

Living Shadow 25

Chapter 25 Be My Partner

Evangeline Brightwater stepped into the bustling cafeteria, her presence commanding immediate attention. The vibrant hum of conversation began to quiet as her gaze swept across the room. She didn't falter, walking with the unshaken poise expected of someone of her stature. Her eyes sought out one table—at the far edge of the cafeteria, where a lone figure sat.

Damon Grey.

She had learned his name earlier after a brief inquiry. Something about him had caught her interest.

As she made her way forward, the silence followed her like a wave. By the time she reached the center of the cafeteria, Xander Ravenscroft had noticed her approach. He turned to his group, gesturing for them to give him space. They complied without hesitation, leaving him standing at the now-empty table.

Xander stood to greet her, his confidence unwavering.

"Lady Brightwater... would you like to have lunch with me?" he asked, a polite smile on his face.

But Evangeline didn't even glance in his direction. She walked past him, her eyes locked on the table at the far corner. Damon's table.

Xander blinked, stunned. The murmurs that rose among his group were quickly drowned out by the whispering of the other students.

Evangeline stopped in front of Damon's table, her graceful presence a stark contrast to the dark-haired boy sitting alone.

Damon didn't notice her at first, his focus on the food in front of him. He lazily stabbed a piece of food with his fork, only to pause and glance up. His black eyes met hers, and his expression hardened into a cold frown.

Evangeline's gaze held steady, her intensity unwavering.

"May I sit here?" she asked.

Damon's tone was sharp, his response immediate.

"No, you may not."

Evangeline blinked, taken aback by his bluntness. In noble society, such a dismissal was unthinkable rude.

Her hesitation lasted only a moment before she did something equally unexpected. Without a word, she took the seat opposite him.

Damon's glare deepened.

'By the goddess, what is wrong with this girl? Didn't I say no?'

The cafeteria was abuzz now. Whispers filled the room as students gawked at the scene. Evangeline Brightwater, the number one first-year, sitting with Damon Grey, the one who barely scraped by in his classes. It was an unusual pairing that had everyone talking.

'I don't need this kind of attention,' Damon thought grimly. He had been doing his best to keep a low profile, and this was exactly the kind of spectacle he wanted to avoid.

As if the situation couldn't get worse, he felt a sharp gaze drilling into him. He turned and saw Xander Ravenscroft glaring at him from across the room, his expression a mix of confusion and anger.

Damon's lips twitched.

'Ah, that's right. Xander has a crush on this girl, doesn't he?'

Damon allowed himself a small, amused smile. It was short-lived, though, as he turned his attention back to Evangeline.

"What do you want, Evangeline Brightwater?" he asked flatly.

She straightened slightly, her composure unshaken.

"Yes... erhm... Sir Damon, I wanted to talk about yesterday."

His brow furrowed in confusion.

'Sir Damon? What is up with this girl?'

Her words gave him pause, especially the mention of yesterday.

'Could it be...? No, she doesn't seem like she knows about Lark... So what could she possibly want?'

Evangeline waited for him to speak, but when he didn't, she hesitantly continued.

"Yesterday, you..."

"What about yesterday? Get straight to the point," Damon cut her off, his tone impatient.

Evangeline reached into her uniform jacket and pulled out a small object, placing it on the table. Damon's eyes flicked down to it, and his breath caught.

"You dropped your brooch yesterday," she explained softly. "I was trying to return it to you."

The sight of the silver brooch, engraved with a rune of probation, made his heart lurch. For a moment, he'd feared he'd left it at the scene of Lark Bonaire's death. But no—he must have dropped it during his brief and vague encounter with Evangeline yesterday.

A wave of relief washed over him, and he let out an involuntary sigh.

He reached for the brooch and pinned it back onto his chest.

"Is that all?" he asked curtly, his tone guarded once more.

Evangeline blinked, caught off guard by his abruptness. She nodded slightly.

"Yes. That's all."

Damon didn't thank her. Instead, he leaned back in his seat, dismissing her with his cold demeanor. But as the cafeteria buzzed with whispers once again, he couldn't shake the feeling that this wasn't the last time Evangeline Brightwater would insert herself into his life.

And of course she wasn't done.

Evangeline frowned. She had approached Damon with good intentions, yet he remained rude and standoffish.

She sighed, deciding to brush it off. After all, he was strong—very strong. She had thought herself the strongest first-year student until the day he defeated her, and it wasn't even common knowledge that he possessed such power.

Her gaze drifted to where Damon sat in a secluded corner of the cafeteria.

'He must be a very humble person who doesn't like attention,' she thought to herself.

If Damon knew her thoughts, he would have facepalmed at the absurdity. If anything, he felt anxious around her. The gap in power between them was astronomical, and he knew he stood no chance against her if it came down to a real fight. His words were nothing but bravado, a thin shield to protect his fragile pride.

'Why isn't she leaving?' Damon thought irritably, watching her push a button to summon a maid.

Evangeline ordered her lunch and then turned her attention back to Damon.

"Evangeline Brightwater," Damon said sharply.

"I believe you've already returned my brooch. You can leave now. You have no more business with me."

Evangeline shook her head, her voice calm.

"I'm already here. I might as well eat. Besides, I still have something I want to ask you."

Damon's heart skipped a beat. He couldn't help but think back to Lark, the guilt still fresh in his mind.

'Does she know? No... she couldn't,' he reassured himself, though the doubt lingered.

The maid returned with Evangeline's food, and she began eating. Damon's attention flickered to the students around them. All eyes were on their table, especially Xander Ravenscroft's.

Oddly, seeing Xander seethe with jealousy brought Damon some satisfaction.

"Now then, Evangeline Brightwater," Damon said, his voice cutting through the silence,

"what do you want? Get to the point—I don't have all day."

Evangeline lifted her glass to her lips, taking a small sip.

"Just call me Evangeline. We're classmates in the same year, after all."

Damon sighed impatiently.

"I said don't beat around the bush."

"May I call you Damon as well?" she asked casually.

"I mean, if you're on a first-name basis with me, it's only fair that I do the same."

Damon groaned inwardly, his frustration mounting.

"I said get to the point. Since you clearly have no intention of talking, I'm leaving."

He stood abruptly, leaving her behind, but her voice stopped him in his tracks.

"Wait, Damon, wait!" she called, her voice loud enough to carry across the cafeteria.

"I wanted to ask you to be my partner!"

The room fell silent. Damon almost tripped over his own feet at her words. His face twisted in disbelief. Xander Ravenscroft's eyes widened in shock, and the entire cafeteria erupted into murmurs.

Damon's mind raced.

'Partner? What is she talking about? This has to be some kind of misunderstanding...'

He considered walking out to avoid the scrutiny, but with so many eyes on him, his legs felt like lead. Reluctantly, he turned back and resumed his seat, masking his anxiety behind a cold expression.

"Explain yourself," he demanded, his voice flat but his nerves far from calm.