

# INTO THE ROSE GARDEN

## Chapter 2

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*Shameless fools.*

Aelock laughed at them inwardly. There were many things more important than money in the world. Those who had learned soul-moving melodies, heart-shaking phrases, mind-blowing beautiful masterpieces, and endlessly deep classics will not be in a hurry to sell themselves so cheaply. Aelock was not interested in them, but he couldn't get rid of the will of his father, who passed away the previous year, so he only smiled gracefully.

The vulgar labor market masqueraded as a tea party was not all that interesting from the start, and the aristocratic sense of duty to lead it soon ran out. Aelock used his non-existent cousin as an excuse to get away from the people and escaped from the garden filled with the thick scent of roses. He made his way to his favorite cedar trail by a shortcut known only to those who have stayed in the huge mansion for a long time.

The trees lined up on one side of the well-polished path stretched straight up toward the sky. The huge trees were planted by the first Count who first built this mansion. They may not have been this big at first, but following the history of the family of Counts, which started as a humble family and now stood side by side with the royal family, they had now become giant trees to look up to.

A cool breeze blew through the towering trees, making the leaves rustle. The irritation that had soared a moment ago was erased in an instant. He walked slowly and inhaled the bitter smell of wood to the fullest.

Aelock loved to stroll along this path and hated being disturbed. So, the servants of the mansion never came in this way, and the butler took care that invited guests would not 'unintentionally' disturb the Count's private break time, so only Aelock could enjoy himself. Well, that's the way it had to be. But who was the one standing far away and looking this way?

As the owner of the mansion, it was absolutely impossible to go back to avoid outsiders. Rather, it was right to send out the guest who entered the space unauthorized. By all means, a little humiliation in return for a nasty intrusion would be fine.

Aelock approached him with a smile. When he got close enough to talk to him, he was sure that the person would shout out a name he obviously didn't want

to remember and gush about how much he was worth the investment. Aelock observed the other person as he narrowed the distance, thinking about what kind of humiliation he should inflict on the unpleasant intruder.

Taller than average, he straightened his shoulders and looked this way. Dark auburn hair and slightly tanned, healthy skin. Neat forehead and nose bridge and cheekbones that gave off an extremely tough impression. The firmly closed mouth fit perfectly with the sharp jawline as if it had been sculpted. Contrary to his stern expression and firm posture, which made him seem like an awfully proud person, the look in his deep-set eyes was pure and honest, unlike the lowly guys who swarmed the garden. The closer he got, the more he filled his vision, like a warlord with a huge cedar tree at his back.

Before he knew it, the desire to humiliate him was gone. Even when the distance between them got closer than necessary, Aelock didn't say anything and simply stared into the dark brown eyes. He was flustered by the awkward atmosphere, but fortunately, his father's strict discipline shone through.

"You must have lost your way."

"Yes."

Even when asked politely, he only gave a blunt answer without any other rhetoric. Even though he only heard one syllable, Aelock felt that his voice was extremely mellow. The low, resonant, and serious voice matched his appearance very well.

“I will show you the way.”

“I am looking for a specific rose garden, but I cannot find it because the garden itself is so large.”

A slightly softened answer came back to this offer. It seems that he was also invited to the tea party. However, the air he carried was different from the common swarm of ants. He didn't make a fuss when he saw Aelock, nor did he look at him with an interested gaze. Rather, he merely saluted in an attitude that showed off moderate etiquette as if he were indifferent. He didn't say his name, and he didn't even ask Aelock's.

This was the first time something of this sort had ever happened. Even complete strangers behaved intimately as if they had found a lost brother when they saw a young man in fine clothes, with bright blond hair, blue eyes,

sophisticated manners, and a gentle smile. Aelock thought he had met someone interesting after a long time.

It didn't take long to go around the shortcut and get to the place where one could see the rose garden. In the meantime, the man kept a little distance and silently accompanied him. Aelock was curious about this man's name, so he introduced himself first in spite of his face.

"My name is Aelock Teiwind."

Before it was too late, Aelock turned and asked right in front of the oriental arbor-vitae barrier, out of sight of others. The tall man only lowered his eyes instead of his head and looked at the hand held out in front of him. He held his hand at a speed that was neither fast nor slow, too brief to be called hesitation, and answered as concisely as before.

"Klopp Bandyke."

Other than that, it was an unimaginably fitting name. That's right. For this man, the term 'appellation' was more appropriate than the simple term 'name'. The combination of sound, echo, and harmony of meanings was close to

perfection. The lean hand was so large that it was able to cover the nobleman's soft, white hand, and even though he held it lightly without force, Aelock could feel the strength of will in it. He looked up into Klopp's eyes. In those dark eyes that didn't falter at all, he saw a person.

Aelock smiled. He didn't even have to force it. He was just overflowing with inexplicable joy and excitement that brought a bright smile to the whole face.

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Earning coins by working on a daily wage basis was a privilege given only to a few. Even the few jobs of a day laborer were reserved for those who advertised their abilities and sold themselves. There were more days of starvation than days of eating. A simple errand to earn two coins was not properly given to a person who was left with only scarred skin and bones. Even so, he was able to live without starving because there were broad-minded people who would even pay for his rotten body.

He hid in a deeper, darker shade so as not to be deprived of the half-eaten bread. The moment he folded his legs and crouched down in a corner to chew on the freshly baked bread, he felt excruciating pain as if his intestines were being torn apart. He knelt down on the ground, trying not to lose his clouding vision. Then he curled up. It was already the third time.

The first time was so painful that he struggled and scratched the floor until his fingernails fell off and he passed out, but the second time, only his heart pounded and it was bearable. It was a common occurrence when selling one's body on the street. It just hurt terribly.

He crawled into a deeper, more closed alley in the throes that felt like a knife swinging his intestines. A foul-smelling, yellow liquid flowed down the crotch of the already soiled pants, along with the red fluid that governed life. He pulled down his pants with trembling hands and placed his skinny bottom on the cold stone ground. He grimaced with the bread in his mouth and bawled in pain.

After a while, a lump of red flesh swelled up and squeezed through the gap, and a black clot of blood came out. It was a person the size of a palm, stored in a sticky, shiny membrane.

It seemed that he had lost consciousness at some point. As he raised his dizzy head, he saw the rosy sky. He lifted his upper body with his wobbly arms.

*Roll.*

The hardened bread, hard to discern from how much it had been bitten, rolled. He lay down on the cold stone ground and pulled his stiff legs together. He pulled what was falling out with a numb hand. No matter how many times he went through it, the feeling of falling between his legs was terrible and vexing. Unknowingly, he let out a cry. The gaping throat blew out air like a broken flute. He used his hollow voice that couldn't even be imbued with grief as a dirge and raised what had not even formed with his hands. Even this clot of blood spilled out red tears from its undivided eyes, but nothing spilled out of the man's eyes.

Barely controlling his staggering legs, he pulled up his clothes and walked with the corpse of a human who knew how to cry. Towards the place where the tears of the sky gather and flow down. *Don't be born like this next time.* He forcefully moved his mouth to say "Farewell" and set the red rose petal-like thing afloat on the river.

The whole way back was a kaleidoscope. The flower-like sky, the cool shade, the black stone path, and the calmly flowing river. Everything was jumbled up and spun round and round. His dry eyes were stiff. For that reason, he couldn't keep up with the dancing world.



He couldn't think of anything, whether it was about where he was going or if it was right to go this way. The mumbling noise in his ears was full of incomprehensible profanity. He couldn't tell whether it was a real human voice or an illusion. There was nothing left of the body that created a person, so it was pushed away even by the wind that could not blow a single leaf. After all the bodily fluids had evaporated, the body, like dried leaves, rolled and rolled around until it reached a certain corner of a street.

He could hear the sounds of wheels rolling swiftly along with the powerful clatter of the horses' hooves on the stone path. When he looked up, several black carriages passed by. The place where he couldn't get his act together was the end of the maze that continued from the slums, a huge square. The square leading directly to the nearby riverside doubled as a crossroads for numerous carriages.

There was usually a lot of traveling, but today was particularly busy. He stood blankly and stared vacantly at the various seals. There were quite a few familiar ones among them. Barons, Viscounts, Dukes, Counts, and sometimes even those of royalty, all remained the same.

The long period of time, when the once noble existence had now become a mass of filth that was less than a piece of trash, was not even a fleeting moment for those families with a long history. There was nothing to change. He was the only one who had changed. The only thing missing was a family

that came to an end because of his stupidity. For others, today was a day like any other.

Even if he kept looking at it, he couldn't even touch that world of light anymore. Even if he tried to touch it, the only thing that would happen would be the dry tips of his hand burning at a terrifying speed. He had to turn around. The reason he couldn't turn around right away wasn't that he had lingering regrets. It was just that the body didn't listen. He barely lifted his feet before turning his hunched back, then slowly turned his shriveled shoulders, and finally tried to turn his dazed head. Just then, a black carriage came running this way from afar.

Why did the four horses with shiny manes and the sturdy, solemn-looking carriage seem to glimmer when they were no different from the others? The head that had just turned around returned to its previous pose. The galloping carriage tore through the wind and passed by narrowly. It was then that he saw it. A clear silhouette among blurry beings.