

ShadowBound 195

Chapter 195: Are You Willing To Take The Risk?

As Liam stepped through the shimmering portal, the familiar pull of myst energy wrapped around him, distorting his senses for a brief moment.

The swirling colors faded, and in the blink of an eye, he found himself standing in the middle of Mystica's chamber.

Before he could take in his surroundings, a familiar, playful voice echoed from the back of the room.

"Who did you bring with you, Ariana? Don't tell me you've already gotten yourself a boyfriend..."

There was a brief pause before Mystica's voice continued, her tone laced with amusement.

"...And don't even try to lie. I can feel a man's presence from a mile away."

Liam exhaled quietly, already anticipating whatever nonsense was about to follow.

Footsteps approached from the back of the chamber, and as Mystica finally emerged into view, her eyes widened slightly when she saw Liam standing alone.

"Oh?" She arched a brow, placing a hand on her hip. "Hey there."

Then, as if something clicked in her mind, a teasing grin spread across her lips.

"Wait a second... don't tell me you're the one who captured my angel's heart?"

Liam's expression remained unreadable. "No."

Mystica pouted dramatically before scanning the room. "But wait... where is my angel? And why are you the one stepping out of the portal door I specifically created for her?"

Liam didn't miss the suspicion in her tone, but he kept his explanation simple.

"I needed some answers from you, but since I've never been here on my own accord, I had no idea how to get here. So I went to Ariana. She showed me the portal and allowed me to use it."

Mystica blinked, then chuckled sheepishly. "Oh, that's right... I have always dragged you here without your consent."

Liam merely stared at her.

"Well, whatever," she shrugged, clearly unbothered. "I don't mind if Ariana let you use it. So, tell me, what exactly are you here to pester me about this time?"

Liam didn't waste any time. "Tactical Espionage and Diplomacy. You didn't mention it yesterday at the Beacon Hall."

Mystica's playful smirk twitched slightly. "Oh? I forgot to mention it?"

Liam wasn't fooled. "Yeah. And I want to pick it, but I need to know what it's really about before I do. Those descriptions on the magical screens don't exactly tell the full story."

Mystica studied him for a moment before humming in amusement. "You, picking that course? Now that's interesting."

She sauntered over to a nearby table, effortlessly pouring herself a glass of deep red wine before settling into her plush chair.

"Not that it isn't a good fit for you—actually, it's perfect—but..." she swirled her glass lazily, her eyes gleaming mischievously.

"Are you really willing to deal with all that diplomacy nonsense? You're not exactly the social type. And more importantly..." She leaned forward slightly.

"For someone who's trying to keep his dark magic hidden from the world... are you sure this is the right move?"

Liam was about to respond when a second voice cut through the air.

"Just tell the kid what he wants."

Liam turned his head just in time to see Galen drop down from a pull-up bar in the far corner of the room.

Galen stretched his arms, rolling his shoulders like he had been there the entire time. "Besides, he's the type to deal with whatever risks come his way anyway. So quit messing with him and spill already."

Mystica huffed, crossing her arms. "Ugh... Can't you just mind your own business, Gally?"

Galen shot her a lazy smirk. "Not when you're stalling like a dramatic old hag."

Mystica gasped in exaggerated offense. "You take that back, you frosted brat!"

Galen just snickered.

Mystica pouted for a moment before sighing, waving a dismissive hand. "Whatever. Don't mind the snow-head, Liam. Go ahead and take a seat."

Liam glanced between the two before stepping forward and lowering himself into the gestured chair, ready to finally get the answers he came for.

Mystica took a slow sip of her wine, savoring the taste before finally setting the glass down. Her eyes settled on Liam, her playful demeanor simmering down just enough to let the weight of her next words settle.

"Tactical Espionage and Diplomacy," she mused, tracing a delicate finger along the rim of her glass. "It's an interesting course—far more than what those neat little descriptions on the selection screens let on."

Liam remained silent, waiting.

Mystica leaned forward, resting her chin on the back of her hand. "At its core, it's about learning how to navigate power. That means infiltration, manipulation, intelligence gathering, and, of course, the more... delicate aspects of persuasion. It's not about brute force or charging into battle. It's about knowing who to speak to, when to speak, and when to keep your mouth shut. It's about learning the inner workings of influence—how nations, guilds, and people function behind the scenes."

She tilted her head slightly. "And diplomacy? That's just war by other means. If you do it right, you won't need to lift a single weapon. You'll make others fight your battles for you."

Liam's fingers tapped against the armrest of his chair. He had expected as much, but Mystica wasn't done.

"But," she continued, her tone turning more serious, "this isn't some lesson in smooth-talking and deception. The deeper you go, the more dangerous the game becomes. Information is the most valuable currency in this world, and those who control it? They control everything."

She folded her legs gracefully, watching Liam closely. "If you really take this course, if you push yourself past the basics and into the real shadows, you'll start dealing with things most people aren't meant to know. Secrets that are kept buried for a reason. And if you go that far, Liam..."

"People will come looking for you."

"And then there's your little situation," she added, swirling her wine again. "It's one thing to be a skilled infiltrator, to blend into places you don't belong. It's another thing entirely when you're hiding something as big as dark magic."

She let that hang in the air for a moment before resting back against her chair. "The deeper you go, the more eyes will be on you. People will dig. And the moment you slip up—even once—someone will notice."

Mystica leaned forward again, propping her elbows on the table and lacing her fingers together. "So... Are you willing to take the risk?"

As Liam pondered over Mystica's words, weighing the risks against the potential rewards, Galen's voice cut through his thoughts like an afterthought.

"Man, you think too much."

Liam glanced to the side just as Galen casually walked past, a towel draped around his sweaty neck. He grabbed a cup of water from a nearby table, taking a slow sip before turning his gaze back to Liam. His expression was as indifferent as ever.

"If you wanna take the damn course, just do it. No need to sit there pondering like some scholar writing a thesis." His tone was flat, entirely unbothered.

Liam didn't respond, but Galen wasn't finished. He studied Liam's unreadable face for a moment before clicking his tongue.

"Tch. You're still thinking about it?" He exhaled in mild irritation. "Look, they don't just teach espionage and all that political nonsense. There's real combat training mixed in. Fighting styles, improved techniques, a few tricks you probably haven't learned yet. It's not just about sneaking around and playing mind games."

Galen leaned against the table, stretching his arms. "So if that's what's bothering you—thinking you won't improve in battle—don't. You'll still get stronger. Probably even faster than if you took some boring command course."

His tone made it clear he didn't actually care what Liam chose, but his words carried weight nonetheless.

Liam remained silent for a few more moments, his mind sifting through everything that had been said. Then, finally, he pushed himself up from his chair.

He had his answer.

"Well, thank you both for your help. I'll be taking my leave now."

Without another word, he turned on his heel and headed toward the portal door he came from. With a step forward, his figure dissolved into the swirling myst energy, vanishing from Mystica's chamber.

A quiet pause settled over the room.

Then Mystica turned toward Galen, an amused smirk curling at her lips. "Huh. For someone who doesn't show much love to his students, you sure had a lot to say to Liam just now."

Galen rolled his eyes and waved her off. "Please. He was gonna pick the course anyway. I just saved him the trouble of overthinking it."

Mystica's smirk widened as she leaned back in her chair, her gaze gleaming with mischief. "Mmm... Or maybe you have a soft spot for him."

Galen scoffed. "Like hell I do."

He picked up his water again, taking another sip before adding nonchalantly, "Besides, it's a good thing Seraphina's the one teaching it."

Mystica's smirk faltered for just a fraction of a second before it returned with twice the amusement.

"Ohhh? My dear friend and Magnus's little crush?"

She tilted her head, watching Galen for a reaction.

But he just set his cup down and walked off without another word.

Mystica chuckled to herself, swirling her wine once more.

"Oh, this is going to be fun."