

ShadowBound 43

Chapter 43: The Nyxarion Dragon: 2

"Did you hear that? What kind of beast screams that loud?" Dylan asked, his voice laced with curiosity as he and Asher trudged through the rain, looking for shelter.

Asher glanced back at the ominous clouds gathering in the distance. "It's coming from that direction," he said, narrowing his eyes. "And whatever it is, it's big." A sudden flicker of purple light caught his attention, crackling across the sky far away.

"Hey, blondie," Asher called out.

"What's up, my dear mean-headed companion?" Dylan replied, wearing his usual teasing grin.

"This is not the time for your useless jokes, idiot. Whatever that thing is," Asher pointed toward the stormy horizon, "it's headed straight for us."

Dylan turned just in time to see the trees being flattened and dust clouds rising like a stampede was on its way. His eyes widened as a dark shape rocketed into the sky. "Holy crap! What the hell is—"

Before he could finish, a massive jet-black dragon soared above them, its wings beating so powerfully that the trees bent under the force.

"Is that a dragon?" Dylan exclaimed, his tone torn between disbelief and amazement.

Asher, normally hard-faced, looked just as stunned, his expression betraying a mix of awe and excitement. But it didn't take him long to snap back. "Wait... is that... Liam?" Dylan suddenly pointed, squinting.

Sure enough, there was Liam, dagger buried deep into the dragon's scales, holding on for dear life as the beast thrashed midair.

"Who names their kid Liam?" Asher muttered, rolling his eyes. "More importantly, how the hell can you even see that from this distance?"

"Because I'm an archer, you ground-crawling simpleton." Dylan grinned, full of sarcasm.

"Just because you're an archer?" Asher raised an eyebrow, his irritation creeping back.

"No, it's because I ate a bird's eye this morning. Of course, it's because I'm an archer!" Dylan snapped back, mockingly. "You ask some real thought-provoking questions, Asher."

Before Asher could retort, Dylan's expression changed in an instant. He spotted something hurtling toward them. "WATCH OUT!"

Without hesitation, he tackled Asher to the ground just as a massive object crashed into the earth with a deafening boom. The ground shattered in a straight line, uprooting trees and sending a thick cloud of dust into the air.

The impact left Asher groaning, pinned beneath Dylan's weight. "Get off me, you overgrown boulder," Asher grumbled, barely able to breathe with the dust and Dylan on top of him.

"Is that any way to thank your prince charming?" Dylan quipped, still grinning as he rolled off Asher.

"Prince charming? You're more like a troll," Asher snapped back, shoving Dylan aside and brushing off the dirt. "Get off me, you lowly trash."

Both of them stood and looked toward the direction of the impact, the dust starting to settle.

As the smokescreen faded, they saw a figure lying amidst the destruction—the ground torn apart, trees broken, and debris scattered everywhere. And right in the middle of it all, Liam lay sprawled out, motionless.

He looked like a corpse.

"...Well," Dylan said after a beat of silence, "it's either nap time or that dragon's got one hell of a right hook."

Asher squinted at the sight. "If he's dead, I'm not giving him a eulogy."

Dylan smirked. "Yeah, I can't imagine the speech. 'Here lies Liam, the guy who thought it was a good idea to wrestle a dragon.'"

Asher crossed his arms, shaking his head. "Moron."

Liam's fingers twitched, his daggers still clutched in his hands as a low groan escaped his lips. The pain radiating through his body was intense, but he slowly began to push himself upright, determined.

"I'm so gonna kill that dragon," he muttered under his breath, his voice laced with pain and frustration as he fought to stand. But no sooner had he spoken than he doubled over, coughing up a considerable amount of blood. The impact from his fall had clearly been more damaging than he'd let on.

"Whoa, easy there, you shouldn't be moving in your condition," Dylan said, rushing over to support him.

Liam looked up at Dylan, a faint smile still playing on his face despite the obvious agony. "You're still alive?"

Dylan gave a mock-salute, grinning. "Of course, my middle name is 'survive,' after all."

"You really need to stop with your useless chatter, blondie," Asher called from where he stood, arms crossed, his expression as stoic as ever.

Liam's gaze shifted to Asher as he stood on his feet, shaky but determined. "Who the hell are you?" he asked, still trying to make sense of the situation.

"This is Asher, but you can call him Blue Flames," Dylan interjected with his signature grin.

Asher's eye twitched. "I told you not to call me that, you idiot."

Unfazed, Liam took a deep breath, exhaling a visible stream of air that looked almost like steam. His body was burning from the inside, but he was doing everything to maintain composure.

Dylan, ever the chatterbox, couldn't help but pry. "So, how'd you end up in this mess anyway? Battling a dragon? Sounds like the definition of 'suicide.'"

"Well... the damn thing came out of nowhere," Liam replied, his tone calm despite the chaotic situation. "I happened to be standing at the wrong place at the wrong time when it decided to show up."

"Damn, talk about bad luck," Dylan said, shaking his head.

"Are there still any students around here?" Liam asked, his eyes now tracking the dragon as it circled above.

"I think they're long gone by now," Dylan answered. "Me and Ash here lured the beast away from the rest of those weaklings."

"That's good..." Liam said, his gaze still locked on the dragon. "Because that thing is about to attack again."

Dylan's expression shifted from lighthearted to concerned in an instant. "Wait, wait, you're not seriously thinking about fighting it again, are you?"

Liam said nothing, his silence a confirmation in itself.

"Well, guess that means I'm in too," Dylan said with a cheerful grin, pulling out his bow. "I can't let you have all the fun."

Asher stepped forward, his fierce gaze locking onto Liam. "There's no way I'm letting you two fight this thing alone," he said, summoning his blue flames that flickered ominously around his hands.

Liam remained expressionless, barely sparing either of them a glance. "Do whatever you want. I don't care if you die, just don't get in my way," he said bluntly.

Dylan laughed it off, but Asher wasn't so easygoing. His eyes narrowed, and he stormed toward Liam. "You arrogant bastard. Are you looking down on me?"

Liam didn't even flinch, meeting Asher's fury with complete indifference. "Say what you want, Blue Flames. Just stay out of my way," he said coolly, shoving Asher aside as he walked past.

Asher clenched his fists, his flames flaring up around him in anger. "Alright then, let's see who kills this dragon first," he growled.

As the tension between the two escalated, the dragon high above finally seemed to take notice of them. With a roar, it began its descent, diving at a terrifying speed straight toward them.

Liam's eyes narrowed, summoning his own red flames, focusing intently on the dragon's trajectory. He was waiting for the perfect moment to strike. Asher, despite his rage, mirrored the action, preparing his blue flames for the clash.

But before either could act, Dylan darted past them, leaping toward the nearest tree. "What are you two waiting for?" he called out, climbing higher with acrobatic ease. "If you want this thing dead, you've gotta strike first!"

Reaching the top of the tallest tree, Dylan balanced on a branch, his bow drawn. He nocked three arrows at once, summoning his myst to form metallic projectiles. "Blinding Beam!" he shouted, releasing the bowstring.

At the tip of the arrows, a brilliant light began to form, a culmination of Dylan's myst, charging into a focused beam of energy. The arrows streaked through the air with precision, heading directly for the dragon's head.

The moment they made contact, a massive magical explosion erupted in the sky. Dylan, with a wide grin plastered across his face, dropped back to the ground, landing gracefully before turning to watch the spectacle. "Bullseye."

The dragon screeched in pain as it fell from the sky, crashing violently into the earth. A thick dust cloud rose from the impact, sweeping over the area and forcing the trio to brace themselves.

As the dust began to clear, Dylan, ever the joker, couldn't resist. "Looks like I win," he teased, wearing his signature grin.

Asher, clearly annoyed, shot him a glare, but Liam remained calm, his eyes focused on the fallen dragon. Something felt off.

Just as Dylan was about to celebrate further, the dragon began to stir, slowly rising to its feet. But this time, its left wing was mangled, nearly torn off from the explosion.

"Guess the fight's not over yet," Liam muttered under his breath, his gaze sharpening as he prepared for round two.

Dylan was just about to open his mouth, already crafting some snarky comment. "Well, looks like I—"

Before he could finish, a sudden gust of wind blew past him.

"What the—"

It was Asher, his figure a blue blur as he darted straight toward the dragon. His flames flared wildly, igniting his right arm with a brilliant azure light that crackled like molten fire.

The intense heat radiating from him warped the air around his hand, making the scene feel even more electrifying.

Dylan blinked, momentarily stunned. "That idiot," he muttered, watching as Asher closed the distance between himself and the dragon with insane speed.

The dragon, sensing the approaching threat, swung one of its massive claws toward Asher, but he was already moving too fast.

With a swift, graceful maneuver, Asher dodged to the side, his body twisting in midair like a wisp of flame, effortlessly avoiding the dragon's strike.

Before the beast could react again, Asher was within striking distance, his right hand pulsing with blue flames that coiled around his fist like a serpent.

His eyes were locked onto a specific point just beneath the dragon's thick, scaly hide.

"Blue Flame Barrage!" Asher growled through gritted teeth, thrusting his flaming fist directly into the dragon's side.

The impact was immediate. A shockwave of blue myst erupted from the point of contact, causing the ground to tremble beneath them.

The flames didn't stop there—Asher's myst detonated outward in a controlled explosion, sending a powerful wave of scorching blue fire that spread across the dragon's body.

The dragon roared in pain, the searing flames dancing across its scales, leaving scorched marks where they touched.

Asher's explosion was so intense that even from a distance, the heat was palpable. It was as if the very air around them was burning.

Dylan, standing back with an incredulous look, watched the whole thing unfold. "Okay, fine, maybe that was cooler than what I was about to do," he muttered to himself, unable to suppress a smirk.

Asher, meanwhile, landed smoothly a few paces away from the dragon, his blue flames still flickering around his right arm as he straightened up.

He turned his head slightly, casting a sideways glance at Dylan and Liam, his expression confident—borderline smug.

"You were saying something, blondie?" Asher asked, his tone sharp with just a hint of a taunt, though his breathing was heavy from the exertion.

Dylan's grin widened. "Oh, nothing. Just... admiring the view," he replied, clearly enjoying the back-and-forth.

But their banter was cut short as the dragon let out another furious roar. Despite the damage it had taken, it wasn't down yet. Smoke rose from the singed parts of its body, its eyes burning with renewed rage as it prepared for its next move.

Asher's lips curled into a fierce smile, his flames blazing once again. "Round two, then?"

This time, there was no need for words. The three of them knew what was coming, and they were ready for it.