

## Garden 110

Vol. 4 Chapter 3.1 - Lucid dream

A cold breeze blew in. With his eyes closed, Aeroc groped for any warmth beside me. The bed was flat. The sheets were untouched.

Doubt made Aeroc open his eyes. The loneliness was heightened by the soft, yet cold feel of the silk. At the same time, Aeroc wondered where he could have gone. Don't tell me.....

Before Aeroc could think anything bad, his night vision provided the answer. Aeroc could see his shirt, glowing blue, on the armrest of the large one-seater sofa a short distance from the end of the bed. Perhaps he hadn't slept.

The angle made it hard to make out Kloff's figure. His hands were resting neatly on the armrests, unmoving. Aeroc wanted to get closer, but he hesitated. Aeroc didn't want to interrupt his solitary contemplation. Then he changed his thoughts. If he was sleeping while sitting up, it would be better to lead him to the bed. Aeroc cautiously approached the sofa.

The curtains were loosely drawn, half revealing a large balcony window. Bright moonlight poured through the window. Sitting there in the pale, fly-like light, Kloff was surprisingly awake. He just stared out the window with a blank expression. Outside, he could see the rose garden.

Ah, this room was originally Mother's room, so it had the best view of the garden.

Following his gaze, Aeroc stared out the window as well. The cabin, as if preserved by magic, and the thorny garden that surrounded it. Aeroc had spent a terrible life inside there. It was a terrifying,

sickening place that made him want to end his own life rather than go back in there. And that's what Kloff was looking at.

Was he pleased to see a sinner pay for his crimes, or was he sneering and contemptuous? Aeroc didn't want to know, but his feet moved without realising it. Slowly, like a shadow, he turned around in front of the couch and faced the man who was as stiff as a statue.

Kloff was stiff like a bronze statue withering away from life. His tightly closed lips showed determination, his half-open eyes showed solitude. The moonlight falling on his hard shoulders made him look even colder. Aeroc reached out to him. Gazing into the distance, his unmoving gaze slowly drew to the sad man. There was no life in those steel-like eyes. Aeroc's heart sank.

"Kloff."

Aeroc unrealizingly called his name. He reached out and stroked the back of Kloff's large, veined hand. His hand was still warm, even though it looked cold. The gypsum-like fingers suddenly twitched. After a moment's hesitation, the long fingers curled around Aeroc's cold fingertips.

".....Ae.....roc?"

The voice was rough, the deep emotion in it a familiar fear. His eyes, slowly widening, were coloured with alarm. His tightly clenched jaw loosened slightly, and he spoke once more, his voice vicious.

"Ae.....roc? Is it really you?"

Something was wrong. Aeroc instinctively took a step back. Just as Aeroc was about to further the distance, a strong hand grabbed his wrist. The heavy chair rattled and Aeroc was pushed backwards. He tried to pull his hand away, but it was impossible. The other man's strength far outweighed his.

"It hurts."

"Aeroc. Aeroc."

Kloff didn't hear any of his words. Instead, he wrapped his arms around Aeroc. No, it was more like he trapped Aeroc in his arms. The arms wrapped around him like shackles.

A heavy head dropped to the nape of his neck. His hot breath scorched his skin, and his spine stiffened. His heels lifted involuntarily. He was getting off balance, but Kloff stood firm, taking the full weight of Aeroc. The position slipped further and further, and Aeroc couldn't help but fall into him. He held his breath, unable to make a sound. His shoulders felt damp.

"Haha..... I thought it was a dream, a terrible nightmare. You, how dare you, leave me behind. You can't do that, you still owe me something."

A sharp blade made of ice plunged into Aeroc's skull. It took his breath away. Aeroc knew this day would come, but he didn't think it would be today.

The blissful illusion was finally over. Everything would return to its rightful place, and Aeroc would return to his place, to the cold garden in the distance.

Kloff gently stroked his stiff body. A low chuckle escaped him.

“I have no intention of letting you go, and you shouldn’t abandon me either. You’ve turned me into a terrible monster.”

Then Kloff lifted his head. His kind eyes were gone. In their place were dark orbs, filled with all sorts of emotions. One arm gripped his trembling waist, the other wrapped around the nape of his thin neck. Aeroc’s vocal cords were frozen, he couldn’t even let out a moan. The cruel man’s expression was as ecstatic as ever.

Dry lips overlapped. It wasn’t a deep kiss, just a quick peck. After a few breathless pecks, Kloff brought their foreheads together. The hand that had been caressing his neck stroked Aeroc’s terrified cheek. A warm thumb brushed his cheekbone.

“You win, you vile human. It’s your win.”

The small laugh came again. Even as Kloff proclaimed his own defeat, he seemed immensely pleased. He kissed Aeroc again, as if he couldn’t be happier. Deeper than before. The hot tongue touched Aeroc’s dry lips. He breathed in Aeroc’s breath. It was a silent kiss, not even a breath to be heard. The only sound was the pounding of his heart.

“Don’t go anywhere now. You don’t even have to go to the garden. Stay next to me, right here.”

Kloff never waited for an answer. He scooped Aeroc up in his arms, refusing to tolerate any argument or disagreement. Kloff didn't seem to struggle at all, even though Aeroc wasn't naturally slender and had gained quite a bit of weight since his pregnancy. Aeroc felt dizzy when he was suddenly lifted, but his head was already spinning.

"Your body is cold."

You have to stay warm, Kloff said, and carried Aeroc to his bed. Gently, he pulled back the sheets and laid him down with care, as if he were handling a cracked glass doll. Then he sat down at the bedside. The demented tyrant could not have been more gentle, touching Aeroc's cold hand.

"It's not even winter, and you're so cold. Perhaps it's better for you to wear gloves."

With that, Kloff was about to turn and leave. He mumbled something about needing to light the fireplace. However, Aeroc couldn't let him go, what if he went outside and woke up as another person.? What if all the disturbed magic shattered and there was a loss of order,? Aeroc dreaded to think what would happen.

Aeroc's numb hand gripped Kloff's sleeve. He turned around. Swallowing the lump in his throat, he barely managed to speak.

"Don't... go."

"However."

“Stay next to me.”

After a moment of silence, Kloff laughed again.

“You’re clever, aren’t you, caving in as soon as you get the upper hand. Your

personality never changes.”

However Kloff interpreted his intentions, he sat back down on the bed, looked at Aeroc for a moment, and then climbed in beside him. Patting the pillows and straightening the sheets, he pulled the dazed Aeroc into his arms. Aeroc could see Kloff’s muscled neck from his slightly loose shirt. Aeroc buried his face in it, feeling the touch of hands on his back.

“It’s late at night. It’s better for you to go to sleep early for your health.”

Aeroc reached out and grabbed his collar. One of the hands on his back reached up and covered his prominent knuckles. Hot tears welled up in his eyes at the gentle touch. Was it from regret, or maybe remorse, maybe sadness, also relief. For some reason, Aeroc didn’t know why he was tearing up.

“Right, even the devil had tears.”

Aeroc closed his eyes. His tears rolled down the bridge of his nose. The back of Kloff's hand, the one that used to leave blue bruises, reached up and brushed against the cheekbones. Aeroc was surprised by that action. The arms around him tightened again, and with a low sigh, he pressed a kiss to Aeroc's sweaty forehead.

"And I love this devil."

What?

"It's a fitting phrase for a man who has become the worst kind of monster."

What again?

Aeroc stared up at him, stunned. Aeroc knew Kloff had imprinted on him. But imprinting was not love. Kloff was angry that he had imprinted on someone he didn't love, and he was dying in agony. Why had he been so foolish as to do such a thing?

Kloff blamed the imprinting for his unnecessary arguments when they reunited, for his courtship of Aeroc when he actually liked someone else. One part of his heart broke, the other leapt for joy. Like a satellite following a planet, Kloff would forever hover around Aeroc. But did Kloff love him before the imprint? This me?

He answered this unspoken question.

“Even if you have sinned, there is no reason for me to do so. You did what you did because you can’t forgive me for turning my back on you. You can condemn me. You can do whatever you want to me until your anger dissipates, but I’m not going to ask for forgiveness. And I also don’t intend to forgive you.”

“...I don’t hope..... for that.”

There was a ragged laugh, followed by a deep breath. Aeroc burst into hot tears. Kloff no longer wiped them away. Instead, he kissed Aeroc’s forehead, his hair, constantly.