

Living Shadow 29

Chapter 29 Unexpected Guest

Damon woke up with his head resting on his study table, his cheek pressed against the rough pages of an open book. The morning sun streamed through the window, bathing the room in warm light as he groggily pushed himself upright, rubbing his face with a frown.

He scanned the room instinctively, searching for something most people wouldn't even think about-his shadow.

Sure enough, he found it. It wasn't where it should have been, stretched obediently across the floor or walls. Instead, it lingered in a far corner, a formless patch of darkness curled in defiance of the sunlight.

"Hey, get over here," Damon commanded, his voice rough from sleep.

The shadow obeyed, gliding across the floor like liquid night until it returned to its proper place beneath him. The sunlight streaming in elongated it unnaturally, casting it across the room.

"Small men cast large shadows... if the conditions are right," Damon muttered to himself, eyeing the distorted projection.

The shadow waved at him in greeting, its edges rippling like smoke caught in a breeze.

"Yes, good morning to you too," he replied dryly. Stretching his arms, he yawned deeply before addressing it again.

"Now then, let's check the system window. Time to monitor our progress... especially regarding hunger."

With a thought, a translucent interface materialized before him, the glowing text hovering in the air:

[HP: 50/50]

[Mana: 35/35]

[Strength: 9]

[Agility: 12]

[Speed: 25]

[Endurance: 10]

[Class: -]

[Shadow Energy: 73]

[Shadow Hunger Levels: 12%]

[Shadow Level: 1]

[Condition: Shadow is Full]

[Attributes: Umbra]

[Skills:]

[5x]

[Locked]

"Hmm... shadow energy is at 73, and hunger levels are at 12%," Damon muttered, stroking his chin thoughtfully.

"As I suspected, there's a strong correlation between the two-just as the system said."

His eyes narrowed as he mentally calculated.

"If I'm not wrong, judging by the rate at which shadow energy depletes and hunger increases, I have roughly 72 hours before I'll need to... feed."

He glanced down at the shadow cast at his feet.

"Is that right?"

The shadow nodded, its form rippling faintly in confirmation.

"Thought so," Damon muttered. His gaze grew sharper as he recalled a particular incident.

"But there's a problem. On certain occasions, I lose shadow energy without realizing it. Like when you absorbed the brunt of the professor's aura. That's why my energy dropped so drastically back then, wasn't it?"

Again, the shadow nodded, almost sheepishly this time.

Damon sighed, remembering the moment clearly. A beastkin professor had decided to intimidate him for being late to class, unleashing a wave of pressure that should have overwhelmed him. Instead, his shadow had silently taken the hit, sparing him but at a cost.

"Yeah, well... thanks for that, I guess," he said begrudgingly.

"But next time, let me handle it unless it's absolutely necessary. I need to

conserve energy for when it really matters."

The shadow rippled in agreement, its edges smoothing out as if appeased.

Shaking off the memory, Damon stood, stretched once more, and began getting ready for the day. As he threw on his uniform and slung a bag over his shoulder, his thoughts were already turning to the future.

Two days. That's all the time he had before his shadow's hunger would become a problem again. And this time, he needed to be ready.

Damon attended his classes without drawing unnecessary attention to himself. He made no effort to avoid Evangeline Brightwater, but she didn't approach him either. Instead, she kept glancing at him during class, her expression unreadable, though she made no move to speak.

However, Evangeline wasn't the only one with eyes on him. Xander Ravenscroft's piercing gaze alternated between Damon and Evangeline, as though he were piecing together a puzzle only he understood.

Damon, too, kept his eyes on Xander's group, but for entirely different reasons. His motives weren't born of curiosity but of survival—a dark, desperate hunger brewing within him. Xander Ravenscroft himself was untouchable. He was not only stronger but also a scion of a powerful noble family, whose wrath Damon could not afford to invoke.

That left Xander's lackeys: Damon's tormentors and bullies.

His gaze flicked briefly to the system interface.

[Shadow Level 1]

Souls Consumed: [1/3]

'I need two more to level up, he thought grimly.

He spent the entire day observing them but found no opportunity to act. His patience wore thin until he overheard their conversation. Apparently, they were planning to sneak out of the academy after curfew to party at Athor's Sanctuary.

Xander had instructed them to ask around about Lark Bonaire's whereabouts-a

futile effort.

"Too bad they won't find anything,' Damon thought with a cold smile.

By the time classes ended, the day had passed faster than expected. Damon considered going to the library but realized he'd been neglecting his physical training. Training in the academy's designated spaces wasn't an option; too many eyes were watching. Instead, he decided to visit his usual spot in the woods. The location was uncomfortably close to where he had killed Lark Bonaire—not directly near it, but close enough to stir unease. Damon debated avoiding the area entirely until the voices of Marcus and his group searching for him left him no choice. For privacy's sake, the woods were his only option.

When Damon arrived, he slipped off his uniform jacket and shirt, exposing his lean frame to the sun. His body wasn't bulky, but his muscles were defined-more so than he remembered. Damon attributed his improved physique to the subtle enhancements made by the system.

He approached the weapons rack and deliberated before selecting a bow. If he was

going to take on Marcus and his group, all of whom were individually stronger than him, he needed the skills of a hunter-someone who could kill beasts

stronger than themselves.

Knocking an arrow, Damon aimed at a target, only to miss. Undeterred, he pulled

another arrow, adjusted his stance, and loosed it again. The process became mechanical, his shots sometimes hitting the target but more often missing.

'If I want to win, I can't face them head-on,' he thought, frowning as another

arrow sailed wide.

'Not without the boost from shadow hunger. But if I rely on that, I'll lose control and leave behind too much evidence.'

He paused, considering his plan methodically.

'I'll have to act before the hunger clouds my mind. Fight them while I'm weaker

but still lucid enough to make smarter decisions.

Damon fired another arrow, this time grazing the edge of the target.

'I could enhance my arrows with mana using the skill [5x]. Maybe even coat them

in poison to weaken them.'

His thoughts settled on Athor's Sanctuary. It wasn't just a town party venue; it

was also home to vendors who dealt in all manner of goods. If he followed Marcus

and his group, he could learn their route out of the academy without being caught and use the opportunity to procure what he needed.

His lips curled into a cold smile. "When they leave, I'll follow them-"

"Who do you intend to follow?"

The sudden voice snapped Damon from his thoughts. He spun around, his heart

freezing as fear surged through him.

Standing there was a red-haired girl with piercing emerald eyes, her academy

uniform pristine. Damon's breath hitched, sweat forming on his brow as

recognition struck.

"Student... council president," he stammered, his voice faltering. Her gaze was sharp and cool. Damon's stomach twisted as he realized his moment of privacy had been completely shattered.