

## Living Shadow 78

### Chapter 78 Intelligent New Companion

Damon's muscles felt sore, his every step accompanied by a mild but persistent ache. The discomfort, however, wasn't what truly troubled him. There was a sting in his heart, deeper and far more elusive, gnawing at the edges of his mind.

'Leona Valefier... I just don't get that beastkin girl.'

He couldn't comprehend her attachment to him. Their interactions had been minimal, yet she'd boldly declared herself his friend. Damon was aware that beastkin were often more direct than humans, especially regarding relationships, but this didn't sit well with him. Opening up to someone was never his style, and he instinctively searched for reasons to doubt her intentions.

"Caw, caw!"

The sharp cry of a raven broke his thoughts, pulling him back to the present. He stopped walking and narrowed his eyes at the familiar sound.

Croft was still with him, circling above before landing on his shoulder. The raven's persistence baffled him, especially since it supposedly held a grudge against him. Without hesitation, Damon reached out, grabbing the bird with lightning speed.

Croft squawked in protest, flapping wildly as Damon gripped it with one arm and used his other hand to clamp its beak shut. His cold gaze locked onto the raven's beady eyes.

"Sylvia said you're intelligent enough to understand me," Damon began, his voice low and cutting.

"Honestly, I don't care if you are. Just know this: if you intend to follow me, then I suggest you stay quiet—or die."

The raven stopped struggling, its dark eyes reflecting Damon's stern expression.

Damon continued, his tone unwavering.

"I'll keep you if you're useful. Perform well enough, and I'll reward you with meat. So make your choice: usefulness or death."

After a tense moment, Damon released the bird. Croft flapped its wings and took off into the night sky, vanishing into the shadows.

Damon watched it go, his face devoid of emotion.

"I suppose it's just a stupid bird."

Sylvia had mentioned a thing or two about ravens and their supposed intelligence. She had even offered tips on training one, volunteering to help him if needed. Damon wasn't convinced but had to admit the

bird seemed to understand him to some extent. Still, he resolved that if it proved useless, he'd get rid of it without hesitation.

He took another step forward but suddenly clutched his head, wincing as his Shadow Perception spread uncontrollably outward. He rubbed his temple, closing his eyes to rein in the overwhelming sensation.

"Still haven't learned to control it," he muttered, frustrated. "I'm going to need a new blindfold."

His previous blindfold had been destroyed during the duel with Xander Ravenscroft, forcing him to rely solely on the shadows to navigate. For now, he kept his eyes shut, the world around him painted in the dark, shifting outlines revealed by his shadows.

A faint ripple moved within the blackness—a familiar presence. Damon smiled faintly.

"I suppose you're far more reliable than that stupid bird," he murmured to his mysterious companion.

He continued walking, his destination clear. The waterways leading out of the academy stretched before him, a quiet, secluded path. He retrieved his pager, sending a message to Carls with precise instructions to meet him.

Minutes later, Damon exited the academy grounds, stepping into the dense forest that bordered it. The shadows welcomed him like an old friend, guiding him toward Athor's Sanctuary.

Walking silently through the woods, Damon moved with caution, his senses attuned to the faintest shifts within the radius of his Shadow Perception. The forest was quiet, save for the rustling of leaves and the occasional snap of a twig underfoot.

A sudden ripple in the shadows caught his attention. A raven landed on the ground ahead of him, something glinting in its beak. Damon stopped, narrowing his eyes as the bird hopped toward him, flapping its wings for emphasis.

In its beak was a round cufflink, the gold catching the faint light filtering through the trees.

Damon bent down, carefully picking up the object. His eyes narrowed as he examined it—a family crest embossed in gold. The design sparked a sense of familiarity, and his mind raced to place it.

The raven cawed loudly, flapping its wings again.

"Caw, caw... Marcus... caw..."

Damon's eyes snapped open in shock.

"No way... This actually belongs to Marcus Fayjoy. That's the Fayjoy family crest."

He glanced down at the raven, his gaze sharp. "Where did you get this?"

The bird tilted its head, then looked away, hopping onto his shoulder with a flutter.

"Caw... caw... useful... demon... useful..."

Damon froze, a mix of surprise and suspicion washing over him.

'This bird... It's far more intelligent than I realized. How long has it been watching me? Could it still hold a grudge?'

He met the raven's beady eyes, his expression darkening.

'But in the end, it's just an animal... and animals can be tamed.'

A cold smile crept across Damon's lips.

"Well, Croft... it seems you and I got off on the wrong wing. I apologize for earlier. Why don't we start over? You've done very well bringing this to me. How about I buy you some fresh meat when we get to town?"

The raven cocked its head, seemingly pleased.

"Caw, caw... meat..."

Closing his eyes, Damon allowed his thoughts to wander.

"I don't know what's happened in the two days I was unconscious, but Tobias is surely still under house arrest. If his name hasn't been cleared, the pressure must be mounting. Tomorrow, I'll gather information... and then kill him."

His mind shifted to Lilith Astranova. He didn't know how much she'd uncovered in the past two days or whether any of it pointed to him.

'I'll need to tread carefully. But thanks to Croft, I've just thought of a perfect way to kill Tobias Morgan.'

First, however, he needed to retrieve weapons from Anvil: two daggers, a hook, a collapsible bow, a quiver of arrows forged from cursed ore. Perhaps he could acquire some atrax to craft a hallucinogenic poison. A color hair dye would also be useful for his plans.

Damon clenched his fists, his lips curling into a predatory smile. He could almost taste the despair that would soon paint Tobias's face.

With renewed determination, he stepped deeper into the forest, the shadows around him growing thicker as he made his way toward town.