

## **Garden 127**

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Not yet? The nuance was odd. It was as if he wanted Aeroc to commit a great sin in the future. It was exhilarating. To be so agitated about a future that didn't exist, a possibility that didn't exist. Even when Bendyke pretended to be sane, he was still a little crazy.

Aeroc didn't want to keep bringing this topic up. He certainly wasn't going to have a leisurely cup of tea. He'd rather do what he had to do quickly, and then wallow in his hatred of unscrupulousness and self-loathing, before contemplating suicide.

"Over there."

"Over there?"

"I've got everything I think we'll need, but if you're looking for something special..... I'm not in the mood to send someone on an errand right now, so you'll have to make do with what is available there."

"Like what?"

Aeroc could sense a bit of confusion on the other end of the line. Aeroc admired how sincere he seemed.

"I think it's only fair that you double-check your cleanliness before getting involved. Of course, this isn't a one-way demand."

With that, Bendyke rose from his seat, and Aeroc, thinking that this would start soon, nearly jumped out of his skin. His late father's harsh teachings shone through in this moment. He flinched slightly, but not very visibly.

Instead of approaching this way, Bendyke stood in front of the small door that Aeroc had said was 'over there'. Opening it, he gasped in surprise. At least his reaction was bigger than Aeroc's. Shutting the door again, he pressed a hand to his temple and brushed his hair back as if nothing happened.

"I don't know if you're naive, or shameless."

Checking the bathroom, Bendyke returned to his seat, clenching and unclenching his hands. Those were the hands of the devil who would soon drag him down to shame and degradation. Aeroc's nerves were fraying. It was important to remain calm. Aeroc tilted the teacup he held slightly and took his first sip.

"Mmm?"

The tea was surprisingly palatable to his tongue. Hugo was the only one who could make tea to Aeroc's satisfaction. No, it was Hugo who had taught Aeroc to taste tea, having acquired his father's fine tastes. As such, Hugo only brewed tea at Teiwind Clan, and then only for guests who were very close to the Count. As such, few people had ever tasted Hugo's tea. Even with the same leaves and utensils, it would have been impossible to replicate the exact same flavour, so how could this man?

Thinking it was a very unpleasant coincidence, Aeroc looked down at his teacup. He tried to find the slightest difference, but nothing immediately stood out. At that time, Bendyke, who had come up beside him, spoke up.

“You said it wasn’t a one-way demand.”

A wicked grin suddenly appeared on the man’s vile face.

Oh, no. This was not the time to be thinking about tea. The hand that held the teacup trembled slightly. The fine china clinked, sending out a clear ringing sound. Aeroc set the teacup down, almost gently. He clasped both his hands and rested his chin on it. Hoping this posture would make him seem the least intimidated at Bendyke.

“Which side do you see yourself as?”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

Aeroc didn’t want to show his internal conflict outwardly. Especially in front of this man. So he looked away to hide his agitation.

The persistent man shifted to face Aeroc and lowered his stance. The shade fell on him. As if that weren’t enough, both of his hands grabbed the armrests of the chair Aeroc was sitting in. Trapped, the anxiety inside Aeroc that had been lurking earlier flared.

“So, top or bottom? No, it’s easier if I say it like this. Do you put it in, or do you spread your legs?”

Aeroc took a sharp intake of breath, startled by the nakedness of the question. When Aeroc coughed, Bendyke snorted.

“I’d advise you to refrain from unnecessary provocation. A chaste angel is tempting enough even if they don’t do anything.”

For the first time, Aeroc realised that the words chaste and angel could be offensive. This man was a master of profanities. Aeroc, who was not immune to unconventional language, lost the cool he had so many times vowed to maintain.

“What did you just say!”

“You don’t think you’re the one to put it in, do you? Well, I wouldn’t mind, but aren’t you inexperienced?”

“Shut up. You bastard. Who says I’m inexperienced?”

Aeroc’s two fists resting on the chair armrests turned white with rage. Bendyke dropped to one knee beside the chair as if they were having a casual talk. He traced the pale vein marks that rose above Aeroc’s white knuckles with his long fingertips. It was a mere touch, but it was so sensual it made the hairs on Aeroc’s arms stand on end. A shiver ran through him, making it difficult to maintain his grip. The five fingers moved of their own accord, reaching out in different directions. The man with the untouchable horns, clad in an invisible black sheath, took Aeroc’s hand and brought it to his red, bleeding lips.

“I can tell just by looking at you. If I can make your cheeks blush with the mere touch of my hand and you’re not a virgin, then you’re the greatest prostitute ever.”

Bastard. Each word that he used cut into Aeroc’s pride like a knife.

“You must be proud of yourself for being so experienced.”

“Not particularly, but I can vouch that I know more about Aeroc Teiwind than anyone else.”

“Which of my staff did you buy off? The coachman? The gardener? The cook? Or perhaps, Hugo?”

“I heard it from you, yourself.”

Bendyke smirked and spouted bullshit. Aeroc had lost the will in this conversation. He was a fool for trying to have a rational conversation with a madman. Aeroc snorted in exasperation.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t give in to your wishes.”

“What?”

What other kind of nonsense was this? Aeroc frowned.

"I told you, I'm interested in you."

"So you're saying..... in that meaning."

"That's right, but I don't want to rush someone into something they're not ready for. I want to be on good terms with you, and in many ways we can share our feelings..... physical desire comes after that."

"You sound as if you want us to be lovers."

Bendyke smiled at that. Aeroc didn't want to fall for his mockery. He stared straight into the other man's eyes, trying to figure out if it was a trap or not. Aeroc shook off the crude emotions that had just occurred and stared until the atmosphere was as awkward as it could be. But he couldn't find any evidence of deception in Bendyke.

"Are you... being serious?"

Aeroc asked, too stunned to speak. Grabbing Aeroc's hand as he stared, Bendyke knelt down and kissed the back of it, like a knight worshipping a king.

"I don't want to lie to you anymore, I've done enough of that."

"Bendyke."

"Kloff."

He must have meant that it was okay to call him in a friendly manner, but Aeroc didn't want to do that yet. Nor would he later. Withdrawing his grasped hand, Aeroc indirectly informed the other of his feelings.

"I hope you won't be hurt if I don't respond to your one-sided courtship, Bendyke."

This man was not like the boys he met in society. This man didn't show any signs of anger or frustration, even as he got a cold rejection on his face.

"It's okay, I'll slowly seduce you."

Exuding confidence, Bendyke returned to his seat. Striking a polite pose, he faced Aeroc with ease. This made Aeroc uncomfortable himself.

They hadn't really done anything except drink tea in Violet's room. Bendyke had merely studied Aeroc as if he were admiring a sculpture, and when the hour grew late, he left of his own accord. Kloff hadn't been lying when he had said he'd take his time with Aeroc. Aeroc was half glad that he didn't have to perform the action with him right away, and half afraid that he might fall for the man's seduction one day.

"Him? Me?"

Aeroc couldn't have a clear answer. It was clear that Bendyke had made an impression in more ways than one. His peaceful routine had been shattered by the sudden storm, and Aeroc had to think of him constantly. Whether in company, or alone. In the library, in the garden. When he slept, when he didn't. All he could think about was Bendyke, and the erotic anxiety the man stirred in him slowly consumed everything else.

"Hmm, ahh."

His dreams, which some called windows of unconsciousness, were a mangled display of desire. In his dreams, he squirmed in pleasure beneath Bendyke.

"Mpfhh, hmph."

Aeroc breathed out, still hot, as he rose up, drenched in sweat and secretions. The sticky nightgown clung to his body. Exhausted, he had no energy to change. If it was going to be like this, they might as well have done it already. Then maybe he wouldn't have to spend these nights panting with unquenched thirst with a fear of the unknown.