

## Living Shadow 84

### Chapter 84 Iris Vale

Damon parted ways with Carls, muttering a quick farewell. There was something he needed to take care of alone. After asking for directions a few times, he reached his destination. Pulling his hood lower, he adjusted the blindfold over his eyes. It was an odd look, but it worked—most people assumed he was blind and paid him little mind.

He stopped in front of the house, a modest building nestled in a quieter part of Athor's Sanctuary. The tall walls and trees surrounding it gave the residence a sense of seclusion, shielding it from the bustle of the main town. The compound boasted a large garden space, its tranquility broken only by the occasional chirp of night creatures.

Damon's shadow perception expanded, stretching out to encompass the entire residence. His senses probed the house and the grounds. The interior was empty, but his focus shifted to the garden. There, he found his target.

A girl, perhaps his age or slightly younger, stood before a charred training dummy. Her hands glowed with magical flames as she hurled fiery blasts at the dummy, the light casting fleeting shadows across the yard.

Damon lingered outside the walls, debating his next move. Should he knock on the front door? The thought seemed ridiculous. He dismissed it quickly. Instead, he made his way to the back, scaling the wall with practiced ease. Walking along its edge, he climbed into a nearby tree.

The shadows beneath the tree wrapped around him like a protective cloak, making him almost invisible. A raven landed on a branch nearby, its piercing gaze locked on him. Damon glanced at his own shadow, now darker and seemingly alive, shifting subtly as if disapproving of his actions.

"Hey... should I really be doing this?" Damon whispered.

His shadow waved its head, clearly disagreeing.

"Jeez, thanks for the vote of confidence," Damon muttered. "But I'm still going to do it."

His heart pounded in his chest as he watched the girl continue her relentless training. Her pink flames lit up the night, fierce and vibrant, yet controlled. Damon's shadow motioned impatiently, as if urging him to move.

"Give me a moment!" he hissed, his voice barely audible. "It's not like I killed her father or anything..."

The raven made a soft caw, almost as if it had something to say. Damon shot it a warning glare. Croft, the raven, took the hint and remained silent. Damon rewarded its cooperation with dried meat, which the bird eagerly snatched from his hand.

Taking another deep breath, Damon felt his hands tremble slightly. He had never imagined he'd meet Carmen Vale's daughter. Life had a way of throwing unexpected challenges, and this was no exception.

'It's now or never,' he thought, steeling himself.

But his body refused to move. No matter how much he willed himself to jump off the branch, he remained frozen in place.

He sighed, biting his lip in frustration.

'Since when did I become such a coward? Oh goddess, give me the strength to do this...'

The prayer felt hollow. Damon knew better than to expect divine intervention, especially for someone like him—a thief, a murderer, and most of all, an unbeliever.

Resigned, he leaned back against the tree trunk, deciding to watch for now. The yard was illuminated by faint lamplight, casting a warm glow over the girl and her surroundings. The moons were absent tonight, leaving the sky dark and foreboding.

Pulling out a pouch of dried meat, Damon held up a piece. Croft fluttered down, perching on his hand to claim its reward.

Damon's gaze returned to the girl. She moved with determination, sending blasts of pink flames at the dummy. Each attack carried power, but her form was riddled with imperfections.

'She's got potential, but her technique needs work,' Damon mused.

Despite his lack of skill in magic, he had read extensively on the subject. In fact, it was his obsession with advanced magical theories that had caused him to fail his first-quarter semester exams.

'Who studies second-year material while preparing for a first-year exam?' he thought bitterly, almost blushing at the memory.

Of course, it wasn't entirely his fault. Marcus had deliberately set him up by handing out the wrong semester's study materials. Damon shook his head at the thought.

'I'm so going to kill that guy someday.'

Still, there had been some upside to the blunder. Damon now possessed a wealth of upper-level knowledge, and with time, he had caught up on the foundational basics. Unfortunately, his poor mana reserves and lack of proper spellcasting experience remained significant obstacles.

'Even with all my theoretical knowledge, I'm still miles behind someone like Sylvia Moonveil,' he thought, frowning.

For now, Damon settled into his perch, his critical eyes analyzing every move Iris Vale made.

Damon sighed, shaking his head at her wild form.

"You're doing it wrong," he called out, his voice calm but carrying a sharp undertone of critique.

The girl in the yard froze mid-motion, spinning around, startled. Her eyes darted wildly, trying to locate the source of the voice.

"Who... who said that?" she demanded, her voice trembling slightly.

Her face was set in a frown, but her hands betrayed her fear, shaking visibly as the pink flames flickered out.

Damon leaned against the tree, concealed by the thick shadows. He smirked as he watched her growing panic.

"You're wasting mana," he continued, his voice floating through the yard.

"If you want to create a proper magic blast spell, you need to compress your mana. Don't let it escape."

Her eyes widened at his words, her head snapping from side to side as she scanned the darkness.

"Answer me! Who the hell are you?" she shouted, her tone more desperate now.

Damon considered his options, then decided to lean into the mysterious act. It was more entertaining that way.

"I smell fear," he said, his voice low and taunting. "Are you afraid?"

Iris gritted her teeth, her fear giving way to anger.

"That's it, you bastard! I'm burning this whole place down!" she yelled, her hands igniting with pink flames that roared to life.

Damon chuckled softly.

"Really now? You might want to rethink that. Burn down your house, and you'll have to live on the streets. Trust me, that's not a good idea."

Her stance shifted into a combat-ready position, her flames burning brighter and hotter.

"Fine by me," she growled, her eyes filled with determination.

Damon sighed, running a hand through his hair.

'Is this girl crazy? What a hothead,' he thought.

Realizing the situation was escalating fast, he stood up and leapt gracefully from the tree, landing in the yard with a soft thud.

"Calm down," he said, raising his hands in mock surrender. "I am not your enemy—"

Before he could finish, two blazing fireballs hurtled toward him, their heat searing the air.

'Huh? What the—? Is she crazy?!' Damon thought as he instinctively ducked and rolled, narrowly avoiding the flaming projectiles.

The fireballs crashed into a nearby tree, scorching its trunk and sending a shower of embers into the night. Damon scrambled to his feet, glaring at the girl.

"Are you out of your mind?!" he snapped, brushing soot off his cloak. "I just said I'm not your enemy!"

Iris smirked, her flames crackling around her hands. "Prove it."

Damon groaned inwardly. This was not how he'd planned for things to go.