

Living Shadow 96

Chapter 96 Gold To Dirt

As soon as Damon stepped out of the range of the student council office, the Remorseless skill deactivated. The moment it did, the blood rushed back to his head, his heart pounding in his chest. Fear and tension crashed over him like a wave, reminding him of just how close he had come to disaster.

'Hah, that was way too close. One mistake, and I'd have been finished. Thank the goddess...'

He placed a trembling hand over his chest, trying to steady his breathing. The memory of everything he had done and said in Lilith's office replayed in his mind, and when he recalled the fake love confession, his ears turned red with embarrassment.

'I can't believe I said something so ridiculous. So embarrassing.'

He glanced down at his shadow, which was animatedly shaking its head in mock disapproval while giving him a thumbs up. The gesture made it clear: it didn't approve of his methods, but it still supported him. Croft, perched silently on his shoulder, broke the quiet.

"Caw, caw. Evil, evil."

Damon reached into his jacket and pulled out a piece of dried meat, holding it up to the raven.

"Here, your reward for keeping quiet. Stay silent, and you'll get more."

Croft snatched the meat eagerly, its beak snapping shut as it focused on its treat.

Damon rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

'Classes are still ongoing, and with the limited time I have, there's only one thing left to do. The date I set in the false letter is three days from now, which means I need to take out Tobias tomorrow. Lilith will expect me to move in three days, but she'll never anticipate an earlier strike on a completely different target.'

A grin spread across his face as the plan solidified in his mind.

'That's why killing Tobias is the most optimum and unexpected move.'

His shadow writhed erratically, growing and shifting in response to the surge of killing intent emanating from him. Reaching into his uniform jacket, Damon felt the cold, smooth edges of the hollow arrows tipped with crushed ore.

The late afternoon sun cast a warm glow, though it wouldn't be long before it dipped below the horizon.

'I need to sneak into Marcus's dorm room.'

Damon had done his fair share of malicious deeds in the past—burning someone's skin with flay powder hidden in their clothes, for instance—but what he was planning now felt darker, more sinister. He intended to use the cursed ore to drive Marcus mad, leaving him entirely consumed by the sinister effects of exposure.

'A fitting payback.'

He adjusted his pace, heading toward the war halls, his mind racing with preparations. To avoid suspicion, he'd have to sneak in unnoticed. If the head maid saw him returning while classes were still in session, her questions would complicate things.

As he walked, the setting sun painted long shadows across the courtyard. Damon's perception flickered, picking up on the shifting forms around him. He shrank and expanded his Shadow Perception at will, testing its limits and growing more accustomed to its peculiar mechanics.

With a deep sigh, he steadied his nerves. The plan was in motion, and he couldn't afford to falter.

Damon couldn't help but reflect on his relationship with Marcus as he approached the War Halls. His mind wandered back to the day he submitted the golden ticket to the academy and officially enrolled. That day felt like a lifetime ago. He had arrived dressed in cheap, patched commoner clothes, lovingly sewn by his sister before her illness took hold.

Marcus had been one of the first to see him before he put on the academy's pristine uniform. Damon remembered how out of place he had felt.

He hadn't joined the academy at the start of the semester like everyone else. Instead, he came in a few weeks after the entrance exams, just before the quarter-semester evaluation. By then, the students had already formed their cliques, and Damon felt like a strange, unwanted transfer student.

His golden ticket had made the professors ecstatic. They believed they were about to mold the next legend. Damon shook his head bitterly.

"Boy, did I let them down at that quarter-semester evaluation. Mana level 30, huh?"

He sighed, lamenting his low mana. Before the disastrous evaluation, his first day in class had already set the tone for what was to come. The professor had asked the students to share the semester scheme of work with him. Naturally, Marcus had volunteered.

Even back then, Damon didn't trust anyone, but Marcus had blindsided him. Never in his wildest dreams did he imagine Marcus would hand him the outline for the second-year students.

"And like a fool, I went and read up on all the second-year materials," Damon muttered under his breath, shaking his head at his own carelessness.

When the exam day arrived, Damon had been completely unprepared. It was like preparing a boat to climb a mountain. He had been ready to sail the seas, but instead, he was confronted by an insurmountable peak. Unsurprisingly, he failed the theoretical exams.

After that, it was a landslide of failures.

He failed at mana control.

He failed the obstacle course.

He failed at dueling.

He failed at non-attribute magic.

He failed at magic combat.

He failed, he failed, he failed, again and again.

Failure became a constant companion, and resentment festered in his heart. To make things worse, Marcus and his group ganged up on him, adding insult to injury. Damon had held so much poison in his heart during those days.

The golden ticket that had once made him popular and admired now became a source of mockery. His spectacular fall from grace was a spectacle for others to enjoy. And thus, Damon earned the humiliating title:

The Academy's Weakest.

The shame of the academy.

But no matter how hard things got, Damon never bowed his head to them. He never submitted. He endured the ridicule and humiliation with clenched fists, waiting for the evaluation results. Though he already knew he had failed, he still had to see the rankings with his own eyes.

Taking a deep breath, Damon muttered to himself,

"Well, I can't blame Marcus for all of it. Just the theoretical part. The practical exams were all me—I just sucked."

He glanced at his shadow, its movements erratic as if mirroring his turbulent emotions.

"But I'll change that this mid-semester evaluation. I swear it... I'll show them all."

With those words fueling his resolve, Damon finally arrived at his destination after his reflective walk down memory lane.

The War Halls were mostly empty, save for the maids and the terrifying head maid, Matilda. Her mere presence was enough to make most students hesitate to linger. Damon took a deep breath, steeling himself. The next step of his plan awaited.