

ShadowBound 46

Chapter 46: I'm Still Weak As Ever

The sun dipped low on the horizon, bathing the academy grounds in the soft orange glow of twilight. Shadows stretched across the cobblestone paths as Liam followed the academy staff in silence, carrying his belongings slung over his shoulder.

A cool breeze whispered through the air, stirring the faint scent of grass and stone, but Liam's mind was elsewhere—calm and focused.

The academy's architecture loomed around them, grand and imposing, with tall spires and marble archways that framed the two buildings ahead.

They were nearly identical in design: both three stories tall, built from smooth stone blocks, with windows spaced evenly along the walls.

Elegant metal plaques above the doors identified them—B1 and B2. Each building mirrored the other, connected only by a small courtyard lined with neatly trimmed hedges and lanterns that flickered to life as the sky dimmed.

Liam and the staff entered the B1 dormitory, their footsteps echoing softly against the polished wooden floors.

The hallways smelled faintly of lavender from enchanted sconces that glowed along the walls, casting a warm, golden hue across the narrow corridors.

Other students could be seen ahead and behind, each accompanied by a different staff member. Some of the students whispered to one another, exchanging wary glances, while others walked with their heads down, exhausted from the trial.

Liam noticed a group of boys further down the hall, already arguing about bunk arrangements, while another pair of girls stared curiously into their new rooms, giggling nervously.

A few doors creaked open and slammed shut as students claimed their spaces, filling the quiet halls with sounds of shuffling luggage and soft voices.

The staff leading Liam, a tall woman with flowing auburn hair, came to a halt at a door on the top floor. She wore a fitted, deep-blue uniform that clung tightly to her frame.

The design of the uniform was strangely provocative—her blouse dipped low in the front, revealing the upper curves of her chest, and the fabric of her sleeves shimmered with subtle runes embroidered along the cuffs.

A short, pleated skirt brushed against her thighs, leaving little to the imagination as she bent slightly to open the door.

"This will be your dorm, young man," she said with a polite bow of her head, her soft voice barely above a whisper.

The movement caused her blouse to shift slightly, but Liam, ever composed, remained unfazed. His expression stayed calm and unreadable, unaffected by the woman's appearance.

"Thank you for your help," he said simply, his voice even. He took the small brass key she handed him and stepped past her, crossing the threshold into the room.

The dorm room was modest yet functional, with a single bed pushed against the far wall and a desk situated under a wide window that overlooked the academy grounds.

The walls were painted a soft gray, and the floor was lined with a thick woolen rug. A wardrobe stood to the side, its wooden doors slightly ajar, revealing empty shelves waiting to be filled.

The room smelled faintly of wood polish, as if freshly cleaned in preparation for his arrival.

Liam set his belongings down beside the bed and turned to shut the door behind him, the latch clicking softly into place. For a brief moment, he stood in the quiet, taking in the peaceful stillness of the room.

Outside his window, he could see other students being led into B2 across the courtyard, some dragging heavy trunks behind them, others talking excitedly.

Liam sat on the edge of his bed, his mind a storm of restless thoughts. He let out a soft, weary sigh before collapsing backward onto the mattress.

The ceiling blurred above him as he closed his eyes and pressed his palms against his face, trying to calm the frustration boiling inside.

A growl of anger threatened to escape, but instead, he roared silently within the depths of his mind. It echoed there—a desperate, maddening scream that no one else would ever hear.

After a few moments, he exhaled sharply and sat upright again, resting his elbows on his knees. His crimson eyes stared at the floor, heavy with the weight of disappointment.

"I'm still nothing but a joke," he muttered bitterly, voice low and full of self-contempt.

"After everything I did—years in that damn forest, mastering Crimson Breathing for a whole year—I still needed help to take down one pathetic dragon."

He clenched his hand into a fist, gazing at it with empty eyes that betrayed no emotion. Yet beneath that blank stare was a raging inferno of self-loathing.

"Now that I think about it... I've never won a fight without help," he whispered, his voice cold and detached.

"The demon outside Nystra? Defeated only because I used one of my shadow beasts. And today, even with those two idiots, we couldn't finish the dragon ourselves."

His jaw tightened as frustration welled up again.

"And Jamak..." He paused, the memory of his battle with the ruler of the Dark Forest clawing at him.

"He let me win. He wanted to die. There's no way I would've beaten him otherwise. He was practically chained by the forest, waiting for someone like me to end his misery."

Suddenly, a smirk tugged at the corner of his mouth, bitter and mocking, as he ran a hand through his disheveled hair.

"Since when did I start whining about the past?" he muttered, shaking his head.

His eyes sharpened, a glimmer of resolve cutting through the haze of frustration.

"As long as I'm alive, the past is just a lesson—something to learn from and move on. Anything else about it? It's useless."

The smirk faded, replaced by a look of fierce determination. His crimson eyes now burned with newfound purpose.

"I won't be held back by childish regrets. As long as I wake up and see the sun, I'll keep moving forward. I'll grow stronger... and I'll surpass everything—everyone."

The words hung in the air, as solid as a promise to himself. No more excuses. No more doubts. Just the relentless pursuit of power.

Liam stood from his bed, stripping off his torn and grimy clothes without a second thought. Naked, he made his way to the bathroom, craving the comfort of warm water to wash away the weight of the day.

As the shower hissed to life, the heat cascaded over his body, easing the tension in his muscles.

The steam swirled around him, wrapping him in temporary tranquility, washing away the remnants of battle, frustration, and doubt.

For a brief moment, he allowed himself to relax, letting the warmth pull the weariness from his bones.

When he finished, he stepped out, water dripping from his skin. Without bothering to towel off, he strode across the room, utterly unbothered by his nakedness.

After rummaging through his belongings, he found a pair of pants and slipped them on.

Now dressed, he wandered to the window. The cool night breeze kissed his damp skin as he stood there, staring up at the crescent moon glowing high in the dark sky.

A sense of calm washed over him, but his mind refused to rest.

A thought surfaced, sharp and clear.

"There are only a handful of mages here... but it's obvious Mystica is the strongest," he murmured, eyes still fixed on the moon.

"I need to see if I can get anything out of her—any information on dark magic."

He clenched his jaw slightly, and his gaze darkened.

"...And that overpowered bastard," he added, thinking of Galen. "His flames... They're on a whole other level. I have to figure out how he's reached that height—and how I can surpass it."

Determination flickered in his crimson eyes, mirroring the sharp curve of the moon above. The path to reaching such a feat might be uncertain, but one thing was clear—he wasn't going rest until he unlocked the same power, or something even far greater.