

## Living Shadow 63

### Chapter 63 Did Someone Die

Damon sat at the back of the class, as he always did. Except this time, he had company—a fact that made him increasingly uncomfortable.

Leona Valefier, his self-proclaimed best friend, sat directly to his right, her black white hair glowing faintly in the soft classroom light. She lounged back casually, grinning as if she owned the space. Sylvia Moonveil, on the other hand, claimed the seat to his left. Her excuse was simple: she was there to ensure he didn't harm the raven now perched on his shoulder.

Evangeline had also followed, though she hadn't bothered to offer an explanation. She simply took a seat nearby, her quiet presence both calming and bright. And then, of course, there was Xander Ravenscroft. His aristocratic scowl practically burned a hole in the back of Damon's head, his indignation over Damon naming the raven "Ravenscroft" still fresh and palpable.

Damon could see through Xander's thinly veiled anger. It wasn't just about the name; Xander clearly wanted an excuse to hover near Evangeline. The crush he harbored for her was obvious, and Damon figured he was merely using their antagonism as an excuse to stay close.

Damon sighed. He hated crowds, hated people being close to him. Having this many around made his skin crawl, feeding his ever-present paranoia.

'What is their angle?' Damon thought, his jaw tightening.

'What are they trying to achieve? Is this some kind of plot?'

He couldn't shake the unease. And then there was that earlier incident with his shadow perception—a disquieting reminder of how little he understood his own abilities.

Sylvia's words replayed in his head: "Damon, stop being stubborn."

It had been so innocuous, yet it struck a nerve. It reminded him too much of something his sister, Luna, used to say whenever she wanted something from him. He couldn't help but draw parallels between the two of them—the white hair, the similar eyes, even their shared magic attributes. For a brief moment, his shadow perception had twisted the world, making Sylvia's image bleed into that of his sister's.

He clenched his fists, his hands brushing against the blindfold covering his eyes. He still couldn't fully comprehend this skill, this strange ability that was more curse than blessing.

Pulling up the skill's description again, Damon read it in his mind as his shadow perception allowed him to view the system panel, even with his eyes closed.

[Skill: Shadow Perception]

[Description:]

"When the first mortals sought shelter from the sun's wrath, an old seer whispered: 'The shadow is not an absence but a mirror—a realm where souls walk untethered by the weight of form.' Thus, in the

echoes of Soltheon myths and Solarion shades, the power of shadows emerged as a bridge between realms, offering perception not bound by flesh but tethered to the world of the unseen."

[Effect:]

The user's awareness extends into the realm of shadows, perceiving movements and presences beyond the limits of light and sight.

[Type:]

Passive/Active

[Cooldown:]

0 sec

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Damon closed the panel and turned his focus back to Sylvia, using the very skill he was trying to understand. This time, her image didn't distort. She looked like herself—no haunting overlap with Luna's fragile features.

'Was it all in my head?' he wondered, his brow furrowing.

"The shadow is a mirror..."

The description echoed in his mind. He didn't understand everything about the skill, nor did he have full control over it. That meant it was entirely possible his mind had played tricks on him.

Unconsciously, his gaze shifted toward Sylvia. She was sitting just inches away, her delicate fingers brushing the raven's feathers with a childlike fascination. There was an innocence to her in that moment, a rare softness that contrasted with the composed demeanor she often displayed.

'Luna.'

The thought flickered again, unbidden. He shook his head, trying to banish it. Of course, Sylvia Moonveil reminded him of his sister—they shared some physical and magical similarities. But Sylvia was an elf, not human like Luna. And the differences between them were just as striking as the similarities.

Damon bit his lip, memories of Luna's pale, sunken face flooding his mind. He could still see her lying weakly in bed, her body frail and wasting away as illness consumed her.

His hands balled into fists.

'I have to win the duel against Xander. I need the money. I need to get Luna better treatment.'

The shadows around Damon deepened, pooling around him like a living, breathing entity. They reacted to his thoughts, feeding off the frustration and resolve simmering inside him. Though the others in the room were oblivious, the raven on his shoulder cawed uneasily, sensing the shift in energy.

"Evil... Evil..." it muttered, its voice softer than usual.

Damon leaned back in his chair, arms crossed, his blindfolded gaze turning toward Leona.

"Hey... you still haven't paid me for my time this morning."

Leona blinked, then scratched the back of her head sheepishly.

"Hehehe... oh, right, sorry about that! Almost forgot. Okay, let me pay now."

She fumbled with her pager, quickly transferring the money to his WAR bank account.

Xander, seated nearby, watched the transaction with visible confusion.

"What... Why is she paying him?" he finally blurted out.

Evangeline sighed, her tone laced with mild exasperation.

"She paid him to act nice and friendly... to us."

"And for having breakfast with her," Sylvia added, her fingers gently stroking the raven perched on the desk.

Xander's eyes widened, his shock evident. As someone who held himself to high standards, this revelation was downright baffling.

He pointed an accusatory finger at Damon.

"Y-you... are you some kind of male prostitute? Or a host?"

Damon sneered, his lips curling into a disdainful smirk.

"No. A prostitute would've been cheaper."

The bluntness of the response only deepened Xander's disgust. He couldn't fathom why anyone would charge money to have breakfast with a classmate.

"Do you only care about filling your pockets?" Xander snapped.

Damon sighed, exuding a mix of irritation and boredom.

"Yes, I do. I wouldn't expect a pampered rich boy who's never seen the real world to understand. So let me give you some advice."

He turned his blindfolded face toward Xander, his voice laced with cold finality.

"In this world, there are no eternal friendships—only eternal benefits."

Damon's words hung in the air, the weight of his cynicism pressing down on the group.

"Human relationships are forged on the principles of mutual benefit," he continued, his voice cutting like a blade.

"That's not true!" Sylvia interjected, her voice firm as she looked him in the eye.

Evangeline nodded in agreement.

"People can become friends without expecting anything in return."

Damon scoffed. "You're all so naive... What else can I expect from nobles?"

Leona pinched his arm sharply.

"Be nice," she chided, her expression somewhere between amused and annoyed.

Damon sighed.

"Fine. Let me rephrase. The benefits you gain from a relationship don't have to be something tangible, like money or luxury. We stand to gain many things from forging these fleeting bonds: the self-gratification of being around someone you love, the joy of destroying someone you hate, impressing your family, or proving your worth. All of these are benefits, but in the end, these bonds always break—whether by choice or by cosmic design."

A heavy silence followed his words.

Leona bit her lip, her cheerful demeanor dimming slightly.

"But even so... having a friend is good, even if it's fleeting."

Damon shrugged, his tone dismissive.

"I don't care. I'm more interested in what you people actually want from me. What's your angle? What do you hope to achieve? The only person here who's been clear is Xander Ravenscroft, and trust me, the feeling is mutual."

Evangeline sighed, shaking her head.

"You really are a difficult person to get along with. No wonder you're always alone."

"That's fine by me. I like it that way."

Sylvia frowned, her calm voice carrying a quiet conviction.

"Whoever is comfortable in solitude is either a wild beast or a god. You're neither, so I'm sure there's a part of you that desires connection."

She paused, her gaze steady.

"Fine. You wanted a reason, right? Here it is: I stand to gain the self-gratification of saving someone from their solitude. That's what I want."

Evangeline smiled faintly at her friend's boldness. Sylvia might have been reserved, but she was far from weak.

"My reason is the same as I've told you before," Evangeline said. "I want you to be my training partner."

Leona raised her hand excitedly. "Me next! Me next!"

She tapped her chin in exaggerated thought.

"Hmm... what do I want? Oh, right! I want to be your friend so you'll cook for me."

Her gaze shifted to Xander, who had been silently fuming. "What about you?"

Everyone turned to him expectantly.

Xander narrowed his eyes, his lips curling in disdain.

"I can't stand this commoner. Especially after hearing what he just said. He's both vile and cunning. I'll stay to keep an eye on him."

Damon sneered, his tone dripping with mockery.

"I couldn't care less what you all want."

As he spoke, Damon's shadow perception picked up on a presence approaching their group.

The blue-haired figure stopped in front of Xander, bowing his head slightly with an air of practiced loyalty. He spared a glance at the rest of the group before turning his focus to Damon.

"Grey," he greeted, his tone disdainful but curt.

Damon's smirk twisted with cold malice. "Marcus."

Damon's expression didn't falter.

"Why the sour expression? Did someone die?"