

## Living Shadow 134

### Chapter 134 Know Your Enemy

Damon moved through the darkness of the evil forest with an unnerving grace. The oppressive gloom of the night, coupled with the dangerous flora, was of no consequence to him. He swung effortlessly from tree to tree using his omnidirectional gear, navigating the treacherous environment as though it were a well-trodden path.

Yet, amidst his confident progress, two things gnawed at him.

The first was the maddening hunger clawing at his very being. It whispered insidiously in his mind, urging him to turn back and slaughter Evangeline, to let his shadow feast on her flesh and soul. The mere thought brought an involuntary shudder.

The second was far more haunting—the lingering image of Sylvia's expression as he eliminated her.

Damon shook his head violently, as if the act could rid him of such thoughts.

"Stop thinking about her," he muttered to himself, his voice a harsh rasp.

He wanted to banish all unnecessary emotions, to let cold logic guide him. But the human heart was a complicated thing, and no amount of mental discipline could erase what he had done. Earlier, his Remorseless skill had dulled his conscience, but now that it had deactivated, he was left with the crushing weight of his actions.

"What an unreliable skill..." he grumbled, though a part of him accepted it. Facing his emotions was perhaps necessary, but now wasn't the time.

He had a task at hand—a forest to burn and a mission to ensure that all the other students forfeited in the ensuing inferno. Midnight was fast approaching, leaving him with only a few hours to execute his plan.

Damon landed gracefully by a narrow stream, its trickling water reflecting faint silver streaks of moonlight. The stream connected to the river ahead, but it was deep enough for him to submerge himself in once the flames consumed the forest. His plan was clear: use the Water Celebration skill to remain underwater while the fire and smoke drove out, or eliminated, everyone else. The burning toxic flora would make escape nearly impossible for anyone who lingered.

He smirked to himself.

"The first rule of the evaluation said 'anything and everything goes,' except the use of magical artifacts."

'Bet they didn't expect the entire forest to go up in flames.'

Crouching, Damon scooped up a handful of the forest's black soil, letting it sift through his fingers. The faint breeze scattered the particles, confirming the wind direction. Perfect. The airflow through the dense canopy would carry the fire swiftly and mercilessly.

Nearby, his preparations were ready. A makeshift pipeline led to a dense cluster of sap-rich trees and oil vines. For extra measure, he'd smeared honey over the most flammable sections and laced them with dragon's breath. Hidden barrels filled with volatile mixtures were rigged to explode. Once he ignited a major ignition point, there would be no stopping the inferno.

"And I'll do it while they're too busy fighting each other," he murmured, the corners of his lips curling into a dark grin.

Damon pulled out a small flint, sparking it against a bundle of dried leaves and twigs. A tiny fire sprang to life, colorless in his monochromatic vision. His shadow writhed erratically, restrained for now as he focused his limited mental strength on his meticulous task.

He picked up a burning twig, its flames crackling softly, and strode toward one of his marked ignition points—a hollow tree filled with oil vines and dragon's breath. As he approached, his steps were deliberate, his every movement precise.

"This is it," he muttered, staring at the hollow tree. "Let's see them survive this."

Damon approached the hollow tree, his steps deliberate, but just as he was about to ignite the blaze, a subtle shift in the air made him pause. The leaves on the ground stirred unnaturally, moved by an unseen force.

In the split second that followed, Damon flipped backward, landing gracefully on his feet as the tree in front of him was violently uprooted and hurled into the stream.

The entire event was instantaneous—so sudden that had his stats not been heightened by the shadow hunger coursing through him, he would've been eliminated on the spot.

Damon turned calmly, his expression unreadable, his Remorseless skill muting any panic or anger he might have felt. He sighed softly, meeting the furious glare of his unexpected opponent.

"They can never make me like you, Xander Ravenscroft."

Standing before him was Xander, a young man with disheveled brown hair and a scowl etched deeply onto his face.

"Likewise, you traitorous mongrel," Xander spat, his voice sharp with disdain.

The dim light of the burning twigs scattered shadows across their faces, the flickering flames casting an eerie glow over the forest.

"What are you planning to do?" Xander demanded, his sword raised, poised to strike.

Damon sighed again, his tone measured and indifferent. "What's it to you?"

Xander's eyes narrowed. "It doesn't matter now."

Damon tilted his head slightly, curious. "How did you find me? The forest is dark, you know."

Xander's grip tightened on his sword as he replied, "I knew you were up to something."

Damon nodded thoughtfully. "I see. What gave me away?"

Xander's glare intensified. "You agreed too quickly."

"Excuse me?" Damon raised an eyebrow.

"You agreed to form a party too quickly," Xander explained, his voice brimming with suspicion. "You were unusually cooperative all day long."

A faint smirk played on Damon's lips. "I see. That was unusual of me. Normally, I wouldn't have. Xander, are you that obsessed with me?"

Xander's jaw clenched in frustration. "No! I just don't trust you. I don't know what you're planning, but I'll stop you."

Damon remained calm, raising his fingers to his mouth and letting out a sharp whistle.

".... Ravenscroft..."

Xander stiffened, his eyes narrowing further. "What do you want? Are you surrendering?"

Damon shook his head, a hint of amusement flickering in his eyes. "I wasn't referring to you, Xander Ravenscroft. I was referring to that Ravenscroft."

Before Xander could respond, a raven swooped down from the darkness, its wings cutting through the air with a ghostly grace. It snatched one of the burning twigs Damon had prepared and disappeared into the night.

Damon smiled faintly. "It's fine if you want to stop me, but you're too late."

Xander's eyes darted to the sky, his nose twitching as he caught the faint but distinct scent of dragon's breath. "What are you planning, you mongrel?"

Damon's expression remained impassive. "Nothing much. But if you must know... I'm going to burn this whole place to the ground. If I were you, I'd start running."

Xander hesitated, his gaze sweeping the area. "No wonder this place reeks of dragon's breath... but you wouldn't set fire to a forest you're in. You're bluffing."

Damon's smirk deepened. "Try me."

At that moment, in the distance, the raven dropped its flaming twig into one of the ignition points. Flames erupted instantly, surging upward and spreading rapidly along the laid-out path. The wind carried the inferno, igniting tree after tree, until the dark forest was consumed by a sea of red.

Damon raised his hand, watching the fire spread with a sense of grim satisfaction.

"I just did."