

## MY LIVING SHADOW SYSTEM DEVOURS TO MAKE ME STRONGER

### Chapter 1 The Academy's Weakest

'Sometimes I wish I was never born, and if I was never born, I would never know this feeling.'

A gloomy youth stood in front of a large notice board in the academy hallway. His fists clenched, teeth gritted, eyes filled with a hopelessness that threatened to swallow him whole.

'I failed... again. Dead last, huh...'

The dark-haired young man with deep blue eyes stared despondently at the results of the first-year quarter-semester evaluation. His name sat at the very bottom.

Damon Grey.

'What did I expect? I worked so hard, and it didn't even matter. I-I still failed.'

His eyes glistened with the threat of tears, but he pushed it all down. He swallowed hard, his fists trembling as he stood frozen in the hallway, oblivious to the bustling students around him.

Looking up to the top of the list, the name at the very peak seemed to have an unreachable halo around it, a world apart from his.

Evangeline Brightwater.

The number one first-year student, a noble with extraordinary talent. To Damon, she was leagues above someone like him—an existence untouchable by the academy's weakest student.

The hallway buzzed with the chatter of students, their voices distant but clear enough to drag him back to reality.

"Looks like Evangeline Brightwater took first place again."

"Isn't that a given? She has a light attribute."

"True, and I heard she might be the first to awaken her class among the freshmen."

"Xander Ravencroft came in third again."

"Yeah, and number two is Sylvia Moonveil. The ranking hasn't changed since the entrance exam."

Their words felt like a heavy weight sinking deeper into Damon's chest. He wanted to give up. He really did. But dropping out wasn't an option.

'I can't fail... I'll do anything... Luna's life depends on my scholarship. I can't... quit. I can't get expelled.'

Giving up was a luxury Damon couldn't afford. His sister's life depended on the academy's scholarship funds. If he failed, the one million zeni that came with it—the money he used to buy the potions keeping her alive—would vanish. He couldn't let that happen. Not to Luna.

A lump formed in his throat, and he swallowed hard, fighting back the tears as he turned away, lost in thought. Every step felt like a struggle. His mind raced with thoughts of his sister's future. He was all she had. They were all each other had in this world.

'If I give up... she'll die. I don't want...'

He shuffled forward, head lowered, shoulders slumped in defeat, when he suddenly bumped into someone. Without even looking up, he muttered an apology.

"Sorry."

Before he could walk away, a hand yanked him back, shoving him to the ground.

"You low-life bastard! Can't you watch where you're going? You just bumped into Xander, and all you can say is sorry?"

Damon recognized the voice immediately—Marcus Fayjoy, a blue-haired noble who was always trailing after Xander Ravencroft, the third-ranked first-year student.

Xander was everything Damon wasn't—wealthy, powerful, and gifted. Marcus, his ever-loyal lackey, was foul-mouthed and quick to throw his weight around.

"Are you deaf, you bastard? Do I have to teach you manners, you weakling?" Marcus sneered.

Damon remained silent. This wasn't the first time he found himself in this situation. Being beaten by Marcus and his gang was practically routine. Xander, aloof as ever, rarely got his hands dirty, leaving the job of tormenting weaker students to Marcus and his cronies.

"I'm sorry," Damon muttered, barely hiding the resentment in his voice.

He got up and tried to walk away. Today wasn't a day he could afford to deal with Marcus. He had already endured enough, but he couldn't quit now.

"Grey, you bastard! Are you ignoring me? You dare to walk away without my permission?"

Marcus grabbed his shoulder, stopping him in his tracks.

Damon sighed inwardly. It was going to be one of those days again. The routine was always the same—Marcus would provoke him, Damon would resist, and a beating would follow. It never ended any other way.

Turning around, Damon slapped Marcus's hand off his shoulder.

"Screw off... I don't have time for you today."

Marcus's face twisted in fury, his cold smile barely masking the rage simmering underneath.

"You really don't know when to give up, do you, Grey? Looks like someone's going to the school healer again."

Damon took a defensive stance, bracing himself for the inevitable beatdown. It was always the same script—resistance, followed by punishment. Marcus lived for tormenting the weak, and no one was weaker than Damon. But for some reason, Damon never backed down, and that infuriated Marcus more than anything.

"You really don't know your place, do you, Grey? Fine, let me remind you."

Marcus lunged forward, but before his fist could connect, Xander's voice cut through the tension.

"That's enough."

Xander's tone was cold, detached. "I came here to check my score, not watch you crush an insect."

Damon gritted his teeth. The casual dismissal, the way Xander looked at him as if he were nothing more than a bug—it gnawed at Damon's insides.

'I want to be... stronger.'

Marcus, ever obedient, nodded and backed off. He wouldn't dare disobey Xander.

Damon walked away, his fists clenched tight, frustration and anger swirling in his chest. He hated them. Hated them more than anything. But more than that, he hated his own weakness. He hated being treated like an insect.

And that was why he would never bow his head to them. Never.

'I am not an insect... I am not an insect... Xander Ravencroft, I swear I'll make you pay for looking down on me,' Damon muttered under his breath, each word laced with defiance. His hands clenched into fists, trembling with the rage of an ant daring to challenge a towering giant.

But deep inside, he knew the bitter truth—an ant could never topple a giant. As long as that gap in strength remained, as long as fate had decided who would stand above and who below, his defiance meant nothing. He would always remain what they saw him as—an insect.

The reality of it gnawed at him. No matter how much he cursed the heavens or swore vengeance, his rage alone would never bridge the insurmountable divide between him and those who looked down on him.

With that weight hanging over him, Damon exited the academy building, his resentment festering in his heart like a slow poison. The lively chatter of students faded behind him as he stepped away from the bustling halls, leaving the populated areas in search of solitude.

His pace quickened, his head lowered, as he walked toward the distant forest on the outskirts of the academy grounds. He couldn't let anyone see the tears welling up in his eyes—tears of frustration, helplessness, fury and resentment.....