

Living Shadow 155

Chapter 155 Old Friends

Quick Hand.

How could Damon not recognize the name? Even now, he carried a dagger that marked his membership in the organization, a silent testament to his past.

His history with Quick Hand began long before he ever set foot in the academy.

After arriving in the capital, he'd been forced to sell his father's house to a noble. With no other options, he had taken what little money he had and bought a rundown home through the war banks—a decrepit place barely standing, nestled within a slum controlled by gangs and corrupt law enforcement.

At the time, it had just been him and his sister. They were alone, unfamiliar with the capital, and completely unprepared for the brutal reality of their new lives.

Food was scarce.

Damon could still remember the gnawing hunger in his stomach, the hollow pain of going days without eating. But no matter what, he wasn't about to let his sister starve—not after what they had escaped from back in their village.

Survival came first.

He had already picked up a few dirty tricks from the caravan they'd traveled with, so naturally, he took to the streets. He started small—stealing food, barely escaping with his life when a furious mob caught him in the act. They had no qualms about lynching a starving child.

It was then that he noticed how the other street kids operated. They weren't reckless like him. They were subtle. Pickpockets. Shadows in the crowd. He observed them, learned their ways, mimicked their techniques.

But Damon had one fatal flaw—he didn't know the inner workings of the system.

The street kids weren't just independent thieves; they paid off the right people. They stole just enough to survive, handing over a cut of their earnings to Quick Hand, the gang that ran the show. That was why they were allowed to keep their scraps.

Damon, on the other hand, had been too successful.

He was adaptable, clever, and unrelenting. In just a short time, he had stolen enough to feed both himself and his sister, even managing to buy rare commodities like meat.

He had smiled at the taste, almost convinced for a moment that things were getting better—that maybe, just maybe, he could return to the days when food was abundant, when his parents were still alive.

But Damon had made a mistake.

He hadn't paid protection money.

His gloomy, outcast nature didn't help either. The other street kids didn't like him, and he had no allies among them.

So they turned him in.

He was captured and dragged before Quick Hand's leader, the one who controlled the slum's underground economy.

He could have begged for mercy. Any sane person would have.

But Damon was stupidly stubborn about the most ridiculous things.

They beat him. He refused to yield.

They beat him again. He still wouldn't give in.

They threw him back onto the streets, half-dead.

The next day, they caught him again. The process repeated itself for an entire month.

And yet, he never broke.

Eventually, even Quick Hand had to acknowledge him. His resilience, his skills, his absolute refusal to kneel.

So they made him an offer.

He became one of them—not a full member, but an errand boy. He was allowed to keep slightly more of his earnings than the other kids, and in return, he got their protection from rival gangs. It wasn't ideal, but it was better than getting killed.

And so, Damon learned.

It was during those years that he earned the moniker Phantom—the pickpocket like a ghost. There was nothing he wouldn't steal if asked.

But there was another side to him.

He wasn't just reckless.

He was insane.

At first, they thought he was an idiot, but soon, they realized the truth.

Damon dared.

He dared to call out the boss over a ten-zeni fee.

He dared to steal from a noble.

He dared to punch the daughter of a rival gang leader.

He dared to refuse bribes to the corrupt constables.

He dared to coat people's clothes in flay powder, leaving them with horrific burns and scars.

In Quick Hand, there was an underground betting system:

"Would the mad bastard survive another week?"

Against all odds, he did.

Time and time again.

A phantom. A mad ghost that refused to die.

But Damon never forgot the reason he stayed.

In his final days with the gang, he took on extreme jobs for more money—anything to get medicine for his sick sister.

Then, one day, he left.

He didn't say goodbye.

He simply disappeared, his golden ticket to the academy in hand.

'They probably think I'm already dead...'

He glanced at Lilith.

"Yeah, I know them... Quick Hand is a smuggling ring. They work for the Chakata family, which is actually funded by Viscount Darkanoff."

She blinked, surprised he knew so much.

"The last part is news to me... you—"

"I was with them before," he interrupted casually.

She nodded slowly, studying him.

He smirked. "The boss of Quick Hand bailed me out of a lot of problems—or rather, was forced to bail me out. All things considered, if I wasn't useful, he would've wanted me dead too."

Damon chuckled, a knowing glint in his eyes.

"Luckily, I made sure he always had a reason to keep me around—for his own interest, of course. Having leverage is always a good thing."

She nodded again, then asked, "We're going to kill them. Don't you feel any solidarity with them?"

Damon's expression grew distant, his smile slowly twisting into something cold.

"I do," he admitted. "That's why I'll kill them."

Lilith raised an eyebrow, waiting for him to elaborate.

"In Quick Hand, it's every man for himself. Some of those bastards made my life a living hell... even worse than it should've been," he continued. His grin widened.

"I swore to some of them that if I ever made it big, they were going to die. The flay powder on their clothes was just the appetizer."

She touched her own garments with a thin smile.

"Flay powder on their clothes... How are you still alive?"

Damon chuckled darkly.

"Who knows? I'm here, aren't I?"

She sighed as the carriage came to a stop by a narrow alley. They stepped out, moving silently through the dimly lit passageways, navigating the labyrinth of backstreets with practiced ease.

Eventually, they emerged onto a wider road, where a large, worn-out sign greeted them:

Murmansk Pawn Shop – We Pay, You Pawn.

Damon exhaled, shaking his head.

"They still use the same fronts as always," he muttered.

The pawn shop's old building had clearly seen better days. Its exterior was dimly lit, and the lack of foot traffic suggested it was more of a cover than an actual business.

Damon closed his eyes briefly, extending his shadow perception into the building.

"Hmm... not many of them inside for me to devour, but I do spot a familiar face."

Lilith glanced at him. He seemed almost eager now—more than before.

She smirked. "Let's go greet your old friends, then. Hello... and goodbye."