

## Living Shadow 74

### Chapter 74 Difference Of Birth

Xander's entire body screamed in agony, his muscles seizing with every shallow breath. His skin was charred and burned, blood seeped from countless wounds, and his legs felt like they no longer existed. The arena blurred before his eyes, but his mind was aflame with a single thought:

'I can't lose. I can't lose to a commoner... Not after everything they've done. I can't lose...'

With a guttural groan, he raised his head, his blood-streaked face pale and haggard. His eyes, barely open, fixated on his opponent.

The commoner—no, Damon Grey—stood a short distance away, his body a bloody mess. A black blindfold obscured his eyes, but his expression remained unnervingly calm. Even now, Xander could feel the quiet determination radiating from the man he once considered beneath notice.

'He's just a bug,' Xander thought, though the words rang hollow in his mind. Damon wasn't supposed to have come this far. He was an insignificant insect, not even worth acknowledging among commoners.

But now, Damon stood tall despite his injuries, his left arm red and raw, burned almost beyond recognition. In his right hand, he held the Falsity Dagger, its edge slick with his own blood.

Xander gritted his teeth, anger bubbling through his pain.

'I can't move... but even so, I won't lose. I refuse to lose.'

Above them, the magic artillery began to stir again, the hum of light magic growing louder as it prepared another barrage.

Damon shifted slightly, sensing the change with his Shadow Perception, but his movements were sluggish.

Xander roared, his voice raw and filled with desperation, "I won't lose to the likes of you—a lowly commoner!"

His blood-soaked hands trembled as he did the unthinkable. He reversed the flow of his gravity magic.

The arena seemed to tremble as Xander's magic warped. Instead of pulling down, his gravity spell pushed upward, creating an opposing force that reflected the incoming light magic. The orbs of searing energy, once aimed to obliterate him, now reversed course, streaking back toward Damon with deadly precision.

From the stands, Professor Keal's eyes narrowed in astonishment.

"He created a new spell mid-battle... Just to counter the light magic attacks."

Damon's body tensed. His Shadow Perception allowed him to sense the incoming attack, but his battered frame was far too damaged and sluggish to react in time. The reflected light magic struck him head-on.

The blast sent Damon flying, his body engulfed in flames of radiant energy. His skin burned, and he coughed violently as the impact seared his lungs. He hit the ground hard, skidding to a stop as his blood soaked the dirt beneath him.

Xander huffed, barely standing, one eye closed while the other fluttered open just enough to glare at his opponent. He forced a twisted smile, his teeth stained crimson.

"I won't lose to a lowly commoner... Your kind are disgusting... ungrateful... mongrels. I could never be beaten by someone like you," he spat, though every word seemed to drain him further.

Damon lay sprawled on the ground, his chest heaving as he tried to suck in air. His hands twitched, fumbling for the dagger that had fallen from his grip, its hilt slick with his own blood.

'I... I can't move...' Damon's thoughts were hazy, his body screaming in protest. His vision blurred, and every breath felt like shards of glass ripping through his chest. Above him, the glowing orbs of light magic hovered ominously, primed to end his life.

Then, a sharp notification cut through the haze.

Ding!

[HP: 19/50]

'I can't... breathe...'

The words echoed in his mind, despair settling like a stone in his gut as the looming light grew brighter, promising only death.

Damon's consciousness was slipping away, his mind teetering on the edge as he fell deeper into his Shadow Perception. His senses spiraled out of control, extending far beyond the arena and reaching the observation deck where his classmates stood.

"Hah... That commoner has finally learned his place," one scoffed.

"What can you expect from trash?" another chimed in with a sneer.

"He should just be expelled from the academy already," a third remarked with a tone dripping in disdain.

Leona bit her lip, her fists clenched as she stared down at Damon's crumpled form.

"Come on, Damon... get up. You can't lose like this," she whispered, her voice trembling with desperation.

Above the crowd, Professor Kael's cold, detached voice rang out, cutting through the cacophony of jeers.

"It was inevitable... He never stood a chance."

A spark of anger flared deep within Damon's fading consciousness. His blood boiled, his spirit roaring back to life.

'I can't lose. Not now... Not when this is my only chance to save her...'

With an agonized roar, Damon forced himself to his feet, swaying unsteadily. His laughter started low, broken and guttural, before rising into something cold and defiant.

The blindfold slipped from his face, revealing his dark, unyielding eyes. The shadows around him rippled and coiled as he reined in his Shadow Perception, bringing his scattered senses under control even as his body screamed in protest.

He pointed his cracked, blood-streaked dagger at Xander, his voice sharp as ice.

"You can call me lowly all you want... but you and I aren't so different. The only thing special about you is the fact that you were born into wealth. You haven't earned a single thing yourself. You've never worked a day in your life. Everything you have—everything you are—was handed to you on a golden platter. You aren't special. You're just another child of privilege, benefiting from the accident of your birth."

Xander, still rooted in place, glared at Damon. His body was too heavy to move, his magic reserves stretched to their limit. But his pride wouldn't let him falter.

"Then we'll see who has the last laugh," Xander growled, his voice laced with venom.

He took a single, agonizing step forward, into the swirling field of light magic. The attacks intensified, their ferocity building to a crescendo. A massive orb of light, several meters wide, formed between the two combatants, its energy pulsating ominously.

It was clear to everyone watching: whoever managed to push that orb toward the other would emerge victorious—or be the last one standing.

Xander gritted his teeth and forced another step, his gravity magic flaring as he reversed its pull. Damon, clutching his dagger, roared in defiance and sprinted toward the massive orb, his shattered body trembling with every movement.

From above, Professor Kael's face twisted in concern as he barked,

"That's enough, you two! You'll get yourselves killed—this match is over!"

Neither boy paid him any mind.

"Shut up!" they roared in unison, their voices raw and filled with unrelenting determination.

Damon thrust his dagger into the orb, but the weapon shattered on impact. Shards of the blade flew toward his face, slicing deep into his skin and painting his cheeks with fresh streaks of blood. He gritted his teeth, his disabled arm trembling as he raised it to press against the ball of light. Both hands burned as he pushed with all his might.

Xander, unable to raise his arms, leaned his entire weight against the orb, his gravity magic in reverse acting as his only counterforce.

The searing pain burned through both boys, but neither relented.

Damon's vision swam, his strength fading. He bit down on his lip until it bled, refusing to let the orb consume him.

'Using my arms alone won't be enough... They'll break before this thing even moves.'

He closed his eyes, summoning the little amounts of his mana. Shadows flickered and coalesced in his palms, forming a dense ball of shadow magic.

"It's true I have a small mana pool... and I can't cast spells like the rest of you. But I refuse to lose to anyone in battle. With this tiny power of mine... I will bring down a giant!"

With a defiant roar, Damon poured all his remaining mana—every ounce of energy he had—into the orb of shadow magic. The collision of light and shadow triggered a chain reaction. Magic attributes exploded, sending waves of destruction cascading through the arena.

Blinding light rained down, ripping through the air with deafening force. The shockwave hurled both boys across the arena, their bodies slamming into the walls with sickening splatters of blood.

Ding!

[HP: 2/50]

As the light dimmed, the arena fell into eerie silence. The two boys lay motionless, twitching faintly as blood pooled around them.

Xander's body shuddered once before falling still, his energy completely spent.

Damon couldn't see; his eyes were flooded with blood. But through the veil of darkness, his Shadow Perception picked up faint sounds—the hurried footsteps of healers rushing toward the arena.

He let out a low, guttural grunt, forcing his battered body to move.

One agonizing step.

He stumbled and fell, but his shattered arms clawed at the ground, dragging his broken body forward, leaving a trail of blood in his wake.

When he finally reached Xander, Damon forced himself to stand, his legs trembling as if they might give out at any moment. Darkness encroached on his vision, and his entire body screamed for him to stop. Death's cold embrace was mere inches away.

But he stood tall, his silhouette ragged and bloodied. He looked down at Xander, whose bloodshot eyes barely fluttered open.

"I... I... win..." Damon whispered, his voice hoarse but resolute.

Xander's eyes filled with tears of rage and despair before they closed, his consciousness slipping away.

Damon heard the distant shouts of the healers growing closer, but the world around him faded into nothingness. The shadows of his perception went silent as his own senses dulled.

Yet, even as everything went dark, Damon remained standing—broken, bloodied, and triumphant.