

ShadowBound 184

Chapter 184: Reunion 2

"Hey, Dylan," Liam greeted.

"What's up, my man? Haven't laid eyes on you in a minute," Dylan said, eyeing Liam's tray as if evaluating it.

"Yeah, I guess. Are you really planning to eat all that?" Liam asked, glancing at Dylan's towering mountain of food.

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"Of course. A knight needs to stay fueled at all times," Dylan declared proudly. "Besides, three days without even a taste of fish during that hellish exam? That really taught me a life lesson."

Liam raised an eyebrow. "And what lesson is that?"

Dylan blinked. "Eh... don't remember." He shrugged. "Anyway, let's head to the others. They're at the usual spot. Follow me to the promised land, lost soul."

With that, Dylan maneuvered his way through the sea of students, balancing his overloaded tray with the grace only he could have.

Liam let out a quiet sigh before following behind.

As they weaved through the crowded cafeteria, they eventually reached their table.

"Hey, guys! Look who I found," Dylan announced, placing his food down with a dramatic flourish.

The group—Sheila, Ariana, Asher, Max, and Charlotte—looked up.

"Liam," Sheila acknowledged.

"Liam," Ariana greeted.

"Liam," Max nodded.

"Bae," Charlotte purred.

"Hey, everyone," Liam said simply.

"Finally decided to show your weakling face, huh?" Asher smirked, biting into his steak.

"I told you, I had something to take care of," Liam replied, unfazed.

"So what?" Asher snorted.

"Seems someone's still salty about being second place," Dylan teased, his grin widening. The table let out a few chuckles.

"C'mon, sit next to me, Bae. I've missed you," Charlotte said in a sultry tone, patting the empty seat beside her.

Liam's gaze swept the table, searching for any other available seats. The only open spots were next to Charlotte and Ariana. His eyes lingered on Ariana's side for a brief moment before making his decision.

"Not today, Charlotte. I'll sit here instead," Liam said, moving to sit beside Ariana.

Ariana's cheeks flushed slightly, clearly caught off guard.

"You're a meanie," Charlotte pouted dramatically. Then, with a mischievous glint in her eye, she turned her attention to Max. "But that won't stop me from switching seats."

She walked over to him and grinned. "Let's switch, Maxie. And before you ask, that wasn't a request."

Max sighed, pushing his tray aside. "Hah, whatever. Sit next to your prince charming all you want."

"Thanks, Maxie~" Charlotte cooed as she plopped down beside Liam. "I might just give you a kiss later as thanks."

Max scoffed. "Pass."

As Liam settled into his seat, Charlotte leaned in, resting her chin on her palm as she smirked at him.

"So, Bae, did you miss me?" she asked playfully.

Liam, already picking up his fork, didn't even spare her a glance. "Not really."

"Ohhh, so that means you missed me just a little, right?"

"No. Not even slightly."

Charlotte gasped dramatically. "How heartless! After everything we've been through!"

"You mean everything you've been through," Asher muttered, rolling his eyes as he stabbed another piece of steak.

Sheila chuckled, shaking her head. "So, Liam, care to share how you managed to rack up thirty-seven Feral-class kills?"

Liam cut into his chicken, his expression indifferent. "Nah, sounds like a hassle. But I would be interested in hearing how you managed to earn the 'Best Leader' title." He glanced up at her.

Sheila blinked in surprise. Normally, Liam brushed off her questions or gave curt answers unless it was something relevant to the whole group. But now... he was actually asking about her experience? 'Did he just—? Is he finally accepting me as a friend?' she thought, momentarily thrown off.

Dylan leaned forward, stuffing a chunk of food into his mouth. "Yeah, Sheila, enlighten us on your legendary leadership. Been wondering about that, especially with that new ponytail you're rocking. What, did you seduce the guys into following you?"

He snorted before adding, "Though, honestly, you're way too much of a man for that. Right, proceed, my fair sister."

Sheila's eye twitched as she took a deep breath, trying to keep herself from strangling Dylan. "You just got back from the exam, Dylan. Maybe try acting a little wise for once?" she said with a forced smile.

Dylan grinned. "Too much effort."

Sheila exhaled sharply before continuing. "Anyway, the exam was... interesting. On the first day, when we were teleported to Vlardia, my group members immediately decided I should be the leader—without my consent, mind you. And since nobody else wanted the role, I had no choice but to comply."

Sheila set down her cutlery and leaned back slightly. "At first, I thought it wouldn't be too bad. I mean, handling people my age shouldn't have been that difficult, right? But I was wrong." She let out a sigh. "Half of them had no solid survival instincts. The other half—mainly the boys—barely listened to me, even though I was forcibly picked as the leader. And somehow, I was supposed to keep them all alive."

Dylan snorted. "Sounds rough. I would've just let natural selection do its thing."

"That's exactly why you weren't chosen as a leader," Sheila deadpanned.

"Hey! I wasn't a leader during the exam, sure, but if I was, I would've been great at it!" Dylan declared, gesturing dramatically with his fork. "Sure, half my group might have abandoned me, but that just makes things easier. Fewer mouths to feed, more kills for me."

Ariana sighed. "That's... not how teamwork works, Dylan."

Dylan shrugged. "Would've worked for me."

Sheila rolled her eyes. "Anyway, the first day was a complete disaster. We got ambushed by a pack of Demon Bears immediately after landing. Some idiot ran ahead without scouting, and before we knew it, we were surrounded. I had to step in and take charge, or we'd all be dead."

Liam listened quietly, cutting into his food. "So, you managed to get them under control?"

Sheila nodded. "Yeah. After surviving that, they actually started listening to me. I set up a strategy—rotating shifts for night watches, planned scavenging routes, and prioritized taking down lone Ferals instead of engaging entire packs. The more we worked together, the smoother things went."

Asher raised an eyebrow. "So, you actually led instead of just barking orders? Impressive."

"I know, right?" Dylan added with mock disgust. "It's like the Sheila I don't know was the one who went into the exam."

"Shut it, Dylan." Sheila shot him a flat look.

"There she is," Dylan said, pointing at her dramatically.

Sheila huffed. "Anyway, the next few days were alright. The only real issue was food. No one in my group had any hunting or fishing skills, so we had to make do with whatever we could find—mostly berries and the occasional fish."

"We had the same problem," Ariana murmured. "Except my group leader was a total jerk. Logan—Chris's lackey." Her voice took on a rare edge of bitterness. "He had zero leadership skills but still decided to put himself in charge."

Liam's gaze shifted to her. "Looks like we had something in common. I had Lucian in my team, but for some reason, he wasn't as bad as how you're describing Logan."

Ariana's cheeks flushed as she quickly dropped her gaze to her food. "R-Really?"

"Yeah."

Max, who had been listening, leaned in. "I was actually surprised when I saw Edith leading your group, Liam, especially with Lucian there. But then again, I wasn't that surprised. Edith has always had great leadership skills."

"You know Edith?" Liam asked.

"Yeah... we're cousins," Max said casually, as if it were obvious.

Liam raised an eyebrow. "I see. By the way, you placed third in leadership rankings. What was your group like?"

Max leaned back, drumming his fingers on the table. "My group? Eh, they weren't terrible, but they weren't exactly great either. We had a decent mix—some solid fighters, a passable strategist—but the real problem?" He sighed dramatically. "Well... it was me."

Liam raised a brow. "You?"

Max smirked. "Yeah. Apparently, my incredible charisma made people a little too comfortable. The first day, they treated the whole thing like a damn camping trip—'Oh, Max has got this!'—so they barely put in any effort. I had to drill it into their heads that this wasn't some school retreat. If they didn't take it seriously, they'd be dead by the second day."

Dylan snickered. "Sounds like a you problem."

Max shrugged. "Maybe. But by the third day, I had them in line. We worked in pairs, prioritized weaker Ferals first, and focused on gathering resources instead of just fighting nonstop. Efficiency was key."

Liam gave a slight nod. "Makes sense. No wasted energy."

"Exactly. And look where it got me—third place." Max grinned, then turned to Sheila. "Though, I was surprised you ranked higher than me. What did you do, give your team a motivational speech?"

Sheila crossed her arms. "No. I led them properly."

"Same thing," Dylan teased.

Sheila shot him a glare but ignored him, instead shifting her gaze to Liam. "And what about you? You weren't even the leader of your group, so how the hell did you rack up thirty-seven kills?"

All eyes turned to Liam. Even Charlotte, who had been lazily twirling her hair, perked up in curiosity.

Liam casually stabbed a piece of chicken with his fork, chewing slowly before responding. "It was thanks to a Titanborne we encountered while surveying the forest. Its presence was drawing in Feral-class demons."

Asher scoffed. "So what? You just intercepted them before they could reach your team and make things worse?"

Liam set his fork down, meeting Asher's gaze. "You surprise me. That's exactly what happened." His tone was calm, matter-of-fact.

Asher blinked. "Wait—you're serious? You personally intercepted an incoming horde of Feral-class demons and took them out?"

"Yeah." Liam took another bite before adding, "And thanks to you teaching me Flame Concentration and Compression, killing them wasn't much of a hassle."

"Tsk. To hell with that bullshit." Asher clicked his tongue in disbelief.

"Woo~ Is our little buzz-cut blushing from getting praised?" Dylan teased with a smirk.

"Shut up, Dylan."

Max leaned in, eyes gleaming with curiosity. "Now I'm really interested in how you managed to kill an Advanced Horror."

At that, the entire table fell silent, all eyes locked onto Liam.