

MY LIVING SHADOW SYSTEM DEVOURS TO MAKE ME STRONGER

Chapter 6 War Halls

Damon just stared into the water, his expression blank as he processed what he saw. The reflection staring back was that of a gloomy young man, his face contorted in shock and confusion.

His mouth quivered. He widened his eyes, leaning closer to the water to make sure he wasn't imagining things. But there was no mistake—something was very wrong with his eyes.

He gasped, his breath quickening. "Wh...what happened to my eyes?"

His irises had turned pitch black—so dark that he couldn't tell where the irises ended and the pupils began. It was as if they'd merged into one void, swallowing the once-blue color entirely.

He pressed his hands against his eyes, prying them open wider, hoping he was just seeing things. But no matter how hard he stared, the blackness remained.

"Ahhh... Wh-what do I do? What if someone notices?"

He stopped himself, forcing a wry smile. "Who's even going to notice? Nobody cares about me... I don't even have friends."

Saying it out loud felt hollow, a sad truth for a boy his age. Ever since it had been revealed that he possessed a pitiful mana pool of only 30, he was seen as too insignificant to be worth anyone's attention. Add to that his tendency to butt heads with the nobles, and even the commoners who managed to pass the harsh entrance exams avoided him.

And then there was his own personality—a bit gloomy, naturally introverted.

He sighed at his reflection, but then shook his head to brush off the pang of loneliness. He hadn't come to the academy to make friends, anyway.

"Right, I'm here for the one million zeni." He reminded himself. It was all for the money, the money that could keep his sister alive.

Standing up, he grabbed his academy jacket from the ground, dusted it off, and pulled it on before scanning the ravine for a way out. But something unusual caught his attention.

The system screen was following him.

He blinked in surprise.

"Errh... how do I make this disappear? Am I going to have this following me around? What if everyone sees it?"

Before he even finished speaking, the system panel blinked out of existence.

"Huh, it disappeared."

His shadow, watching the whole thing, slapped its own head in exasperation.

Damon's mouth twitched as he saw even his shadow looking disappointed in him.

"Hmm. You wouldn't happen to know how to make it reappear, right?"

The shadow seemed to give him a look of disgust, though it had no face, its posture was enough to convey disappointment.

"Tch, can't rely on you, can I... unless..."

Damon felt himself relax a little, no longer as wary of his own shadow, though he still kept his guard up. He decided to try something.

"Emm... system... open."

The panel flickered into existence again, though his shadow seemed annoyed by the exact phrasing he used.

Ignoring it, Damon whispered, "Disappear."

The screen vanished, and he tried again. "System." It opened. "Close." It closed.

For the next few minutes, he tried different words to open and close the system panel, finally realizing it wasn't the words that triggered it, but his thoughts. He didn't need to say anything; he just had to think about wanting it open or closed.

Satisfied, he exhaled.

"At least one thing's in my control."

With that done, he glanced at his shadow, which looked so bored and annoyed it could die from sheer impatience.

Damon smirked, feeling a smug sense of triumph.

"Alright, let's head back to the academy... and act normal around other people."

In response, the shadow snapped to attention, giving him a sharp salute. Damon didn't recognize the gesture—after all, the military salute in his world was different—but he could tell it was a sign of acknowledgment.

That was good enough.

Damon took in his surroundings, scanning the forest. After some walking, he found where the ravine ended and climbed up a hill, stopping at the top to gaze out at the dense forest stretching far ahead.

This was outside the academy's protective barrier. The further one ventured, the more dangerous it became: goblins, kobolds, trolls, ogres, and all manner of terrifying creatures lurked out there.

He knew this was no place for someone like him. Turning back, he walked toward the academy's barrier.

It didn't take long to cross into familiar grounds, where he spotted tracks left by Marcus and his group.

"Those idiots left me for dead and didn't even bother hiding their tracks..." he muttered, amused by their carelessness.

"If I were in their shoes, I'd have covered my tracks and left a few hollow clues to mislead any investigations."

He shook his head. He wouldn't be in their shoes, but he'd make sure they regretted what they did. After all, the goddess of doom was also the goddess of judgment, and by her hand, he would see them punished.

Resolute, he continued out of the forest, eventually reaching the academy grounds. Passing by his secret training spot, he saw faint bloodstains still marking the ground from when he'd been beaten up. Ignoring them, he made his way to his dorm.

Surprisingly, despite his status as the weakest and a commoner, his dorm was in the academy's finest building. Passing by other students heading to class, no one paid him any mind.

The dorm building he lived in was known as the Halls of War—or simply, the War Halls. Named after the war continent Soltheon, it was a tribute to the goddess of doom and war. The building resembled a grand castle; Damon had never known such luxury until he moved in here.

Not surprisingly, he was the only commoner in the dorm, a fact owed to his unique scholarship—a golden ticket recommendation that allowed him to bypass the entrance exams, gain a place in the best dorm, and receive a million-zeni scholarship fund.

Entering the lavish hall designed for the wealthiest noble lineages, he took the side stairs up to his floor. Reaching his dorm, he stepped inside. The spacious room was more like a suite.

After a quick bath to wash off the grime, he changed into a fresh uniform. A flicker of anxiety washed over him; what if someone noticed something strange about him? What if they saw his eyes?

But no one did, and his shadow stayed obedient, avoiding any unwanted attention.

He walked into the main building, hoping to make it to class on time. But as he hurried down the hall, a voice called out to him.

"Damon Grey... see me in my office at once."