

Living Shadow 14

Chapter 14 Cooking Up A Storm

Damon silently made his way down the dimly lit halls, half-afraid the head maid would appear out of nowhere. The war halls carried an eerie stillness at night, shadows stretching across the walls and corners in a way that would unsettle most people. Yet, Damon found himself oddly comforted by the darkness.

Where others might see obscurity, Damon saw clarity. To his eyes, the mild darkness was as vivid as daylight. Every detail of the lavish carpets, intricate marble floors, and towering walls of the dormitory stood out. Still, he kept his footsteps light, careful not to disturb the quiet or alert anyone to his presence.

The other students were likely already asleep, exhausted from a demanding day of classes and activities. The war halls, reserved for the academy's elite, had an air of exclusivity.

The uppermost floors housed top-performing students like Xander Ravenscroft, Evangeline Brightwater, student council president Lilith Astranova, and the more accomplished seniors.

These floors were pristine and spacious, a testament to the privilege and prestige of their residents. Damon, by virtue of his golden ticket, had been granted access to these floors despite his unconventional scores.

Below these heights, the floors accommodated nobility and students with excellent academic credits, but none matched the luxury of the upper floors.

There were other dormitories scattered throughout the academy, but none had the same aura of excellence and intimidation.

Damon had never ventured out this late before. Most nights, he collapsed into his bed after grueling days, often too tired to do anything but sleep.

On his hardest days, when trials piled up, he would drift off with tear stains still drying on his cheeks. His struggles had left him gloomy, hardened, and weary.

Yet tonight, something about the emptiness of the halls and the strange comfort he felt in the darkness gave him a semblance of calm.

As he reached the elevator, he paused. Using it would be quicker, but it was also risky. If the head maid found out, he'd be in for a nightmare. Among the student body, Professor Kael Blackthorn was a figure of fear, but for Damon and others in the war halls, the head maid was the true terror. Her wrath was legendary.

Turning to his shadow, Damon whispered,

"Don't go anywhere. We just have to sneak down a few floors. As long as the head maid doesn't see us, we're golden."

The shadow gave him a playful thumbs-up and exaggerated a tip-toeing motion, earning a wry smile from Damon.

Despite the unnerving day he'd spent with this peculiar entity, its antics had started to endear it to him. It was strange, but the companionship felt genuine.

Still, Damon couldn't ignore the gnawing fear deep in his gut. The changes to his body were unpredictable.

His insatiable hunger weighed on him, no matter how much food he consumed. Worse, his vision occasionally shifted, the world losing all color and plunging into stark black and white. Every symptom seemed linked to the shadow's hunger, an ominous connection he couldn't fully understand.

"Its hunger is affecting me too," Damon thought grimly.

He had been keeping an eye on the shadow energy stat in his system. It was dropping steadily, and the shadow's hunger was growing more demanding. He glanced at the shadow again, its form twitching slightly as if restless.

"I'll feed you soon,"

Damon muttered softly, more to himself than to his companion.

With a deep breath, he began descending the stairs, the faint sound of his footsteps echoing in the quiet, empty halls.

The journey down the lower floors was uneventful. Damon moved as quietly as a mouse, his soft footsteps barely audible against the cold marble floors.

The halls were eerily silent, and shadows loomed in every corner, yet he felt no unease. The darkness had become strangely familiar, even comforting.

He passed by the dining halls, their grandeur muted in the dim light. Finally, he reached the kitchen. Pushing the door open, he entered cautiously, confident that no one would be there at this hour.

The sound of munching broke the silence—a feral, almost desperate noise of someone devouring food. Damon's senses heightened as he turned toward the source. His sharp vision pierced the dimness, landing on a figure seated at a table.

Before he could fully process what he saw, the figure turned, and Damon found himself face-to-face with the source of the noise.

Her features were immediately distinguishable: black hair streaked with white highlights, sharp animal ears perched atop her head, and a lean, athletic frame that spoke of raw power and grace.

Her physique was striking, her toned body complemented by curves that would have made most men stumble over their words.

She was Leona Valefier, the beastkin girl.

She didn't seem to notice him at first, too focused on shoveling food into her mouth as if it might disappear at any moment. Damon stared at her, his exhaustion adding to his disbelief at the scene.

Suddenly, his stomach growled—a deep, guttural sound that echoed in the still kitchen. The noise was deafening in the quiet, and Leona froze mid-bite, her golden eyes snapping toward him.

"Who... who's there?" she demanded, her voice sharp. "Show yourself."

Her gaze narrowed, her frown deepening.

"I can see you. Make yourself known."

Damon noticed the faint crackle of sparks forming around her hands. She was poised to strike, her body coiled like a predator ready to pounce. Despite knowing he was no match for her strength, his pride as a teenager wouldn't let him back down easily.

He quickly glanced around and spotted the light switch near the door.

'How convenient.'

Without hesitation, he reached for it and flicked it on. The room flooded with light, and Damon instantly felt the comfort of the shadows slip away. His own shadow returned to behaving normally, no longer stirring unnaturally.

Leona blinked against the sudden brightness, and when her eyes adjusted, she took in Damon's disheveled appearance. Her expression softened, and the tension in her posture melted away. Food still smeared her mouth as she relaxed back into her seat without a word.

Damon averted his gaze, his eyes falling on the other doors in the kitchen. Two of them led to the pantry and the cold room, his intended destination. But with Leona sitting there, watching, he couldn't exactly sneak off unnoticed.

Leona, however, didn't seem in any hurry to leave. She casually continued her feast, completely unbothered by his presence.

'Guess I'll have to eat something until she's gone,' Damon thought. His hunger was too overwhelming to wait her out.

He wandered the kitchen, checking the usual spots where the maids stored leftover pastries and prepared meals. To his shock, every shelf, every container, was empty. Not a single scrap of food remained.

'How is all that food gone?' he wondered.

The maids always cooked in excess to cater to the whims of the elite students, yet now, there was nothing.

His shadow, ever the silent observer, pointed directly at Leona.

'No... it can't be,' Damon thought, staring at her incredulously.

'I mean, she's a beastkin, but no one eats that much... right? Not to mention she's a girl... there's just no way.'

Yet the evidence was irrefutable. Plates and bowls surrounded her, and she was still eating with gusto, even humming a little tune between bites.

He sighed heavily.

'Guess I'll have to cook.'

At least the raw ingredients were untouched. The kitchen was enormous, fully stocked with an array of supplies, and the pantry offered even more if needed. Damon gathered everything he could use, setting the ingredients on the counter.

Leona glanced at him, her golden eyes curious, but she didn't stop eating.

Damon got to work, prepping the meal with methodical efficiency. His knife sliced through vegetables with precision, and within minutes, his ingredients were ready. Despite his exhaustion and ravenous hunger, he moved quickly, determined to cook enough to satisfy the unrelenting void in his stomach.

No matter how much he ate, his hunger never seemed to wane, a troubling realization he tried to ignore.

With his prep complete, Damon lit the stove and began to cook. The rhythmic sounds of chopping, sizzling, and stirring filled the kitchen, blending with the soft hum of Leona's continued feast.