

R. Garden 50

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His father's financial advisor, whom he had trusted to manage Teiwind's assets since his father's time, retired shortly after his father's death. Like many aristocrats, Aeroc took these matters into his own hands. He took on the task confidently, but it wasn't as easy as he thought. One investment after another failed, and he had lost a lot of money.

"My pride is getting bruised."

The good news was that the Teiwind's wealth was the equivalent of an entire small nation, so a few bad investments were nothing. The problem was that the Teiwind also needed to spend as much as a small nation. He might be able to get by for a few years, but if he continued to make bad investments, Teiwind would be in a risk of being unable to support sponsorships and social activities in the future.

Worse yet, he might be reduced to poverty and forced to sell his hard-earned books to buy bread and barely peek through the windows of art museums. That was horrible even just thinking about it. After some hard thinking using his brain, which was smart enough to not think much of investing, he realized the root cause of his failures in investment.

"I need to hire a financial manager."

Only after being cornered did Aeroc recognize the limits of his abilities. The failures weren't a total loss, but it was the price he paid for better reflection.

Aeroc couldn't just randomly hire someone to manage his finances, an area where trust was essential. Using his failures as a mirror, this time, Aeroc asked for a recommendation from an experienced acquaintance, Viscount Derbyshire. Aeroc received several enclosed referral letters. Not only the Viscount Derbyshire, but the Duchess of Clayton, the Viscount Westport, and many others all named the same person at the same time.

"They're really not helpful at all."

Aeroc wondered if they were colluding behind his back, how they could all point to Bendyke. As much as he wanted to say he was surprised, inwardly he knew it would lead to that man. The capital's social circles were abuzz these days with talk of Bendyke, a young investment manager and lawyer whose investment predictions were so accurate they could be compared to a prophet or wizard, and whose fortune was actually growing at an alarming rate. Anyone with even a passing interest in money scrambled to get in line for his services, only to find that Bendyke was shunning clients for personal reasons. But that arrogant behavior made him even more famous. He accepted clients based on a completely unspecified criterion, not minding the size of their trust assets. No one knew what his secret criteria were.

Aside from a few royalties and dukes, the only known long-term rather than one-off contractors were the Derbyshire, Westport, and Wolflake clans. What they all had in common was that they were old, respected families. While it was surprising that he managed to stretch until the royalties, it's entirely possible that the Duchess of Clayton could have built the bridge. However, the Wolflake clan is more surprising.

Wolflake was a royal family with great influence in the political arena. The current Marquis of Wolfrake was known for his cold temper and aristocratic pride, and he was notoriously unwilling to deal with anyone unworthy of his rank. Aeroc was almost the only person of his age with whom he interacted on a regular basis. Aeroc frowned, wondering how Bendyke had managed to woo him into a friendship.

He knew, in his humble way, that these three clans were a big part of the capital's social scene. Adding Teiwind to the mix, and it would be a force to be reckoned with. Aeroc wasn't sure what Bendyke's ambition was, but he resented it.

Aeroc personally sought out other financial managers, but every single trustworthy one politely declined, saying they couldn't handle the assets of Teiwind. Aeroc even tried to convince them in person, but one of them said something outrageous.

"Haven't you already hired the most competent financial manager you can find?"

"I don't understand what you're saying."

"A large clan might have several managers at the same time for their assets, but Mr. Bendyke is more than capable on his own. More than that, I don't want to unnecessarily compete with him."

Aeroc frowned at those incomprehensible words.

"Do you mean that he is my financial manager?"

"From what I know, yes."

The other man chuckled. It masked the awkwardness of Aeroc not understanding the flow of the conversation.

"I didn't hire him. Where did you hear that?"

As Aeroc prodded, the other man finally realized he wasn't joking and began to visibly panic.

"Did that man say that to you?"

"No, that's absolutely not it. I thought that a clan as great as Teiwind would definitely hire Mr. Bendyke, and..... I don't know where this misunderstanding came from, I think it would be best to meet with him and clear up any misunderstandings."

"I'll see to that."

Aeroc replied curtly, then walked away. He felt offended. Just what was wrong with that man that Aeroc had to clear up the misunderstanding? Bendyke was the fraud. Aside from feeling an intense displeasure, Aeroc scrapped his plans to hire another financial manager. He didn't want to go around begging when no one was willing to do it anyway. It's just a matter of tightening up their finances for the time being. Aeroc decided to try the simplest and most obvious solution.

But the old Count's estate wasn't as simple as he had thought. Simply not making further expenses didn't solve all the problems. A letter arrived, demanding payment for venture capital investments under a contract. Even for Aeroc, who was a big spender, the sum was so large that he had to clean his eyes and double-check. Surprised, he quickly emailed the venture capital company to ask why, and they responded by asking him to double-check some of the contract questions he had. Aeroc quickly looked up the contract. It wasn't that Aeroc couldn't remember the terms written on it, it was that Aeroc didn't know what they meant. After a day of struggling with the reply's explanation and the contract, Aeroc

figured out the hard way that the co-president of the venture capital company was himself, and that he was supposed to temporarily cover the losses of the other investors.

“I’ve never thought it would be like this.”

It got worse. The cash income from the estate was not enough to cover the demanded payment. He would have to part with some of the artwork that had been passed down through the generations.

“If my father heard of this, he would have risen up from his grave and given me a beating.”

Indeed, Aeroc could already hear the shout of “Aeloc Vinadellin Taywind, come to the study at once!” pounding in his eardrums. His cheeks tingled. Aeroc had to come up with something right away. But he’d already suffered a few failures, and whatever he came up with was more likely to lead to another horrible ending.

“Oh, well.”

Aeroc wandered through the mansion through the night, examining the paintings on the walls, the furniture, and antiques. None of it was left untouched by his father. After thoroughly examining them, he selected paintings that were by up-and-coming artists, so they weren’t expensive.

By the time the hazy dawn broke, Aeroc was completely exhausted. He didn’t dare straddle the chair in the study where his father’s spirit might have sat, and instead sat on the small stool he used to be scolded in. Aeroc thought about it until his head was feverish, but he couldn’t come up with a solution. Unconsciously, one of my legs trembled. Realizing that he had lost his dignity, Aeroc let out a long, long sigh. There was no other way.

“So this is why you summoned me so early in the morning.”

Bendyke sneered as they entered the study. He took an uninvited seat and made himself comfortable, and Aeroc, far away from him, resisted the urge to return the sarcasm right back. He was in such a bad situation that he had to borrow this demon’s help.

“I hope you had a comfortable ride on your way here.”

Aeroc knew he spoke too fast. Ha. He couldn’t believe he was nervous about this man. It couldn’t be. It was just because he hadn’t slept well. And this man wasn’t the right person to show his favor to. Noticing that Aeroc was being rude, the unruly barbarian frowned.

“It’s impossible to feel comfortable from the moment you wake me up from my deep slumber. Unlike an aristocrat who can sit still and have money poured into his pockets, I have to earn money to eat, buy clothes, and sleep. I’ve been working late all week and had planned to rest the whole morning today.”

“I apologize for summoning you on such short notice, but it was very urgent and I had no choice. If you don’t mind, I’d like to invite you to dinner.....”

Aeroc forced himself to say something he didn’t mean. As hard as it was to say, it didn’t look good on the listener. Before Aeroc could finish, Bendyke interrupted him.

“I’ve told you before, there’s no need for you to be polite between us. Just tell me what you want.”

That was good timing from him, but Aeroc still didn't feel good about it. Everything about him felt offensive and discomforting. Who the hell did he think Aeroc was, a passing trainee assistant?

"I wonder how anyone else tolerates your arrogance. Do you also act this arrogant in the presence of Viscount Derbyshire?"

"They're not Aeroc Teiwind."