

ShadowBound 128

Chapter 128: Catching Up 2

'Did we get a new professor?' Liam wondered, narrowing his eyes at the man standing at the front of the class. 'Or have I just been out too long and forgotten he existed?'

The professor was a middle-aged man with neatly combed gray hair and sharp amber eyes that seemed to pierce through the room. He stood tall, his presence commanding respect, and wore glasses perched perfectly on his nose. His tailored suit added to his air of precision and professionalism.

Liam leaned slightly toward Dylan, lowering his voice to a whisper. "Hey, Dylan."

"What's up, man?" Dylan whispered back, leaning in with his trademark casual grin.

"Who's that? I don't think I've seen him before," Liam asked, gesturing subtly toward the professor.

Dylan's face lit up with sudden realization. "Oh, right! My bad—I forgot you were out. That's Professor Armond Caelus, our new history professor. He started a couple of days ago."

'History professor?' Liam frowned slightly. 'There hasn't been a history professor in this class for the past two months. Looks like the academy's making some changes.'

"I see," Liam replied softly. "Thanks."

But just as the words left his lips, the sharp voice of Professor Caelus rang through the room, silencing the low hum of chatter.

"Since the two gentlemen in the back find private conversation more engaging than my lecture," Professor Caelus said, his tone cold and precise, "perhaps they would be so kind as to enlighten the rest of us on what could possibly be more important than today's lesson."

All eyes turned toward Liam and Dylan, the class suddenly buzzing with muted whispers and stifled laughter.

Dylan leaned back in his chair, a sheepish grin spreading across his face. "Well, Professor, I was just catching Liam up on your name and role since he's been out sick."

The professor's amber eyes narrowed behind his glasses as he regarded Dylan, his expression unreadable. "I appreciate your eagerness to keep your classmate informed, Mr. Wellington," he said, his voice laced with quiet authority, "but perhaps next time you could wait until after the lecture."

"Yes, sir," Dylan replied with a mockingly serious nod, though the faint trace of amusement never left his face.

"And you,..." Professor Caelus, trying to find what to call Liam.

"Liam Hunter." Liam said.

"Mr. Hunter." The Professor continued, "since you've missed my previous lectures, I suggest you pay extra attention today. I don't tolerate disruptions in my classroom."

Liam simply nodded, his stoic demeanor unchanged. "Understood, Professor."

"Good," Professor Caelus said sharply, returning to the board. "Now, as I was saying..."

As the lecture resumed, Dylan leaned toward Liam again, whispering with a smirk, "Man, he's got the whole 'stern teacher' act down, huh?"

"Save it for after class," Liam muttered.

Professor Caelus adjusted his glasses and turned to face the class, his commanding voice filling the room. "For the past three days, we've been discussing the vital role of noble families in the Eastern Region and their contributions to this academy. As many of you are aware, institutions like this one

don't run solely on talent and magic. They require funding, resources, and political backing—things that the noble houses of the Eastern Region have provided for centuries."

He began writing on the board, neat letters spelling out names that carried weight: Avanclore, Greystone, Marthias.

"These families are pillars of our society. The Avanclore Family, for instance, is one of the largest economic supporters of the academy. Their trade networks extend across the continent, bringing wealth and stability to this region. Without them, this institution—and many others like it—wouldn't exist."

Liam's gaze flicked to the board, his expression impassive but his thoughts swirling.

'The Avanclore Family, they were quite kind people.' he mused. 'But... what's the big deal about some rich merchants funding an academy? How does any of this help me survive a fight—or win one?' He leaned back in his seat, crossing his arms as he let the professor's words flow past him.

But as he glanced around the room, he noticed how intently the other students were paying attention, scribbling notes or nodding in agreement.

'Am I the only one who thinks this is useless?' Liam wondered. He clenched his fists slightly, the memory of his grandfather surfacing. 'Grandfather never cared about nobles, and neither do I. The ones in Zone 18 were nothing but selfish trash, looking out for themselves while the rest of us struggled to survive.'

Zone 18, his home in the southern region, was a harsh and underdeveloped place. Life there was simple but hard, the people kind but powerless. The so-called nobles who lived there barely lifted a finger to help anyone but themselves. They were nothing compared to these grand-sounding families in the Eastern Region.

Still, as Liam's gaze shifted back to the professor, a thought nagged at him.

'But what do I even know about the Eastern Region or even this continent?' he admitted reluctantly. 'The only reason I made it here after Grandfather died was because of that old map he had of Zone 14. Without it, I would've been completely lost. And if I don't even understand how things work here, what's stopping me from getting blindsided by something I don't see coming?'

With a quiet sigh, Liam sat up a little straighter, forcing himself to focus. The last thing he wanted was to admit that this lecture might actually teach him something useful.

"Now," Professor Caelus continued, his tone sharp as ever, "while the noble families' contributions are primarily economic and political, they also shape the culture and alliances within the Eastern Region. Understanding their influence is critical for anyone hoping to thrive here—not just for success but for survival. A lack of knowledge about these dynamics could be your downfall."

Liam's jaw tightened at the professor's words, the implicit challenge in them striking a chord. 'Fine,' he thought, 'if knowing about these nobles is part of surviving here, I'll learn. But that doesn't mean I have to like it.'

The lecture finally ended after what felt like an eternity to Liam. As Professor Caelus left the classroom, the students began to chatter excitedly, the weight of the morning's theories lifting from their minds. The rest of the day's lessons passed in a blur, the monotony of lectures giving way to the anticipation of physical training.

By noon, the academy's cafeteria was bustling with students, the air filled with the scent of freshly cooked meals and the steady hum of conversation. Tables were packed as everyone eagerly refueled before their weaponry training.

Sitting at a table near the window, Liam quietly ate his meal, his expression unreadable as usual. Across from him sat Dylan and Asher, the latter sporting his usual smug grin as he watched the chaos of the cafeteria unfold.

The peace at their table, however, was short-lived.

"Why are you sitting here today?" Asher's sharp tone cut through the noise, his irritation evident as his gaze landed on Charlotte, who had just gracefully taken a seat next to Liam.

Charlotte ignored Asher's pointed question, her attention fully on Liam. "Why are you so loud, blue flame? Besides, it's not like I'm here for you," she replied coolly, leaning closer to Liam with a sly smile.

"So, my stoic boyfriend," she began, her tone dripping with playful seduction, "mind if I feed you? Or would you prefer to feed me?" Her voice softened as she leaned closer, her teasing words meant for Liam alone.

Liam paused mid-bite, his expression unchanging but his eyes narrowing slightly. "I would prefer it if you didn't call me that," he said flatly. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he added, "...And I'd also appreciate it if you gave me some space." His voice was calm but firm, his red eyes briefly meeting hers with a flicker of annoyance.

Charlotte's grin widened, unbothered by his response. "Mmm, I like it when you look at me that way," she purred, her voice dropping an octave. "It makes me love you even more... and it makes me feel hotter. Are you willing to take responsibility for that?" Her words were barely above a whisper as she leaned in closer, her lips near his ear.

Liam let out a quiet sigh, his grip on his fork tightening momentarily before he set it down. His jaw tensed as he took a deep breath, willing himself to stay calm.

Across the table, Dylan leaned toward Asher, his voice low but laced with amusement. "I swear I can hear his blood pressure rising."

Asher chuckled, leaning back in his chair with a satisfied smirk. "This is priceless," he said, crossing his arms. "It's nice to see him squirm for once. Makes my day, honestly."

Charlotte, oblivious or perhaps intentionally ignoring the commentary, continued her assault on Liam's patience. She rested her chin in her palm, watching him with a mischievous glint in her eyes. "You know," she said sweetly, "you're even more attractive when you're annoyed. Maybe I should do this more often."

Liam, now visibly exasperated, picked up his fork again and resumed eating in silence, clearly deciding that engaging further was a waste of energy.

Dylan leaned closer to Asher again, grinning. "Think he's planning your murder or hers first?"

Asher shrugged, the smirk still on his face. "Who cares? It's worth it."

For a brief moment, Liam's red eyes flicked toward both of them, the warning clear. The two wisely fell silent, though their amusement didn't fade.

Charlotte, however, seemed more emboldened than ever. She leaned even closer, practically invading Liam's personal space. "So, about that responsibility..." she whispered, the teasing lilt in her voice impossible to ignore.

Liam set down his fork again, his patience finally reaching its limit. "Charlotte," he said quietly, "you're are slowly reaching your limits."

She pulled back slightly, her smirk softening into a playful pout. "Fine, fine," she said, raising her hands in mock surrender. "I'll behave... only because you asked nicely."