

Living Shadow 179

Chapter 179 Tiny Favor

"Let me go... let me go, you bastard—AHH!"

A small body crashed onto the cold, hard floor.

Damon groaned, pain lancing through his ribs as he pushed himself up, his ragged clothes stained with dirt and blood. His arms trembled, covered in bruises, but his blue eyes burned with defiance.

Towering over him stood Back-to-Back, a smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. The elf grabbed Damon by the collar and dragged him forward, shoving him onto the wooden floor of a dimly lit office.

At the center of the room, behind a heavy oak desk, sat a man—the Boss.

Broad-shouldered, thick-bearded, his massive frame looked as if it had been carved from a tree itself. A lumberjack axe rested against his chair, its blade gleaming under the candlelight.

Back-to-Back chuckled as he nudged Damon forward.

"Boss, this little runt was trying to scam the Albedo Familia without your permission." He sneered.
"Heard he pulled off a whole seventy thousand zeni."

Damon's eyes widened.

"What?! No! He set me up! He was the—"

Before he could finish, Back-to-Back kicked him hard in the stomach.

Damon gasped, collapsing to his knees, clutching his gut. A low whisper slithered into his ear.

"Take the blame, runt." Back-to-Back's voice was a quiet threat.

"You don't want the rest of the group finding out about your cute little sister, do you?"

Damon's breath hitched. His fingers curled into fists.

His sister.

His only family.

His Achilles' heel.

"I'll kill you." His voice was raw with hatred.

Back-to-Back chuckled, ruffling his hair mockingly.

"Yeah, sure you will."

He turned toward the Boss.

"So? What are we doing with the kid, Boss? Heh, beating him up should do the trick."

The Boss sighed. He rose from his chair, towering over Damon, looking down with a cold stare.

"He's useful," the Boss muttered.

"Stubborn, but useful. I could break every bone in his body, and Phantom here would still be defiant."

Then, without warning—he kicked Damon in the ribs.

The force sent him skidding across the floor, his breath catching as pain exploded through his chest.

Damon coughed violently, bile rising in his throat.

The Boss shook his head in disappointment.

"What kind of parents gave birth to a rascalion like you?"

Damon gritted his teeth.

Even through the pain—he raised his head. His glare was like ice, unyielding.

"Probably the same kind that raised someone like you."

The room fell silent.

Back-to-Back sighed.

'This kid has a death wish.'

The Boss's expression remained neutral, but a flicker of something unreadable passed through his gaze. He had seen Damon pull this before—testing his limits, pushing just far enough to make himself indispensable.

It was reckless.

But it was also clever.

Back-to-Back chuckled. "Let's not stoop to his level, Boss. Just rough him up and let him go. He still has errands to run for you, right?"

The Boss shook his head.

"No. Not this time."

He leaned back against his desk.

"Cut off three fingers. Then throw him in the cellar for a week."

Damon's fists clenched tighter.

The Boss smirked. "Make that two weeks. No food. No water. If a beating won't teach him, let's see how starvation and isolation do."

Back-to-Back hesitated, but then sighed and nodded.

He unsheathed his dagger and grabbed Damon's wrist.

Damon glared at him. His fingers trembled—not from fear, but from rage.

"I swear, Back-to-Back—I'll kill you."

The elf sighed. "Yeah, yeah. Stay still—clean cuts are easier to reattach with a low potion."

Then—

SLASH.

Three fingers dropped to the floor.

Blood spilled.

Damon's vision blurred. Pain seared through his nerves, a fire consuming his senses.

But he didn't scream.

He didn't give them the satisfaction.

His eyes remained cold as he clutched his bloody stump.

Back-to-Back scoffed and delivered a final, brutal punch.

Darkness swallowed Damon whole.

Cold. Wet. Darkness.

When Damon awoke, his body ached all over.

The air was thick with filth and decay. The stench of human waste clogged his nose, making him gag. The walls were damp, closing in on him, suffocating.

It was pitch black.

His fingers...

Damon's breath hitched as he reached for his hand.

They were back.

Attached.

Bandaged, but stiff.

'What the hell...?'

A mocking voice echoed from the darkness.

"Oh? You're awake?"

Back-to-Back.

Damon's teeth ground together.

The elf chuckled. "I took it upon myself to use a potion to reattach your fingers. Oh, and by the way—you owe me for that potion."

Damon clenched his jaw.

"Owe you?" His voice was low, venomous. "You're the one who set me up. I'm in this mess because of you!"

Back-to-Back sneered.

"Ah, ah, ah... careful now." His voice was light, amused. "Don't forget about little Luna. We wouldn't want all the people you've crossed to find out about her, now would we?"

Damon's fists shook.

This was how Back-to-Back kept control.

By keeping a hand around Damon's Achilles' heel.

His sister.

Back-to-Back hummed. "Anyway, enjoy your stay, kiddo."

He turned to leave, pausing at the exit.

"Oh, and some advice?" His smirk was audible.

"Try to store your piss."

Damon blinked.

"It makes for a good drink after a week of starvation. Should be enough to last you two weeks."

The door slammed shut.

The lock clicked into place.

Damon sat in the dark, alone.

And for the first time in a while, he recalled what hell felt like.

Two weeks. That was how long Damon starved. By the time he was dragged out, he was covered in filth, reeking of waste, and looked half-dead—more like a corpse than a person. He didn't walk out. He was pulled out by Back to Back.

Somehow, after two days, he got up again.

All thanks to Back to Back of course.

And that was all the leverage Back to Back needed to use him again. And again. And again.

This was how their relationship continued for years.

Back to Back had used him countless times, and every time, Damon wanted to kill that damn elf. But each time he even thought about it, the elf would just smirk and say, "There are no eternal friendships, only eternal benefits."

As if they were ever friends to begin with.

Like the time he set him up for certain death, laughing it off as some kind of twisted test of his potential.

"You survived, huh? Damn, I figured they'd gut you in five minutes. Guess I owe someone a zenì or two."

Or the time he sold Damon out.

"You think I sold you out? No, no, I just got a better deal... No hard feelings."

Every day was a game of psychological manipulation, twisting Damon's mind until he could barely tell what was real. Gaslighting him, trying to make him believe he owed the elf. Mocking him whenever he hesitated, whenever he showed even the slightest shred of emotion.

"You wanna cry? Go ahead... Maybe if you finally let go of that ego of yours, they'll only take one finger next time."

Damon never forgot his grudges. He always paid them back in full.

And tonight, Back to Back lay in front of him, caved in, soaked in blood, barely clinging to life.

Even so—even so—Damon's heart twisted. It hurt.

Because no matter how much he wanted to kill this damn elf, there was no denying that, in his own twisted way... Back to Back had protected him too.

And that was why he wouldn't let the elf have the satisfaction of seeing him cry before he died.

Damon exhaled sharply, wiping the blood off his blade. He stared down at the dying elf and muttered coldly,

"I only have a few words for you before you go... There are no eternal benefits either. Nothing lasts forever. And guess what, you shit show?"

His grip on the dagger tightened.

"I actually made friends."

Back to Back's lips curled into a thin, bloody smile.

"Ahh... is that right? Good for you..." He coughed weakly, blood trickling down his chin.

"I'd watch their backs if I were them... Haha... or are they just a figment—" he wheezed, "—a figment of your imagination?"

His half-lidded eyes flickered over the bodies littering the ground—the aftermath of Damon's slaughter.

"You really turned out to be quite the little monster..." Back to Back murmured.

"I tried to stop that, you know... but oh well..." He gave a faint chuckle, voice barely above a whisper.

"I'm as good as dead now..."

Damon clenched his fists.

Back to Back's breaths were getting slower. Shallower.

His fading eyes stared into the void as he rasped,

"Hey, runt... are you still there...? I can't see you... Can I ask for a tiny favor...?"