

ShadowBound 133

Chapter 133: Beast Magic

"Beast Magic?" Liam asked, his brows slightly furrowed in confusion.

"Yeah, Bae. Don't tell me you don't know what Beast Magic is," Charlotte teased, her voice dripping with playful condescension.

"The name gives me an idea, but I don't actually know what it entails," Liam admitted, his tone flat and uninterested.

Charlotte gasped dramatically, placing the back of her hand on her forehead like a tragic actress in a play. "How cruel of you, Bae! To not know your girlfriend's affinity—do you even realize how much that hurts me?" She clutched her chest, feigning deep pain.

"Girlfriend?!" Ariana's mind spiraled at the word, her face turning red with jealousy. She bit her lip, her eyes darting between Liam and Charlotte. 'Do they really have something going on between them?' she thought, her heart racing as she tried to suppress her emotions.

"You're barely a friend," Liam replied calmly, not even sparing Charlotte a glance as he continued eating. "I'd prefer if you didn't say that."

Charlotte leaned closer, her voice dropping to a purr. "Why so shy, Bae? We might've just started being friends today, but I know you like me too."

Dylan, who had been silently enjoying the banter, burst into laughter. "Damn, Charlotte, why don't you just explain to Liam what Beast Magic is? Maybe then he'll consider liking you." He smirked, leaning back in his chair.

"Mm, you might be onto something," Charlotte said, turning her full attention back to Liam. "Alright, listen up, Bae—and everyone else, since it seems I've got an audience."

Everyone at the table—Ariana, Sheila, Dylan, and even Asher—was now focused on her, intrigued despite themselves.

"So," Charlotte began with a mischievous glint in her eyes, "Beast Magic is one of the rarest affinities out there. And that's because not everyone can inherit it."

"Not everyone?" Liam asked, tilting his head slightly. "Isn't it just like any other affinity? What makes it so special?"

Charlotte chuckled, clearly enjoying the moment. "Oh, it's very special. You see, Beast Magic was born from something... unique. It traces back to the intimate relationships between humans and mystical beasts."

Dylan nearly choked on his food, his face contorted in disbelief. "Wait—hold up! How did that even work?"

Charlotte smirked, shrugging. "Beats me. But during the time of the Demon Wars, some humans decided to... uh, bond with mystical beasts from the Beast Realm. They wanted children with powerful, unique affinities. And voila—Beast Magic was born."

"So, what you're saying is," Asher interjected, folding his arms, "to have an affinity for Beast Magic, you need to be part of a bloodline that includes... well..." He trailed off, not wanting to say the obvious.

"Exactly," Charlotte confirmed with a wink.

Dylan leaned forward, his face a mixture of amusement and disbelief. "So, let me get this straight. Your great-great-great-great grandparents were a human and a mystical beast who, uh, did the... deed?"

Charlotte laughed, clearly unbothered. "Pretty much. And look at me now—living proof of their success." She leaned back smugly, arms crossed, as everyone else at the table processed her words.

"So how does it work? The Beast Magic thing, I mean," Liam asked, giving Charlotte his full attention for the first time.

Charlotte smirked, clearly enjoying the spotlight. "The basic principle of Beast Magic is that it enhances the physical traits of the human using it. Strength, speed, agility... that sort of thing."

Liam's eyes narrowed slightly as he considered her words. 'I see. That explains her ridiculous strength and speed.'

"So, is that all it does, or is there more to it?" Liam asked, genuinely intrigued now.

"Come on, Liam, do you seriously not know about Beast Magic?" Dylan chimed in with a teasing grin, clearly enjoying the moment.

"Well, this is my first time hearing about it. Do you have any insight into it?" Liam replied, unbothered by Dylan's tone.

Dylan shrugged, his expression casual. "Yeah, I know a bit. Beast Magic is actually pretty well-known, even though it's rare."

Liam raised an eyebrow. "So, what you're saying is, the rest of you clearly know about Beast Magic, but you were all acting surprised when Charlotte was explaining its origin?" He shot them a look, his voice slightly bemused.

Sheila answered before anyone else could. "Well, most people know about Beast Magic, but the origin story is something not everyone knows. That's why Asher and Dylan were surprised when Charlotte shared that part."

Before Sheila could continue, Charlotte let out a playful laugh. "Pfft, why're you acting like you know all about Beast Magic, Princess? You were clearly just as surprised as they were."

Sheila shot Charlotte a glare, but Charlotte was quick to shift the focus. "If anything, the one here who knows Beast Magic as well as I do is Ariana." She gave Ariana a sly look, the attention of everyone at the table suddenly turning toward her.

Ariana blinked, her thoughts interrupted, and she froze, her cheeks flushing as her name was mentioned. "W-what... me?" she stammered, her voice catching.

Charlotte leaned back in her chair with a smug grin. "Don't act dumb, honey. And you definitely shouldn't be turning all red like that."

"I'm not!" Ariana snapped, but the pitch of her voice betrayed her, rising higher than she intended.

Liam gave a brief, knowing glance toward Ariana. 'Makes sense. For someone under the tutelage of a mage like Mystica, she's bound to know about something like this.'

Ariana shifted uncomfortably, clearly trying to regain composure.

Liam leaned back slightly, his curiosity piqued. "So, what does Beast Magic actually do? Enhancing physical traits can't be all there is to it."

Charlotte grinned, clearly pleased by his interest. "Oh, Bae, you want to know everything, huh?" She stretched her arms above her head lazily before leaning forward. "Fine. Beast Magic isn't just about strength and speed. It also lets me transform into a full black jaguar. And not just any jaguar—a big one. About 5'5" at the shoulder."

Sheila blinked, wide-eyed. "That's enormous! You'd be bigger than most horses!"

"Exactly, Princess," Charlotte said with a wink. "And that's not all. I can also go halfway—turning into a hybrid form. You know, claws, fangs, heightened senses, and the speed of a beast but still humanoid enough to keep some... finer advantages." She smirked, casting a sideways glance at Liam.

Dylan nearly choked on his drink. "So you're saying you can go full beast mode or just... half-beast? That's insane! Do you grow a tail in your hybrid form? Wait, do you wag it when you're happy?"

"Dylan!" Sheila scolded, her face burning with embarrassment.

Charlotte laughed, clearly unfazed. "No tail wagging, you perv. But the choice of form gives me versatility. As a full jaguar, I'm all raw power—perfect for overwhelming an opponent or scaring the crap out of someone. But in my hybrid form, I get the best of both worlds: agility, power, and the ability to fight in ways a full beast can't."

Liam nodded thoughtfully. "That makes sense. So how does the transformation work? How do you go from human to jaguar—or halfway?"

Charlotte hesitated, scratching her cheek with a sheepish grin. "Well... it's kind of hard to explain. It's not just physical—it's like my Myst shifts and reshapes me, but... ugh, I'm not good at the whole technical side of things." She turned toward Ariana with a sly smile. "Hey, sweetheart, why don't you help me out here? You're the Myst expert, aren't you?"

Ariana's cheeks turned pink as all eyes shifted to her again. She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear nervously. "Um, well... okay. Myst is basically the life energy that flows through everything. For a transformation like Charlotte's, her Myst adapts to mimic the essence of a mystical beast—reshaping her body to match its form while maintaining her consciousness. It's incredibly complex and requires a lot of control."

Charlotte snapped her fingers. "Exactly! That's what I was trying to say! Thanks, Ari."

"But..." Ariana continued, looking at Charlotte, "it also takes a toll, doesn't it? A transformation that extreme must consume a significant amount of Myst."

Charlotte's grin faltered for a moment before she shrugged it off. "Well, yeah, it drains me a bit, but I'm used to it. And besides, it's worth it to see the look on people's faces when a jaguar the size of a horse charges at them."

Dylan laughed. "I'd pay to see that. You'd clear a battlefield in seconds."

Asher smirked. "So, let me guess—you use the hybrid form for showing off and the full form for scaring people?"

Charlotte winked. "You know me too well, handsome."

Liam, still calm and composed, took it all in. "Interesting. So your Myst essentially reconstructs your body temporarily to match the traits of a beast. It must take a lot of precision to maintain control during that process."

Charlotte gave him an impressed look. "Wow, Bae, you do listen when you're interested."

Ariana gave a small, proud smile, quietly relieved she'd been able to help explain without embarrassing herself further. Meanwhile, Charlotte leaned back, enjoying the attention and the lively conversation she'd sparked.

Liam's eyes lingered on Charlotte for a moment as he processed her explanation. "It sounds like it's not just about raw power but also control. Losing focus during a transformation could be... problematic."

Charlotte leaned closer, resting her chin on her hand with a smirk. "Oh, worried about me, Bae? That's sweet."

"I'm not worried," Liam replied flatly, turning his attention back to his plate. "I just don't want you to accidentally hurt someone, to be more precise—me, because you couldn't control your form."

Dylan chuckled, pointing his fork at Liam. "Dude, I think that's as close to 'I care about you' as it gets with him."

Charlotte grinned mischievously. "Aw, Liam, you do care. Don't worry, I've got my transformations under control. I wouldn't accidentally pounce on you... unless you wanted me to."

Ariana, who had been taking a sip of water, nearly choked. She coughed lightly, her cheeks burning as she avoided looking in Liam's direction. Sheila leaned over and gently patted Ariana's back, her own cheeks pink from Charlotte's bold remark.

"Charlotte, you're unbelievable," Sheila muttered, trying to maintain her composure.

"What?" Charlotte said innocently, twirling a lock of her hair. "I'm just being honest."

Liam ignored the comment entirely, shifting the conversation back. "So, your Myst adapts to match a beast's essence. Does that mean you're limited to the jaguar, or could you transform into something else?"

Charlotte's grin widened. "Oh, that's a great question, Liam! Beast Magic users usually bond with a specific type of mystical beast, which becomes their core essence. For me, it's the jaguar. It's rare to find someone who can change forms or bond with multiple beasts. That takes a whole different level of Myst compatibility."

"Interesting," Liam murmured, tapping his fingers on the table. "So your affinity is bound to the jaguar essence. Which means your transformations are seamless?"

"Seamless and deadly," Charlotte added, flexing her fingers as if sharpening imaginary claws. "But hey, don't think I'm all beastly. I can be pretty graceful too."

Dylan smirked. "Graceful? You mean like the time you tried to pounce on a target during training and fell face-first into the mud?"

"That was a distraction tactic," Charlotte shot back, crossing her arms indignantly. "I meant to do that."

"Sure you did," Dylan teased, earning a round of soft chuckles from the table.

Ariana, still quietly processing everything, finally spoke up. "Charlotte, if your jaguar form is tied to your Myst essence, does that mean it grows stronger as your Myst does?"

"Exactly, sweetheart," Charlotte replied, clearly enjoying the chance to talk about her abilities. "The more I train, the more refined and powerful my transformations become. Same goes for my hybrid form. With enough Myst control, I can hold either form for hours without breaking a sweat."

Ariana nodded thoughtfully, her curiosity momentarily overcoming her shyness. "That's incredible. It must take so much discipline to reach that level of mastery."

Charlotte gave her a warm smile, genuinely appreciating the compliment. "It does, but it's worth it. And who knows? Maybe one day, I'll be able to switch between forms even faster. Could come in handy when I need to save your butt, Liam."

"You can save someone else's butt," Liam replied dryly.

Charlotte leaned back, satisfied. "Well, if I ever do, you'll owe me big time, Bae. Maybe even a thank-you."