

ShadowBound 112

Chapter 112: The Progress

The training with Mystica was drawing to a close. While Mystica herself was preoccupied with other matters, Sheila, Liam, Dylan, and Ariana had each absorbed the lessons she had imparted to them in their own ways.

Ariana and Dylan mostly trained together, having spent the longest time under Mystica's guidance. They shared insights and worked in sync, their bond growing even stronger.

Sheila, on the other hand, preferred to spend most of her time immersed in the book Mystica had given her, pouring over its contents in search of new spells and techniques. Occasionally, she would join them in their sessions, though she was more focused on learning than on sparring.

In the weeks that passed, Sheila underwent a subtle yet noticeable transformation. It wasn't a drastic change, but it was evident to those who knew her well. Since her heart-to-heart conversation with Liam, Sheila had made a quiet effort to reconnect with the kinder, more innocent side of herself.

She longed to rediscover the sweet girl she once was, before she had felt the pressure to emulate her brother. Yet, in doing so, she didn't lose the fierce determination that had always been a part of her.

This shift, though gradual, was beginning to make Sheila more considerate of those around her, more attuned to the feelings of others. Dylan, especially, noticed and appreciated the change. As Sheila's childhood friend, he had always been troubled by her attempts to mold herself into someone else to earn her brother's approval.

For a while, he had felt powerless to help her see that she didn't need to lose herself in the process. But now, seeing her begin to return to her true self, he couldn't help but feel a sense of relief, even if traces of her brother's imitation still lingered. To Dylan, it didn't matter—he was simply happy to see the girl he cared about come back.

One of Sheila's quiet ambitions over the past few weeks had been to draw closer to Liam. Yet, despite her best efforts, the most she could manage from him was a curt "hi." That brief greeting was almost a fluke, an outcome of chance rather than any real connection.

Sheila, however, was determined to prove to Liam how much she had changed, how much she was willing to put in to show him her true self. But his cold indifference made his earlier words—"Nothing you really do matters to me"—even clearer. Sheila's attempts to reach him felt like echoes in an empty space, but she kept trying nonetheless.

As for Liam, he had entered his final weeks with Mystica focused on acquiring new multiple techniques. However, his plans shifted unexpectedly, giving him the time to hone his craft in ways he hadn't anticipated.

Among the lessons he absorbed were two new abilities in addition to Shadow Solidification from the tome Mystica had provided him: Shadow Rend and Assassin's Veil.

Shadow Rend was a technique that allowed the user to unleash a flurry of slashes in a single, fluid motion, channeling myst through their weapon or hands. With each strike, shadowy afterimages would be created, each capable of delivering its own blow.

The technique could overwhelm multiple opponents in a wide arc, or concentrate its strikes on a single target for devastating precision. It was an immensely powerful technique, but it demanded careful control over both myst and movement to avoid overexertion.

Although Liam had made significant progress in learning Shadow Rend, the technique still pushed his limits. It consumed a great deal of myst, forcing him to expand his core even further. Mastering it was proving difficult, and while he had learned the basics, he wasn't yet able to use it at its full potential.

Assassin's Veil, a dark magic spell that erases the user's presence by manipulating light, sound, and myst, rendering them completely undetectable. The caster channels myst to suppress their own aura, blending seamlessly with their surroundings and silencing any noise they make.

This creates an illusion of invisibility, allowing the user to move unnoticed, making it ideal for stealth, infiltration, and ambushes. While the spell offers total concealment, it is energy-draining and vulnerable to intense light or physical contact, requiring precise control to maintain its effectiveness.

Both new techniques Liam had learned were undeniably fascinating, but he chose not to focus on perfecting them just yet. Mastery would require months of dedicated training for each, and Liam knew his time was better spent refining something he could use more immediately.

Instead, he dedicated most of his efforts to Shadow Solidification. Realizing the depth of knowledge within the book *Mystica* had given him, Liam decided against rushing through its contents. He resolved to take a more methodical approach, learning one spell or technique at a time.

His progress with Shadow Solidification was impressive. Where he had once struggled to form basic constructs—simple spheres, rudimentary daggers, small shields, or the vague outline of a hand—he could now craft far more complex and substantial creations.

Larger objects took shape under his control, and he could produce them in greater quantities, showcasing both his improved precision and expanded myst reserves. The growth was undeniable, and Liam's confidence in his abilities grew with each success.

As for Chris and his lackeys, Liam hadn't encountered them in some time. Their absence was unusual, almost suspicious, but he chose not to let it distract him. There were more pressing matters at hand, and whatever schemes they were plotting could wait.

"I can't believe my time with you all is already coming to an end," *Mystica* announced in a dramatic, mocking tone, addressing Ariana, Dylan, Liam, and Sheila.

The group stood in the familiar clearing of the illusory forest.

"Time does fly, doesn't it?" *Mystica* continued, clasping her hands together with exaggerated sorrow.

"I might be sad, but I'm actually happy. Why? Because I'm finally going to have a month of freedom! No students to pester me while you all head off for weaponry training. Such a relief." She finished with a mischievous smirk.

Dylan clutched his chest dramatically and stumbled backward. "How could you say such a thing in front of your loyal servant? I'm devastated, wounded—nay, betrayed!" With a flourish, he fell to the ground as if struck by an arrow.

"Oh, please." Mystica rolled her eyes, though her smirk widened. "No need for theatrics, Dylan. You and Ariana will still be seeing me often."

Dylan immediately popped back up, dusting himself off. "Aha! I knew it. She can't resist my charm. I'm obviously her favorite."

"You're definitely something," Sheila quipped dryly, as she gave him a side glance. "Favorite might be a stretch."

Ariana giggled softly, shaking her head. "It seems you can never change, Dylan." Experience tales at empire

"Of course not," Dylan replied, grinning. "Why mess with perfection?"

Mystica raised a hand to silence the playful banter. "Anyway, I have something to propose, but it's entirely up to you if you're interested." Her expression turned slightly more serious, though her usual playful tone remained.

"I've been invited by one of the noble families in Grandeur City to a party. Since you'll have two free days before your training shift begins, I was thinking of taking you four along as my guests."

Dylan immediately shot to his feet, his eyes wide with excitement. "A party? Grandeur City? Nobles? Yes! I accept! Lead me to the promised land!" He threw his arms up dramatically, earning a chuckle from Mystica.

"Well, that was predictable," Sheila remarked with a hint of amusement in her voice. "I'm in too. It sounds like a good opportunity to relax."

Ariana nodded eagerly, her eyes lighting up. "It sounds wonderful. Thank you for inviting us, Mystica."

Mystica's gaze shifted to Liam, who hadn't responded. "And what about you, Liam?" she asked, her tone turning deliberately mischievous. "Don't tell me you're turning down a chance to hobnob with the elite."

Liam placed his hands in his pockets, his expression calm. "I don't think I'm much of a party person. But I actually need to speak with you about something. I have a question."

Mystica tilted her head curiously, studying him for a moment before shrugging. "Is that so? Very well. You three," she said, turning to Ariana, Dylan, and Sheila, "can get going. He'll join you later."

Dylan gasped dramatically. "You're leaving us alone, Mystica? Abandoning us in our hour of need?"

Ariana rolled her eyes. "We're just heading to the teleportation cave. Try not to get lost on the way, Dylan."

"Lost? Me? Impossible!" Dylan placed a hand on his chest. "I have an impeccable sense of direction. Follow me, ladies—I'll lead us to glory."

"More like a detour," Sheila teased as she followed him.

As they walked toward the cave, Ariana leaned closer to Sheila. "Do you think Liam's going to join us later?" she whispered.

Sheila shrugged, glancing back toward the clearing. "Maybe. He's... complicated. But who knows? Mystica might talk him into it."

"I hope she does," Ariana replied with a shy smile.

Back in the clearing, Mystica waited until the others were out of earshot before turning to Liam. "Alright, Liam. What's so important that you couldn't tell me in front of them?"

"I didn't say I had something that important tell you which required them to go away. You told them to leave first." Liam replied with a deadpan expression.

"You sure do have guts." Mystica said with an animated irritated face. "Anyway, what is it you want you ask?"