

Living Shadow 51

Chapter 51 Pride Over Money

It was well past midnight by the time Damon finished testing his weapons and experimenting with his newly expanded mana pool. Exhaustion tugged at his body, but he forced himself to focus. Pulling out his collection of materials, he meticulously recorded what he had gathered.

Among the inventory were monster fluids, herbs, and chemical solutions. Each item had been chosen with purpose.

'This should do,' Damon thought, his eyes scanning the list.

He had deliberately avoided buying ready-made poisons—not only were they expensive, but purchasing them left a trail that could lead back to him. Instead, he had opted for the raw materials, planning to craft the concoctions himself.

Two primary poisons were needed: a lethal one for swift kills and another that acted fast. Beyond that, he required paralyzing agents, poisons to incapacitate, and smokes for both offense and escape.

Smoke bombs were a priority, especially those that could mask his scent.

"Two days," Damon muttered under his breath.

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That was all the time he could afford to suppress his shadow hunger while remaining lucid. Any longer, and the hunger would overtake him.

The golden ratio was a shadow hunger level of 50%. At that threshold, his stats received a significant boost, but his mind remained under control. Anything higher would risk chaos.

'It's not enough time,' Damon thought bitterly, clenching his fists.

His magical abilities lagged far behind his peers. While they flaunted unique spells, Damon could barely manage a basic shadow magic bullet.

"Not enough," he murmured. "But with my [5x] skill, I can crush them physically in an ambush."

Taking them head-on would be suicide, and Damon knew it.

He began walking back to the War Halls dorm, his mind racing with plans.

'I'll need to skip classes for the next two days to finish my preparations. One target... that's all I need. Study his habits, strike when the moment is right. One more soul is all I need to level up.'

Leveling up might grant him new system rewards, potentially giving him an edge.

When he reached the War Halls dorm, the main door was locked, as expected. Trying to enter through the front would be foolish. The back door was likely shut too, but Damon didn't care.

The night cloaked the academy in darkness, but Damon moved as though it were daylight. His enhanced vision made the shadows irrelevant. He followed the hedge wall, slipping through a concealed section disguised by illusion magic.

The passage led him to the dorm garden. From there, Damon navigated to one of the side doors and entered the kitchen.

As he stepped inside, the faint clang of pots and the acrid smell of something burning assaulted his senses.

The kitchen was a disaster zone. Pans, utensils, and spilled ingredients were strewn everywhere. Damon froze, his eyes narrowing at the chaos.

In the center of the mess was Leona Valefier, struggling with a pan of badly burned... something.

She was frantically attempting to salvage the situation, muttering under her breath. Damon's heart skipped a beat when she dropped the pan with a loud clang.

"Crap! The head maid's gonna hear this..." Leona whispered, her golden eyes twitching in panic.

Damon turned toward the exit, fully intending to leave before she noticed him.

But Leona spotted him. Her eyes lit up like a starving person who had just found salvation. Without hesitation, she vaulted over the counter and grabbed Damon before he could reach the door.

"Ah, you're here! I've been looking for you all night! I even went outside the academy, but I couldn't find you!"

Damon glared at her, his voice low and icy. "Let me go."

Leona hesitated for a moment before releasing his arm.

"My apologies," she murmured, her tone subdued. "It's just... I was so hungry, and I couldn't find you."

Damon's glare hardened.

"Don't act like we're friends. Now get out of my way before the head maid hears this commotion."

Leona bit her lip, her golden eyes shimmering with indignation. She looked like a child who had been scolded by someone she trusted.

In a voice barely above a whisper, she said, "But... I'm hungry."

Damon heard her plea as he reached for the door, but he didn't care.

Leona watched him, her face falling as his indifference became clear. She was used to getting her way—whether with her father or brothers—but Damon remained as cold as ever.

Her mind raced for a solution. If she didn't act fast, she would go to bed hungry again.

Then she remembered her debt to him—the one with a crushing 70% interest rate for each day it wasn't repaid. Damon hadn't mentioned it today, which meant he was likely letting it grow.

"Zeni," she muttered, her voice trembling slightly.

Damon froze mid-step, his head turning slightly as he flared at her with icy disdain.

"What did you say?"

She straightened her posture, meeting his glare.

"I'll pay you in zeni if you cook and eat with me. And I'll also pay back my debt from yesterday—right now."

Leona reached into her nightwear, which had a small pocket, and pulled out her pager.

"Give me your pager number. I'll pay for yesterday's debt," she said, her tone resolute.

Damon raised an eyebrow, momentarily taken aback by her straightforwardness. After a brief pause, he relented and gave her his number.

A few moments later, a ding echoed from his own pager. He pulled it out and stared at the notification in disbelief.

Leona Valefier had transferred eighty thousand zeni to him.

Damon froze, his eyes narrowing at the figure displayed on the screen.

'This... this girl just casually sent eighty thousand zeni? I was only charging her 8,508.1 zeni at principal interest for one day! Can't she do basic math?'

His mind spun as he calculated the amount again, confirming that she had overpaid. For a moment, his disbelief gave way to amusement.

Damon smirked, a crooked grin spreading across his face.

"Well... what do you want to eat?" he asked, his voice light, betraying his good mood.

Leona smiled back, a mischievous glint in her golden eyes.

"Something delicious, like last time. Lots of it."

Damon's mood brightened further. Money, it seemed, truly could buy happiness, and Leona had just purchased his. This was, by far, the easiest money he'd ever made. To think, he hadn't even charged her for the food he was about to cook.

'Cooking for a noble would wound my pride... but I think that eighty thousand just healed it. Who needs pride when you can make money?' Damon thought, stifling a chuckle.

"Fine," he said, rolling up his sleeves. "I'll cook, but you're going to clean up the mess you made."

Leona's golden eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Yes, sir!" she replied with a mock salute.

She immediately began clanging pots and pans together as she attempted to tidy up, the sound echoing loudly through the kitchen.

Damon winced and shot her a sharp glare.

"Quietly," he hissed in a low whisper, "before the head maid comes down."