

ShadowBound 125

Chapter 125: Recovery

Three days had passed since the demon attack, and Grandeur City was beginning to regain its rhythm. Outside the walls of the Academy, rumors about the horrific events continued to swirl, growing more exaggerated with every retelling. Whispers of blood demons, mysterious mages, and shadowy battles filled the streets.

Within the walls of the Academy, however, Mystica ensured a far more controlled narrative. Only the story she wanted heard was allowed to spread. According to this carefully constructed tale, she had singlehandedly vanquished the demons, saving countless lives in the process. No mention of Liam or his involvement was allowed to surface.

The Academy's staff, save for Galen and Magnus, were no exception to Mystica's manipulations. Through subtle suggestions and clever deflections, she guided their perceptions, leaving them none the wiser.

The students, captivated by Mystica's supposed heroism, gossiped endlessly about her unmatched power. To them, she was an untouchable force, the ultimate savior. They had no inkling of the truth—that someone within their ranks had faced down death and emerged scarred but victorious.

Only a select few knew the real story: Dylan, Sheila, and Ariana. Mystica had considered erasing even their memories, crafting an alternate reality where they, alongside Liam, had merely aided civilians while she alone battled the blood demons. Yet, she hesitated. Mystica, for all her calculated cunning, valued the bonds that tied this small group together. For now, their knowledge of the truth was a risk she was willing to take.

Hiding Liam's condition presented its own set of challenges. His injuries, though healed by Mystica's magic, left him weakened and vulnerable. Sending him to the Academy's infirmary would have raised too many questions—questions Mystica was not prepared to answer.

Instead, she brought him to her own private quarters, a space few even knew existed. Hidden within the labyrinthine structure of the Academy, her chambers were a sanctuary of mystic energy, lined with shelves of ancient tomes and glowing artifacts. It was here that she tended to Liam, personally ensuring his recovery.

By day, Mystica maintained her commanding presence within the Academy, seamlessly juggling her duties and her facade. By night, she returned to her chambers, checking on Liam with a quiet tenderness that seemed at odds with her usual playful demeanor.

Though he remained unconscious for much of those three days, Mystica could sense his strength returning. She had poured her energy into stabilizing him, healing not just his physical wounds but the deeper, invisible scars left by his battle with the demons.

As she watched over him, a rare flicker of vulnerability crossed her face. "You've done more than anyone could have expected, Liam," she murmured softly one evening. "But the world isn't ready to know your name yet. Especially, not when you are dark magic user."

It was the fourth night since Liam had fallen into his slumber. The moon hung high in the sky, casting its pale light over Grandeur City, while inside Mystica's private chambers, the atmosphere was quiet but tense.

Galen entered the room with his usual calm, his tall frame casting a shadow across the walls. His crimson eyes briefly scanned the dimly lit room before settling on the bed where Liam lay. His expression was neutral, as always, betraying no emotion.

"How's he doing?" he asked, stepping closer to the bed.

Mystica leaned casually against a nearby counter, a glass of wine in her hand, the liquid glinting like rubies in the faint light. Her posture was relaxed, but her sharp gaze revealed she was anything but.

"Thanks to my healing magic, his recovery has been remarkable. Physically, he's fine—most of his wounds have closed, and his strength is slowly returning. But the poison..." She trailed off, her lips curving slightly as if amused by the challenge. "It infected most of his internal organs. That's the only reason he's still out cold."

Galen frowned slightly. "Blood Demons. They never change, do they?"

Mystica nodded. "Savage killers with a nasty edge to their blood magic. But their real ace is their venom. Every attack made with their blood carries a high-level toxin—designed to kill not instantly, but slowly. It's cruel and efficient."

"Yeah, I've seen their work before," Galen muttered, his voice low. He crossed his arms as he stared at Liam. "The poison in their blood isn't just meant to kill. It breaks down myst flow, weakening anyone it infects. That alone is deadly in a fight."

Mystica smirked, swirling her wine lazily. "Liam got hit plenty of times during that battle. His system was flooded with poison, but even so, he managed to hold on. Thanks to that breathing technique of his—what's it called again? Crimson Breathing?"

Galen gave a small nod.

"That technique," Mystica continued, her voice holding a touch of admiration, "it helped him neutralize the poison just enough to stay alive. He might not have even realized he was doing it. His instincts carried him through."

"I doubt he knew," Galen agreed, moving to the counter to pour himself a drink. The faint clink of glass echoed softly. "Still, it's impressive. Most knights would've succumbed to that much poison within hours, even with training."

Mystica sat down in a nearby chair, resting her chin on her hand. "You're right. But let's talk about something more curious—why were Blood Demons in Zone 12 to begin with? This wasn't some random attack, Galen. They were after something."

Galen paused mid-sip, his eyes narrowing slightly. "You think they had a specific target?"

Mystica raised an eyebrow. "Demons don't pull off coordinated attacks like this unless there's a motive. And this wasn't their first move, was it? The Tempest Kingdom was attacked recently too, wasn't it?"

Galen frowned deeply, setting his drink down. "You're not wrong. The Syncs that attacked the Tempest Kingdom were Gaia Demons—territorial and primal. And now Blood Demons show up here? Those two types don't work together. Hell, they don't even tolerate each other."

Mystica leaned forward, a glint of interest in her eyes. "Exactly. So, what could possibly link these attacks? Different demon types, different Zones, but the timing is too close to ignore."

Galen's expression darkened as the realization hit him. He straightened, his tone more serious. "It's not the Zones they're targeting—it's the leadership. The Tempest Kingdom's queen was the target of that attack. And now they're here, in one of the most fortified areas of the Zones. If they weren't after territory, then..."

"They're after influence," Mystica finished, her voice unusually sharp. "Or something tied to it. But what's the connection between the Tempest Kingdom and Zone 12?"

Galen shook his head, his frustration evident. "I don't know yet, but whatever it is, it's bigger than we thought. This isn't just a random surge in demon activity."

Mystica smirked faintly, her mischievous demeanor returning. "Well, whatever their game is, I'll figure it out. Demons aren't exactly subtle, and if they're targeting the Zones' leadership, they're playing a dangerous hand. One they won't win."

Galen glanced at her, his eyes narrowing slightly. "Well, no matter what it is—"

He was cut off by Liam's abrupt gasp, the sharp intake of air echoing in the room. In an instant, Liam was upright, his body tense and his hands instinctively flexing to summon his daggers, but nothing happened.

His gaze darted around the room, locking on Mystica and Galen. Mystica appeared calm, her lips curving into a playful smirk, while Galen barely seemed fazed, sipping leisurely from his glass of wine.

"Relax, kid. No need to get all worked up," Galen drawled, his tone almost bored.

Liam, still catching his breath, glared at Galen. "A little more concern wouldn't hurt," Mystica teased, casting a sideways glance at Galen.

Liam's heartbeat hammered in his chest as he processed their words. His muscles screamed for rest, but his mind wouldn't allow it. As he started to regain his composure, a sudden dizziness overwhelmed him. His vision blurred, and he staggered, barely keeping himself upright.

Before he could collapse, Mystica flicked her wrist, her air magic weaving a gentle current around him. In the blink of an eye, Liam floated into the air, weightless and suspended, until she gently guided him back onto the bed.

"Looks like you're not quite yourself yet," Mystica murmured, her tone a mixture of concern and amusement. "You still need rest."

Liam's voice was weak, barely above a whisper. "Why do I feel... so weak?"

"Poison," Mystica replied, her eyes glinting with a hint of mischief. "The demons poisoned you. But that breathing technique of yours? It helped more than you realize."

"Poison?" Liam's mind reeled as the pieces fell into place. "The demons... had poison?"

His thoughts fragmented as exhaustion overcame him. His body gave out, and he fell back into the bed, his consciousness fading.

Galen finished his glass of wine with a languid motion. "His body still needs rest. Leave him be."

"Yeah," Mystica agreed, her voice light with a soft giggle. "But don't worry, he'll be fine."

Galen turned toward the door, walking toward it calmly. He paused with his hand on the doorframe, casting one last glance at Mystica. "See you around, Mystica. And don't get any ideas with the kid." He flashed a knowing smirk as he opened the door.

Mystica feigned a wounded expression, putting a hand to her chest dramatically. "Oh, Galen, your words cut me so deeply. I would never do such a thing," she said, her voice dripping with playful sarcasm.

Galen rolled his eyes, walking out of the room with a smirk still on his lips.