

Living Shadow 197

Chapter 197 Ingredient

Damon was somewhat reassured, but that did little to ease his paranoia. If one of the professors had seen him kill Tobias, who could it be? What were their intentions? Why hadn't they reported him? Were they waiting to catch him in the act? Or, better yet, had they never planned to?

Was meeting him there a coincidence, or had they been targeting him from the start?

Many possibilities flashed through his mind. Why did they tamper with the evidence he left behind on purpose? Did they change it up because...

'They didn't want me to be caught...'

He wouldn't have been because the ripped jacket had belonged to Marcus. That had been his aim.

"But the person didn't know that..."

Lilith walked beside him with her usual grace, her hips swaying in rhythm with the movement of her long red hair.

"You don't need to be paranoid. I'm sure you've come to the same conclusion as me," she said.

"Which means whoever it is won't expose you. They have their own intentions. Or rather, they were after their own plan. If I had to guess, they must have seen you devour Tobias and taken an interest in your powers."

She knew the academy wasn't just an educational institution—that was only part of it. Most of the staff weren't even true professors. They were researchers who had awakened a class—alchemists, mages, magi, and so forth. These types mostly cared about their research. After all, this was a world where people turned themselves into liches just to continue their pursuit of knowledge. Illegally, of course.

She wouldn't be surprised if one of the professors believed they had a type of magic or class skill that would benefit from Damon's power. Or rather—his shadow.

"I'm not sure," she continued, "but I think someone might want to use you as an ingredient in black magic."

Damon glanced down at his shadow, which had been acting as any normal shadow would.

"What? Why me...? I'm..." He paused.

"A prime ingredient for black magic. But the dark magic attribute isn't even rare—it's almost common."

She nodded.

"But yours is shadow. That's somewhat rare—not unheard of, but rare to come by."

She glanced at his shadow.

"And yours is even more appealing, with all its strange abilities..."

His eyes grew colder.

"I see. With this, we've determined that whoever it is... is an enemy."

She shook her head.

"Not yet. But we can determine they'll make their move in time. However, they wouldn't act out during the noble meeting. At least, I hope so."

He narrowed his eyes.

"So, I still have reasons to be paranoid."

She shook her head again.

"Not paranoid. Cautious. That's what you should be."

He sighed. Thinking of all the professors he knew... It was also possible that it wasn't one he was familiar with. But only a professor would have been in that area. Although, at that time of night, it was suspicious.

Then there was also Rein Ambridge, who he'd found unconscious with signs of struggle. He never verified with Marcus if he was the one who had knocked him out...

"Hmm... It's dangerous, but what if I use myself as bait?"

She glanced at him.

"No. If they wanted to make their move, they would have already. But... who do you think it is?"

Damon held his chin. He really didn't know.

"I don't know... Kael, Alfred, Emerald, Tunpick, Hardhand... It could be any professor. And each of them... hmm, let's just say they don't like me very much."

She paused, brushing her hair to the side as she walked.

"You mentioned all the professors you know—except Chrome. Well... he is a nice old man."

Damon narrowed his eyes.

"There was simply no need to mention him. He has no such motives. If anything, the most suspicious would be Kael."

She nodded.

"Is it because he has a dark attribute?"

He shook his head.

"No. It's because the Blackthorne family hasn't produced anyone in the fifth class advancement in four generations. And in the last Demon Wars, their elder—who had been in the fifth class for several centuries—died in battle. So, yes... he has a lot of motivation."

Lilith wasn't so sure about that. Damon did have a strong impression of Kael, but whether it was accurate or not was another matter.

"Hmm... we'll have to investigate further. Since Kael is your suspect, I'll look into what he was doing on the day you killed Tobias. But for all intents and purposes, we have no evidence. And Kael is a straightforward man. If he didn't like you, he wouldn't hide it. While he's cold, I can assure you he's someone who actually cares for his students."

Damon clicked his tongue. He wasn't going to give Kael the benefit of the doubt. Kael had opposed him at every turn—the mid-semester evaluation was proof of that. If Damon hadn't seen the criteria for the evaluation beforehand, he would have been in serious trouble.

"That's news to me..." he muttered.

But fine. Until they had solid evidence, they needed to focus on more pressing matters.

"Until we have proof, we should focus on the problems at hand. I'll start thinking of ways to level up while you sort out our spoils from what we got. We can discuss the rest of the issues later."

Lilith's eyes flickered at the mention of leveling up. She certainly hoped he didn't feel threatened. If he did... she wasn't sure what dangerous things he might do.

"I agree with you," she said after a moment. "If there's anything you know, you'll tell me, right?"

Damon raised an eyebrow.

"Ahmm... sure..."

She sighed as they walked toward a small, weathered statue of the goddess outside a tall spire.

They stopped at a circular array, the runes dim with only faint flickers of magic. At the center was a glowing gem embedded into the formation—he recognized it as a magic crystal, smeared with residual magic energy.

Standing at the formation's center, Lilith poured her magic into it. Their bodies shimmered before vanishing, swallowed by the teleportation spell.