

ShadowBound 104

Chapter 104: Quite Fascinating

Mystica leaned back in her chair, her eyes gleaming with mischief. "Why don't you have a seat? No need to feel so stiff in my chamber," she said, gesturing gracefully toward one of the plush black couches near the center of the room.

Liam, however, remained standing. His expression was unreadable, his posture relaxed yet firm. "I don't mean any disrespect, but if it's all the same to you, let's get to the point. Why am I here?"

Mystica's smile widened at his directness. "Straight to business, are we?" She tapped her chin playfully before gesturing toward a sleek black book resting on the table beside her.

"Very well. Apart from wanting to hand over this book," she said, tapping it lightly with her index finger, "I also thought it'd be a good time for a little conversation. A heart-to-heart, if you will. So, for the sake of this book... won't you sit?"

Liam's eyes briefly flicked to the book, his interest clear despite his stoic demeanor. He considered her words for a moment, then sighed. "Alright," he said, walking over and taking the seat she had previously indicated.

Mystica tilted her head slightly, watching him settle in. "You're such a fascinating one, Liam. Let me start with this: about a week ago, you were nearly executed, weren't you?" Her tone was casual, but her teasing smile betrayed her amusement.

Liam met her gaze, unfazed. "What exactly are you getting at? And why bring it up now, after staying silent about it for so long?"

Mystica chuckled softly, swirling the wine in her glass before taking a sip. "Fair questions. Yes, I knew about it—watched the whole thing, in fact. You handled yourself impressively, I must say. But why didn't I intervene?" She leaned forward slightly, her tone dropping just enough to carry a hint of seriousness. "Simple. I wanted to see how you'd handle the situation."

"You see, Liam, the stronger you become, the more people will notice you. And with your magic—dark magic—you're going to attract attention, not all of it welcome. This was something I needed to see for myself. And also you need to understand that every action you take will ripple outward, drawing both allies and enemies."

She paused, watching his reaction. Liam's face remained impassive, his silence prompting her to continue.

"That said, I have to ask..." Mystica's voice shifted, her teasing smile returning. "Why did you break Sheila so badly? She's been quieter than a shadow lately, and we both know it's not just because of her loss to you."

Liam was quiet for a moment, his gaze steady. Finally, he said, "This side of Sheila exists because she allows it to. Whatever she's feeling, it's hers to deal with." His tone was blunt, his words carrying an air of finality.

Mystica arched a brow, clearly intrigued. "Care to elaborate on that?"

"No."

Her purple eyes widened slightly in mock surprise. "Huh? Huhhh? Why not?"

"Because," Liam said flatly, "you already know the answer."

Mystica chuckled, her voice soft but rich with amusement. "You're sharper than you let on, Liam. Sometimes I wonder how a kid like you can pick up on things so quickly, especially when you've only just begun your magical journey. Truly fascinating... Liam Hunter."

Liam offered no response, his expression as stoic as ever.

"Well," Mystica said, standing up and stretching with exaggerated elegance, "that's all I had for you. Take the book." She waved her hand, and the black book floated off the table, hovering toward Liam.

He caught it effortlessly, standing as he did. "If that's all, then I'll take my leave." He turned toward the door, ready to go.

"One more thing," Mystica called, her tone playful. "A little tip, free of charge: if you want to start learning from that book—especially a spell, I'd recommend beginning with Shadow Solidification. It's simple enough for a beginner, I think. But it's very helpful once you understand how to use it effectively."

Liam paused, his hand on the door. "How do I get back to my room?" he asked, turning his head slightly to glance at her.

"The same way you got here, darling. The spell I cast is still active. Just walk through the door, and you'll find yourself back where you belong." She smiled, waving him off. "Now go. I've had enough work for one evening, and I need to unwind. Undressing, after all, is the best part of the day."

Liam didn't linger. He turned the knob and stepped through the doorway. Just as Mystica promised, he found himself back in his room, the faint scent of the room greeting him as the black book rested firmly in his hand.

Pausing, he turned back to the door, a flicker of doubt crossing his mind. He opened it cautiously, half-expecting some lingering trace of Mystica's spell. Instead, he was greeted by the silent hallway, illuminated by the soft, warm glow of the wall-mounted lamps.

"Looks like she canceled the spell," he muttered, more to himself than anyone else. Satisfied, he shut the door quietly and walked over to his desk, placing the black book down with care.

Liam stood there for a moment, his eyes lingering on the book's cover. Its surface was smooth but faintly glimmered, as though imbued with Mystica's magic.

He began unbuttoning his shirt as he moved toward the bathroom, his mind replaying the odd sensation of being teleported through a doorway. By the time he pulled the shirt off, an uneasy feeling had begun to creep over him.

"Let's not do that again," he murmured, tossing his shirt into the laundry bin. His tone was firm, as if addressing Mystica despite her absence.

Meanwhile, back in Mystica's chamber, the air was heavy with the scent of lavender and rose petals. She stood by her ornate bathtub, her usual gown discarded onto a nearby chair. Slipping into a silken robe, she tied it loosely at the waist as she prepared to indulge in a well-deserved bath.

"I'm utterly drained today," she murmured, her voice soft but laced with weariness. She reached out, dipping her fingers into the steaming water, watching the ripples dance around the scattered rose petals.

Just as she began to untie her robe to step in, the sound of her door creaking open stopped her in her tracks.

Her head tilted slightly, a smirk already forming on her lips as she turned her gaze over her shoulder. Standing in the doorway were Galen and Magnus, their contrasting expressions painting a humorous picture.

Magnus was the first to speak, his tone laced with exasperation. "I don't know why you dragged me here, Galen. I've got things to do, you know. Important things."

"Your 'important things' usually involve napping or causing trouble," Galen retorted without even sparing him a glance. "But for once, you might actually contribute something useful."

Magnus let out an exaggerated sigh, throwing his hands up in defeat. "Why does it have to be today?"

Mystica's voice cut through their banter like silk laced with mischief. "Well, well, not only did you arrive at the perfect time, but you brought Magnus along too. Don't tell me..." She turned to face them fully, her robe slipping slightly off one shoulder, teasing the curve of her skin. "...we're having a threesome tonight?"

Galen's expression immediately soured, his red eyes narrowing. "Why is it that everything you say sounds like innuendo?"

"Because you barged in without knocking, darling," Mystica replied smoothly, her smirk widening as she adjusted the robe just enough to retain her modesty—or what little of it she cared to maintain.

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Magnus, meanwhile, scratched the back of his neck, his easy grin showing he wasn't fazed in the slightest. "Hey there, Mystica. Looks like we caught you at bath time."

"You don't say, Magnus." Her tone shifted to a flirtatious lilt as she sauntered closer to him. "Missed me, have you?"

"Who wouldn't miss you?" Magnus shot back, his grin widening.

Mystica chuckled, a rich, melodic sound that filled the room. "Charming as ever. Now, if you two don't mind, let me take a quick bath. I promise not to keep you waiting too long."

With that, she turned back toward the tub, her movements deliberate and graceful. As the robe slipped from her shoulders and fell to the floor, the warm light of the chamber highlighted the smooth lines of her back.

Unbothered by the presence of her uninvited guests, she stepped into the bath with an elegance that only Mystica could manage, the rose-scented water enveloping her as she sank in with a satisfied sigh.

"You two can make yourselves comfortable—or not," she said, her voice teasing as she rested her arms on the edge of the tub. "But if you're here to talk, be patient. This goddess deserves her moment of peace."

Magnus exchanged a glance with Galen, his grin turning sheepish. "Yeah, she's still the same."

"And you're still wasting time," Galen replied, though there was a faint smirk tugging at his lips.

Mystica only laughed softly, her eyes closing as she let the warmth of the water and the presence of her guests amuse her.