

ShadowBound 185

Chapter 185: Reunion 3

"Well, it was alright. A bit brutal at first, but I won," Liam said casually.

Dylan scoffed. "Damn, care to elaborate? Because, my good sir, none of us can picture a damn thing with just those words."

Liam leaned back slightly. "The Advanced Horror was a Malgath. I'd say we were on equal footing—maybe I was slightly weaker. The fight was intense, especially since it happened on the same day we took down a Titanborne."

"Wait, two major fights in one day? And you still came out on top? That's insane."

"That's my man~" Charlotte purred, giving Liam a playful wink.

Liam ignored her and continued, "At first, Lucian and I had to team up to take it down while the others handled regular Horrors—Skivoks, mostly."

Max let out a low whistle. "An Advanced Horror and a swarm of Skivoks? You guys must've been drenched in sweat."

Dylan squinted dramatically. "But hold on—if you and Lucian teamed up to fight the Malgath... doesn't that mean the kill wasn't yours?"

Liam took another bite of his food. "Lucian got knocked out partway through, so I had to finish the fight alone."

Dylan dropped his fork like a mic. "How convenient. Just the way you like it. And guess what? He won."

Max leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table. "Alright, now I really want details. How the hell did you take down a Malgath alone after an entire fight with a Titanborne?"

Ariana nodded eagerly, her eyes wide with curiosity. Even Sheila, who had been calmly sipping her drink, set it down to listen.

Liam tapped his fingers against the table, considering how much to share. "It wasn't easy," he admitted. "Malgaths are already a cut above regular Horrors—stronger, smarter, and more resilient. But when they evolve into an Advanced Horror, everything doubles. They think faster, strategize better, and they don't just rely on brute force... though the one I fought did rely on brute force quite a bit."

"Yeah, I've read about them," Ariana said. "They're considered apex predators—Horrors that evolve beyond mindless slaughter."

"Exactly," Liam said. "It fought using what suited it best—speed and its destructive white flames to keep me on the defensive. But the most annoying thing? Its damn regeneration."

Dylan let out a low whistle. "Yeah, see? That's why I would've just stayed out of the fight."

Asher smirked. "And then you wouldn't have your precious ninth ranking, would you?"

"Touché." Dylan grinned.

Sheila leaned forward slightly. "So what tipped the battle in your favor?"

Liam scratched the side of his face. "I had to push Flame Concentration and Compression twice as hard, using them in a more destructive way than usual. The Malgath was strong and fast, but I was faster. So I leaned into that."

"And that was enough?" Asher asked skeptically.

Liam took a sip of water before continuing. "Not entirely. It still broke one of my daggers, so I had to rely on just one—along with my fists and feet. Not ideal, but I made it work."

Dylan yawned dramatically. "Alright, man, just get to how you killed the damn thing. You're hogging the spotlight."

Liam set his glass down. "I turned my right arm into a living inferno and burned the Malgath from the inside out."

Asher's brows furrowed. "Hold on—turned your arm into a living inferno? How does that even work?"

Liam leaned back, folding his arms. "By using both Concentration and Compression, I gathered almost all of my fiery energy into one arm, making it feel like molten lava. That was Concentration's job—focusing all the power into a single limb. Compression made sure that energy didn't flare out uncontrollably."

Asher's expression shifted as realization dawned. "So when you struck, all of that destructive power was released at the exact point of impact."

Liam nodded. "Exactly."

"Damn, that's impressive," Max said. "But did you get injured?"

"Yeah, but the academy sent a healer, so I was fine," Liam replied.

Charlotte leaned in closer, resting her chin on Liam's shoulder with a playful smirk. "That's my baby~ Always coming back in one piece."

Dylan snorted. "Charlotte, you really gotta stop that. You're gonna make our dear Liam think you actually like him."

Charlotte blinked innocently. "But I do, though."

Dylan squinted at her. "Like genuinely like him? Or like how you 'liked' that one guy during our first week here until he ran out of money?"

Charlotte gasped in mock offense. "First of all, how dare you—"

"Oh, I dare plenty."

"—and second, that was different. He was dumb and boring. Liam, however..." She ran a finger down his arm, her voice turning sultry. "Strong, mysterious, broody—oh, and that whole 'undefeated lone wolf' thing? So attractive."

Liam, unbothered, continued eating as if she didn't exist.

Dylan smirked. "Damn, Liam, you could at least acknowledge that she's throwing herself at you. A man's gotta have some pride."

Liam swallowed his food and deadpanned, "I have enough pride to ignore obvious bait."

Charlotte pouted dramatically. "Cold. I love it."

As the banter continued, Asher simply smirked to himself, eyes on his plate. 'Damn you, Hunter. You just can't stay in one place, can you? Always pushing further, turning every lesson into something even deadlier.'

His fingers tapped against the table as he stole a quick glance at Liam. 'I should be annoyed that you're using the technique I taught you. Should regret teaching it at all. But instead... I feel a mix of frustration and excitement. Because now, you've just given me another reason why I can't slack off. Let's keep this fire burning, Hunter—because mine sure as hell isn't dying.'

After the group fell into a brief silence, Dylan let out an exaggerated sigh, stretching his arms as if the weight of unspoken words was unbearable. "Alright, since no one else is gonna ask, guess it's up to me."

He turned to Liam, tilting his head with mock suspicion. "What the hell happened to you in Vlardia? 'Cause the Liam I know wouldn't have talked this much in a month, let alone in one conversation."

The others nodded in agreement, Sheila gave a knowing look. "He has a point."

"Definitely," Max added, smirking.

Even Asher, who had been quietly observing, leaned back and made a face of exaggerated disgust. "Yeah, it's honestly disturbing."

Liam, unfazed by their reactions, simply shrugged. "I haven't changed. It's just that since Sheila and Max shared their experiences when asked, I figured it wouldn't be right if I ignored the question when it was my turn."

The group exchanged glances, nodding in understanding.

Dylan, however, snickered. "Since when do you care about our feelings?" He rested his chin on his hand, grinning. "But hey, not complaining. You should talk more often—this version of you isn't too bad."

Liam gave Dylan a deadpan look. "You make it sound like I never talk."

Dylan chuckled, nudging Max. "Because you don't. And there he is—the grumpy bastard we all know and love."

Max smirked but leaned back in his chair, stretching. "Still, I gotta admit, it's weird hearing you explain things in this much detail. Usually, it's just 'Yeah, that's true' or 'It was alright.'"

Sheila tapped a finger on the table, eyeing Liam with curiosity. "Maybe Vlardia did change him."

"Or," Asher cut in, resting his chin on his knuckles, "maybe it was that Edith girl. Or the pink-haired one... but honestly, she gives off too much Dylan energy."

"Hey, what's wrong with my energy?" Dylan asked in mock offense.

"Everything." Sheila shot him a glare.

Dylan clutched his chest dramatically. "Ouch. Right in the heart."

Liam met Asher's stare before exhaling. "That's got to be the dumbest thing you've ever said."

Before Asher could reply, Charlotte, who had been uncharacteristically quiet, suddenly leaned into Liam's space with a sultry smile. "Or maybe," she purred, tracing a slow circle on the table with her finger, "my presence has given him the right motivation to open up."

Dylan snorted. "Charlotte, you keep flirting like that, and one day Liam's just gonna vanish into the shadows to escape you."

Charlotte turned to him with an exaggerated pout. "Oh, Dylan, sweetie, if Liam really wanted to escape me, he would've done it already." She glanced back at Liam, her smile turning mischievous. "But he hasn't."

Dylan rubbed his chin as if in deep thought. "Hmm. So what you're saying is... our boy likes the attention?"

Liam, without even looking up, muttered, "Please don't make such assumptions."

Charlotte's grin widened as she leaned in closer, her breath warm against Liam's ear. "Oh? Trying to keep our love life a secret? I don't mind, you know~"

Liam's jaw clenched slightly, but he wasn't the only one affected. Ariana, sitting beside him, had turned a sleek shade of red, her focus shifting aggressively to her food as if willing herself not to exist.

Max shook his head, laughing. "Alright, alright, Charlotte. Maybe give him a break? He's actually talked this much today. Let's not scare off all his newly learned social skills."

Charlotte's eyes flicked toward Sheila, whose cheeks were slightly flushed, then to Ariana, who radiated pure discomfort. Sensing the tension, she smirked mischievously before finally pulling back—just slightly.

As the laughter and teasing settled, the group gradually eased into more casual conversation, shifting to topics that didn't involve battles or relentless flirting. The atmosphere around the table became lighter, filled with the occasional joke from Dylan, a witty remark from Asher, and Ariana finally regaining enough composure to join in again.

Plates were emptied, drinks were finished, and the once-hectic dining hall had started to quiet down as other students trickled out. Max stretched with a satisfied sigh.

Few minutes later, the group started making their way out of the dining hall, the night air cool against their faces as they stepped outside.

Ariana, still slightly flustered from earlier, walked beside Liam but kept her gaze forward. "Um, well... goodnight, everyone."

"Goodnight~" Charlotte cooed, winking at Liam one last time before walking off.

Max and Sheila also left the group, walking in pair with a conversation. Leaving behind Liam, Asher, and Dylan—the main trio—to walk back to their respective dorms.