

Living Shadow 198

Chapter 198 A Date

Clang! Clang!

The sounds of heavy breathing and the clash of training weapons echoed across the vast training ground. The space, reinforced with complex magic arrays, bore witness to an intense sparring session. A young man with black hair stood at its center, his body drenched in sweat. His hands and face showed signs of battle—bruises forming from repeated blows. Despite his fatigue, he kept his stance firm, facing off against a golden-haired girl with sun-marked eyes. She held a training sword, her expression calm yet unyielding.

Damon lunged forward, slashing his training sword at her. The blunt weapon met resistance as Evangeline blocked it with ease, the force of the impact pushing her back slightly.

"I may not have talent for the sword," Damon muttered, adjusting his grip, "but this would be a different story if I were using daggers..."

Evangeline smirked, her tone laced with mockery.

"Too bad today's subject is swordsmanship," she said smoothly. "All I hear are excuses."

Damon gritted his teeth as he steadied himself. His form adhered strictly to the fundamental principles of swordplay—every move calculated, every swing precise. He almost resembled a young knight-in-training, his technique bearing an uncanny resemblance to Evangeline's own.

She struck.

"Why are you only using the basics? Are you holding back against me?"

Damon sneered.

"Do I look like I enjoy being beaten up? This is the only swordsmanship I know. If I change it up, it'd be something else entirely."

He parried her strike, countering with a quick maneuver that forced her to adjust her footing.

"I have no talent for the sword," he added, breathing heavily. "That's why I learned to use daggers and a bow instead."

Evangeline clicked her tongue.

Liar.

He was obviously lying to her again. How could someone with no talent in swordsmanship wield a blade with such precision? How could he rely only on the basics and still manage to hold his own against her?

Her irritation flared. She had enough of his nonsense. If Damon wanted to keep lying to her, then fine—he'd have to pay for it.

Channeling her mana, she infused her blade with magic.

[Radiant Blade]

A streak of light magic engulfed her sword as she swung down toward him.

Damon's eyes widened.

He hadn't expected that. Up until now, he had been relying solely on his passive skills to hold his ground. The rules strictly forbade the use of magic in this exercise. But fortunately for him, it was light magic. Through his heightened perception of shadows, he caught the shift in shadows and reacted instinctively—deftly dodging the glowing arc of her blade.

A commanding voice rang across the training grounds.

"Evangeline, use of magic—you're out!"

The professor's booming declaration echoed through the field. He cast a glance at Damon.

"Well done."

Damon stood there for a moment, feeling somewhat awkward at the unexpected acknowledgment. He let his gaze drift toward the other students who had been sparring nearby.

Murmurs spread through the crowd.

"Ahh, Goddess, why? Why didn't he lose?"

"I bet he tricked her into using magic."

"I swore she had that match won."

"...Is it weird that I think he's kinda cool?"

"I mean, come on, guys. He can't be that bad—didn't he beat up those Imperial Academy students?"

"Ugh, I guess you're right. He did put them in their place. Still, I don't think he's a good guy."

Damon glanced around at his peers. Over the past few days, their opinions of him had started shifting. His reputation, once tarnished, had begun to recover—slowly but surely.

He was well on his way to building his influence within the class.

At least, that was the plan.

It had been a few days since Lady Margan arrived, and in that short time, she had already kidnapped a maid.

Yes, she had kidnapped one of the maids from the war halls.

As for why she did it... well, naturally, Damon may have had something to do with it.

A few days earlier, he had been assigned as her guide around the academy. She had specifically requested him—and only him. Since he was part of the student council, it wasn't an unreasonable request, so he had gone along with it.

During that time, he had subtly crafted an illusion—one where it appeared as though Lady Margan was manipulating him with her feminine wiles. He had let her think she had the upper hand, especially after she kissed his cheek, making it seem like he had started slipping information carelessly.

From there, he had carefully led her to believe that if she wanted access to Marcus Fayjoy's room, she might need a maid's assistance to slip inside unnoticed.

And she had taken the bait.

However, in the process, she had stumbled upon something unexpected—on the night of her son's death, Marcus Fayjoy's academy uniform had been found torn, stained with traces of water magic, and even had remnants of the forest clinging to it.

That was all Lady Margan needed.

From there, she came to the inevitable conclusion—Marcus Fayjoy was the one who had killed her son.

Naturally, she would hold onto that grudge, and once the pieces fell into place, she would act.

It was a psychological trick—one Damon had himself fallen victim to in the past. If you let someone believe they had discovered the truth on their own, they were far more likely to cling to that belief.

Damon put down his training sword.

Tomorrow, the noble and academy conference would begin. The last noble family set to arrive would be here today.

He glanced at his classmates, his eyes briefly settling on Evangeline, who stood beside him.

"Now what?" she asked.

Damon turned his head toward her.

"What?"

She narrowed her eyes, nodding toward Sylvia—the elven girl sitting in a corner with a book.

Or at least, he would have thought she was reading—if the book wasn't upside down.

Right. Sylvia.

"I'm sorry," Damon sighed, rubbing the back of his head. "I've tried my best. I've tried getting through to her so many times, but I just... don't know what's wrong."

The truth was, he felt worse with each passing day.

It had been so much easier when he didn't give a damn about them.

But now... he did.

Evangeline let out a quiet sigh, her eyes betraying an emotion she tried to suppress.

Damon exhaled, his frustration evident.

"You're her best friend," he muttered. "Any suggestions? Anything would help."

Evangeline hesitated before nodding.

"I don't know much about her, okay? All I do know is that she comes from a very high-ranked family in the Verdant Continent... and she was sheltered—far more than usual. She's not the type to go out."

Damon's expression shifted.

"Wait... what?" A thought clicked in his mind. "Hmmm... I think that could work..."

Evangeline raised an eyebrow.

"What could work?"

Damon smirked, his gaze shifting toward Sylvia.

"I hate to break it to you... but it looks like I'm taking Sylvia on a date."

Evangeline blinked.

"...Wha—what?!"