

ShadowBound 210

Chapter 210: Why Are You Still Hesitant?

Liam instinctively glanced around as Seraphina's voice slithered into his ears. His gaze swept across the hall until it landed on her—still lounging lazily at the far end, her lips curved in an unreadable smirk. He hesitated for only a moment before making his way toward her.

Upon reaching her, Liam gave a slight bow, his voice calm and collected. "You called for me, Professor Vale."

Seraphina clicked her tongue in disapproval, waving off his formal greeting as though it physically pained her. "Professor Vale? Ugh, please, stop. You make it sound like you're referring to my uncle, Orin Vale." She sighed theatrically before her lips curled into a playful smirk.

"You can simply call me Seraphina. Or," she leaned forward slightly, eyes twinkling with mischief, "just for you, you can call me Sera-kiss." She added a slow, seductive wink.

Liam remained unfazed. "Lady Seraphina, may I know why you called me here?" His tone was as neutral as ever, completely disregarding her antics.

Seraphina pouted before dramatically placing a hand over her heart. "Straight to business, is it? How cruel. But fine, we'll save the fun for later." Her expression shifted as she rested her chin in her palms, her green eyes gleaming with something sharper now. "Tell me, little shadow—why do you hesitate every time you're up against human-shaped targets?"

Liam was silent for a beat before answering. "I suppose... I don't have that complete emptiness in me to take a life without hesitation."

At that, Seraphina let out an unexpected burst of laughter, clutching her stomach as she wheezed. After a moment, she wiped a tear from her eye, still chuckling. "Oh, darling, that is both touching and so concerning coming from someone like you."

Then, with a shift in demeanor, she pursed her lips and muttered a spell under her breath. The next words she spoke were silent to the world but clear to one person.

'Kaine, be a dear and set up a nice little dome for me and my sweet boy here.'

From his distant position, Kaine, who had been watching the exchange from the moment Liam approached Seraphina, let out a sharp exhale through his nose. His steely gray eyes narrowed, his irritation not aimed at Seraphina, but at Liam. 'What the hell is she planning with that useless kid?' he thought with disdain.

Still, he obeyed, manipulating the training hall's myst-infused properties. Within seconds, a translucent dome materialized around Seraphina and Liam, isolating them from the rest of the students.

Liam immediately noticed the shift. His eyes flickered around the enclosed space before landing back on Seraphina, his instincts telling him she was up to something.

Seraphina, now standing, stretched lazily before flicking her gaze toward him. Her form-fitting black pants accentuated her shape, and her dark green blouse—unbuttoned just enough to be teasing—only added to her air of calculated seduction.

"Good, now that we're nice and hidden," she purred, "let's have a real conversation." Her smirk deepened as she crossed her arms. "You say you lack the emptiness to kill humans without hesitation. But tell me, sweet thing, what makes you think people kill because they're empty-hearted?"

Liam's jaw tightened slightly. "That's... not what I meant."

Seraphina's grin widened. "Oh, how cute." She stepped closer, her tone turning almost affectionate. "I really thought you were one of those detached, emotionless brats. But now that I see you up close, you're just a kid who lost something—or someone—and chose this path because of it." Her green eyes studied him, dissecting him like a puzzle. "You might be able to cut down demons without a second thought, with pure efficiency... but at the end of the day, you aren't as cold and detached as you like to think."

Liam said nothing.

Seraphina chuckled. "Hah. You know what? Let's make this chat more interesting. How about a little one-on-one training?"

Before Liam could answer, the dome, which had been faintly glowing, was suddenly consumed by darkness. A thick, inky blackness swallowed everything, stretching beyond even Liam's enhanced vision.

His body tensed instinctively. His senses screamed as the unnatural void pressed against him. He recognized this kind of abyss, this eerie suffocation—dark magic.

Yet something was off. It felt like dark magic... but it wasn't exactly the same.

Seraphina's voice purred through the void. "Alright, little shadow... let's chat." Her tone dipped lower, almost a whisper against his skin. "And I suggest you stay on guard—because you just stepped into my domain."

Liam barely had time to register her words before his instincts flared. He spun, sensing an attack from behind. He stepped sideways just in time, dodging the first strike—only for the attacker to shift mid-motion, redirecting their blade straight for his eyes.

His sword shot up, the steel catching the edge of the attack just in time to deflect it. With a fluid motion, he countered, lashing out with a side kick. He felt his foot connect—but then, pain flared in his gut.

A second blade had already pierced his side.

Liam staggered back, gripping his wound. The darkness obscured his vision, but he could feel the warm, wet sensation beneath his fingers.

Seraphina's laughter coiled around him like a serpent. "That's what happens when you hesitate, darling." Her voice was silk wrapped around steel. "Now, let's begin our little lesson, shall we?"

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Liam stayed on high alert, gripping his sword tightly. The darkness surrounding him was absolute—no light, no shadows, just an overwhelming void. He couldn't see his opponent, couldn't track any movements. Every sense was strained to its limit.

Then, an attack.

A blade came from his right. Liam barely reacted in time, twisting his body to deflect it with his sword. The moment steel clashed, the attacker vanished into nothingness. No weight, no presence—just an illusion.

Another strike, this time from behind. Liam ducked, pivoting on his heel, swinging his sword at the source—nothing. His blade cut through empty air.

A whisper slithered around him, Seraphina's voice filled with amusement. "Still hesitating? You fight demons without a second thought, yet against humans, you are holding back, sweetie?"

Liam clenched his jaw. He didn't answer. He focused on the movement, on the next attack—because it was coming.

And it did.

A sudden force from the left. He blocked, parried—then pain. A second blade stabbed into his side. Liam staggered back, hand clutching his wound.

"See? This is what hesitation costs you," Seraphina's voice taunted. "You still think humans deserve your mercy?"

Liam tightened his grip on his sword. He tried to push her words out of his head, but they kept clawing their way back.

Another attack—overhead. He raised his blade, blocking the strike with a sharp clang. He countered with a swift slash, but once again, nothing.

A laugh echoed through the darkness. "You think just because they're human, they hold more value than demons? That your hesitation makes you better?"

Liam gritted his teeth, forcing himself to focus on the fight. But no matter how many times he swung, dodged, or countered, he never truly hit anything. It was like fighting a ghost.

"I was like you once," Seraphina said, her voice suddenly softer, but still laced with mockery. "I killed demons without hesitation. But humans? That was different... until I realized something."

Liam's breath was heavy, his muscles tensed, but he still couldn't tune her out.

"There's no difference," she continued. "You think your soft spot matters? It doesn't. Humans, demons... in the end, they'll all stab you in the back just the same."

Liam's grip on his sword faltered for just a second. And in that moment, another attack came—straight for his throat.

Liam's heart skipped a beat as he barely managed to sidestep the slash aimed at his throat. His sword came up just in time to deflect the blade, but the cut still grazed his skin, drawing a thin line of blood. He stumbled backward, his breath ragged, as the voice continued to echo in the suffocating darkness.

For a fleeting moment, everything stood still as Liam crouched on one knee, his body bruised, cut, and battered from the relentless barrage. His breath came in heavy, uneven gasps.

"You know," Seraphina's voice floated around him like a silken whisper, playful, "it's surprising how you haven't used any of your magic yet. I mean, I get not using your dark magic—there's a reason for that. But not using your fire magic? That's just plain stupid, don't you think?"

Liam's senses sharpened as he felt her presence shift, moving—no, gliding—around him like a ghost he couldn't pin down.

"And that's not the only stupid thing you've done," she purred. "All those attacks you threw with your sword? Cute. But none of them were even close to lethal. Blunt side of the blade, really? How sweet that you care, sweetheart, but I like my men merciless."

Liam gritted his teeth, trying to keep his composure, but her voice was dangerously close now, her lips grazing the edge of his ear. 'How does she know? I haven't used my dark magic around anyone, especially not with the Veil of Flux hiding my myst... unless...'

Then, without warning, a soft, almost sensual hand cupped his jaw, lifting his head just enough to expose his neck.

Seraphina's tone dropped into something more dangerous, more intimate. "It's such a sight, to see that surprised look on your face... especially in my void."