

ShadowBound 115

Chapter 115: Anything To Get Out Of Here

The festivity hall was an awe-inspiring sight, a vast space designed to impress and overwhelm. Tables draped in pristine white sheets stretched across the room, each adorned with glittering crystal glasses and elegant centerpieces of rare, luminous flowers.

Waiters and waitresses, impeccably dressed in black and white, glided gracefully between the guests, their trays laden with sparkling wine and exotic hors d'oeuvres. At the far end of the hall, a grand piano stood on a raised platform, and a virtuoso pianist filled the air with delicate, enchanting melodies that seemed to carry the very essence of elegance.

The hall was alive with conversation and laughter as nobles and guests mingled in their dazzling attire, creating a kaleidoscope of colors and textures. Each voice, every clink of glass, and the gentle murmur of the music wove together into a symphony of sophistication that should have been captivating. Yet, to Liam, it was nothing more than noise.

Mystica turned to her students, her usual teasing smirk softening into something more genuine. "Go on. Enjoy yourselves. Mingle, eat, drink—this is part of your education too."

Dylan was the first to seize the opportunity, flashing a grin. "Don't mind if I do!" He immediately darted off, his path weaving between the tables like an arrow fired at every dish and drink he could spot. He piled his plate high with treats that looked too refined for someone his age, ignoring the raised eyebrows of passing nobles.

Ariana and Sheila, more composed, exchanged glances before making their way toward Catherine and Emilia. The Avanclore sisters greeted them warmly, and before long, the four young women were engrossed in conversation.

Sheila's polite demeanor meshed well with Catherine's grace, while Ariana and Emilia's shared vibrant energy made their laughter echo across the hall. Little Clara lingered at the edge of the group, occasionally giggling at something Emilia said but remaining shyly tucked behind her elder sisters.

Liam, however, drifted toward a counter at the edge of the room. He ignored the sparkling wines and colorful cocktails being poured by the bartenders, asking simply for water. The bartender gave him a curious glance but complied without a word, sliding a glass of chilled water across the counter.

Taking the glass, Liam leaned against the polished surface and scanned the room, his sharp eyes cataloging every detail. His face remained stoic, but his thoughts churned with irritation and unease.

"This is quite irritating," he thought, sipping his water. "Why did Mystica even bring us here? Parading around in fancy clothes, exchanging meaningless pleasantries... Is there a need for all these? I could've been trainings at this hour. Instead, I'm stuck here, with all these people. Well, it's my fault for asking Mystica those questions anyway."

His attention shifted to Dylan, now stuffing his face with delicacies while balancing a glass of some sparkling drink in one hand. He let out a quiet sigh. "At least someone's enjoying themselves. Dylan's probably going to regret that drink when Mystica finds out."

Then his eyes flicked toward Sheila and Ariana, now fully engaged with the Avanclore sisters. Sheila's elegant posture and polite smiles made her seem like she belonged in a place like this. Ariana, on the other hand, looked radiant, her genuine laughter lighting up the group.

As he stood there for a while, a nearby group of children—around Clara's age—laughed loudly as they ran past, their shrill voices cutting through the music. Liam's jaw tightened. "And the kids. They're just as loud as Dylan. Great."

He took another sip of water and closed his eyes for a moment, letting the cool liquid calm his frustration. But even with his eyes closed, the faint glow of the chandelier above and the ceaseless chatter around him refused to let him find peace.

Mystica's voice echoed in his mind. "Try not to embarrass yourselves."

"I'm doing my best," Liam thought wryly, opening his eyes again. "But I'd rather face a horde of shadowbeasts than another hour of this."

In the dense forest just miles from the Avanciare estate, the moonlight seeped through the canopy, casting an eerie glow upon the rugged cliff. Two figures stood there, their forms monstrous yet oddly majestic under the pale light.

The twin blood demons with deep crimson skin that shimmered like liquid fire, bore identical, wicked grins on their faces, revealing sharp fangs that gleamed with a sinister sheen.

The younger demon, squatting with an almost predatory ease, rested his clawed hands on his knees, his sharp black nails tapping against his flesh. "I'm sick and tired of waiting, brother," he hissed, his voice guttural and laced with hunger. "We've been feasting on scraps, but tonight... tonight, we should have a proper meal. A feast fit for demons."

The elder demon, standing tall beside him, crossed his arms over his broad chest. His golden eyes glowed faintly as he gazed out toward the distant lights of Grandeur City.

"Seems you've forgotten why we're here," he said, his voice deeper, more composed but no less menacing. "Our purpose isn't gluttony. Lord Sanguis sent us to retrieve the artifact. It's too important to risk failure for the sake of your appetite."

The younger demon's lips curled into a feral grin, his long tongue flicking out to lick at his sharp teeth. "I know what you're saying, brother, but can't you feel it? Their scent—" He inhaled deeply, his nostrils flaring. "It's thick in the air. So many humans gathered in one place. So vulnerable. How can you not feel the urge to devour them all?"

The elder demon's gaze flicked down to his brother, his grin widening slightly. "Oh, I feel it," he admitted, his tone calm yet dripping with malice. "The urge to tear through them, to hear their screams as we feast. But the Primordial is among them. She may look like a woman, but don't forget what she is. Crossing paths with her could cost us everything. We retrieve the artifact first—then we devour whoever crosses our path on the way out."

The younger demon snarled but then let out a low, malicious chuckle. "Now that," he said, his tone darkly gleeful, "sounds like a plan I can live with. As long as I get to taste their blood before the night is over."

The elder demon was about to respond when the younger one froze, his golden eyes narrowing as he gestured with a clawed finger. "But why wait when we have a gift right below us?" he said, his voice laced with cruel excitement.

The elder demon followed his brother's gesture to the base of the cliff, where a young girl—no more than 12 or 13—walking through the forest. She wore a neat, beautiful dress that seemed out of place in the wilderness, its fabric shimmering faintly in the moonlight.

Her hair was tied back in a delicate braid, and she carried a small lantern that cast a warm glow around her. Her movements were careless, vulnerable, as he moved up to the cliff.

"Looks like we've found something to whet our appetites," the younger demon said, his grin widening to reveal his full set of razor-sharp teeth. "Her scent is pure, untainted by fear. Perfect for a little snack."

The elder demon's grin mirrored his brother's, his golden eyes gleaming. "A young one like that... she'll be just the thing to boost our energy before the main event."

The younger demon rose to his feet, his clawed hands flexing eagerly. "Shall I grab her, or do you want the honors, brother?"

The elder demon smirked. "Patience. Let's make this enjoyable. We'll stalk her a bit, let her feel the terror creep in. Fear makes the blood sweeter, after all."

They both chuckled darkly, their sinister laughter echoing through the forest as they melted into the shadows, their forms blending seamlessly with the night.

A few minutes earlier, back at the Avanclore estate, the grand hall was alive with the sounds of laughter and music, but near the center of the room, a woman approached Mrs. Avanclore with hurried steps. Her elegant gown swished as she leaned in, her face marked with worry. Your next read awaits at empire

"Sister," the woman whispered urgently, though her voice carried enough for nearby nobles to hear. "I can't find Elena. I think she sneaked out to the cliff again."

Mrs. Avanclore stiffened, but her composure remained intact as she addressed her sister. "Calm yourself. How could Elena possibly have gone to that cliff at this hour? It's miles away from here," she said, though a flicker of concern crossed her eyes.

"You know how enthusiastic Elena is about that place," the woman insisted, wringing her hands. "She loves the view and always talks about the stories surrounding it. Please, let your guards search for her. With people disappearing recently... I can't bear the thought of my sweet Elena becoming a victim."

A murmur rippled through the surrounding nobles who had overheard the conversation. Whispers about the recent disappearances in Grandeur City stirred the atmosphere, adding a weight of unease to the otherwise joyous evening.

Standing at the edge of the room, Liam observed the scene with sharp eyes, a faint smirk tugging at his lips. 'Looks like an opportunity has presented itself,' he thought. He could feel the growing tension and sensed his chance to escape this suffocating festivity.

As Mrs. Avanclore turned to her husband, who was already summoning the guards with a flick of his hand, Liam decided to act. He approached with quiet confidence although the nobles glanced curiously at the unexpected interruption.

"I'd like to join the search for Elena," Liam said, his voice calm but resolute.

Mrs. Avanclore looked at him with raised brows, her tone sharp. "Young man, I appreciate your concern, but this is not a task for a guest to involve himself in. You could become a hindrance should anything happen."

Before Liam could respond, Mystica appeared seemingly out of nowhere, a glass of wine elegantly balanced in her hand. Her presence was magnetic, drawing the attention of everyone around her. She took a sip before speaking, her tone playful yet firm.

"Oh, let him go," Mystica said with a faint smile. "Liam isn't just any guest. He's more capable than you might think. If anything, he'll help your guards find Elena faster."

Mrs. Avanclore opened her mouth to protest, but her husband placed a calming hand on her arm. "If Mystica vouches for him, then I'll allow it," Mr. Avanclore said after a moment of deliberation.

Mrs. Avanclore hesitated but ultimately nodded, though her expression remained skeptical. "Very well. But if you put yourself in harm's way, don't say I didn't warn you."

Liam inclined his head respectfully. "Understood."

As the guards prepared to leave, Liam followed them toward the mansion's exit. Mystica gave him a knowing glance, her eyes sparkling with amusement. "Don't get lost, my little shadow. And try not to disappoint."