

ShadowBound 144

Chapter 144: End Of Announcement

As the Headmaster and Gordon exited the Beacon Hall, the atmosphere shifted. Rising gracefully from his seat on the stage, a new figure approached the pulpit. It was Sir Regulus.

In stark contrast to the Headmaster's composed demeanor, Regulus exuded a more approachable warmth. His dark silver hair gleamed faintly under the hall's lights, complementing his piercing silver eyes that seemed to sparkle with genuine kindness. A warm, welcoming smile graced his face, instantly putting the students at ease.

He was dressed impeccably in a finely tailored black shirt, topped with a white coat embroidered with intricate gold patterns. The elegance of his attire matched his charismatic aura, making him appear both noble and approachable.

"Good evening, first-years," Regulus began, his voice steady and reassuring. "That concludes all the information you need to know about next week's exams." He paused, scanning the sea of young faces before him, offering a comforting smile as though to assure them there was nothing to fear.

After a brief pause, his smile widened as he chuckled softly. "Oh... where are my manners?" he said, a playful glint in his eyes. "Those of you with lightning affinities likely already know me, but for the rest, allow me to introduce myself. I am Sir Regulus Storm." His tone was friendly, his words carrying an easy confidence that made the students feel less tense.

"Anyway," he continued, waving a hand lightly as if to brush off any lingering anxiety, "that's all from me. You are dismissed."

With those simple words, the tension in the room began to dissolve. The students stood and started making their way out, some in small groups chatting quietly about the exams, others in pairs, and a few moving alone, lost in their thoughts.

Regulus watched them go with a satisfied expression, his warm smile never faltering. Within minutes, the once-bustling hall emptied. The authorities left shortly after, leaving the Beacon Hall silent once more.

The grand hallways of the academy stretched endlessly, lit by magical sconces that cast a gentle glow along the polished marble floors. Headmaster Thion walked with an air of composed dignity as his personal assistant, Gordon, who maintained a pace just slightly behind, exuding his usual charm with a smile that seemed almost too perfect to be genuine.

"Headmaster," Gordon began, his voice smooth and polite, tinged with just the right amount of curiosity. "If I may ask, do you not think your decision to set the passing mark at ninety percent was... rather severe? Some might even call it excessive."

Thion didn't break his stride, his calm gaze fixed ahead. "The decision was deliberate, Gordon. This academy prides itself on cultivating the elite, those who will shape the future of magic and governance across the kingdoms. Mediocrity has no place here."

"Of course, of course," Gordon replied, his tone light, as if agreeing wholeheartedly. "Still, one might argue that such a harsh standard could lead to unrest—both within the student body and beyond. Imagine the backlash if a noble's child were expelled for failing to meet such stringent expectations."

Thion stopped walking and turned slightly to face Gordon, his eyes calm but unyielding. "The standard applies equally to all students, noble or commoner. This academy is not a place for entitlement; it is a place for excellence."

Gordon hesitated for a moment, then gave a soft chuckle, as though amused. "A noble sentiment, Headmaster, truly. But we cannot ignore the political intricacies of such decisions. The academy's reputation is as much about public perception as it is about merit."

Thion resumed walking, "Reputation means little if it is not built on truth and strength. If expelling unworthy students tarnishes the academy's name in the eyes of the weak, so be it. Those who matter will understand the importance of maintaining our standards."

Gordon quickened his steps slightly to keep pace. "You speak as a true leader, Headmaster," he said smoothly. "Still, I wonder if there might be a way to soften the message for the sake of appearances."

Perhaps a special exemption for those from particularly influential families? It could prevent certain... complications."

Thion glanced at Gordon, his expression unreadable. "Influence holds no weight here. The academy exists above politics, and I will not compromise its integrity for personal gain or favor."

Gordon's smile didn't falter, though his eyes narrowed slightly as he processed the Headmaster's unwavering stance. "Naturally, Headmaster. Your commitment to fairness and excellence is unparalleled. I only wish to ensure that no external pressures disrupt the academy's operations. After all, we both have its best interests at heart."

Thion inclined his head slightly, his voice calm but final. "Indeed, Gordon. I trust you will continue to act in its best interest."

The calm rhythm of the hallway was broken by the sound of approaching footsteps. Thion and Gordon paused as voices carried toward them.

"You know, you sure know when to be lazy, even surpassing me," one of the voices teased, dripping with nonchalance.

"And you sure know when to have terrible timing to be energized," the other replied, laced with irritation.

From the corner ahead, two figures emerged—Galen and Magnus.

"Oh, hey there, Headmaster," Magnus greeted with an enthusiastic wave, his wide smile as bright as ever.

"Hello, Magnus," Thion replied, his serene gaze shifting to Galen. He stood with his signature lazy stance, a look of mild disinterest etched on his face. "Galen," Thion acknowledged with a small nod.

"It's surprising to see you two here," Thion continued, his tone calm but carrying a hint of curiosity. "I didn't notice either of you at the announcement this evening."

"Wait... don't tell me we missed it?" Magnus exclaimed, his expression feigning shock for dramatic effect.

"Yes, it concluded just moments ago," Thion responded evenly.

"See? It's all your fault for making us late!" Magnus said, turning on Galen with mock indignation.

"Oh, shut it," Galen retorted, a hint of annoyance creeping into his voice. "I told you I didn't want to come, but you insisted on dragging me along. Don't go pinning the blame on me." With that, Galen began to turn back toward the direction they had come from.

"Anyway, see you around, Headmaster," Galen added over his shoulder, his tone casual as he walked away.

He paused briefly, casting a sharp glance at Gordon, whose ever-present smile had not faltered. Galen's expression darkened as he muttered a spell under his breath. Using Whisper, he directed his words solely into Gordon's mind.

"And Noodle Head," Galen's voice hissed in Gordon's thoughts, sharp and cutting. "Don't ever look at me like that again."

Gordon's smile remained perfectly intact, but his eyes momentarily narrowed before he quickly masked his irritation.

"Wait for me!" Magnus called, jogging to catch up with Galen. He gave a quick wave to Thion as he departed. "Anyway, bye, Headmaster!"

Thion watched them leave, an amused glint in his golden eyes. "Such an interesting pair of individuals, don't you think, Gordon?"

"Indeed, Headmaster. Very interesting individuals," Gordon replied smoothly, his smile unwavering as they resumed their walk.

However, behind that polished demeanor, Gordon's thoughts seethed with anger.

"Interesting individuals,' my ass. Those insolent fools didn't even acknowledge me. How dare they? Especially that arrogant bastard, Galen. I swear, one day I'll make him pay for this humiliation and even daring to threaten me," Gordon fumed silently, his mind filled with disdain, though his expression betrayed nothing.

The hallway returned to its quiet ambiance as the Headmaster and his assistant continued toward the office.

Meanwhile, back in the student quarters, Liam walked up the stairs with Dylan and Asher in tow.

"Getting expelled is really something, you know. Now I have to put in extra work," Dylan complained dramatically, throwing his hands in the air.

"Will you shut up already?" Asher snapped, his tone laced with annoyance. "If you're so keen on getting expelled, why not just do it now and save the academy some stress?" He pushed past Dylan with an exaggerated huff. "And for Myst's sake, move out of the way if you're not going to walk."

And just like that, their usual cat-and-dog argument broke out. Their voices rose and overlapped, drawing the attention of nearby students who either chuckled or rolled their eyes.

Trailing behind them, Liam remained silent. His disinterest in their bickering was evident as he subtly slipped past the duo, ignoring the chaos entirely.

"This announcement has already eaten into my training time," Liam thought, his mind focused elsewhere. "I need to try it out before hitting the bed tonight."

He ascended the final step and turned right toward his room. However, before taking another step, his form suddenly vanished into thin air without a trace.

A few seconds later, Dylan and Asher reached the top of the stairs, their argument still simmering.

"Wait," Dylan said, looking around. "Didn't he just make this turn? There's no way he's already at his room."

"Who cares?" Asher said with a dismissive wave. "He's a grown-ass weakling. No need to lose sleep over him." With that, Asher sauntered toward his room, his tone as nonchalant as ever.

Dylan hesitated for a moment, glancing down the hallway before shrugging. "Yeah, whatever." He followed suit, heading toward his own room.

At the same time, Liam found himself in a completely different place—a chamber. The soft glow of a chandelier illuminated the familiar surroundings. The polished stone walls and the faint hum of myst in the air confirmed where he was.

Mystica's chamber.

Liam's gaze immediately landed on her, lounging in her chair with an air of elegance. Her long, dark hair cascaded down over her shoulder as she sat with one leg crossed over the other, a book resting in her hands.

"Can you at least inform me before pulling me out of thin air?" Liam said, his voice carrying a mix of irritation and unease.

Mystica looked up from her book, a playful smirk tugging at her lips. "Oh, c'mon, it's not that bad," she said, her tone dripping with amusement. "Since when did you start whining about things like this anyway?"