

ShadowBound 242

Chapter 242: Our Last Stand 1

Liam's consciousness slowly stirred, an almost eerie calm spreading through him as the world came into focus. His body was still broken, his wounds were vast, but they didn't feel as they should. He wasn't drowning in pain like before—no, his mind was sharp, his senses clearer than they had been in the chaos of the fight. The blood on his chest was still warm, the wound made by the bone-like projection was still there, but... his heart was still beating.

His gaze wandered to the blood-red sky above, the rain still falling in sheets. It was as if the world itself had frozen in time, trapped in the aftermath of battle, everything suspended in the false weight of this simulation.

His fingers twitched, instinctively reaching for the wound on his chest. He touched the slick blood, feeling its texture against his fingertips. Without thinking, he brought his fingers to his lips and tasted it.

The metallic tang was too familiar. His stomach churned.

"This isn't even mine."

Liam's eyes dulled, completely accepting this simulation. Everything—the pain, the blood, the death—was a mere illusion he failed to really accept from the beginning.

The only thing that truly felt genuine was the weight of his exhaustion. The aching, bone-deep fatigue that dragged at him.

The fight, the death, it all felt like a distant dream.

With a slow, deliberate movement, Liam pushed himself off the ground. His body screamed in protest, but the numbness of detachment dulled the pain. His gaze fixed forward.

And then his eyes went wide at the sight before him.

Chris was dead. His head ripped clean from his body by the demon, and it didn't stop there. With a twisted snarl, it tore through Chris's torso, ripping it in half as though the body were nothing more than a piece of meat. The corpse was discarded like a broken toy, lifeless, useless.

Liam's expression didn't change. Not even a flicker of anger, or sorrow, or shock. He simply watched. Detached.

His gaze shifted, scanning the battlefield.

Asher was still alive, though barely. His left arm was gone, the stump a bloody mess, but he was breathing—barely. He was still fighting.

But it wasn't Asher that drew Liam's attention now.

No, it was Sheila.

She was sprawled on the ground a few meters away, her body battered, her uniform torn, covered in cuts and bruises. Bone-like projections pierced her limbs, pinning her to the earth as the demon advanced.

Liam's eyes followed the creature's movements with a calm focus. It stalked toward Sheila, deliberately slow, savoring the moment of her impending death. It reached down, effortlessly pulling her from the ground, tearing the bone projections from her body with little regard for her pain. Sheila was limp in its grasp, her body far too weak to resist, her breath ragged, struggling to make any sound as agony ripped through her.

The demon lifted her higher, a sinister grin stretching across its face as it formed a bone blade from its wrist—aiming straight for Sheila's heart.

But then—

Whoosh.

A burst of red flames shot through the air, blinding in their intensity, blurring past the demon. It roared in frustration, trying to react, but before it could even register what was happening, Sheila was no longer in its grasp.

Liam stood there, his body unbothered by the pain or the blood that still clung to him, Sheila's fragile form cradled gently in his arms.

He didn't look at her, didn't even spare a glance toward the demon. His eyes were dead, focused solely on what was in front of him, the task at hand. With steady hands, he placed Sheila down on the ground, her body a trembling wreck from the pain and exhaustion.

She tried to speak, her voice a mere whisper, weak and broken. "Liam... I—"

But before she could say another word, Liam's voice interrupted her—flat, emotionless.

"Save your strength," he said, his tone devoid of anything. "You'll need it when this is over."

He turned his gaze to the demon without even a pause.

"This thing... we'll take care of it."

There was no fire in his words, no anger, no sense of urgency. Just a detached certainty.

Sheila tried to reach for him, but her arm faltered, barely able to move from the damage.

#####

Liam didn't look back. His steps were deliberate and unwavering as he moved toward Asher, still sprawled on the battlefield. The storm of chaos around them seemed distant, muffled by his focused mind. He stopped just short of the bloodied form.

Asher's chest rose and fell, the faintest sign of life. His eyes were shut tight, his body battered and broken, but still breathing.

Liam stared down at him, the blankness in his expression unchanged. "Hey, buzz cut," he said, his voice flat, carrying none of the emotion that a normal person might expect. "Last I checked, you said this thing owed you a beating. Are you just gonna die a pathetic death like this without keeping your word?"

He waited a beat, then continued, "I can tell you're injured, but you remember what we were told, right? This is just a simulation. No matter how real it feels."

Liam's gaze shifted to the demon in the distance. "I don't mind if you want to quit. But I survived a heart stab. So, if you're claiming to be stronger than me, I suggest you get on your feet. Because that severed arm? It's nothing but a scratch."

As Liam turned toward the demon, his words hanging in the air, he heard the faint growl from behind him.

"Tch... show off," Asher grunted, forcing out the words, each one strained and ragged. "Coming to life... after being... stabbed in the... heart. Don't think... that makes you stronger... than me."

Liam stopped, glancing back over his shoulder. He watched Asher push himself up with gritted teeth, his movements slow but steady. The blue flare of flame ignited in Asher's right hand, quickly moving to his severed arm. He pressed it against the bloody stump, sealing the wound with a wave of searing blue heat, the smell of burnt flesh mingling with the air.

Liam's eyes softened, ever so slightly, but his voice remained unchanged. "Good. Now, let's finish this. One last push to end this damn exam."

Asher stood beside him, his face a mix of grim determination and smoldering intensity. He clenched his newly formed blue flame arm, the energy crackling around his hand. "Of course," he said, a smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. "I did say this thing owed me a better beating."