

ShadowBound 211

Chapter 211: Accept It

Liam's breath was ragged, his grip tightening on his sword, but his body refused to move. The void around him pressed in, suffocating, the weight of Seraphina's presence bearing down like an unshakable shadow.

"You remind me of myself, you know," Seraphina mused, still behind him. "A long time ago, I thought just like you. I believed there was a line—demons were the enemy, humans were... something else. Something worth protecting." She let out a quiet chuckle, but there was no warmth in it.

Liam gritted his teeth, his jaw clenching so hard it hurt.

Seraphina continued, unhurried. "Back then, I was naive—strong, capable, but naive. I thought my enemies were just monsters with claws and fangs. That was before I watched my so-called allies sell me out for a handful of gold. Before I watched the people I bled for turn their backs when I needed them most. And you know what the worst part was?"

She crouched in front of him now, the void shifting like liquid as she came into view. Her glowing green eyes locked onto his. "It wasn't greed, Liam. It wasn't even desperation. It was the simple fact that they could. That's the nature of humans—if betrayal is an option, they'll take it."

Liam's fingers twitched against his sword hilt, but he said nothing.

Seraphina tilted her head, a slow smirk forming. "You don't fully believe me yet. Not completely. Because you haven't experienced the cruelty of mankind—not really." She traced a finger lightly along his cheek. "Oh, I know you've seen the selfish whims of nobles, their greed, their arrogance. But that?" She scoffed. "That's nothing. Just entitled brats playing king in their tiny worlds. You've never felt true human malice, Liam. Not the kind that makes demons look merciful."

Liam's breath hitched, anger bubbling just beneath the surface.

"But I do know something about you," Seraphina continued, voice dipping into something silkier. "You're only the way you are now—this detached, brooding little soldier—because you lost someone to

demons." She leaned in just enough for her breath to ghost against his skin. "That's why you slaughter them without hesitation, why you don't even blink when you tear through them." Her eyes gleamed with amusement. "Your hatred is easy to understand. It's... predictable."

Liam's pulse pounded in his ears.

"You think I'm wrong?" she teased. "I don't need to read your mind, Liam. I can read you. Like an open book." She tapped a finger against his forehead. "That stiff posture, that controlled breathing, the way your hands twitch whenever I get too close? I know exactly who you are. And you hate that, don't you?"

Liam's fingers twitched again—this time, not from restraint, but from raw frustration.

Seraphina chuckled. "But that's why you'll never reach whatever goal you've set for yourself—whether it's revenge, purpose, or something else entirely." She leaned closer. "Because as long as you cling to this ridiculous soft spot for humans, you're just as weak as any commoner."

Liam's breath came faster now, the rage twisting in his gut, hotter than fire. She was right. Every single word. And that infuriated him more than anything else.

More than when he lost his grandfather.

More than when Draven 'died' in the dark forest.

And Seraphina knew it.

She was tearing into the very foundation of his existence, stripping him bare, forcing him to confront a truth he didn't want to acknowledge.

His fingers trembled, not from fear, but from the sheer, unbearable need to shut her up.

Seraphina's smirk deepened as she watched the storm build in Liam's eyes. The tension in his shoulders, the way his breath came sharp and uneven—she was getting to him. Breaking through that cold, controlled exterior piece by piece.

"You feel it now, don't you?" she murmured, her voice dripping with satisfaction. "That frustration burning in your chest? It's not because I'm lying." She tilted her head, her fingers resting lightly beneath his chin. "No, sweetheart, it's because I'm right."

Liam's body trembled, a storm raging inside him. He wanted to deny it, to shut her out, but every word dug deeper, carving through flesh and bone until they reached something raw.

"You're nothing but a child playing soldier," she continued, her voice dropping to a whisper. "You think you understand pain? Loss? Hatred? But you've only scratched the surface. You lost a dear one, and what did you do? You pointed your blade at demons and swore to destroy them all. How... simple."

Liam's fingers curled into fists, his nails digging into his palms.

"But let me ask you this," Seraphina purred, leaning closer until their foreheads nearly touched. "What happens when that isn't enough?"

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Liam's breath hitched.

"What happens when you wipe out every demon in sight and realize the hole inside you is still there? When you finally understand that vengeance is nothing but an illusion—an excuse to keep moving forward because you're too afraid to admit you have nothing else?"

His heart pounded against his ribs, his vision beginning to blur out at the woman before him. He wanted to strike, to shut her up, to bury his blade deep into something just to make this unbearable feeling stop.

Seraphina's smile turned almost gentle, almost pitying. "You're still weak, Liam. Because deep down, you still believe in something. In people." She laughed softly, shaking her head. "That's why you

hesitate. That's why you hold back. And until you rid yourself of that pathetic little hope, you will never reach the heights you're chasing."

The deep unfamiliar rage kept clawing at Liam's chest, getting hotter, and darker than the void he stood in.

Because for the first time in his life, he didn't know what to say.

Because for the first time in his life, he wasn't sure if he was angry at her—

Or himself.

Liam's vision blurred, his thoughts spiraling into a suffocating abyss. His mind clawed at the edges of reason, but Seraphina's words had sunk too deep, their venom spreading like wildfire.

Was everything he was trying to built again —bonds, friendships—just a chain binding him to mediocrity?

Dylan's carefree grin, Asher's sharp, competitive fire, Ariana's gentle kindness... Were they nothing more than distractions? Weighing him down, making him hesitate?

His breath hitched. His chest tightened. His heartbeat pounded in his ears like war drums.

The darkness swelled around him, creeping into the cracks of his resolve, swallowing him whole. His lungs burned—he couldn't breathe.

Seraphina's voice slithered through the void, sick with satisfaction. "That's it... Let it take you. Let it strip you down until there's nothing left but power. That's what you want, isn't it?"

Liam's hands trembled, his vision narrowing to an abyss darker than even his own shadows. His entire body felt weightless, slipping further into nothingness.

Then—

A whisper of wind. The scent of earth, fresh and alive. Warmth against his skin.

His eyes fluttered open.

Above him stretched a vast blue sky, endless and serene, its expanse untouched by darkness. Beneath him, an endless sea of green grass swayed gently in the breeze, the land stretching beyond sight.

Liam's breath was still shaky as he forced himself to his feet, the sensation of suffocation lingering even in this new place. The void was gone, replaced by an open field stretching endlessly under a clear blue sky. The wind carried a familiar scent—earthy, warm, comforting. It felt real.

Too real.

Then, he heard the voice.

"Liam."

His body locked up. He turned slowly, almost afraid to believe it. And there he was.