

## Living Shadow 26

### Chapter 26 Reputation Of The Weakest

Damon was a hateful, spiteful, and jaded person with a sour outlook on life. Yet, deep down, he was still just a teenage boy. And like any teenage boy, he wasn't entirely immune to drama—especially when the number one girl in his class suddenly asked him to be her partner.

Of course, Damon wasn't stupid. He knew there was no romantic undertone to her request. Still, he couldn't help but wonder what her true intentions were.

The attention from the rest of the cafeteria made him uncomfortable. Whispers and glances swirled around them like an irritating buzz, but Damon forced himself to keep a calm facade. The last thing he wanted was to embarrass himself further.

Evangeline, in stark contrast, seemed unbothered by the attention. Her golden hair shimmered under the cafeteria lights, and her sun-kissed eyes were focused solely on him.

With Damon seated again, she finally spoke, her voice soft but clear.

"I want you to be my sparring partner."

Damon furrowed his brows, his expression darkening.

'Sparring partner? She caused such a commotion for that?'

But then, confusion hit him like a wave.

'Why would she want me? Doesn't she know I'm the weakest guy here? My mana pool barely scrapes 30...'

He stared at her, suspicion pooling in his black eyes.

'She's trying to humiliate me. That's it. Typical noble games.'

His lips pressed into a thin line as he chewed on his inner cheek.

'Or maybe... it's some kind of scheme. Why would someone like her want to associate with me of all people?'

Damon's sharp gaze swept over her, noticing the way her fork trembled slightly in her hand despite her outwardly composed demeanor.

"Why do you want me?" he asked coldly, his voice laced with mistrust.

Evangeline blinked, as if the question itself was absurd. Her golden eyes widened slightly before softening with clarity.

"Isn't it obvious?" she said, her tone steady.

"You're really strong. You have incredible mastery over your body in combat—you dodged my light magic using only reinforcement magic. You also have the battle awareness to anticipate my every move."

She delivered the explanation in one fluid breath, her words filled with admiration.

Damon, however, sat frozen. Confusion twisted his features as her praise bounced around in his head.

'Reinforcement magic? I can't even use that.'

He glanced at her, his frown deepening.

'Mastery over my body? The only thing I'm good at is running away... what is she even talking about?'

Subtly, Damon's eyes flicked to the side, where his shadow stretched ominously along the floor.

'Anticipating her attacks...' he thought grimly.

'It wasn't me. It was my shadow taking control when Shadow Hunger hit 80%. That's all.'

His chest tightened as he remembered the sensation of losing control, the primal, gnawing hunger that overtook him. Her light attribute had burned into his senses, a radiant beacon that made her... different.

Evangeline waited for him, her posture poised yet patient. Seconds stretched uncomfortably, her gaze unwavering, while Damon wrestled with his thoughts.

Finally, he leaned back in his chair, his expression icy.

"You've got the wrong idea, Evangeline Brightwater. I'm not the guy you think I am."

Damon sighed, his frustration barely contained as he addressed the persistent girl in front of him.

"Evangeline Brightwater... I hope you realize that I'm the academy's weakest student. I can't help you. Someone of your strength level would destroy me in a spar or any type of training."

His words were blunt, but he hoped the truth would make her reconsider. Without the temporary stat boost from his shadow hunger, he was, by all measurable standards, the lowest-ranked student in the academy.

But Evangeline wasn't swayed. Her confident demeanor remained unshaken, and she tilted her head slightly, misinterpreting his rejection as mere modesty.

"I insist," she said firmly.

"You're the only one among the first years who can spar with me evenly... and even surpass me."

Damon's eye twitched, irritation flickering behind his calm expression. He was over this conversation.

He glanced around the bustling cafeteria, his gaze landing on Sylvia Moonveil, an elf girl seated nearby who appeared far more interested in her meal than the growing spectacle.

"What about Sylvia Moonveil? She's ranked number two, right?" he suggested, hoping to redirect Evangeline's determination.

Evangeline shook her head without hesitation.

"I'm stronger than her," she replied confidently.

"And her combat style doesn't suit me. Besides, elves are different from us humans."

Damon sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"Isn't she your friend. That's racist," he muttered dryly.

Evangeline smiled at his comment, seemingly amused.

"You're a very forward person," she said with a hint of admiration.

Damon shot her a deadpan look, his thoughts sharp and biting.

'I'm not. You're just reading into nothing.'

But, of course, his thoughts didn't reach her.

Scanning the room again, Damon's eyes settled on Xander Ravenscroft, who was glaring daggers at him from across the cafeteria. A sly smile crept onto Damon's face as an idea formed.

"What about him?" Damon said, gesturing toward Xander.

"Xander Ravenscroft. He's ranked number three among the first years, and he's human—just like us."

Evangeline turned briefly to glance at Xander before shaking her head again, her golden hair shimmering in the light. Xander, who couldn't hear their conversation, visibly paled at her disappointed expression.

"He's much weaker than you," Evangeline said matter-of-factly.

"It doesn't matter who you point out among the first years. None of them are strong enough to match either of us."

Damon kept his gaze fixed on Xander, who now looked ready to explode with rage.

"In that case, why not the second years?" Damon continued, his voice tinged with sarcasm.

"The student council president, Lilith Astranova, is practically in a class of her own. Or there's number two, Renata—"

Evangeline cut him off with a wave of her hand.

"No," she said with a small laugh.

"I'm looking to spar, not to die. Lady Astranova has already awakened her third class, and Renata is nearly on her level. None of the first years, including us, have had a class awakening yet."

She picked up her glass and took a measured sip, her eyes glinting with resolve.

"That's why I want us to train together."

Damon didn't respond immediately. His gaze drifted behind her to where Xander Ravenscroft was still glaring at him, his expression dark with simmering fury.

Noticing Damon's distraction, Evangeline turned to see Xander approaching, his steps firm and deliberate.

"Lady Brightwater," Xander began, his voice filled with indignation,

"it is far beneath your standing to sit with this lowlife, let alone ask him to be your sparring partner. Surely you're unaware, but he is the last-ranked first-year student—and at record-breaking levels, at that."

His voice rose with each word, drawing attention from nearby tables.

Pointing at Damon's chest, Xander continued,

"Do you see that brooch? That's a probationary brooch—reserved for the absolute worst students. Only the most disgraceful failures have the dishonor of wearing it."

Murmurs spread through the cafeteria like wildfire.

"A probation brooch? I didn't even notice it."

"I thought those were just rumors."

"How bad do you have to be to get one?"

"Wait, isn't that the guy with a mana level of 30?"

"No way! What's someone like that doing here?"

Damon heard every insult, every mocking whisper, but his face remained calm, his expression betraying nothing. Only his shadow betrayed his inner turmoil, quivering erratically with suppressed anger.

'Xander Ravenscroft... I will not forget this humiliation.'

Taking a deep breath, Damon finally glanced at Evangeline, his voice calm but laced with subtle defiance.

"Evangeline," he said, intentionally using her first name to enrage Xander further.

"Like I said before, I can't be your sparring partner. I am, after all, the academy's weakest."

Without waiting for her reply, Damon stood, his movements deliberate and composed. Ignoring Evangeline's calls, he walked out of the cafeteria, his expression eerily calm, leaving behind the murmurs and stares that had begun to suffocate the room.