

Living Shadow 24

Chapter 24 No, You May Not

Damon saw the first light of dawn creeping through his window, casting a pale, golden glow across his room. His face remained buried in the books he'd borrowed from the library, where he'd been reading tirelessly through the night.

The darkness that had shrouded the room earlier was no hindrance to him now, thanks to his newfound vision that rendered light unnecessary. Even in the absence of illumination, he could clearly see every word on the pages, every corner of his room.

As dawn brightened the space, Damon's gaze shifted toward his shadow. It had spent the night skidding across the room, flitting from corner to corner like a restless sentinel on patrol.

He yawned, exhaustion setting in after a sleepless night.

I can't afford to miss class again, he thought, rubbing his eyes. Missing yesterday had already put him on edge. Another absence might start drawing attention, and that was the last thing he needed.

Still, the nagging worry crept in. His absence could implicate him, couldn't it?

"No," he muttered, shaking his head.

"I can't let myself second-guess everything. If I do, my heart will give out long before they catch me."

He clung to the belief that there was no evidence tying him to Lark Bonaire. There couldn't be. He had been too careful.

Damon walked into the bathroom and washed up. The cold water splashing against his face helped chase away some of the lingering fatigue. Afterward, he dressed in his crisp, clean uniform, neatly folding and tossing his soiled clothes into the laundry basket. The maids would take care of it on laundry day, as always.

As he stepped into the hallway, his eyes caught a flash of red hair.

There, walking down the corridor, was a stunning girl with striking crimson locks that shimmered even in the dim morning light. Her posture and gait were regal, exuding confidence and authority. Damon didn't even need to see her face to know who she was: Lilith Astranova, the second-year student council president.

"What's she doing on this floor?" he muttered under his breath.

Second-years had their own floor, far removed from his. There was no reason she should be here. But Damon shook his head, dismissing the thought.

'Not my problem.... Except is she here to, investigate..'

Narrowing his eyes he turned in the opposite direction, took the elevator down, and headed for the dining hall.

Breakfast was light, barely enough to stave off his hunger, but it didn't matter. He wasn't in the mood to eat anyway. Finishing quickly, Damon left for his first class of the day—Potion Brewing.

When he arrived, only a handful of students were present. Perfect. Damon found a quiet corner where he could blend into the background, avoiding any unnecessary attention.

As he sat, his ears perked up, hoping to catch whispers of rumors or clues about Lark Bonaire. Most of it was mundane chatter, the typical gossip that floated around the academy. But then, a name caught his attention.

Lark.

Damon's eyes shifted toward a group of students. It was Xander Ravenscroft and his friends. Their voices were hushed, just out of earshot.

"I can't hear them," Damon muttered, irritation creeping in.

His unease grew. I killed Lark Bonaire... what if they know?

His shadow, which had been idly shifting nearby, suddenly waved at him.

Damon blinked, startled.

"You want to listen in on them?"

The shadow nodded, its form quivering in anticipation.

Damon hesitated, biting his lip. It felt risky, but he couldn't let this opportunity slip by.

"Fine," he whispered. "But don't get caught."

The shadow saluted him before slithering under the desks, blending seamlessly with the natural shadows cast by the morning light. It moved unnoticed, positioning itself beneath Xander's group.

Damon's heart raced, his palms clammy with anxiety.

'Don't get caught. Don't get caught...'

The shadow merged flawlessly into the room's inanimate darkness, becoming nearly invisible. Damon forced himself to breathe steadily, trying to look nonchalant as the class filled up.

Eventually, the professor arrived, and the shadow slipped back to Damon's side.

Leaning closer to it, Damon whispered,

"Well? Do they know he's dead?"

The shadow shook its head.

Damon exhaled, relief washing over him.

"So they don't suspect me?"

The shadow shook its head again, then gestured with a series of movements that Damon instinctively understood.

"They noticed he didn't come back last night," Damon murmured, piecing the information together.

"And they haven't seen him this morning either..."

The shadow continued to gesture.

"They tried calling his pager, but he didn't pick up. So they reported his absence to the academy... just in case he got into trouble."

Damon's chest tightened.

"How thoughtful of them," he muttered bitterly. Then, narrowing his eyes, he added,

"Let me guess—reporting it on such short notice was Xander Ravenscroft's idea, wasn't it?"

The shadow nodded.

"I figured as much. That bastard... he's not stupid. No, it's more like he has excellent judgment."

Damon's gaze locked onto Xander, a simmering resentment bubbling beneath his calm exterior.

"He always causes problems for me, even without meaning to."

His voice was laced with venom.

"I hate him... even more now."

He sighed, slumping slightly in his chair. 'How could I not hate someone who treats me like I'm less than the dirt beneath his feet?'

The professor began the lecture, but Damon's mind remained elsewhere, his thoughts entangled in schemes and strategies for staying ahead of those who might stand in his way.

The professor droned on and on, his monotone voice blending into the background as Damon half-listened. He jotted down the important parts of the lecture, but his mind kept wandering, preoccupied with thoughts of Lark Bonaire.

Lark was dead, and no matter how much Damon wanted to dismiss it, the weight of that reality bore down on him. The guilt and paranoia gnawed at him, making it hard to focus.

Class eventually ended, followed by the next, and soon it was lunchtime.

During lectures, Damon couldn't ignore the subtle glances cast his way by Evangeline Brightwater. The number one first-year, her reputation was as pristine as her golden hair and sun-marked eyes. But her attention unsettled him.

Damon hadn't even noticed at first—it was his shadow that informed him, giving him a nudge and pointing her out. Each time her gaze lingered, it added to his unease.

Why is she looking at me? he wondered.

The cafeteria was crowded as always, the hum of voices and clatter of trays filling the air. Damon, however, didn't need to worry about finding a seat. He headed straight to the more exclusive section reserved for nobles and top-ranking students.

When he arrived, he spotted Xander Ravenscroft and his group occupying a table near the center. Their laughter and animated conversation grated on his nerves, but Damon didn't stop. He walked past them, his gaze fixed on the table at the farthest corner—secluded and quiet, just the way he preferred.

Reaching the table, Damon sat down. It was only then that he realized he hadn't grabbed any food. But the thought of weaving through the bustling cafeteria unsettled him further. Instead, he pressed a button discreetly embedded into the table, summoning a maid.

When she arrived, he ordered something light.

As he waited, Damon could hear the murmurs of other nobles nearby, their whispers sharp and cutting.

"Did you see what he did yesterday?" one whispered.

"He's a beast," another scoffed.

Damon ignored them, though their words rekindled the memory of yesterday's incident. His shadow had been hungry—ravenous, in fact—and he had lost control, acting in a way that was... less than human. The aftermath had earned him disdainful looks and cruel remarks, but Damon refused to let their judgment affect him.

His food arrived shortly after, and he started eating in silence, savoring the calm of his corner. But that peace didn't last long.

The cafeteria gradually fell silent, the bustling noise replaced by an eerie stillness. Damon glanced up, his fork hovering mid-air, and found himself staring at Evangeline Brightwater.

She stood directly in front of him, her flawless appearance almost glowing in the soft cafeteria light. Her expression was composed, but her eyes held a quiet intensity as she addressed him.

"May I sit here?" she asked politely, her voice calm yet firm.

Damon frowned, setting his fork down. He met her gaze, unflinching.

"No, you may not."

His tone was cold, leaving no room for negotiation.

