

Living Shadow 27

Chapter 27 No Allies

Damon Grey was a sore loser, with a massive ego and a pride far beyond his station—or so people claimed. It was a reputation he'd earned during his short, tumultuous life, and one he didn't entirely deny.

But Damon had learned early on that bowing your head and begging didn't make the pain stop. It didn't ease the humiliation. The people who oppressed others found joy in seeing them grovel, and Damon had decided long ago that he would never give them that satisfaction again.

He had bowed enough. He had begged enough. And yet, humiliation had followed him like a shadow. But at least now, when it came, he stood tall.

Nobles. Every single one of them was the same in his eyes. They exploited the commoners simply because they could, knowing the oppressed would rarely fight back.

The irony wasn't lost on him. The means of production lay in the hands of the common people, yet they were the ones eating scraps—when they ate at all. Damon knew what it was like to starve, to watch others waste food as if it were nothing.

He knew what it felt like to eat crumbs that someone had deliberately trampled underfoot, savoring even that because it was all he had.

He'd seen it all—the inhumane treatment, the casual cruelty. That was why Damon would always hold a negative bias toward nobles.

And Xander Ravenscroft? He was the cookie-cutter image of everything Damon despised. They had never spoken before today. Hell, Xander had barely acknowledged his existence until now.

But that didn't matter. Damon hated him for the simple fact that he was Xander Ravenscroft.

And now, Xander had given him even more reason to hate him.

Damon gritted his teeth as he made his way toward the library, his shadow trailing him like an obedient companion, its movements perfectly mimicking his.

The library building loomed large in front of him, its grand doors a silent promise of refuge and knowledge. Just as Damon reached for the handle, a cold, sharp sensation exploded across his side.

The impact sent him flying, his back slamming into the unyielding stone wall with a sickening thud. Air rushed from his lungs, and he coughed violently, groaning as pain flared through his body.

Shaking off the haze, Damon struggled to his feet, his eyes locking onto a group of angry faces. Marcus Fayjoy stood at the forefront, his lips curled into a sneer.

Xander Ravenscroft's lackeys.

Marcus raised his hand, the faint glow of mana gathering as another ball of ice materialized in his palm.

Damon frowned, his fists clenching. He wasn't in the mood for this, but it seemed they weren't going to give him a choice.

"You just don't know when to quit, do you?" Marcus jeered, the ice orb in his hand glowing ominously.

"Surround him," Marcus commanded.

The other boys quickly moved, forming a semicircle around Damon. Their actions didn't go unnoticed, as a small crowd of onlookers began to gather, murmuring amongst themselves.

"What's going on there?"

"Are they planning to gang up on him?"

"Someone call a professor—they can't fight here!"

Damon smiled coldly, his black eyes scanning his would-be attackers.

'Hmm, they must be really pissed to try something like this in broad daylight. Not even the patience to wait until I was somewhere secluded.'

Getting picked on wasn't new to Damon, but having an audience for his humiliation? That was something new.

He quickly assessed his chances. With his newfound skill, [5x], he could multiply his mana reserves fivefold. But even then, it wouldn't be enough—not against Marcus and his cronies. His other stats weren't worth mentioning either.

His gaze shifted to his shadow, which lay still beneath him, its edges sharp and clear against the cobblestones.

'I need to get stronger.'

Damon's lips curled into a mocking smile as he straightened his posture.

"To what do I owe the honor, for a group of noble lords to grace a nameless commoner like me? Truly, I'm blessed," he sneered, his cold voice dripping with derision.

Marcus's face twisted with rage, a vein on his forehead visibly pulsing. He took a deep breath, struggling to maintain his composure.

"You've crossed a line today, Grey," Marcus growled.

"You messed up. So, I'll be a nice guy and give you a friendly warning. Lady Brightwater is a noble, far out of your league. We don't know what dirty trick you used to mislead her, but someone like her is beyond the likes of you. If we see you anywhere near her again, you'll regret it."

Damon wiped the streak of blood from his mouth, a remnant of Marcus's initial attack, and smiled defiantly.

"Would be a little hard when we're in the same class. And besides, shouldn't you be telling your lady that? If I remember correctly, she was the one who approached me."

Marcus's face darkened, his anger boiling over. He turned and hurled a ball of ice magic at the wall, the impact sending shards flying.

"You never learn, do you? Fine then—we'll beat it into you until you understand!"

Damon's eyes grew colder, his body tensing as he prepared for the inevitable.

"Sure. I'd like to see you try."

He quickly went over every possible outcome in his mind, and none of them favored him. But that didn't mean he would just stand there and take it.

Marcus signaled to the others, their hands beginning to glow with the hues of their respective magic. Damon braced himself, knowing he was seconds away from being bombarded from all directions.

"That's enough! What is going on here?"

The cold, commanding voice of Professor Kael Blackthorn cut through the tension like a knife. Damon stiffened, his gaze snapping to the approaching figure. Any other day, he would have avoided Blackthorn like the plague. But now? He was glad the professor had arrived.

Kael Blackthorn was a no-nonsense type of person, and Damon knew he wouldn't condone something like this, at least not openly.

Marcus and his group paled at the sound of his voice, their bravado vanishing in an instant.

"Oh, good afternoon, Professor," Marcus said, forcing a smile.

"Nothing's going on. We were just giving Grey here a proper demonstration of what actual magic looks like."

He glanced at his cronies, who nodded quickly.

"Isn't that right, guys?"

"Yeah, Grey needed help."

"Yes, sir, we were just showing him some spells."

Marcus smiled smugly.

"You heard them, Professor."

Kael's eyes narrowed, his sharp gaze shifting to Damon. Blood stained Damon's lips, and his expression was colder than usual.

"Is that true?" Kael asked.

Damon's fists clenched, anger bubbling beneath the surface.

'What do you care?'

The thought nearly escaped his lips, but he swallowed it down. Instead, he stayed silent, his defiant glare speaking volumes.

Sensing the tension, Marcus seized the opportunity to retreat.

"Well, Professor, since you're here, we'll take our leave."

Without waiting for a response, Marcus and his group hurried off, eager to avoid further scrutiny. The crowd dispersed soon after, their curiosity satisfied.

Kael stepped closer to Damon, his expression unreadable.

"For your own good, Damon Grey, take my advice and drop out. You don't belong here. You'll never make it at the academy."

Damon's jaw tightened, his nails digging into his palms. The professor's words were like a dagger to his pride.

"And I said go screw yourself," Damon whispered, his voice dripping with venom.

Kael's eyes briefly flickered with something—amusement, perhaps—but he didn't respond. Instead, he turned and walked away, his robes billowing behind him.

Damon's glare followed him until he disappeared from view. He knew Kael Blackthorn wanted him gone more than anyone else. The professor hadn't stepped in to protect him—he'd simply wanted to witness Damon fail.

Kael Blackthorn wasn't an ally. He was just another noble.