

Living Shadow 75

Chapter 75 Marcus's Fears

The battle was nothing short of shocking. Xander Ravenscroft, the third-ranked student, against Damon Grey, the weakest in the academy. It was a duel that should have ended the moment it began, with Xander's overwhelming power obliterating Damon's feeble mana pool. But the outcome defied all expectations. Against all odds, there Damon stood, battered and bloodied, towering over his defeated opponent.

The arena, once filled with jeers and mockery, had fallen into a stunned silence. Those who had belittled Damon now looked upon him with a mix of awe and disbelief. His unyielding spirit cast a shadow over their contempt, forcing them to confront the undeniable truth—this was no ordinary student.

They recalled his words, his philosophy, which they had dismissed as the ravings of a deluded fool. Now, those very words resonated in their minds.

"Impossible..."

"How did he... survive?"

"Is he even human?"

"No one can take that much damage and still stand!"

"He's... a freak."

Professor Kael had long since abandoned his post outside the observation deck. The intensity of the final clash had convinced him that the duel had gone far beyond the bounds of safety. He'd attempted to intervene, but the combatants were too consumed by their struggle to heed his commands.

Dark magic was Kael's specialty, not healing. Even if he had managed to reach them in time, his abilities would have been of little use in mending their broken bodies. Frustrated and powerless, he called for emergency healers, barking into his communicator with urgency. Fortunately, the response was swift; the healers were stationed nearby, anticipating potential injuries from such matches.

Kael didn't waste time trying to unlock the massive vaulted doors. Instead, he summoned a surge of dark energy, punching a hole through the barrier with raw force.

As the path opened, Leona darted inside like a storm, her body crackling with the energy of her Strom attribute magic. Her golden eyes locked onto Damon's bloodied form, standing defiant but holding himself upright. Her heart pounded with worry and rage as she rushed to him.

"Damon... Damon..." she whispered, her voice trembling.

Yet, she hesitated. His injuries were so severe that she feared touching him might worsen his condition. Behind her, the healers flooded into the arena, led by Kael himself.

Sylvia and Evangeline followed shortly after, their faces pale with dread as they surveyed the scene. Xander and Damon were carefully placed on stretchers, their bodies surrounded by the shimmering light of various healing spells.

Marcus stumbled into the blood-soaked arena, dropping to his knees beside Xander. His face was a mask of fear and desperation as he reached out, whispering his friend's name.

Leona clenched her fists tightly, her body trembling with suppressed anger as her gaze flickered between Xander and Damon. It had been an honorable duel, and Damon had emerged victorious—but that did little to quell the rage simmering in her heart.

"Caw! Caw! Dead... dead... dead..."

The ominous cry of the raven perched on Sylvia's shoulder broke the tense silence. The bird flapped its wings uneasily before flying over to perch on Damon's stretcher. Sylvia's face turned ghostly white as the raven's words echoed in her ears.

She couldn't just stand there. She pushed past the healers tending to Damon, her hands trembling as she prepared a spell.

"Let me help," she insisted, her voice unsteady.

[Lunar Restoration]

A soft, silvery light enveloped her hands as she channeled her strongest healing spell. The pale glow of her moon attribute magic seeped into Damon's battered body, but the results were underwhelming. The wounds were too severe; healing magic could only do so much for someone teetering on the brink of death.

Her voice quivered as she asked, "Is he... is he still alive?"

The healer beside her, cloaked in a dark hood, nodded grimly.

"He's alive—barely. With injuries like these, he should've died instantly. It's... amazing."

The healer glanced at Sylvia, noting the trembling in her hands and the worry etched into her features.

"Your friend... he's a tough one," the healer added softly.

Sylvia swallowed hard, willing herself to believe those words as the pale light of her magic continued to shine. Damon Grey, the weakest in the academy, had survived the impossible. But at what cost?

Evangeline bit her lip, her teeth pressing hard enough to nearly draw blood. Unlike Sylvia, she couldn't help—not in any meaningful way.

While she had the ability to use healing light magic, it was weak, an inferior imitation of what Sylvia could accomplish. All she could do now was clasp her hands together and whisper silent prayers to the Goddess of Doom, pleading for the lives of classmates to be spared.

'I should have stopped them...'

The thought clawed at her heart like a blade. She felt a deep, gnawing regret as she stared at Damon and Xander, both battered and bloodied. Today had been... fun, of all things, almost like a party of adventurers from the stories. And Damon—Damon had been the glue that held them together.

But now... now everything was in shambles.

Xander and Damon had always been at odds. Their personalities, their ideals—everything about them clashed. Both were too stubborn to yield, too steadfast to compromise. Evangeline clenched her fists tightly, the guilt eating her alive.

"Why... why did I let this happen?"

Marcus stood nearby, pale as a ghost, his face frozen in horror. His heart pounded erratically in his chest as he watched the healers frantically work on Xander.

"Clear... heal... again. One more time!"

The healers' voices rang out urgently, the buzz of their combined lightning and healing magic filling the room.

"We need two vials of revitalization potion—now!"

Marcus barely heard them. His mind was spinning, trapped in a vortex of fear and despair. First Lark had disappeared, only to be later declared dead. Then Isaac vanished without a trace, and though no body had been found, everyone had already assumed the worst. Now, Tobias—another of their friends—was being accused of unspeakable crimes.

It was too much.

Marcus's head throbbed as tears spilled down his face. His hands trembled as he pressed them against his temples.

'What... what is happening to us? Oh, Goddess, I beg you, please... please help us.'

As his blurred gaze drifted, it fell upon Damon Grey's unconscious body. The sight of the boy filled Marcus with a mix of anger and an icy, unshakable dread. Damon had always been stubborn, always unyielding. Even when beaten, his piercing blue eyes had never lost their icy resolve.

But now...

'His eyes... they were blue. But now they're black.'

Marcus's mind raced, piecing together fragments of unsettling memories.

'His eyes changed. Was it... was it after we beat him up and left him for dead beyond the barrier?'

The realization struck him like a thunderclap.

"He spent the entire night beyond the academy barrier," Marcus whispered, his voice trembling.

"In a monster-infested area... covered in blood. The blood should have drawn monsters... there's no way he could've survived."

He gulped, his throat dry as sandpaper. Damon survived in the evil forest covered in blood for a whole night.

"And yet... he came back. But his eyes—his eyes are different now."

Marcus's fear deepened, his mind spiraling into darker and darker places.

'He's faster than before, stronger than before. I even heard rumors that he fought Leona Valefier and survived. Could it be... no... this isn't Damon Grey.'

His body shook violently, his face pale as death.

'It... it's a monster pretending to be him.'

His breath quickened, and his thoughts turned frantic. The monsters beyond the barrier were all stronger than any first year student.

'I have to tell the professors... but... if I do, it means admitting that we killed the real Damon Grey. Lark... Isaac... they must have been killed by it too.'

Marcus's knees buckled as he staggered back, his mind a swirling tempest of fear and guilt.

'I need more evidence... or they won't believe me.'

He clenched his fists, his nails digging painfully into his palms.

'I need to know the truth... no matter what it takes.'