LINNAEUS FORGETS

The year 1758 was a comparatively happy one in the life of Carl Linnaeus. For although his second son, Johannes, had died the year before at the age of three, in that same year his daughter Sophia, the last child he was to have, was born. And in 1758 he purchased three small bordering estates in the country near Uppsala and on one of these, Hammarby, he established a retreat, to which he thereafter retired during the summer months, away from the town and its deadly fever. He was content in his family, his wife and five children living; and having recently been made a Knight of the Polar Star, he now received certain intelligence that at the opportune hour he would be ennobled by King Adolph Fredrik.

The landscape about Hammarby was pleasant and interesting, though of course Linnaeus long ago had observed and classified every botanical specimen this region had to offer. Even so, he went almost daily on long walks into the countryside, usually accompanied by students. The students

could not deny themselves his presence even during vacation periods; they were attracted to him as hummingbirds to trumpet vines by his geniality and humor and by his encyclopedic knowledge of every plant springing from the earth.

And he was happy, too, in overseeing the renovations of the buildings in Hammarby and the construction of the new orangery, in which he hoped to bring to fruition certain exotic plants that had never before flowered on Swedish soil. Linnaeus had become at last a famous man, a world figure in the same fashion that Samuel Johnson and Voltaire and Albrecht von Haller were world figures, and every post brought him sheaves of adulatory verse and requests for permission to dedicate books to him and inquiries about the details of his system of sexual classification and plant specimens of every sort. Most of the specimens were flowers quite commonly known, but dried and pressed and sent to him by young ladies who sometimes hoped that they had discovered a new species, or who hoped merely to secure a token of the man's notice, an autograph letter. But he also received botanical samples from persons with quite reputable knowledge, from scientists persuaded that they had discovered some anomaly or exception that might cause him to think over again some part of his method. (For the ghost of Siegesbeck was even yet not completely laid.) Occasionally other specimens arrived that were indeed unfamiliar to him. These came from scientists and missionaries traveling in remote parts of the world, or the plants were sent by knowledgeable ship captains or now and then by some common sailor who had come to know, however vaguely and confusedly, something of Linnaeus's reputation.

His renown had come to him so belatedly and so tendentiously that the great botanist took a child's delight in all this attention. He read all the verses and all the letters and often would answer his unknown correspondents pretty much in their own manner; letters still remain to us in

which he addressed one or another of his admirers in a silly and exaggerated prose style, admiring especially the charms of these young ladies on whom he had never set eyes. Sweden was in those days regarded as a backward country, having only a few warriors and enlightened despots to offer as important cultural figures, and part of Linnaeus's pride in his own achievements evinced itself in nationalist terms, a habit that Frenchmen and Englishmen found endearing.

On June 12, 1758, a large box was delivered to Linnaeus, along with a brief letter, and both these objects were battered from much travel. He opened first the box and found inside it a plant in a wicker basket that had been lined with oilskin. The plant was rooted in a black sandy loam, now dry and crumbly, and Linnaeus immediately watered it from a sprinkling can, though he entertained little hope of saving—actually, resuscitating—the plant. The plant was so wonderfully woebegone in appearance, so tattered by rough handling, that the scientist could not say immediately whether it was shrub, flower, or a tall grass. It seemed to have collapsed in upon itself, and its tough leaves and stems were the color of parchment and crackled like parchment when he tried to examine them. He desisted, hoping that the accompanying letter would answer some of his questions.

The letter bore no postmark. It was signed with a Dutch name, Gerhaert Oorts, though it was written in French. As he read the letter, it became clear to Linnaeus that the man who had signed it had not written it out himself but had dictated it to someone else who had translated his words as he spoke. The man who wrote the letter was a Dutch sailor, a common seaman, and it was probably one of his superior officers who had served him as amanuensis and translator. The letter was undated and began: *"Cher maître Charles Linné, père de la science botanique; je ne sçay si. . . ."*

"To the great Carl Linnaeus, father of botany; I know not whether the breadth of your interests still includes a

wondering curiosity about strange plants which grow in many different parts of the world, or whether your ever-agile spirit has undertaken to possess new kingdoms of science entirely. But in case you are continuing in your botanical endeavors, I am taking liberty to send you a remarkable flower [*une fleur merveilleuse*] that my fellows and I have observed to have strange properties and characteristics. This flower grows in no great abundance on the small islands east of Guiana in the South Seas. With all worshipful respect, I am your obedient servant, Gerhaert Oorts."

Linnaeus smiled on reading this letter, amused by the odd wording, but then frowned slightly. He still had no useful information. The fact that Mynheer Oorts called the plant a flower was no guarantee that it was indeed a flower. Few people in the world were truly interested in botany, and it was not to be expected that a sailor could have leisure for even the most rudimentary study of the subject. The most he could profitably surmise was that it bore blooms, which the sailor had seen.

He looked at it again, but it was so crumpled in upon itself that he was fearful of damaging it if he undertook a hasty inspection. It was good to know that it was a tropical plant. Linnaeus lifted the basket out of the box and set the plant on the corner of a long table where the sunlight fell strongest. He noticed that the soil was already thirsty again, so he watered it liberally, still not having any expectation that his ministrations would take the least effect.

It was now quarter till two, and as he had arranged a two o'clock appointment with a troublesome student, Linnaeus hurried out of his museum—which he called "my little back room"—and went into the main house to prepare himself. His student arrived promptly but was so talkative and contentious and so involved in a number of personal problems that the rest of the afternoon was dissipated in conference with him. After this, it was time for dinner, over which Linnaeus and his family habitually sat

for more than two hours, gossiping and teasing and laughing. And then there was music on the clavier in the small, rough dining room; the botanist was partial to Telemann, and sat beaming in a corner of a sofa, nodding in time to a sonata.

And so it was eight o'clock before he found opportunity to return to his little back room. He had decided to defer thorough investigation of his new specimen until the next day, preferring to examine his plants by natural sunlight rather than by lamplight. For though the undying summer twilight still held the western sky, in the museum it was gray and shadowy. But he wanted to take a final look at the plant before retiring and he needed also to draw up an account of the day's activities for his journal.

He entered the little house and lit two oil lamps. The light they shed mingled with the twilight, giving a strange orange tint to the walls and furnishings.

Linnaeus was immediately aware that changes had taken place in the plant. It was no trick of the light; the plant had acquired more color. The leaves and stems were suffused with a bright lemonish yellow, a color much more alive than the dim dun the plant had shown at two o'clock. And in the room hung a pervasive scent, unmistakable but not oppressive, which could be accounted for only by the presence of the plant. This was a pleasant perfume and full of reminiscence—but he could not remember of what the scent reminded him. So many associations crowded into his mind that he could sort none of them out; but there was nothing unhappy in these confused sensations. He wagged his head in dreamy wonder.

He looked at it more closely and saw that the plant had lost its dry parchmentlike texture, that its surfaces had become pliable and lifelike in appearance. Truly it was a remarkable specimen, with its warm perfume and marvelous recuperative powers. He began to speculate that this plant had the power of simply becoming dormant, and not dying, when deprived of proper moisture and nourishment.

He took up a bucket of well water, replenishing the watering can, and watered it again, resolving that he would give up all his other projects now until he had properly examined this stranger and classified it.

He snuffed the lamps and went out again into the vast whitish-yellow twilight. A huge full moon loomed in the east, just brushing the tree tips of a grove, and from within the grove sounded the harsh trills and staccato accents of a song sparrow and the calmly flowing recital of a thrush. The air was already cool enough that he could feel the warmth of the earth rising about his ankles. Now the botanist was entirely happy, and he felt within him the excitement he often had felt before when he came to know that he had found a new species and could enter another name and description into his grand catalogue.

He must have spent more time in his little back room than he had supposed, for when he reentered his dwelling house, all was silent and only enough lamps were burning for him to see to make his way about. Everyone had retired, even the two servants. Linnaeus reflected that his household had become accustomed to his arduous hours and took it for granted that he could look after his own desires at bedtime. He took a lamp and went quietly up the stairs to the bedroom. He dressed himself for bed and got in beside Fru Linnaea, who had gathered herself into a warm huddle on the left-hand side. As he arranged the bedclothes, she murmured some sleep-blurred words that he could not quite hear, and he stroked her shoulder and then turned on his right side to go to sleep.

But sleep did not come. Instead, bad memories rose, memories of old academic quarrels, and memories especially of the attacks upon him by Johann Siegesbeck. For when Siegesbeck first attacked his system of sexual classification in that detestable book called *Short Outline of True Botanic Wisdom*, Linnaeus had almost no reputation to speak of and Siegesbeck represented—to Sweden, at least—the authority of the academy. And what, Linnaeus

asked, was the basis of this ignorant pedant's objections? Why, that his system of classifying plants was morally dissolute. In his book, Siegesbeck had asked, "Who would have thought that bluebells, lilies, and onions could be up to such immorality?" He went on for pages in this vein, not failing to point out that Sir Thomas Browne had listed the notion of the sexuality of plants as one of the vulgar errors. Finally Siegesbeck had asked—anticipating an objection Goethe would voice eighty-three years later—how such a licentious method of classification could be taught to young students without corruption of minds and morals.

Linnaeus groaned involuntarily, helpless under the force of memory.

These attacks had not let up, had cost him a position at the university, so that he was forced to support himself as a medical practitioner and for two barren years had been exiled from his botanical studies. In truth, Linnaeus never understood the nature of these attacks; they seemed foolish and irrelevant, and that is why he remembered them so bitterly. He could never understand how a man could write: "To tell you that nothing could equal the gross prurience of Linnaeus's mind is perfectly needless. A literal translation of the first principles of Linnaean botany is enough to shock female modesty. It is possible that many virtuous students might not be able to make out the similitude of *Clitoria*."

It seemed to Linnaeus that to describe his system of classification as immoral was to describe nature as immoral, and nature could not be immoral. It seemed to him that the plants inhabited a different world than the fallen world of mankind, and that they lived in a sphere of perfect freedom and ease, unvexed by momentary and perverse jealousies. Any man with eyes could see that the stamens were masculine and the pistils feminine, and that if there was only one stamen to the female part (Monandria), this approximation of the Christian European family was only charmingly coincidental. It was more likely that the female

would be attended by four husbands (Tetrandria) or by five (Pentandria) or by twelve or more (Dodecandria). When he placed the poppy in the class Polyandria and described its arrangement as "Twenty males or more in the same bed with the female," he meant to say of the flower no more than God had said when He created it. How had it happened that mere literal description had caused him such unwarrantable hardship?

These thoughts and others toiled in his mind for an hour or so. When at last they subsided, Linnaeus had turned on his left side toward his wife and fallen asleep, breathing unevenly.

He rose later than was his custom. His sleep had been shaken by garish dreams that now he could not remember, and he wished he had awakened earlier. Now he got out of bed with uncertain movements and stiffly made his toilet and dressed himself. His head buzzed. He hurried downstairs as soon as he could.

It was much later than he had supposed. None of the family was about; everyone had already breakfasted and set out in pursuit of the new day. Only Nils, the elderly bachelor manservant, waited to serve him in the dining room. He informed his master that Fru Linnaea had taken all the children, except the baby asleep in the nursery, on an excursion into town. Linnaeus nodded, and wondered briefly whether the state of his accounts this quarter could support the good Fru's passion for shopping. Then he forgot about it.

It was almost nine o'clock.

He ate a large breakfast of bread and cheese and butter and fruit, together with four cups of strong black tea. After eating, he felt both refreshed and dilatory and he thought for a long moment of taking advantage of the morning and the unnaturally quiet house to read in some of the new volumes of botanical studies that had arrived during the past few weeks.

But when he remembered the new specimen awaiting him in the museum, these impulses evaporated and he left the house quickly. It was another fine day. The sky was cloudless, a mild, mild blue. Where the east grove cast its shadow on the lawn, dew still remained, and he smelled its freshness as he passed. He fumbled the latch excitedly, and then he swung the museum door open.

His swift first impression was that something had caught fire and burned, the odor in the room was so strong. It wasn't an acrid smell, a smell of destruction, but it was overpowering, and in a moment he identified it as having an organic source. He closed the door and walked to the center of the room. It was not only the heavy damp odor that attacked his senses but also a high-pitched musical chirping, or twittering, scattered on the room's laden air. And the two sensations, smell and sound, were indistinguishably mixed; here was an example of that sensory confusion of which M. Diderot had written so engagingly. At first he could not discover the source of all this sensual hurly-burly. The morning sun entered the windows to shine aslant the north wall, so that between Linnaeus and his strange new plant there fell a tall rectangular corridor of sunshine through which his gaze couldn't pierce clearly.

He stood stock-still, for what he could see of the plant beyond the light astonished him. It had opened out and grown monstrously; it was enormous, tier on tier of dark green reaching to a height of three feet or more above the table. No blooms that he could see, but differentiated levels of broad green leaves spread out in orderly fashion from bottom to top, so that the plant had the appearance of a flourishing green pyramid. And there was movement among and about the leaves, a shifting in the air all around it, and he supposed that an extensive tropical insect life had been transported into his little museum. Linnaeus smiled nervously, hardly able to contain his excitement, and stepped into the passage of sunlight.

As he advanced toward the plant, the twittering sound

grew louder. The foliage, he thought, must be rife with living creatures. He came to the edge of the table but could not see clearly yet, his sight still dazzled from stepping into and out of the swath of sunshine.

Even when his eyes grew more accustomed to shadow, he still could not make out exactly what he was looking at. There was a general confused movement about and within the plant, a continual settling and unsettling as around a beehive, but the small creatures that flitted there were so shining and iridescent, so gossamerlike, that he could fix no proper impression of them. Now, though, he heard them quite clearly, and realized that what at first had seemed a confused mélange of twittering was, in fact, an orderly progression of sounds, a music as of flutes and piccolos in polyphony.

He could account for this impression in no way but to think of it as a product of his imagination. He had become aware that his senses were not so acute as they ordinarily were; or rather, that they were acute enough, but that he was having some difficulty in interpreting what his senses told him. It occurred to him that the perfume of the plant—which now cloaked him heavily, an invisible smoke—possessed perhaps some narcotic quality. When he reached past the corner of the table to a wall shelf for a magnifying glass, he noticed that his movements were sluggish and that an odd feeling of remoteness took power over his mind.

He leaned over the plant, training his glass and trying to breathe less deeply. The creature that swam into his sight, flitting through the magnification, so startled him that he dropped the glass to the floor and began to rub his eyes and temples and forehead. He wasn't sure what he had seen—that is, he could not believe what he thought he had seen—because it was no form of insect life at all.

He retrieved the glass and looked again, moving from one area of the plant to another, like a man examining a map.

These were no insects, though many of the creatures here inhabiting were winged. They were of flesh, however diminutive they were in size. The whole animal family was represented here in miniature: horses, cows, dogs, serpents, lions and tigers and leopards, elephants, oppossums and otters. . . . All the animals Linnaeus had seen or heard of surfaced here for a moment in his horn-handled glass and then sped away on their ordinary amazing errands—and not only the animals he might have seen in the world, but the fabulous animals, too: unicorns and dragons and gryphons and basilisks and the Arabian flying serpents of which Herodotus had written.

Tears streamed on the botanist's face, and he straightened and wiped his eyes with his palm. He looked all about him in the long room, but nothing else had changed. The floor was littered with potting soil and broken and empty pots, and on the shelves were the jars of chemicals and dried leaves, and on the small round table by the window his journal lay open, with two quill pens beside it and the inkpot and his pewter snuffbox. If he had indeed become insane all in a moment, the distortion of his perceptions did not extend to the daily objects of his existence but was confined to this one strange plant.

He stepped to the little table and took two pinches of snuff, hoping that the tobacco might clear his head and that the dust in his nostrils might prevent to some degree the narcotic effect of the plant's perfume, if that was what caused the appearance of these visions. He sneezed in the sunlight and dust motes rose golden around him. He bent to his journal and dipped his pen and thought, but finally wrote nothing. What could he write down that he would believe in a week's time?

He returned to the plant, determined to subject it to the most minute examination. He decided to limit his observation to the plant itself, disregarding the fantastic animal life. With the plant, his senses would be less likely to deceive him. But his resolve melted away when once again he em-

ployed the magnifying glass. There was too much movement; the distraction was too violent.

Now he observed that there were not only miniature animals, real and fabulous, but there was also a widespread colony, or nation, of homunculi. Here were little men and women, perfectly formed, and—like the other animals—sometimes having wings. He felt the mingled fear and astonishment that Mr. Swift's hapless Gulliver felt when he first encountered the Lilliputians. But he also felt an admiration, as he might have felt upon seeing some particularly well-fashioned example of the Swiss watchmaker's art. To see large animals in small, with their customary motions so accelerated, did indeed give the impression of a mechanical exhibition.

Yet there was really nothing mechanical about them, if he put himself in their situation. They were self-determining; most of their actions had motives intelligible to him, however exotic were the means of carrying out these motives. Here, for example, a tiny rotund man in a green jerkin and saffron trousers talked—sang, rather—to a tiny slender man dressed all in brown. At the conclusion of this recitative, the man in brown raced away and leapt onto the back of a tiny winged camel, which bore him from this lower level of the plant to an upper one, where he dismounted and began singing to a young lady in a bright blue gown. Perfectly obvious that a message had been delivered. . . . Here in another place a party of men and women mounted on unwinged great cats, lions and leopards and tigers, pursued over the otherwise-deserted broad plain of a leaf a fearful Hydra, its nine heads snapping and spitting. At last they impaled it to the white leaf vein with the sharp black thorns they carried for lances and then they set the monster afire, writhing and shrieking, and they rode away together. A grayish waxy blister formed on the leaf where the hydra had burned. . . . And here in another area a formal ball was taking place, the tiny gentlemen leading out the ladies in time to the music of an orchestra sawing and pounding at the instruments. . . .

This plant, then, enfolded a little world, a miniature society in which the mundane and the fanciful commingled in matter-of-fact fashion but at a feverish rate of speed.

Linnaeus became aware that his legs were trembling from tiredness and that his back ached. He straightened, feeling a grateful release of muscle tension. He went round to the little table and sat, dipped his pen again, and began writing hurriedly, hardly stopping to think. He wrote until his hand almost cramped and then he flexed it several times and wrote more, covering page after page with his neat sharp script. Finally he laid the pen aside and leaned back in his chair and thought. Many different suppositions formed in his mind, but none of them made clear sense. He was still befuddled and he felt that he might be confused for years to come, that he had fallen victim to a dream or vision from which he might never recover.

In a while he felt rested and he returned again to look at the plant.

By now a whole season, or a generation or more, had passed. The plant itself was a darker green than before, its shape had changed, and even more creatures now lived within it. The mid-part of the plant had opened out into a large boxlike space thickly walled with hand-sized kidney-shaped leaves. This section formed a miniature theater or courtyard. Something was taking place here, but Linnaeus could not readily figure out what it was.

Much elaborate construction had been undertaken. The smaller leaves of the plant in this space had been clipped and arranged into a grand formal garden. There were walls and arches of greenery and greenery shaped into obelisks topped with globes, and Greek columns and balconies and level paths. Wooden statues and busts were placed at intervals within this garden, and it seemed to Linnaeus that on some of the subjects he could make out the lineaments of the great classical botanists. Here, for example, was Pliny, and there was Theophrastus. Many of the persons so honored were unfamiliar to him, but then he found on one of

the busts, occupying a position of great prominence, his own rounded cheerful features. Could this be true? He stared and stared, but his little glass lacked enough magnification for him to be finally certain.

Music was everywhere; chamber orchestras were stationed at various points along the outer walls of the garden and two large orchestras were set up at either end of the wide main path. There were a number of people calmly walking about, twittering to one another, but there were fewer than he had supposed at first. The air above them was dotted with cherubs flying about playfully, and much of the foliage was decorated with artfully hung tapestries. There was about the scene an attitude of expectancy, of waiting.

At this point the various orchestras began to sound in concert and gathered the music into recognizable shape. The sound was still thin and high-pitched, but Linnaeus discerned in it a long reiterative fanfare, which was followed by a slow, grave processional march. All the little people turned from their casual attitudes and gave their attention to the wall of leaves standing at the end of the main wide pathway. There was a clipped narrow corridor in front of the wall and from it emerged a happy band of naked children. They advanced slowly and disorderly, strewing the path with tiny pink petals that they lifted out in dripping handfuls from woven baskets slung over their shoulders. They were singing in unison, but Linnaeus could not make out the melody, their soprano voices pitched beyond his range of hearing. Following the children came another group of musicians, blowing and thumping, and then a train of comely maidens, dressed in airy long white dresses tied about the waists with broad ribbons, green and yellow. The maidens, too, were singing, and the botanist now began to hear the vocal music, a measured but joyous choral hymn. Linnaeus was smiling to himself, buoyed up on an ocean of happy fullness; his face and eyes were bright.

The beautiful maidens were followed by another troop of petal-scattering children, and after them came a large orderly group of animals of all sorts, domestic animals and wild animals and fantastic animals, stalking forward with their fine innate dignities, though not, of course, in step. The animals were unattended, moving in the procession as if conscious of their places and duties. There were more of these animals, male and female of each kind, than Linnaeus had expected to live within the plant. He attempted vainly to count the number of different species, but he gave over as they kept pouring forward smoothly, like sand grains twinkling into the bottom of an hourglass.

The spectators had gathered to the sides of the pathway and stood cheering and applauding.

The animals passed by, and now a train of carriages ranked in twos took their place. These carriages each were drawn by teams of four little horses, and both the horses and carriages were loaded down with great garlands of bright flowers, hung with blooms from end to end. Powdered ladies fluttered their fans in the windows. And after the carriages, another band of musicians marched.

Slowly now, little by little, a large company of strong young men appeared, scores of them. Each wore a stout leather harness from which long reins of leather were attached behind to an enormous wheeled platform. The young men, their bodies shining, drew this platform down the pathway. The platform itself supported another formal garden, within which was an interior arrangement suggestive of a royal court. There was a throne on its dais, and numerous attendants before and behind the throne. Flaming braziers in each corner gave off thick grayish-purple clouds of smoke, and around these braziers small children exhibited various instruments and implements connected with the science of botany: shovels, thermometers, barometers, potting spades, and so forth. Below the dais on the left-hand side, a savage, a New World Indian, adorned with feathers and gold, knelt in homage, and in front of him a

beautiful woman in Turkish dress proffered to the throne a tea shrub in a silver pot. Farther to the left, at the edge of the tableau, a sable Ethiopian stood, he also carrying a plant indigenous to his mysterious continent.

The throne itself was a living creature, a great tawny lion with sherry-colored eyes. The power and wildness of the creature were unmistakable in him, but now he lay placid and willing, with a sleepy smile on his face. And on this throne of the living lion, over whose back a covering of deep-plush green satin had been thrown, sat the goddess Flora. This was she indeed, wearing a golden crown and holding in her left hand a gathering of peonies (*Paeonia officinalis*) and in her right hand a heavy golden key. Flora sat in ease, the goddess gowned in a carmine silk that shone silver where the light fell on it in broad planes, the gown tied over her right shoulder and arm to form a sleeve, and gathered lower on her left side to leave the breast bare. An expression of sublime dreaminess was on her face and she gazed off into a far distance, thinking thoughts unknowable even to her most intimate initiates. She was attended on her right-hand side by Apollo, splendidly naked except for the laurel bays round his forehead and his bow and quiver crossed on his chest. Behind her Diana disposed herself, half-reclining, half-supporting herself on her bow, and wearing in her hair her crescent-moon fillet. Apollo devoted his attention to Flora, holding aloft a blazing torch, and looking down upon her with an expression of mingled tenderness and admiration. He stood astride the carcass of a loathsome slain dragon, signifying the demise of ignorance and superstitious unbelief.

The music rolled forth in loud hosannas, and the spectators on every side knelt in reverence to the goddess as she passed.

Linnaeus became dizzy. He closed his eyes for a moment and felt the floor twirling beneath his feet. He stumbled across the room to his chair by the writing table and sat. His chin dropped down on his chest; he fell into a deep swoon.

When he regained consciousness, the shaft of sunlight had reached the west wall. At least an hour had passed. When he stirred himself, there was an unaccustomed stiffness in his limbs and it seemed to him that over the past twenty-four hours or so his body had aged several years.

His first clear thoughts were of the plant, and he rose and went to his worktable to find out what changes had occurred. But the plant was no more; it had disappeared. Here was the wicker container lined with oilcloth, here was the earth inside it, now returned to its dry and crumbly condition, but the wonderful plant no longer existed. All that remained was a greasy gray-green powder sifted over the soil. Linnaeus took up a pinch of it in his fingers and sniffed at it and even tasted it, but it had no sensory qualities at all except a neutral oiliness. Absentmindedly he wiped his fingers on his coat sleeve.

A deep melancholy descended upon the man and he locked his hands behind his back and began walking about the room, striding up and down beside his worktable. A harsh welter of thoughts and impulses overcame his mind. At one point he halted in mid-stride, turned and crossed to his writing table, and snatched up his journal, anxious to determine what account he had written of his strange adventure.

His journal was no help at all, for he could not read it. He looked at the unfinished last page and then thumbed backward for seven pages and turned them all over again, staring and staring. He had written in a script unintelligible to him, a writing that seemed to bear some distant resemblance to Arabic perhaps, but which bore no resemblance at all to his usual exuberant mixture of Latin and Swedish. Not a word or a syllable on any page conveyed the least meaning to him.

As he gazed at these dots and squiggles he had scratched on the page, Linnaeus began to forget. He waved his hand before his face like a man brushing away cobwebs. The more he looked at his pages, the more he forgot, until fi-

nally he had forgotten the whole episode: the letter from the Dutch sailor, the receiving of the plant, the discovery of the little world the plant contained—everything.

Like a man in a trance, and with entranced movements, he returned to his worktable and swept some scattered crumbs of soil into a broken pot and carried it away and deposited it in the dustbin.

It has been said that some great minds have the ability *to forget deeply*. That is what happened to Linnaeus; he forgot the plant and the bright vision that had been vouchsafed to him. But the profoundest levels of his life had been stirred, and some of the details of his thinking had changed.

His love for metaphor sharpened, for one thing. Writing in his *Deliciae naturae*, which appeared fourteen years after his encounter with the plant, he described a small pink-flowered ericaceous plant of Lapland growing on a rock by a pool, with a newt as "the blushing naked princess Andromeda, lovable and beautiful, chained to a sea rock and exposed to a horrible dragon." These kinds of conceits intrigued him, and more than ever metaphor began to inform the way he perceived and outlined the facts of his science.

Another happy change in his life was the cessation of his bad nights of sleeplessness and uneasy dreams. No longer was he troubled by memories of the attacks of Siegesbeck or any other of his old opponents. Linnaeus had acquired a new and resistless faith in his observations. He was finally certain that the plants of this earth carry on their love affairs in uncaring merry freedom, making whatever sexual arrangements best suit them, and that they go to replenish the globe guiltlessly, in high and winsome delight.