

Garden 113

Vol. 4.5 Chapter 1.1 - One fine evening

After a few years of giving birth and frantically raising children, the sound of their laughter filled the spacious mansion with beauty. Like a sunken masterpiece, the once stark space sparkled like a new coat of colour.

“Thanks.”

“Why?”

“For giving me a treasure.”

Aeroc stood beside Kloff and took his hand.

“That’s usually said by the alphas, isn’t it?”

“Outwardly, I am an alpha, so save your complaints. A thank you is a thank you.”

Aeroc kissed his lover’s lips lightly, which were pouting with interest and maybe a little displeasure.

Lenoc and Eurea had filled his heart, but two children were hardly enough to fill the estate. However, they had agreed to remain childless for the time being. There was nothing wrong with Aeroc's health. When he objected, Kloff made vile threats that he would keep Aeroc locked up and impregnate him.

"I've already got three ticking time bombs running around under my nose, and I've got enough on my plate as it is, so I'm going to have to politely decline the offer of a freakishly pretty angel who cries, eats, and poops once every two hours."

Was childcare that exhausting? Of course, Aeroc was exhausted too. Martha helped, and Hugo lent a hand during the day. But Martha had never broken her solemn promise to rest at night, and Hugo's help was rejected by Kloff.

As an imprinted Alpha, he hated the idea of leaving Aeroc and the two children in the hands of another Alpha, as they were considered 'his territory'. In fact, after Martha, Kloff was the only one who was more nurturing than Aeroc. Ever since Lenoc was born, it had been his job to carry the children and put them to bed.

Sometimes it made Aeroc jealous, so he would occasionally take the child and curl up in Kloff's big arms. Despite the weight, he never complained and stayed with Aeroc and the child until they fell asleep. At the same time, he maintained an active public life.

Ever since he began working at the Treasury, Kloff's influence had grown with each passing day. As successful as his life had been for a viscount without a title, Kloff was never satisfied.

"I will get a title."

“A title? Isn’t the Count enough?”

“That’s not mine, it’s yours.”

“What is mine is yours.”

“It’s different.”

No one could break Kloff’s stubbornness. Thanks to him, the Teiwind house (nicknamed: Fearsome Captain Bendyke and three VIPs) was getting better after plowing through rough ice.

Rapiel, who travelled abroad frequently, had recently returned home and set up his family at Wolflake Villa, not too far from the Teiwind estate. Kloff had gone to visit him, grasping at straws indeed, and had left the two important kids he couldn’t be bothered to worry about to be gone for a week. When Aeroc half-jokingly accused him of selling out his children, Kloff was nonchalant.

“Lenoc likes Sioux and wants to sleep there. And so does Eurea.”

“Lenoc likes Sioux?”

Aeroc repeated in disbelief, remembering his own son who frowned and looked as if he would be in trouble when he were Sioux.

“He’s hating him because he likes him.”

“Well, considering Lenoc is your son, I suppose I can understand where that comes from.”

Aeroc felt a strange sense of déjà vu as he listened to Kloff spout off his logic. Firstborn sons take after their fathers. It made sense, somehow, that Lenoc would be like that. Still, it was the first time he’d ever been away from his children for a week, and he was really worried.

Without them, the estate suddenly felt like a tomb. Out of loneliness, Aeroc hovered by his spouse’s side, but that man, minding his own business, didn’t pay much attention to Aeroc. Aeroc knew Kloff was dealing with something really urgent, so he wasn’t about to throw a childish tantrum. Instead, he plopped down on a nearby couch and opened a book. As Aeroc flipped through the pages in a bored manner, he suddenly spoke up.

“I wonder how Lenoc and Eurea are doing.”

“Don’t worry about them. They’re going to do fine no matter where they go.”

Kloff was currently sitting at his desk in the cool, breezy study, still wrestling with papers. Because of Aeroc’s brilliance yet utter uselessness when it came to money matters, he was in charge of the Teiwind count’s accounts, amount of almost rivalling companies, and all decisions regarding the general living and education of the family. He was also the primary caretaker of their children. Dealing with two children and chasing them around, he barely had time to keep up with all the paperwork and bills, and as soon as he did, he abandoned his spouse and went back to money matters.

Kloff had said that if he had more time to himself afford it, he wouldn't have dropped the kids off at someone else's house. Aeroc believed those words. Already a decent enough partner, Kloff also wanted to become the perfect father. Sending the children away was not an easy decision, even for him. And to send them to the hated Wolflake Village?

Kloff had a pile of receipts that threatened to get the house paralysed if he didn't deal with them. The butler, the cook, and even Martha's weekly salary were overdue. No one would be able to handle Martha's rage for not getting paid.

"Last month's bills are still piling up. This has no end."

Kloff grumbled and sorted through the receipts. It was bad enough that the Count was a spendthrift, but there were receipts for all sorts of supplies consumed at the estate, inquiries and letters from his vast estate, large and small amounts, and the investment business he'd started himself, as well as those from his enormous staff. From light decisions, to others that needed to be pondered deeply, everything demanded his attention.

"A week won't be enough."

The Teiwind Count, the real owner of the house, wandered lazily around Kloff in the midst of all this busyness. He was seated at a small tea table by a window with lace curtains fluttering, absorbed in his reading, and sipped his strong tea with the same leisurely manner as if he were mocking Kloff. The sunlight bounced off his faded blond hair, reflecting it in an opalescent glow. Kloff worked diligently on his paperwork, occasionally stealing glances at the beautiful man who used a chandelier to illuminate himself.

"Hmmm. The tea is just the right temperature, it smells wonderful."

Aeroc took a seat in the breeze and sipped the red liquid. He deliberately swirled the teacup slowly to spread the aroma and make sure he was heard. He didn't realise the money-grubbing cobbler was getting off from his heavy arse.

Bulb farming was all the rage this year. Aeroc smiled wryly as he watched the beautiful, colourful flowers bloom in clusters. He hadn't always been that into gardening. But lately, he had been having a lot of fun in it. Strangled the villain, following those words, Aeroc literally strangled the phallus of Kloff. Not realising that he got carried away with spending money, he had been buying up rare bulbs at international flower markets.

"It's a good thing you're not doing a soirée this year, or I'd be dead in my papers by now."

The man with his nose buried in papers grunted. Aeroc glanced at Kloff surreptitiously and twisted his lips.

He planned to hold a nightly soirée when summer arrived and the flowers were in full bloom. It would be wonderful to play nocturnes on piano, violin, and cello. But even that would not be easy. For some reason, the cobbler, who controlled the house's finances, didn't like the idea of holding soirées, among other artistic activities. At one point, Aeroc prodded.

"If you don't object to buying paintings, why do you hate soirée so much?"

"A painting is a tangible thing. A soirée is a one-off. It's useless."

“What a cheapskate.”

In short, Kloff said, a painting or sculpture is an investment, but a soirée is not. Later, he told Aeroc that he wouldn't discourage him from attending recitals, and that Aeroc could feel free to buy tickets. But it was also important to play music yourself. Kloff didn't understand that rich emotional experiences are essential for children growing up.

“Playing in front of a crowd builds confidence and a sense of responsibility for the event, and I can't have children who will succeed the Count without practising putting themselves out there in public.”

“I, myself, turned out just fine without playing recitals.”

“You're talking as a cheapskate cobbler.”

“Emotional experiences can't be bought by money, they're nurtured by running around in the great outdoors. That's what city kids lack.”

“Aha. Since I'm from the city, so you'll have to take the children to the great outdoors yourself.”

Kloff was silent. He was not in a position to take time off from the Treasury right now. When Aeroc glared at him, he said something else to distract himself.

“Read a book. Get a poetry collection. Have a recital.”

It was the least expensive presentation a damn hillbilly could come up with. Aeroc bought the book, of course. But literature and music are two different things. No matter how many times Aeroc repeated to him that it was important to have an abundance of musical stimulation from an early age in order to become a good player, his ears wouldn't listen. He'd always known he lacked musicality, but lately he'd been secretly worried that he might be deaf.