The Last Kitsune & The New Advisor

BOOK 1 in The Last Kitsune Series

A Dark Urban Romantasy by Y. L. Zamora

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THE LAST KITSUNE AND THE NEW ADVISOR

BOOK ONE OF

THE LAST KITSUNE SERIES

Y.L. Zamora

Raven and Fox Books

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1 – Advisor

Tomorrow! She'll be here tomorrow, were my thoughts as I presided over the Green Shades graduation ceremony and a smile creeped through my lips. I didn't smile much these days, but thinking about her made me feel better.

She would have loved this event.

Sada Kazuki wasn't only the most sought-after Advisor in the Alliance of the Five, she was also the smartest person I knew —yes, even smarter than my genius Advisor and second score from our entire class, Nōka Daichi, but bet who was first score, not only in our year, but historically? It was her, and that once sweet little smarty-pants girl, now fucking extraordinary powerhouse of a woman, was my oldest friend.

She was so impressive that even when she couldn't wield her Anima, and had absolutely no Shade powers, she became the top strategist of her time, consulting not only for Masashi, our Military base, but the other four nations in our coalition, and was already in the War room when I was barely learning to control my Kitsune powers. She was instrumental in us winning the Last Shade War and was the most decorated civilian in the history of Tani, our country.

And she was coming to work with me *tomorrow*. I smiled again as Daichi announced me and the crowd of Shades formed in the plaza around the Shadow Tower cheered. I waved at them, taking the podium.

"Shades!" I called and they cheered again. "Greens!" An olive wave shifted in the mob, whistling and hailing, waving their gloved fists in the air.

All the cadets wore their dress uniforms: military tunics, side caps,

and pressed slacks in their respective colors, with white gloves and shined black boots. The Green Shades made almost half of the crowd, formed closer around the stage, eyes full of hunger for a heroic future.

"Greys!" I called next, and the cadets dressed in slate, roared with grave voices from the middle rows in the formation. They were more experienced, already cut in the field, and therefore, sounded more secure in their cheering. "Blacks!" The last couple of lines, all elite soldiers, shouted heavily, rotundly, with the weight of their years under my service, with the conviction of who'd been tested and proved in the battlefield, as my siblings in arms.

"Shades! Shades! Shades!" They cheered together and sounded like music, like violence, like blood and pain, and my heart rumble with nostalgia.

"Congratulations!" I smiled, proud of them as I nodded at Lord Sixth and Lady Fourth behind me, between their respective Silver Shade escorts. I'd seen many graduations in five years as Shadow Commander of Masashi, yet I still got emotional thinking about their immense potential, knowing all too well many of them dreamed of following in my steps.

"You've probably never heard this story about me, but I've always wanted to be Shadow of the Valley," I joked and the crowd laughed. "These old folk behind me would tell you how much of a pain in the—" I glanced back and Lady Fourth's fist clenched by her sides as she mumbled something, probably cursing me under her breath, while VI covered his smile and shook his head. "Ahem, how much of a pesky little one I was, telling anybody who'd listen I'd be Shadow one day."

"Nanadaime!" a cadet shouted and the mob cheered again. "Lord

Seventh!" someone else yelled and I lifted my gloved right hand, quieting them down.

"It wasn't easy, I can tell you that," I continued. "It took me all of thirty years to accomplish it, and I even lost a few chunks in the way here." I removed the white glove and lifted my right arm again; a prosthetic I've gotten some time after the end of the Last Shade War. The mood got too solemn and serious for a moment and I scratched my neck with the mechanical fingers. "Though I beat all of them to the curve, right Baba? Sensei?" I chuckled, feeling the previous Shadow's death stares on my neck, and the Shades relaxed. I heard their laughter trickling through the ranks again.

"I'm not the best with words, you all know that, but believe me when I say, it's possible to become strong. It's possible when you got people in your corner, when you can trust your friends and colleagues, your brothers and sisters in arms, when you don't EVER GIVE UP!" I roared the last part, lifting my mechanical fist in the air and the cadets roared again.

"Shades! Shades! Shades!"

"Now, enjoy the rest of the day," I glanced quickly behind me and added, "and party all night," I winked at them, "but report bright and early tomorrow for orders!" I said and the cheering and whistling reached a new apex. "You're dismissed!"

They scattered around to meet their friends and families also gathered all over the Shadow Square, chanting and celebrating and as their noise started quieting down, I found myself looking for *her* dark eyes behind me, wondering if she'd be impressed or amused by my total lack of oratory skills, but I remembered she didn't arrive until…

tomorrow.

I sighed, walking back to meet J-Sensei and Lady Riku.

"Baba, don't be mad," I begged, but she grabbed my black jacket and pulled me down to her level, to meet her fiery hazel eyes. Even when she looked very unthreatening in her all-black dress uniform with golden IV's embroidery on her cuffs and lapel, and a red lined dignified cloak, standing as tall as my ribs, Baba was a strong, cunning Shade, capable of giving me a run for my money, even now in her seventies.

"If you ever call me old again…" she threatened with a small bony fist in my face, but I knew better than to tease her again. Those small fists could bring down entire cities with their deadly fire.

Lady Riku was one of the best doctors in the five nations and a scientist, the Fourth Shadow of Masashi, the love of my late Master's life, and even the closest thing to a grandmother I ever knew, but also a very scary woman.

"Sensei, save me," I called for VI to assist but he waved me away with his gloved hand. His uniform was like ours, the only difference among us where our signature colors, reflected in the accents and the lining of our dress cloaks. His buttons and general threading were all blue, unlike the golden VI motive adorning his collar and cuffs. My color was blood orange, and my number as his successor, was VII.

"Like I'm not scared of Lady Fourth myself," he said, and she shot him a killer look, which prompted him to make himself smaller too. Daichi shook his head, completely fed up with our nonsense.

Daichi was not only my main Advisor at the moment, but also one of my oldest best friends. We went to the Academy together and became men, supporting each other's rights and also wrongs. He was annoyingly

chill and nonchalant, lazy to a fault, but so smart, he made up for his tendency to procrastinate and disengage with pure genius.

"When's Kazuki coming to set him straight?" Baba asked, letting go of my jacket, finally. *Tomorrow,* I thought, smiling, but then I got self-conscious.

"No Shade's ever gonna respect me if they hear you talking to me like this, Baba," I complained, but she sucked her teeth, waving me away with her hand. She still treated me like a pesky brat, even at my mature age of thirty-seven, and it made me feel inadequate to this day. I crossed my arms over my chest, ready to melt the fuck down if she kept it up, but she ignored me instead and I sighed.

"Seriously!" She added, irritated. "She never should have left."

"Well, we couldn't kidnap her," J-Sensei said hesitantly and I smiled, sharing a complicit look with Daichi because Lord Sixth was the one in trouble now. "And the Alliance is stronger than ever, in big part thanks to her," he added with more resolve now and Baba grunted.

J-Sensei was nothing if not a pacifist, always calm and collected, eager to please and smooth things up. Total opposite from me. I couldn't help it but to crave conflict and thrill.

"You better make her stay this time," Baba threatened him and I agreed, nodding silently. "She belongs with you, here!" She told me and I smiled to the side, agreeing even harder now.

"Yes ma'am. I will tie her to my bed if need be," I let out and when they all raised brows, I realized what I'd said, and choked. Then I barked: "A BED! Any bed… or even better, her own bed," I stuttered through a bunch of words, every one of them stupider than the previous one. "How about I don't tie her to any bed? I shouldn't tie her at all," I muttered,

deflated and exhausted.

That was… something…

Baba looked at me like I was a freak accident of nature and closed her eyes, sighing. I gave up, hiding my face in my hands and they all shook their heads and began walking away from me.

"At least you warned us you weren't any good with words," Daichi mocked me, patting my shoulder while I internally prayed for the earth to open and swallow me.

Sometimes I can't believe they voted me Seventh Shadow of Masashi. At least she wasn't here to hear that, I thought, glancing around at the several workers who'd began to clean up and take apart the stage. I nodded at them as I trotted down from it and stared at the Shadow Tower behind me. I walked up to the glass wall and went to fix the cloak over my shoulders when I realized, my pupils had turned into vertical slits and I paused.

That hasn't happened in a minute. Daitaru's voice rang in my own ears, echoey and groggy. *Not since that night, when she showed on your tv…* I gulped. My Fox Spirit tended to perceive things about myself way before I did. *You know what that means*.

We don't talk about my wedding night, Daitaru! I reminded him with shame and guilt and he hid his face in his paws, shaking his head. *It doesn't mean anything. She's my oldest friend.* I shook the thought away, hiding from my own darkest secrets and blinked. When I opened my eyes again, they were back to normal, though my pupils were still extremely dilated and my lips trembled, reflected in the pristine glass.

Whatever you say, he said, going back to sleep inside of me.

“Tomorrow,” I whispered as I stared at myself in the mirror and clenched my fists by my side, and I didn’t know if I was more excited than scared, but I sighed and marched into the building.

2 - Sunrise

I'd never been a morning person, but sunrises always made me feel melancholic for… for something I didn't know what it was, something that had always been missing from this hole inside my chest.

Sunrises called for me often, and I would wake up when it was still dark, in the middle of the worst nightmares, where I'd lost everything, though that everything was a mystery, covered in sweat and tears, horrified like a little kid… a weird thing. I never had nightmares as a war orphan, or a war veteran, not even as a widower. I only had nightmares when the void in my soul needed some release and only the occasional dawn soothed that ache.

Not every sunrise was tortuous, some were blissful, like this one. Today I'd woken up with a smile in my face, a musical laughter in my ears, a sweet taste in my lips… and an obscene erection. Days like this one were good days, and even though they only happened like twice a year, around spring and autumn, they filled me with happiness. The emptiness in my chest didn't weight so heavy and I could breathe again.

That's how I felt while I drank my morning latte, sitting alone on the back porch swing, staring at the Zen garden I'd planted with my own two hands over a decade ago, still in my sweats because I didn't need to be in the office for a while, but I couldn't go back to sleep. Today was a special day. Today she—

"Papa!" My daughter Hana said, leaning on the doorway to the house. "I thought you were sleeping." She walked outside in her pink pajama pants, rubbing her sleepy eyes. It was too early for her. School didn't start for another two hours, yet here she was. "I didn't want you to

oversleep. You can't be late for your meeting with your friend Kazuki," she said and my chest tightened, the coffee mug in my hand shuddered and I sighed, almost spilling it.

What's gotten into you?

"Don't worry honey. Ima go get ready now," I assured her, my eyes on the sun as it rose in the most beautiful morning I'd seen in years. I brought my fingers to my lips and took a deep breath and they smelled like... *impossible*. I hadn't touched a woman in years.

I shook my head and my cheeks burned as I took a long sip of my dark milky brew, which I didn't need. I'd slept better than ever last night, but I always had lattes. It was one of those rituals I couldn't remember where I picked them from anymore, but I just honored them daily, like drinking wine in this same porch some nights while I stared at the moon, wishing for another good sunrise.

"Do you like this lady, papa?" Hana asked and I spat my coffee into the weathered wood boards.

"What kind of question is that?" I asked when I could gathered my breathing again. "Your mother—"

"Mom would be happy, papa. It's been almost three years," Hana said before I could justify myself. I was so embarrassed and she was getting way too cheeky with her questions.

"Kazuki's just my *friend*. She's my oldest friend..." I said, as my sight drifted away to the sun once more, and my heart rumbled again in anticipation...

What's happening to me?

3 – Shadow

This morning I had to report for my new job as Advisor to Masashi's Lord Seventh Shadow, and I woke up extra early because I couldn't sleep. I never slept well in hotel beds, but also, the thought of seeing him again after all those years, made me sick to my stomach. I was so anxious, so nervous about being in his warm presence once more, after so long.

Would he remember me from our shared upbringing? Would I be able to look at his beautiful blue eyes without forgetting I was a renowned strategist and not his childhood friend?

I was a mess inside, but I wouldn't show it. I was a grown woman now, accomplished and strong. *Clearly, seeing the most powerful man alive, the man I have admired and looked up to since we were little kids, is nothing to be scared of*, I thought, trying to compose myself.

I spent an hour looking for the right outfit, like I didn't know all too well he wouldn't care at all. They wore uniforms in the Shadow Tower, and because I wasn't a military asset, anything I put on would be alright, but I couldn't help it. I wanted to make a good first impression. I needed him to appreciate and respect me, which he'd done our entire early life, but I desired it, now as a colleague too.

I felt so silly, acting like a girl all over again. After some more overthinking, I decided to wear a white tall-collared shirt with oversized long sleeves, a black high waisted pencil skirt, heels, and my hair up. It was the first warm Spring day of the year and I wanted to enjoy it.

I'm ready to advise!

I arrived at the Shadow Square with fifteen minutes to spare and

walked around the building to the Fallen Shade Cemetery and quickly looked for *it,* holding three roses, two of them white. I walked directly to my husband's tombstone and kissed it with my fingers, placing a yellow rose for him.

"I miss you so much, my love," I said, letting his memories cozy up my heart. He'd made me incredibly happy and taken away from me way too soon… "Keep watching over me," I asked, and the temperature spiked as if he was listening to me. I smiled, missing his fire too, but I wanted to leave flowers for my parents as well before I started work, which I quickly did. They rested a few rows down since I was a baby.

It was almost time, so I said goodbye to them and walked back to the entrance.

The Shadow Tower was the tallest building in Masashi; fifteen stories high, although there were lower wings of only a couple of floors where most of the officers had their headquarters. When I stood in front of it, five minutes to eight, my eyes followed the main structure all the way till the top floor, all glass and steel, where Haru's office was.

I sighed with excitement and a hint of nervousness, checking my attire one more time on the glass doors before me. Then, I approached the two Shades posted outside.

"I'm Sada Kazuki," I identified myself. "Here to see—"

"Lord Seventh," the young cadet on the right said. She looked like an older teen and wore all Green Shade service uniform. Because Masashi was a military city, the children who'd become Shades went to the same Academy, where they received a military geared education.

"Nanadaime's expecting you, Miss Sada. Please, fallow me," she added, and her partner, a boy of similar age and rank pushed the door

open for us.

I went to regular school while Haru attended the Academy, and he went on to become a Shade, but I didn't. They tested us all as children. That's when I had to admit, I didn't have any Anima powers, but I overperformed in all the academic testing, which made the Fourth Shadow decide to train me herself as a strategist, while Haru went to serve in active duty and continue his education on the field.

The Green girl guided me across the building lobby and a middle-aged woman dressed in Grey uniform waved at me with a happy grin from the front desk. I waved back, totally not knowing who she was, but she clearly recognized me. I blushed, absolutely embarrassed as the young Shade escorted me to Lord Seventh's office, and after a quick elevator ride where neither of us said a word, she marched me through a wide corridor, brightly illuminated by the morning sun, coming in through the floor-to-ceiling glass wall I'd seen from the street. When we reached the double-paned red door at the end, she knocked three times.

My hands trembled as I stood in front of the closed door, waiting. The moment I had anticipated for so long had arrived. I was about to see my oldest friend for the first time in over ten years.

"Come on in," he said, and hearing his familiar voice again, even muffled through the wooden panes, gave me butterflies. I breathed in and out, pulled myself together, and walked through the door the cadet had opened for me.

Daichi-sama, my academic score rival and probably the smartest Shade from our year, nodded when I laid eyes on him. He hadn't changed much, still lanky and a little skippy in his black tunic, though he'd changed his hair from shoulder length dreadlocks to a dread fade,

and was a few inches taller than me now.

Lord Sixth didn't seem to age at all, with his low curly ponytail and round glasses, laid back as always, hands in his pockets, wearing a black service tunic as well, even when he'd been retired from active service for more than five years. His official Shadow cape, also black with blue lining and the number six embroidered in gold on the collar, laid on the back of the chair he got up from as I came in. He smiled at me and I nodded, but after I bowed at him, my wandering curious eyes went to Lord Seventh.

I could only see the back of his head over his chair, turned to the glass windows behind him. His hair glowed golden, catching the sunrays, still short and wavy, effortlessly parted to the side over a fresh undercut, unlike the last time I saw him, more than a decade ago when he fully embraced a military cut.

My heart wanted to burst out of my chest as he slowly turned around to face me.

"Welcome home, Kazuki-chan," he said endearingly, as he used to call me when we were children, and his sad smile turned bright when he laid his eyes on me. I felt a wave of warmth creeping from my chest to my neck, as I focused on the charming dimples forming on his sun-kissed cheeks, then the cheeky fangs peeking through his reddish plump lips.

He'd never been hard on the eyes at all, but I didn't expect the Seventh Shadow to look so handsomely mysterious in his Commander service uniform: all-black shirt and cargo pants, tucked under tactical boots. I had to suppress a smile. Knowing him, I bet he'd purposely rolled his long sleeves up to his elbows over his shell jacket and left two orange buttons —sewn in the same bold color thread, like all the seams

on his clothes— undone to undignify it a bit, showing a peek of an equally irreverent neon orange t-shirt, which was totally unauthorized, but who would correct *him*. His collar and cuffs were embroidered with golden VII's.

He stood up and walked around the desk toward me.

The boyish rounded face I remembered so well was gone, aged into a sharp jaw and a thick neck, muscular and taut. His once lively eyes had turned a bit tired, and hooded under thick brows, and the skin around them had started to crease, still tanned with a golden glow, and flawless, because he could heal instantly from any wound, adorned by the Kitsune markings: three light whisker-like pointy lines on each of his cheeks, and a teardrop in the middle of the forehead.

Shades had all Anima markings in our skins, yes, even me, although I couldn't access mine, and it was so common it was easy to miss, but his were adorably vulpine and I always adored how they became faint or their color deepened, depending on his mood or if he was using his Anima. Right now, they were faintly, neutrally reddish.

"Nanadaime," I said, and extended my arm to shake his mechanical hand. He had lost it back in the Last Shade War, but Lady Fourth developed the prosthetic he was wearing. His knuckles and veins glowed dimly in neon-blue and disappeared under his sleeve.

His eyes zeroed in on the small fox tattoo on my wrist when my cuff dragged up my forearm, as I offered him my hand and I flushed, but he shook his head and instead, opened his arms widely and just… hugged me.

"It's been what, over a decade since we last saw each other?" he said in my ear and a shiver ran through my spine. I slowly brought my

arms up and patted his wide back, and his embrace felt too familiar and extremely warm.

His not the first Shadow Commander you've hugged. Get it together, Kazuki, I told myself, swallowing the nerves as his cheek brushed mine.

The embrace only lasted a few seconds, but his warm, wide body covered mine, and I got lost in his solid chest for what felt like *too long*. He smelled as if he'd just showered, clean-shaven and fresh. "I've missed you," he whispered, and his minty cool breath on my neck gave me goosebumps, and his raspy voice in my ear sounded heavier and deeper than I remembered.

I gulped as my throat burned. I'm sure I blushed, but I convinced myself it was the sun at his back, heating the entire office up, and also me.

I came back to reality when he put his hands on my shoulders and looked me straight in the eyes with his, mesmerizingly rare as I remembered —the most intense blue with a golden ring around the apples of his eyes. He smiled bright and wide and his pupils were huge, almost covering the entire blue irises.

"I'm so glad to have you with me, finally," he said so quietly, and I blushed again, trying to say, *"thank you,"* but I don't think I was able to speak correctly after his warm, welcoming touch. He chuckled, bringing his arm behind his head, to rub his neck that had turned pink as well. I bit the inside of my lip, trying to pull myself together.

I was there to do a job not a fool of myself in front of Lord Seventh.

"Please, take a sit," he invited while I shook Lord Sixth and Daichi's hands with assertiveness and professionalism.

See? That wasn't so difficult. They're just your work colleagues, I told

myself, remembering Haru was not only my hero, but also, my dear friend. There was no reason for me to be intimidated by him, beyond the fact he was the most powerful man in the world, a highly decorated hero, the reason we're all alive since his actions had put an end to the Last Shade War, and the most impressive being I'd ever had the pleasure to know.

And he's your boss now.

Lord Sixth and Daichi also welcome me with warm, kind words and we all sat down around the Shadow's desk. It was in the middle of the vast room, right in front of a glass wall, opposite two comfortable armchairs that could be turned back to face a plush sofa that finished the sitting area, right off the red door.

By the wall to the left there were two desks. One was clearly Daichi's, by the pictures of him and his wife, and an empty one, probably for me.

The wall to the right had the pictures of all the Shadows with Haru's at the top as the sitting Commander, and his formal daishō mounted under it. Both katanas had gold banding on black-lacquered cases. I also noticed hung by the door, along with his Seventh Shadow black cloak lined in auburn, the ones he used regularly. Those had bold, orange silk wrapped tsukas in plain black sayas,.

Haru leaned on the edge of the desk, right in front of me, and we started talking about my travels and our childhood, and soon enough, his clear laughter filled the room with its nostalgic sound.

I caught Daichi and Lord Sixth exchanging complicit looks and nods throughout the whole conversation. They seemed satisfied. After a short while, I realized I had fully relaxed. Spending time with Haru again felt like the old times, like we never parted ways. Being around him had

always being easy and felt natural, and… right.

Haru was like a bright sun, and I was a sunflower, always incorrigibly fascinated by him.

After several hours enthusiastically catching up with our professional lives, he burst into laughter again when my stomach growled. My entire body flushed and I apologized profusely. I'd been too nervous and skipped breakfast, which wasn't something I did regularly, and it was a couple of hours past midday already.

"Don't worry Kazuki-chan! I'm also starving." He gave me the kindest smile, but I still clenched my fists over my knees, mortified. "Wow! This has been such a lovely conversation. I haven't talked this much in forever, right guys?" he asked them cheerily.

"We thought you were broken forever," Lord Sixth said, crossing his legs as he leaned back on his chair. He seemed pleased.

Daichi chuckled and nodded, before mocking his friend. "I missed the obnoxious you."

Haru sucked his teeth.

"I'm sorry I took so much of your time, Lord Seventh." I stood up quickly.

"Not at all! You've brought me so much happiness and good memories." He looked me straight in the eyes again as he spoke to me. Haru always looked people in the eyes. "Let me treat you to some ramen," he added, towering over me.

"No, I can't—"

"Oh, indulge me. I haven't been to Oishī in a long time. I'd love for you to accompany me… please." He grabbed my hand with his left one, while he sweetly manipulated me with his captivating, foxy eyes. I

glanced at Lord Sixth and he nodded, encouraging.

... to be continued 😊

Thank you so much for reading. I hope I did enough to hook you and make you continue. If you do, an advanced (not 100% polished) copy of this book is already available to Beta read and provide feedback about it, so I can make sure the plot, character arc, and pacing are working withing the story. If you wish to help me with the next step, I'll appreciate it. If not, don't worry. Maybe you'll like my next story, or even one of my previous ones if you haven't read them yet. You can find my catalog here: ravenandfoxbooks.com/shop

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