

ShadowBound 201

Chapter 201: Final Class Coming Up

As the final seconds of the assessment ticked away, the battlefield remained chaotic. Some students had grown more aggressive, pushing themselves to the limit, while others had been utterly incapable of handling the pressure. A few had barely managed to scrape by, using sheer luck to avoid being "killed," but there was no hiding their clumsy movements and lack of awareness. The ones who failed the worst were those who hesitated—those who, even against mere illusions, couldn't bring themselves to attack without second-guessing.

Then, in an instant, everything vanished.

The towering maze walls flickered out of existence. The holographic demons disintegrated into nothing. The once-crowded battlefield was now just an open training hall, with exhausted students scattered around, some panting heavily, others standing in silence.

Darius, Garrick, and Vance returned, stepping forward with their assessments.

Vance spoke first, his tone steady and neutral. "Some of you show promise. Most of you don't. The purpose of this test was simple—fight, adapt, survive. Some of you fought but lacked control. Some of you adapted, but too slowly. Many of you did nothing but react, scrambling without any sense of direction. Those of you who did that? You were already dead the moment the test started." His gaze lingered on the worst performers before he stepped back, uninterested in wasting more words.

Garrick sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "If this was a real battlefield, half of you would be corpses already." His eyes swept over the students, unimpressed. "Some of you didn't know how to use your own damn weapons. Some of you relied entirely on myst like a crutch. News flash—myst won't save you when a real demon is sinking its claws into your throat." He scoffed, crossing his arms.

"Some of you actually put in effort. That's good. But effort alone doesn't mean a damn thing if you're still weak." His eyes flickered to Liam and Asher, narrowing slightly. "And you two—don't think for a second that because you did well, you get a break. Next time you show up late, the weights on your back will be doubled."

Darius finally stepped forward, his sharp gaze dissecting every single student before him. His silence was heavy, suffocating. When he finally spoke, his words cut deep.

"Weak. Mediocre. Disappointing." His voice was laced with nothing but disdain. "I watched some of you hesitate. I watched some of you shake, unsure of whether to strike down a threat. I watched as some of you barely swung your weapons at all, as if you were afraid to commit to an attack." His red eyes swept over them, filled with disgust.

"You feared harming something that was meant to be your enemy. That hesitation? That weakness? If this had been real, you'd be dead."

The room was silent. No one dared to move.

Then, Darius took a step forward, his presence heavy. "Now, let me ask you a question." His voice was calm, but there was a razor-sharp edge to it.

"Why do we raise our swords and weapons at demons, but not at humans?"

Silence. Some students glanced at one another, unsure if there was a correct answer. Then, finally, one of them spoke hesitantly.

"Because... humans aren't a threat to mankind, but demons are?"

A smirk tugged at the corner of Darius' lips. "Exactly. This is the first lesson a knight must learn and honor."

Another pause. Then Garrick clapped his hands together. "That's enough. There's five minutes left. Go to the locker rooms, change back into your academy uniforms, and get out. You're dismissed when the bell rings."

The students wasted no time leaving. Some walked off in complete silence, still processing everything. Others whispered among themselves, shaken by what had just happened.

As the students filed out of the training hall, the sound of the bell ringing echoed down the hallways, signaling the end of their second class and the start of their lunch break. The cafeteria quickly filled with students eager to refuel after the grueling morning, their chatter a welcome distraction from the weight of the day's events.

Liam and Asher made their way through the crowded cafeteria, easily finding their usual group gathered around the table. Sheila, Ariana, Dylan, Max, and Charlotte were all there, each with a plate of food in front of them. The group waved them over, and Liam and Asher took their seats, helping themselves to the available spots as they dug into their meals.

Dylan was in the middle of teasing Max about his latest "failed attempts" at Forgemastery. "Max, honestly, I've seen bricks with more finesse than your last project. I'm pretty sure even the forge was laughing at you."

Max, completely unfazed, shot back, "Oh yeah? At least my creations don't explode when I breathe on them. Maybe you should change your technique from 'firestarter' to 'fire extinguisher,' huh?"

The group burst into laughter, with Sheila nudging Dylan playfully. "Cut him some slack, Dylan. It's not easy working with metal... especially when you're as clueless as you are with anything that doesn't involve setting things on fire."

Dylan rolled his eyes dramatically. "Hey, some of us just have a passion for a good blaze! Just ask Asher." He grinned, directing his teasing at the fire-wielder.

Asher shot back without missing a beat, "Don't put your nonsense on me, broomstick."

"Broomstick? I'm no broomstick!" Dylan retorted, puffing his chest out comically. "Anyway, enough about this ogre of a topic. Let's get back to the important stuff... Max, I'll let you off the hook for now. Only because Sheila asked her favorite subject to show some mercy."

Sheila immediately twitched at his words. "Don't ever say that again. It sounds cringier the more I think about it."

Meanwhile, Charlotte, ever the one to gravitate toward Liam, slid into the seat next to him, her body close enough that it was unmistakably intentional. She flashed him a flirtatious smile, her voice dropping to a sultry whisper. "Guess what, Bae? After lunch, we've finally got the same class together. Just the two of us." She purred, leaning in just a bit closer. "Looking forward to a pleasant day, just you and me."

Liam glanced at her with a side-eye, unbothered. "It would be wise for you to choose your words more carefully, Charlotte. It's getting a bit vexing. You can try Asher; he's free."

"What's your problem, weakling?" Asher shot back, not even looking up from his food. "Just because we spent a couple of classes together doesn't mean you can pass your little kitty cat off on me."

Liam shrugged nonchalantly. "It was a suggestion."

Charlotte, not to be deterred, leaned in closer, her voice honeyed with exaggerated sweetness. "Asher's clearly not my type, but you, darling... you're more than just my type."

Dylan, watching from across the table, gagged dramatically, his face twisted in mock disgust. "Disgusting. Even I don't flirt that hard."

The conversation shifted as Sheila and Ariana began discussing how their first day had gone. Sheila casually mentioned some of the more amusing mishaps in their courses, making light of the more chaotic moments. Ariana, ever the optimist, chimed in with a few interesting facts she had learned, keeping her tone sweet and light-hearted. Both of them seemed content, if a little worn out from the busy start to their academy life.

As the group continued their lunch, their chatter shifted between classes, instructors, and whatever else came to mind, the air filled with the buzz of new experiences and the camaraderie of shared moments.

The 50-minute lunch break came to a close with the sharp sound of the bell, signaling the students to finish up and head to their next class. The cafeteria quickly began to empty as everyone gathered their things, eager to make it to their destinations before the next bell rang.

Liam and his group rose from the table, each heading in different directions. Sheila and Asher, sharing the same class, made their way toward the Strategic Command and Leadership course, chatting casually as they walked. Their easy banter and mutual interest in the subject made the walk less tedious.

Ariana and Dylan, both headed for the Alchemy department, strolled side by side. Dylan was already cracking jokes, causing Ariana to giggle as they weaved through the bustling hallways. Max, also bound for Alchemy, took a different route to his own class, his path diverging from the others.

Meanwhile, Liam and Charlotte made their way toward the Tactical Espionage and Diplomacy class. The hallway they walked down was quiet, their footsteps echoing off the stone walls as Charlotte led the way. She, of course, filled the silence with her usual chatter, while Liam's attention was divided between her words and the path ahead. Continue reading at

"It's honestly surprising how you have no idea where your next class is, Bae," Charlotte teased. "If I wasn't in the same class, what would you have done, huh? Guess we'll never know."

Liam's expression remained neutral, his attention still partly elsewhere as he gave a noncommittal grunt in response. He wasn't exactly thrilled to be spending the next class with Charlotte, but he wasn't one to let his discomfort show on his face.

When they reached the door to the Tactical Espionage and Diplomacy classroom, Liam paused for a brief moment, scanning the door for a name tag, hoping for some sort of label like the one on Professor Vale's door. But there was nothing. No indication of what awaited them inside.

Charlotte, not noticing his hesitation, simply pushed the door open with a sharp motion. "You just gonna stand there? Let's go in."

They entered, and Liam's gaze swept over the room. Several seats were already filled, and the students inside cast disinterested and disdainful glances at the newcomers. The girls shot looks of clear disgust at Charlotte, seemingly repelled by the way she carried herself, while the boys turned their eyes to Liam with similar disdain. Neither of them seemed to have made a favorable impression.