

## **Shadow 641**

### Chapter 641: Slap

Seras let herself get pulled along by Damon as they moved through the bustling street.

He stopped suddenly, a small frown forming on his face.

"Hmmm." He made a small sound under his breath.

Seras smiled faintly.

"Ahhh, you see it, don't you... I passively have the aura of war and carnage around me. That doesn't exactly attract people."

Damon turned around with a sneer.

"Looks like the food stall I was hoping to eat at is sold out."

He pointed at a stand where a fat human man was packing up, a sold-out sign written boldly across his stand.

"Seriously, who the hell gets sold out on the first day..."

He waved his hand dismissively.

"Come on, there's another place. It's something of a hole in the wall though."

Seras blinked in surprise, then laughed softly.

Looking at her hand, she muttered, "You have no idea how many times I've thought of killing you within...."

"Twenty-five times." Damon cut her off with a calm expression.

"You thought of killing me twenty-five times within the span of time I dragged you through the streets."

Damon didn't sense any killing intent from her, but he did feel an overwhelming flood of danger signals from his danger sense skill.

Seras tilted her head, her long hair swaying slightly.

"Then why didn't you run?"

He shrugged absentmindedly.

"I've always liked to play with fire...."

Her white eyes gleamed at him with a strange light.

"I see."

Damon didn't mind her words and simply continued walking. Seras Blade was terrifying, but after what he'd been through, he had built up something of a tolerance for dread and existential terror.

Seras followed him with a small smile that almost seemed playful, but any sane person would have known to run from this monster. Her gaze drifted to a building they passed. She glanced at its window and flashed a knowing smile.

Damon didn't really care, so he walked on, the street full of people subconsciously moving away when Seras passed.

That was what she had meant earlier. He followed a few familiar alleys, not because they were the safest, but because he was more used to traveling through dark alleys. Old habits die hard, especially here in Valerion.

It wasn't long before they arrived at a small restaurant. The scent of pastries filled the air.

Damon pushed the door open and entered inside, taking a seat in the corner.

As soon as he sat down, a waitress came and offered them a menu or rather, she offered Damon a menu and then quickly dropped Seras's menu before backing away with a pale face.

She stood at Damon's side subconsciously.

"I'll have some tea and tamberly cake."

Seras smiled at the waitress, which only caused the woman to sweat more without even knowing why. The beautiful woman with ashen hair unnerved her deeply.

"I'll have the same."

The waitstaff hurried away.

Seras leaned forward on her palms.

"So... how's the academy treating you?"

Damon raised an eyebrow.

"You didn't come all the way here to ask me that. Why do you care?"

She winked playfully at him.

"I don't. People just assume I endorse you, so it makes it seem like we are on the same side."

Damon leaned back in his chair, crossing his legs. The waitress soon returned with a trolley and quietly set the table. Strangely enough, she seemed calm this time, showing no unease.

The sweet scent of tamberly cakes mixed with the warm aroma of tea.

"Right... suppose I should thank you for the golden ticket. Brunch is on me. And to think I was going to make you pay."

Seras giggled softly.

"You're a strange one... interesting. You just say whatever you feel like."

Her eyes suddenly grew cold.

"I hate people who talk but can't back it up."

Damon picked up a slice of tamberly cake.

"Kind of curious... how did you even meet my parents and give them that ticket?"

Seras realized he was actually ignoring her, which stirred a small desire to cut off his head. But he had said something interesting.

"I knew your mother beforehand. When I met her on the battlefield, she told me she had a kid... two actually. So I gave her the ticket as a gift for a successful childbirth."

Damon looked at her, seeing through her.

"You didn't have anything on you, did you?"

She took a sip of tea, steam rising around her pink lips.

"Ho... how did you know?"

He rolled his eyes.

"I had a hunch. You don't seem like a very reliable person. Do you always do whatever you like?"

Seras nibbled at her tamberly cake, her eyes flickering dangerously.

"Should I not? I find that everything is monotonous. There just isn't anything interesting. I act how I please because I know I have the power to back it up. Can you?"

Damon gasped with his hand on his chest.

"Damn, you're really taking shots at me... when you're already on your way to the life of a spinster. Anyway, thanks for the golden ticket."

Seras tilted her head, her cold eyes on him.

"Saying thank you doesn't excuse your words. I thought you'd be different. But I suppose you're like all your peers. You have a backer, so you act arrogant."

Damon smiled, not taking the slight seriously.

"Is that the reason you held yourself back from killing me? Ooh, don't mind my imaginary backer. If you were as great as you thought, why not kill me? Do it."

"Hahahah... that's really cute." Seras glanced at the waitress coldly.

"You're injured. I could tell by how you were walking. Soul wounds, I surmise. You're practically half dead with those wounds."

She stood up slowly, her aura flickering faintly.

"Tomorrow is the war games, right? I would, but since you and I aren't peers, I should at least give you a chance. Show me you can back up your words."

She leaned in close to him, her cold breath brushing against his ear.

"Tomorrow, you'll either impress me... or die under my blade. Either way, I'll enjoy it."

She turned around, her gaze falling on the waitress.

"Leave, Jarvis... or I'll kill you too."

Damon watched the maid stiffen, then a man's voice came from her mouth.

I wouldn't advise harming him unless you want to deal with my lord.

He didn't move but slowly shifted into a battle stance.

Damon, who was seated just behind Seras Blade, stood up. Before anyone could react—

Slap.

The sound rang out sharply in the air. Jarvis's eyes widened, sweat pooling down his face.

Seras trembled at the sheer audacity... no, this was madness.

She glanced down just below her hips. He actually... he actually struck her rear.

"You... you... die..."

Damon didn't even realize what had happened. He just felt the world spin as he was slammed half into the wall, Seras's hand gripping his neck.

"Heheh..." he coughed up blood as he laughed.

"Just because I called this place a hole in the wall doesn't mean we should leave a hole in its walls."

"Ahh, let's not forget... you said you wouldn't kill me today. Tomorrow then..."

Damon raised his eyes slightly, noticing a knife pressed to Seras's neck where Jarvis, clearly agitated, held it.

"Leave.. now."

"I can kill you both," Seras whispered.

"I know... and so what?" Damon replied.

Her white eyes flickered, then she laughed.

She held his neck, her grip unnervingly soft yet crushing.

"I, Seras Blade, declare that you are by far the most arrogant man alive."

She let him go, and Damon fell to the ground in a pool of his own blood.

"I'd hate for you to die..."

Damon brushed off the dust, his lips curled in a grin.

"You're softer than I expected... and I'm not talking about your personality."

Seras shook her head, walking out through the broken wall behind Damon.

"You are interesting... I hope you don't become a fleeting memory, just another tale of stupidity passed on to little children."

With those words, she vanished.

Damon coughed up blood, his vision spinning before he finally blacked out.

Chapter 642: Let's Kill Her

Jarvis let out a sigh of relief. In all his years serving House Brightwater, this had to be the most extra, unnecessary, uncalled-for amount of trouble he had ever experienced.

He glanced at Damon, who was lying there with a smile on his lips and blood streaked across his mouth.

The place was now damaged.

"She really didn't kill us..."

This surprised Jarvis. Seras Blade may have seemed like a playful woman, but she was war.

Perhaps from the distance, when men observed war from a place of comfort and safety, it looked grand, epic, and glorious. Bonds are forged, enemies are slain, and heroes are born.

But that was not the nature of war. It was horrible and vile, filled with death, disease, and famine. Lives were destroyed, families broken, men killed, women raped, and children... those who survived carried that hatred, passing it in their blood from one generation to the next.

"People may forget their grudges but wars never end."

That was Seras Blade. How could she not be called a monster?

After all, before war there is peace, and before death there is life.

Man may crave conflict, but he also desires peace and its monotony.

"What audacity..." Jarvis was awed by a mere child who had not even reached twenty.

This child had smiled at war, even when faced with her horrors.

Jarvis bit his lips, but this wasn't the end of it. Seras had said she would kill Damon tomorrow, and that was not a joke. She would kill Damon tomorrow. That was as sure as the sun would rise.

However, she had a condition, which was simple: Damon had to impress her with his performance.

But Jarvis was well aware how arbitrary that was. Seras did not give any parameters for Damon to pass. Whether she was impressed or not was up to her whims.

Damon's life and death was up to her whims.

He actually spanked her rear.

"I should take him back with me and let his grace decide."

As soon as he said that, Damon groaned.

"Ahhh my head..."

When the young man looked up, his dark eyes saw Jarvis, who still looked like the waitress.

Jarvis wore a deadpan expression.

"Apologies in advance."

"Huh wha..." Before Damon finished his words, Jarvis kicked him in the temple, making him go unconscious.

He grabbed Damon, slinging him over his shoulder. Then with a single step, he turned and disappeared like the wind.

When he appeared again, he was in a large residence somewhere in the capital. This area was completely exclusive.

In fact, it was actually more like a small city with the name of an estate. Everywhere had the banners of House Brightwater, with thousands of their troops stationed here.

This was a right reserved exclusively for the four Grand Dukedoms.

Jarvis now stood in a large private parlour. There was a woman and two men seated there.

As soon as he arrived, he threw Damon to the ground and knelt down before them.

This was the Grand Duke Damian, his son the Duke Cassian, and of course his daughter-in-law Annalise.

Cassian frowned as he glanced at the unconscious Damon.

"What is this..."

Annalise stood up to check on Damon. She lifted his head, placing it gently on her thigh.

"Ahh, poor child... who did this..."

The Grand Duke narrowed his eyes, his aura heavy with rage.

"Jarvis... what is the meaning of this..."

Jarvis really didn't know what to say. If anything, he was also troubled.

Cassian checked Damon's pulse. He was fine, at least on the surface, except for his soul, which was heavily damaged. It seemed more like backlash from using a spell or skill than actual damage to his soul.

Jarvis responded to the Grand Duke's words.

"It was Seras Blade. She did this. At least, in hindsight, it would be better to say he did it to himself."

Cassian waved his hand, and a light carried Damon to an empty sofa, laying him there.

"Why would Seras Blade do this? Is this retaliation for asking you to keep an eye on her?"

Jarvis shook his head.

"No, that's not the reason why. In fact, he's unconscious now only because I knocked him out."

The Grand Duke's eyes glowed coldly.

"You... hit... my grandson..."

Cassian raised his hand, stopping his father.

"Jarvis, tell us what happened."

Jarvis began to explain everything he had seen and heard.

After a few minutes, the Grand Duke was stunned into silence.

Cassian felt like pulling his hair out, while Annalise just trembled with wide eyes.

The Grand Duke looked at Jarvis.

"He spanked her rear, you said..."

Cassian crossed his fingers, resting his chin on them.

"He dared her to kill him, you said..."

Annalise was the third person trembling.

"He called her ugly, you said."

Jarvis nodded his head. He could understand their shock.

No one in their right mind would say that to Seras Blade.

Annalise glanced at Damon, who was sleeping like a baby.

Her nephew was quite the audacious one.

"Erhmm... father... were you this bold as a child..."

The Grand Duke gave her a sore look.

"I was bold, not crazy..."

Cassian took a deep breath.

"He agreed to such an arbitrary condition. Seras Blade is never impressed with anyone because no one is like Seras Blade. Maybe if Ashcroft was here but... ahhh, Damon."

The Grand Duke sighed, standing up.

"Let's kill her. There's no better choice. I'll go do that now."

Cassian grabbed him, pulling him down.

"How about we not destroy the capital city over something we can discuss. Look, Seras clearly knows Damon's identity, which means she's prepared to offend us both to kill him."

He glanced at Jarvis.

"I think part of the reason she wants to kill him is because she thinks he's arrogant because he has us to protect him."

Annalise held her temple.

"He's just naturally arrogant then. How did he live this long..."

Jarvis nodded. Seras hadn't turned hostile until she noticed Jarvis was following them.

"She must have been under the impression I was Damon's bodyguard, and I was the reason he was arrogant."

Annalise, who had recently found out about Damon, sighed.

"What do we do then..."

Cassian crossed his arms.

"Damon only needs to impress her, right..."

"Ahh, what the hell, what was that for..." Damon groaned, sitting up.

His eyes regained focus as he looked around.

He found himself in a luxurious room with a solemn atmosphere.

He frowned, seeing the Grand Duke and everyone staring at him.

Damon said the first words that came to him.

"What, did someone die..."

Chapter 643: It Looked Spankable

"Young man...."

"Sir," Damon replied to the duke.

"Are you allergic to peace?"

"No sir... but peace is allergic to me," Damon replied in all seriousness.

Cassian's eyes twitched.

"Take this seriously. Do you have any idea who you just offended?"

Damon felt like the duke was scolding him. Hmmm, this was strange. The last time he had been scolded was when his mother was alive, and she didn't have the patience to just talk. She also threw hands.

He half expected Cassian to beat the living daylights out of him, but it seemed Cassian was far more patient than his sister.

"Erhmm... Seras Blade, the Empire's daughter of war...."

"The daughter of war?" Cassian repeated loudly, his tone sharp.

"What made you think it was a good idea to provoke someone like that?"

Damon's lips twitched.

"I didn't... it just sort of happened."

Cassian paced across the room with a distraught expression. Not many could see this expression on his face, but today he had it. He didn't seem like the cold and terrifying Golden Death, but more like an uncle who was frustrated with his troublesome nephew.

"The insults I can understand... but why did you spank her rear?"

Damon was genuinely confused with this question.

"I... bea... because it looked spankable...."

Cassian instantly felt the blood rush to his head. In this moment the urge to scream his head off really presented itself.

Annalise stood up, touching his shoulders.

"Calm down now. No need to get worked up. Here, have a seat."

Cassian took a deep breath and sat down. His father, the Grand Duke, didn't say anything.

Damon sighed. This wasn't his fault. Seras was the one who approached him. She was the one who started it. And besides, she was the one who thought of killing him first.

She did that twenty-five times.

Damon was just reacting the way Damon usually would.

"I mean, I sort of thanked her for the golden ticket...."

Cassian's brows furrowed, then he laughed.

"He thanked her for the golden ticket, hahaha! Do you hear that? Then you proceeded to sexually harass one of the most dangerous people alive...."

Damon wanted to say something but realized Cassian had a point.

Annalise sighed.

"Damon, did you at any point not realize she could kill you?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"No. I wasn't worried about that. She had no serious intent to do so...."

Glancing around, he looked at the four people in the room with him.

"More importantly... why am I here? This is a very bizarre way to summon someone, Your Grace. You could have just sent a message or wrote...."

The Grand Duke chuckled, looking at Damon with a spark of amusement.

"Not bad... not bad indeed. How do you intend to impress Seras Blade with those injuries?"

Damon glanced at his body, raising an eyebrow.

"What injuries?"

"The ones on your soul," the Grand Duke replied with a pang of worry.

"It seems to be backlash from a spell or skill, which means it will take time to heal naturally...."

Cassian glanced at him.

"How did you sustain such grievous backlash, and what skill could be so vicious?"

Damon could sense they were worried, but this was a good opportunity to give himself an alibi.

"I got them from fighting some guy in a dungeon. I barely beat him, but he got away...."

Lilith had told him the contents of a secret meeting between the great powers of this world, and they seemed to be searching for him. By her estimation it was only a matter of time before they found him out as the one who beat Ashcroft.

Who better to back him up than his own grandfather and uncle?

"I see.... And can you fight with those wounds?"

Cassian did not ask who, which caused Damon to bite his lips. It seemed he could keep things under wraps a little longer.

It was only a matter of time before Abellona discovered him anyway.

"That won't be a problem."

Cassian glanced at his father with a worried expression.

"That doesn't seem reassuring...."

Damon shook his head. The whole Ashcroft issue was on his mind. The way things stood, he did not want to be interrogated by forces beyond his control, or maybe taken by the Temple and asked unnecessary questions, or even go through their rumored brainwashing.

However, if he had the Brightwater household to fall back on, even if others believed him fighting and defeating Ashcroft was dubious, they would only ask questions, not try to use him.

'Power really does make a lot of difference in this world.'

The Temple had learned its lesson with Seras Blade. They would not allow another variable they didn't have full control of to run amok.

The reasonable choice was simple: join them or be eliminated.

What good is power that you can't use?

Damon closed his eyes with a sigh.

"I would win without any issue... but Ashcroft sort of did a number on me. I can't even feel my face right now...."

Cassian nodded absentmindedly.

"Oh, I see... Ashcroft did.... Hmm... what did you just say?"

Damon shrugged.

"I'm dealing with the aftermath of my battle with Ashcroft... you know, the Dominator."

This was the best course of action. Damon needed someone to act as his backer, and to do so he needed them to at least be aware of potential dangers to his person.

Cassian glanced at his father, who stood up looming over Damon with a serious expression.

"Some words should not be said in jest."

Damon narrowed his eyes.

"Do I look like I'm joking?"

"I happen to know Abellona of Valtheron gave a report on the happenings of that day, and while I won, I do not feel safe. Ashcroft is still out there, and more importantly I can't deal with threats from within...."

Damon smiled faintly adding.

"I don't know why... but I feel I can trust you."

Leaning back in the chair, he exhaled.

"You are all looking for me, aren't you? The one who fought the Dominator... and won."

Cassian crossed his arms, feeling the headache increase.

"I see... so Duke Astranova's suspicions about you weren't baseless after all."

Damon felt his heart sink. He knew it. Someone already had a clue it was him. It was a good thing he made the first move.

The Grand Duke closed his eyes.

"You would trust us when you kept quiet the whole time? Why not go public and earn yourself the title of hero?"

Damon smiled calmly.

"If I did so thoughtlessly, I would be prey for whoever holds the most power, which at the moment is the Temple. I don't trust you... but even if I don't, I still think whatever ulterior motives you may have would be less than the Temple's."

Hearing Damon's words, the Grand Duke felt a pang in his chest. This was his own grandson, yet he was treating him so cruelly.

The boy really knew how to break an old man's heart.

Cassian crossed his arms. He should feel proud that his nephew was so outstanding, but wasn't this a little too outstanding?

"The brightest lights burn out the quickest."

Damon frowned at his words. That was a very ominous thing to say.

"We'll help, but only if you tell us everything," Cassian whispered.

Damon nodded.

"I'll need a drink. We'll be here a while."

#### Chapter 644: That's Gonna Be A No For Me

This was a tactic in manipulation. However, what made this type of manipulation so vicious was the fact that everyone in the room knew what Damon was after, but at the same time they could not let him be.

A young man who had the potential to beat Ashcroft all by himself.

That was an asset both military and political.

However, at this point he was just an investment, which meant he was a liability. He came with too many risks and troubles. So young, yet so many enemies.

Annalise could see that, and she was sure both her husband and father-in-law could as well. From his calm and casual attitude, she knew Damon was well aware of what he was doing. The boy was reckless, that much was true, but he was also calculating.

'He knows how to weaponize his audacity.'

Cassian was a pragmatic uncle, however he was still an uncle. The Grand Duke was stern, or at least made a show of it, but he was a soft-hearted old lion.

Annalise let out a soft sigh.

'We're about to get exploited, aren't we?'

'He's manipulating us while genuinely needing us... we are his only choice at the moment.'

However, Annalise was also aware he was close to the daughter of House Astranova, and he was also friends with the son of the Ravenscroft family. This boy was well politically connected. There was the daughter of the Roaring Gale from the Wild Continent.

He surrounded himself with gateways to potential allies.

A maid had walked in with tea earlier, and Damon had said his part. They had been here quite a while. Cassian glanced at the young man casually sipping his tea with a calm expression that evidently said:

I win.

Still, he had to teach his nephew humility.

"You defeated Ashcroft... and he escaped."

"That's right."

"You want us to act as your backing, giving you both political influence and military support."

Damon put down his teacup.

"Viscount Damon has a nice ring to it... I'll also want some land."

He smiled softly.

"It's not everyday a guy can defeat Ashcroft."

Cassian scoffed.

"And if we refuse to act as your backers?"

Damon didn't say anything. He was sure they would help him. But then he reached for his pocket and pulled out his pager.

"Hmm. It's almost time. Oh, my apologies, I have a small meeting with the one and only heir of House Ravenscroft."

He leaned back in his chair.

"Nothing serious. He only needs a favor from me and agreed to do whatever I ask in exchange... desperate people are very easy to push around, you know."

The Grand Duke chuckled. His grandson's negotiating skills were truly impressive. This boy was adaptable, using opportunities and random chance with his wit.

"What value can you provide? And how can we be sure you won't turn on us when you've reached your full potential?"

Damon kept his expression calm.

'Seriously, old man, I know you'll agree. Stop acting tough.'

He didn't let his thoughts leak through.

"That's the thing... you don't. I'm an investment."

Picking up the teapot, he poured the contents into the empty cup of the Grand Duke.

"Go big or go home, I like to say."

The old man nodded. This youngster wasn't bad, but these two were wily old foxes and could also take advantage of the situation.

"We don't need you, you need us. Let's break it down. You've made an enemy of the White Ruler, you pissed off someone in the Temple, you harassed Sera's Blade, you destroyed Ashcroft, demons would want you dead... and most young nobles, among a long list of people who dislike you."

Damon was quiet, then he chuckled.

"Didn't know I was so popular."

The Grand Duke cleared his throat.

"While you are an investment, you're more like a high-risk, high-return. In other words, a gamble."

He leaned his palm on his chin.

"Okay, let's cut to the chase then. You guys want me to sign an oath scroll, right?"

The Grand Duke glanced at Cassian, who smiled back at him.

"We have a better idea."

Damon suddenly got a bad feeling.

"What... I'm all ears."

The Grand Duke gave him a soft smile. The smile made Damon's skin crawl.

"Since you are an investment... we will agree to back you. But we're going to need something to fall back on."

Cassian sighed.

"We'll need you... to marry into the family."

Damon squinted his eyes with an air of confusion. He glanced at the two men in the room, then raised his hand in surrender.

"Aren't... you two a little too old for me? And you're sort of male... that's gonna be a no for me."

Annalise couldn't help but facepalm in exasperation.

Cassian scoffed.

"You're in the mood for jokes... good. But we're serious."

Damon sneered without a hint of fear.

"Yeah, so was I. Why on earth would you two think that I would ever agree to that? What right do we have to just sit here and decide Evangeline's whole life... so no, I'll pass."

He stood up, slamming the table with his fist until it shattered.

"I think I'll take my chances with whoever is coming after me."

"Hahahaha... ahhh," the Grand Duke laughed, his face beaming despite Damon's blatant disrespect.

"Ahhh, good, very good. I'm glad to see you have Evangeline's best interest at heart. Alright then... we only need to convince her, am I right?"

Damon didn't really like that idea at all.

"Sweet talking her or manipulating her into making the decision to help me won't work. That's still a no for me."

Cassian sighed. Why did they even think this was going to work? He was clearly not going to agree.

"What now?"

Annalise sighed. She had let them talk, now it was her turn.

"There's more than one way to join a family, and you don't even have to marry Evangeline."

They all turned to her.

"Why not just become my godson? You enjoy all the benefits without the deficits."

The two of them nodded.

Hmm. That could work.

Damon narrowed his eyes.

"Isn't that a bit suspicious? The whole reason you guys made that poor joke was because you wanted a way to guarantee I stayed on your side. Now you suddenly want to adopt me... isn't that a bit suspicious?... you gain nothing from that.."

Cassian felt the urge to sigh.

Why did he have to be so paranoid? They didn't even have any ulterior motives. They just wanted an excuse to welcome him home.

"I insist on the initial suggestion," Cassian decided to push it.

"We'll give you our political backing now. Think of it as tasting the pie. If you like it, you can buy the whole thing. Do you accept or not? After all, your only qualm seems to be the three of us arbitrarily deciding Evangeline's life."

The Grand Duke nodded in agreement.

"In that case, we'll leave negotiations to Evangeline then. She'll decide the terms and conditions. Do we have an agreement?... her life, her choice."

Damon didn't even know what to say.

'Seriously, what is wrong with these two? Anything but telling me the truth, huh. Why do they think I acted out?'

'Just tell me the truth and that's it. This whole thing is a farce, and they both know it.'

"Very well then. We have an agreement."

He narrowed his eyes, feeling irritated with the two of them.

"Do you want that in writing?"

The Grand Duke smiled, shaking his head.

"There's no need. I believe both parties would honor their word."

The old man seemed excited.

"Actually, before tomorrow's games, there's going to be something of a military parade. Nothing too big. Why not join us?"

Damon sighed, feeling cheated without even knowing how.

"Alright then."

'I see where the shitty part of my personality comes from... these two are horrible human beings... I think I just got played... worst I still haven't figured out how."

Chapter 645: Vengeance Or Justice

The sound of an expensive wine bottle being opened rang out in the room as father and son poured each other drinks and patted each other's backs.

"Ahhh, that little shit was really clever, but we got him.."

Cassian laughed, toasting his father.

The Grand Duke stroked his golden hair with satisfaction.

"Hahaha, who else can he turn to but family... The marriage gambit wasn't really about our little Evangeline, but about ownership."

Cassian took a sip of the wine, savoring the rich taste before speaking again.

"He couldn't reject without seeming outright unreasonable, especially since he was the one making the offer."

"Plus, there was also the issue of Sera's schemes... but nothing we can't solve with a few calls."

"Yes we can start early."

It was all smiles with schemes. Annalise sat nearby, speechless as she watched them.

"Ahhh... I liked how he figured it out but didn't try to escape. We used his own tricks," the Grand Duke laughed heartily, clearly enjoying the outcome.

Annalise's eyebrows twitched. The three of them had ironed out some minor details, and Damon had left to meet Xander Ravenscroft.

"I can't believe the both of you are happy about taking advantage of your seventeen-year-old nephew and grandchild."

Cassian closed his eyes, his voice calm and without regret.

"He started it, and I call this a win-win situation. We both got what we wanted. Besides, if Damon was the only one, it would be easy. However, we still had to think about Luna, so him becoming godchild doesn't really help Luna much."

The Grand Duke nodded in agreement.

"Making the frail Luna a godchild as well would seem suspicious. However, our way was the best."

Annalise sighed, rubbing her temple as if warding off a headache.

"It's a good thing Evangeline didn't get this scheming side... and I hope Luna didn't too. Someone has to protect those girls from you three, and from the looks of it, that's up to me."

The two of them glanced at her, then burst into laughter, congratulating each other as if they weren't adults plotting against a child.

"Ahhh, I can't with these two..." Annalise muttered.

She turned her gaze toward the window, wondering where Damon was at the moment, and whether he too was celebrating his own small victory against the two of them.

Of course, Damon was already somewhere else. He had arrived at the restaurant a little too early. The VIP room had been reserved for him alone, giving him time to ponder his thoughts, what he would say to Xander, and what he might ask for in exchange or maybe nothing at all.

Still, he soon found himself contemplating the choices that had led him here.

Some people represented the best of humanity, while most represented its foul truth.

The soft ambiance and luxury of the private chamber did not ease his mind. Yet his heart was frighteningly calm. He did not carry the agitation of what he had done. Xander had caught him by surprise once before. Now, he came prepared.

When he was a child, Back To Back had taught him that the rule was simple always look out for number one yourself.

But that couldn't be true, because Damon's number one had always been his sister.

He would have had an easier life if he had just cut her off and abandoned her all those years ago. He wouldn't have had to stay in Valerion, working for a smuggling ring, when the world was so big and open to him.

The thought had simply never crossed Damon's mind.

And even if it had, it wouldn't have mattered. Even if holding on to his sister meant he would drown alongside her, he would rather drown with her than live without her.

If nothing else, he had Luna. As long as she remained, he wanted to be Damon for her.

He wanted her to need him... no, he needed her to need him.

That had been, was, and would always be his purpose. What other purpose was greater? None. And that was his weakness, the key to his eventual downfall.

The wide double doors of the chamber slowly opened. Light spilled into the luxurious room, illuminating its high-quality seats, tables, and carefully chosen art decorations.

This was money and power embodied.

Yet the young man who walked in bore the look of someone powerless and defeated. He sat down across from Damon without ceremony.

His brown hair gleamed under the light, his clothes made of the highest quality fabric clothes so costly they could have fed a poor family for more than a century. And this wasn't even among his better attire.

This young man was Xander Ravenscroft, the only living male child of House Ravenscroft, and the one destined to inherit their seat of power.

"You're early," those were the first words Xander said, settling into his chair across from Damon, who sat with a crown upon his head, his dark hair flowing like a waterfall.

"Unfortunately... I had nothing better to do with my time, so here I am."

Xander smiled lightly, though his blue eyes betrayed a bleakness. They seemed darker than before not cold, but hollow.

These were the eyes of a changed man.

Damon sighed. This was not how Xander Ravenscroft should be. These were not the eyes of the man who had once challenged Damon's ways and ideals.

That man was gone now. He had been killed by Damon or perhaps it was more accurate to say by Amon. No, he had been killed by his brother's death. The poison of grief had spread, taking root in his heart.

The atmosphere grew solemn, an air Damon found unsettling. It made him uneasy.

"What was your brother like, Xander? Was he a good man?"

Damon didn't truly need to ask this question, but he wanted to know more about the man he had killed. While he had shared a drink with Godric before ending his life, he had never really known him.

"He was the best of men. He was steadfast, he helped the weak and fought against injustice. He was kind to his subjects and wise beyond his years. An icon I could only admire."

Xander bit his lips.

"He taught me honor, how to live by it. He was the most honorable man I know."

Damon listened carefully. Of course, this was Xander's impression of his brother. Why was he not surprised? To Damon, however, he was someone else entirely.

To him, Godric was the author of his misery, the man whose single vain action had altered the course of his life forever.

The man he had met was a coward who could not face the truth. He had hidden in his shadows, drowning in drink, feeling regret but refusing to move forward.

'He couldn't live, but he didn't want to die either.'

That was Damon's impression of Godric. In the end, Godric was just like him someone who had failed at life.

Wishing for noble ideals, while carrying shame in the shadows.

Damon didn't look Xander in the eye.

"Let me ask you something, Xander. How you answer will drastically affect what I say and what I do."

Xander didn't understand what Damon was getting at, but he didn't hesitate.

"Ask."

Damon nodded, finally meeting his gaze directly.

"Do you want truth and justice... or do you want vengeance?"

Xander's eyes hardened. He didn't hesitate.

"I want vengeance."

Chapter 646: Damon's Demand

Damon closed his eyes. So this was Xander's choice after all.

He had given him a choice, and predictably, Xander had let his hate consume him.

He glanced at the young man sitting across from him.

"I've always hated you, Xander Ravenscroft.... Do you know why?"

Xander narrowed his eyes.

"So what...."

Damon chuckled softly, leaning back.

"I hated how honorable you were. I hated how I could not embody such an ideal. To put it simply, I hated you for being you. There was nothing deep about it.... but"

He paused, clenching his fist tightly.

"I hate this version of you the most. You turn your back on truth and justice just to become this...."

Xander gritted his teeth.

"You believed in revenge.... You always have...."

Damon nodded slowly.

"Yes, and I am a hypocrite. But I will not deny you the right to choose your destiny."

Leaning back further in his chair, Damon closed his eyes.

"Do you remember when Sylvia was possessed in the Whispering Forest?"

Xander's hand trembled slightly, his expression shadowed by the lingering fear of that nightmarish event.

"Yes.... How can I forget something so horrifying...."

Damon chuckled again.

"Do you know... the Unknown God doesn't accept fate, but believes what we call fate is merely choice that accumulates into a consequence. We only hate when those choices don't serve us."

Xander raised an eyebrow.

"What are you trying to say...."

Damon shook his head slowly, a weary smile flickering across his lips.

"One day, you will look back on the choice I gave you here and wonder why it led to whatever lies ahead of us. I wonder if you will laugh... or cry...."

Xander closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them with a cold resolve.

"In the end, we only regret the choice we didn't make. I have made mine."

Damon smiled calmly. So this was it, then.

"I know I of all people should not be speaking, but hear me out all the same."

He kept his true thoughts hidden, adding in his mind:

'Because this is my last kindness to a friend.'

He had been giving Xander a choice. If Xander had chosen truth and justice, Damon had been planning to tell him the truth about his brother and the fact that he was the one who killed him.

This was not a plan without merit. Damon had been planning to make sure Xander would sign an oath of silence, never telling anyone what he had learned.

It was dangerous, because it put a lot of Damon's plans at risk and created an unknown variable he could not kill.

Xander would have been free to choose what to do with that information, even if he had to carry it alone.

"This is your last chance to make a choice."

"Revenge is a vicious circle. Hatred fueled from a place of love will only birth more hate."

He pressed on, a strange calm settling in his heart.

"If you face Amon, and let's say you kill him... what about Amon's sibling? Will they not also want revenge? And so the circle continues."

He fixed his gaze on Xander, his dark eyes flickering.

"Have you asked yourself why Amon killed your brother? What wrong Godric could have done against him?"

Xander stiffened. Damon's words pierced deeper than he liked.

"Xander, did you think about this? What you stand to lose from this vicious circle?"

Damon bit his lip, his tone growing heavy.

"The dead are gone, and the living inherit their hate. We hate in the name of love..."

Xander looked at him coldly.

"Are you done? Thank you for your advice, but I didn't come here for a lecture from someone who's lived by hate his whole life. You would never forgive if you were in my shoes. Why should I?"

Damon chuckled softly, shaking his head.

"I see.... So be it then. The man I hated is gone. Now all I see is a spirit of vengeance."

His eyes grew colder, his voice a low growl.

"Xander, I know what I want from you."

"You wish to fall into this vicious cycle? I welcome you. Know this you either kill your enemy at the end of this path or die. There is no mercy in our world."

In that moment, Damon resolved himself. If he faced Xander, who had come for revenge, he would kill him.

This was the one thing he could give him the right to die as his enemy.

"The truth is painful, and lies are kind. When you face Amon and unveil his mask, I hope you are still strong enough to fight..."

Xander clenched his fist.

"I will be. For my brother."

Damon shook his head, his voice weighted with experience.

"No, Xander. This revenge is not for your brother. It is for you... the one who was left behind."

He knew. Revenge was never about the dead. It was always about the living, who refused to let go.

"I have a price, Xander. I was initially going to ask for money or something frivolous, but now I want something more. For agreeing to help, I make no guarantee of success. You will most likely die...."

Xander's eyes hardened with resolve.

"Name your price."

Damon closed his eyes.

"I will either fuel this circle... or break it. Only time will tell. But know this you made your choice, and this is the last choice you will make before you walk the road to ruin."

Opening his eyes, his dark voice reached Xander's ears.

"For my price, I demand you give me your firstborn child. I guarantee no harm will come to him, and when your child is of age, I will return him. That is my price, Xander. Do you accept?"

Xander's hands trembled, his heart beating so loudly Damon could see his chest heaving.

"Why would you...."

"Yes or no. Make your choice," Damon cut him off sharply.

Xander was still young and had no wife or children. Still, he gritted his teeth, the eyes of an avenger burning.

"I accept your terms...."

Damon's eyes glared coldly at him.

"You betray your offspring... for hatred of a minute."

Xander bit his lip until it bled.

"This is your price, and I accept it. My future offspring will live well in your hands. I have no fears."

Damon reached into the shadows and pulled out a small scroll.

It was ironic. This scroll had been what he obtained after killing Godric Ravenscroft.

A page from the Unknown God's forbidden tome.

Chapter 647: Two Bad Men, That Wished To Be Good

[Dauntless Page]

Type: [Cursed]

[Description]

Truly, I hate the play of fate and its countless whims. Do not point hands at the heavens when your choice brought you here. I see not fate, for I am not its pawn, but karma will always be reaped.

[Effect:]

A single page torn from the Unknown God's journey book. Oaths signed in this book cannot be broken. A binding vow made under the promises of the Unknown God and by his power all agreements will be enforced.

Damon dropped it in front of Xander, who frowned at the sight.

"What's this... an oath scroll?"

There was a chilling smile on Damon's face.

"Something worse. I've written down my terms. I will help you with Amon, but I make no promises to kill him for you. That is up to you."

His tone grew darker as he leaned forward.

"Second, I will prevent Amon from killing you until the day you find his face...and see his truths."

Damon took a deep breath, steadying his words.

"Third, win or lose, I will guarantee that no one of your lineage will die by Amon's hands.

"Fourth, The contract can be terminated if both parties agree."

His eyes glimmered with a cruel promise.

"Lastly, I will give you your chance, Xander. The chance to face Amon with a very real possibility of killing him. With all masks gone and all truths laid bare, on that day you can make another choice. I will make sure at least fifty percent of Amon's power is gone. That is my part—my half in this... a fair chance."

Damon didn't say the rest aloud.

'Because on that day, if you fight me, I will act with the intent to kill you... my former friend.'

However, Damon's words said at least fifty percent it could be more; he could very well be weaker...as long as it gave Xander a fair chance of killing him.

Damon understood that and so did Xander.

A fair chance to kill amon.

Xander narrowed his eyes.

"Is that it...."

Damon nodded.

"Yes. That's it. You don't want me to kill him for you, do you? I'll give you a fair chance to face him on your own. To live or to die... that will be up to your strength."

Xander glared at him.

"And how are you going to guarantee that?"

Damon smiled calmly.

"I do not know what tomorrow holds. I only know tomorrow will come."

The page from the Unknown God's journey book would enforce that agreement, so whether Damon wanted it or not, it would take effect.

Xander clenched his fist.

"Very well then. I only need to face him when he is half strong or less. That's your agreement, right?"

Damon passed him a dagger. Xander cut his thumb and imprinted his bleeding mark onto the page.

"My firstborn is yours. From the moment they speak their first word, you may take them."

Damon did the same, imprinting his bleeding thumb. The agreement was sealed, and the page vanished into nothing.

Xander stood up to leave.

Damon's voice echoed behind him.

"Revenge is bittersweet... but oftentimes, bitter."

"We wish to be good but fail to forgive."

This was human nature.

Unforgiveness produces bitterness.

This was human nature.

Xander Ravenscroft was a human, and so was Damon Grey, except they both represented two different types of humans.

One that had been good, and one that was evil.

What else could you call someone who had failed to forgive?

It is easier to focus on the wrongs done to us, to nurse anger, and to hold onto grudges rather than letting go of the pain.

That was a natural instinct.

The depth of the wound often correlates with the difficulty of forgiving; deeper hurt can make forgiveness feel impossible.

To some, it was impossible. Damon was a weak, weak man... and Xander was just as weak. Neither of these humans could forgive the wounds left so deep.

Humans wish to do good but produce pain. We preach peace and fight wars. We talk of love but spread hate.

We say never again but repeat the same horrible atrocities.

We speak of humanity as if it were a benevolent concept but forget to mention the vile things humanity has done.

Cruelty was as much a human concept as kindness. Then why do we act as if kindness is more human? Our instincts are often cruel.

At our core, we are beasts.

Though we still wish to be good.

That wish is what makes us human, and that wish is what we call humanity.

Revenge was a cycle.

Today you are the victim, tomorrow the villain.

Yesterday, Godric was the villain and Damon his victim. Today, Damon was the villain and Xander the victim.

Damon was left in silence. He did not know how this oath would affect him, but he knew it would. Because as of this moment, no matter how powerful he became, as long as he was fighting Xander whether as Amon or as himself with the condition that Xander was after his revenge, then Damon had a fair chance of dying against him.

"Well, that's fair... a handicap... against someone who wants me dead... suppose I'm not a death seeker for nothing."

He sighed, rubbing his temples.

"What am I even gonna do with his kid... I asked that because I thought it would make him think more about his actions."

Clearly, someone blinded by hate wouldn't stop to think of love, and Xander was just a child himself.

He could choose not to have any children, but Damon knew that was a slim chance. Xander was heir and only son. While he had a sister, it was his duty to carry on his bloodline, so he would most likely have a child.

"Ahhh, I just offered to raise his kid too...."

As for how the child was raised, that was up to Damon.

Xander did not know what sinister designs Damon had, but he also didn't care.

Love had been forgotten, replaced with hatred.

As Damon sat there, his heart was gripped by darkness that began to fester deeper within. The seed of depravity he had gotten from Ashcroft fed on Damon's negativity his vile actions, his emotions, his resentment.

His failure to forgive fed this seed, and slowly it began to grow larger. A small crack appeared, and from that crack a sliver of demonic energy was released into the stream of his mana and his blood.

Change was a gradual process, but this change Damon could feel.

In the end, a demon was one who had let themselves fall into depravity.

Damon Grey was one who was depraved. He could not forgive. He was truly one on the path to becoming a demon.

He would not forgive, and as long as he did not, his seed of depravity would continue to grow.

Forgiveness is the hardest of virtues.

We are trapped in the prison of resentment.

He was trapped.

Damon stood up, his figure casting a long shadow across the ground. With a single step, he disappeared into the night.

His arrangement with Xander would be tomorrow's problem to solve.

## Chapter 648: Believe In Me

He woke up feeling heavy-headed, his body taking a little too much rest due to his injuries.

A damaged soul had a bunch of side effects. Apparently, sleeping like a rock was one of them.

Waking up, he went about his affairs.

"I just realized something... I should never be left unsupervised."

"Why'd you say that?"

"Hmmm. Is it just me or do I do the dumbest, most suicidal things when I'm all by myself with my thoughts..."

"I mean the last time, I got into a fight with Ashcroft because I chose to follow some knights. Now I spanked Sera's blade..."

Damon chuckled to himself, rubbing his face.

"I'm also sort of talking to my own reflection in the mirror... when I have a perfectly good shadow to talk to..."

He glanced down at his shadow, which was shaking its head as if it were just tired of him.

"Hmmm. What do you think?"

Damon nodded at the shadow.

"Yeah, that's right, that's right... ahh, I missed this. We haven't talked in a while, buddy."

He smirked faintly.

"I almost missed the good old days... when I was broke, had no friends... hmm, yeah no, no way..."

He walked out into the streets of Valerion, feeling refreshed.

"Renata said the war games start in four days, but this is the third day..."

However, the war games did begin today, except today was not when the games actually started. Today was more like a declaration. Journalists interviewed participants, the empire showed off a military parade, and everyone went to the arena.

Among many things. So Renata wasn't wrong, she had actually been talking about the more intense fights.

"Wait a minute... wait a goddess damn minute... how am I supposed to impress Sera's blade if there won't be any serious fights today?"

"Heheheheh..." he chuckled to himself.

That woman just wanted to kill him.

"Did no one think about this... or was the fact that I told those two about Ashcroft so distracting?"

He closed his eyes as the sun beat down on his hood.

"Hhahah... I'm definitely gonna die today..."

He stopped, holding his chin.

"Wait but wait... what if I actually get the games to start today... I mean, I'm sure all preparations are ready, and all that ceremony and fanfare can be skipped if most participants want to go and someone in power with enough influence agrees."

Damon picked up his pager.

"Looks like I need to call in some favors... or... wait no... I'll let future Damon figure it out..."

He glanced at his shadow, who shook its head, telling him that was a bad idea.

He sneered. "Fine... I'll call, I'll call."

Damon had an idea of what he wanted to do. If the Grand Duke agreed for the game to start today, it would work. So he pulled out his pager and sent his grandfather a call. No answer. Then he tried calling his friends. Same.

"Hmm. Suppose I'll leave a message."

He smiled.

"I love nepotism... especially when it benefits me..."

After that, he sent a message to Lilith, Xander, Sylvia, and Leona.

The idea was for them to use their families' influence to help get things moving.

"Knowing people in high places really helps."

"Hahahhah hahahhah... ahhh, I love abusing power... I'll die but not today... hahah haha."

Before he could say anything more, he noticed people shooting him occasional glances.

"Mommy, why is that person talking to himself?" a child cried out as his mother ushered him away.

"Don't stare, honey. We get weirdos like this every time there's a major event."

A merchant shook his head.

"Poor lad, the stress of the games is already getting to him..."

Another woman shook her head with pity.

"He won't make it far with such a scrawny build... he needs more muscle."

"Maybe he's a mage type..."

"Probably wearing that hood to act mysterious. The posers die the quickest..."

An old man cupped his hands around his mouth.

"Don't worry, kid, you can forfeit... give up... you can't make it..."

"Yeah, don't get yourself killed. The nobles have better weapons and gear... you'll never make it..."

Damon was speechless.

"Tsk."

"Shut up, you bastards. I was raised on these streets, the least you can do is believe in me. Totally ruined my mood, now I have to ruin other people's moods..."

"Did you hear that? He's a street kid, he's definitely dying first..."

"Don't try to be a hero, kid..."

Damon walked away feeling aggrieved. He was in such a bad mood he didn't even look at his pager, which was constantly buzzing.

These people had good intentions, since they were obviously trying to warn him.

He looked down at what he was wearing. He was not in simple clothes.

Clicking his tongue, he equipped his armor.

As soon as he did, a child walked toward him, stopping in front of him.

The child sighed.

"Sir... you're late." It was a man's voice, one he recognized.

"Erhm... Jarvis... what's up..."

The child closed his eyes.

"The parade has begun. And you are late. Did you not check your pager?"

Damon did check his pager.

"Hmm. No wonder it was buzzing... how did you get my contact info..."

The child kept his face impassive.

"His Grace did inform you of the parade yesterday, didn't he?"

Damon nodded. "Yeah... he said it was at noon..."

Jarvis pointed at the sun.

"It's past noon. You overslept... you kept the whole nation waiting... Shall we..."

Damon coughed, feeling a bit embarrassed.

"Right, right, my apologies..."

Well, this was embarrassing. He had slept in. He just didn't expect the Grand Duke to halt a whole parade for him.

He was certain this parade was to show off the empire's power, so all nobles, even the imperial family, would be joining this march.

"Well, that explains why no one was answering their pagers."

Jarvis grew into a man then he held his shoulders, and suddenly the world seemed to shift.

When Damon reappeared, he found himself standing above a massive cavalry of magical beasts mounted by armored knights, all carrying weapons and flags.

There were a couple of large structures floating in the air, with open-air views and glowing magic circles beneath them. Damon was standing on one of them.

It bore the massive crest and banners of House Brightwater flying proudly.

At the center were seats arranged for the members of the house, designed to be opulent and comfortable.

There was a soft sigh from one of the people there, a voice Damon instantly recognized as belonging to Duke Cassian.

"You're late."

Chapter 649: Don't Make Things Difficult For Me

"Is this one of those expensive floating pavilions..."

Damon spoke those words on instinct, his eyes scanning the structure with casual irreverence.

Cassian's eye twitched.

"You're late, and all you care about is the pavilion..."

"Ahem, ahem." Damon awkwardly cleared his throat, scratching his cheek with a sheepish grin.

"Sorry about that... it's just, I've always prayed for one of these to fall, just so the people floating above our heads know that money doesn't make them immortal."

"Cough, cough..." He coughed again, looking away.

"I was young then, sir... I see the error of my ways."

Cassian felt the urge to pull his hair out, while Evangeline, seated behind him, watched Damon with a pitiful expression.

"He hasn't seen anything yet," she muttered under her breath.

The Grand Duke chuckled, his deep voice echoing through the chamber.

"Welcome, young Ascendant. Since you are here, I believe there is no need for further fanfare. Shall we proceed? We've kept everyone waiting long enough."

Damon awkwardly scratched the back of his head.

"Ergmm...."

"There's no need to feel guilty, it was a small matter," the Grand Duke introduced Damon with ease, dismissing the weight of his lateness.

Cassian sighed heavily as he walked back to his seat, his steps slow and deliberate.

"I would hardly call keeping the emperor and every great house waiting for half an hour a small matter."

Annalise, seated beside the Duke, smiled warmly at Damon.

"Don't worry, no one noticed," she said, attempting to reassure him, mistaking his awkwardness for nervousness.

Evangeline crossed her arms and rolled her eyes.

"Everyone noticed. You... why are you always getting in trouble?"

Damon bit his lip.

"Who knows..."

He turned to the Grand Duke.

"Right, your grace, about that..."

"Your sister and apprentice will be seated with us for the duration of the war games, and I will guarantee their safety," the Grand Duke declared, glancing at Damon.

"As for the matter of the games actually starting tomorrow... we already noticed Sera's vicious scheme. So we took it upon ourselves to make sure everything begins today."

Damon blinked in surprise. For all his confidence, he really was still a youngling compared to these sly foxes. They had already spotted the missing pieces and set everything in place.

"Wait, then why didn't you say anything?"

Cassian closed his eyes as he leaned back against a large golden chair, his tone calm.

"There was no need to. We agreed to act as your backers, did we not?"

Evangeline tilted her head but said nothing. Damon, however, couldn't help but notice she wasn't wearing a dress but her armor.

The doors opened. A figure walked into the room clad in gleaming golden armor. He knelt down before the Grand Duke.

"Your grace, the steed is ready."

Cassian nodded and glanced at Damon.

"Alright then... you'll be leading this parade."

Damon thought he had heard wrong.

"Wait, what? Me? I thought I was joining the parade."

The Grand Duke smiled faintly.

"You didn't think we were just going to let you mix with the common masses? We couldn't move because you are the one leading the vanguard."

Damon pulled off his hood and narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

"What's your angle..."

The Grand Duke chuckled again.

"Of course, I can understand if you're scared to go. After all, leading the parade is very mentally tasking. People would have all their eyes on you... fame, glory, and so much more. You would even go down in the history books."

Damon raised his hand.

"I didn't say I wasn't going to do it. But wait, doesn't that mean most of the people who wanted the position would hate me?"

The Grand Duke ignored his concerns.

"Good. Then Evangeline can join you. You can have whatever you want."

"Really? I can?" Damon asked, needing to be sure.

The Grand Duke nodded with a smile.

"Of course. Anything you want."

Damon smiled, satisfied.

As soon as he did, Evangeline sighed and stood up.

'He has no idea what he has unleashed.'

"Let's go, and please try not to do anything weird."

Damon was appalled as he followed her.

"My goodness, I am a man of upright character...."

A minute and a half later, Damon proved her right.

"This horse is too cheap. Bring me that one."

He waved dismissively at what could only be one of the most well-bred dragon horses. Its muscles and stride were intimidating, its form grand and regal.

Instead, he pointed at another beast. This one was terrifying to behold. Its form resembled a unicorn, except its body was silver, with crystal-like horns growing around its hooves. Its eyes glowed with untamed menace.

"But sir, that belongs to the Grand Duke..."

The knight tasked with escorting Damon to the front of the parade looked like he was about to cry.

"Good, I'll take it," Damon replied, holding his chin with a thin smile.

"But sir, it's his favorite horse... no one rides it," the knight pleaded, his voice trembling.

He didn't have the guts to face someone as terrifying as the Grand Duke and tell him Damon had taken his horse. But he also couldn't stop Damon, since the Grand Duke had said he could have anything.

"It was fated. I'll take it," Damon insisted firmly.

"Sir, I'm begging you, don't make things difficult for me..."

The knight was ready to throw away his pride and beg Damon to choose the horse he was originally given.

"I insist on making things difficult. I want that one, and I won't take any other. In fact, I'm not going anywhere without that dragon horse."

Damon crossed his arms defiantly.

The knight and everyone present began to sweat. The parade was already late.

"It's actually a Tyrant Horse," Evangeline sighed.

"And it belongs to my grandfather... but fine, let him have it. Let's just get going. Assuming you can tame it... it only listens to grandfather."

Damon could hear Evangeline's sneer. She was practically daring him.

'Go ahead, take it if you can.'

He walked up to the massive Tyrant Horse. It stomped its hooves aggressively, its presence dominating the space.

Damon's dark eyes glimmered faintly, and the horse stared back into them.

Its hostility faded... just like that.

Damon smiled gently, all malice vanishing from his expression.

"That's what I thought."

He turned to the knights and Evangeline, who were all dumbfounded.

"Arrange the saddle."

Evangeline let out a soft sigh.

Of course it was Damon. Why was she even surprised?

The knights hesitated until Evangeline nodded.

"I'll take responsibility if anything happens."

#### Chapter 650: The Damon Way

The streets of Valerion were packed with onlookers as a path was opened in the center, knights acting as living barriers to keep the crowd off the broad road.

The sounds of hooves striking against cobblestone echoed through the air. Banners flew high, and hovering above were large floating pavilions, each pavilion reserved for a great house.

Surrounding these pavilions were knights mounted on flying beasts.

Large wyverns with wings that cast immense shadows circled the sky, alongside Pegasi and mighty griffins.

Each house had their own guardians, and higher still were great marvels of magical technology.

Airships floated in the clouds, releasing confetti and flower petals that rained down on the city.

The crowds on the streets chanted and screamed as a massive parade of warriors and knights marched proudly, their bright ceremonial armor glittering beneath the sun.

The flags of the great Valtheron Empire rippled in the wind.

However, none of these sights could compare to the figure leading the vanguard.

His steed was a powerful beast with silver fur, its hooves striking the cobblestone with thunderous rhythm, its horns glowing faintly yet menacingly. His features were hidden behind a dark hood.

Yet all eyes were drawn to this unknown, mysterious figure. His dark armor seemed to devour the light of the sun itself, and dark shadows surrounded him on all sides, following like a tide.

Where he passed, the screaming crowd of men, women, and children fell silent, caught between dread and awe. The world around him seemed solemn.

It was as if no one dared to make a sound when the tide of shadows swept past.

This darkness was not alone. As soon as he and the tide passed, a beautiful armored lady glowing in golden light rode on her steed, followed by knights carrying the banners of House Brightwater.

Only after they had passed did the screams of excitement resume.

Damon chuckled under his hood, his lips curling mischievously.

'I knew it was a great idea to use shadow control to aura farm...'

'It added to my mystic... yeah, hehehe, perfect. This is perfect... and to make myself even more mysterious, I'll use shadow armor to make it look like my armor is alive.'

He held tightly onto the reins of his silver steed.

'I can't wait to see how my images go down in the papers...'

Behind him, Evangeline did not know what frivolous thoughts were running through his head. Surely, he was treating this as seriously as he needed to. This was, after all, a great honor.

However, she was about to be disappointed.

While others may have considered this a sacred honor, Damon... did not. He was... well, there was no need to say it at this point.

The grand parade was a ceremonial event, and the only ones who joined were the people of Valtheron, nobody else.

The parade would stop at the area where the war games would take place, where everyone who wasn't from Valtheron would already be waiting.

Damon was supposed to go through the grand square, passing beneath a large structural arc that resembled the teleportation gates. But after reaching it, Damon suddenly frowned.

The journalists didn't really get a good enough image of him.

"They only got my right side... I need images of my left."

He decided to go one more round.

"I know what type of man you are. Don't even think about it..."

Evangeline's cold voice rang from behind him.

He cleared his throat slightly.

"What... I was heading to the arena... after one more round."

He suddenly felt a coldness from the visor of her helm pressing on him, which made him clear his throat again.

"Then I realized that was a waste of my time. That's why I was actually heading to the arena."

Her presence lingered close behind him, her gaze sharp even through her helm.

"Now beat it, you'll get in my shot."

She rolled her eyes beneath her helm.

"You're the one who told me to give you a light."

He pulled the reins firmly, guiding his steed amid the cheers of the crowd.

"Now I'm telling you to screw off. You're no longer needed here."

Evangeline gritted her teeth but held her silence. She didn't want to cause a scene in front of so many witnesses, though she felt helpless.

"Why... why are you like this?"

Damon paid her no mind. Since he wasn't going for another round, he might as well make a flashy entrance at the arena.

He was sure all the foreign nobles, royals, and dignitaries were already seated, waiting for the host nation.

Damon placed his hand on his chest, puffing out slightly.

"I have to show off for the glory of the empire... It's not because I enjoy this... I do it for the people."

Evangeline could hear his muttering. She felt like crying, but all she could do was beg the goddess he didn't go too far overboard.

All he had to do was go to the center of the arena, dismount, and raise the flag of the empire. That was all.

Damon raised his hand as soon as he reached within range of the arena. His eyes gleamed beneath the hood.

"I've never used my shadow control skill to its full potential... I think today is that day."

Those who were present would remember this day as the day shadows rose to the sky.

From every corner within the reach of Damon's shadow perception, which stretched several kilometers at full output, he called upon all shadows.

From the crowd, gasps erupted. Some scrambled in fear, nearly causing a stampede.

The shadows flowed past the pavilions and through the knights until they formed towering black structures that reached for the heavens.

Damon's head buzzed. His soul ached. His nose bled. His body felt faint.

But it was a small price to pay.

When his lone steed walked through the walls of shadows that blotted out the sun and covered the wide area of the arc entrance, the world seemed to hold its breath.

All eyes were fixed on the lone figure, mounted on his silver steed, standing beneath the flying flag of Valtheron.

The people of Valtheron were awed into silence. The crowd of onlookers, both locals and foreigners, were entranced as the shadows slowly faded, leaving Damon's figure standing tall before the assembled military.

What... what a show of power.

Clap... clap...

The citizens of Valtheron were moved to tears.

Cheers erupted.

Damon stood with his face covered in blood, but it was all worth it, for no one saw his true face under the hood.

He was still mysterious.

Evangeline shook her head dejectedly. He had completely gone against ceremony, culture, and years of tradition.

Yet everyone seemed impressed.

"Why... why do you always do this to me... ahhh."