

Living Shadow 193

Chapter 193 Lady Margan

A massive circular magic array spread across the ground, stretching a full 700 meters in diameter. At its very center stood an enormous arc of metal, gleaming like silver under the daylight.

This mystical gate—crafted from materials so rare and expensive that only the wealthiest nations could afford them—was a marvel of magical engineering. But the cost was justified.

In the distance, towering white pillars lined the perimeter, each embedded with high-level mana cores harvested from monsters of the fourth or even fifth rank. These mana cores fueled the gate, their energy keeping its portal open.

This was a teleportation gate—a crucial piece of infrastructure that allowed cities and regions to remain connected. A journey that would normally take weeks could be completed in mere moments. It served as the nexus of trade, logistics, and commerce, forming the backbone of the economy.

Even now, carriages passed through, stopping briefly at security checkpoints before vanishing into the shimmering gateway.

Traveling through the Golden Roads was considered relatively safe, but even they weren't completely free from monster attacks. And even if they were, the world of Aetherus was simply too vast. The continent of Soltheon alone spanned millions of kilometers, filled with countless unexplored regions.

Why the planet didn't collapse under its own gravity had baffled scholars for centuries.

The gates were remnants of an ancient civilization, and only a few remained. Constructing new ones was unthinkable expensive—the farther the distance, the greater the cost. Each one required an immense supply of mana cores and magic crystals, making them a rare and valuable commodity.

—Valerion West, Teleportation Gate—

Beyond the security checkpoints, Damon and Lilith stood beside a waiting carriage, their eyes fixed on the gate's entrance. They were awaiting the arrival of Lady Attina Margan—the mother of the late Tobias Margan.

Damon remained calm. Lady Margan was a mermaid who had lost her only son. And though it had been his hands that ended Tobias's life, she did not know that.

He had no love for nobility and found their company grating, but this was different. He needed to get on her good side, to earn her trust. That meant setting aside his usual standoffish demeanor—at least for now.

Lilith stood quietly at his side. She had returned to her usual composed self, but every so often, she would glance at him with a faint trace of guilt. She had apologized more than once for losing her composure earlier, but he had reassured her that it wasn't necessary.

If anything, he found relief in knowing that she wasn't some perfect woman who always kept her emotions in check.

Still, his mind remained focused on Lady Margan.

From what he knew, she was a widow—her husband, a human, had died in the Demon Wars. Tobias had been her only child, and she had never remarried.

"Know thyself and know thy enemy, and you will win a hundred battles."

A lonely woman, grieving the loss of her son... Her emotions would be in turmoil. And that made her vulnerable.

The gate rippled, its shimmering surface distorting like water disturbed by a pebble. Then, with a burst of mana, a group of carriages emerged.

Each carriage bore banners of a weeping mermaid—the sigil of House Margan.

The noble entourage moved swiftly, their vehicles pulling away from the main teleportation paths and separating from the other carriages that had their own destinations. Unlike the mundane horse-drawn carriages of commoners, these were pulled by tamed monsters—a rare breed of magic beasts bred for both speed and endurance.

It wasn't difficult to spot Lilith and Damon. Though they weren't wearing official academy uniforms, they still bore the crest of Aether Academy.

A knight, clad in well-worn armor, approached them on horseback. His steed, an armored warhorse, exuded a powerful presence. The knight's armor bore numerous dents and claw marks—clear signs of past battles.

Damon's eyes flicked to the man as he removed his helmet.

The knight had rugged features—a rough beard, blonde hair, and a small scar that ran down his cheek. A long sword hung by his side, while a spear—adorned with the sigil of House Margan—rested in his hand. The runes inscribed on his weapons marked them as magical artifacts.

The knight's presence was imposing, his aura suggesting he was somewhere between the third and fourth class advancements.

A melee-type warrior, no doubt. Whether his class was common, rare, or unique, Damon couldn't tell.

Lilith, however, seemed far more powerful than him.

The knight stopped before them, straightening in his saddle.

"Greetings. I am Galahad of the Deep, Knight Captain in service to House Margan." His voice was steady, formal. His sharp gaze flickered between them. "I take it you are the welcoming party from Aether Academy?"

Lilith stepped forward, her posture composed.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Ser Galahad." She gave a polite nod.

"I am Lilith Astranova, Student Council President of Aether Academy. By my side is Damon Grey, Student Council Discipline Master. We apologize for the small entourage."

Damon gave the knight a curt nod, mirroring Lilith.

As a high noble, Lilith did not need to lower herself before a mere knight—even if he was a captain.

Galahad returned the nod.

"I shall inform Lady Margan. I will only be a moment."

With that, he turned his steed and rode back toward the noble entourage.

Lilith cast Damon a sideways glance.

"Don't forget—you promised to be on your best behavior."

Damon exhaled sharply and muttered back, "Yeah, yeah. I haven't forgotten my own words."

A minute later, the door of the main carriage opened, and a woman stepped out.

Two knights—both of the second class advancement—flanked her protectively as she approached.

Her expression was unreadable.

She had long black hair that cascaded down her back and deep blue eyes that held a quiet intensity. Her features were striking—she was a beautiful middle-aged woman in the prime of her years.

Yet, there was something about her—whether it was sadness or simply the weariness of long travel, Damon wasn't sure.

She stopped before them, her gaze steady.

She had traveled thousands of kilometers to reach Valerion.

"Greetings." Her voice was calm, measured. "I am Attina Margan, Daughter of the Sea."

A pause.

"I wish I could say our meeting was a pleasant one... but it is not."