

Shadow 761

Chapter 761: Who You Were

Truth was always incompatible with liars.

The truth was a steel horse. No matter how hard you tried to stop it you would fail. You might delay this slow steel horse but you could never escape it.

Damon was not a fan of the truth at least when it came to certain things. It was because the truth was bitter and cut deeper than any sword. And right now he was the keeper of many truths.

Though he preferred to call them secrets.

Yes Damon had many secrets and depending on which ones were revealed it could lead to a breakdown of his personal relationships and a complete civil war.

Sadly enough Damon was not the only person with secrets that needed to be revealed. Everyone did.

The question was what was the difference between a secret and a lie.

Lazarak had told Damon things about the trial of truth. This trial had three simple rules.

The first rule was simple.

It shows you who you were.

The second rule was similar.

It shows you who you are.

And finally the last rule.

It shows you who you will become.

Honestly Damon did not know what to make of these strange rules if they could even be called rules. He knew who he was and he understood who he is. The only thing he did not know was who he would become.

And since even the trial could not decide that for him would that not challenge its own rules.

That said Damon knew it would not be that easy.

The reason was simple. This trial and this prison were built to hold a god powerful and wise. How could they be so simple. They were designed to hold down anyone who tried to leave.

Failure was not an option.

Damon sighed. His breath left a faint ripple in the fog as if the world was listening to every exhale.

Except his odds were not looking good from the start. He had no idea where he was at the moment.

Right now he was standing in a place he had never been before. Of course he had not been here before.

Because this world this place was, he glanced down and saw his reflection. He saw his own face, a young man with weary eyes and long black hair falling against pale cheeks.

There were blood stains on his face though it did not seem to be his own. His fingers twitched toward the stains on instinct, rubbing at them, feeling nothing but cold skin and dried texture.

This was not what should have been reflected back. All things considered he was in the body of his shadow Ghost and Ghost looked like a dark solid shadow shaped like a man. Or in this case an elf.

Damon turned around carefully but he saw no one. His movement stirred the mist but revealed nothing. This whole world was a fogged mirror labyrinth.

There were reflections everywhere and all around him everything was made of glass with the fog obscuring his gaze from traveling far.

The ground was smooth and eerily perfect. Everything was silent. So silent Damon began to hear a ringing sound in the air.

At first he thought it was outside of him. Then he realized it was coming from inside his own ears as the silence pressed inward.

'Where the hell is this' he thought. His thought burst out through the mirror surface like a scream.

It rattled the mirror world with a ghastly noise that seemed wrong in this serene world.

The shock made Damon's chest seize. He froze his heart on instinct and placed a hand over it to feel its stillness.

This was not his body that was true. But Ghost had a body like a living elf. So his heart should have been on the left. Damon was sure it was on the left.

Then why was his heart on the right.

Damon's eyes flickered. He angled his head slightly, listening for any shift behind him.

A cold sensation slid across the back of his neck like a fingertip traced in warning. Danger flickered.

Damon pivoted sharply, raising his hands slightly in reflex, ready to strike.

Nothing. Only the same unease. But stronger. He felt as if someone was looking at him. This gaze pressed against his skin, prickling gooseflesh up his arms.

It felt as if he was being forced to stand in the middle of a large crowd completely naked.

Damon turned his head slowly then quickly then sharply then again more cautiously.

His movements became more controlled as his breathing steadied. He tried to pick up where the gaze was coming from. But he could not.

No. He could. He sensed he was being watched. But it was not from any single direction or pair of eyes.

The gaze came from everywhere. It came from this world of reflective surfaces.

'I need to get out of here' his mind said and the world trembled with it.

Damon bit his lip. That small pain grounded him. This was not good. He did not know where Matia and Lazarak were and he was unsure of what was even happening.

He closed his eyes. He forced his posture to stillness. He tried sensing for shadows using Ghost's body. Nothing answered him. The shadows did not move.

No, there were no shadows here.

A terrible thought leaked from his mind into the world.

'Am I the reflection or am I trapped in the mirror.'

His words rolled through the world like a stone crashing across glass. This world was deplorable.

In this place you could not keep secrets. You could not lie. Your thoughts were open and screamed for all to hear.

Everything in your mind, your emotions, feelings, desires, doubts, all of it fed this world.

The greater the lie the stronger the truth when it arrived.

Damon began walking. After a few steps his footsteps finally echoed back. The sound felt delayed like the world had to think about whether it should allow the noise.

"Wait no do not leave me here wait stop"

A voice reached him. It scraped like someone dragging air through a crushed throat. Low and desperate.

"No ...please no someone please..."

This voice was familiar in its desperation.

"Is this really how I am going to die.... In a ditch."

Naturally Damon recognized the voice. His own voice. His shoulders rolled back slightly in preparation for whatever would come next.

"So this is the first rule" he said aloud because he hated how loudly thoughts echoed here.

The first rule showed who you were.

This was Damon. It was the day he had been pushed into a ditch by Marcus and his gang after refusing to yield for the nth time.

Damon remembered how desperate he had been to survive. More than anything he did not feel hatred for the fools. He had only been trying to survive.

"Well they are dead now and they tasted delicious. Wonder why I was so hesitant to eat them."

He spoke aloud to drown out the unease pressing around him.

Then—

The reflection of him on the ground smiled. It rose from the glass like a man pushing up from water. Shards of mirrored liquid slid off its body as it broke free of its eternal mimicry.

Damon did not flinch. His stance widened slightly and his fingers curled as if around an invisible blade.

"First my shadow, now my reflection. How original."

The reflection smiled wider.

"What bravado. You say you want to die. Yet you fight so desperately for life."

It stared at him. Its form seemed more real than Damon's own.

"Liar."

Something inside Damon cracked. It felt like a shard had been stolen right out of his chest.

Chapter 762: Second Failure

Damon stood there frozen for a moment. His eyes widened, but he did not understand what had been taken from him.

He still looked whole. But something had been pulled out of him and handed to his reflection.

Damon did not waste another moment. He shot forward, feet digging against the mirrored ground, sword drawn in an instant.

He swung downward with a frozen crescent arc. The impact smashed against the reflective world behind the reflection, sending cracks rippling outward like veins of ice.

His eyes widened again. His reflection had not even touched the blade. It simply stood there, watching him, unbothered.

Damon glanced at his hands. His fingers trembled slightly from the force of the strike. Then he frowned.

"It's not real," his thoughts screamed through the world, the sound ripping the silence apart.

The reflection smiled softly at him.

"Always resorting to violence. You cannot settle anything without hurting, cheating or killing someone. Father would be so disappointed in you."

Damon crossed his arms, planting his feet firmly. He watched the reflection with cold calculation. He spoke aloud because that was the rule in this world.

"I see. You have your heart on the correct side unlike me. And more importantly you follow the rules of this world. You cannot tell lies. Is that correct."

The reflection smiled the same devious smile Damon would have worn against someone he planned to break.

"That is correct. Unlike you I do not lie."

Damon scoffed. His gaze sharpened as he looked up and down his reflection.

"Then you've already failed to be an honest reflection."

He smiled at it coldly.

"Cut the bullshit. You cannot lie and you do not need to. Because truth cuts deeper than any lie."

The reflection brushed a hand along its cheek lightly, almost tender.

"You know that now so what."

Damon glanced at the reflective surfaces. But none of them showed him. Not even a shadow. It was as if he was not standing in front of a mirror at all. His stomach tightened.

Still, there was something he needed to ask.

"Are you the mirror seraph?"

The reflection shook its head.

"I am not."

Damon narrowed his eyes.

"Then who are you?"

"I am Damon Grey," the reflection replied.

Damon paused. That should have been a lie. But was it. Was it Damon Grey or was he Damon Grey?

Who had the right to decide the name. The identity.

The reflection looked like Damon Grey. It spoke like Damon Grey. Was that not enough to convince the world that it indeed was Damon Grey.

By contrast Damon looked different. He sounded different. He felt different. Was he Damon Grey.

He shook his head hard, pushing the doubts away as they echoed against the mirrored walls.

"Are you scared," the reflection asked.

Damon gritted his teeth with a low snarl.

"Of course not. I am not scared."

Lying was a habit and Damon was good at it. This was second nature.

Without waiting for another word he walked away. A cold unease spread in his chest like creeping frost.

Slowly the reflection walked beside him. Its footsteps adjusted to match Damon's rhythm exactly. Each step echoed with a subtle delay, as if the world was deciding which one of them was real.

As if telling Damon I am real and you are not.

As they walked Damon watched the surface of the mirrors. There were faint movements within them. Fluttering wings. A silhouette watching from far away, obscured by drifting mist.

His reflection was not quiet. Questions burst out around them like drops of ink in water. Damon could not ignore any of them. Every attempt to empty his mind failed. The world forced him to think. Forced him to remember.

After several minutes walking through the mirrored corridors Damon's head grew heavy. His heartbeat dragged like lead. His chest felt tighter than before.

They reached a clear opening. Far away he saw something rising from the fog. A glass cathedral that shimmered like frozen starlight.

"It is quite interesting, don't you think?" the reflection said calmly.

"I always imagined how you would tell her. Do you intend to let her find out on her own? Let us be real for a moment. We both know you are not going to tell her."

Damon bit his lip. His eyes lowered. His breath came out shaky as he walked toward the distant cathedral.

"I killed your father Iris. It was me, Damon Grey, your teacher who taught you magic and combat. The same person who fueled your desire for vengeance."

His glare snapped toward the reflection.

"I did not fuel her desire for revenge. I just gave her a reason to live on. I..."

The reflection sneered mockingly.

"You cannot even finish your words. Let us admit it. She would not need any of that if you did not kill her father. Now now me. Do not act like you are absolved."

Damon's eyes flickered. His knuckles tightened around the hilt of his sword. He stepped back instinctively.

The reflection stepped forward, closing the space.

"Do not forget that. Because I will never let you forget it."

Its form pulsed with a stronger presence. Its voice carried more weight. More solidity.

Damon felt it pressing against him.

"How do you do it anyway. Look at her every day with that lying face. Smile like everything is fine. Is that why you leave teaching her to Lilith Astranova. As if she is the one who owes the debt. Ah blood debt. I love blood debts."

Damon's teeth clamped together. His jaw ached. His thoughts shook the air.

'Shut up.'

His voice echoed like thunder. The mirrors quivered.

"Why? Because you are a coward. Think about it. You did not need to kill her father. If you had the spine to do what needed to be done and kill Marcus and his gang and eat those wretches then Iris would still eat dinner with her father."

The reflection leaned closer to him. Its breath felt cold against Damon's skin.

"I do not want to eat people. That is what you said. Well guess what you damned cannibal. You already did. And you loved it. Deep down you know you did."

The reflection reached out and touched Damon's shoulder. Its hand was warm, solid and very much alive.

"Why don't we go tell Luna what we have been doing. All of it. Will she still accept you as her brother? Or will she only see a monster walking the path toward demonization."

He leaned in closer. His voice slid into Damon's ear.

"She hates demons. Like you."

"This is who you are."

Glass shattered all around them. Damon's heart clenched.

He had failed the second rule.

It shows you who you are.

And his reflection grew stronger.

Chapter 763: Loss Of Self

"You've gone soft... you don't even know where you're going or what you need to do."

The reflection mocked him, its voice echoing faintly as if the air itself was sneering.

"That's why you're always contradicting yourself.... Ashcroft had a plan he had a path he was absolutely certain of Then there's you.."

The insults kept coming, each word growing more vile than the last. They hung in the reflective air like poison.

Damon bit his lip as he walked toward the distant cathedral. His steps were slow, heavy, the ground shimmering beneath him like liquid glass.

He could feel it in his chest, a certainty pressing like stone. He would not pass the Trial of Truth. All he could do was delay the inevitable.

"You're right," Damon admitted. He forced a small smile, the muscles in his face tightening unnaturally.

"And that is a problem... for you ... you want to be me so bad ... yet you forget that I don't tell the truth ... at least my shadow mimics my actions then there's a reflection acting differently from the person casting it..."

The reflection chuckled, lips stretching into a mocking grin that mirrored Damon's face a little too perfectly.

"Bold of you to assume anyone wants to be like you no one even likes you.. personality... shit morality zero.. a bit high and mighty aren't we ... then again all you are is a loser with an ego.."

It glanced at Damon with a cold, sideways look as they walked, its gait smooth and effortless compared to his tense stride.

"I'm not trying to be a failure.. I'm the upgrade.."

A tremor ran through Damon's fingers, but he curled his hands into fists to steady himself. He had to reach the cathedral. He had to convince himself none of this was true. He just needed to buy time.

"Funny you would say that ..." he murmured.

Damon smiled as he walked through the reflective world, his boots rippling the ground like water.

"Morality is a privilege someone who has no reason to lie wouldn't lie. Someone who isn't cornered into theft by starvation will no doubt point fingers because they have the privilege to be moral."

He closed his eyes for a moment, feeling his legs grow heavier, as if every step fought against sinking into the world itself.

"Nevertheless we are all sinners. The only difference is people choose their own sins and they judge others based on a sin that is different from theirs take lies for instance.

We lie everyday even though it's a sin but when we are lied to we act as if we have never lied ourselves... we justify our own sins."

The reflection scoffed softly, a small puff of disdain in its voice.

"Pathetic attempt to buy yourself the time you don't have ... you can't argue about Morality with me .. I have committed no sins I only existed but mere moments ago when you came into this world."

Damon's cold smile sharpened, his gaze narrowing.

"Then you admit you are not real and therefore just a false reflection..."

The reflection chuckled again.

"Lies and trickery is second nature to you ... I already knew that. I knew you would lead the conversation in this direction..."

It wore a long smile that stretched across its face, disturbingly wide yet still a perfect imitation of Damon's.

"I'm what you could have been...yet this is what you are.."

As it spoke those words, Damon heard something. A voice whispering from the reflective surfaces around him. He stiffened. He tried to stay still, to avoid looking, to ignore it.

But it was too late.

His body turned against his will, his neck twisting slowly until he faced what he had been avoiding.

A figure knelt on the reflective ground, tears dripping onto the polished surface. His long dark hair fell around small horns like those of a demon, and two wide black wings hung behind him, bent and broken.

It was Damon. Older, more worn. More humanly shattered.

His hands trembled violently as he begged pleaded and bowed before a glowing symbol.

Damon knew that symbol. He had seen it countless times.

The Unknown God.

The older Damon cried out.

"I beg you... I beg..." He slammed his head onto the ground again and again, the sound of bone meeting glass echoing sharply.

"I don't want to die please.... help me ..."

"I surrender to your divine will... please.."

The sight made Damon's breath catch. His chest tightened. The Damon on the ground was a future version of himself. Older and more desperate, completely broken.

He shook his head slowly.

"No... thats not me..."

The reflection scoffed, a soft smile playing at its lips.

"Ahhh is that so We've already established that I cannot lie and you know that... I am a reflection of who you are... and I have shown you."

It stopped walking, turning fully toward Damon, who stood frozen as he watched himself bow and break.

"God is almighty, powerful and transcendent.. you of all people have felt his limitless power. There is no one and nothing that can stand in his way ..."

Damon's heart tightened as memories flooded him. He had felt the Unknown God's power firsthand. With a single word the god had brought the entire world, Damon included, to a standstill. None could move without his permission.

He had inverted life and death as easily as breathing.

To go against him was impossible. Laughable. A possibility lower than negative infinity.

Damon could die. But he could never submit. That was the one thing that kept him alive. The only thing that allowed him to endure. The ego of the nobody who refused to kneel.

"You would rather go out in a blaze of glory.." the reflection whispered.

"Its just death." Damon whispered back. He felt his hands stiffen. He glanced down and saw the tips of his fingers turning smooth and glossy, transforming into reflective mirror.

"Thats not me.."

"Then why does the truth hurt so much? We both know you'll succeed at everything except dying... you can't escape.."

Damon's heart went still as the voice faded under the rising sound of glass crawling over his skin. His body was becoming a statue of a mirror.

In the distance, he saw a dark armored figure sprinting toward him. Her expression was desperate.

Yet she was too far. She would never reach him in time.

He sighed softly.

"Sorry Luna ... looks like I'll be tapping out early ..."

The figure running toward him was Matia. Her hand formed a spear of ice and she hurled it with a thunderous crack. It struck his reflection, shattering it into countless shards.

But the spear did not stop. It hurtled toward Damon. The only part of him left unfrozen was his head.

Then he heard Matia's voice, frantic and pleading.

"You have to admit... the truth."

She had been shouting that from the moment she appeared. He only heard her now.

"Please..." she begged.

Damon exhaled. Matia had overcome the trial. This world no longer held sway over her.

"The truth huh..."

He glanced at the fractured reflection beside him. What truth did he need to admit?

He had only one chance. So he blurted out random confessions.

"I killed Carmen Vale ..."

"I killed Xander's brother."

"I'm Amon ... I hate.. ahhh... dammit..."

Matia reached him and pressed frost over his body, trying desperately to slow the spread. She looked into his eyes. Damon saw the fear in her expression... the raw desperation.

He sighed.

Then he closed his eyes and whispered.

"I'm afraid."

The mirror stopped.

"I believe my defiance is absolute. I believe death is my liberation. I believe I fear nothing."

His voice trembled.

"But the Seraph showed me the one thing I buried:

I am terrified of becoming the Unknown God's puppet.

I am terrified that all my choices are illusions. I am terrified that every step is manipulated.

I am terrified of my lack of control.

I do not fear death. I fear control."

Damon admitted what he never wanted to say. What every part of him resisted.

"I am afraid someone else is writing my destiny."

The sound of cracking glass boomed outward. Damon broke free from the trial. A white light washed over him.

When his vision cleared, he stood in a white room. At the center, Lazarak glared coldly at a strange entity.

Matia rushed to him and wrapped him in a relieved hug.

Damon had been the last to complete the Trial.

"Ahh this really is a liars nightmare."

Chapter 764: A Psychological Horror Unto Herself

The world was not what she was used to, but she regained her bearings quite easily.

She exhaled once, steady and controlled, letting her eyes adjust as she scanned her surroundings. Her stance settled into that familiar grounded stillness as her heartbeat slowed to its normal rhythm.

Glancing around, her heart was clear. This was the Trial of Truth.

Ediolon was a strange place for a prison, but then again, this was where the rebellious god Lazarak was held.

She doubted Lazarak had ever told the entire truth about his rebellion. If he was not dangerous, there was no way he would be imprisoned here. He was the main prisoner, and everyone else was merely an extra piece added to his confinement.

Her footsteps echoed a few seconds after she stepped. Each delayed footfall rang behind her, completely out of sync with her actual movement, the sound stretching unnaturally across the space. She slowed her pace for a moment, listening, then kept walking.

She remembered the rules Lazarak had told them. She was not worried about herself in this trial. She was worried about her lord.

Damon was not a very honest person. He was something close to a pathological liar and a cheat. For him, lying was almost second nature. Matia's jaw tightened. She needed to find him quickly.

Lazarak had said he would deal with the trial himself, and frankly speaking, Matia was not going to search for him.

If the god wished to wander, he could wander.

Suddenly she stopped in front of a reflective wall outside the cathedral. Her eyes remained calm as she stared into it. Instead of her stalwart form, all she saw was a weak, trembling, androgynous young fairy. Her reflection hunched slightly, its wings shivering as though cold.

Matia did not react. In the distance, she could hear her father's voice.

"Why... why did you have to be born a woman... why did you kill your brother."

Her expression flickered for only a moment. She did not humor her weak-looking reflection.

She stepped forward instead, her armor shifting softly with the motion. The reflection followed her across every surface she passed, its fragile image shaking with each movement.

It was like giving herself the silent treatment. Matia disliked speaking unless absolutely necessary.

And this was not one of those times.

"Are you ashamed of yourself, you disgraceful, weak woman? Shameless. You disappoint your own father."

Matia lifted her gaze toward the reflection. Her thoughts did not echo outward. She was not thinking of anything. She was a woman of action, not unnecessary thoughts. In the heat of battle, overanalyzing small things could lead to death.

She continued walking toward the cathedral, hoping Damon would be there. He had a habit of going wherever the action was.

Tired of being ignored, her reflection rose from the ground.

A soft crack appeared across its form even though Matia had not said a single word. The trial was meant to damage her, yet it seemed she was the one damaging it by simply existing.

Her reflection shifted. This time it took the shape of a faceless armored version of her. A tall woman made of black ice, pale skinned, with no face at all, as if she lacked her own identity.

"You do not care about your father or your brother."

Matia stopped. Her voice was calm, steady, and cold. She did not mean to speak, but this world forced the words from her.

"I love my brother. I despise my father."

The reflection followed her as she walked, unmoved by the truth.

This time it changed tactics.

"...Who are you right now..."

"I am Ruined Fairy," Matia replied. "I am a shadow."

The faceless reflection tilted slightly. Its icy armor glowed faintly, as cold and stalwart as she was.

"Are you not Matia Faldren? Matia was her own person with her own dreams, not an obedient tool of a madman."

Matia paused. Her figure remained stiff just before she reached the cathedral.

"You are a tool. Ruined Fairy is not a name."

The reflection seemed to glance at her, though it had no eyes.

"I am a shadow," Matia replied coldly.

The reflection tilted its head with a soft laugh, a sound Matia would never have made.

"You are a tool that will be discarded. When you break, he will throw you away with all his other broken tools."

"Poor shadow, abandoned by her master," it mocked.

Matia kept her gaze fixed on it.

"He is already trying to die. Did he even bother asking you how you felt about his death? No, he did not. You will be a masterless shadow soon. All alone."

It danced over the glass like a drifting snowflake.

"Loyalty will be rewarded with abandonment. It is like you are the problem. If you were good enough, he would stay. Just like your brother. Your very dead brother."

Matia did not speak. A bitter feeling rose in her chest. She hated it. She hated this thing.

She slowly formed a sword of ice in her hand. Frost spiraled up her wrist, gathering shape as she stepped toward the reflection. It watched her approach as though amused.

Matia raised her sword. The reflection did not move, certain she could not touch it. She swung down with a sharp sound, like glass breaking.

The reflection exploded into pieces. Its head spun across the reflective ground, staring up at her with fear and confusion.

"How."

Matia opened her hand. The sword melted into snowflakes that drifted to the floor.

"You talk too much."

"You are correct. That is true. My truth is that I fear being abandoned by my master. However, that is not all of it. What I fear more than not being enough..."

"I fear that I will not be there for him."

"I want to be the one who is always at his side, even if he chooses oblivion. I may not like it, but I remain loyal to my goal and my nature as a knight and a shadow."

She looked down at the shattered reflection with disdain.

"I am not my father, and I will never be like him. I will be a shadow like no other, because I am Ruined Fairy, shadow of the Unknown Ruler. Do not forget it."

The Trial of Truth had been destroyed by her. It had not even been a challenge. At first she ignored it, but more than anything, Matia's truth was not her fear.

Her truth was loyalty.

Looking around, she noticed something in the distance. Narrowing her eyes, she saw the familiar black silhouette. Her eyes widened and she removed her helm, lifting it with a sharp motion.

Without hesitation, she charged toward him.

It was a shadow's duty to protect her lord, and hers needed her.

Chapter 765: Against The Gods

The prison was made to hold him. Naturally, Lazarak had taken precautions long ago to ensure he could escape if he ever felt the need. It was not that he could not leave. He simply never felt like doing so, or perhaps he always knew he would fail to accomplish his goals even if he did escape.

So the question was what changed.

The answer was simple. He now had company. Someone who would see his goal through to the end, even if that someone was the strange and suicidal shadow that accompanied him.

It was a strange creature, yet Lazarak couldn't help but like him.

He seemed quite cruel, but from what Lazarak had seen, he was quite kind as well. He had given up a chance to rebuild his physical body just so his knight would regain her will.

He liked the shadow.

Lazarak stood in the reflective hall of the mirror cathedral.

Its halls were lined with statues of the goddess of doom, each carved in a different form, each representing a different symbol of her nature. Yet only the one in the center captured his eyes.

In his mind, it looked the most like her.

It was a veiled woman, her face covered completely. Even with the veil hiding her, she radiated an everlasting beauty. Yet behind that beauty, when one looked closer, there was eternal rage and coldness hidden beneath her ruthless intensity.

But Lazarak saw something else behind all that fury, behind the doom she embodied.

He saw sadness. Deep, lonely sadness. The goddess of doom was sad.

Perhaps this was the first thing he ever saw when his creator made him, when she crafted the world he existed in countless eons ago, long before he had gained will, long before the darkness that became Lazarak had consciousness.

When he gazed at his creator back then, he did not only see coldness. He saw sorrow too.

Far be it for a minor god of a small world to know the heart of a true god. Lazarak knew nothing. He understood nothing. Everything he had, everything he was, was simply a product of her will, a result of her creation.

He was the god of peace created by the goddess of war and doom.

His gaze remained fixed on the reflective mirror sculpted in her image.

"You are a failure." The voice came from the statue of the goddess.

Lazarak smiled softly. His toddler-sized form looked even smaller in the vast hall that glorified her. Mortals did not worship the goddess of doom. They did not pray to her. They prayed to lesser gods, who in turn prayed to the goddess.

Still, Lazarak remained unshaken by the accusation.

"Peace is the mother of war. If there is no peace, how can war come? I am not a failure. I am a perfection."

His tone was calm, steady, and unbothered by the mirror's attempt to provoke him.

"Peace is merely a pause before the next war, a temporary rest before glory and carnage."

Lazarak's expression almost faltered, yet he recognized the tactic. The mirror seraph was trying to wound him.

"In life, peace is a pause, yes. But all who fight wars are seekers of peace. Men of peace are the architects of war. In the end, they all desire peace. And when all wars end, when the flames of life die, they find peace in death."

His voice did not waver. Lazarak had always feared he was a failed creation of the goddess of doom. If he was good enough, why did she create his brother, who was his complete opposite?

"You are a failure and a disgrace to the goddess of doom." The mirror seraph mocked him.

Lazarak smiled again at the creature, servant of the lesser god Seraph Null.

This time he struck back.

"My goodness. Are you saying our creator, the goddess of doom, is not perfect? That the mistress of inevitability, the one who controls fate, has acted in error?"

The mirror seraph fell silent, shaken by its own blasphemy.

Mortals did not understand how to fear the goddess of doom because they could not imagine what a true god was capable of. Even lesser gods barely understood.

The omniverse was vast and infinite, yet a place like this was a mere playground for a true god. Here, the rules were whatever they said they were.

If a true god lacked the ability to do something, it was simply because they felt no need to do so.

"How dare a lowly creature like you blaspheme my creator when you know nothing of her greatness."

The mirror seraph regained itself.

"If you knew her greatness, why rebel? Traitor. You were among the greatest, one of two minor gods overseeing this world, yet you grew jealous."

Its words hit Lazarak at his core.

"Your brother, Lord Aetherus, was the heart and soul of this world. Despite you being born first, you were just the backup. You hated how everyone venerated him. You were full of envy, so you tried to usurp him."

Lazarak's brows twitched. It was not wrong.

He had been jealous of his brother. He loved him, but they never saw eye to eye. It was difficult having a sibling who was your exact opposite. A sibling who excelled where you failed. A sibling praised while you faded into obscurity.

Aetherus had all the followers, all the devotion, all the faith. He could inspire entire tribes with only his presence. He was the light. Beautiful, radiant, charismatic.

'Admit it Lazarak. Deep down you were jealous.'

The thought echoed through the cathedral, loud and crushing.

Lazarak bit his lip until he tasted blood.

By contrast, he himself was eccentric, unpredictable, and entirely un-godlike. He did not punish mortals with disasters. He did not give the dramatic security lesser gods offered. Those who prayed for peace were often met with silence at his dusty, forgotten altars.

Promises he made were rarely kept.

"Aetherus could rain down light on battlefields and wipe out entire armies opposing those who prayed to him."

"He could heal wounds and make his devotees nearly immortal in war."

"I am ashamed to say that as his big brother, I fall short. I may wield darkness and power, but I lack the will to carry out such violence with such certainty. I am afraid to kill those who cannot fight. I hate the sight of blood. I tremble at the drums of war."

His eyes filled with tears as he tried to hold back shame.

"I know I am a weak god. I want to uncover and learn. I want to hear laughter, watch plants grow. I want to share knowledge and see dreams come true. It is weak and pathetic, but that is what I want."

His head lowered. His small hands curled into fists.

"I was ashamed, but not anymore. Because you are all wrong. Every last one of you. Just because I do not fit in does not mean there is something wrong with me. It is all of you who are sick. You who keep killing each other."

His tears hardened into fury.

"It is you mad gods who want blood sacrifices. You want heads thrown on your altars. You are insane."

His tiny hand quivered.

"All that blood, all that stench of rotting corpses on your altars. Why would you encourage sacrificing children? Why kill women? Why is everything an endless cycle of vengeance?"

Lazarak had seen it all. He loathed it.

"Lesser gods give their blessings in war to tribes and races. Each one encourages conflict to test mortals like toys. Virgin sacrifices, ripped-out hearts, firstborn children. And you tell me to feel shame?"

His voice cracked with indignation.

"Ashamed? Why would I ever be ashamed when all of you are so twisted? You can give blessings freely. They cost you nothing. You could offer weapons and trinkets created with simple magical alchemy."

His tiny form bristled with pure offense.

"You hoard knowledge. You keep mortals uncivilized and barbaric. You create tribalism, racism, separation, all to feed your flames of war."

"Religion is a joke if it can't preach acceptance, peace and love."

His tears burned with rage.

"How could I not rebel?"

His small hand lifted.

"You did not make a monster out of me. I made a monster of myself to stop monsters."

His tears dried as darkness coiled around him. With a wave of his small hand, a vast blackness swallowed the cathedral. Every mirror dimmed. Without light, a mirror was blind.

"I am Lazarak, god of darkness, serenity, and repose. Now die."

A sound erupted like thousands of stones hurled inside a glass house as countless mirrors shattered. Darkness slowly withdrew.

Lazarak found himself standing in the same cathedral, yet this time a true entity stood before him.

Footsteps echoed behind him. Damon and Matia entered the cathedral.

Lazarak did not take his eyes off the creature.

"I killed your reflection. You are next."

'Lazarak was peace, and peace would wage war for another day of peace.'

'This was Lazarak's vicious circle and his nightmare.'

Damon could only watch this tragic comedy unfold.

'Would he ever wake up from this horror?'

Chapter 766: Thousand Fog Mirror

The mirror seraph was quite an unusual-looking creature; however, this was not out of place for an angel or any creature bearing the name seraph.

Angels were beautiful in a terrifying way... because angels looked terrifying to ward off evil, and demons looked beautiful to deceive.

That said, the mirror seraph was an angel made of mirrors. It didn't quite have a human shape. Instead, it had four reflective wings, its body thin with too many joints, its head bent at an angle with eyes or something like that scattered across its wings.

On its head there was a spinning halo.

It hovered in the air slightly, part of its body cracked, and darkness seemed to have infected its form.

Lazarak's eyes were calm, yet there was an uncharacteristic coldness to them.

"Surrender, Mirror Seraph... you've lost."

The seraph spread its wings. Their reflective forms showed the faces of Lazarak, Damon, and Matia.

Its thin arm stretched and formed a narrow reflective blade.

"I am the warden of this realm... and none shall pass. Traitor god... you shall not pass."

The mirror seraph took a battle stance.

Damon didn't wait for it to attack first. He leaped into the air as he pulled out a bow. Ice spread from the arrow's tip as he drew back with all his might.

With a whispering sound through the wind, he fired. He fell after his own fast-traveling arrow, his dealer hand sharp as he gripped his short, broken sword.

The mirror seraph raised its wings and evaded. Matia rushed forward with a wave of ice behind her, unleashing a barrage of ice spears.

"Reflection."

The seraph whispered the word as its wings spread wider and flapped. Damon's arrow and Matia's ice spears were recreated equally powerful copies appearing with the same speed, force, and mana signature. They collided with the originals and destroyed them.

It was like throwing something at a mirror, except instead of breaking, the mirror sent the attack back with equal strength, and both self-destructed.

Damon flipped in the air as he landed on the ground. Without a moment's hesitation, he charged toward the mirror seraph. His dealer's hand held in the form of a broken sword—half of it was gone, but Damon didn't mind. It was his perfect weapon. Its blade unleashed a crescent slash of magical energy.

"Ice Blade."

This was an ice-based variation of his sword technique, Dark Blade. The slash rushed toward the mirror seraph, who swung its mirror blade. The thin reflective edge let out a sound like breaking glass.

Damon slid across the floor as a sharp shard of deadly mirror whistled past his head.

"Ahh...that was a close one..."

Matia came down on the mirror seraph, her sword shifting into a battle axe made of ice, aiming to smash through its body.

However, the creature dodged and kicked Matia with one of its long, jointed legs. The cathedral floor trembled and the pillars collapsed as Matia was thrown into one of them.

Damon raised his hand. A barrage of magic bullets shot toward the mirror seraph, dipping at speeds high enough to leave afterimages.

It gave Damon the opening he needed some breathing room for a more complex spell.

[Magic Missile]

He released magic missiles based on the attribute of the body he was using.

Ghost had been an ice-attribute elf, and now that he was a shadow and Damon was possessing him, Damon was forced to use Ghost's frost-aligned strength.

Thus the magic missiles were ice.

Damon wasn't sure what effect they'd have...

Magic Missiles were meant to explode on impact while moving at extreme speeds.

The only problem: Damon didn't have enough mana in this body.

Mana had never been a problem for him before. His spells were always overwhelming. But now he could only unleash four magic missiles—where in his own body, he would've fired far more.

The missiles let out a sharp whistle as they shot toward the mirror seraph. It evaded the first easily. But when it tried to weave around the second, it exploded, spreading a wave of ice over the area.

Its glass wings cracked softly.

The mirror seraph tried to move, but a whirlpool of darkness swelled beneath its feet.

Lazarak, who hadn't moved since the fight began, smiled coldly.

"Where do you think you're going... stay."

The seraph tilted its head, sensing danger, just as Matia's battle axe came crashing down toward it. It raised its glass sword. The sword cracked, but it held. The force still drove the seraph onto its knees, or whatever it had in place of knees.

The tip of Matia's axe bit into its shoulder as a chilling coldness traveled through its soul.

This was the skill: Wings of Ruin.

Skill – [Wings of Ruin]

Your blade freezes wounds, making them slow to heal. Each strike leaves an icy scar that saps vitality, hindering recovery and spreading a chilling curse. The more you dance, the deeper the frost sinks, making each injury a lasting mark of your deadly elegance.

It was in pain. Good. That was very good, because Damon knew how deadly this skill was. It prevented healing and spread a chilling curse through the soul.

The fact that Matia had hit the mirror seraph even once was enough to slowly destroy it.

Damon raised his hand as he turned into a shadow, sliding behind the mirror seraph. With a single swipe of his sword, he slashed at another wing.

The pain forced the seraph to screech.

Damon smiled maniacally.

"Not so talkative now, are you..."

The seraph tried to free itself by flying, but Lazarak's darkness held it down.

With only two wings left, it raised its twisted head, seething with rage.

"You have forced my hand."

It lifted its thin hand upward as a strange power began to gather.

"Domain... Thousand Fog Mirror."

Damon felt the familiar dread he had felt in the ruins of Lysithara.

He was witnessing a domain again... except this didn't feel like the incomplete ones a Rank Four could produce.

This was the mirror seraph's domain

Chapter 767: Domain

Domains were a characteristic of the fifth class advancement.

It was a symbol of authority, the dividing line of power.

However, they were still something someone at the fourth class could use. The most basic requirement for reaching the fifth class was the creation of a domain. And in order to create a domain...

Damon had no idea how to do that.

However, he did know that some creatures at the fourth rank possessed a simple domain, an area of influence where they had authority.

The Beldam of the Evil Forest had one around her home, where she controlled everything.

The strange saint in the library of Lysithara had one as well.

And yet... they were both in the fourth class, not the fifth.

To reach the fifth class, one needed to create a complete domain.

So why was the Beldam's domain incomplete?

Simple, she could not use it outside the place she had fixed it. She had been building it, but it wasn't finished.

Those in the fifth class had a complete domain, one with all the powers and abilities a true domain offered.

A fifth-class being was not allowed in this world simply because the highest-ranked native was a fourth-class. Therefore, this creature, the mirror seraph should not be capable of using a domain.

But that wasn't the problem.

The problem was that the mirror seraph was already a higher rank than the fourth. In truth, it was suffering under the suppressive effects of this world.

So for that reason, it had taken a risk. It deployed its fifth-class domain while restricted to the fourth class.

After all, it had already been proven that a fourth-class could use a domain.

Secondly, this was its area. It was being attacked in its own home. Who was to say it hadn't taken precautions?

Lastly, it had a fifth-class or higher comprehension of what a domain was.

And with that understanding alone, it would be able to bring out a frightening amount of a domain's true power.

Damon could tell they were in danger.

He had experienced the insidious effects of a domain before, but only that of the fourth class, never the fifth.

Fourth-class domains did not seem to have a physical effect. They existed, but only as an outline... a blueprint.

But even that outline was powerful.

In her domain, the Beldam could control everything in her house. Her domain allowed her to see and hear their every move.

Back then, Damon had been forced to pretend he was under her control to deceive her... and, in doing so, also deceive his friends.

But the mirror seraph's domain was different.

This domain was complete in terms of understanding.

Damon could tell that much, even with his ignorance.

Lazarak narrowed his eyes slightly, a flicker of irritation crossing his face.

"This thing's gone crazy... to think it would risk using a domain in a lesser world without a single fifth-class being in it..."

He smiled coldly at the mirror seraph.

"He'll get crushed by the laws of this world."

Damon glanced at the mirror seraph. From its two remaining wings, a deep fog poured out... the fog spreading across the cathedral. When it grew sparse, Damon found himself standing in an entirely different place.

The world was almost illusionary, as if trying its best to become real but failing miserably.

Thus it was trapped between the illusionary and the corporeal.

They were standing on a realm of mirrors, hanging in a sparse fog in all directions.

Up was down, down was left—no sense of direction felt correct.

Platforms of mirrors flickered in and out of existence.

Damon was surprisingly close to Lazarak, but Matia was in the opposite direction.

"Hmmm... what's this guy's actual rank..." Damon muttered.

Lazarak folded his arms.

"He's not at the seventh class, so he isn't an actual lesser god... but he is at the third level of the sixth class advancement, officially."

Lazarak glanced around the domain with a sigh.

"It's hovering between fourth and fifth. Basically, he has the understanding of a sixth-class domain, but he's trapped in a fourth-class body... a pseudo, or maybe a quasi-domain."

"Look." Lazarak pointed at the mirror seraph.

Its body, aside from the place Matia had struck had a large crack. At the same time, it was drawing in the mirrors from its domain to fix itself.

There seemed to be an invisible law trying to crush both the domain and the seraph until it conformed to the world's rules.

But the seraph was desperate, healing itself with the mirrors of its own domain.

Once the creature stabilized, it looked at them with the cold expression of someone staring at those who had ruined everything.

"...This is over. You have lost. My domain will crush you."

Damon smiled menacingly as he strode forward.

"Really now... I'd love to experience a quasi-domain."

He drew a bow and fired a string of arrows at the mirror seraph.

The seraph spun in the air as a formation of mirrors formed a pentagon, Damon felt a restrictive force surround him, slowing his body.

He blinked.

That was all he did.

But suddenly he was standing in front of the arrows he had just shot.

And from the way his body was moving, whatever slowed him would vanish in a moment.

There was no way to evade.

Damon would be impaled by his own arrows.

Even if he moved at the last second, this body would still take massive damage.

This was the power of a domain.

Without a domain of your own, fighting inside one was asking to be killed.

A domain allowed you to establish an area with your own rules and influence, only limited by your overall strength and comprehension.

Damon was starting to understand what a domain truly was.

He braced himself for the impact—

A wave of darkness rushed over the arrows, shattering them. Damon was freed from the restrictions, but the force of his interrupted movement was still applied to his body. He went flying headfirst into a mirror, smashing it into pieces.

"Ouch," he whispered in a deadpan tone.

Chapter 768: Serenity

Picking himself up from the broken mirrors, Damon rose just as a thin, invisible slice cut through the space he had been standing in.

A sharp sting of warning rippled down his spine.

He rolled aside, boots skidding across the slick surface, and sprinted along the floating mirrors.

"Lazarak, what's the plan..." Damon called out as he ducked beneath another slicing arc of light.

Lazarak twisted his body around several mirror shards that shot toward him like a volley of arrows, each one whistling past his face. His expression tightened with irritation.

"I'm working on it. You can't beat a domain without a domain except if you're completely crazy..."

Damon dropped into a slide just as the mirror seraph swooped down from above, its attack missing his head by a hair. He twisted, pushing up to his feet in one fluid motion.

"I'm crazy, and even I don't see myself doing that..." he shot back, dodging another slash from the creature.

"You dare disregard me in my own domain..." the mirror seraph screeched, its voice vibrating the glass beneath them.

Damon swung himself under a mirror platform, gripping the edge as his body arced gracefully.

"Shut up, we're trying to think here..." he and Lazarak echoed in unison.

The mirror seraph trembled with fury. Never had it been ignored so thoroughly. Insulted even less.

"What a clown," Lazarak added with disdain, flicking a shard aside with a casual gesture.

"I know, you'd think he actually had a brain in that ugly ass head," Damon mocked, lips curling into a vicious grin as he vaulted over a collapsing mirror.

"What would you expect from someone sent to prison to rot? He's problematic here because he's ugly..." Lazarak chimed in with a thin, sly smile.

Damon caught the meaning immediately. This was their plan.

The truth was simple. This was the mirror seraph's domain, thousands of mirrors. Here, it was stronger than all of them. The only real strategy was to stall for time and keep it too distracted to realize what mattered.

And what mattered was also simple. The domain itself was on borrowed time. It existed in a world that did not allow domains of this level. The world was retaliating, pressing against it with crushing force. When it broke through, the mirror seraph would suffer the full consequences.

Damon and Lazarak worked seamlessly together to ragebait the creature.

He glanced at Lazarak with a grin.

'I knew I liked something about this guy from the beginning. A fellow ragebaiter.'

Thinking back, Lazarak had insulted Damon by calling him ugly more than once. To his face.

"That's enough. I will not be insulted by a foul shadow and a traitor God..." the mirror seraph screamed, wings flaring violently.

It raised its hands. Massive mirror platforms began to shift, grinding against each other. When they collided, fragments scattered like crystal rain. The broken pieces reflected Damon, Lazarak, and Matia.

The reflections shimmered. Then they became real.

Hundreds of copies filled the domain.

"Kill them. Kill them all," the mirror seraph commanded coldly.

Damon froze for a moment. He could not tell which Matia or Lazarak was real. So he turned to the copies of himself, or rather the copies of Ghost, and charged straight toward them. He raised his hand.

[Magic Gatling]

A barrage of magic bullets erupted, lighting the domain with violent flashes. The false copies exploded into fragments as easily as they had appeared.

"Hah, pathetic. No wonder you were left to rot here. Even your creations are just like you. Cheap." Damon's voice echoed with cold mockery.

Cracks spread across the mirror seraph's body as the world intensified its suppression. Damon sidestepped a slice as the creature dove at him, then slipped into a mirror to close the distance again.

Before it could reach him, a storm of ice burst from Matia's wings. She dropped from above, slamming onto the seraph's back. Her wings glittered like a snowflake caught in moonlight.

They crashed through several mirror platforms, tumbling left due to the warped geometry of the domain. The mirror seraph struggled, but Matia seized its wings and unleashed a surge of ice. The feathers turned brittle. A soft crack followed.

The wings shattered.

The seraph plummeted, flailing, but snatched a mirror mid-fall and slammed Matia with it. The glass split in half, reshaping itself. The creature forced the shards into new wings, grotesque and misshapen, slapped onto its back at unnatural angles.

It regained its momentum and prepared to dive into another mirror when a small black shape shot through the air.

Lazarak.

In his tiny infant form, he kicked forward, striking where the creature's face should have been. The seraph flipped violently, sent flying.

It screeched in rage as dozens of mirrors moved into formation, each one glowing with a dangerous magical seal.

Lazarak's face went pale.

Damon felt his heart tighten as a suffocating aura of death filled the air. The magic gathering in those mirrors was wrong.

Deep and dangerous.

The mirror seraph reached into the reflection and pulled out a feather larger than an eagle's wing.

"Seraph Null's feather..." Lazarak whispered. That was bad. They could not allow this now.

Lazarak steadied himself, expression turning cold.

"Who gave you the right to question other people's truth?" he sneered.

"How dare a mirror made in the image of an angel question anyone when all mirrors do is lie."

His gaze sharpened on the seraph as the domain trembled. It was reaching its limit, but not fast enough.

"Did Seraph Null never tell you? You aren't one of us. You're not even a real entity."

Lazarak spoke with surgical cruelty, pulling at the creature's shame, its doubts, its pain.

If the domain attack landed, Damon and Matia would die. Even if Lazarak survived, the seraph would have summoned Seraph Null with the feather.

"You were created from a magic item. Seraph Null called you a tool. That is all you'll ever be..."

His eyes flicked to the feather.

"Go ahead. Call him. Show him how much of an incompetent failure you are."

The mirror seraph froze. Its hand trembled around the feather.

Lazarak raised his hand. His voice dropped to a whisper.

"Serenity."

The domain shattered, crushed by the world. In the same instant, Lazarak's power hit the mirror seraph, and its body went limp.

Damon's eyes widened.

Chapter 769: Death, Become My Blade

It wasn't quite clear what Lazarak had done. Damon was sure his power was a darkness attribute, yet this was something else entirely.

"Is that a spell?" he muttered.

But he didn't feel any magical energy at all. It was as if the world itself had acted in Lazarak's will.

The mirror seraph collapsed with its domain. Liquid mirror spilled from its wounds as it slumped forward, limbs limp. Its once terrifying form was riddled with deep gouges, its former magnificence torn and hollow.

Lazarak fell to one knee, his tiny body trembling as though he had pushed himself too far. Slowly, he rose. A deep, ancient, fearsome aura poured from him. Darkness unfurled behind him like a cloak as he walked toward the fallen seraph.

He stopped in front of it. Even in toddler form, even with it kneeling, the seraph still towered above him. Lazarak raised his small hand and touched its head.

"You are at peace with my authority. Serenity has affected you. All your desire for resistance, violence, and war are gone. Your pain and grievance that you cannot forgive have been taken by me."

His eyes closed, and the mirror seraph stared down at him with a dim, fading light.

"Fear not, lost child. Your pain is not invalidated. Your pain, your rage, your grievance, all of it I have taken onto myself. I am Lazarak, god of darkness. I am the gentle darkness for all children to rest in. Lay in my shade and fear not the perils of the illuminating dawn. There are no wars here."

His voice was a soft melody. For the first time, Damon felt genuine divinity from Lazarak, a strange and benevolent presence rather than the casual madness he normally carried.

The mirror seraph slowly closed its eyes and lay down, as if all its struggles had simply dissolved.

Lazarak sighed and opened his eyes.

Damon glanced at the creature. "Is it dead?"

Lazarak shook his head. "Not quite. I can't kill even if I want to."

Damon stared at him in confusion. That made no sense. Lazarak had been fighting like he intended to kill it earlier. And wasn't his entire goal to wage war against gods?

"Erhm... I'm confused. Aren't you trying to wage a war? I mean, you're literally planning to summon something that can fight the goddess and take down your brother and his posse."

Lazarak shrugged with a thin, conniving smile.

"And nothing has changed. I simply didn't want to scare you off from the start. But I can't actually take a life. It's my vow. I cannot actively kill someone. Anyone, really."

He smiled gently. "I took a vow renouncing murder."

Damon raised a brow. "How do you intend to win a war without killing anyone? Do you intend to kill them with kindness?"

Lazarak understood how ridiculous that sounded, but he did have a method. Lazarak was god of darkness, peace, and repose. Repose was akin to death, but his death was peaceful. He was the final resting place for warriors.

"I can try killing someone," Lazarak said, "but even if I do, they will not die. My vow resurrects them. It was necessary to resist the influence of the power that drives us all to war."

Damon knew exactly what power he meant. The ninth Pillar of the Omniverse. The Pillar of Conflict. Hidden in Aetherus since the zero epoch, rather it had been here always.

"So you know about it," Damon whispered.

Lazarak looked at him with a knowing smile.

"You know about it as well. I knew I liked you."

Damon didn't know where it was, only that it was somewhere in Aetherus. He still had a system quest to find its exact location. He decided to bait Lazarak into revealing something.

"You know where it's hidden too," Damon said, pretending confidence, hoping Lazarak would slip up.

Lazarak's eyes widened. He suddenly leapt up, grabbing Damon's face with shocking urgency.

"You actually know where that foul thing is hidden. Tell me now."

Damon narrowed his eyes. "I don't, actually. I was hoping you did. Looks like that's a stretch."

Lazarak dropped down, brows furrowed.

"That's a shame. How little do you trust me? If I did know, I would tell you. You really are a paranoid person."

Damon rolled his eyes. He already knew he was paranoid. That was how he survived. Doubt, always doubt. He didn't even trust himself. How was he supposed to trust anyone?

He also didn't love himself. So how was he supposed to love anyone?

Damon lowered his head at the thought.

Lazarak sensed the shift in mood and changed the subject.

"I can take a life, but even if I do, they resurrect. Basically, I can't kill someone. But that's fine. I have you."

He smiled at Damon, gentle and warm, while speaking the coldest possible words.

"Death, become my blade. And reap for me a million souls."

Damon's expression remained calm. This confirmed it. He had been right not to trust Lazarak. This god of peace was completely insane. Who else would want to befriend Damon?

In this world everyone wanted something. Nothing wrong with that. That was life.

Even Damon's friends never gave a damn about him when he was the defiant weakest. Maybe he was interesting, but nothing more.

'We are all worth something to someone. If you have no value, you have nothing and no one.'

Growing up meant understanding that even parents loved based on value.

"A god of peace who wields death as his blade," Damon muttered. His lips curled into a thin smile. "I knew something was off about you. Sure, I'm in."

He glanced at the mirror seraph, already drifting to sleep, recalling how Lazarak brought it down with one word.

"What did you do to it? Serenity. What was that?"

Lazarak waved his hand dismissively. "Oh, that little thing. It's nothing. It's merely my authority. Just a little thing gods have. No big deal."

Damon had vague knowledge about authorities, but he didn't think they were such a tangible force.

"What's that? Tell me."

Lazarak smiled. "Fine, but only if you stop holding a grudge about me keeping things from you."

Damon smiled softly. "I promise I'll pay you back in a less hurtful way."

Lazarak shrugged. "Good enough for me."

He raised his hand.

"An authority—"

Chapter 770: Nature Of Authority

An Authority is not magic... it is not a power or a skill.

An Authority is the will to rule... authorities are the right to rule. The power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior.

The right to command or control.

Lazarak lifted his head, his small frame straightening as if preparing to give a lesson. His fingers brushed lightly against his robe, smoothing it with a subtle air of self-importance.

"That is what an Authority is."

Damon gave him a deadpan expression, his eyelids lowering just slightly. He tilted his head as if questioning Lazarak's sanity.

"You just gave me a textbook definition. I already knew that. Tell me what it actually is."

Lazarak cleared his throat softly. He looked at Damon with a somewhat awkward expression, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. His gaze flickered to the side before returning to Damon.

"I was getting there..." he muttered.

He glanced at Damon again before continuing.

"An Authority is a truth the universe has been forced to accept. A truth so absolute that the world obeys it without requiring power, mana, spells, or training."

His brows furrowed as if he were peeling apart the concept in his mind.

"Magic is an action. Divinity is a state. Authority is a law... a truth... Once an Authority is born, the world cannot contradict it."

Damon found himself leaning slightly forward. He rested his hand against his hip, eyes narrowing with a growing spark of interest.

His curiosity came from experience, not ignorance.

With the Unknown God, Damon knew better than to pry into the mysteries of gods, but he was already too deep to turn away.

Lazarak glanced toward the sleeping Mirror Seraph. Its reflective feathers rose and fell slowly, the creature curled in a quiet heap.

"Authorities are unique but can also be similar. It is possible for more than one entity to have the same type of Authority, or rather a different type of Authority within the same domain."

He placed his small hand on his chest, chin lifting as if stating something important.

"Take me for example. I have Authority over serenity and darkness, basically wherever my godhood extends. However that does not mean another god of darkness cannot wield an Authority in that domain."

Damon said nothing, but he nodded faintly. His eyes flickered with recognition.

"So what happens when you meet someone with the same type of Authority."

Lazarak shrugged, raising both hands in a helpless gesture.

"The person with the greatest mastery of the Authority wins, I guess. I am not clear on that. Normally when someone with an Authority, for instance darkness, meets someone using magic to wield darkness, the Authority can simply stop the magic with will alone."

Damon nodded slowly, letting the idea settle.

He placed a hand on his chin, rubbing it thoughtfully.

"It is reality obeying will, not power." Damon whispered softly.

Lazarak had not cast anything earlier. Damon had sensed no mana. There was no magic seal.

The world had simply enforced his will, like a subject kneeling before a ruler because it had no right to resist.

"An Authority is the right to rule." Damon muttered.

Lazarak walked toward the statue of the Goddess of Doom. The statue had been untouched in the battle with the Mirror Seraph. His small fingers reached out and brushed the shards from her glass foot with a gentle, almost reverent touch.

"It is not that simple." He tilted his head toward Damon.

"Authority is not a skill or a power. It overrides even concepts, and they can be absolutely anything."

He gestured to the goddess statue, his movements slow and deliberate.

"Take my creator for example, a true god. She has Authority over doom, and by that measure everything that falls under the definition of doom is within the scope of her Authority. One Authority can do many things, all according to the user's will."

Damon narrowed his eyes, shifting his stance.

"What if someone has an Authority over will itself. Will everything fall under them? Will all Authorities become their own."

Lazarak smiled. The corners of his mouth curled upward as he shook his head, a slight sneer forming.

"You are thinking too simple my friend. It is not that easy. Authorities can counter Authorities. At the level of a true god they are boundless and undefined. At least you can comprehend mine when I use it. You might not even comprehend a true god's."

Damon was silent as he thought of the true beings. His arms lowered to his sides as he exhaled quietly.

More importantly, he thought of the Unknown God. Damon had heard the names of a couple of his Authorities.

Lazarak walked slowly, trailing his fingers along the statue's robe. The glass goddess stood tall, her face hidden beneath her veil.

The Goddess of Doom. Bride of the Unknown God.

Come to think of it, Valarie had once referred to her as a spinster, which was amusing since she was considered the bride of the Unknown God.

Except she was not his wife, just a bride. Similar words but different meanings at their core.

Damon kept his gaze on Lazarak, waiting as the small god continued to speak.

"Authorities are feared because they cannot be scaled or trained."

"You cannot improve it. You cannot strengthen it. You cannot learn it. It is once. Forever and absolute."

Lazarak paused, his expression deepening.

"Though you need a deep understanding of it to wield it properly, or you risk breaking something or tampering with universal laws you do not understand. Basically it is like a king who does not know everything that happens in their kingdom."

Damon nodded slowly, letting the logic settle.

"I see. The more you know of your Authority the more power you gain, and the deeper your influence."

He glanced at Lazarak with a soft smile forming.

"How do I get one."

Lazarak raised a brow, tilting his head.

"Get what."

Damon sighed, shoulders sinking slightly.

"An Authority. How does one gain one. Are you just born with it."

Lazarak nodded with a sly smile.

"Actually I was born with mine. So yes. Though you can gain one. I just do not know how. Maybe if you became a god."

Damon lowered his head in disappointment, his shoulders slumping just a little more.

"Oh I see."

Lazarak scratched his cheek, guilt flickering across his face.

"I mean if you do not have one I can share mine with you. It is not a big deal."

Damon lifted his head, eyes wide.

"Huh. You can share it."

Lazarak nodded with a bright smile.

"Yeah I can. Gods do it all the time. How hard can it be to give someone a small chunk of your Authority."

Damon's eyes widened in surprise. The very idea seemed impossible, yet Lazarak said it casually.

Having learned what an Authority was, he could not help but think further.

"Hmmm the Authorities kind of seem like the Pillars. I mean each of them represents a concept. I wonder if the Pillars are proto Authorities."

Lazarak paused mid gesture and looked at him with surprise.

Damon winced a bit.

"I mean each Pillar is the cosmic Authority of its concept, anchored into the root of existence. Your Authority is like a micro Pillar. A localized truth."

Damon spread his arms wide.

"The Pillar of Conflict is a cosmic Authority. All living things must struggle. It makes sense."

Lazarak stared at him without blinking.

"That makes sense... but..." he whispered softly.

"There is actually more than one. I had a theory but I was not sure of its veracity."

Damon nodded with a faint furrow in his expression. It seemed Lazarak did not know everything.

"Yeah there are like twelve of them."