

ShadowBound 228

Chapter 228: Do What You Want

Liam and his friends had trained until exhaustion, pushing themselves to the limit. By nightfall, they finally wrapped up their session, and most had gone their separate ways. Dylan and Max left first, muttering something about a meeting with their forgemastery instructor.

Ariana had a similar excuse—something about helping Mystica with an undisclosed task.

That left only Liam, Asher, Sheila, and Charlotte lingering in the training hall, cooling off after their intense sparring.

"Well, well, would you look at that? Four of us left—two guys, two girls~" Charlotte mused as she and Sheila emerged from the girls' changing room.

"Don't even start, Charlotte," Sheila warned as they approached the boys.

"What? It's perfect! You pair up with Asher, and I'll take my lovely Liam. Simple, isn't it, princess?" Charlotte grinned mischievously, making sure Asher and Liam heard every word.

"UGH, NEVER!" Asher and Sheila shouted in unison, their voices echoing through the hall.

Charlotte blinked in surprise before smirking. "Damn, see? That's exactly why you two should be together. And that means I—" she made a dramatic pause, "—get my darling Liam~"

Before anyone could react, Charlotte lunged at Liam, ready to cling onto him.

Without even looking, Liam calmly extended his arm, placing a firm hand on her face mid-air and stopping her in her tracks.

"Not interested," he said flatly.

Charlotte's feet dangled slightly off the ground as Liam held her back with a palm to her face. She made a few exaggerated grabby motions toward him, her tail swishing in frustration before finally giving up with a dramatic sigh.

"Liam, babe, you're breaking my heart here," she whined, pouting.

"Stop calling me that," he replied, dropping his hand and letting her feet touch the ground again.

Sheila chuckled while Asher shook his head. "Charlotte, one day you're gonna push too far, and he's just gonna disappear to a place to just escape you."

"Pfft, please," Charlotte scoffed, flipping her curls over her shoulder. "That just means I'll have to get faster at chasing him."

Liam sighed, already regretting staying behind. "It would be better if you do something productive instead."

Charlotte smirked. "Oh, I am. Like making sure I end up in your bed tonight."

Sheila rolled her eyes as her cheeks flushed slightly but smiled. "Alright, alright. Enough of this. We should probably head back. Tomorrow's another day of training, and I don't know about you all, but I need my sleep."

"Yeah, I'm out," Asher stretched, cracking his neck. "I'd rather not wake up feeling like I got hit by a carriage."

As the four of them stepped out of the training hall, the cool night air greeted them. The academy grounds were quieter now, the earlier energy of the day fading into the stillness of the evening.

Sheila cast a quick glance at Liam, her voice barely above a whisper. "So... walking back together?"

Liam side-eyed her, immediately sensing she had something on her mind. Without hesitation, he gave a small nod. "Sure."

As the two began walking off, Charlotte let out an exaggerated gasp, clutching her chest dramatically. "WOW, SHEILA. NICE MOVE. WAY TO STEAL MY BAAAAEEEE!"

She stomped over to Asher, standing beside him with a mock pout.

"Shut up, dammit," Asher grumbled, already tired.

Charlotte smirked, tilting her head teasingly. "Awww, do you want me to fill in for Sheila instead? I promise I'll make it worth your while~"

Asher recoiled instantly, his face contorting with pure disgust. "Not in a million years. Don't even think about dragging me into your nonsense."

Charlotte simply grinned. "Say what you want, but deep down, I know you're considering it."

"Shameless," Asher muttered, shaking his head as they started walking back.

As Liam and Sheila strolled through the dimly lit academy grounds, the quiet hum of the night surrounding them, their steps naturally fell into sync. Neither was in a rush, and for a while, they walked in silence, the cool air carrying the distant sounds of the campus settling for the night.

Sheila finally broke the quiet. "You knew I wanted to talk, didn't you?"

Liam kept his gaze ahead. "It was obvious."

She sighed, crossing her arms. "Figures. You don't miss much, do you?"

Liam didn't reply, waiting for her to get to the point. After a brief hesitation, Sheila exhaled and spoke. "It's about Chris... and the others like him."

Liam remained silent, listening.

"I know I said I'd stop worrying about them," she admitted, frustration lacing her voice. "But... it still gets to me. No matter how much I tell myself their opinions don't matter, there's this nagging feeling that I have to prove something. Like if I don't, they'll always have an excuse to undermine me. And I hate that."

Liam finally glanced at her. "You don't need their validation," he stated flatly.

Sheila let out a dry chuckle. "Easy for you to say. No one questions your strength. No one wonders if you deserve to be here."

Liam didn't argue. It was true—his abilities spoke for themselves, and he never cared enough to entertain others' opinions.

Sheila ran a hand through her hair, irritation flashing in her eyes. "I know I'm strong. I know I earned my place here. But it still pisses me off that people like Chris think they have the right to decide whether I belong. And what pisses me off even more..." She slowed her pace, turning fully to face Liam, forcing him to stop as well. "...is that if I don't prove them wrong, some people will actually believe them."

Liam studied her for a moment, his expression unreadable. Then he spoke in his usual calm, detached tone. "Then prove them wrong."

Sheila blinked.

"You're wasting time worrying about opinions that don't matter," Liam continued. "If you want to shut them up, do it with results. Beat them. Outshine them. Leave them with nothing to say. And honestly? You've already done that by being number one."

Sheila stared at him before a slow smirk curved her lips. "That's a very Liam answer."

He shrugged. "Like I said before, do what you want."

Sheila chuckled, the weight on her shoulders easing just a little. "You know what? You're right. I'll do what I want. And what I want... is to prove them wrong."

Liam gave a small nod, satisfied that she'd come to the conclusion herself.

For a while, they walked in comfortable silence again. Then Sheila shot him a side glance, mischief flickering in her eyes. "You know... since I got you all to myself for once, I could take advantage of this moment."

Liam sighed. "Don't start acting like Charlotte."

She laughed, nudging his shoulder playfully. "Relax, I'm just messing with you."

Liam didn't respond, but for just a second—so quick it was barely noticeable—Sheila swore she saw the corner of his mouth almost twitch.

Sheila smirked to herself but didn't push it further. The night air was cool, and for once, the academy felt peaceful. No intense training, no glaring competitions, no backhanded comments from people like Chris. Just quiet.

After a few more steps, she glanced at Liam again, this time more serious. "Hey... can I ask you something?"

Liam gave a small nod, signaling for her to go on.

She hesitated for a second, then sighed. "Do you ever care about what people think of you? Like... at all?"

Liam didn't answer immediately. He kept walking, hands in his pockets, eyes fixed ahead. Then, in that same even tone, he replied, "No."

Sheila raised an eyebrow. "Not even a little?"

"No."

She huffed, crossing her arms. "Must be nice."

Liam finally glanced at her. "It's not that deep. People's opinions change like the wind. One moment they like you, the next, they don't. Worrying about that is pointless."

Sheila rolled her eyes. "Yeah, well, some of us don't have the luxury of just ignoring it all."

"You do," Liam corrected. "You just don't want to."

She stopped walking. Liam took a few more steps before realizing and turning back to face her.

Sheila was frowning, but it wasn't anger—it was more like frustration mixed with realization. "You really believe that, don't you?"

Liam just stared at her.

She exhaled sharply, rubbing her temples. "Gods, I wish I had even half your indifference."

"Wouldn't suit you," Liam said simply, starting to walk again.

Sheila blinked, caught off guard for a moment, before shaking her head with a small laugh. "And why's that?" she asked, catching up.

Liam shrugged. "You care too much. That's just who you are."

Sheila stared at him, the words sinking in deeper than she expected. After a moment, she simply smiled.

"I guess you do pay attention to things after all," she mused.

Liam didn't answer, but she caught the subtle side glance he gave her. That was enough.

The dorm buildings were coming into view now, their walk coming to an end. Sheila stretched her arms above her head. "Well, this was nice. Thanks for letting me vent."

Liam gave a slight nod, as if to say sure.

Sheila smirked. "Maybe next time, you can do the talking, and I'll be the one listening."

Liam scoffed. "Unlikely."

Sheila chuckled. "Figures."

As they reached the dorms, she gave him one last glance. "Night, Liam."

"Night."

As Liam watched Sheila ascend the stairs, his gaze subtly shifted to the side, sensing a presence lurking nearby.

"What do you want?" His voice was calm, detached—but laced with quiet irritation.

From the shadows, a lone figure stepped forward, a smirk curling across his face. It was Chris—without his usual lackeys, just him.

As he moved into the moonlight, the faint glow caught in his dark hair, and his sharp green eyes gleamed with something almost predatory.

"Well, well... never figured you for the type to take interest in our little outcast," he mused, his tone dripping with mockery.