

ShadowBound 250

Chapter 250: Break (Part 1)

Two days had passed since the exam, marking the official end of the semester. The academy buzzed with excitement as most students packed their belongings and departed, eager for their break. Only a handful chose to remain on campus, preferring the solitude or the opportunity to train.

During those two days, not a single student touched their training regimen—not even Liam. He deliberately spent the time resting, ensuring he was in peak condition for the two-week break. He had no intention of leaving the academy. If possible, he hoped to train under Mystica, refining his dark magic further.

That said, Liam did consider visiting Nystra City to see the Silverharts. They were, after all, the reason he was able to stand where he was today. Though he would never openly admit it, a part of him missed them—felt a lingering debt that he wished he could repay. However, that wasn't his priority right now. Instead, he penned them a letter, informing them of his break but explaining that he wouldn't be returning anytime soon.

Among his group, only Liam and Ariana chose to stay at the academy. Ariana's reason was clear—she was Mystica's apprentice, and her training took precedence. The rest had their own obligations.

Dylan was heading back to Sear, one of the two cities in Zone 7, to help his parents. Max had similar responsibilities, though his home was elsewhere in Zone 12, outside Grandeur City.

Sheila had made a promise to her parents to return whenever the academy granted a break. If she didn't, they might force her to transfer to the Noble Knight Academy, something she had no intention of allowing.

As for Asher and Charlotte, their reasons for leaving weren't as urgent—just family duties. The surprising revelation, however, was that both of them came from noble households.

Asher was a member of the prestigious Hawthorne family, one of the wealthiest noble lineages in Llis, Zone 15. The Hawthornes held significant trust within the Solara Kingdom, making them a household of great influence.

Charlotte, on the other hand, belonged to the Raven family. While not as wealthy as the Hawthornes, they were still a prominent name. Her family resided in Arl, the second city of Zone 12, and were well-known in their own right.

Despite the farewells, the luggage carts, and the echoing goodbyes, the academy didn't feel empty. Not to Liam, at least. The silence wasn't hollow—it was full. Full of potential, of clarity, of stillness that let the air taste like freedom. No instructors breathing fire, no schedules dictating his day. Just time... time to train, to reflect, to sharpen the edges of his resolve.

By the third morning, the dorms had settled into a deep calm. The only sounds were the occasional chirps outside the windows. Inside his room, Liam sat cross-legged in the center, his eyes closed, body still as stone. He was locked in Crimson Breathing—drawing myst into his body in steady, disciplined waves. Steam curled from his skin like mist over a moonlit lake, slowly flooding the room until it looked like he was meditating in a hidden hot spring.

Fifteen minutes passed before he finally exhaled—a slow, heated breath. His crimson eyes opened with quiet intent.

"That should do it," he muttered, standing up and heading to the bathroom.

A few minutes later, he emerged, cleaned up and dressed in a laid-back outfit. He sat on the edge of his bed and exhaled again, this time softer, lighter.

"Nyxie," he said low under his breath.

A pulse of darkness rippled from his shadow, and Nyxie emerged with a graceful flutter, doing a couple playful loops in the air before landing neatly on his lap. She licked his cheek with a cool, shadowy tongue.

"Yeah, yeah, I missed you too," Liam said, the corner of his mouth twitching into a small smirk.

"I've got good news," he added, stroking the space between her horns as she tilted head head, clearly curious.

"I'm on a two-week break. Most of the students already bounced—only a few stragglers left." He stood as Nyxie leapt onto his shoulder with feline ease.

"Which means... you get to spend more time out in the open. And guess what? Ariana's still here."

Nyxie perked up, her shadows rippling with excitement. She twirled once in the air and landed again on his shoulder, thrusting a tiny paw forward like a tiny, inky general commanding, 'March!'

"I get it, I get it. Don't rush me!" Liam chuckled slightly. "And you know the drill—back into the shadows. Can't have anyone seeing you."

With a flicker, Nyxie dissolved into black mist and slipped into the dark pool beneath his feet.

Liam opened the door and stepped into the quiet hallway.

It didn't take Liam more than five minutes to reach Ariana's dorm.

The hall was still hushed, morning light pouring in through high windows like golden ribbons across the floor. When he got to her room, he noticed the door was slightly ajar—just enough to show a sliver of the inside. Still, he knocked, out of habit and courtesy.

No answer.

He paused, glanced down the hallway, then leaned in a bit.

"...Ariana?" he called softly, just loud enough to carry through the door.

Then—a sound. A clutter. A startled little crash like books tumbling from a shelf.

Liam raised a brow. "What was that?"

Before he could knock again, the door swung open with a creak, revealing Ariana in all her accidental glory.

She was standing there, blinking wide green eyes up at him without her glasses—eyes that looked brighter and softer without the usual lens between them. Her auburn hair was piled into a chaotic bun, with strands poking out in all direction. And she was wearing a sky-blue silk nightgown that fluttered just above her knees, the light fabric catching the breeze from inside her room.

"L-Liam!?" she squeaked, instantly slapping the door halfway shut again with a thud, just enough to hide her from the shoulders down. "Wha—What are you doing here this early!?"

Liam blinked, then respectfully turned his back to the door. "Didn't mean to startle you. I just needed a favor, that's all."

"Oh—oh no, it's fine! I—I just thought you were someone else!" she called from behind the safety of the door, voice flustered and breathy. "Wait just a second, I'll get dressed! Thank you!"

Before he could respond, the door shut fully with a soft click.

Liam sighed, rubbing the back of his neck just as Nyxie peeked halfway out of his shadow like a nosy little gremlin.

"You can go," he muttered.

Nyxie slithered out, tail flicking like smoke, and zipped under the door with ghostly silence.

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Liam placed his hands in his pockets, his expression unreadable but his tone dry. "Why is it that every time I need to talk to her, it feels like I walked into the start of some romantic comedy..."