

Living Shadow 104

Chapter 104 The End Of The Line

Damon coughed as he retreated deeper into the cover of the trees. The shadows embraced him, cloaking his form from sight, but he knew that wouldn't be enough.

He bit his lip, frustration and adrenaline coursing through him.

'I thought Tobias was just a regular human,' he fumed silently, 'but that bastard had to turn out to be half-merfolk.'

Half-merfolk—resistant to non-magical poison and capable of seeing in the dark, though not as well as Damon. The illumination crystal Tobias carried proved his night vision wasn't perfect, but it was still better than most humans.

'Good thing I dragged him into the forest,' Damon thought.

If Tobias returned to the academy, he'd expose everything. But Tobias didn't seem interested in leaving. Damon understood why—Tobias knew he was stronger, and capturing Damon was his best chance at clearing his name. Sneaking out of house arrest would likely make the academy suspect Tobias of trying to flee, which only added to his desperation.

'He's only half-merfolk, so he's resistant, not immune,' Damon reassured himself. 'The poison is affecting him, even if it's slower. He's not at full power.'

Gripping his bow tightly, Damon gritted his teeth.

'This is my killing field. He's the prey. What kind of hunter can't take down something stronger than himself?'

"Tobias," Damon called out, his voice carefully laced with mock desperation, "please, let's talk about this. We can work out a deal."

Tobias chuckled, standing firm in the clearing. Around him, human-sized balls of water floated ominously, the liquid gleaming faintly under the moonlight.

"Finally want to talk, huh?" Tobias taunted, his tone mocking. "So you do know fear after all. I knew your tough-guy act was just that—an act. Fine, come out. I won't kill you."

Damon forced a smile, masking his frustration.

"I'm scared," he said, his voice trembling just enough to sound convincing.

"You still have those water spells. I can't use magic well... You might accidentally kill me."

Tobias smirked, feeling a surge of confidence despite the faint dizziness creeping through him. The rustling of the trees and the sound of his moving water spells made pinpointing Damon's location

difficult. Even his enhanced vision seemed useless against the darkness, which felt almost alive, concealing Damon's every movement.

"Fine," Tobias said, waving his hand. The floating orbs of water condensed into a single large one, reducing his offensive options but making him feel less threatening.

Damon stepped into the clearing. Tobias expected to see him trembling in fear, but instead, Damon raised his bow with practiced precision.

A sharp whistling sound split the air. Tobias reacted on instinct, shifting his remaining water spell as a shield, but the arrow shattered it with ease. Pain exploded in his shoulder, and he staggered back, his mana momentarily disrupted.

"What the—" Tobias glanced at his arm in shock. A small, clean hole pierced through his shoulder, the arrow embedded in the tree behind him.

Damon clicked his tongue and loosed another arrow. Tobias leapt aside before the second shot even left the bowstring.

[Water Blade!]

Tobias slashed his hand, releasing a crescent-shaped wave of water that tore through the trees. Damon ducked, narrowly avoiding the attack, disappearing once more into the shadows.

'Damn it,' Damon thought, steadying his breath.

'Hollow arrows are tricky to use. I was aiming for his heart, but only grazed his shoulder.'

The arrows' complex aerodynamics made them hard to aim precisely, and while they were laced with poison, the hollow tip had also passed through too quickly to disrupt Tobias's mana for long, making the cursed tips barely effective.

Damon clenched his fists.

'I could keep hiding and shooting, but those arrows leave too many holes. It'd be obvious what happened. Plus... I don't have enough left. Most of them are stashed under Marcus's bed to drive him crazy.'

He glanced around, eyeing the traps he had prepared in the forest.

'No matter. I just need to lure him in. Let him feel confident.'

Hidden among the trees, Damon notched another arrow. Taking a deep breath, he aimed carefully and released.

The arrow whistled through the air, grazing Tobias's cheek. A thin line of blood appeared, trickling down his face. Tobias didn't flinch.

"Is that all you've got?" Tobias growled, his voice dripping with contempt. "You're going to need more than cheap tricks to take me down, Damon Grey."

Damon bit his lip, his expression stoic, the calm induced by the effects of Remorseless. The skill dulled his fear, steadying his nerves, but it didn't do anything for his aim.

He loosed another arrow, but Tobias had adapted. The half-merfolk had conjured two layered water barriers around himself. The first slowed down Damon's arrows, disrupting the magical effects they carried. The second layer gave Tobias time to dodge, and it was working.

'These arrows aren't doing much anymore,' Damon thought bitterly.

Tobias raised his hands, his lips curling into a confident smirk.

"[Water Jet!]"

From Tobias's position, high-pressure jets of water erupted in every direction, cutting through the surrounding trees like blades. Damon barely managed to avoid the brunt of the attack, sliding under one of the jets, though the sharp spray of water grazed him. The shrubs he passed through tore at his clothes and skin, leaving bruises and scratches across his body.

Clicking his tongue in frustration, Damon decided it was time to change tactics. He wasn't going to win this from a distance.

Reaching for the omnidirectional gear strapped to his arm, Damon fired the hook into a nearby tree. With a quick tug, the mechanism pulled him forward at high speed. He disengaged the hook mid-air, letting it retract into its brace as he landed deftly closer to Tobias.

'The poison should be working by now,' Damon thought, glancing at Tobias's faintly trembling hands. The hollow arrows had been laced with a powerful toxin, but being half-merfolk gave Tobias an unfair edge. Resistance wasn't immunity, though—Damon just had to press harder.

Tobias raised his hands to attack again, but Damon was ready. Drawing his magisite daggers, he infused them with mana, sharpening their edges until they glimmered dangerously in the moonlight.

Tobias fired a blast of water, but Damon slashed through it with the enhanced daggers, rolling aside to avoid the follow-up attack. Planting his feet firmly against a tree, Damon kicked off, propelling himself straight at Tobias.

He closed the distance in an instant, his dagger poised for a decisive strike.

But Tobias grinned.

"Got you."

Water from the ground surged upward, forming a sphere around Damon in an instant. The sphere engulfed him completely, trapping him in a barrier of swirling liquid.

Damon thrashed against the crushing weight of the water, struggling to move his arms to strike at the barrier's edge. His lungs burned as he tried to hold his breath, his strikes growing weaker with each attempt.

Through the muffled pressure of the water, Tobias's voice reached him, smug and calm.

"Don't bother trying to break it. This is a barrier of water. You'll drown, and when you do, I'll take you back to answer for your crimes."

Damon's daggers sliced through the barrier's edge, but it repaired itself almost instantly, the liquid reforming seamlessly. The air in his lungs was slipping away, replaced by the heavy weight of water pressing against his chest.

Darkness began to creep into the edges of his vision as his movements slowed.

"Damn it..." Damon muttered weakly, his voice barely audible as the water consumed him.

Tobias stood outside the barrier, watching with satisfaction as Damon's struggles diminished. A slow smile spread across his face.

"This is the end for you."