

ShadowBound 192

Chapter 192: A Bold Move 2

As Ariana stepped inside, her eyes wandered across the room, finally giving her something else to focus on besides Liam's physique.

His dorm was surprisingly spacious—at least, it felt that way. Maybe it was because he had fewer belongings than she did. While her own room was decorated with books, trinkets, and magical notes scattered across various surfaces, Liam's space was minimalistic. A neatly made bed, a study table with a few papers, a single bookshelf, and a weapon rack. Everything was organized, almost unnervingly so.

As she took in her surroundings, Liam silently walked over to hang his towel before slipping on his shirt. Once done, he turned back to her, his red eyes settling on her with a neutral gaze.

"You can sit on the bed," he said, gesturing casually. Then, without waiting for her response, he pulled out the wooden chair by his study table and sat down.

Ariana hesitated for a moment, her earlier awkwardness lingering, but eventually, she made her way to his bed, perching carefully on the edge like she was afraid to disturb anything.

She clasped her hands together in her lap, finally feeling her heartbeat settle. 'Okay, okay. Just focus on why you're here.'

Liam leaned back slightly in his chair, arms crossed as he regarded Ariana. "So, what exactly are you having trouble with?"

Ariana twiddled her fingers, her eyes darting away for a moment before she finally answered, "Well... I already picked Elemental Myst Mastery as one of my primary courses—because, you know, I kind of have to." She let out a small, nervous laugh, her cheeks puffing slightly. "But everything else just doesn't feel right for me. I don't see myself swinging a sword, leading a battlefield, or brewing potions all day. And healing magic... I could do it, but I'm not sure if it's for me."

She sighed, puffing her cheeks again in frustration. "It's so hard to choose..."

Liam opened his mouth to respond—

WHOOSH!

A blur of shadow suddenly shot out from beneath him, and before either of them could react, it crashed straight into Ariana's face.

"Wha—?!" Ariana squeaked as a small, shadowy creature wrapped around her, its tiny wings fluttering excitedly. A warm, rough sensation brushed against her cheek—licks.

Liam blinked, his expression deadpan. "...Did I tell you to come out?"

Ariana, who had finally processed what just happened, gently pushed the creature back, holding it in front of her. She recognized the sleek dark form, the gleaming blue eyes, and the playful energy. But—

"Wait..." Ariana squinted. "Did you get a new shadow creature?"

The little dragon—now roughly the size of a cat—wiggled in her hands, looking up at Liam with an exaggeratedly guilty expression, much like a kitten caught stealing food.

Liam exhaled through his nose, still unimpressed. "No, it's the same one you met before."

Ariana's eyes widened. "Wait, this is the huge dragon from before?!" She glanced between the tiny creature and Liam, her brain struggling to connect the dots.

Liam gave a simple nod. "I used a technique to make her smaller."

Ariana was still processing when something else clicked. "Wait, her?" She blinked, then tilted her head. "It's a girl?"

"Yeah," Liam said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "Her name's Nyxie."

As soon as he said that, Nyxie let out a tiny chirp before wriggling free from Ariana's grip—only to immediately dive back into her arms, snuggling into her like a cat demanding attention.

Ariana let out a surprised laugh, her heart melting at the sudden affection. "Aw, she remembers me!"

Nyxie responded by happily nuzzling against her before making a triumphant little squeak, as if saying, 'Of course I do, peasant!'

Liam watched with the same deadpan expression. "She just likes attention."

Nyxie turned her head sharply to him, narrowing her glowing eyes as if deeply offended by the accusation. Then, with dramatic flair, she draped herself over Ariana's shoulder, throwing one tiny wing over her own face in an exaggerated sulk.

Ariana giggled, gently scratching under Nyxie's chin. "I think she likes me more than you, Liam."

Liam shrugged. "She probably does."

Nyxie shot him another glare before curling up against Ariana, purring like a satisfied cat.

Ariana, meanwhile, was completely enchanted. "I can't believe this was the same terrifying dragon from before. She's so cute like this!"

Liam sighed. "Yeah, she knows that too."

Nyxie smugly flicked her tail, clearly reveling in the praise.

Liam exhaled slightly, shifting the conversation back on track. "Anyway, about your course selections."

Ariana blinked, her mind still slightly wrapped around Nyxie's cuteness, before quickly nodding. "Oh, y-yeah. Got distracted for a second there," she said with a nervous laugh, scratching her cheek.

Liam leaned back slightly, crossing his arms. "Healing and Support Magic actually suit you. You're naturally kind, and it complements your elemental versatility as a Primordial."

Ariana's cheeks warmed slightly at the compliment, though she quickly waved her hands dismissively. "I-I mean, I guess... but I don't know if I can handle the pressure. Healing magic means having people's lives in your hands, and what if I mess up?"

Liam gave her a blank look. "Then you try again."

"...That's kind of a terrifying way to put it," she muttered.

Liam shrugged. "You'd be good at it. But if you're unsure, don't force yourself. Same with Alchemy—it seems like your kind of thing, but if you don't enjoy it, there's no point."

Ariana nodded, feeling slightly reassured. "Yeah, I just don't like working with potions and formulas. It's too... sterile."

Liam hummed in understanding. "Then we're not even going to talk about Forgemastery or Beast Transformation. You don't have the physical strength for one, and you don't have a beast affinity for the other."

Ariana pouted slightly. "Hey, I could get stronger..."

Liam gave her a flat look. "You couldn't even lift Magnus' training sword properly."

Ariana slumped. "...Fair point."

Shaking his head, Liam gestured toward her magical screen. "Let me see your course options."

Ariana lifted her magical screen toward him, but Liam squinted, leaning forward slightly. "I can't see it properly from here." Without much thought, he got up from his chair and sat down beside her on the bed.

Ariana stiffened. Oh no. Continue reading stories on

He was too close.

Not that he was invading her space, but still—she wasn't expecting him to just sit next to her like it was nothing. Her brain momentarily shut down as she felt the slight warmth radiating from him.

"Are you going to scroll or just sit there?"

Ariana jolted. "I—I was scrolling!" She quickly flicked through the courses, her fingers fumbling slightly.

Liam's eyes followed the screen, skimming the courses until something caught his attention. He narrowed his eyes slightly, feeling like he had just seen something he hadn't noticed before.

"Wait," he said, pointing. "Tap on that."

Ariana followed his gaze and tapped on the highlighted section.

Two new courses appeared:

- Tactical Espionage & Diplomacy
- Spatial Manipulation & Dimensional Warping

Both of them stared at the screen in surprise.

"...Huh," Liam muttered. "I don't remember seeing those before."

Ariana blinked. "Me neither. Did they just add them?"

Frowning slightly, Liam summoned his own magical screen and searched through his course list. He scrolled carefully, and sure enough—there they were. Tactical Espionage & Diplomacy and Spatial Manipulation & Dimensional Warping.

He tapped them, and the descriptions loaded.

Ariana leaned closer to read as well. "Did Mystica forget to mention these?"

Liam stared at the screen, processing. "Either that, or she left them out intentionally to see who would find them."

Ariana huffed. "That sounds exactly like something she'd do."

As they skimmed through the descriptions, they quickly understood Spatial Manipulation & Dimensional Warping—it focused on high-level teleportation magic, pocket dimensions, and advanced spatial techniques. A complicated but incredibly useful field.

But the other course—

"Tactical Espionage & Diplomacy..." Ariana frowned. "This one sounds weird."

Liam tilted his head slightly, reading further. "'The study of infiltration, deception, persuasion, and high-stakes negotiation techniques. Trains students in covert operations and diplomatic interactions.'"

"That sounds like something high-ranked knight assassins would do," Ariana mused, her eyes narrowing slightly at the course description.

Liam nodded. "Yeah, it does."

His gaze lingered on Tactical Espionage & Diplomacy longer than he intended. Something about it felt incomplete—like the course description wasn't telling the full story. And yet, there was an undeniable pull toward it. He wasn't sure if it was curiosity or instinct, but a part of him wanted to pick it.

'Would this actually benefit me?' Liam wondered, his fingers idly tapping against his knee.

He snapped out of his thoughts and turned to Ariana. "Hey, you're a Primordial. Last time we talked about your affinities, you told me you only have four right now, right?"

Ariana nodded. "Y—yeah, I only have four at the moment."

"Is space one of them?"

She blinked at the question before nodding again. "Well, yeah. But I can only use a few gravitational magic spells. Nothing big."

Liam leaned back slightly, considering his next words carefully. "Then Spatial Manipulation & Dimensional Warping is a course you should seriously consider."

Ariana tilted her head. "You think so?"

Liam gave a firm nod. "It makes sense. If you already have an affinity for space, then you have a natural advantage in learning high-level spatial magic. Teleportation, dimensional storage, pocket dimensions—this course is teaching the kind of magic that could make you practically untouchable."

Ariana bit her lip, looking uncertain. "I don't know, Liam. Spatial magic is incredibly advanced. I can barely control the little gravitational magic I have now."

"That's because you haven't trained it properly," Liam countered. "Think about it—this course could help you develop that affinity. You're a Primordial, Ariana. Your potential is far beyond what most people can even comprehend. If you don't push your limits, you'll never know how far you can go."

Ariana hesitated, his words sinking in. He wasn't wrong—she did want to grow stronger. And if spatial magic was already within her reach, wouldn't it be a waste not to refine it?

Still, she felt nervous. "What if I can't keep up?"

Liam sighed. "You doubt yourself too much, Ariana. You were able to help me learn the myst techniques in just one night. You can handle this."

A small, embarrassed smile formed on Ariana's lips. "...Fine. You make a good argument. I'll pick Spatial Manipulation."

Liam gave a satisfied nod. "Good choice."

Ariana tapped on the course, officially selecting it. Then she glanced at Liam, noticing he was staring at her screen again. "...What now?"

Liam smirked slightly. "Alchemy."

Ariana groaned. "Liam."

"Hear me out," he said before she could protest further. "You don't like how formulaic it is, right? Too sterile?"

"Exactly."

"But you're a Primordial," Liam repeated. "Alchemy isn't just potions and formulas for you—it's a way to combine different myst types. If you learn how to use it properly, you could create entirely new magical effects that no one else can."

Ariana's brows furrowed. "New magical effects...?"

"Think about it," Liam continued. "You have four affinities right now—what if you could fuse them into something unique? Alchemy could teach you how to mix myst on a deeper level, beyond just using multiple affinities separately."

Ariana's expression wavered. She hadn't thought about it like that before. She had assumed alchemy was just about making potions and enchanting materials, but if Liam was right... it could be much more.

Still, she hesitated. "...But I don't know if I have the patience for all that."

Liam sighed. "Then don't take it."

Ariana blinked. "Wait—"

"I'm not forcing you," he said simply. "I just wanted you to see the value in it. If you really don't want it, don't pick it."

Ariana stared at him for a moment before looking back at her magical screen. She bit her lip, considering.

"...Ugh," she groaned, rubbing her forehead. "Why do you make things sound so reasonable?"

"Because they are."

With a reluctant sigh, Ariana tapped the screen again—this time, selecting Alchemy.

Liam nodded approvingly. "Good."

Ariana pouted. "I hate that you're so persuasive."

Nyxie, who had been listening quietly, suddenly flopped dramatically in Ariana's lap with a soft chirp—clearly mimicking Ariana's exaggerated distress. Then, for added effect, she covered her eyes with her tiny wings as if the decision had been too much to bear.

Ariana stared at Nyxie for a second before bursting into laughter. "Oh my gods, you are so dramatic!"

Liam rolled his eyes. "She's literally copying you."

Nyxie peeked through her wings, stuck out her tongue, and then snuggled deeper into Ariana's lap with a smug little chirp.

Ariana giggled, hugging the tiny shadow dragon close. "I think she's on my side."

Liam sighed. "That's because you keep spoiling her."