

Living Shadow 34

Chapter 34 Energy Drain

"Damn that stingy shopkeeper..." Damon muttered under his breath, clicking his tongue in irritation.

His stomach growled, a sharp reminder of his growing hunger. He'd spent the last thirty minutes inside the shop haggling over the price of a worn-out cloak. The shopkeeper's stubbornness had tested Damon's patience, but every zenì mattered. He couldn't afford to waste money unless it was absolutely necessary.

'I'll be using this cloak for a very long time,' he thought grimly.

The cloak wasn't much to look at—its brown fabric was already fraying at the edges, and it had clearly seen better days. Still, Damon had prioritized durability over appearance, even while being a cheapskate. The hooded cloak reached all the way to his legs, effectively concealing his academy uniform beneath.

Glancing at his shadow, Damon frowned slightly. An unusual hunger gnawed at him, more unsettling than the pangs from his empty stomach. He couldn't quite place the feeling, but it left him uneasy.

"Alright, let's go. Show me where Marcus and his group went," he said, his tone sharp.

His shadow responded with its customary thumbs up before slipping away, moving fluidly along the cobblestones. Damon followed at a measured pace, careful not to attract attention. The cloak helped, but he was acutely aware of the unusual sight he presented—a person without a shadow, especially when cloaked, was bound to draw notice.

Athor's Sanctuary was still alive with activity, even though it was well past midnight. The streets bustled with adventurers, merchants, and townsfolk, the warm glow of lanterns illuminating the lively scene. Damon's shadow led him toward the more affluent part of town, where the Adventurers' Guild was located.

The moment Damon stepped into the district, he felt the shift in atmosphere. Lavish storefronts lined the streets, their goods displayed behind polished glass. Restaurants exuded sophistication, their interiors visible through grand windows, and their menus undoubtedly far beyond Damon's meager budget.

The area was undeniably safer than the rest of town, thanks to the guild's enforcement of the rules. Still, Damon knew better than to trust appearances. Some adventurers were little more than criminals with licenses, but they wouldn't dare commit crimes here. The nobles who frequented this district ensured swift consequences for anyone foolish enough to disrupt the peace.

Damon glanced at the opulent surroundings and sighed.

'This world will always favor the rich and powerful... and the nobles are both,' he thought bitterly, his teeth clenched in frustration.

His shadow stopped abruptly near a grand fountain in the center of the district. Damon approached it cautiously, watching as his shadow pointed toward a building across the street.

It was a restaurant—a lavish establishment that radiated sophistication and exclusivity. The golden glow from its chandeliers spilled out onto the street, and the scent of rich, decadent food lingered in the air.

Damon's eyes narrowed as he saw a group of students entering the restaurant. They carried themselves with the confidence of seniors, students who had earned enough freedom to indulge in such luxuries.

"I can't enter a place like that dressed like this," Damon muttered to himself, tugging slightly at his cloak.

The garment, while practical, was far too shabby for such an establishment. Damon had no intention of discarding it, especially after all the trouble he'd gone through to buy it. Besides, he didn't need to follow Marcus and his group inside. Observing them from a distance would suffice.

'No way I'm wasting money on a place like that,' Damon thought, his frugal instincts flaring. He positioned himself discreetly by the fountain, watching and waiting for the right moment to act.

Damon stood outside the lavish restaurant, his gaze fixed on its ornate facade as he considered his next move. He needed to wait for Marcus and his group to leave. An ambush would be the easiest way to isolate one of them, allowing him to feed his shadow and keep it satisfied.

His stomach growled loudly, interrupting his thoughts.

"Damn it... I'm already feeling hungry. I've got at least a day or two before I hit ravenous, right?"

Unease crept in as he opened his system panel, his face going pale as he stared at the stats displayed before him.

[HP: 50/50]

[Mana: 35/35]

[Strength: 9]

[Agility: 12]

[Speed: 25]

[Endurance: 10]

[Class: —]

[Shadow: 24]

[Shadow Hunger Level: 51%]

[Shadow Level: 1]

[Condition: Shadow Is Mildly Hungry]

[Attributes: Umbra]

Skills: [5x]

[Locked]

"Ugh... no way..." Damon muttered, his heart sinking.

"How did my shadow energy drop so much in such a short time?"

He glanced down at his shadow, which quivered slightly in response.

"Wait... sending you to follow Marcus and his group... being so far from me must have drained your energy," he murmured, narrowing his eyes.

"Damn it. This was a mistake on my part..."

The weight of the situation pressed down on him. His shadow was growing hungrier by the moment, and he knew he couldn't afford to let its hunger spiral out of control.

Looking around, Damon noticed a modest tavern not far from the Adventurers' Guild. It wasn't as grand as the restaurant across the street, but it was busy enough to provide cover while still affording him a view of the establishment where Marcus had gone.

'First, I'll need some zeni,' Damon thought, scanning his surroundings.

He spotted a small shop nearby, one he knew would exchange cash if he used his magic money card. Slipping inside, he completed the transaction in a matter of minutes, pocketing the physical currency.

The Magic Money Card—or MMC—was a marvel of Aeron's advancements in magical technology. It allowed users to store their funds securely, linked to an account accessible through war banks or authorized outlets. The Academy had issued Damon one upon his enrollment, loading his scholarship funds and benefits directly into it.

While it was convenient, Damon couldn't risk drawing attention to himself by withdrawing zeni in a rowdy place like the tavern. Such establishments were magnets for troublemakers, and with his meager skills, Damon had no desire to invite the wrath of adventurers or thieves.

Pulling his cloak tighter around him, Damon crossed the street and pushed open the tavern's heavy door. The smell of stale ale and roasting meat greeted him, along with the din of boisterous conversations.

His arrival was immediately punctuated by chaos. A skinny man flew through the air toward him, seemingly tossed by an unseen force. Damon sidestepped effortlessly, his reflexes honed from years of surviving in the streets.

He glanced toward the source of the commotion and froze.

Standing in the center of the tavern was Leona Valefier. Her dark hair, streaked with white highlights, framed her sharp golden eyes, and her animal-like ears twitched slightly as she held a mug in one hand.

Damon instinctively pulled his hood lower, hoping to avoid her gaze.

The tavern's patrons were too absorbed in their revelry to care about the brief scuffle, but Leona's sharp eyes locked onto him. Damon tried to maneuver toward a secluded corner table, but before he could sit, her voice cut through the noise.

"Hey! I finally found you. I've been looking for you all night," she declared, her tone a mix of relief and irritation.

Damon's heart sank. This wasn't going to be a simple night after all.