

Living Shadow 123

Chapter 123 Let Them Go

Sylvia Moonveil was a scholar at heart. When something piqued her interest, she pursued it relentlessly, seeking to unravel every detail. Gaining knowledge was more than a habit—it was her way of life. Damon had learned this much from spending time around her.

He had also noticed her subtle intrigue in him—or more accurately, in his abilities. As for why she found him so fascinating, he hadn't yet figured it out. Sylvia had read countless books and was, for all intents and purposes, a walking encyclopedia. She took immense pride in her knowledge, seeing it as her greatest strength.

However, knowledge didn't always translate to experience. In truth, Sylvia was still woefully naive when it came to navigating the darker, more insidious aspects of life. To put it simply, she was a sheltered flower—book smart but lacking in street smarts.

It was precisely her vast academic knowledge that led Damon to predict her next move. She would realize that the professors had designed the higher-point automata to be too powerful for a single student to handle, even someone as exceptional as Evangeline.

'To that end, she's going to suggest we form a party,' Damon thought. 'And I'll just go along for the ride.'

Sylvia's gaze shifted toward him, her tone calm but insistent.

"We need to form a party. And before you even think about refusing, let me make it clear—we won't be able to gather enough points to pass without a strong team. The automata in the inner regions will

undoubtedly be worth more points. Considering the fact that they're giving us time to prepare before the exam begins, it's obvious we need to work together..."

Damon raised a hand, cutting her off mid-sentence.

"That's enough. There's no need to convince me—I wasn't going to refuse. You're right."

Sylvia blinked, taken aback by how quickly he had agreed. She had fully expected him to retort with something arrogant, like I can handle it alone.

"Oh, really?" she asked, a hint of surprise in her voice.

Xander, meanwhile, narrowed his eyes suspiciously. Damon agreeing so readily didn't sit well with him.

'Is the evaluation really so tough that even he is willing to cooperate?' Xander wondered.

Evangeline nodded curtly, cutting through the tension. "What's the plan, then?"

Sylvia placed a hand on her chin, glancing between the group.

"We have five people at the moment, but a full party usually consists of seven. Still, with our current strengths, it should work... I think."

Hesitant, Xander stepped forward, his expression tense.

"Actually, I have a request... can we bring Marcus into the party?"

Sylvia's gaze shifted toward Marcus, who was standing in the corner muttering to himself. She frowned, her discomfort evident.

"Erhm... if you want to, but I... what do you think, Damon?"

Damon sighed, his patience already thinning due to his hunger.

"Don't throw the problem on me. If you want to say something rude, just say it. But fine, bring him in... assuming he even wants to join us."

Leona shook her head firmly. "I don't like that guy. He gives me bad vibes."

Damon shot her a knowing look, thinking, 'That's because he's already half-insane.'

Xander clenched his jaw.

"I know he's not in the best place right now, but Marcus is a talented fighter. He also has a powerful attribute—we could use him."

Evangeline folded her arms, her tone cold. "Damon's right. We don't need to mince words. He can't join us if he's unreliable."

Damon glanced at her, his voice calm but sharp. "That's a bit harsh."

Xander lowered his head, his voice heavy with desperation. "Please..."

The group fell silent, their eyes widening. For someone like Xander—a noble—to bow his head was a serious gesture. Even Damon found himself surprised.

'He really sees that guy as his friend... this guy pisses me off the more I know him.'

Damon sighed, shaking his head. "Alright then... if Marcus wants to join, let him."

Evangeline narrowed her eyes. "What if he slows us down?"

"I'll cover for him," Damon replied simply, knowing full well how things would unfold.

Sylvia nodded. "Fine by me. Leona, what do you think?"

Leona shrugged. "I'm cool with it, I guess. Right, Damon?"

Xander smiled faintly. "Thank you. I won't let you down."

Without wasting time, he ran toward Marcus, who stood in the distance. Damon watched as Xander attempted to explain the situation, but the moment Marcus glanced in their direction, Damon couldn't help smirking and licking his lips in amusement.

Marcus's face went pale with fear.

"Unhand me! I don't want to join your party!" Marcus's loud protests drew everyone's attention as he struggled against Xander's attempts to calm him down.

Naturally, the commotion had unintended consequences. The other students, who hadn't yet considered forming parties, began to murmur amongst themselves.

"Wait, they're forming parties?"

"I thought this was an individual evaluation?"

"No, it says 'anything goes,' and the professor even mentioned it."

"Let's form a party!"

"Who wants to join Natch's party?"

"Need four more people here!"

Damon pinched the bridge of his nose, sighing deeply. Marcus had unwittingly set off a chain reaction, and now the once-quiet field was abuzz with students hastily organizing themselves into groups.

Xander returned to the group, looking despondent. "I'm sorry. I tried..."

Sylvia shook her head. "It's fine. I expected him to refuse anyway. I just wanted to spare you the disappointment."

Leona clicked her tongue in irritation. "Tsk. Great job, Xander. Now everyone else has the same idea."

Xander bit his lip. "I apologize."

Evangeline placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "It's not your fault."

Damon smirked. "She's right—it's not your fault. You're just an idiot."

Xander glared at him. "Fine. You've made your point."

A loud growl interrupted their exchange as Damon clutched his stomach, prompting everyone to glance at him awkwardly.

Sylvia raised an eyebrow. "Didn't you have a huge breakfast?"

Damon turned away, clearly avoiding the question. "Don't we have an exam to handle?"

Evangeline nodded, steering the conversation back on track. "Should we add one more member?"

"No," Damon said firmly. "Our lineup is fine as it is."

His gaze flicked briefly toward the other students as he thought,

'I don't want any more unknown variables.'

With that settled, the group discussed their strategy. Before they could finalize it, Professor Kael stepped forward, his voice cutting through the noise.

"Now then, your evaluation begins. You have until midnight to collect a limited number of points. You must meet the 3,000-point requirement to pass. Now go... and may the goddess be with you."

Like a charging army, the students surged forward into the Evil Forest, their battle cries echoing in the crisp morning air.

Except for Damon's group. Damon, stubborn as ever, refused to move.

"Let them go first," he said, leaning casually against a tree.