

ShadowBound 218

Chapter 218: He Kept His Promise

The classroom was quiet as Professor Vale stood at the front, adjusting his glasses while surveying his students. The past weeks had been rigorous, and the improvement in their control over Fire Myst was evident. Most of them no longer struggled with basic shaping and manipulation. Now, it was time for the final lesson of the semester.

He clasped his hands together, drawing their attention. "You've all come a long way," he began. "Your flames are no longer wild, unstable things. You can shape them, sustain them, and even regulate their heat. But there is one final aspect of fire you must understand before we conclude this semester."

With a flick of his wrist, a single flame appeared in his palm. It wavered for a moment before stretching out like a thin thread, then splitting into two, then four—each flicker precise, controlled. "Fire is not just about destruction or power. It is a tool, a force that can be divided, redirected, and layered. The final lesson will focus on Multi-Stream Manipulation—the ability to control multiple flames simultaneously, each serving a different purpose."

He let the flames dance between his fingers before extinguishing them with a simple gesture. "This is the difference between a fire mage who simply attacks and one who dictates the battlefield. By the end of this, you will understand how to split, maintain, and command multiple flames without losing focus. Now, let's begin."

The students sat up, their focus sharpening at the prospect of learning something new. Liam and Asher simply stayed composed as always—this was different from anything they'd done before. Creating a single flame was one thing, but splitting and controlling multiple at once? That sounded like a headache.

Professor Vale gestured toward the sigils on their desks. "You will start small. Ignite a single flame as you have before. Once it is stable, attempt to separate it into two without losing either." He paused, scanning the room. "This will require precision. Too much force, and you will snuff them out. Too little, and they will collapse back into one."

The students got to work. Most ignited their flames easily, holding it steady above they sigil. They concentrated, pushing their myst to stretch it apart. For a brief moment, some made their fire flickered, elongating like a thread—only to snap back into one.

Asher gritted his teeth in frustration. "Tch. This feels like trying to split a damn hair."

Professor Vale walked through the students, watching their struggles with an unreadable expression. "Your mistake," he said evenly, "is thinking of fire as something you must tear apart. Fire flows. It does not like to be forced. Guide it."

Liam, who had also been struggling, adjusted his approach. Instead of pulling the flame apart aggressively or smoothly, he willed it to divide naturally, like water splitting around a rock. The ember wavered—and then, for a brief second, it separated into two weak flickers before merging back.

'I can't believe I forgot about Resonance.'

Across the room, some students were beginning to get the hang of it, though their flames were unstable. Others, like Asher, were still struggling to find the right balance.

Professor Vale nodded slightly. "This will take time. Keep at it."

The lesson continued, each student doing their best to keep their flames steady. Time passed, and soon, the class came to an end. As soon as they were dismissed, the students wasted no time rushing out, heading to their next courses.

Liam and Asher made their way to their Knight Combat Training class. As they walked, Asher's eyes caught something on Liam's neck—a faint but noticeable bruise.

"Hey, weakling," Asher drawled, his tone as condescending as ever. "Not that I care, but what the hell is that on your neck?"

Liam didn't bother looking at him, keeping his gaze fixed forward. "Espionage class," he answered flatly.

Asher raised an eyebrow. "What? And how exactly does a class like that leave you looking like you got choked out in an alley?" There was no real concern in his voice, just mild curiosity laced with mockery.

Liam let out a quiet sigh. "The lessons are practical... real-life scenarios. This was courtesy of my instructor."

Asher scoffed. "Pfft. Makes sense. You must've been slacking off to earn a bruise like that. What a disappointment," he said with a smirk, shaking his head.

Liam didn't dignify that with a response as they approached the training hall.

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Knight Combat Training passed in a blur—though that was only because the students were thrown straight into battle against advanced holographic demons from start to finish. The relentless pace left little room for anything but survival.

Lunch came and went just as quickly, the day seeming to move in fast-forward.

Before long, Liam found himself on his way to his final class of the day—Tactical Espionage.

As always, Charlotte was right beside him, practically draped over his arm, her touch lingering, teasing. Her fingers idly traced patterns along his sleeve as she leaned in, her warm breath brushing against his neck.

"You know, Liam," she purred, her voice a sultry whisper, "I'm starting to think you're leaving me for Lady Seraphina. And now I can't help but wonder... are you into older women? Am I not perfect enough for you, bae?"

Liam exhaled sharply through his nose. "First," he said, his tone flat as he carefully freed himself from her hold, "I'd appreciate it if you didn't cling to me like that. It's irritating."

Charlotte chuckled, thoroughly amused. "And second?"

"Don't make such assumptions."

Her smirk deepened. "Oh? So does that mean you do love me after all, bae?"

Liam shot her a sidelong glance. "Don't make that assumption either."

Charlotte's grin turned wicked. "Oh, come on, you know you love this kitty cat, bae."

Liam didn't dignify her with a response. Instead, he pushed open the doors to the Tactical Espionage training hall and stepped inside.

At her usual spot, Seraphina sat perched on the edge of a desk, one leg elegantly crossed over the other. Her emerald eyes gleamed as she watched Liam walk in, and she bit her lip in a way that was anything but subtle.

Beside her stood him.

Veylan Kaine.

The silver-haired instructor remained a few meters back, arms folded, his expression unreadable. But his steely gaze locked onto Liam the moment he entered, cold and filled with barely veiled disdain.

Liam, still unfazed, made his way toward the changing room without a word.

A few minutes later, the students had gathered at the center of the hall, standing before both Seraphina and Kaine.

"How are you doing, kids? Hope you're all well," Seraphina said, still perched lazily on her desk. Her eyes swept over them with feigned curiosity. "It's quite surprising to see ten of you still standing with the semester coming to an end. Interesting, isn't it?"

She waved a hand dismissively. "Anyway, the routine stays the same. Go get yourselves busy with the holographic humans~"

Then her gaze slid back to Liam, a sly smile curling her lips. "And sweet Liam, you're still on special combat training with Kaine. Enjoy, sweetie. And Kaine, don't break my diamond, hmm?"

Kaine's jaw visibly tightened, but he said nothing.

Seraphina stood, stretching languidly before turning her attention to Charlotte. "You're with me today, darling. You've been slacking off too much with those holograms. Let's switch things up a bit, shall we?"

Charlotte blinked, momentarily surprised by the sudden callout, but she quickly recovered, flashing her usual smirk. "Anything for you, Lady Seraphina~" she purred, following after her.

As the rest of the students were thrown into holographic battle scenarios, Liam found himself standing before Kaine in a far corner of the hall, inside a private holographic dome.

Just the two of them.

It had been weeks since Liam and Kaine's tense encounter in Liam's dorm, and true to his word, Kaine had made it his mission to turn Liam's life into a living hell.

At first, he doubled Liam's workload, forcing him through grueling exercises with twice the difficulty of his peers, hoping the boy would break and quit. But he had underestimated him—again. Liam endured every brutal task without complaint, his stubborn resilience burning as fiercely as the fire he wielded.

Realizing this approach wouldn't work, Kaine shifted tactics. He spoke to Seraphina—though "asked for permission" was the better phrase, as even he wouldn't dare attempt manipulation on her. He proposed special training sessions with Liam, and Seraphina, ever amused by the idea of making Liam stronger, had agreed without hesitation.

And so, the weeks had passed with Liam and Kaine locked in one-on-one sparring sessions. Kaine held back—barely—just enough to avoid outright maiming him, but never enough to spare him from pain.

Every match left Liam battered, bruised, and aching. His Mend spell couldn't heal the worst of it, forcing him to either endure or seek the infirmary, which he rarely did.

Yet, despite the relentless punishment, despite the growing toll on his body, Liam never once considered dropping the course. There were too many things that intrigued him, too many pieces he had yet to fit together. And today was no different.

Kaine rolled up his sleeves, his steely gaze fixed on Liam. "Hope you're ready, kid."

Silent as ever, Liam spun his sword in his grip, the blade scraping the ground and sending up a shower of sparks. Then, without warning, a burst of fiery energy erupted from him, heat rippling through the air.

"As always, until the bell rings."