

ShadowBound 191

Chapter 191: A Bold Move

After leaving the library, Liam headed straight to his room, retrieving his sword before making his way to one of the training grounds. Though he had no real difficulty wielding a sword, he was well aware that his proficiency and power with it paled in comparison to his mastery of dual daggers.

In a pure weapons-only fight, he knew Asher and Sheila—both skilled swordsmen—might actually have a chance against him. That was unacceptable. With class selections underway, he'd be relying on a sword for the time being, at least until his daggers were ready from Mr. Blackwood.

The training grounds were empty due to everyone being preoccupied with course selections, making it the perfect opportunity to train without distractions. Wasting no time, Liam engaged with the enchanted wooden dummies. No matter how many times he reduced them to splinters, they seamlessly reassembled, allowing him to go all out without restraint.

For the rest of the afternoon, he relentlessly practiced, refining his strikes and movement. Fire magic blazed through his swings, enhancing his attacks, but he consciously refrained from using dark magic. It was broad daylight—he couldn't afford to risk anyone witnessing him wielding something forbidden.

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As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows over the training ground, Liam stood at its center, sweat trickling down his face.

"I'd like to keep going, but it's better to come back at night," he muttered, gripping his sword in one hand while wiping his forehead with the other. "That'll be the best time to train with dark magic."

With a quiet sigh, he retrieved the sword's sheath from the ground and smoothly slid the blade back into place. His body ached from the relentless training, but he paid it no mind as he made his way back to his room, intent on washing away the exhaustion.

As soon as he stepped inside, Nyxie emerged from his shadow, stretching her wings as she hovered in her small, cat-like form.

"Don't destroy anything," Liam said flatly, not even glancing at her as he leaned the sheathed sword against the wall. He began unbuttoning his shirt, stripping it off as he headed straight for the bathroom, ignoring the mischievous glint in Nyxie's eyes.

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Ariana lay sprawled across her bed, staring at the magical screen hovering before her. The long list of courses seemed to taunt her as she mindlessly scrolled up and down, frustration evident on her face.

"Okay, okay... Elemental Myst Mastery is an obvious choice. That one's settled. But what about the rest?*" she thought, letting out a groan.

Knight Combat Training? Absolutely not. Sure, she had participated in Magnus's one-month weaponry training, but that was a disaster. The number of times she had tripped over her own feet or nearly poked her own eye out with a practice sword was enough to make even Magnus forget her name out of secondhand embarrassment.

Strategic Command and Leadership? Also a no. She couldn't picture herself barking orders at people, let alone standing at the front of a battlefield. Just the idea made her shudder.

"Maybe... Alchemy?" she thought, tapping her chin. It made sense. She was smart enough for it. But then again, did she really enjoy brewing potions and mixing strange ingredients together? The memory of the one time she tried making a simple healing salve and ended up creating an oddly sentient blob that refused to be disposed of made her reconsider. Find your next read at

That left Healing and Support Magic. It seemed like a reasonable choice. It was useful, and she was a caring person, after all... but still, something about locking herself into a healer's path made her hesitate.

Ariana sighed deeply, letting her screen blink out of existence before dramatically burying her face into her pillow. "Ughhh! Why is this so hard?"

As she lay there wallowing in self-pity, a thought suddenly surfaced.

Wait... back at the library, Charlotte asked Liam for help, but he said he had something to do.

She lifted her head slightly. Would he be done by now? If so, maybe... maybe he could help her too.

Her fingers curled around her pillow as an internal battle immediately began raging in her mind.

"Go ask him."

"No, that's stupid! He probably doesn't want to be bothered."

"But he's smart, and he'd probably help if I asked."

"What if he gets annoyed? What if he calls it a 'waste of time' in that flat, scary tone of his?"

"But I really need help!"

She groaned again, rolling onto her back and covering her face. "Why am I even overthinking this?!"

After a few more minutes of mental warfare, she finally sat up with newfound determination—or at least, as much determination as her small frame could muster.

"Okay! I'll go ask him!" she declared, clenching her fists.

She hopped off her bed and marched toward the door, stopping in front of her mirror for a quick check. "Serious face, serious face..." she muttered, puffing her cheeks before exhaling sharply.

She furrowed her brows, attempting to look as composed and businesslike as possible. Instead, she ended up looking like a pouty squirrel.

"Ugh, whatever!" she huffed, shaking her head before heading out of her dorm, her steps growing lighter as nervousness crept in despite her best efforts.

As Ariana stood in front of Liam's door, her confidence crumbled like a poorly made house of cards.

Why am I here again?!

Her hands twitched at her sides as she bit her lip, her mind scrambling for an escape plan. She could just turn around and pretend she never even came! Yes! That was a perfect plan!

But then—what if Liam somehow knew she had been here? What if he opened the door just as she was running away and called her out? That would be humiliating!

She took a deep breath and raised her hand to knock—only to freeze.

What if he's sleeping? What if he's busy? What if I knock, and he opens the door with that cold, unreadable stare and—

"Aaaaghhh!" she internally screamed, gripping her head in frustration.

She turned around dramatically, ready to flee. Nope, nope, abort mission!

But then she spun back. Wait! No! I came here for a reason!

She lifted her fist again—paused. But what if—

STOP THINKING AND JUST KNOCK!

With a tiny squeak, she squeezed her eyes shut and rapped on the door with the weakest knock known to mankind.

Meanwhile, inside Liam's room, he had just finished his shower, his damp hair slightly tousled as he slid into his pants. A towel hung around his neck as steam still lingered in the air. Just as he reached for his shirt, he heard the faintest knock at the door.

Immediately, his eyes flicked to Nyxie, who had been lazily floating around.

"Hide," he ordered, his voice firm.

Nyxie, being the absolute genius that she was, darted toward the bed and buried herself under his pillow.

Except... her tail was still sticking out.

Liam stared.

Nyxie's tail twitched.

"...You do realize you're not hidden, right?" he deadpanned.

The tail froze.

A second later, it slowly, painstakingly wriggled under the pillow, as if that would somehow erase the fact that he had already seen it.

Liam sighed, rubbing his temple. "Nyxie. Shadow. Now."

With a small huff, Nyxie finally did as she was told, sinking into his shadow like a stubborn cat being forced into its bed.

With that settled, Liam made his way to the door—still shirtless, because honestly, whoever it was, they'd either deal with it or leave.

When he swung the door open, he was met with an interesting sight.

Ariana was mid-step, clearly in the process of fleeing, when she suddenly froze like a deer caught in headlights.

Her eyes slowly trailed up, her face instantly turning crimson as she registered Liam standing there—wet hair, towel draped around his neck, very much shirtless.

Ariana.exe had officially crashed.

Ariana stood there, completely frozen, as if her brain had been yanked out and tossed into the void.

Why... why is he shirtless?!

Her mind screamed at her to look away, but her eyes refused to cooperate, instead betraying her by lingering far too long on Liam's well-defined torso.

Liam, on the other hand, simply arched a brow, his red eyes flicking over her face as he took in her tense posture and frantic expression. "...You good?"

Ariana jolted, snapping out of her daze. "I—I'm fine! Completely fine! Never been finer!" She laughed awkwardly, waving her hands as if that would somehow dispel the intense heat rushing to her face.

Liam squinted. He had seen a lot of strange things in his life, but Ariana's current behavior? This was a new level of weird.

She fidgeted, looking everywhere but at him, her fingers nervously twisting the hem of her sleeves. Her mouth opened, closed, then opened again as if she was trying to form words but failing miserably.

"...Are you having a malfunction?" Liam asked, genuinely curious.

Ariana groaned internally. Why am I like this?!

Deciding that the only way out was through, she squeezed her eyes shut, took a deep breath, and then—

"I NEED HELP CHOOSING MY COURSES!!"

Her voice came out way too high-pitched, nearly echoing down the hall.

Liam blinked, slightly taken aback. "...Okay."

Ariana slowly opened one eye to peek at him. Seeing his unreadable expression only made things worse.

She swallowed hard, finally daring to meet his gaze—but the moment her eyes drifted downward again, her entire soul short-circuited.

Oh no. Oh no. Too much. TOO MUCH.

Her brain scrambled for an emergency escape, and the only words that left her mouth were:

"I—I like your abs."

Liam stared.

Ariana stared back, utterly mortified. WHY DID I SAY THAT?!

Before Liam could even process what she had just blurted out, Ariana spun on her heel, ready to bolt down the hallway and never return.

But just as she took her first step—

"You can come inside."

Liam's calm voice stopped her in her tracks.

She hesitated, turning back slightly, her face still burning.

"I don't mind helping you with your course selection," Liam continued, leaning against the doorframe.
"You've helped me before. So... it's only fair."

Ariana fidgeted, still clearly embarrassed, but after a moment, she gave a small nod and hesitantly stepped inside.

Just act normal, Ariana. Act normal.

Easier said than done.