

## Living Shadow 99

### Chapter 99 Lavish Mode Of Transportation

The sun had long set, casting a cool, bluish glow over the academy grounds. Damon tried everything he could to buy more time—excuses, delays, even pretending to be busy—but Lilith Astranova wasn't someone who took no for an answer. And so, he found himself reluctantly making his way to the academy's gates.

The gates of the academy were nothing short of magnificent. A towering metallic structure crafted from rods of unknown origin, they glistened faintly under the moonlight. Damon had no clue what material they were made from, but their presence alone was intimidating. It was said that Athor the Sage, the legendary founder of the academy, had created the gates himself.

'He must have been quite the artist,' Damon thought wryly, staring up at the intricate patterns etched into the metal.

Then again, what else could one expect from a man who had supposedly reached the seventh class advancement? Athor's power was said to have been so immense that it dwarfed the entire world. Stories claimed he had fought the Dominator, Ashcroft, in a battle so intense that he had vanished without a trace.

Damon sighed, using the myths as a way to distract himself.

'But can I really afford to be distracted, considering who I'm meeting?'

Lilith Astranova. The mere thought of her sent a shiver down his spine. If there was anyone who could rattle him, it was her. She was clever, cunning, and persistent. Damon knew she likely had schemes and

plots ready to ensnare him. But if today's earlier encounter proved anything, it was that she didn't actually have any concrete evidence against him.

'She's operating on instinct,' he realized.

And yet, that didn't comfort him. If anything, it made her more dangerous. Intuition like hers was rare and often unnervingly accurate. He suspected she had an agenda beyond whatever the academy's rules dictated, but speculating on her motives wasn't going to help him now.

Damon shook his head. It was better to stay sharp and avoid getting caught in her web.

As he neared the gates, he reminded himself of another inconvenient truth: he couldn't actually leave the academy grounds. As a first-year student, his movements were restricted, and the only times he had managed to leave were through sneaky, less-than-legitimate methods.

'Why does she want to meet here, of all places?' he wondered.

He stopped just short of the imposing gates, their cold metal almost seeming to hum with power. Now he just had to wait. The question was: for what?

Damon scanned the area and immediately spotted Lilith Astranova seated by the grand marble fountain near the academy gates. The fountain's shimmering water reflected the warm glow of the nearby lamps, casting a soft radiance over her. Her striking red hair seemed to glow like embers, accentuating her already breathtaking beauty.

Most men would have been entranced by the sight, but Damon remained unfazed. To him, Lilith might as well have been a siren luring sailors to their doom.

He approached her cautiously, his steps deliberate.

"President," he greeted curtly.

She didn't even glance his way, her attention seemingly fixed on the cascading water of the fountain. Damon sighed, bracing himself for the ordeal ahead.

"Lilith, you wanted to see me," he said, this time more direct.

She finally turned her head, her gaze locking onto his. Her voice was calm but carried an edge of authority.

"Yes, I've been waiting for you. I can't believe you tried to get out of this. I'm going to need your assistance tonight."

Damon frowned slightly, nodding. "I'll be happy to help."

Lilith chuckled softly, clearly amused. "You don't look very happy right now."

Damon met her gaze with a deadpan expression.

"I'm absolutely beaming with joy."

Her lips curled into a sly smile as she reached into her jacket, pulling out a brooch adorned with the academy insignia. She tossed it to him casually.

He caught it, examining it with mild suspicion. "What's this supposed to be?"

"It's your pass," she explained. "With that, you'll have permission to follow me into town. Keep it on you in case we get separated."

Damon's unease deepened at the mention of leaving the academy grounds. He had planned to meet Iris Vale today, and this unexpected task was throwing a wrench in his plans.

"You want me to go to Athor's Sanctuary?" he asked cautiously.

Lilith nodded. "Yes. Think of it as a learning experience. You mentioned you haven't been to town since enrolling here."

Damon remained silent, his expression carefully neutral. Her words carried a subtle challenge, as if daring him to lie.

She smiled knowingly, adding, "Unless, of course, you've been sneaking out and have been less than truthful about it."

Damon shook his head quickly. "I... will be happy to accompany you, Lilith."

Satisfied, she stood, her commanding presence making it clear she expected him to follow.

"Excellent. Let's get moving. While we're there, you'll help with patrol. If you spot any first-years out of bounds, apprehend them or contact me or another council member for backup."

He nodded reluctantly. "I don't have the contact numbers of the others."

Lilith gestured to the brooch in his hand. "The brooch contains a sound stone. Sound stones connect only to others from the same source. They were common before pagers, though flawed since each stone works with only its pair and disintegrates after a while."

Damon nodded absently, filing the information away. As she spoke, an idea began forming in the back of his mind, but he kept his face impassive.

The two of them reached the gates, where they underwent a brief security check. The guards barely glanced at Lilith—it was a mere formality—but she insisted on the process since Damon, a first-year, was accompanying her.

Once cleared, they boarded a waiting carriage. Damon's eyes widened slightly as he took in the luxurious interior. The polished wood, soft leather seats, and faintly glowing comfort spells were a stark contrast to the rickety wooden carts he was accustomed to.

"Tch," he muttered under his breath.

Lilith, catching the sound, raised an eyebrow.

"Is something the matter? Is the carriage not to your liking? I apologize—these are of lower quality. Next time, I'll ensure a better arrangement."

Damon shot her a sideways glance, his thoughts racing.

'Low quality? What could be better than this? An airship?'

He couldn't help but think of the famed airships of Vuldren, said to glide between the floating continents. Of course, he'd never even seen one in person, let alone boarded one.

'Maybe teleportation gates are better,' he mused. But those were far too expensive, especially for someone like him.

Lilith, mistaking his silence for dissatisfaction, seemed to take his reaction as a personal critique. Damon sighed inwardly.

'Damn nobles and their deep pockets.'

The carriage ride was smooth and uneventful, and it wasn't long before they arrived at Athor's Sanctuary.