

Living Shadow 89

Chapter 89 Goodbye Loner Life

The sunlight streamed through the window, spilling across Damon's desk where he sat, a thick book on magic history propped open in his hands. Dark circles marred his face, evidence of a sleepless night. With a deep sigh, he flipped the final page, scanning the last paragraph before snapping the book shut.

Stretching his arms above his head, he yawned.

"With this, I've more or less caught up with the first-year curriculum..."

He wasn't about to be caught lacking in theoretical exams or tests again. After his previous humiliation, he had made it a point to read through the entire syllabus for the year, summarizing and taking meticulous notes to commit it all to memory.

What happened last time would never happen again. As for Marcus Fayjoy, the one who caused it... his reckoning was coming.

Damon exhaled, setting the book aside and pulling his blindfold back over his tired eyes. He had returned to his dorm late last night after his meeting with Iris, just past midnight, only to find Leona Valefier sulking in the dorm kitchen. She sat silently, arms crossed, clearly waiting for him.

When Damon slipped in, her pout deepened, though she said nothing. It was painfully obvious she was upset that he had left without saying a word.

Though guilt didn't weigh on him much, Damon decided to appease her by cooking up a storm. He prepared several hearty meat dishes, reasoning that a full stomach might soften her mood. But more importantly, his encounter with Iris had prompted another thought: he might not be enough to train her. If he was to mold her into someone capable of carrying out her ambitions, he needed help.

That was why he decided to get on Leona's good side. He also resolved to ingratiate himself with Sylvia Moonveil—her vast library of knowledge would undoubtedly prove invaluable.

'At this rate, I might as well be chummy with everyone,' Damon mused.

It wasn't just about forming alliances, though; it was about adaptability. Damon prided himself on being supremely flexible, willing to abandon principles and reshape himself to fit any situation. If it meant surviving—and thriving—then so be it.

His body had mostly recovered, the soreness in his limbs a fading memory. He owed some thanks to the ointments Sylvia and Evangeline had passed along, though he wasn't one for sentimental gratitude.

A faint grumble from his stomach interrupted his thoughts, though he quickly dismissed it. It wasn't the shadow hunger, not yet. He estimated he could hold out for another day or two. That gave him just enough time to deal with Tobias Margan.

Damon pulled a cufflink from his pocket, turning it over in his fingers. It belonged to Marcus Fayjoy. Originally, he had planned to lure Tobias out using Isaac's handwriting. But after some thought, he decided on a more elaborate approach. He would mimic Marcus's handwriting, framing him with a fabricated letter and leaving behind this cufflink along with some carefully placed ice crystals.

It would be perfect revenge, executed just before Damon turned his attention to Marcus and the last remnants of his group. Coincidentally, the five of them would provide just enough to level him up.

'Five left. Once I devour them, I won't have any enemies left. But then what? Prey on other students?'

Damon shook his head, dismissing the thought.

'That's not a long-term plan. Hm, I'll have to target people in Athor's Sanctuary. Surely there are some crooks no one would miss.'

He bit his lip, glancing down at the shadow curling around his feet.

"What do you think, buddy? Innocent students or crooks in town?"

The shadow mimicked a thoughtful pose, one hand on its chin before gesturing ambiguously, suggesting both.

Damon chuckled darkly, shaking his head. "I shouldn't expect you to have any morals. But that's fine—I don't have many either."

Still, he weighed the risks carefully.

"If we go into town, we risk making more enemies. And who knows? Those enemies might turn out to be stronger than expected. But killing innocent students... that's wrong, at least by conventional mortal law. Plus, it could draw the wrath of noble families and the academy's administration."

The shadow moved restlessly, as if contemplating his words.

Damon smirked. "How about some monster meat instead?"

At this, the shadow darted to his side, shaking its head furiously while puffing out its chest and flexing exaggerated muscles.

"I guess that's a no," Damon muttered, amused.

"As expected. Besides, any monster we encounter in this region could kill me in seconds. Even if you could eat monster meat, I'm not about to risk my life for it. I only gamble with an eighty percent chance of winning."

Still, he wondered about the mechanics of shadow hunger. His shadow could eat monster meat but it couldn't convert that to shadow energy.

'I assume it's like that mana crystal. I can gain attribute points, but not shadow energy—or maybe just a boost to one stat.'

He pushed the thought aside for now. Testing theories was one thing, but not at the expense of his survival. Damon had no intention of dying young.... So fighting monsters could wait.

Damon rose from the chair with a groggy stretch, the events of the previous night still lingering in his mind. He shuffled into the bathroom and emerged refreshed, droplets of water clinging to his hair. Croft, the raven, was still dozing on a pillow, feathers ruffled from sleep.

He dressed quickly, fastening his uniform with practiced efficiency before pinning the brooch to his chest. As he opened the door, the subtle creak stirred Croft, who immediately flapped its wings and landed on Damon's shoulder, settling into its usual perch.

Descending to the dining hall on the bottom floor, Damon noted the quiet emptiness. The nobles were still waking, granting him the privilege of having the space to himself. He chose a table near the window and sat down, ready to eat.

As he took his first bite, a familiar presence brushed against his senses—Leona Valefier. Her shadow loomed in his perception before she entered, her golden eyes fixated on him. She said nothing as she approached, her usual boisterous energy conspicuously absent.

Damon sighed, recalling how he had cooked for her the night before to lift her mood. She hadn't even offered to repay the favor. Seeing her so quiet was strange, but he had already decided to keep her in his good graces. If he was going to train Iris properly, Leona's combat expertise might come in handy.

"Hello there... bestie," he said, forcing the last word out with barely concealed discomfort.

Leona's ears perked up, her mood visibly brightening as a radiant smile spread across her face. Her golden eyes sparkled with delight. "What did you just say?"

Before Damon could respond, a maid arrived with a large trolley laden with food, interrupting the moment. Grateful for the distraction, Damon motioned toward the meal.

"Let's eat," he said flatly, avoiding her expectant gaze.

As they began eating, Damon's thoughts wandered.

'I suppose I can use her... although I may have to put up with her whims. Not that I'm not doing that already. Iris, I'm really going all out for you.'