

Living Shadow 174

Chapter 174 Back To Back

A young elf sat atop a tall pile of crates, his long blonde hair gleaming in the moonlight streaming through the mansion's large windows. The place was somewhat dusty, but he had opened a window, allowing the cool night air to flow in. A wistful expression lingered on his sharp, handsome features.

He wore a soft tunic reinforced with metal plates at the elbows and kneecaps. A finely crafted bow rested against his side, with a quiver slung across his back, containing only a few arrows. At his waist, two daggers lay strapped within easy reach. Around his neck, hidden beneath his collar, hung a silver pendant engraved with two short blades crossed together.

A quiet sigh escaped his lips as he sensed the movements of five others scattered across the grand hall. The high ceilings and dim candlelight barely illuminated the figures engaged in a casual game of cards, but none of it affected his mood.

'Makia is dead...'

A thin smile crossed his lips.

'Did you know that, runt? You never even got the chance to make good on your promise to kill him...'

His thoughts drifted to a certain stubborn, defiant boy—one who refused to lower his head, no matter the beating, no matter the odds. The icy blue of his eyes had always burned with untamed spirit, refusing to break.

Back-to-Back sighed again. That boy had disappeared for more than a month and a half now. The rest of Quick Hand had already concluded he was dead—after all, where else did that little pickpocket have to run?

But he wasn't so sure.

That runt wouldn't die so easily. Not quietly, at least. If he had died, he would've left behind silent ripples of his struggles... or a big, bloody bang.

A quiet chuckle escaped him.

He first met Damon Grey after the kid went on a reckless pickpocketing spree—without paying protection money. At the time, Back-to-Back hadn't cared. Just another street rat who would either die or be forgotten.

But Damon had been different.

Even after getting beaten down, day after day, he never submitted. He never begged.

'What a tough little shit...'

It was then that Back-to-Back realized the kid had something most didn't—fire, grit... and a little insanity.

Intrigued, he used the boy whenever he could, pushing him, testing him. And somehow, the runt adapted. He learned fast. Too fast. Cunning, ruthless—he was turning into a real freak.

'If someone like him gets a taste for blood... a lot of people are going to die.'

That was something Back-to-Back firmly believed.

Maybe it was some twisted remnant of his past life as a guardian, or maybe he just didn't want to see that boy become a monster. Either way, he made sure Damon's hands stayed clean—for as long as possible.

But it was inevitable.

One day, that boy would be a problem.

Back-to-Back had taught him archery, hoping it would temper his reckless nature. But the sword skills Damon practiced on his own were becoming increasingly vicious. Each day, the boy pieced together techniques, forcing his way past the basics with sheer, relentless will.

So he convinced the kid he had no talent for the sword. That it was a waste of time. Slowly, but surely, he gaslighted him—by showing off his own skill, planting doubt in Damon's mind.

It worked.

Damon eventually picked up archery, learning through blood and sweat—sometimes almost dying in the process.

But even then, his vicious nature couldn't be hidden behind a bow.

Back-to-Back had seen it in the way the boy fought, the way he created his own brutal dagger arts.

Lucky for the world, the goddess was kind.

The boy had little mana. He couldn't cause too much harm.

Still, tonight felt wrong. A lingering unease gnawed at the back of Back-to-Back's mind.

He stood, leaning on the railings.

'Why else would I be so damn melancholic?'

'Maybe I'm getting old...'

'It's not like the runt is coming back to make good on his promise to kill me...'

He chuckled at the thought.

Wouldn't that be something? The boy killing him after just a few short years.

Still, somewhere out there, that little demon was someone else's problem now.

Hopefully, someone had tamed him.

Though...

Maybe they could tame his corpse. But never his spirit.

One of the men playing cards got up and stretched before heading toward the door leading inward—to the restrooms.

Back-to-Back yawned, stepping into the shadows.

'This place is a waste of manpower...'

Six first-class advancement fighters, stationed in a place no one would dare rob? This mansion was surrounded by heavily secured imperial facilities.

And even if someone knew...

Who would be stupid enough to steal from the Charkata Family?

Or worse—the Viscount?

Anyone foolish enough to try was suicidal.

The amount of wealth inside this place was staggering—millions of illegal zeni, magic crystals, rare ores, priceless art, jewelry, property deeds...

A thief's dream.

Or a graveyard.

Back-to-Back yawned again, hardly bothering to stay vigilant.

Until—

A soft groan.

A thud.

The sound of a body hitting the floor.

Before he could even react—

The world shimmered.

A dark pulse rippled through the air as the entire mansion was sealed inside a space barrier.

He looked up at the shimmering world beyond the barrier, now distant and unreachable. The outside had been cut off, leaving only the cold silence of the sealed mansion.

Then, he heard it—two sets of footsteps. Slow. Deliberate.

His fingers tightened around his bowstring as he smoothly pulled back an arrow, his gaze fixed on the source of the approaching sounds. Around him, the others reacted as well, drawing their weapons in tense anticipation. One of them tried to signal the outside, but it was useless.

Space was completely severed.

Back-to-Back narrowed his eyes as the intruders finally revealed themselves.

A young man and a woman stepped forward, walking side by side. The man's presence was calm yet cold, and in his grasp, a dagger gleamed—dripping with fresh blood.

The other men in the room tensed, their grips tightening on their weapons. Caution filled their eyes as they studied the newcomers.

Then, the young man raised his head, his gaze settling on Back-to-Back with a slow, deliberate motion.

A cold smile touched his lips.

"Hey there, Back-to-Back..."

The familiarity in his tone sent a chill through the air.

"I'm here to make good on my promise."

He paused, his piercing eyes gleaming with lethal intent.

"To kill you."