

Living Shadow 16

Chapter 16 Unique Diet

The academy's kitchen was massive, outfitted with every amenity imaginable—especially in War Hall, the dormitory reserved for royals, nobles, and the academy's elite students. Among its many features was the cold room, a vast space kept frozen to store a variety of meats.

Damon pushed open the heavy door and was met with an imposing sight: large vaulted doors, each one radiating an icy chill. He hesitated in front of them, his hand hovering over the handle as he debated whether to proceed.

His stomach growled loudly, and his shadow flickered erratically on the floor, its movements almost agitated. Gritting his teeth, Damon clenched the handle and yanked the doors open. A blast of cold air rushed out, sending a shiver through his body as bright white lights illuminated the interior.

The cold room was enormous, the walls coated in frost that shimmered under the lights. Rows of processed animal carcasses hung from metal hooks—cows, goats, and other creatures, their forms preserved in the biting cold. Crates filled with smaller cuts of meat were stacked neatly in the corners. The air was thick with the scent of raw flesh, sharp and metallic.

Damon stepped inside cautiously, his shadow extending itself across the frosty floor, moving independently as if surveying the room. His head throbbed, and a wave of fatigue washed over him, even though he'd spent the entire day sleeping.

"Hey, come on over here," Damon called to his shadow.

The shadow retreated from its wandering and stopped in front of him, its vague form quivering slightly.

"Let's go for that one. It's big enough and should be good to eat," Damon said, pointing at a frozen cow carcass, its head already removed.

The shadow slithered toward the cow, circling it with a curious energy. Then, it stopped.

Damon waited. One minute. Two minutes. Nothing happened.

Frustration bubbled up inside him.

"What... Why aren't you eating?"

The shadow shook its head, a gesture that seemed both annoyed and reluctant. It pointed at the cow with a tendril-like limb, its movements deliberate.

Damon's patience snapped.

"What do you mean you can't eat that?"

The shadow crossed its arms—crossed its arms, as if it were just as frustrated as he was. Damon pressed his fingers to his temples, massaging away the throbbing pain as he took a deep breath to calm himself.

"Okay... fine. No problem. If beef won't work, there's mutton, fish, and plenty of other options."

He pointed toward a hanging sheep carcass.

"Eat that."

The shadow glided over to the sheep, circling it in the same manner as before. Once again, it refused to eat. Damon's lips pressed into a thin line, his body trembling—whether from the cold, his own gnawing hunger, or sheer irritation, he wasn't sure.

He tried directing the shadow to other meats: pork, fish, and even crates of small game. But no matter what he offered, it wouldn't eat. Worse, the hunger emanating from the shadow seemed to grow stronger, and Damon realized with a sinking feeling that he was being affected by it too.

'That's why I can't get full... no matter how much I eat.'

A shiver ran down his spine as he recalled the system's warning: If your shadow is not fed, you will perish.

His heart sank, and his breathing quickened.

"W-what do I do? Oh, Goddess, what do I do?"

Fear gripped him. He dropped to his knees on the icy floor, clutching his head. His thoughts spiraled as he struggled to find a solution.

"What do I feed it? Am I going to live like this? Will I... die?"

The horror of his situation weighed heavily on him. He could feel it pressing down, suffocating him.

As he sat there in despair, his shadow moved closer. A tendril rose from the floor and waved at him, catching his attention. Damon looked up, his face pale.

The shadow gestured to its chest and flexed as if mimicking strength. Damon stared at it, his brows furrowed.

'It's trying to tell me something... to be strong? To not panic?'

Roughly guessing the shadow's intent, Damon forced himself to take a steady breath.

"Okay... okay. I'll figure this out."

But as he looked around the cold room, surrounded by countless pounds of meat the shadow wouldn't touch, a nagging doubt remained: What if I can't?

Damon smiled faintly, his lips trembling as he fought back the lump in his throat. His chest tightened, and tears threatened to spill, but he swallowed them down with sheer willpower.

"Yeah... thanks," he murmured, directing his words at the shadow.

"This isn't the time for a mental breakdown. I need to keep a cool head. So, you can't eat beef... maybe you have a different diet. Souls and flesh, right? I just need to figure out what kind."

With that resolve, Damon snapped himself out of his despair, his mind shifting gears as he began considering a plan of action.

He stood up, brushing off his knees.

"I need to monitor my state and document everything I find. The system panel should give me accurate measurements."

Leaving the cold room, Damon flicked off the lights and walked back to the kitchen. The fluorescent lights clicked off, casting the area in darkness as he climbed the stairs to his room.

Once inside, he activated the system panel again, his tired eyes scanning through the information with a sense of urgency.

The interface displayed a detailed breakdown of his shadow's hunger:

[Hunger Levels]

0%-20% Hunger: Safe range. The shadow is under control.

20%-50% Hunger: Increased temptation to feed. Minor stat boosts.

50%-80% Hunger: Loss of partial control. Significant power boosts.

90%-100% Hunger: Shadow becomes ravenous, fully takes control. Immediate risk of losing humanity.

Damon sighed, his shoulders slumping. His hunger was already at 49%. He was dangerously close to the next threshold, where he'd lose partial control of the shadow.

Sitting down in a soft chair, Damon stared into the darkness of his room. His voice was low, edged with unease.

"I can't sleep. What if my shadow goes berserk while I'm unconscious... and kills me instead?"

The shadow reacted immediately, clutching its chest as if scandalized, its form rippling with an almost offended energy.

Damon rolled his eyes, dismissing the theatrics.

"I don't have time for this," he muttered, pulling out his pager and setting a timer. He kept the system panel open, its glowing interface a constant reminder of his precarious state.

"I need to know how long it takes for the percentage to change," he said, jotting down notes.

"If I can figure out the timing, I'll know how long I have."

Despite the weight of exhaustion, Damon forced himself to move to his study, where a stack of books from the library waited for him. He pulled one open and flipped to the first page.

"I'll use this time to read," he decided, "while observing my shadow and documenting any changes to my body. The pager will help me track everything."

Lost in his research, Damon noticed the absence of light in the room. The darkness didn't matter—he could see perfectly, even without illumination.

That was the first change he documented.

But hunger gnawed at him, pulling his focus away. His concentration faltered, and his eyes felt heavier with each passing second. Eventually, his head dipped lower, resting on the table. Fatigue overtook him, and he fell asleep.

The darkness gave way to the light of the morning sun, creeping through the edges of the drawn curtains. The rays grew stronger as the sun climbed higher, painting the room in golden hues. Yet Damon did not stir, his face buried in the crook of his arm.

A sharp knock broke the silence.

When no response came, the door creaked open, the measured clicks of heels echoing against the hardwood floor.

His name was called out again but he gave no response.

"Damon Grey!"

The stern voice of the headmaid pierced through the haze of sleep. A firm hand shook his shoulder, jostling him awake.

"Damon Grey, wake up," her stern voice called.

"Damon Grey! Wake up now! Sleeping this late when you have a class is unbecoming of a student."

Groggy, Damon blinked his eyes open, struggling to focus. The figure of the head maid stood over him, her sharp features outlined in the dim light filtering into the room.

As Damon's vision adjusted, a wave of horror surged through him.

The world around him had shifted—colors dyed into shadows, and every detail was unnaturally vivid, as though he could perceive the faintest movements in the air itself.

"Ah... ahh... wha—" Damon stammered, his voice trembling.

The headmaid frowned, her gaze piercing.

"Are you quite all right, Damon?"

Damon gripped the edge of the table, his breath hitching. What is happening to me?