

Living Shadow 98

Chapter 98 Worse Luck

Damon was really starting to wonder if the cursed ore on the hollow arrow tips he carried in his jacket was affecting his luck. Otherwise, how could he explain such a streak of misfortune?

He'd been so focused on his Shadow Perception tracking the maid in Marcus's room that he'd neglected his immediate surroundings—an oversight that had led him straight into the person he least wanted to encounter.

'My brain can only process so much information at once,' he thought bitterly as he stumbled back, looking up to meet the piercing amber eyes of the head maid.

Her expression was composed, as always, exuding the dignified authority she carried like a second skin. Damon's heart sank.

"Well, hello there, Miss Matilda..." he greeted hastily, brushing himself off. "Apologies—I didn't see you there."

He tried to sidestep her and make a quick escape, but her calm, commanding voice halted him.

"Hold on a moment, Damon. What are you doing in the dorms while your peers are still in class?"

'Crap... exactly what I was trying to avoid.' Damon bit his lip, forcing a smile as he turned to face her.

"I was in class," he lied smoothly, "but my pet raven flew towards the dorms. I came to get him and was just about to head back."

Matilda's cold, imperious gaze studied him for a long moment before she gave a curt nod.

"And where is this pet of yours now?"

Damon's mind raced. He couldn't very well tell her Croft was sitting comfortably in his dorm after he'd snuck into Marcus's room to plant cursed ore.

"I think it flew to the upper floors. I was about to go check there," he said, trying to sound as earnest as possible.

Matilda nodded, though her expression remained unreadable.

"It seems you've had some trouble with the student council," she remarked.

'How did she know.'

Damon gave a half-shrug. "Yes, but I've worked it out, ma'am."

Her sharp eyes lingered on him before she gestured towards the elevator.

"Well, shall we?"

Damon blinked in surprise.

'Is she trying to help me, or is this some kind of interrogation?'

Reluctantly, he followed her into the elevator.

As they ascended, Matilda broke the silence.

"How are you feeling? Has your body recovered from your duel with Xander?"

Damon hesitated, caught off guard by the unexpected question. Then he remembered that Matilda was impartial to all the students under her care. Perhaps this was just part of her duty.

"I'm fine," he replied cautiously. "The healers did a good job."

She nodded, her gaze fixed on the elevator doors.

"While I understand the recklessness of youth and the fear of losing," she said, her tone stern,

"you shouldn't throw your life away so carelessly. If you die, that's when you're truly defeated. As long as you're alive, you can always make a comeback."

Damon blinked, stunned as she turned her sharp glare on him.

"You and Xander were reckless and foolish. No duel or competition is worth putting your lives in mortal danger," she continued, her voice a blend of scorn and concern.

Damon didn't know what to say. The last person to scold him for being reckless was his late mother, and Matilda's words struck a nerve he didn't realize was still raw.

By the time they reached his dorm, her stern lecture had left him dazed. She waited as he retrieved Croft, the raven fluttering to his shoulder with a huff, before she dismissed him with a firm order to return to class.

As Damon walked back, his mind reeled.

'Did she really chew me out like that? For my own good?' he wondered, shaking his head. He remembered how she'd asked about his well-being before scolding him, a small but significant detail.

He chuckled dryly. "What, does she think she's my mother or something?"

Damon arrived at class, only to find Professor Kael standing at the front of the room. He let out a sigh.

'My luck really is getting worse,' he thought grimly.

Pushing the door open, he attempted to slip in quietly, but the moment he stepped inside, the first person who noticed him raised their voice.

"He came back! The criminal!"

The declaration sparked a ripple of murmurs across the room.

"They actually let him go?"

"He actually came back?" someone murmured.

"They really let him go? Must've pulled some strings."

"I wonder what crime he committed."

"It must be serious if the student council president got involved."

Damon clenched his jaw, ignoring the judgmental stares and whispers. He was about to find a seat when Leona, who had been sitting anxiously with Sylvia, Evangeline, and Xander, jumped up and ran to him.

"You came back! I was so worried," she exclaimed, throwing her arms around him.

Damon froze, clearly uncomfortable with the sudden embrace. Awkwardly, he patted her shoulder and gently pushed her away.

"I'm fine. It wasn't a crime, just a small misunderstanding," he said with a forced smile.

Leona nodded, relief evident on her face.

"I'm glad you're okay. I thought she might've held a grudge because you fooled her once..."

Sylvia and Evangeline joined them, with Xander trailing behind, a frown etched on his face.

"I'm glad it was nothing," Evangeline said, exhaling in relief.

Sylvia crossed her arms. "It was bound to be nothing. I knew that."

Evangeline raised a skeptical eyebrow.

"Did you? Because I distinctly remember you worrying he might be sent to the Inquisition, even though I told you that was a ridiculous assumption."

Sylvia chuckled nervously. "Yes, well, I suppose you were right."

She couldn't admit to Evangeline that her fear had stemmed from spotting Damon without his shadow earlier, but at least it had all turned out fine.

Xander's sneer broke through the conversation.

"I think the real mistake was sending this wretch back."

Damon sighed, shaking his head. Despite Xander's harsh words, he hadn't forgotten that Xander had actually stood up for him when it mattered.

"Can I sit down now?" Damon said with a tired look. "Lilith, that slave driver, made me do a mountain of paperwork. I need a break."

As he walked to his seat, Marcus, sitting nearby, immediately grabbed his belongings and moved to a seat further away, his face pale with fear.

Damon smirked coldly, his thoughts sharp. 'Run, Marcus. Where will you run? It's too late for you.'

Once seated, his classmates bombarded him with questions, and for the first time, Damon found himself answering them generously.

Professor Kael didn't even glance their way, his focus on the board as though the commotion existed in another realm. But when he finally turned around, his sharp gaze silenced the room instantly.

Class ended soon after, and as Damon prepared to leave, exhausted from the day, his pager vibrated. Pulling it out, he sighed heavily at the name displayed.

'I knew she wasn't done with me,' he thought grimly.

Leona peeked over his shoulder and read the name aloud. "Lilith Astranova? What does she want now?"

Damon sighed again, shrugging. "Who knows?"

He answered the call, and her voice came through, firm and commanding.

"Meet me by the academy gates. Now."

Damon hung up, running a hand through his hair.

'My luck has definitely gotten worse.'