

Living Shadow 178

Chapter 178 Know Thy Self

Damon took a deep breath.

His [Remorseless] skill dulled his emotions, leaving only a cold, calculating logic that steadied his mind. There was no anger, no hesitation—only clarity.

He glanced at Lilith, giving her a small nod.

She narrowed her eyes at him but ultimately released Back-to-Back from the suffocating grip of her Void Attribute Magic.

The moment the spell lifted, Back-to-Back staggered, his body trembling violently. He coughed, his breath ragged, his face pale from blood loss and poison. The air around him reeked of iron and decay, his wounds soaking his tattered clothes in fresh crimson.

Damon met his gaze.

"Back-to-Back... let's settle this with a duel. You and me. Fair and square."

The weakened elf barely managed to push himself upright. His knees wobbled, but his sharp, weary eyes locked onto Damon with an icy glare.

"Y-You... call this... fair and square...?" His voice was weak, barely above a whisper.

"After... you poisoned your opponent?"

Damon scoffed.

"Fine. I'll give you a moment to catch your breath." He took a few steps back.

"I'll even give you some distance."

Back-to-Back knew better than to think of it as a kindness. It wasn't a favor—it was a trap. The longer he stood there, the more the poison would spread through his body, the more blood he would lose. Damon was simply letting time do the work for him.

Damon smirked. "Here are the rules... we walk for sixty seconds, and then we begin."

He turned his head toward Lilith.

"You don't need to worry about her."

Then, speaking louder, "Lilith, don't interfere. Even if I'm dying."

Back-to-Back let out a dry chuckle before coughing again, blood flecking his lips. That was a lie. Damon might act smug, but they both knew—if he was really about to die, Lilith would step in. This wasn't about a fair fight. Damon wasn't interested in proving his strength.

He just wanted to prove something to him.

The elf let out a thin, tired smile.

'Still the same petty brat, huh...?'

Damon had never been the type to forgive or forget. A grudge with him was eternal.

"Fine, let's fight." Back-to-Back straightened his stance despite the burning ache in his muscles.

"I might die today, but I'll take you down with me, you bloodthirsty little runt."

Damon gave a silent nod and turned, his footsteps echoing through the grand hall.

Back-to-Back listened carefully, hearing the rhythm of Damon's steps—until, suddenly, they vanished.

A smile curled on his lips.

'Still using the same street tricks, huh?'

Damon had never been one to fight fair. He wouldn't strike head-on. He would disappear into the darkness and attack from behind—where it was least expected.

Back-to-Back reached for his bow, pulling out two arrows with trembling fingers. His limbs felt like stone, his head heavy with dizziness. His vision blurred.

The poison was working.

But even so, he stepped forward into the moonlit shadows, guided by the faint glow of the twin moons above.

His gaze flickered to Lilith Astranova, standing high above on the balcony.

She watched the scene unfold with a mild, detached expression—but he knew the truth.

If he looked like he was winning, she would kill him.

She wasn't here to spectate. She was here to make sure Damon didn't lose.

'That's fine... I'll just have to end it before she can react.'

A knowing smirk crossed his lips.

Lilith knew where Damon was.

And from the direction of her gaze... so did he.

'Perfect.'

Back-to-Back steadied his breathing, forcing his body to remain still. He didn't move.

He couldn't afford to.

With his injuries, any sudden movement would send him crashing down. So instead, he waited—his bow drawn, his fingers tense on the string.

The moment Damon made his move—

He would fire.

And end this.

Damon knew exactly how Back-to-Back fought.

And that's why he wouldn't do what the elf expected.

Over the years, Damon had imagined killing him countless times. Every scenario, every move, every possibility—he had played them out in his mind over and over again.

He hadn't just learned from Back-to-Back—he had studied him, dissected him, understood him.

And now, he would use that against him.

Damon had always been unpredictable, but this time, he crafted a pattern—a false rhythm for Back-to-Back to recognize, to analyze, to predict. But beneath that facade, his true attack was waiting.

The elf had no idea.

As Back-to-Back held his bow steady, eyes locked in one direction, Damon didn't attack from behind. That was what the elf expected. Instead—

He moved from the opposite side.

The moment Damon emerged from cover, Back-to-Back reacted instantly, twisting his body and firing an arrow without hesitation.

The arrow shot forward, cutting through the air with lethal precision—and the moment it did, Damon felt it.

A killing intent sharper than anything before.

More subdued than the wendigo's, but far more refined. It was pure.

By the time he sensed it—the arrow was already upon him.

Damon's instincts kicked in. He twisted his head, narrowly avoiding the shot as it grazed his cheek. Blood dripped from the shallow cut.

[5x to Agility]

His body accelerated, the world slowing to a crawl under the effects of [Beholder's Gaze.]

But he didn't attack, he moved his left arm to his chest.

A dull thud struck his left arm—another arrow.

Damon glanced down. His shadow armor had stopped it, but the force still sent a shock through his body.

'The first arrow was a feint.'

This was Back-to-Back's signature kill. He never relied on just one shot. The second was always the real hit. Dodging was useless—he never missed.

But Damon already knew that.

His hand moved before his mind could think.

With a flick of his wrist—a dagger flew.

The magisite blade spun through the air straight toward Back-to-Back's head.

The elf reacted immediately, raising his bow to deflect it. The dagger clanged off the wooden frame, spinning harmlessly away—

But that was exactly what Damon wanted.

Before Back-to-Back could lower his arms—

A second dagger plunged into his chest.

Back-to-Back's eyes widened.

'He switched hands.'

Blood gushed from his lips as a crooked smile spread across his face.

"Heh... ha... ha..."

He let out a choked laugh.

His own trick—used against him.

A deep, guttural groan tore from his throat as his body slammed against the wall, his bow slipping from his grasp.

Damon walked forward, ripping the arrow from his left arm, blood dripping freely onto the cold stone floor.

Back-to-Back grinned through the pain.

"Heh... well played, runt..." His voice was hoarse, weak. "You... won this."

He coughed, blood staining his lips. "You finally beat me..."

Damon stood over him. His expression was calm—too calm.

But his fists...

His fists were clenched so tightly his nails dug into his palms, blood pooling between his fingers.

Back-to-Back's grin didn't fade. He tilted his head back against the wall, his breaths coming shallow and ragged.

"Heh... what is it, kiddo...?" His voice was softer now. "You look like you're about to cry..."

Damon's eyes burned.

[Remorseless] deactivated.

His hands trembled. His jaw clenched.

For a long, heavy moment, he didn't speak.

Then, finally—

"Shut up."