

## Living Shadow 101

### Chapter 101 Trouble In Paradise

Iris's expectant eyes watched him, her gaze unwavering. Damon froze for a moment, caught off guard by the intensity of her expression. He turned to Lilith, only to find a sly smile playing on her lips. For a brief moment, he felt his breath hitch and his heart pound, but right on cue, the Remorseless skill activated, forcing him to calm himself.

Damon frowned, carefully placing his teacup down with a faint click.

"I'm sorry, Lilith, but I think there's been some misunderstanding."

Lilith raised an eyebrow, her smirk widening slightly. "A misunderstanding?"

Damon nodded slowly, maintaining his composure.

"Yes. You seem to believe I'm some sort of expert on the matter. But as much as I'd love to bask in the glow of your faith in me, I'm afraid I have no idea what you're talking about."

Iris's blue eyes darted toward him, her voice trembling slightly. "You... really don't know anything?"

Damon turned his gaze to her, his tone softening.

"No, Iris. I don't. I wish I did—if only to help you find some peace. But I'm as in the dark about your father's death as anyone else."

Iris lowered her head, her voice barely above a whisper. "I see."

Lilith tilted her head, her smirk turning sharper.

"Really? You mean to tell me you, of all people, have absolutely no insight into what happened to Carmen Vale?"

Her gaze flicked back to Damon, her tone teasing yet probing.

"Are you sure about that?"

Damon shook his head slowly, his voice steady.

"That's exactly what I'm saying. I'm just a student trying to get through the day without being dragged into anyone else's schemes. If someone's led you to believe otherwise, I'd suggest reevaluating your sources."

The jab was subtle but unmistakable, and Lilith caught it. Her smirk faltered briefly before returning, more calculated than before.

"Hmm, I see. Perhaps this was a misunderstanding on my part. But I'm sure someone with your... unique perspective would be willing to help me, wouldn't you, Damon?"

Damon kept his expression calm, though he recognized the trap. She was baiting him, but with Iris watching him with such a hopeful, pleading gaze, he knew he couldn't refuse.

"Yes," he said evenly. "I'll try my best to assist however I can."

His hand clenched tightly at his side. Lilith Astranova had crossed a line—there was no reason to involve Iris in any of this.

"Very well," Lilith said, her tone triumphant. "I'm glad to have you on board."

She glanced at Iris, who was still looking at Damon with a mix of hope and longing.

"Don't worry, Iris. Damon is quite capable. With his assistance, I'm certain we'll sniff out the monster behind your father's death."

Iris nodded, her voice soft but sincere. "Thank you for your help."

Damon picked up his teacup again, sipping quietly as the tension in the room grew heavier.

Lilith tried to make small talk to ease the atmosphere, but Iris's mood remained somber, her thoughts clearly elsewhere. Eventually, Lilith decided it was time to leave.

As they stood, Lilith led the way to the door. Before Damon could follow, he felt a tug on his uniform. Turning, he found Iris clutching the fabric, her head resting against his back. Tears streaked her cheeks, her voice trembling as she spoke.

"I've decided... I want to... I'm going to... So help me carry out my ambitions, like you promised."

Damon nodded, lowering his voice so only she could hear.

"Very well. I promise I'll look after you from now on. But I won't guarantee this path will be easy."

With that, he gently pulled away and followed Lilith out of the house.

Iris stood at the doorway, watching them leave, her expression unreadable. Slowly, she closed the door behind them.

Lilith and Damon walked in tense silence, the oppressive stillness between them broken only by their footsteps on the cobblestone path. Suddenly, Damon stopped, his body rigid as the Remorseless skill faded.

"What the hell was that?" he demanded, his voice sharp with barely contained fury.

Lilith turned her head slightly, a feigned expression of confusion playing on her face.

"What was what?"

That response only made Damon's anger boil over. He turned on her, grabbing her collar with enough force to make her stumble slightly.

"Stop playing dumb, you bitch!" he growled, his voice low but seething with anger.

"Why did you bring up her father? I don't know what you think I know, but I'm innocent!"

Lilith's expression shifted from feigned innocence to icy disdain. She glanced at the hand clutching her collar and then looked directly at him, her gaze sharp enough to cut.

"Let go," she said coldly. "This is no way to treat a lady... or else."

Damon's grip tightened, his expression steady despite the overwhelming gap in power between them.

"Or else what?" he challenged, his voice calm but dripping with defiance.

He knew full well that the difference in their abilities was insurmountable. Facing her was like a rabbit squaring off against a lion—she could obliterate him with a mere flick of her wrist. And yet, Damon didn't care. His anger burned too hot, drowning out the instinct for self-preservation.

Before either of them could act, the sound of delicate footsteps echoed through the stillness, followed by a voice dripping with mockery.

"Well, well, well. What do we have here? The pristine student council president messing around with a boy in a secluded area in the dead of night..."

The voice paused for dramatic effect.

"What a sight."

Damon immediately released Lilith's collar and turned to face the source of the interruption. Standing a short distance away was a woman with violet hair tied into a sleek ponytail, her eyes matching the vivid hue of her hair. She wore the academy uniform, but her confident posture and the curve of her body gave her an aura of nobility. Her beauty rivaled that of Lilith Astranova, though her aloof expression and the subtle smirk on her lips grated on Damon's nerves.

In Damon's perception, the shadows surrounding her seemed... off. There was something strange, something unnatural about her presence.

He knew exactly who she was.

Renata Malcrist.

She wasn't just any student. Ranked number two among the second years, she lived in the War Halls and had a reputation for unmatched power. Renata had already reached her second class advancement—a feat that placed her on par with Lilith Astranova. Her unique magic attribute, Zero, made her even more dangerous.

Rumors of her exploits circulated widely. She was known to take down monsters at the level of those who had reached their third class advancement, and she herself was just a step away from crossing that threshold.

Lilith immediately stepped between Damon and Renata, her stance a mix of caution and hostility. Her cold, calculating eyes locked on the violet-haired girl.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

Renata's smirk deepened as she crossed her arms, her gaze flickering between Lilith and Damon.

"Now, now," Renata said, her tone light but laced with amusement. "No need to get defensive, Astranova. I was just passing by and couldn't help but notice the tension. What's the matter? Trouble in paradise?"

Damon felt a vein pulse in his temple, but he held his tongue, watching the exchange with wary eyes. He knew better than to underestimate someone like Renata.

Lilith's voice dropped, her tone sharp and biting. "This doesn't concern you. Leave."

Renata chuckled softly, taking a leisurely step closer. "Oh, but I think it does. You see, when someone like you—Astranova herself—gets so worked up over a mere boy, I can't help but be curious."

Her eyes shifted to Damon, her gaze lingering. "And him... there's something different about him, isn't there?"

Lilith's posture stiffened, her body tensing like a coiled spring.

"I said leave," she repeated, her voice colder than ever.

Renata's smirk didn't waver as she raised her hands in mock surrender.

"Relax, I'm just observing. But if you're so keen on hiding something..." Her gaze grew sharper, almost predatory. "...it must be interesting."

Damon clenched his fists, his instincts screaming that this encounter was far from over. Whatever Renata's intentions, it was clear she wasn't leaving anytime soon.