

ShadowBound 164

Chapter 164: Aftermath

As the dust began to settle, the heavy silence was only broken by the faint crackling of dying flames. Edith ordered Lucian to open the sealed cave before turning her gaze to Robin. "Take Karla back to the cave. Make sure she replenishes her myst reserves."

Robin nodded, picking Karla in a princess carry. "Hold on," he said before they flew away, heading for the cave.

Edith then looked at Lucian, who was still staring at the obliterated battlefield. "Make your platform wide enough for the both of us," she ordered again.

Lucian muttered under his breath but complied, spreading his hands as the earthen platform beneath him widened to accommodate Edith. She hopped on, and with a pulse of his myst, the platform hovered forward, gliding over the aftermath of the explosion.

The clearing, once dense with trees, was now barren, with jagged pieces of the Titanborne's remains scattered like broken statues. Blackened earth and scorch marks stretched in every direction, a testament to the sheer force Liam had unleashed.

Edith's eyes narrowed as she scanned the debris. "The sheer power... I didn't think he had this in him."

Lucian remained quiet, his jaw tight. He'd always thought his rank meant something, that being ranked 5 placed him above most. Yet here was Liam, ranked 8, showing a level of strength that left him feeling insignificant.

Finally, they spotted him.

Liam's body lay motionless amidst the wreckage, steam rising from his academy uniform, which was mostly intact save for a few singed edges. He was face down, his dark hair plastered to his forehead, faint embers glowing around him. Your next read is at

Edith didn't hesitate. She leapt off the platform and sprinted toward him, her heart pounding. Lucian followed more hesitantly, still grappling with the weight of his own thoughts.

"Liam!" Edith knelt beside him, carefully rolling his body onto his back. His face was pale, his breathing shallow but steady. "He's alive." Relief washed over her voice.

Lucian stood a few steps away, his expression unreadable. "Of course he is. The academy wouldn't let a student die. And besides, someone that stubborn doesn't die easily."

Edith shot him a glare but said nothing as she gently checked Liam for injuries. Then, she noticed his left hand was clenched tightly, his knuckles white. "What's he holding?"

She tried to pry his fingers open, but they wouldn't budge. "Lucian, help me with this."

Lucian knelt beside her as he tried to loosen Liam's grip. Even together, they couldn't make his hand budge.

"It's like he's holding onto it for dear life," Edith muttered, frustration creeping into her tone.

Lucian straightened, brushing off his hands. "Leave it. Whatever it is, he's not letting go anytime soon."

Edith frowned but relented, standing up. "Fine. Can you find his daggers? They're not here."

Lucian nodded, scanning the area. After a few moments, he spotted the twin blades embedded in the shattered remains of the Titanborne's skull. With a flick of his wrist, he summoned an earthen arm to retrieve them.

"Found them," Lucian said, holding up the daggers as he returned to Edith.

She sighed in relief. "Good. Let's get him back to the cave."

Lucian created a second earthen platform, carefully lifting Liam's unconscious body onto it with his daggers placed beside him.

"Do you think he's going to wake up soon?" Edith asked as they floated back toward their hideout.

Lucian shrugged, his tone sharper than he intended. "Who knows? The guy just detonated himself like a walking bomb. Be glad he's even alive."

Edith shot him a pointed look. "Why are you so irritated? He saved all of us."

Lucian didn't answer immediately, his jaw tightening. Finally, he muttered, "Because I thought I was stronger."

Edith blinked, caught off guard by the admission. "What?"

Lucian clenched his fists. "I'm ranked 5. He's ranked 8. I'm supposed to be better than him, but... watching what he just did, it's clear I'm not. He's on a completely different level."

For a moment, Edith didn't know how to respond. Then she said softly, "Strength isn't just about rank, Lucian. It's about what you're willing to do when it matters. Liam proved that today. But it doesn't mean you're weak. It means you have room to grow."

"Also, you too showed how strong you are on the first day of our arrival here and even today. So be proud." She added with a warm smile.

Lucian glanced at her, her words hitting harder than he wanted to admit. "Thanks," he murmured, his cheeks flushing slightly.

They fell into silence as the cave came into view. Robin was already waiting at the entrance, his expression a mix of worry and relief as he saw them approach with Liam's body.

Edith stepped off the platform first, gesturing for Lucian to help her move Liam inside. Together, they carried him to his makeshift earthen bed and laid him down gently.

"We should rest too. I'm beat," Edith said as she dropped her sheathed sword and shield beside her makeshift earthen bed. Stretching out with a sigh, she laid back, exhaustion finally catching up to her.

"Yeah, you're right. My whole body aches," Lucian replied, pulling off his shirt to reveal bruises and scrapes scattered across his torso. He winced slightly as he sat down on his own earthen bed, rubbing his shoulders.

Robin, still jittery from the day's events, shifted awkwardly. "W—well, I guess I'll take the lookout, then," he stammered, starting toward the cave entrance.

"No need, Robin," Edith said, cracking one eye open to glance at him. "You did great today, and you need rest just as much as we do." Her voice soft and kind.

Robin hesitated, his hand hovering near his bow. "But—"

"Lucian, close the entrance with your magic," Edith interrupted, closing her eyes again.

"Understood." Lucian flicked his wrist, and with a low rumble, the earth shifted, sealing the cave's entrance.

Robin stood frozen, his lips parting as if to argue further, but Lucian beat him to it. "You deserve to rest too, Robin," he said, his voice softer now. "We all made it through today, thanks to you. Get some sleep."

Robin glanced between the two of them, their steady, reassuring presence calming his nerves. He finally muttered under his breath, "Thank you, guys," as he set down his quiver and bow.

He made his way to his makeshift earthen bed, as he laid down before stretching out and closing his eyes.

During this kind of examination, the Headmaster himself, along with a few elite knights, gathered in the grand observation dome to supervise the students' progress and ensure their safety. Noble families from across the region often came on the first day to watch, scouting for potential recruits or assessing political opportunities.

The exam lasted three days, and while the Headmaster and knights couldn't monitor the students 24/7, the Headmaster was notorious for staying up even during the night. However, his late-night company usually consisted of people like Galen and Magnus—knights who clearly had better things to do but were too bored to actually do them.

On the first night of the examination in Vlardia, Galen and Magnus spent their time in the observation dome. Not out of duty or concern, of course, but simply because they had nothing else to entertain themselves with.

Now, on day two, the Headmaster, his assistant Gordon, and several knights had just witnessed Liam's explosive battle with the Titanborne. The room was abuzz with murmurs, many of the knights still in shock—not just at Liam's performance, but also at the fact that Galen, of all people, had chosen students to mentor this time around.

"Is this the potential Galen saw?" one knight whispered. "I mean, he never takes on students."

"And it's not just the stoic kid," another knight chimed in. "That Asher kid with the blue flames? He's a walking inferno!"

"Wow, Gally," Magnus said, cutting through the chatter with a mouthful of cookies. "Who knew you'd teach your students such suicidal stunts just to take down a couple of demons?"

"I didn't teach them anything," Galen replied, slouched lazily in his chair. He stared at the magical screens displaying the students in Vlardia, his crimson eyes betraying not a shred of enthusiasm. "Those two are just reckless hotheads."

Magnus snorted, almost choking on his popcorn. "'I didn't teach them anything,' you say? Yeah, right. You can't fool me. Admit it, you're secretly invested in them. I see the sparkle in your eyes every time they pull off one of their little stunts!"

Galen shot him a deadpan look. "The only thing sparkling here is the reflection of your crumbs on the screen."

Unfazed, Magnus leaned back, tossing another handful of popcorn into his mouth. "Sure, sure, keep playing it cool. But we all know you're sweating under that fancy knightly composure. You're dying to claim credit for those two."

Galen let out a long, theatrical sigh, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Magnus, if I'm ever 'dying,' it'll be because I've spent more than five minutes listening to you."

"Denial isn't just a river, Gally," Magnus quipped with a grin, flicking a stray popcorn kernel at him. "You're rooting for them, and we all know it."