

## Living Shadow 57

### Chapter 57 The Only Commoner

The world was dark and colorless for Damon. His eyes were blindfolded by a strip of black fabric, casting him into utter darkness. But the absence of color came not from the fabric alone—it was the result of his shadow perception. Viewing the world through shadows stripped it of vibrancy, rendering everything in monochrome hues.

His newfound perception brought as much challenge as it did utility. His vision relied entirely on the shadows surrounding him. He could see through the inanimate shadows of walls, trees, or objects, but when it came to the shadows cast by people, his ability faltered. From them, he could only sense faint ripples, vague impressions of movement within the shadow realm.

However, Damon had one advantage—he could see clearly through the perspective of his own shadow. Even if it moved far from him, it acted as a mirror, transmitting everything it saw back to him.

That was a vast improvement from before. Previously, he had to rely on his shadow to try and mime its findings, a silent messenger whose gestures often left him guessing.

He sighed, steadying himself by pressing a hand against the cold wall.

"Seeing through shadows is... difficult," he muttered, the frustration evident in his tone.

After hours of practice, he was finally starting to adapt. Yet, his shadow perception remained a fickle and treacherous tool. Shadows obeyed the whims of the light that birthed them; even a slight shift in illumination could drastically alter his view of the world. It was disorienting, like trying to navigate through a kaleidoscope in constant motion.

The night had been long, but he had made progress. Blindfolding his eyes had proven essential, forcing him to rely solely on this new perception.

Damon made his way to the dorm door, his hand brushing lightly over its surface as he prepared to face the day. He knew this wasn't going to be easy. The blindfold was bound to attract attention, especially considering he was already treated as a pariah among the noble students.

But it had to be done. If he didn't master this skill, he would remain vulnerable. The memory of being cornered by Lark Bonaire in the forest flashed through his mind—a grim reminder of what his lack of control had cost him.

'I need to understand depth perception, learn to adapt to the ever-changing view, and make it my strength, not my weakness,' he resolved.

With that thought, Damon pushed the door open and stepped into the hallway. His movements were fluid, unhurried. Though blindfolded, he didn't stumble, relying entirely on his shadow perception. After hours of effort, he had managed to suppress its radius to ten meters, giving him a clear but manageable range.

Reaching the elevator, he extended a hand to find the buttons. The shadows within the small space outlined them clearly, allowing him to press the one for the ground floor with ease.

It was early morning, the time when most students were bustling about, preparing to leave. Normally, Damon avoided this hour, preferring to move earlier or later to escape the judgmental gazes of the nobles. Today, however, he made no effort to dodge anyone.

The elevator descended smoothly, the soft hum of its mechanisms filling the silence. When the doors opened, Damon stepped out into the lobby. He exhaled softly, bracing himself for the challenges of the day ahead.

If he wanted to survive—and thrive—he needed to conquer this new world of shadows. Your next read is at empire

The ground floor of the dormitory exuded opulence. Chandeliers cast soft, golden light across the polished floors, and antique furniture adorned the space, giving it a grandeur more fitting for a palace than student housing—not that Damon had ever set foot in a palace to compare.

A handful of students were departing for their morning activities, while others lingered in the western wing's dining hall, indulging in breakfast. Maids moved about silently, attending to their duties with practiced grace. The air was filled with the soft murmur of conversation, the gentle clinking of porcelain, and the glow of sunlight streaming through the tall windows.

To Damon, the most striking feature wasn't the luxury or the atmosphere but the distorted interplay of light and shadows created by the humans in the room. His shadow perception picked up every movement, every shift in the light. The sheer number of people tested his control, forcing him to take a deep breath and will his perception to shrink back to a manageable ten-meter radius before it spiraled out of control.

The dining room, packed with nobles, was the last place Damon wanted to be this morning. He resolved to eat later at the cafeteria, where the crowd would be more varied.

But as he turned to leave—

"Damon!"

The excited, boisterous voice made him wince. He recognized it immediately Leona Valefier.

'Ignore her. Walk away. I can't deal with that nuisance this morning,' he thought grimly, quickening his pace.

Leona wasn't one to give up easily. Damon felt the ripple of her shadow as she closed the distance between them, her presence distorting the light around her. Just as she was about to grab his shoulder, he sidestepped smoothly, causing her to stumble forward and nearly fall.

She regained her balance and turned to him with wide, golden eyes.

"Wow, how did you do that?" she asked, her gaze flicking to the black blindfold covering his eyes.

"And while wearing that, no less! Amazing! Is this some kind of special training?"

Her awe-struck tone drew curious glances from nearby students. Damon's jaw tightened, his fists clenching at his sides.

'This damn beast girl is getting on my nerves,' he thought bitterly.

Without sparing her a glance, he snapped,

"It's none of your business. Now scram. I've got nothing to do with you at the moment."

Leona, unbothered by his rudeness, only smiled. Over the past two days, she had grown accustomed to Damon's abrasive demeanor, chalking it up to his personality rather than taking offense.

"Let's have breakfast together," she suggested cheerfully.

"You're not planning to leave on an empty stomach, are you?"

Damon scowled, keenly aware of the attention her loud voice was drawing. He needed to get out of here before things escalated.

"I'll pass," he said curtly, brushing past her.

"Wait!" she called after him. "I'll pay you five thousand zeni to eat with me!"

That stopped him in his tracks. Slowly, a smirk crept across his face.

"Hmmm. I suppose I can make time," he said, his tone suddenly amiable.

Leona beamed, clearly pleased with herself. She had a fair understanding of Damon by now—he was a man who put a price on everything. As long as you offered the right amount of money, he'd agree to almost anything.

Their relationship was peculiar, to say the least. Perhaps it was the beginning of an unusual friendship, or perhaps it was nothing more than a transactional arrangement.

For Leona, who lived by her emotions and instincts, it felt like camaraderie. For Damon, whose world was ruled by cold logic, it was simply business.

The two of them found an empty table in the dining hall, away from the clusters of nobles. Leona seemed to be in high spirits, her golden eyes bright with energy. Damon, on the other hand, remained as gloomy as ever, his black blindfold giving him an almost spectral appearance.

As soon as they sat down, the whispers began.

"Why is that commoner wearing a blindfold? Did that mongrel finally go blind?"

"I can't believe he's still here at the academy."

"Don't worry. He'll be expelled soon enough. Just look at the brooch on his chest—it's only a matter of time."

Damon sighed, trying to tune them out. This was precisely why he usually avoided the dining hall during peak hours. As the only commoner among the noble students in the War Halls, he was a constant target for their disdain.

His frown deepened as he felt two new shadows approach their table. They moved with purpose, their presence sharp and unmistakable.

"May I sit here?"

Damon didn't bother to look up. His response was immediate and flat.

"No."