

Living Shadow 103

Chapter 103 Critical Mistake

Damon took a long, deep breath. All his preparations were as complete as they could be under the circumstances, though the rushed setup left much to be desired.

His shadow coiled at his feet, restless and hungry, though not yet to the point of taking over.

He opened his system panel, scanning the familiar stats with a frown.

[HP: 50/50]

[Mana: 90/90]

[Strength: 9]

[Agility: 17]

[Speed: 35]

[Endurance: 10]

[Class: —]

[Shadow: 60]

[Shadow Hunger Levels: 40%]

[Shadow Level: 2]

[Condition: Shadow is Mildly Hungry]

[Attributes: Umbra]

[Skills:]

[5x] [Remorseless] [Shadow Perception]

[Locked]

Damon clicked his tongue. The incident with Renata earlier had taken its toll, forcing him to use his shadow just to survive her aura.

"Using my shadow to resist her was a waste," he muttered bitterly.

His shadow pool, initially around 100, had increased to 200 upon reaching level 2. But he'd noticed something strange: his Shadow Hunger only kicked in once the pool dropped below 100.

"So, as long as my energy stays above 100, hunger won't rise. It just glitches between 2% and 3%," he observed, recalling how it had stabilized before the depletion.

He cursed Renata under his breath. "Damn it, Renata. You're throwing a wrench in my plans."

The setup for his killing field—a carefully prepared zone where he intended to eliminate Tobias—was far from ideal. With only an hour and a half to prepare, it had been an uphill battle to get things ready. Still, it would have to do. If the traps and tricks failed, he could always rely on the darkness to level the playing field.

Damon was racing against the clock.

The bait was already set. He'd sent Croft in earlier with a forged letter—written in Marcus's handwriting but signed with the name Isaac Regardi.

The letter hinted at betrayal and framed Tobias as the target of a scheme. It instructed him to sneak out and meet at a specific location under the pretense of uncovering the traitor. To ensure Tobias brought the letter, Damon included a map and emphasized the need to keep it secret, as one of their "friends" could be the culprit.

It wasn't a flawless plan, but Tobias was paranoid and desperate enough to fall for it. Damon was counting on him arriving with the letter in hand, putting him in a position where he couldn't discard it without leaving evidence.

All Damon had to do now was wait.

As he stood in the shadowed corner of the trees, his fists clenched. He needed to finish this quickly and return to his dorm before Lilith Astranova returned.

Time was slipping through his fingers, but he wouldn't let it defeat him.

This was a step toward survival. Toward strength.

Toward freedom.

Freedom from fear and weakness.

And right on cue, Damon spotted the young man: Tobias Morgan. His black hair reflected faintly under the glow of the illumination crystal he carried, his eyes darting around nervously. In the darkness, Damon remained unseen, cloaked by the shadows that concealed him.

Damon silently slipped deeper into the forest, pulling out an illumination crystal of his own. He activated it briefly, just enough for Tobias to catch the faint light and the glimpse of dyed blue hair, before turning it off and retreating further into the woods.

Tobias froze as the flicker of light caught his attention. Squinting into the distance, he could just make out a silhouette, its hair glinting blue under the faint moonlight filtering through the trees.

"That's not Isaac," Tobias murmured to himself, frowning. "Blue hair... could it be Marcus?"

The ruse worked. Damon had deliberately dyed his hair to create the illusion. He knew Tobias would be skeptical about Isaac being alive, especially after the academy had officially declared him dead. The letter, penned in Marcus's handwriting, was designed to fit the narrative perfectly. Marcus was a close friend, someone Tobias would trust, and the idea of him trying to help clear Tobias's name was too tempting to ignore.

Believing it was Marcus, Tobias took the bait and hurried after the light, his breath heavy with anticipation. His thoughts raced. Marcus had to be trying to help him, right? The student council president had promised to clear his name, but days had passed with no progress. His pager had been confiscated as part of the investigation, leaving him completely cut off from the outside world.

As he ran, the illumination crystal in his hand flickered pale light across the forest floor, guiding his way. Occasionally, another faint light flashed in the distance, leading him deeper into the woods. Tobias's heart pounded as he pursued it, determination driving his steps.

Finally, the flickering stopped. He spotted the light source, now stationary, draped in fabric and on the trunk of a tree. Approaching cautiously, Tobias lifted the fabric to reveal the crystal.

But the moment he disturbed it, a trap sprang to life. A burst of smoke shot into his face, filling his lungs and choking him. Tobias staggered back, coughing violently as dizziness washed over him.

"What... what is this..." he gasped, stumbling as his vision blurred.

Slow, deliberate footsteps echoed behind him. He turned unsteadily to see a figure emerging from the shadows. The blue hair shimmered faintly in the moonlight, and Tobias's heart sank.

"Marcus..." he croaked, barely able to stand.

The figure stepped closer, his expression cold.

"Actually, no," came the flat response.

Tobias's eyes widened as he recognized the voice. "Damon Grey... it's you... why?"

Damon shrugged casually, his bow already in hand.

"Why not? It's only fair," he said, his tone as sharp as the arrow he prepared to notch.

Tobias coughed harder, his head swimming. "Is this... revenge? Did you kill Isaac?"

Damon shook his head, a faint smirk curling his lips.

"No, and yes. It's not about revenge, Tobias. It's about survival. The law of the fittest. And right now? You don't look very fit."

He raised his bow, his voice turning icy.

"Let me help you on your way."

Tobias staggered, his knees buckling under the weight of the poison coursing through him. Damon's shadow flickered in the pale light as he drew the bowstring taut.

But before the arrow could fly, Tobias laughed weakly and stood upright. His hand glowed with a swirling orb of water, and with a burst of energy, he launched it at Damon, sending him flying into a nearby tree.

Damon groaned as he hit the ground, his body soaked and his bow slipping from his grip.

"You almost had me, Grey," Tobias said, straightening his posture.

"But you made one critical mistake." He sneered, his voice laced with contempt.

"You didn't know I'm half-merfolk. Poison doesn't work on me—it's temporary at best."

Tobias's sharp glare locked onto Damon as water droplets slid from his hands.

"Now, I'm going to drag you back to the academy and make you confess to your crimes, you bastard."

Damon scrambled to his feet, clutching his bow as he disappeared into the shadows once more.

Tobias clicked his tongue in irritation.

"You can't hide from me. Merfolk live in the depths—we see perfectly in the dark. You're dead, Damon Grey."