

Living Shadow 76

Chapter 76 Caregiver

The first sensation he felt was the enveloping dark—a world of shadows. It was familiar to him, the strange realm his senses often wandered to, but this time it felt different. Like blurred vision struggling to regain focus, the shadows seemed indistinct, as though something was obstructing his clarity.

Damon's eyes fluttered open, his breathing shallow and raspy, his throat parched. The room was dim, its faint illumination barely reaching the corners, but the ceiling above him was unmistakable.

'The infirmary...'

The faint darkness didn't hinder his sight at all. For the first time, both his regular vision and his shadow perception were active simultaneously. The realization was strange, but he didn't dwell on it.

He instantly recognized where he was. He had been sent here too many times after being bloodied by his bullies. This place was no stranger to him.

He tried to move, but every joint, muscle, and bone in his body protested with a dull, aching soreness.

"Ahhh..." he groaned softly, his voice weak and hoarse.

As his eyes adjusted, something caught his attention—a familiar system prompt hovering faintly in his vision.

[HP: 40/50]

Damon raised a shaky hand to the glowing message, his expression unreadable.

"I'm... still alive, huh," he muttered.

Despite the gravity of surviving yet another brush with death, his heart remained calm. There was no wave of relief, no tears of joy. He had been here too many times before.

Turning his head slightly, Damon managed to push himself into a sitting position. As he glanced down at the bed he occupied, something unusual caught his attention. For the first time in his many visits to the infirmary, someone was by his side when he woke up.

It wasn't a healer.

It was a young girl with black hair streaked with white highlights. Beastkin ears perched atop her head twitched faintly in her sleep. Her breathing was soft and even, her features serene in unconscious repose.

'Leona Valefier... What is she doing here?'

Damon's cautious gaze lingered on her. He couldn't understand why the beastkin girl was sitting beside him, sleeping as if she belonged there.

By his bedside, he noticed his pager and, next to it, the raven. The bird perched quietly, its eyes closed, unmoving.

Suddenly, his stomach growled loudly, the sound breaking the silence. Damon stiffened, his face paling. He didn't know how long he had been unconscious, but if his shadow hunger had reached its peak, he'd be in trouble.

His eyes darted around the room, searching for his shadow. There it was, cast faintly by the pale light spilling into the infirmary. It didn't move, merely behaving like any ordinary shadow.

Damon exhaled slowly, relieved. The shadow wasn't acting erratically, so he allowed himself to relax.

For now, at least, the immediate danger had passed. But the question remained—what had happened after the duel, and why was Leona here?

He opened his system panel, the faint glow of the interface illuminating his vision.

[HP: 40/50]

[Mana: 90/90]

[Strength: 9]

[Agility: 17]

[Speed: 35]

[Endurance: 10]

[Class: —]

[Shadow: 100]

[Shadow Hunger Levels: 2%]

[Shadow Level: 2%]

[Condition: Shadow is Full]

[Attributes: Umbra]

[Skills:]

[5x] [Remorseless] [Shadow Perception]

[Locked]

"Phew..." Damon let out a sigh of relief. His shadow hunger was manageable. The notification brought a measure of calm, but it raised a troubling question.

'How long have I been out?'

His body still felt sore, even after being healed, hinting at how severe his injuries must have been. He needed answers.

He called to his shadow.

"How long was I unconscious for?"

The shadow moved, breaking free of its mimicry. Its dark fingers extended, forming a gesture.

"Two days, huh..." Damon muttered. "My commission to Anvil is probably ready."

Reaching for his pager, he picked it up and opened it. Several missed calls and unread messages stared back at him. The first few were from Carl—likely updates about his commission. But one notification made his heart sink.

It was a call from the Healing Institute, where his sister, Luna, was receiving care.

Damon's hands trembled, his dark pupils shaking. Panic surged through him as he frantically dialed back.

No answer.

Sweat rolled down his temple as he tried again and again. Each failed attempt only deepened the pit of dread in his stomach.

"No... Luna..." Damon's voice cracked. "I have to go."

His mind spiraled into worst-case scenarios. Without hesitation, he tried to get up, but his legs gave out the moment he stood. He collapsed to the floor with a painful thud.

"Ahh... ouch..."

The noise startled Croft, the raven perched nearby. The bird's beady eyes opened, and it let out a piercing caw.

"Caw caw! Demon! Demon! Evil! Evil!"

The commotion jolted Leona Valefier awake. The beastkin girl immediately entered a battle-ready stance, golden magical energy radiating from her. The word "demon" was a bitter trigger for her race.

Her glowing eyes scanned the room until they locked onto Damon, sprawled on the floor. Her tense expression softened, and tears welled in her eyes as she rushed toward him.

"Damon! Damon! I'm so glad you're okay! I was so worried!"

"Ahh! Stop—ouch! You're crushing me!" Damon grunted, wincing under her weight.

Realizing what she was doing, Leona quickly released him, flustered.

"Sorry... you're injured... I was just happy you were okay..."

Damon shot her a cold glare, his black eyes sharp as ever.

Meanwhile, Croft continued its racket.

"Caw caw! Demon awake! Awake!"

Damon's patience wore thin. He turned to the raven.

"Shut up, you dumb bird! My name isn't 'Demon,' it's Damon! Two different words!"

Croft, undeterred, flew toward his head and began pecking at his hair.

"Caw caw! Evil Demon!"

Damon swatted the bird away, his irritation growing. Croft retreated to the desk, glaring at him resentfully.

Attempting to rise again, Damon pushed himself off the floor, but Leona was faster. She grabbed him and guided him back to the bed, forcing him to sit.

"Let me go! My pager..." Damon gestured toward the device on the floor.

Leona picked it up but held it away from him.

"Rest first," she said firmly. "Even the strongest warriors need to recover."

Damon's expression remained icy, but his heart was in turmoil. He needed to get to Valerion, the capital city, to ensure Luna was safe.

Ignoring Leona's words, he tried to stand again.

"Stay put!" Leona pushed him back down, her golden eyes filled with concern.

"Get off me!" Damon snapped. "Let me go!"

Leona shook her head, her voice trembling with emotion.

"No... you need to calm down first. As your friend, I can't let you go like this."

Damon's teeth clenched in frustration.

"Get off me, you furry bitch! We aren't friends!"

Leona froze, her ears drooping slightly. Her lips quivered as she bit back her emotions. Her voice came out as a soft whisper.

"I don't care..." she said. "I won't let go until you calm down."