

ShadowBound 226

Chapter 226: Not In The Academy

"I sure do have something to address." Chris stood, his voice laced with anger and pride. "How the hell is someone who isn't even from this land—someone from the Northern Region—being made the leader of this exam? And me? The assistant? In my own kingdom?" His green eyes burned with indignation. "As the prince of the Tempest Kingdom, I demand this decision be changed immediately. Frankly, it feels like an insult."

Silence filled the hall as all eyes shifted between Chris and Thion.

The Headmaster regarded him for a moment before speaking, his tone calm but firm. "Is that so?" He exhaled slowly, then continued, "So you believe that just because you happen to be the son of King and Queen Rature, that entitles you to authority in this academy?"

Chris stiffened, but before he could respond, Thion pressed on.

"Well, it seems I must educate you on what His Majesty has failed to teach you, and what Her Majesty has been too occupied to correct—because if she had, you wouldn't be spewing such nonsense."

Chris clenched his fists, his anger rising beyond his initial complaint.

"First," Thion said, his gaze locking onto Chris, "despite this academy being under the rule of the Tempest Kingdom, you have no say in its governance. The moment you step inside these walls, you are not a prince—you are a student. You abide by my authority and the authority of the academy's faculty. Nothing more."

Chris gritted his teeth but said nothing.

"Second," Thion continued, his voice unwavering, "I hope you're well aware that Sheila—despite being royalty of the Crescent Kingdom—is ranked number one among your peers. And unlike you, she earned that rank. She demonstrated leadership during your midterm exams while you did not. You weren't even close."

"You were assigned as the assistant only because you're ranked second among the students. I could have chosen Edith Roswell or Maxwell Samson—both of whom displayed far better leadership qualities than you did. And yet, despite all that, you were still given the position of vice leader."

Chris's fury boiled over.

"Hey, Chris, calm down," Logan, seated beside him, tried to intervene, sensing his friend's growing frustration.

"Shut the hell up, Logan! I don't need your bullshit right now!" Chris snapped, his anger spilling over into his words.

His glare returned to Thion. "Comparing me to those half-baked idiots who got into this academy by sheer luck—idiots who aren't even close to my level?" He scoffed in disdain. "This is ridiculous. I swear, I'll have my father remove you from the Headmaster position for this disgrace."

A low murmur spread through the hall.

But Thion? He remained completely unfazed. In fact, a smirk tugged at the corners of his lips.

"Let's make one thing very clear," he said, tilting his head slightly. "His Majesty has no power over this academy. Only Her Majesty does. And I can assure you..." His smirk deepened. "Queen Lucy wouldn't spare a second to entertain your pathetic complaints."

Chris's expression faltered, his confidence wavering for the first time. He knew Thion was right.

His mother had never taken his side in matters like this. Her strictness had always been a thorn in his side, and she had never indulged his whims. Even if his father were willing to back him, it wouldn't matter. Queen Lucy was the true authority in the kingdom—after all, she was the one with royal blood.

Chris clenched his jaw, swallowing his frustration as he reconsidered his words.

The hall remained tense, all eyes locked on Chris as he stood there, fists clenched, shoulders rigid. His pride warred with the undeniable truth of Thion's words. For the first time in a long while, he found himself backed into a corner with no escape.

The silence stretched, thick with unspoken thoughts.

Then, Chris exhaled sharply, forcing himself to relax—at least outwardly. "Fine," he muttered, voice laced with barely contained frustration. "If that's how it is, then I'll just prove I should've been the leader instead."

Thion gave a slow nod, his smirk fading into something more neutral. "That's the right mindset. Whether you like the decision or not, your only option is to prove you deserve better. If you think you're the rightful leader, then act like it. Earn it."

Chris clicked his tongue in irritation but didn't argue further. He returned to his seat, arms crossed, jaw tight. Logan shot him a wary glance but said nothing, while Lucian, seated on the other side, stoic as always.

Thion stepped forward, his gaze sweeping over the students. "Now that we're done with that little outburst," he said coolly, "I'll leave you with this—good luck. In five days, your exam begins."

With a slight pause, he added, "Make sure you're ready."

"You're dismissed."

As soon as Thion dismissed them, murmurs rippled through the hall. Excitement, anxiety, and frustration mixed together—some students eager for the challenge, others dreading it, and a few, like Chris, still simmering with anger.

Sheila exhaled sharply, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Great. I get to deal with that for the entire exam," she muttered under her breath.

Dylan stretched with a lazy grin. "Man, this is gonna be a nightmare. I can already feel the stress crawling up my spine."

"As if you ever take anything seriously," Asher scoffed.

"Hey, I take survival very seriously," Dylan shot back, still grinning.

Liam, who had remained silent throughout the announcement, simply turned and started toward the exit. Ariana, noticing, quickly fell into step beside him.

"So... what do you think?" she asked, adjusting her glasses.

Liam cast her a sidelong glance, his expression unreadable. "It's going to be a mess. And Sheila has the worst job of all."

Ariana frowned slightly. "You're not wrong. But... I think she can handle it."

Liam didn't answer right away, his gaze flicking toward Sheila. She was still standing in place, visibly drained, the weight of responsibility settling on her shoulders after Chris's outburst.

"I hope she does," he finally said.

Ariana smiled softly, glancing down. She could tell that, deep down, Liam also believed Sheila would do well.

"So... what are you off to do?" she asked, her voice slightly unsteady.

"Rest for a bit, then train, I guess," Liam replied as they continued walking.

"Oh, I see. Mm... I... um..." Ariana hesitated, struggling to piece her words together.

Liam shot her a side glance. "Something wrong?"

"N-no, I'm fine... I just..." She took a breath. "I wanted to ask you something."

"Alright," Liam said, his gaze shifting back ahead.

"I... um... I wanted to... ask if you could, um..." She fidgeted with the hem of her skirt, her voice barely above a whisper. "If you could... teach me how to fight?"

Liam abruptly stopped walking, turning fully to face her. "Fight?"

Ariana nodded quickly, gripping the fabric of her skirt. "Y-yeah... I mean, I know magic, and I can defend myself sometimes, but..." She hesitated, stealing a brief glance at Liam before looking away. "I want to be better. Stronger. Not just with spells, but in actual combat."

Liam studied her in silence, his red eyes unreadable. "Why, though? Why ask now?"

Ariana swallowed, her fingers tightening. "Because... I don't want to be a burden. Not to you, not to Sheila, not to anyone. I want to be able to protect myself—and the people I care about."

Liam remained quiet, his gaze lingering on her. After a moment, he exhaled through his nose, the ghost of a smirk tugging at his lips.

"Burden? Who told you that?" His voice was calm, almost amused. "If anything, you're the most useful one among us."

Ariana's head snapped up, her green eyes wide. "Wait... what?"

"What I mean is, there's no need to call yourself that. And if you really want to learn how to fight like the rest of us, I can help. But honestly?" He resumed walking. "It'd be better if you just trained with us instead of waiting around to patch us up after."

Ariana blinked, caught off guard by his words. She hadn't expected that. But after a second, she quickly shook off her surprise and stepped forward, falling into stride beside him.

"I understand. And... thank you, Liam." She said, moving a little closer.

"Don't mention it."