

Living Shadow 35

Chapter 35 Subject Of Misunderstandings

Damon kept his hood low, avoiding Leona Valefier's piercing golden gaze as he moved to a table by the window. From here, he could keep a clear view of the restaurant where Marcus and his group were gathered. He slid into the seat without a word, hoping she would leave him be.

Leona, however, was not so easily deterred. She followed him without hesitation and sat across from him, her mug clinking against the wooden table as she placed it down.

"That's very rude, you know," she said, her voice light but with a cold edge.

"You can't just ignore someone like that."

Damon didn't respond, keeping his gaze fixed on the window.

'What is wrong with this girl, and why is she even talking to me?' he thought, annoyed.

Leona's golden eyes flickered with amusement, and she leaned in slightly.

"Hey, why did you sneak out of the academy? I thought you were going to cook something tasty. Hmm... but this is fun too, I guess."

Damon narrowed his eyes beneath his hood, his mind racing.

'Did she follow me? Of course she did... How am I slipping up this much? Have I lost my edge?'

Leona, for her part, had been following Damon from the moment she saw him enter the dormitory kitchen. She'd initially assumed he was about to prepare some kind of midnight snack, and she'd planned to join in.

But when he left the academy instead, her curiosity had been piqued. She trailed him as he moved through the town, though she briefly lost track of him when he disappeared into a crowd. Finding him here at the tavern was sheer luck—or so she believed.

Yet Damon's silence puzzled her. She'd expected at least some sort of acknowledgment, but instead, he seemed intent on ignoring her entirely.

Leona shrugged and downed the contents of her mug just as a tavern waitress approached their table.

"Welcome to the Drunk Imp! What can I get for you?" the waitress asked cheerfully.

Leona glanced at Damon, not bothering to hide the fact that she hadn't brought any money. The mug she'd been drinking from? Paid for by the unfortunate skinny man she'd tossed out of the tavern earlier.

She fully expected Damon to foot the bill for anything else she ordered, and she didn't feel the least bit ashamed.

In Lothria, her homeland on the wild continent, the strong naturally commanded respect and resources. To her, Damon was undeniably the strongest first-year in the academy, even if he didn't act like it. Letting someone stronger take the lead wasn't a blow to her pride—it was simply how things worked.

Damon, however, was completely unaware of Leona's reasoning or the conclusions she'd drawn about him. He didn't know that his actions—intentional or otherwise—had convinced her that he was far stronger than he truly was. In reality, he was barely scraping by, but her assumptions couldn't have been further from the truth.

"What'll it be?" the waitress repeated, glancing between the two of them.

Damon sighed, pulling his hood a little lower. This night was only getting more complicated.

His stomach growled loudly, and he scowled in irritation. He reached into his pocket, pulling out three zeni and placing it on the table.

"Meat and drink—whatever this can get me. Make sure I stay sober tonight," he said curtly.

Before the waitress could leave, Leona Valefier chimed in with a grin.

"I'll take the same thing I just drank earlier. It's pretty good."

The waitress hesitated, glancing at Damon for approval. He gave no reaction, simply pulling his hood lower. Taking that as consent, she walked away with the money.

Damon turned his gaze toward Leona, glaring at her from beneath his hood.

'She better not be planning to drink on my hard-earned zen... or we're going to have a problem,' he thought bitterly.

Leona smiled at him, unfazed.

"You're so mean, Damon. I can't believe you didn't cook yesterday! I was so hungry I had to eat all the cold, tasteless junk left in the dorms."

Damon narrowed his eyes at her, his tone sharp.

"How do you know my name? And why are you acting like I'm supposed to care?"

He wasn't surprised she knew his name. His reputation as the weakest student in the academy often made him a cautionary example for what not to be.

Leona, however, hadn't learned his name through gossip or infamy. She tilted her head innocently.

"I overheard it."

Damon's glare deepened.

"From where?"

"Evangeline and Sylvia," she said nonchalantly.

"I just happened to hear them talking about you."

The mention of those names piqued Damon's interest. Evangeline Brightwater and Sylvia Moonveil were the two strongest students in their year. If they were talking about him, it couldn't be good. Still, he didn't want to appear too eager and risk giving Leona any leverage.

"Evangeline Brightwater and Sylvia Moonveil talking about me? Doubt it," he replied, feigning disinterest.

Leona brushed her hair aside, her golden eyes sparkling.

"I'm serious. Evangeline said you—"

Before she could finish, the waitress returned, setting trays of meat and drinks on their table. She placed a mug in front of Damon and another in front of Leona, then filled the rest of the space with steaming plates of food.

The moment she left, both Damon and Leona lunged for the food, grabbing handfuls of meat with their hands. Damon ate quickly and efficiently, his stomach finally quieting. But watching Leona devour the food on his dime made his heart ache.

'She's going to pay back every penny she owes me—with interest. Even if I can't beat her now, the moment I can, she's paying up.' Damon had always been too frugal to let anyone waste his money without consequences.

The food disappeared fast. Damon ate just enough to satisfy his hunger, while Leona devoured the rest without shame. They drained their mugs at the same time, slamming them onto the table in unison.

Leona wiped her hands with a handkerchief, as if suddenly remembering something.

"Right, where was I? Oh, yeah—I'm telling the truth."

Damon sighed, already regretting entertaining the conversation.

"You've already said that. Now pay up. You owe me ten zeni with a 70% interest rate for every day you don't pay."

Leona blinked in confusion.

"But didn't you only pay three zeni for all this? I don't have my magic money card with me right now, so I'll pay you back when we get back to the academy."

She slammed her hand on the table before Damon could respond.

"Anyway, all that petty change stuff isn't important!"

Damon bit his lip, frustrated.

'Of course, a rich noble doesn't think money is important. Damn those nobles.'

Leona leaned forward, her golden eyes gleaming with excitement.

"As I was saying, I heard you were strong. And now I've confirmed it for myself. So... fight me. I want to know what it's like to battle the strongest guy in our class."