

Living Shadow 170

Chapter 170 Loveless World

Damon once again found himself trudging down the evening path, sporting a fresh black eye and a haggard appearance. He winced as he adjusted his gait.

A raven glided silently above him, disappearing into the twilight.

As he approached the academy gates, he spotted Lilith Astranova seated by the fountain. The evening sun cast a warm glow on her red locks, her porcelain skin almost luminous. She was an exquisite sight—curves in all the right places, full red lips that stood out like blood on snow.

But Damon was in no mood to appreciate her beauty.

Muttering faint curses under his breath, he stalked forward.

Lilith glanced up at him.

"You're late again."

Her gaze lingered on his bruised face.

"What happened this time?"

Damon scowled.

"I ran into the same wall from yesterday."

Lilith arched an eyebrow.

"Wasn't it the pavement?"

He clicked his tongue.

"Tsk. Same thing."

She sighed, flicking her hand. A small vial appeared in her palm, which she tossed to him.

Damon caught it and downed the contents in one go. The bruising faded instantly, the pain dulling to nothing.

He let out a breath, still annoyed.

Lilith smirked at him, feigning concern.

"Poor thing. Are you being bullied? Tell me about it—I'll get justice for you."

Damon scoffed.

"Hah. Very funny, Lilith. The academy's rules subtly encourage bullying, and no, I'm not being bullied."

He paused, rubbing his chin.

"At least... I don't think I am. I just keep getting beaten up by a girl who wants me to do stuff."

Lilith raised an eyebrow.

"By a girl? Well, don't you know? If a girl bullies you, it means she likes you."

Damon adjusted his uniform with a dry look.

"I highly doubt that. Evangeline is the farthest thing from having a crush on me."

Lilith's expression shifted. Her eyes narrowed slightly.

"Evangeline Brightwater... Hmm. You'd best hope that never happens. Otherwise, I'm fairly certain you'd end up dead."

Damon blinked.

"Huh? Dead? I know nobles wouldn't date commoners, but isn't that a bit extreme for a school crush?"

Lilith stood, turning on her heel and walking toward the carriage.

Damon followed, his curiosity piqued.

"Alright. What do you know?"

Lilith sighed.

"Relax. I was going to tell you anyway. But keep in mind—this is a secret. And unless you want to offend Evangeline's grandfather—the Archduke—you'd better keep it that way."

Damon swiped a finger over his chest.

"I cross my heart."

Lilith shot him a sidelong glance as they neared the carriage.

"The current Duke—Evangeline's father—had a sister once. She attended this academy."

Damon frowned.

"Had? You make it sound like she's dead."

Lilith nodded.

"She is—at least, officially. But in reality... the Archduke's daughter fell in love with a commoner knight who served her."

Damon's brow furrowed.

"So she eloped?"

Lilith shook her head.

"No. She couldn't. Where could she possibly run where someone of the Seventh-Class Advancement couldn't find her? She had no means of escape."

Damon found the story interesting, but he had a sinking feeling it was going to end tragically.

This was the real world, after all.

Lilith continued.

"The knight came before the Archduke himself and declared his love for her. He refused to run—said it would be dishonorable."

Damon grimaced.

"Ahh, yuck. A knight-hero type. I hate those the most. What an idiot."

Lilith chuckled, clearly amused by his reaction.

The carriage rocked slightly as it moved down the road.

Damon glanced at her.

"So let me guess. The Archduke slapped him to death, and he turned into meat paste."

Lilith shook her head.

"That should have been the outcome. But even the Archduke was stunned by his bravery and valor. The man was only a First-Class Advancement knight from some no-name village."

She looked out the window, her expression distant.

"He was jailed. But the Archduke's daughter threatened to take her own life. I don't know all the details, but soon after... the Grand Duchy officially declared her dead."

Damon exhaled sharply, chuckling.

"Ahh. That was the punchline. I knew it."

Lilith shook her head.

"I said officially, but to those of us who stand on equal footing with the Brightwater Duchy... we know she didn't die."

Lilith's voice was calm, almost indifferent, yet there was an underlying weight to her words.

"Her father let her go with the man she loved and disowned her. She was declared dead because the duchy couldn't bear the shame of marrying a commoner."

Damon blinked.

He was shocked by the outcome.

He had been certain the knight would have been executed. No noble—let alone an Archduke—would allow something like that.

"You're joking, right?"

Lilith shook her head.

"I'm not."

She gazed out of the carriage window, her expression unreadable.

"That's why it's a secret. I'm sure Lady Brightwater is out there somewhere, living her life with the man she loves, in sickness and in health... but the Archduke? He changed. He became colder, distant. The man barely shows himself. In fact..."

She exhaled. "He hasn't left the duchy in seventeen years—not since his daughter left."

Damon sighed.

"And why exactly is this story relevant to me?"

Lilith turned to him with a knowing smile.

"Oh, this is a cautionary tale."

She leaned in slightly, her red lips curving into a smirk.

"The Brightwater Duchy will not make the same mistake twice. If Evangeline Brightwater ever showed even the slightest interest in you—a commoner—trust me..."

Her voice dropped.

"You will die."

Damon swallowed.

"Hehe... it will never come to that. But if it did—please inform Their Excellencies, the Archduke and Duke, that I am a man who can be bought."

He straightened his uniform. "A few million, and I'd never look at her again."

Lilith chuckled as the carriage came to a halt at Athor's Sanctuary.

"I'm afraid all they would offer you is a few thousand blades."

Damon stepped out of the carriage, shaking his head.

"Well, I suppose it's a good thing I'm not a romantic, but a pragmatist." He glanced at her with a smirk.
"Any girl who falls for me is bound to be disappointed."

Lilith smiled.

"I'm glad you're not stupid." She leaned back, crossing her legs elegantly. "Most stories like this end in bloodshed—whole families and villages erased by an angry noble."

She met his gaze.

"This world doesn't care about love. If you want love, you need the power to seize it."