

Living Shadow 15

Chapter 15 Sharing A Meal

The kitchen was massive, far more extravagant than what one would expect from a dorm kitchen. Outfitted with state-of-the-art gadgets imported from the magic continent of Aeronia, it was a place designed for luxury.

Damon, however, barely knew how to use any of it. Such opulence was far removed from the life of a commoner, and he felt out of place even standing there.

The only thing he recognized was the stove, and that was only because it looked simple enough to operate. He had seen the maids light it a few times before, and that knowledge proved sufficient.

He started with something straightforward: stir-frying meat and vegetables. Tossing them in a pan, he added a mix of seasoning and spices, letting the aroma fill the air. It wasn't complicated, and Damon found the process surprisingly manageable.

Next, he cooked rice—a lot of it. He wasn't planning on holding back tonight. A hearty soup with generous chunks of meat followed, its simmering broth adding another layer to the kitchen's intoxicating smells. Finally, he noticed some pre-sliced potatoes, likely prepped by the maids earlier. Grinning at his luck, he fried them to a golden crisp and whipped up a rich tomato sauce to pair with them.

The kitchen soon became a storm of activity, the clatter of pots and pans blending with the hiss of sizzling oil. The air grew thick with the mouthwatering aroma of Damon's efforts.

Seated at the table, Leona Valefier paused in her feast, her sharp senses drawn to the enticing smells. Her chewing slowed, and though she continued to eat, her previous enthusiasm waned. The food she had devoured moments ago now seemed dull in comparison.

Leona's golden eyes flicked toward Damon occasionally, watching as he moved with surprising efficiency for someone who claimed no familiarity with a luxurious kitchen.

Her mouth watered despite herself, and she cursed her treacherous appetite for betraying her pride.

Meanwhile, Damon worked tirelessly, barely able to keep up with his own hunger. His stomach grumbled incessantly, so he began eating as he cooked.

Whatever finished first went straight into his mouth. But his cooking outpaced his eating, and before long, he had a mountain of food prepared.

Finally done, Damon glanced around for a place to eat. The counter with its fancy high stools seemed unwelcoming, and the idea of retreating to the dining area was unthinkable.

'No way. If the headmaid catches me in there, I'm dead.'

That left only one option: the table where Leona Valefier was sitting.

His face twisted into a grimace at the thought. Sharing a table with a noble wasn't appealing in the slightest. He could already imagine her looking down on him with disdain, her nose wrinkled in disgust.

But then another thought pushed through his reservations.

'This isn't her table. It's academy property. All students are equal here.'

With those words to steel his resolve, Damon picked up the first tray of food and set it on the table. After several trips back and forth, he finally had his entire feast laid out.

The spread was immense, the faint smoke curling upward carrying an irresistible aroma. One might think it was prepared for a large party of adventurers, yet it was all meant for one ravenous teenager.

Adding the remnants of Leona's meal, the table looked more like the aftermath of a banquet.

Leona kept her eyes fixed on her own food—or at least, she tried to. Despite her best efforts, her mouth watered, and her gaze kept drifting to Damon's dishes.

The smells were maddening, her beastkin senses heightening her awareness of every savory detail. Sitting so close to Damon's food was torture, as if she could almost taste it just by breathing.

Damon, for his part, made a deliberate effort to avoid looking at her. He didn't want any trouble with any self-entitled noble. But the truth was, he found it hard to focus because she was stunningly beautiful—and to make things worse, she was still in her pajamas.

The realization had only dawned on him while he was cooking, and now it nagged at the edge of his thoughts.

His stomach growled, louder this time, breaking the silence. Without further hesitation, Damon dove into his meal like a beast unleashed. He started with utensils but quickly abandoned them, shoveling fries, chunks of meat, rice, and stir-fried vegetables into his mouth with his hands.

Leona stopped eating entirely, her golden eyes sparkling with a strange curiosity as she watched him devour his food.

Her mouth watered, and for a moment, she seemed entranced. Then she shook her head as if snapping herself out of a daze and returned to nibbling on her pastries and cold sausages. Compared to Damon's flavorful dishes, her meal seemed bland and lifeless.

Meanwhile, Damon was lost in his own frenzy. His lips glistened with grease, and he attacked his food with such intensity that even the stir-fry was not spared. But his body reached its limit before his hunger could fully subside.

He leaned back, his stomach bloated and his movements sluggish. Despite the mountain of food he had consumed, his stomach still growled faintly. Standing up, he glanced down and saw his shadow flickering tiredly, almost as if it shared his exhaustion.

But Damon couldn't eat another bite. The thought of food made him nauseous. He needed fresh air, or he'd risk losing everything he'd just eaten.

He scanned the kitchen and chose the garden door. The dining room door was off-limits—too risky with the headmaid potentially nearby. He didn't even consider the dorm back entrance; it was undoubtedly locked at this hour.

The garden door creaked open, and Damon stepped outside. The cool night air brushed against his face, offering immediate relief. The garden was serene, filled with vibrant flowers, a scattering of fountains, and carefully trimmed green shrubs adorned with rose vines as a barrier from the outside..

He walked to the nearest fountain, holding his hand over his mouth as waves of nausea hit him. Sitting on the fountain's edge, he tried to steady himself. His shadow danced erratically at his feet, shifting between lethargy and strange bursts of aggression.

Damon took deep breaths, trying to calm the unease building in his chest. Fear gnawed at him—not just from his shadow's unpredictable behavior but from the isolation he felt. He trusted no one, neither in the academy nor beyond its walls.

He couldn't share his plight with anyone, he was all alone.

'Just stay calm. Bury it all and keep a cool head.'

After several minutes, his head cleared, and he felt stable enough to return. Pushing open the kitchen door, Damon froze.

Leona Valefier was gone—and so was the rest of his food.

'Th-that damn beastkin ate my food...'

He shook his head. He wasn't going to eat it anyway.

'At least she's gone.'

With the kitchen finally empty, Damon moved quickly. He made his way to the cold room. It was time to feed his shadow.