

ShadowBound 244

Chapter 244: The Resting Room

As Liam and Asher succumbed to exhaustion, their bodies finally giving in, the holographic world around them began to unravel. The crimson sky cracked apart, the rain dissipated mid-fall, and the scorched battlefield crumbled into nothingness. The cityscape, the charred corpses of demons, even the fallen students—all of it dissolved into glowing fragments before vanishing completely.

Beyond the simulation dome, the students who had 'died' earlier had already been awake, relocated to a separate resting area while they waited for the scenario to conclude. Some sat in quiet contemplation, their bodies drained but their minds racing. Others remained slumped in deep exhaustion, their Myst reserves completely depleted.

Most of the ones still awake carried a heavy weight on their shoulders—failure. The battle had revealed an ugly truth: they hadn't even been able to stand their ground against a few Horror-class demons. Some had died in seconds, others had barely put up a fight. Now, sitting there, they replayed their last moments over and over, the sting of helplessness cutting deeper than any wound.

A few had already accepted the reality—they weren't on the same level as the top ten. But even so, deep down, self-judgment gnawed at them. Meanwhile, others distracted themselves with conversation, murmuring about the sheer realism of the simulation. The sensation of their weapons piercing flesh, the blood, the pain, the sheer terror of dying—it had all felt far too real. More real than they ever expected, despite the headmaster's warnings.

Time blurred. Some had been there for thirty minutes, others even longer, depending on when they had been taken out. Then, a hum of blue Myst resonated through the air. The remaining students who had survived the final stretch of battle began to reappear—their bodies materializing into the rest area just like the others before them.

Just as expected, they were completely unharmed. The injuries, the wounds, even the missing limbs—they had only existed within the simulation. But the exhaustion? That was painfully real.

The arrivals were Ariana, Dylan, Max, Charlotte, and the ginger girl. They were conscious upon arrival, though their exhaustion was evident—especially in Max and Charlotte, who looked like they had just crawled out of a battlefield.

"Damn," Max exhaled, immediately feeling his left arm to make sure it was still there. Relief washed over his face. "For a second, I really thought I was dead."

Charlotte sighed, dropping onto the floor without any care for grace. She propped herself up with one arm while using the other to unbutton the first two buttons of her uniform, her breath still heavy. "Last thing I remember was someone carrying me off the battlefield to the city." Her golden eyes flickered in thought before she gave a tired smirk. "Guess I went too far with my beast form. Burned right through my Myst."

She tilted her head slightly. "But who the hell carried me?" Her gaze shifted toward Max, Dylan, and Ariana. "I know it wasn't any of you guys."

Max snorted, rubbing the back of his neck. "Obviously not. I passed out after losing my damn arm. And these two?" He gestured toward Dylan and Ariana. "They were chilling in the city. Why the hell would they leave and come to the battlefield?"

Dylan scoffed, feigning offense. "First off, that hurts, even though you're right, mob-head." His signature smirk returned almost instantly. "But—we had our own problems, alright? And you should've seen my glorious killer spell out there." He threw his hands up dramatically. "I wiped out a ton of demons with that bad boy. Absolute massacre."

His grin widened as he leaned back with a satisfied nod. "Honestly, kinda carried the city battle. No big deal."

Just as Max opened his mouth to speak, a familiar voice cut through the chatter.

"Can you guys shut it?" The tone was sharp, laced with irritation.

Heads turned toward the source—Chris. He was sprawled across a bench, clearly drained, while his usual lackeys, Logan and Lucian, stood nearby. None of them had noticed when he arrived, but it seemed he had appeared alongside them.

Charlotte smirked, tilting her head. "'Sorry for disturbing your peace, my prince.' That what you wanna hear?" Her voice dripped with teasing amusement.

Chris scoffed, barely cracking an eye open. "Tch. You wish I had the energy for your taunts, kittycat." His voice was rough, exhaustion evident in every word. He looked even more wrecked than Max and Charlotte.

Still, a ghost of a smirk tugged at his lips. "But don't worry... you'll be thanking me soon enough." With that, he shut his eyes again, as if the conversation wasn't worth another second of his attention.

Charlotte narrowed her eyes. "The hell is that supposed to mean—"

Before she could finish, a deep hum of blue Myst filled the air.

This time, only three figures materialized, their bodies forming from the light—Sheila, Liam, and Asher.

But unlike the others, these three looked far worse. Their exhaustion was on another level, their bodies nearly motionless as they arrived. Sheila lay completely still for a few moments before suddenly jolting awake, breath hitching as her hands darted across her body—checking for wounds, for the bone projections she had suffered at the hands of the Berserker Demon.

But there were none. No blood, no pain. Just the crushing weight of fatigue.

Her gaze shifted immediately to her side. Liam and Asher were still unconscious. But like her, they were unharmed. Relief flooded her, a deep sigh escaping as she processed the reality—only exhaustion carried over to the real world.

"Sheila, are you okay?" Ariana's gentle voice pulled her back. She crouched beside her, concern etched into her features.

"I'm fine... just a little exhausted." Sheila tried to stand but barely got an inch off the ground before her legs buckled.

"Whoa, hey—don't push yourself." Ariana quickly supported her, guiding her to a bench.

Charlotte arched a brow, arms crossed. "That doesn't look like 'a little exhausted,' princess."

Sheila turned to the voice, spotting Charlotte still sitting on the floor, smirking. Then her gaze flickered to Max. "Looks like Chris wasn't lying when he said he saved you guys."

Charlotte blinked. "W-What?"

Sheila gave a small smirk. "Yeah, sounds crazy, but he pulled you two out of the battlefield."

Max and Charlotte exchanged glances, clearly struggling to believe it.

"You have to be joking," Charlotte muttered.

Dylan let out a low whistle. "Damn. Looks like you owe your hero a 'thank you'—and an apology." He snickered before bursting into laughter.

"Shut up, Dylan," Charlotte snapped, heat rising to her face as her gaze flickered to Chris.

He was still lying on the bench, eyes closed, completely unbothered—like he couldn't care less whether they believed it or not.

"Anyway," Charlotte said, shifting the conversation, "what happened to those two? My sweet Liam, I mean. Asher's not exactly my concern."

Dylan chuckled, catching on immediately. "I see what you're doing, Char. Avoiding your hero isn't exactly good manners, you know."

"Shut up, Dylan," she snapped. "Like I was saying—what happened to them?"

Sheila smirked slightly before glancing at the unconscious forms of Liam and Asher. "Honestly... all four of us fought the Berserker Demon. And it completely wiped the floor with us."

She hesitated, voice dipping lower. "But somehow... these two were still standing. Even through the pain."

'Unlike me.'

The weight of that admission settled for a moment before Sheila inhaled, regaining her composure. "I don't know exactly what happened, but I can say this—they are the reason the city didn't suffer a brutal end. And the reason why this exam was completed at all."

A heavy silence filled the room. No one spoke.

Then, after a long pause, Max exhaled and leaned back with a smirk.

"Looks like they're always in the spotlight, huh?"