MY LIVING SHADOW SYSTEM DEVOURS TO MAKE ME STRONGER

The realization of what had just happened finally caught up with Damon. He stood there, holding his pager in one hand and an envelope from Kael in the other. His gaze drifted to the scorched mark on the ground, where a beam of light had seared the earth just inches away from him.

His face went pale. That could have been him.

Sensing every eye on him, Damon kept his expression tightly controlled, masking his fear with a hardened glare. His dark eyes held a glint of anger, a front to conceal the panic bubbling inside.

His gaze shifted to Evangeline Brightwater, who stood frozen, her expression a mix of unease and shock. It was clear she hadn't meant for her attack to go astray. Beside her was Sylvia Moonveil, who met his stare coolly, while the other students remained silent, processing what they'd just witnessed.

Damon's heart pounded as if it might burst, but he maintained his composure, unwilling to show any weakness before his peers—especially not to the nobles. With an exaggerated sigh, he looked toward the professor and lifted his pager.

"Your time is up, Professor… I have another class to get to."

Without waiting for a reply, he turned and walked off the training grounds, ignoring the murmurs that followed him. He could feel their stares, heavy on his back.

'Don't look back… keep walking,' he reminded himself, teeth gritted against the tension in his chest.

The professor called something after him, but Damon was too rattled to register it. He simply kept walking until he reached a quiet spot beneath a tree, finally letting out a long, shaky breath.

Looking down at his shadow, he murmured,

"Oh, my goddess… praise the Lady of Doom, Mistress of Fate… Bringer of Death… I almost joined her today."

His heart continued to hammer as his shadow shifted beside him, waving dismissively as if to reassure him.

Damon chuckled, feeling a surprising surge of gratitude.

"Thank you… may the goddess reward you. You really saved me back there," he whispered, patting his chest.

He couldn't explain it, but he was certain his shadow had reacted to Evangeline's light magic and allowed him to dodge what could have been a fatal attack.

He sighed in relief, muttering to himself, "Another close call with the healers… because of a noble. Damn them."

His shadow seemed to agree, mimicking a fist as if cursing out the nobles itself. Damon smirked.

"Still, thank you… I don't know what you are, but I'm grateful. Even if you might be dangerous, you still saved my life."

He tapped his chin thoughtfully.

"Now, let's get through the day and find you some food."

Opening his system panel, he noticed his shadow's energy level had dropped further, with a new status update.

"Condition: Shadow is mildly hungry," he read aloud, then touched his own stomach as it growled in unison.

"Guess I'm a little famished too. Let's finish the next class and then get something to eat… for me."

At this, his shadow raised a hand in exasperation, and Damon chuckled, shaking his head.

"Come on, relax. I'll sneak into the dorm's kitchen storage later and swipe a whole cow for you. Trust me."

His shadow crossed its arms, clearly unimpressed by the promise of a whole cow. Damon rolled his eyes, still scrolling through his pager.

"Ahh, not eating breakfast is catching up to me," he muttered, checking his schedule.

"Let's see… next up is a theory class. Great, it's the history of the Demon Wars."

His stomach grumbled again, but he ignored it, talking to his shadow to distract himself.

"So, the demons and goddess races have been at war forever… though it always feels like the class is just propaganda for the goddess race. Don't worry, it's almost like listening to a story—with a bunch of dates thrown in."

As they walked, his shadow continued to make subtle, nearly imperceptible gestures in response, keeping him company in the silence.

Damon's mind was plagued with worries, yet there was a strange comfort in knowing he had someone—something—to confide in, even if it was just his shadow.

It was the smallest solace, but it made the solitude easier to bear. Perhaps that's why people kept pets. In his case, he was just a loner, talking to his shadow. Nothing unusual about that… right?

"Oh, right," he muttered to himself, remembering the envelope Professor Blackthorn had given him.

"I forgot to look at this…"

He glanced down at his shadow.

"What do you think is inside? Couldn't be my results; he already threw those at me. Probably has something to do with me being a probationary student now."

Finding a secluded bench beneath a tree, Damon settled down and carefully opened the envelope. As he scanned the contents, his brow furrowed.

"Kael Blackthorn, that bastard…"

The envelope contained a list of regulations he was now subject to as a probationary student. Most of the rules were tedious, but one line stood out, making his stomach twist. He was required to wear a probationary student brooch on his uniform, prominently displayed for all to see.

Damon's heart sank. It was a blatant act of shaming, a way to mark him as lesser than his peers. They might as well have slapped a sign on him reading thief and paraded him naked around the campus square. His lips quivered. He had almost been in a decent mood, but this was a cold reminder that good things didn't come his way.

Lowering his head, he pulled the brooch from his pocket, its insignia gleaming in the sunlight. He considered not wearing it, but Kael would no doubt use that as an excuse to make his life even harder.

He sighed, voice barely above a whisper.

"At least I still have the privileges of a golden ticket student."

The weight of it pressed on him, his chest tightening with each breath. His shadow waved gently, as if to console him.

"Yeah, I'm fine," he muttered, brushing himself off as he stood.

"Let's get to class. I'm sure everyone else has already beaten me there by now."