

The Gardener's Tale

Karl von Effner, director of the royal gardens

Midsummer, east parterre:
a scene inspired by—what? Pythagoras?
 Nothing in nature is
 like this: calculated to please
 simply for the sake of pleasing.
Ludwig loved it—of course,
not as much as the Winter Garden, but
 then, that's a portable
 pleasance, imported (or rather,
 dis-Oriented) from places
as far east as Persia
and the precincts of Patusan—potted,
 pruned, and presented un-
 der glass. We procured palms, peacocks,
 pagodas, poppies, peonies,
and parti-colored blooms
of every possible shape, size, and form
 —not to mention a pair
 of gazelles and a prized parrot
 that reproduced so perfectly
Ludwig's loud, nervous laugh,
footmen hearing it perked up in panic
 at their Master's unex-
 pected presence. One fall, we packed
it all up and shipped it to *Schloss*

Berg on Starnberger See—
palms, peafowl, plants, and all—and all for a
princess! (oh, all right then,
a grand duchess, one Maria
of Russia, or St. Petersburg
to be precise, where match-
makers prate, pander, and peddle their wares).
Most thought—especially
the girl's mother, a czarina—
Ludwig would fall prostrate before
Her Pouting Prettiness;
but—and about this I take a certain,
how shall I say . . . *perverse*
pleasure—His Majesty showed less
interest in the Duchess than in
my premier progeny:
Peter! You see, the elder boy was there
to help unpack, de-pot,
replant, et cetera, and the King just
happened to notice him reposed
upon a peat pallet,
parched and perspiring heavily, his shirt
pasted like a poultice
to his chest and back. Ludwig paused,
and I, heart palpitating, feared
a reprimand, perhaps
some painful punishment for having pooped
out before Paradise

was . . . recompleted, so to speak;
but no! Nothing of the kind. No,
it seems the King had stopped
to ask, merely to ask, about a par-
ticular type of plant,
wanting to know if it was not
indeed some kind of a pansy. . . .
Ah, the large part that luck
plays in our precious lives: this, *this*, was
a prime example, for
you see, it so happens Peter
is an expert on this flower,
a hybrid, the purplest
of purples, its petals plush as velvet.
Presently, they were off,
perambulating the lake shore,
each delighted with the other's
genius and unmis-
table perspicacity regarding
things horticultural.
And to my paternal delight,
this meeting was but the prelude
to a longer, deeper
relationship, which, upon our return
to the Palace, reached full
blossom: the King, notorious
insomniac that he was, was
soon calling for Peter

every night! Before long, they were inseparable. As for me,
ah, well—I preened like a pasha!
But, of course, into every tale comes some conflict. In this case the forms were pettiness, jealousy, and pernicious gossip:
you see, some said their love was not . . .
platonic (my Greek, not theirs), but sordid, sinful, at best pathetic. And I'm ashamed to say that, at first, I allowed it to cause me a good deal of pain.
But this too soon passed and was replaced, posthaste, by pride. (And would that I not fall prey again to such prude perversions, perpetrated by those priggish pillars of pettiness!) You see two points of fact prevailed:
one, Munich produces many bright boys, but the King chose mine; and two, many and varied are love's productions transposed by the Greeks!