garden, it is certainly clear to you that these are blossoms. Insects are just bound to arrive... Insect males smell the pheromone scent produced by its flowers and it makes them crazy. You know my dear children. Flowers do whatever it takes to survive. These are the ways of the nature. one cannot be surprised that they grow abundantly throughout Europe.



41 PLANTS

Welcome to botanical garden where human feet have not trodden for years. Actually, one has, or rather a pair of them have. They belong to a passionate botanist who spends all his time in the company of flowers. He does not seem interested in people, as he feels himself to be a plant rather than a member of the genus homo sapiens. Strange as it may seem to you, maybe even scary like everything unknown, please, rest assured that he is completely harmless just as plants are. Of course, if you're not a fly or a beetle that carnivorous plants enjoy so much to savour. No worries, those meat lovers might possibly snatch at your snack if you have ham and roll or a sausage in your bag but that is the worst harm they might do. Though some of the plants from this forgotten botanical garden look like predators at first sight, even spooky, they are still just plants that may never catch you. Enough talking, keep your hats on and our tour of the botanical garden starts. Let's enter...