

ShadowBound 179

Chapter 179: Back To The Academy 2

As the students dispersed from the dome, some stuck with the groups they had fought alongside during the exam, while others reunited with their usual friends. Those heading in different directions exchanged brief waves, knowing they might not cross paths as often now that the test was over.

"So, I guess this is where we say goodbye, huh?" Edith said, glancing at her group members.

Lucian raised a brow. "What are you talking about? We're still at the same academy. Stop making it sound so dramatic."

Karla chuckled. "He's got a point."

Edith sighed before flashing a small smile. "Fair enough. I guess the right thing to say is... see you guys around."

"Yeah, see you around," Karla added. "Make sure to say hi when you spot me."

"Especially you two," Edith said, shooting a look at Lucian and Liam before turning to leave.

Robin hesitated before nervously chiming in, "B-Bye, guys. See you around." He quickly followed the girls toward Building B.

As the three disappeared into the crowd, Lucian and Liam remained standing among the passing students.

Lucian exhaled. "So—"

"Don't start." Liam cut him off immediately. "Whatever speech you're about to give, I'm not interested. The exam is over. There's nothing tying us together anymore. You can go back to Chris."

Without another word, Liam turned and walked toward Building A.

Lucian remained where he stood, watching Liam's retreating figure.

A frustrated sigh left his lips. 'Looks like I won't be able to convince him.'

His thoughts drifted, instinctively finishing with—'I guess I'll just go back to Chris, then.'

But for the first time, the thought didn't sit right with him.

'Do I really want that?'

His gaze lifted toward the sky, the sun casting a harsh light against his face.

'I already know the answer to that. But moving on my own...' His jaw clenched. 'That's not an option. Not with my family so deeply entangled with the royal family.'

Then, a bitter anger stirred in his chest.

'That man—my so-called father—is nothing but a lapdog for the Ratures. A pathetic old bastard who only cares about his own gain. Not his wife. Not his children.'

His fists tightened.

'Don't worry, Mom. One way or another... I'll free us from that worthless son of a b*tch.'

Lucian took a deep breath, shaking off the weight of his thoughts as he turned away from the crowd. His mind was restless, but now wasn't the time to dwell on things he couldn't change—at least, not yet.

For now, he needed to figure out his next step.

Meanwhile, Liam walked through the academy grounds, paying no mind to the students chatting around him. He could still feel the lingering gazes—some curious, others wary. The battlefield exam had certainly made him stand out more than he intended.

As he neared Building A, a familiar voice called out.

"Tch. You didn't wait for me, bastard."

Liam sighed, already knowing who it was. He turned his head slightly, meeting Asher's irritated expression as he fell into step beside him.

"Not my problem," Liam replied flatly.

Asher scoffed. "Hah? After all I did for you? I at least deserve a little gratitude."

Liam barely glanced at him. "Didn't you say you only taught me for your own benefit? Seems like a you problem."

Asher clicked his tongue. "Tch. You really know how to be annoying."

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They walked in silence for a moment before Asher side-eyed Liam, his competitive nature surfacing again. "Still can't believe you got more kills than me."

Liam exhaled through his nose. "Deal with it."

Asher groaned dramatically. "Damn it. Whatever. I'll just make sure I crush you next time."

Liam didn't respond, but the corner of his mouth lifted slightly.

As they reached the corridor of their individual forms, Asher stretched, letting out a satisfied sigh. "Anyway, I'll be heading to get some food after taking a bath. You coming?"

Liam shook his head. "Not now, I have something I need to take care of. I'll join for dinner."

Asher waved him off. "Suit yourself. Later, loser."

Liam ignored him and stepped into his dorm. The moment he shut the door behind him, he finally let out a breath.

"I need to find Mystica. I have to get this concealment spell off me... and there's something else I need to confirm."

With that in mind, he unsheathed his dagger and set it on the table near the window. His fingers lingered on the hilt for a brief moment before he reached to unbutton his shirt.

Just as he was about to pull it off, a magical portal flickered into existence right in front of him, swirling with an eerie glow.

Liam's gaze snapped to it. "What the—?"

He instinctively stepped back, his body tensing as he studied the portal, but before he could decide whether to attack or evade, a familiar voice echoed from within.

"It's me, Liam. Step through the portal. Or do you not want that concealment spell removed?"

Mystica.

There was a teasing lilt to her tone, laced with mischief, as if she was enjoying his hesitation.

Liam stood there for a few seconds, weighing his options. Then, without another word, he grabbed his dagger and stepped forward, vanishing into the portal's glow.

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As Liam stepped out of the magical portal, he found himself back in Mystica's chamber. The air carried the familiar scent of aged wine and faint traces of mystic incense.

Seated comfortably in an elegant chair, Mystica held a glass of wine in her hand as usual, a knowing smirk playing on her lips. However, instead of her usual gown, she wore a revealing silk robe, draped loosely around her frame. The fabric barely covered the ample curve of her chest, and with one long, bare leg crossed over the other, her smooth thigh down to her toes was on full display.

"Well, welcome back, my lovely Liam," Mystica purred, her tone laced with amusement.

Liam barely reacted, his eyes meeting hers with mild indifference. "Thanks, I guess."

Before he could continue, another voice cut in lazily.

"Hey, kid. Pass me the bottle of wine over there—the Tigerburn."

Liam turned his head to see Magnus, sprawled across the couch with a grin of pure laziness on his face. His dark hair was slightly messy, and the way he lounged made it seem like getting up was too much effort.

Liam raised an eyebrow. "Uh...?"

Magnus let out an exaggerated sigh. "Come on, kid, the drink. Be useful."

Suppressing the urge to ignore him, Liam walked over to the counter, scanning the labels until he found Tigerburn. Picking it up, he tossed it toward Magnus, who caught it with a dramatic groan.

"Much appreciated. You've saved a dying man." Magnus said with an exaggerated tone.

Liam ignored him and turned back to Mystica. "Since you called me here, I assume you're finally removing the concealment spell?"

Mystica took a slow sip of her wine before flashing a smug smile. "Of course. I figured you'd be itching to get rid of it the moment you returned. And, as usual, I was right."

Liam exhaled through his nose. "Then let's get it over with."

Mystica gracefully rose from her seat. "Step into that circle over there." She gestured toward an intricate magic formation drawn on the floor. "I'd like to get this done quickly. I need my beauty sleep."

Liam glanced at the window. "It's still the afternoon."

Mystica waved a hand dismissively. "Irrelevant. Now, get your tiny balls in the circle, sweetie."

Deciding not to argue, Liam stepped into the ritual circle. Mystica followed, standing opposite him.

"Now, just like last time, repeat after me. Word for word." She raised her hands, waiting for Liam to place his palms against hers.

Liam complied. "Alright."

Before beginning, Mystica threw a glance toward Magnus. "And Magpie, try not to make any noise."

Magnus gave a mock salute. "Understood, Ma'am."

Ignoring him, Mystica began the chant. Her voice was low, smooth, and resonant.

"Solus Atra..."

Liam matched her tone. "Solus Atra..."

"Nymbrath..."

"Nymbrath..."

"Arkaios."

"Arkaios."

The moment the final word was spoken, Mystica swiftly stepped out of the circle.

Immediately, the dark powder on the floor began to shimmer, rising into the air like tendrils of living smoke. The substance twisted and coiled, moving with an eerie grace as it wrapped itself around Liam.

The shadows thickened, forming a vortex that engulfed him completely. A cold, numbing sensation spread through his body, followed by an odd heaviness—like something that had been missing was being restored. The swirling tendrils pulsed, glowing faintly before retreating into the symbols on the floor.

As the ritual concluded, the room dimmed momentarily before everything settled. The circle beneath Liam faded away, leaving only silence.

Liam exhaled slowly, his senses adjusting to the familiar presence of his dark myst—something he hadn't felt in days. Lifting his hand, he flexed his fingers, feeling the energy flow through him again.

Mystica smirked as she walked back to her seat. "You should be good as new. If you want to check, try one of those shadowy tricks of yours."

Liam didn't hesitate. Walking over to the table, he picked up his dagger. Closing his eyes, he focused—then, the blade dissolved into pure darkness, sinking into his palm. With another flick of his wrist, the weapon reappeared instantly.

"It worked." Liam said simply.

Mystica swirled the wine in her glass. "Obviously. I don't mess up."

She took another sip before waving him off. "Anyway, now shoo. You've gotten what you came for."

But Liam didn't move. Instead, he returned the dagger to his Void Storage and turned to face her once more.

"I need to ask you something before I leave."

Mystica sighed dramatically. "Hah... what is it?"

"It's about this."