

R. Garden 47

Vol. 5 ITRG Volume 5 Chapter 2.3

“Ack!”

Suddenly, one of the men shouted and stomped off. Aeroc turned around and saw his companion helping the fallen man to his feet, shouting “Hey, you!”.

“Is your shoulder broken?”

“Wait, it’s a broken shoulder, then I’ll have to be out for the next six months, and who’s going to take care of my wife, old mother, and five kids?”

The exaggeration sounded like a con man. Aeroc frowned and turned to leave, but the man whose shoulder had just been shattered jumped to his feet and grabbed him.

“You’ll have to pay for my medical bills.”

“Alimony, plus living expenses.”

“I thought you said you broke your shoulder? It looks fine.”

“This, my shoulder.”

Suddenly, the man grabbed his other shoulder and grunted. The way the two of them were beating the crap out of each other, it was as if they’d been planning this all along. It’s not often that he was bothered by such lowlifes. His euphoria quickly turned to muddy water. Aeroc had no desire to fall for their scams, but he didn’t want to waste time here. He didn’t want to ruin a good night.

“How much would be enough?”

Aeroc pulled his wallet from the inside pocket of his coat. Their faces changed as they saw the gold coins and bills. One of them suddenly limped.

“My leg is broken too.”

“Oh my, this is bad.”

“This will do.”

Aeroc pulled a gold coin out of his wallet and threw it at them. The gold coin struck the smirking one in the chest and fell to the ground with a loud clatter. The other, seeing the gleam of gold, snatched it up, and the one with said broken leg snatched it away. He glared at Aeroc.

“Wait, my lord. It’s mine, isn’t it? It’s too much for you to throw it away.”

Still, he clutched the gold coin tightly in his hand and refused to let go. Snorting, Aeroc tried to ignore them and continue on his way.

“Hey!”

They shouted angrily, lunging for him. Aeroc twisted slightly to the side, dodged, and hit the one that lunged for him in the back with his cane.

Thud.

“Ack!”

The one who’d been stabbed in the back fell face-first to the ground. The other one ducked and lunged, not even flinching from the cane blow. A grimy hand groped for Aeroc’s body. Even though he knew they were trying to take his wallet, he felt humiliated by that filthy touch. He was firmly angry. He raised the heavy ornament on his cane to smack the bastard in the back of the head.

Bang.

“Urgh.”

Someone kicked the man in the side, and he rolled over, still holding his stomach. The man who'd been punched in the back by Aeroc earlier lunged again, but the unexpected ally had gotten the better of him. The ally was bigger than anyone else here, he grabbed the charging man by the throat with one hand. He lifted his opponent to his feet and slammed him to the ground. He dodged out of the way as the one who'd punched him in the gut lunged with a clenched fist, just as Aeroc had done earlier, and then struck him in the back with the cane he held. It was the same dodge, the same attack, but the tremor of the long rod slicing through the air and the thud of the blow on the impostor's back were completely different.

Smack.

Thud.

The fallen man was completely out cold. The other man who had just gotten to his feet from being grabbed by the throat took one look at the scene, clutched the gold coin tightly in his hand, and backed away slowly. As the ally looked on, he scurried away.

When the dust settled, the man who had suddenly appeared bowed low. A black-gloved hand picked up a silk hat, which Aeroc only realized as the one he'd dropped after feeling for his hair.

"Thank you for your help."

Aeroc, who had just accepted the hat from the other man, froze. The man standing with his back to the yellow gaslight was a familiar face. It was the madman who'd charged him on the estate's walkway.

"After the concert, I was wondering where you were going. I see you're still in the habit of wandering around dangerous places without realizing it's dangerous."

"I think you're the dangerous one. You followed my back."

Although Aeroc had gotten help, it was only a matter of time before this man turned on himself. The excessive violence was just like before, and it was even more dangerous given the potential of the cane in the hands of the other man. Aeroc scanned his surroundings quickly. He hoped there was someone he could call for help, but there was no one on the streets late at night. If he was kidnapped here, would anyone be able to find him? He doubted it.

"You don't have to be so vigilant, I won't do anything to you."

The tone of his voice was disturbing. It sounded like a sick man crying out in pain. It was seeping in.

"I don't know anyone who can be trusted after saying that."

"Do you really not remember me?"

"Why should I remember you?"

"Are you serious?"

Aeroc's irritation was rising at his persistence. In a world full of shallow people trying to impress and increase their connections, there had to be a fine line. How twisted could anyone be, to be so ignorant and insane as to do such a thing? The man's demeanor was better than before. This poor aristocrat must have been bleeding profusely from usury for months.

"I'm not pretending to not know, I really don't. Why should I have to remember a violent, eccentric, insane man like you? I'm not that free."

"You really don't remember."

He looked genuinely confused. His gaze was full of doubt. He studied Aeroc, frowned for a moment, and then fell back into conflict. The confusion he felt was palpable through his closed mouth. He seemed to genuinely believe that Aeroc knew him and was pretending not to. If this was an intentional act, he was brilliant. Either that, or he was a genius trickster. Maybe he had mistook Aeroc for another person.

"Something is wrong. I've been walking around the capital for months, trying to figure this out, and it doesn't make any sense. This isn't the hell I thought it was, but you're obviously here, so why?"

"If anything is wrong, it's your head."

"Are you sure..... you don't remember anything, and this isn't a hell of your own making?"

The madman was about to extend his hand towards Aeroc.

Swat.

The back of the hand Aeroc swung to knock the man's hand away ended up smacking him in the cheek. It was because their distance was suddenly closer. Aeroc was inwardly surprised, since he hadn't meant to, but he didn't show it outwardly. Instead, Aeroc grabbed his cane with both hands in case that man lunged. Aeroc was so nervous that he shuddered slightly, knowing that this time he would surely strike him in the groin and escape.

The other man was as surprised after getting hit in the cheek. He gently touched his cheek with his fingertips. His eyes narrowed slightly.

"It's already the second time in this place."

Aeroc tried to think of what the man meant the second time, but then he remembered that he had punched him in the cheekbone before. Unlike then, this madman had remained remarkably calm this time. Which made it all the more intimidating.

"This is really weird, it's like I've gone back in time..... No, this is a crazy idea."

Aeroc laughed at the thought of a crazy person concluding that himself was crazy.

"You've never met me for real. And you've never committed murder. That's why you're so angry."

“I don’t know where you’ve been that you said those words, but there’s a limit to being rude.”

Aeroc didn’t feel like listening to more of the man’s insanity. If he kept dealing with this man, he might end up going insane.

“But I appreciate your help. Contact my butler, and I’ll reward you accordingly.”

Aeroc was about to give away his business card, but thought differently. The man already knew the name and the location of the estate. Aeroc didn’t want to give the man a business card and give him an excuse to make up a false connection to a third party.

“Aeroc?”

“My name isn’t cheap enough to be called by the likes of you.”

“I see.”

In response to Aeroc’s cold retort, he suddenly grinned.

“If this is a new world, I’ll start over.”

He was a madman after all, rambling unintelligibly until the end. Aeroc set himself upright.

“Goodbye, then.”

Aeroc turned away, head held high in pride, but the worry in his back was killing him. But Aeroc kept walking, as he always did, at a pace that was neither fast nor slow. Aeroc expected the man to jump on him from behind at any moment, but that didn't happen until he met the coachman near the music hall who was desperately looking for him.

The carriage swept through the streets where Aeroc had met him earlier. The collapsed man was still there, but the other had already disappeared.

“I don't want to see him again.”

Aeroc shuddered as he remembered the ghastly creature's maddened eyes.