

Living Shadow 88

Chapter 88 Dire Ambitions

Damon was caught off guard by her sudden outburst. The sharpness of her tone and the anger in her eyes were unexpected. Her emotions seemed to boil over without warning, leaving him momentarily speechless.

It wasn't the first time he'd seen such resentment. He recognized the look—it was one he was all too familiar with.

"I'm not a noble," Damon said calmly, leaning back in his chair.

"I don't think you've ever heard of a noble family named Grey, have you?"

Iris didn't seem convinced. Her gaze shifted to the tea cup in front of him, her lips pressing into a thin line.

"But you have to be," she insisted. "That tea etiquette... only nobles bother with that kind of refinement."

Damon tilted his head slightly, perplexed. "Tea etiquette?"

"Yes!" she snapped. "The way you hold the cup, pour the tea, everything about it screams noble upbringing."

Damon chuckled softly, setting the tea cup down.

"This is just how I normally drink tea. My mother was very particular about it."

He sighed.

"But no, I'm definitely not a noble."

Iris studied him, her brow furrowed in uncertainty. After a long pause, she bit her lip and sat down, her shoulders slumping slightly.

"I... I apologize for my outburst," she murmured, her voice quieter now.

Damon shook his head dismissively. "It's fine. You're quite the hothead, though."

Her cheeks flushed, and she avoided his gaze.

"You don't seem to like nobles very much," he observed, his tone neutral.

Her expression darkened instantly, and her fists clenched on her lap.

"I hate them," she spat through gritted teeth.

The intensity in her voice struck a chord with Damon, sparking a vague sense of déjà vu. Fate, it seemed, enjoyed playing strange games. Not long ago, he'd said something similar to her father. He recalled the man's response—calm, but firm—and decided to answer her in his own way.

"I hate them too," Damon said, his voice steady.

Iris blinked, surprised. Her head tilted slightly as she studied his face, searching for any trace of insincerity.

He smiled faintly.

"What? They suck. They treat people horribly. I can't imagine why anyone would like them."

Her lips quirked upward ever so slightly, though her anger hadn't fully faded. She nodded in agreement as Damon picked up his tea cup again.

"Why do you hate them?" he asked, glancing at her over the rim of his cup.

"Aren't you a former noble? Your old man didn't seem to have a problem with them."

Iris's jaw tightened, and her fists balled even tighter.

"Fallen noble," she corrected bitterly.

"We're not the same. People like me get worse treatment than commoners. At first, even the commoners didn't like us."

Damon nodded, unsurprised. It was a predictable outcome, given the rigid hierarchies of the world they lived in.

Iris's face twisted in frustration.

"We're in this mess because of nobles. They framed my father and took everything we had. They're all two-faced hypocrites."

Her voice cracked as she continued, her emotions spilling over like a dam breaking under pressure.

"If it weren't for them, my father wouldn't have been killed by a monster. He'd still be alive. If it weren't for them, my mother would still be alive. My brothers wouldn't have died..."

Damon remained silent, watching as tears began to streak down her cheeks. Her shoulders trembled, and she tried in vain to hold herself together, but the grief she'd been suppressing for so long was finally surfacing.

He kept his expression neutral, though the turmoil within him threatened to break free.

'If it weren't for me, your father would still be alive.'

The thought echoed in his mind, heavy with guilt. But he couldn't say it aloud. If he did, the number of people who wanted him dead would skyrocket.

So, he stayed quiet, his calm demeanor masking the storm inside. All he could do was let her cry, her sorrow filling the silence of the room as he suppressed his own inner conflict.

"Is that why you wanted to get into the academy? To restore your family's name?" Damon asked, his voice calm but probing.

Iris stopped sobbing and looked up at him with tear-streaked cheeks and reddened eyes. Her lips trembled, but she remained silent, prompting him to continue.

"The academy is a good place to start if you manage to survive there. When you graduate, you'll instantly be someone well-regarded. Positions of power will be within reach, and with that, you could restore House Vale," Damon explained, his tone pragmatic.

Iris nodded slowly, the spark of determination flickering in her weary expression.

"That was the plan," she admitted. "But my father... he didn't want to restore the house. He was content here. He said revenge would only bring pain and spread more pain. He believed the best revenge was to live happily."

Damon nodded. It sounded like something Carmen Vale would say—a sentiment steeped in wisdom. But Damon, a man who had embraced vengeance more than once, couldn't agree.

"Your father is a wise man," he remarked.

Iris glanced at him skeptically. "So, you're telling me to give up too?"

Damon shook his head.

"I agree he's wise, but I don't agree with that line of thinking. Revenge is... satisfying. Seeing the fear in the eyes of those who wronged you, making them beg for their lives, and taking it away—that's satisfying."

His lips curled into a thin, almost unsettling smile as he spoke. The words carried a dark edge that made Iris shiver.

"A wise man once said, 'An eye for an eye makes the world go blind,'" Damon continued, his tone laced with mockery.

"But that man probably never lost an eye. If he did, he'd want payback."

Damon raised his tea cup, sipping it leisurely.

"If revenge is what you want, I'll help you. If the academy is what you want, I'll help you. If it's someone you want dead, I'll help you."

Iris stared at him, trying to gauge the sincerity in his words.

"And what's in it for you?" she asked cautiously.

Damon held up two fingers. "I repay my debts and... personal enjoyment."

She hesitated for only a moment before responding. "I want all of that."

Damon nodded, his expression steady. "You'd have to kill people. Your father wouldn't want that."

Iris bit her lip, her gaze hardening.

"He's gone now. His ideals won't help me anymore."

Damon studied her closely. This wasn't what he had expected. Carmen Vale's daughter wasn't the gentle, meek girl he had imagined. Instead, she was a spitfire, burning with enough hatred for the nobility to willingly team up with someone as shady as him.

Despite his uncertainty, Damon made up his mind. He would grant her wish.

"Alright, then. As my apprentice, I can't let you go off on your own. You're wildly ambitious. If you want to restore your noble house, fine, I'll help. But first, we start with getting you into the academy," he declared.

Iris nodded, determination replacing her tears.

"You should be careful, Iris. What you want isn't for the faint of heart. Think it over. I'll be back tomorrow," Damon said, rising to his feet.

As he turned, Croft landed gracefully on his shoulder. He opened the door and stepped out into the night, pulling up his hood.

He clenched his fist tightly, the cool night air biting against his skin.

'This was not what I was expecting,' he thought.

'If I do this, I'll be making more enemies in the future. But... I've decided. I'll help her see her ambitions through, no matter what. It's just a few nobles. It's not like I haven't killed some already.'

With that, Damon disappeared into the shadows, his resolve set and his path filled with the inevitable chaos that lay ahead.