

Living Shadow 187

Chapter 187 Work Out

"That... that young man is quite tyrannical."

"He's skilled too... He's from Aether Academy."

"What's one of the Aether Academy students doing in the capital?"

Among the onlookers, an Imperial civil servant narrowed his eyes.

"Serves those Imperial Academy students right for bullying an old woman."

Beside him, one of his colleagues suddenly tensed.

"Wait... doesn't that red-haired woman seem familiar?"

He glanced at her, frowning, before his eyes widened in recognition.

"That's—That's Lady Astranova of the Astranova Dukedom... It has to be! She's Aether Academy's student council president!"

Gasps spread through the crowd as murmurs filled the air.

"That boy must be very talented."

"Do you think Lady Astranova wants to groom him to join her house after he graduates?"

"Looks like the Imperial Academy students are going to lose again."

"Yeah, they can't beat Aether Academy..."

Among them, some Imperial Academy students watched with cold expressions.

Meanwhile, Damon raised his fingers and fired a Magic Bullet. The projectile struck its target—his new skill Dead Eye ensured that. With it, he could see the exact path the bullet would take before even pulling the trigger.

The wind mage groaned as he was shot in the arm.

"Sorry about that," Damon mused. "I happen to have something of a schoolshooter mindset... I love shooting... at fellow students. "

Bang. Bang.

Several more shots rang out. Damon grinned crookedly. This was too easy. He had grown stronger. This was the power of someone on the verge of their first-class advancement.

The blonde student—the first one he had punched—staggered to his feet. He glanced at his ice-wielding companion, who was still unscathed, then sniffed and wiped the blood from his nose. He wanted a moment to regain his bearings before attacking. His opponent seemed strong...

"Who are you? I've never heard of a first-year like you among Aether Academy's students."

Damon smiled.

"Are you buying time? That's fine. I needed a workout anyway, so I'll indulge you... My name is Damon Grey."

The blonde narrowed his eyes. He had never heard the name before. He knew all the top ten first-year students in Aether Academy.

"I am Vail Heron."

Damon nodded.

"I don't care."

A simple psychological tactic. Nobles were proud—used to being acknowledged. Being dismissed so easily was like a slap to the face. It worked. Vail scowled and attacked immediately, unleashing a blast of lightning.

Damon dodged the first strike, but a second one followed—no problem. Time slowed slightly under the passive effects of Beholder's Gaze. He sidestepped, the crackling arc of lightning scorching the pavement where he had just stood.

But the other student—an ice mage—launched a blast of frost at him. Damon flipped backward, Parkour enhancing his movement, then fired his omnidirectional gear at the ground. The wires yanked him forward at blinding speed.

He twisted mid-air, delivering a vicious roundhouse kick to the ice mage's face, knocking him out instantly.

Rolling to the side, he easily dodged another lightning strike from Vail.

Damon smiled.

"And then there was one..."

Vail gritted his teeth.

"Why are you attacking us? That old woman and her grandson have nothing to do with you!"

Damon scoffed.

"They don't. I don't care about them... I'm just curious how strong the first-years of the Imperial Academy are."

He raised his hand and turned to the crowd—some of whom were students, their faces a mix of unease and curiosity.

"And all I see is weakness. You can only bully the helpless. You can't fight someone who can punch back."

Damon's dark irises glowed slightly under the streetlights, making Vail shiver.

"Who... who are you really?"

Damon walked toward him with a calm, deliberate gait.

"I'm the guy who's going to break your bones, you noble-grade trash."

Then he shot forward. His speed was frightening. Vail barely had time to react before Damon was already closing the distance. Desperately, he fired off a series of lightning blasts, but Damon weaved through them effortlessly, his thin smile never reaching his eyes.

And then—bam!

Damon's fist buried itself in Vail's face, snapping his head back. He followed up with a brutal knee to the diaphragm, knocking the wind out of him. Before Vail could even gasp for breath, Damon grabbed him, lifted him into the air, and slammed him into the ground. The impact left cracks in the pavement.

Vail tried to crawl away, wheezing, but Damon stepped forward and—crack!

A sickening crunch echoed through the street as Damon stomped down, shattering his leg.

"Amazing how strong you are when you're fighting old women," Damon mused, his voice laced with mockery.

"Your fists must feel really big then."

Vail screamed in agony. The crowd watched in stunned silence, a mix of fear and satisfaction in their expressions.

The old woman clutched her grandson tightly, watching with wide eyes. Meanwhile, the boy—about Damon's age—stared at him with something different. Not fear. Not horror. But... a spark of something deeper.

Damon crouched down, grabbing Vail by the hair and yanking his head up.

"Normally, I'd break every bone I could... but I'm feeling generous today."

He glanced at the others.

"You lot, hand over all your money. I'll take that as compensation for making me watch the pathetic sight of noble brats bullying an elderly woman."

He smirked, pressing Vail's face into the pavement before fishing through his pockets. A heavy pouch of zeni fell into Damon's hands. He weighed it for a moment, then moved to the other three who were barely conscious. Their weak groans didn't stop him from kicking them as he relieved them of their pouches.

The onlookers held their breath. Some were unsettled, others seemed pleased. The patrol guards hesitated, exchanging glances. This was a fight between students from two academies. And frankly... they weren't paid enough to get involved.

Meanwhile, the other Imperial Academy students had already called reinforcements using their pagers.

Lilith, watching from the sidelines, smiled. Everything was going as planned.

Damon finished gathering the money, then picked up the old woman's broken basket of bread. He placed the bread and the stolen zeni inside before tossing the nobles' empty pouches away like garbage.

He walked over to the old woman and handed it to her, leaning in slightly.

"Don't say anything. Just take this and get your grandson out of here," he murmured.

"Trouble's on its way, but they'll be too focused on me to care about you."

Tears welled in the woman's eyes as she clutched the basket.

"Thank you," she whispered, holding her grandson close as he struggled to his feet, limping.

The young man—about Damon's age—looked at him long and hard, as if trying to etch his face into his memory. He said nothing, only giving Damon a firm nod before turning away.

As they disappeared into the streets, Damon's senses flared.

Shadows.

Multiple figures.

Armed and closing in.

He grinned and glanced at Lilith.

"That was barely a workout."

The crowd gawked at him in disbelief. He had fought four people at once—and he still wasn't satisfied?

Lilith chuckled, her emerald eyes gleaming.

"I suppose it's good that more are coming." She flicked a glance at him.

"Beat them all, or our professors will really have something to say about us. Win, and you might actually get on their good side after... well, everything you've done."

Damon smirked, cracking his neck as the sound of rushing footsteps filled the air.

"I suppose I can't let them down." His grin widened. "I'll make sure to cause a big enough commotion for them to clean up."

And then—

The Imperial Academy students charged in.