

## Living Shadow 32

### Chapter 32 Tailing

Damon followed Marcus Fayjoy from the shadows, his movements precise and silent. He let his shadow scout ahead while he trailed slowly behind. Reaching the ground floor was easy enough; as long as they made no noise, the ever-watchful headmaid wouldn't notice.

He observed Marcus slip through the dining hall and into the kitchen, the faint creak of the door barely audible.

Damon crouched behind a row of chairs, gesturing for his shadow to proceed. Once the shadow disappeared through the kitchen door, Damon waited a moment before entering cautiously.

By the time he stepped inside, Marcus was gone. That was fine. His shadow, lingering near one of the side doors, motioned to him silently. Damon followed its gaze to the door, noting where it led.

'This door goes to the garden,' he thought. 'Why not just use the main exit through the kitchen?'

Still, he didn't question it further. Instead, he sent his shadow through the door and waited a few seconds before slipping through himself.

---

The soft glow of the twin moons bathed the academy grounds in a faint, ethereal light. Damon scanned the garden for his shadow and found it waving at him from behind a cluster of flower beds. He moved quickly but quietly, keeping his figure low.

Ahead, Marcus pushed through a hedge wall that, to Damon's surprise, didn't resist.

'No way,' Damon thought as he stopped at the edge. His eyes narrowed, his fingers brushing against the thick greenery. 'They actually destroyed part of the hedge and covered it with illusion magic?'

Testing it, Damon pressed his weight against the foliage. Despite its tangible appearance, he slipped through with ease, emerging on the other side of the academy's dormitory perimeter.

"This is elven illusion magic," he murmured under his breath, his eyes scanning the skillful design. "It's too refined. Seniors must have done this."

Marcus, still unaware of his pursuer, continued moving cautiously. Damon's shadow crept closer to their target, following Marcus's every move as he navigated the outer grounds.

---

Escaping the dormitory was the easy part, but leaving the academy itself would be the real challenge. First-year students like Damon weren't allowed to leave, especially at night. It was a privilege reserved for senior students, who could do so without fear of consequence due to their strength and standing.

Still, it was an open secret that first-years often found ways to sneak out, usually heading to Athor's Sanctuary—the nearest town—for a taste of freedom. While the academy's faculty often turned a blind eye to these escapades, being caught still carried the risk of punishment, particularly from the student council, who patrolled the town for wayward first-years.

Damon didn't know the finer details of these escape routes. He wasn't particularly close to his fellow first-years, nor had he shown much interest in these outings before. Tonight, however, was different.

From his hidden position, Damon watched as Marcus stopped outside one of the academy's detached buildings. A few minutes passed before members of Marcus's group joined him. The boys exchanged hurried whispers before moving as a group—not towards the academy gates, but toward a section of the outer wall.

Damon tilted his head, observing their path.

'That's... a waterway, isn't it?'

He squinted, recalling rumors about an old drainage system that extended beneath the academy.

"Hey, stay close to them," he whispered.

His shadow acknowledged the command with a quick gesture, slipping closer to the group while maintaining its cover. Damon followed at a safe distance, his heart pounding with anticipation. Whatever Marcus and his group were up to, Damon intended to find out.

They reached the outer wall, where a faint barrier shimmered in the moonlight. Instead of touching it, Marcus and his group descended carefully into the paved waterway below. Damon followed at a distance, crouching low as they approached a set of heavy metal bars embedded in the wall.

Marcus stepped forward and tapped the bars in a distinct rhythm. Almost instantly, the metal shimmered faintly, and the group passed through with ease.

Damon blinked in surprise.

'That's not illusion magic... what is it?' He memorized the tapping sequence, waiting for the group to move on before stepping closer.

When the area was clear, he approached the bars. Pressing a hand against them, he confirmed they were solid. With a steady breath, he replicated the same rhythmic taps Marcus had used, but nothing happened.

Frowning, he tried again, this time ensuring his taps matched the exact timing. The second attempt worked; the bars shimmered, granting him passage.

"That was close," he muttered to himself, stepping through. "I was too tense."

His shadow waved from the other side, beckoning him forward. Damon passed through and found himself standing in a dense forest outside the academy's boundaries. In the distance, he spotted faint trails leading away.

"Spatial magic..." Damon's eyes widened as he studied his surroundings.

"Someone actually used a high-level spatial spell for this. I can't underestimate my peers' desperation to party—or just to feel free."

He looked around, but Marcus and his group were already out of sight.

"Where did they go?"

His shadow glided ahead, and Damon followed its lead, weaving through the trees until he stopped behind a large Magi oak. Peering out, he saw Marcus and his companions boarding a carriage.

The horses neighed softly, and the carriage began to roll away. Damon's jaw tightened.

"I'm going to lose them."

He didn't have the stamina to keep up over a long distance, nor the mana reserves to maintain high level movement magic. Eyeing the back of the carriage, he decided to hitch a ride.

The vehicle was already gaining speed, so Damon activated his skill.

"[5x Speed]."

A burst of energy surged through him.

[Speed: 125]

In an instant, his body accelerated, the world around him blurring as he sprinted after the carriage. He caught up swiftly, grabbing onto the back and hoisting himself up. Flattening his body against the wooden frame, he made sure he wasn't visible from inside.

He exhaled softly. The ride wasn't comfortable, but it was better than falling behind.

---

The carriage rumbled along the path toward Athor's Sanctuary. Along the way, Damon noticed other students sneaking through the woods or taking hidden trails toward the town. A few he recognized as first-years like himself, moving so stealthily he wouldn't have seen them if not for his shadow pointing them out.

As the bright lights of Athor's Sanctuary came into view, Damon prepared to dismount. When the carriage slowed slightly, he leaped off, landing gracefully on the road.

"Stay with them," he instructed his shadow, which continued trailing the group as the carriage entered the town.

Damon blended into a crowd of travelers, his sharp eyes scanning the bustling streets.

---

Athor's Sanctuary was alive with activity. Bright lanterns illuminated the cobblestone roads, and vendors called out their wares from colorful stalls. Food carts, trinket shops, and performers lined the streets, creating a vibrant atmosphere.

At the center of the town stood a towering statue of the Goddess of Doom, her sword and scales gleaming ominously in the lantern light. The sight of it sent a shiver down Damon's spine.

The lively streets made him uneasy for another reason—he had no shadow. With his companion busy tailing Marcus's group, Damon felt exposed. He stuck out in a subtle yet unnatural way, something he hoped no one would notice.

As he navigated the crowded streets, Damon faced a new problem. He didn't know anyone in the town, nor was he familiar with its layout. Scammers and thieves were bound to be lurking, and he also had to watch for the student council, who might be patrolling for wayward first-years.

Still, Damon wasn't entirely out of his depth. He'd lived on the streets before and pulled off a fair share of scams himself. He just needed to keep his composure, blend in, and avoid looking like an easy target.

"Ah, hello there!" A cheerful voice interrupted his thoughts. "You must be new here. Allow me to show you around Athor's Sanctuary."

Damon sighed inwardly. He hadn't even made it far, and already a vulture had approached him, looking for an easy mark.