

Living Shadow 173

Chapter 173 Hide A Tree In A Forest

They stopped at an exquisite lodge—one that was obviously paid for by Lilith.

If Damon had his way, he would've taken the money and found an inn favored by adventurers.

Or, if he wanted to take his frugality even further, he would've just slept in the same run-down house he once shared with his sister.

But alas—Lilith was paying.

And as a high noble, she would never sleep in such a place.

More than that—she had no intention of parting ways with him.

So, naturally, she got him a suite.

Too honest for his own good, Damon couldn't help but point out how much money was being wasted.

In fact, he would've preferred they shared a suite, considering the size of the damn thing.

But Lilith had shut that idea down before he could even finish his sentence.

He had to remind her that he'd already seen her bare back before.

That earned him a chilling smile.

Still, he wasn't complaining.

It was her dime.

If she thought he was going to feel guilty about making her pay, she was about to be disappointed.

As for a man's pride in letting a woman pay?

Damon had none.

And so, he had the massive suite to himself.

Standing by the open window, he overlooked the vast spires of Valerion, the city lights sprawling endlessly before him.

But his focus wasn't on the view.

It was on his dagger.

Or rather, on the vial of poisons he was pouring onto its hilt.

Not one—but every poison he could.

Each designed to kill.

After all, his target was a first-class advancement.

And Damon?

Damon wanted to fight him fair and square—

By asking Lilith to pin him down while he stabbed him with a poisoned dagger.

As his target slowly weakened...

And when he was on the brink of death—

Their honorable duel would begin.

This would be his revenge against Back to Back.

Their relationship had never been one of mentorship—it was built on utility.

Back to Back never saw Damon as a friend or student—only as a disposable tool.

Damon, despite hating him, kept coming back, because on some level, he recognized the value of what he had learned.

It was a vicious cycle:

Use. Betray. Discard. Repeat.

But it had shaped Damon into who he was now.

A toxic cycle of survival, manipulation—

And now, eventual reckoning.

That was why Damon had to fight Back to Back—not just kill him.

This was to settle old scores.

And though the duel would be one-sided, since Damon was cheating—

It would be his way of getting closure.

And maybe...

Understanding the wretched elf.

As Damon carefully filled his twin daggers with poison, the door to his suite swung open.

Lilith Astranova stepped inside, holding a large, rolled-up piece of paper.

She glanced at him, her emerald eyes narrowing.

"Should I be asking what you're doing?"

Damon didn't bother looking up. He continued his work, now coating his cursed ore arrows with the same lethal mixture.

"What does it look like?" he muttered. "I'm preparing for a life-and-death duel with someone... in the first-class advancement."

Lilith furrowed her brow.

"I didn't know you got strong enough to do that without your shadow taking over."

She reached for the last arrow, inspecting it briefly before placing it back into its quiver.

Damon smirked.

"Oh, I have something even better."

She raised an eyebrow.

"And what's that? Did you gain a new skill or an ability with that much power?"

He shook his head.

"No. But I have you."

Lilith's lips curled slightly.

"Me?"

"Yeah. You pin him down for me so I can poison and heavily injure him. Then we can start the duel."

She chuckled.

"That's dishonorable."

Damon rolled his eyes.

"It's honorable to even the playing field. And so what? Honor doesn't mean anything to me. You don't win wars by being honorable—you win them by killing your enemies."

Lilith sighed, shaking her head.

"So pinning someone down and poisoning them is a war now? How avant-garde."

She walked over to the bed and unrolled the paper—a map.

"I'll keep that in mind."

She gestured to him.

"Come here."

Damon finished arranging his arrows, then stepped forward, eyes scanning the map.

It was a detailed layout of Valerion.

"Whatever we do, we have to do it tonight," Lilith said. "You said you know a good place—one where we can take everything they have... and feed your shadow as well."

Damon nodded, pointing to a section of the map.

"Right here. The place Quick Hand keeps a large portion of their funds—not just theirs, but their parent organization's too. The Charkata Family. And by extension—the Viscount."

Lilith's eyes flickered with intrigue.

"You're sure you want to attack this place?"

Damon met her gaze.

"This place is..."

"Surrounded by imperial organizations," he finished. "If you want to hide a tree, you do it in a forest. The place is guarded by very few people. But frankly speaking... they don't need many guards."

He traced his finger across the map, stopping at a symbol—a sword and shield.

"They have the Knights' HQ right around the corner. No one would cause trouble there—or even suspect that a criminal organization keeps their treasury in that area. Because of that, there are no magical defenses.

"To the north, they have a high branch of the Temple Diocese."

"To the west," Lilith added, resting her chin on her hand, "the Imperial Tax Office."

Damon nodded.

"No one would ever think to raid that place. No one would even suspect that a smuggling ring keeps their goods there. As for how they procured land in such a location... that's the Viscount's work."

Lilith's expression darkened.

"And how do we get in? They have eyes everywhere. Walking or sneaking in would be difficult. If we mess up, we'd be swamped."

Damon looked at her.

"Exactly. So how do we do it?"

Lilith smirked.

"Walk there? Why would we do such a thing?"

She tilted her head, a flicker of amusement in her emerald eyes.

"They have no magical defenses—so why not let ourselves in... by teleporting?"

She leaned in slightly, her voice turning silky.

"I am, after all, the Priestess of the Void."