

## Living Shadow 17

### Chapter 17 Monochrome Perception

Damon stared at the headmaid, his widened eyes betraying the fear and confusion clawing at his mind. But it wasn't fear of her—it was the visceral, gut-wrenching shock of a world stripped of color.

The room, the sunlight, even the headmaid herself—all of it had faded into stark black and white. The only exception was the headmaid's chest, where a vibrant, golden glow pulsed faintly, alien in this monochrome existence.

His hands trembled as he took a deep breath, trying to steady himself.

The headmaid remained unaffected by the change, her stern demeanor unchanged. She was a tall, composed woman with long black hair braided neatly down her back and sharp amber eyes that always seemed to pierce through him. Her uniform was pristine, marked by a brooch displaying the academy's crest—a small detail Damon would never have noticed before, but now he could see it with startling clarity.

"Damon Grey, are you all right?" Matilda's voice was firm, though her eyes narrowed as she caught Damon staring.

The golden glow captivated him, drawing his gaze with an almost magnetic pull. His mouth hung open, and to his horror, he felt the unmistakable wetness of drool trailing from his lips.

"Ermh... yes, Miss Matilda... I'm fine," he muttered, forcing himself to tear his eyes away from her chest.

The room's monochrome state remained overwhelming. The sunlight streaming through the windows lacked its usual warmth, appearing cold and colorless.

Yet somehow, Damon still knew the original colors of everything—the polished mahogany of his desk, the navy curtains swaying lightly by the window. His vision was unnervingly sharp; even the dew droplets on the window frame, reflecting faintly distorted images of the outside world, were startlingly clear.

'What is happening to me?' he thought, his mind racing.

A quick glance at the system panel still floating in front of him made his stomach drop. His shadow hunger had climbed to dangerous levels.

Matilda's voice broke through his daze, irritation evident.

"Damon Grey, stop staring into the distance and get up. You have 15 minutes to get ready. After that, you'll have 5 minutes to eat before heading out. That gives you a total of 20 minutes. Now move."

Her sharp tone jolted him.

"Y-yes! I'll be ready!" he stammered, scrambling to his feet and bolting toward the bathroom.

Matilda, frowning slightly, glanced around his room, noting its spotless condition—a testament to the maids' efficiency. She turned to leave, but paused just before closing the door, her brows furrowed.

'Did the color of his eyes change? I'm certain he had blue eyes before...'

The thought lingered as she walked away, her memory of Damon's peculiar black eyes gnawing at the edges of her mind.

In the bathroom, Damon slammed the door shut, his breaths coming in short, shaky bursts. His gaze flicked toward his shadow on the wall. At first, it seemed normal, mimicking his movements as it always did. But then it glitched.

It wasn't his imagination—the shadow flickered erratically, its edges warping and distorting. One moment it was there; the next, it seemed to blink out of existence for a fraction of a second before returning, weaker than before. Its usual playful gestures were absent, replaced by a feeble stillness that was deeply unsettling.

Damon's breath caught in his throat. He called up the system panel, dread pooling in his stomach.

[Shadow Hunger Levels: 80%]

[Condition: Shadow is starved.]

A deep, hollow ache flared in his stomach as if on cue. His body felt heavy, the heat of hunger radiating from the pit of his being.

He shook his head weakly, trying to push the feeling aside.

"Get it together," he muttered to himself.

He quickly washed up, the cold water doing little to refresh him. Once done, he dressed in his clean academy uniform, carefully pinning the brooch given to him by Professor Kael Blackthorn to his chest.

Before stepping out, Damon glanced at himself in the mirror. His black eyes stared back, void of their former blue hue, heavy dark circles under his eyes.

With a sigh, he adjusted his uniform, ensuring it fit neatly and avoided drawing unnecessary attention to his appearance.

'I need to avoid crowded areas,'

he thought grimly as he exited the bathroom and headed downstairs, his mind already racing with the complications of his new reality.

Damon stepped into the elevator, his fingers trembling slightly as he pressed the button for the ground floor. The soft hum of the machinery did little to calm the storm brewing within him.

As the doors slid open, he strode forward, intent on leaving the building, when a maid called out to him. Her voice, polite yet firm, pulled him from his thoughts.

Reluctantly, he followed her down the hall toward the dining room.

As they walked, Damon couldn't ignore the faint golden glow radiating from her chest. It was the same as what he had seen in the headmaid, a warm, ethereal light that stirred something primal within him. His mouth watered involuntarily, and the faintest scent of something delectable wafted through his senses.

The hunger clawed at him. For a brief moment, an uncontrollable urge to attack flared in his mind, a dark whisper urging him forward.

'No!' He shook his head sharply, forcing himself back to reality.

The maid led him to a small table where a modest breakfast had been arranged. She lowered her head respectfully before speaking.

"You did not eat breakfast yesterday. The headmaid insists you do so today."

Her tone softened slightly.

"She also said she is willing to forgive your absence from the dorms the night before."

Damon blinked, momentarily distracted. He could hear her heartbeat, the rhythmic pulse of her blood coursing through her veins. The golden glow of her soul captivated him, but he forced his gaze downward, unwilling to let her see the hunger in his eyes.

The maid stepped back after delivering her message, bowing slightly before leaving the room. Her absence gave him the clarity to process her words.

'How did she know?' he wondered, his brows furrowing in confusion.

As the headmaid, it was Matilda's duty to oversee all the students in the War Halls, even someone like him. But Damon couldn't shake the question of why she cared so much about his actions.

His stomach growled, interrupting his thoughts. With a fatigued expression, he wolfed down the food in front of him. It was gone in moments, consumed with such ferocity that it startled even him.

Yet the hollow ache in his gut remained. No matter how much he ate, it wouldn't make a difference. This insatiable hunger wasn't physical; it stemmed from something far darker.

His eyes flicked to the faint golden light he could see emanating from others' chests. Each glow whispered of sustenance, and he couldn't deny the truth any longer.

'I know what my shadow wants,' he thought grimly. 'And it's not good.'

Pushing the empty plate aside, Damon stood abruptly. Dark circles hung under his eyes, and his once-sharp gloomy gaze was dulled by fatigue. Without a word, he left the dining room and exited the dormitory, the brisk morning air greeting him as he stepped outside.

As he reached the academy's main plaza, a sudden jolt of awareness hit him like a lightning strike. His breath caught in his throat, his senses sharpening in an instant as the world around him seemed to ripple. Something was wrong, terribly wrong, and the shadow inside him stirred with a chilling anticipation.