

Garden 71

Vol. 3 Chapter 10.3 - The bitter with the sweet

“This isn’t like your usual self. Why are you suddenly like this?”

In the fear that fills the cold air, inside the dry and rigid soul, hope pokes its head out like a dewy sprout. He grabbed that delicate and beautiful thing with sharp claws, ripping it out. He didn’t know what kind of ending it would bring. He crushed the last hope that had sprouted in his heart.

“I hate you so much. I’m disgusted with you. I hope you meet the same miserable end just like what you did before.”

“Aeroc?”

His bloodied hands grasped for someone who had already left. He called his name over and over, waiting for an answer that would never come.

Kloff woke up to a terrible nightmare. It was so vivid that he found himself gasping for air with tears in his eyes. The corners of his eyes stung. The pain was so intense that he couldn’t open his eyes properly. He raised his hand and wiped his tear-streaked cheeks. Even as he wiped his cheeks with the palm of his hand, tears continued to uncontrollably pour out. He couldn’t breathe properly, so he took several rough breaths.

His lips were wet with tears that had been streaming down his nasal passages for some time. No matter how much he wiped his tears, it was useless. Maybe his tear ducts were broken, or his heart was melting. Why did he feel such regret and self-loathing?

Eventually, he opened his eyes. The pillow was soaked with tears. He had no strength in his limbs and felt so lethargic that he thought he might die. In his blurry vision, he saw a room that he didn't recognize. It was clearly an unfamiliar room, but the atmosphere didn't feel strange. As he took a deep breath, a familiar scent filled the air, and the inexplicable feeling of regret slowly faded away.

Unable to breathe, Kloff sat up and realized that someone was sleeping next to him, dead as a doornail. A blond face that seemed to be dreaming. It was Aeroc. He was sleeping so deeply that Kloff wasn't sure he was still alive.

He couldn't be dead, right?

A sudden sense of dread came over him. He didn't know when, but it seemed like there had been a time when Aeroc hadn't opened his eyes for an eternity. Perhaps it was in a dream. Kloff couldn't let him go like this. He didn't want to be left alone ever again.

Kloff hastily pulled Aeroc into an embrace and checked if he was breathing. He pressed his ear against Aeroc's nose tip, checked his warm body temperature with his hand, and then pressed his ear against his chest. His heart was beating strongly. Kloff could feel his chest moving with his regular breathing. He was alive and healthy.

Exhaling a sigh of relief, he tightly held Aeroc in his arms. The slightly restless movements he had been making earlier seemed to stir Aeroc from his sleep, frowning and waking up. At other times, Kloff would let him continue to sleep, but now Kloff wanted to see him open his eyes. He wanted to see his reflection in those blue eyes.

“Aeroc?”

Kloff called out, his voice sounding ridiculous with tears. Aeroc didn’t answer. Even in that short moment, it felt like Kloff’s blood was running cold, and he became anxious. His eyes, which had stopped tearing, flared hot again.

“Ae...roc?”

He couldn’t even pronounce that short word correctly. Tears fell down his cheeks and the golden eyelashes that caught them fluttered. Then, a hoarse raspy voice came out, “Uhng.”

Kloff felt relieved. Aeroc’s grimace, which relieved him of his deathly horror, made him feel grateful. That face looked so lovely. Kloff stole a kiss as he watched Aeroc’s lips twist and squirm, not being able to make a coherent sound.

The recipient of the thieving kiss faintly protested, and when the kiss was broken, he slowly opened his eyes, tears clinging to his voluminous lashes. Kloff smiled at the sight of his own foolish reflection in those deep lake-like eyes. Blinking slowly, Aeroc looked at him dazedly, not quite awake yet.

“...I can’t do it anymore.”

“No more for tonight.”

“But why, Kloff?”

Aeroc’s eyes widened in surprise as he noticed the tears in Kloff’s eyes, and he quickly raised one hand to wipe them away. At the same time, he stood up and used his other hand to wipe Kloff’s wet cheek. He seemed very confused and asked, “What’s wrong?” But Kloff couldn’t properly speak, his choked voice sounded extremely sad and painful, as if his heart was being torn apart. Kloff took the hand that came to cup his cheek and pressed his lips against the palm of it.

“It’s nothing.”

“You’re crying so much, it can’t be nothing. Are you...”

Aeroc couldn’t continue his words. He bit his lip and then smiled thinly. His smile seemed so genuine and sad, which made Kloff’s heart sink. A few more tears rolled down his face.

“If you want to change your mind about this now...”

“Shut your mouth. No matter what happens, you are mine, and you’re never going to get away from me.”

The intimidation had no power at all coming from someone who was half melting away from tearing up. However, Aeroc embraced the sobbing man, like an abandoned child, without uttering a word.

Usually, an aristocratic Count normally looked down on people with arrogance, but strangely, Aeroc lacked confidence when it came to Kloff. Even when he had pushed Kloff away, saying that he couldn't go through something like before again, he always trembled like someone hurt by love.

Kloff didn't know what had happened in Aeroc's past, a past that seemed to be filled with nothing but light. He had suffered deep wounds that were hard to gauge, and it would take a long time for him to heal from them. Kloff should be the one to wrap his arms around Aeroc and hold him, but it was Kloff who clung to him instead.

A lack of confidence meant that there was a lack of certainty, and consequently, a lack of trust in the other person. Kloff, who was bound to him, felt the same way. It was unsettling that Aeroc always left room for doubt, like he were a brilliant mind who could only memorize but never understand. Or maybe he just wanted to make sure.

Each time, Kloff made sure to give a clear answer. He firmly believed that repetitive learning was an excellent method that would work for even fools. Kloff repeated over and over again amidst his endless tears, "You are mine, and I will never let you go." Eventually, Aeroc's voice began to crack.

"Then why? Why are you crying?"

It was a nightmare he didn't want to recall. Aeroc wrapped his arms around Kloff, rested his nose on his head, and whispered softly to Kloff to tell him what was going on. Kloff wanted to become Aeroc's pillar, but his voice and the touch of his hand caressing his back felt so warm, causing Kloff to stop being stubborn.

"In my dream, I was driven mad because you killed my wife, Rapiel, and our unborn child so horribly. So I curse you to die an equally miserable death. Continuously. Over and over. Until you really die that way."

At that moment, the person who was holding him froze completely, like an ice doll. His breathing stopped, and his heart started pounding loudly. The fingertips that had been gently stroking his back trembled. When Kloff raised his head, Aeroc's face was white with shock.

Immediately, Kloff regretted it. He had done something an Alpha should never do to an unstable omega in heat. It was cruel of him to say that he had cursed the omega whom he was supposed to love and hold in his arms, even if it was only in a dream. It was something that should never be said to Aeroc, who was already sensitive and anxious. He was foolish.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said such things."

Kloff pulled himself up, and this time he hugged the trembling Aeroc tightly. He gently stroked Aeroc's back as he had just done for him. Aeroc's trembling hand reached for Kloff's chest. It was more of pushing him away instead of approaching him. Kloff felt like sewing his own mouth right away for saying such words.

"I shouldn't have said anything."

Kloff pulled him closer, and Aeroc's forehead touched Kloff's slightly damp cheek. Spontaneously, he kissed that forehead. Aeroc still didn't say a word, which made Kloff speak more unnecessarily.

"They say dreams are the opposite of reality, so this nightmare might bring me luck."

Kloff stroked Aeroc lightly, trying to warm his frozen body anyhow.

“Maybe you had six children in the dream because of my subconscious desire. In the dream, you were an alpha, but I forcefully changed you into an omega. When it actually happened because of a medical mutation. The reality seems to be strangely mixed up in the dream. I’ve already broken up with Rapiel, and now, you are my wife. It’s just a stupid dream. Good things will keep happening to us, so don’t worry about those strange dreams.”

No matter how much Kloff tried to soothe him, Aeroc’s trembling didn’t subside. He could even hear faint sobs. Kloff regretted deeply that his careless words had made his clearly pregnant omega tremble in fear.

“Shh... It’s okay. Nothing’s going to happen. I wouldn’t do that to you.”

He coaxed Aeroc for a long time with a soft voice. After a while, Aeroc himself made an effort to control his tears as he took a few deep breaths with suppressed sobs. Sometime later, an almost incomprehensible hoarse voice reached his ears.

“In your dream... after I died...”

“I told you not to worry about that stupid dream.”

Even though Kloff tried to draw a firm line, Aeroc didn't stop. He pressed his wet eyes against the nape of the Alpha's neck as he hugged him, and then he slowly spoke.

"...Were you happy?"

"What?"

Not understanding what he meant, Kloff asked in return. Aeroc sniffled before asking again with a fading voice.

"Since you got your revenge... Was I tormenting you anymore?"

"Do you want to know about that?"