

ShadowBound 50

Chapter 50: Late Night Encounter

The rest of the day passed swiftly, with little time to dwell on the earlier altercation.

Liam discovered that he, Asher, and Dylan were all assigned to the same building—B1—and even shared the same floor, which meant they'd be seeing more of each other than anticipated.

When Liam returned to his room after the orientation, Naya greeted him at the door with a formal but friendly nod.

She handed over a neatly folded uniform with the academy's insignia embroidered on the chest.

"Here's your uniform. Make sure it fits properly," Naya said, her voice polite yet professional.

Liam nodded. After briefly trying it on to check the fit, he switched to something casual—a plain shirt and simple pants—before heading out again.

The evening air felt cool as he stepped outside his dorm. On the way down to the first floor, he found Naya sitting with her fellow attendants, chatting quietly.

Liam approached her with measured steps. His expression remained unreadable, his voice calm and deliberate.

"Hey, Naya. Can you help me with something real quick?"

Naya blinked, a bit surprised but quick to respond. "Yeah, of course. What do you need?" She stood gracefully, smoothing down the front of her dress.

"Could you show me where the training grounds are?" Liam asked, his voice low but steady.

"Training grounds? Sure. But, uh... which one? There's a big one, and there are a few smaller ones spread out around the campus."

"The large one," Liam replied without hesitation.

Naya smiled politely. "Alright then, follow me. I'll take you there." She turned to her colleagues, waving cheerfully. "See you all later!"

The two stepped outside into the cool night breeze. The academy grounds, bustling earlier, were now enveloped in a peaceful stillness, with only the distant rustling of trees and the occasional chirp of night insects filling the silence.

The moonlight cast long shadows across the cobblestone paths, adding a serene glow to the empty walkways.

They walked side by side, Naya keeping a respectful distance.

"So, the training ground we're heading to—it's one of the largest ones," she explained, filling the silence as they strolled.

"It's designed like a mini-coliseum, though it's mostly used for duels and sparring matches."

Liam gave a slight nod but said nothing.

After a few minutes, they arrived at the entrance to the training ground. Tall stone walls encircled the open space, and the arena's interior shimmered faintly under the moonlight.

"This is it," Naya said, gesturing toward the entrance. "But, just so you know, no one's allowed to use the training grounds until official lessons start after the weekend—so, the day after tomorrow." She glanced at Liam nervously, trying to gauge his intent.

Liam's expression didn't change. "I know. I'm not here to train or break any rules. I just wanted to look around."

Naya exhaled, visibly relieved, though a trace of hesitation lingered in her gaze. "That's good. I was worried for a second there." She smiled softly, though the unease in her posture didn't entirely fade.

"You don't need to wait for me," Liam added, his voice calm but firm. "I'll make my way back on my own."

Naya hesitated, chewing the inside of her cheek as if debating whether to argue. "I... I don't think I should just leave you here. It's against protocol, and—"

"Let's not make this complicated," Liam interrupted, his tone polite but unyielding. "If anything happens, I'll take full responsibility. You won't get in trouble."

Naya faltered, trying to come up with a valid reason to stay, but Liam's gaze made it clear the discussion was over. Eventually, she gave in with a reluctant nod.

"Alright," she murmured, her voice soft. "I'll leave you to it. Just... be careful."

With a final glance over her shoulder, she turned and walked away. As she retreated, her thoughts swirled with unease.

'What's he planning to do here this late? It's nearly midnight,' she thought, frowning slightly. Something about the whole situation felt strange, and she couldn't shake the feeling that Liam wasn't just here for a casual stroll.

'I hope he doesn't do anything reckless...' Naya mused, casting one last glance toward the silent arena before disappeared from site.

Liam, standing alone at the entrance, let the stillness wash over him. The vast space inside the training ground stretched before him.

He exhaled slowly, hands in his pockets, and stared out at the arena under the pale moonlight, as if contemplating something only he could understand.

Then, with a faint smirk tugging at the corner of his lips, he stepped forward into the silent coliseum.

The training ground had the unmistakable aura of a place built for spectacle. Liam scanned the rows of stone seats arranged in tiers, circling the arena like silent watchers—definitely designed for an audience.

As Liam walked deeper into the center of the arena, the ground crunched softly beneath his boots. The earth was rough and uneven, just like a real coliseum—trampled countless times by fighters testing their mettle.

Stopping at the heart of the arena, Liam tilted his head slightly, taking in his surroundings with quiet satisfaction.

"This... this is perfect," he muttered under his breath, the hint of a smirk playing at his lips.

He closed his eyes for a moment, exhaling slowly. Then, with a cold, commanding voice, he gave the order.

"Come out."

The ground trembled ever so slightly as one of his shadow beasts began to stir. Tendrils of darkness slithered across the dirt, merging and twisting until a massive shape emerged.

Slowly, the jet-black form of a dragon from his trial took shape, rising from the shadows like a specter called from the abyss.

The dragon was enormous—its sleek black scales gleaming faintly under the moonlight, and its serpentine body coiling as it fully materialized.

As it emerged, it spread its colossal wings wide, creating a gust of wind that kicked up dust in swirling clouds around them.

The beast's maw opened, and it drew in a deep breath, preparing to release a deafening roar that could have echoed throughout the academy grounds.

But before it could unleash the sound, Liam shot it an exasperated look, his voice sharp yet laced with dry humor.

"Shut up, you idiot."

The dragon froze mid-breath, its eyes wide with a sheepish glint, and immediately snapped its jaws shut with an audible clink.

Folding its massive wings against its sides, the beast lowered its head, bowing obediently to Liam.

Liam stared at the dragon with a deadpan expression, one brow arched. The sheer contrast of this once-mighty beast—now acting like a scolded puppy—was enough to draw a faint, amused sigh from him.

He placed a hand on the dragon's snout, feeling the cool texture of its smooth scales beneath his fingers.

As soon as he made contact, the dragon's long tail gave an eager wiggle, swishing back and forth across the ground like a dog waiting for praise.

Liam's calm expression cracked for a moment, turning into a look of confusion. His brow furrowed as if his brain short-circuited at the absurdity of the sight.

"What...?" He blinked, watching the massive tail swish with enthusiasm. "What is this?"

The dragon tilted its head slightly, an almost expectant gleam in its glowing eyes, as if it were hoping for a pat on the head.

Liam sighed, dragging a hand down his face. "You've got to be kidding me."

Regaining his composure, he chuckled softly under his breath. "So, despite being a fierce creature, once tamed by Extraction, your loyalty is absolute. Doesn't matter how terrifying you were in life, huh?"

He kept his hand on the dragon's snout, the beast nuzzling into his palm like a domesticated pet.

He took a step back, giving the dragon a once-over. "But you're definitely smaller than you were when you were alive." His gaze flicked over its form, noting the subtle differences—the wingspan, the height, and the weight of its presence.

The dragon tilted its head as if trying to understand Liam's comment, then gave another happy flick of its tail.

Liam shook his head, a faint grin tugging at the corner of his lips. "Yeah, I guess size doesn't matter when you're this obedient."

He patted the dragon's snout one last time before stepping back. "Alright, that's enough for now."

The dragon huffed quietly in response, curling its wings tightly against its body, clearly content to remain in its summoned state until ordered otherwise.

As Liam and the dragon stood in the stillness, the beast suddenly tensed, sensing someone nearby. Its sharp gaze locked onto the audience seats, nostrils flaring. Liam immediately noticed the shift.

A voice echoed from above, casual but edged with amusement.

"You know you're not supposed to be here at this hour right?."

Liam snapped his head toward the source. The moonlight stretched across the stands, revealing a figure sitting comfortably among the empty seats—Galen.

His posture was relaxed, one arm draped over the back of the chair, his white sleeves rolled up casually, paired with black pants.

As the light fully illuminated him, Galen leaned forward, an amused smirk tugging at his lips.

"You do realize you're breaking the rules, right?"

There was no malice in his tone—just a lazy, almost entertained air, as if waiting to see how Liam would respond.