

## Garden 108

Vol. 4 Chapter 2.14 - My honorable defiance toward confronting the disrespectful illegal inhabitant

Gone was Bült's laid-back, disrespectful demeanour, and he stiffened like a frozen ice sculpture, his voice quivering as he spoke of autumn. The demon listened with an intrigued, Hmm. Then he casually wrapped his arm around Mother's waist, which Mother tried to shake off with a frown, but that guy wasn't one to back down. He didn't care if anyone else saw them or not, he just pulled Mother right up next to him and casually listened to Bült's story.

"I guess you're right, the four seasons are only meaningful if you collect them all."

"Summer and autumn are mine, so don't covet them."

"They're hanging in the study we share anyway."

The demon dragged Mother towards the other paintings. Mother's interest was waning a little as he'd already seen them all, but Mother's eyes quickly lit up when the demon said that if he could buy the paintings that Mother took a liking to.

"What's with you today?"

"A birthday present."

At that, Mother's eyes widened a little and the corners of his mouth lifted.

“Bear in mind that you didn’t put a limit on the number.”

“That’s..... Alright.”

Being hit back, the Demon made a little sour face, but he didn’t say anything more. In fact, he seemed very calm from earlier, maybe because they were still outside, or maybe because he didn’t think it was a big deal. In any case, the name Bült had already been erased from Mother’s mind, so I decided not to bother anymore.

As the demon took Mother to see the gallery, Bült, still frozen and unmelted, stared blankly behind him. Just in case he hadn’t understood it correctly, I decided to check in with him.

“Father said earlier that he doesn’t have a wife, right? He doesn’t have a wife, but he does have a lover. Do you see my face? Doesn’t it look like someone?”

“I..... I see.”

Bült stuttered in shock. He really must have had no idea.

“You should have suspected something else when even an alpha is that attractive. You lack observation and imagination for a painter, perhaps because you only paint landscapes. In any case, give up using Mother as your model, and I suggest you don’t travel alone in the future. Viscount Bendyke holds onto a grudge more than you think.”

That should be enough to get the point across. I smirked and brushed him off, then walked over to my parents in the distance. I squeezed between them, admiring the demon's brazenness in exuding personal intimacy even in a crowded art gallery.

"Lenoc?"

"Father, let's go home, I'm hungry."

I ignored the demon and turned to Mother.

On the carriage ride home, neither the demon nor Mother showed any signs of distress.

"But how did you know? Is it really a coincidence?"

"I heard that the autumn was booked, so I came in a hurry."

It was a shameless lie. Mother made a face and looked first at the demon, then at me, but I just said, "Oh, I can't wait to eat my strawberry roll," like an innocent child who knows nothing.

When I got home, Martha and Hugo were a little surprised. They hadn't expected us to return with the demon. They quickly scattered under the glare of the de facto ruler of the house.

The rest of the evening went on as usual without any problems. Eurea and I shared the cake from the bakery, and the demon tucked the youngest into bed. As he told us to go to bed earlier than usual, I didn't question it, only happy that I was able to skip my spelling lesson.

"Good night."

"Good night, you mustn't wander around at night."

The demon watched us siblings sleep, then left the room. Beyond the closing door in the distance, I could see Mother waiting for the demon, looking a little nervous, but I quickly forgot about it as I dozed off.

For the rest of the day, Mother rested in his room, unwell. Maybe I shouldn't have called the demon to the gallery. Worried, I went to Martha.

"I can't believe he provoked an imprinted alpha, no matter how lonely he was. Sometimes I admire Sir Aeroc's courage. His back is hurting, that's why he needs to rest all day."

It takes courage to provoke an imprinted alpha and it hurts your back? I raised a question mark. "Don't overthink it, it's a grown-up thing, you'll understand when you become an adult," Martha shrugged.

“But what’s an imprinted alpha, anyway? Is he strong?”

“It’s called imprinting when you only look at one person, like your father.”

My heart started pounding in my chest. Was the Demon King an Imprint Alpha, giving him powers that no one else could match? If so, for me to grow taller wasn’t important right now. I had to know.

“Mmm..... He’s indeed strong, but.”

Martha, who had just finished stirring the cake batter, stared at the distant ceiling and scratched her head.

“But?”

Would I finally learn the identity of the demon, and what evil spell Mother had fallen under? The tension was palpable. My thumping heart threatened to jump out of my mouth. I gripped the table with both hands and waited for her next words. Martha, who had just finished whisking, leaned down and whispered in Lenoc’s ear.

“He’s under an evil spell, and if we break that spell, we’ll all meet a terrible end.”

“Uuugh!”

I was shocked. Martha said, “Ho-ho-ho, an imprinted Alpha is scary, so go and do your word homework, or you’ll get in trouble.” And with that, she stirred the dough again. My skin crawled. Homework is not important. Magic! I have to write it down in my journal!

Imprinted. What kind of evil magic was bothering Mother so much? This needed to be investigated urgently. Mother was bedridden and Eurea hadn’t been seen since morning, as she went out to play in the garden. Jester was in Martha’s care. The demon had traveled to the palace and would be back soon. Now was the time.

I ran to the study. The evil spell would be hidden in an inconspicuous space. I will definitely find the evil demon’s grimoire.

I balled my fists and stood before the bookshelves. The most likely candidates were the law books the demon had used since college. Somewhere in there, the secret of the demon must be hidden. I had to find it quickly.

The demon’s bookshelves were very large and tall. No fool would hide secrets within reach, so I was suspicious of the old book at the very top. I took the study ladder and placed it in front of him. Even at its highest point, I couldn’t reach it. I raised my heels up. It was still about an inch short. Is the milk I’ve had so far not yet enough?!

“I’ll have to stack more.”

I quickly climbed down the ladder. I took out the thick law books and laid them out on the floor. I placed the study ladder on top of them and climbed up. The ladder wobbled.

“Uwah!”

I grabbed the bookshelf with both hands and hung on. I took a moment to catch my breath. Luckily, I managed to keep my balance. You’re doing great, Lenoc Teiwind!

I carefully stretched my arm out. The book on top was very old and thick at the same time. It took a lot of strength to pull it out with one hand. But as the eldest alpha heir to the Count, I must not lose to a mere book. I gritted my teeth and pulled it out. I quickly flicked through it and found it to be an ordinary law book. Of course, I wouldn’t find it in one try. I put it back in its place. It was harder to put it back in than to take it out. I was sweating profusely.

“The book must be enchanted.”

I pulled out the second book. It was a bust. The third, too.

“Uh, ugh.”

Twelve books remained. But with how much strength I had left, I could only carry two of them. The books were too heavy, and the poor Count’s young master was still too young. There must be a quick-growth spell in the grimoire. If I was as big as a demon, I wouldn’t have this much trouble. It was not fair that he alone was big.

More busts followed.

It was almost time for the demon to return. It was better to try again next time. Except for one more thing. There was a particularly worn and tattered book perched on the edge. The spine was peeling and the title was barely visible. The threads that held it together poked through the frayed edges. Let's take a look at that one. I grasped the thick hardback cover, heavier than any other book, and tried to pull it out, but it was so worn that the contents were separated from the cover. Oh no!

I strained my fingers and gave it a little tug, my heeled feet straining. The ladder tilted slightly. With my other hand, I gripped the shelf tightly. Just a little further would be enough. I tried again and again, and finally, the book started to come off. As expected! Just a little more!

That's when it happened. The tilted ladder gave a loud crash.

"Aack!"

Scared, I clung to the shelf.

Thud.

The heavy books fell backward with a heavy thud. It should have stopped there, but the recoil sent it tumbling forward, sending a chill down my spine.

Crash.



A few books fell to the floor. My worry grew along with the shadows that slowly fell over me. I'm really going to get in trouble if I don't die. I'm sorry, Mom... and..... I squeezed my eyes shut.

"Lenoc!"

Thump.