

ShadowBound 51

Chapter 51: A Piece Of Advise

As Liam locked eyes with Galen, his calm expression didn't waver. The knight stood lazily, hands still tucked in his pockets, watching Liam with a relaxed smirk, like a cat toying with a mouse.

"You know," Galen began, slowly rising from his seat. "I was wondering how long it'd take before you finally brought that thing out." He tilted his head toward the dragon, eyes gleaming with amusement.

Liam blinked, confused by the remark. How did Galen know about the dragon?

The massive shadow beast shifted, lowering its stance in response to Galen's presence. Its wings flared slightly, preparing to strike.

"Stand down," Liam ordered in a low, steady voice. "There's no point. You can't win against him anyway."

The dragon hesitated, huffing through its nostrils, but it obeyed, settling back on its haunches.

Galen chuckled softly. "Huh. Impressive. You've got it well-trained."

His nonchalant tone only deepened Liam's suspicion. "What do you want, geezer?" he asked, eyes narrowing.

"Geezer?" Galen echoed with a short laugh. "Please..."

And then, without warning, he vanished—leaving a faint trail of glowing sparks in his wake.

Liam's heart skipped a beat. His eyes widened as Galen reappeared in the blink of an eye—right in front of the dragon, close enough to pat its snout. The dragon recoiled slightly, but Galen remained unfazed.

"...I'm not that old, kid." He gave Liam a teasing glance, a playful smirk curling his lips.

Liam stared, stunned. That wasn't just speed—it was speed boosted with fire. But how?

Before Liam could ask, Galen straightened, his gaze turning serious. "You've got potential, kid. But you're wasting it."

Liam frowned. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Exactly what it sounds like," Galen said coolly. "Right now, you're the last known dark magic user." He paused, letting the weight of the statement hang in the air. "And I assume you know what happened to the others, right?"

"Yeah," Liam answered. "They were wiped out during the last magical conflict."

Galen gave a low, amused chuckle. "Is that what they told you?"

Liam stiffened, thrown off by the knight's response.

"The truth is... dark magic users started disappearing long before that conflict. It happened after the battle with the blood demons." Galen's gaze darkened. "Those demons hunted down dark magic users for years, erasing them from existence."

Liam's mind immediately flashed to the night his grandfather died. He clenched his fists, forcing the memory back.

Galen's sharp eyes didn't miss the shift in Liam's expression. "Whoever raised you must've been exceptional to keep you alive," he said, almost like an afterthought.

Liam steadied himself, exhaling slowly. "What do you know about the blood demons?"

"Not much I'm willing to tell," Galen replied with a lazy shrug. "But if you want answers about them or anything related to dark magic, go find Mystica."

Liam bit back his frustration, feeling his patience wear thin. 'This guy is seriously getting on my nerves,' he thought.

Galen, as if sensing Liam's irritation, gave a half-smirk. "Look, I couldn't care less about your dragon or whatever shadow army you've got. But you're holding yourself back."

"How?" Liam asked, keeping his tone even.

"You've learned two dark magic techniques—one lets you take the shadows of your fallen enemies, and the other lets you store and summon objects, like your daggers." Galen's eyes gleamed. "But that's it. That's all you know, and you're obsessing over perfecting them."

"I need to perfect them," Liam argued.

Galen shook his head with a smirk. "That's your problem. You're focusing too narrowly. And that's exactly why you're ranked lower than Asher."

Liam raised a brow, unconvinced. "What does Asher have to do with this?"

"Simple." Galen leaned closer, the flames flickering faintly in his eyes. "Asher uses his power to its fullest. Every time he fights, he pushes his flames to their limit. But you? You rely too much on your daggers and physical strength, treating your flames like an afterthought."

Liam's jaw tightened.

"You could easily beat Asher," Galen continued, "but only if you stop holding yourself back. If you rely only on your flames, though? You're guaranteed to lose."

Liam's expression remained neutral, but inside, the knight's words stung.

"So what do you want from me?" Liam asked flatly.

Galen grinned, finally stepping away. "It's not what I want. It's what you need to hear." He turned, hands sliding back into his pockets. "When classes start, I'll be your instructor—yours and Asher's. So consider this a heads-up."

He glanced back over his shoulder, a flicker of fire dancing along his fingertips.

"Stop leaning on your dark magic as a crutch. Start mastering your flames—or you won't survive what's coming."

With that, Galen strode off, his figure slowly swallowed by the shadows of the arena.

Liam stood alone in the silent arena, the moonlight casting pale beams across the dirt floor. He glanced at the dragon, whose glowing eyes remained locked on him, waiting for the next command.

"Return," Liam ordered, his voice steady.

In an instant, the dragon dissolved into dark tendrils, slithering back into the depths of Liam's shadow. The misty residue clung to the ground for a moment before vanishing completely, leaving the arena eerily still.

Liam exhaled, his gaze dropping to the hand that had touched the dragon moments ago. His fingers twitched, and with a flick of his wrist, a small flame ignited in his palm—red and steady, dancing lightly against the cool night air.

"So... that bastard wants me to hold back on my magic." He stared into the flame, the reflection flickering in his eyes. "Fine. I'll play along—for now."

He clenched his hand into a fist, snuffing out the flame with a sharp motion. The embers fizzled into nothing, leaving only the faint scent of charred air.

"But I'm still going to learn dark magic from Mystica," he muttered under his breath, determination hardening his voice. "Whether he likes it or not."

Liam tilted his head upward, the silver glow of the moon hanging high above him, cold and unwavering.

With that thought lingering, Liam turned on his heel, his steps soft against the dirt floor. He walked out of the arena and made his way back to his room.

The grand chamber of the Knights' Council was a towering hall, its high arched ceiling adorned with banners of various regions, each representing an elite division of knights.

Flickering chandeliers cast a warm golden glow across the round marble table where knights of high renown had gathered. Their armor gleamed under the light, a testament to their discipline, but the weight of the meeting was heavy.

Discussions were already underway, and the tension in the room buzzed like an unspoken threat.

Seated at the head of the table was Sir Varyn Hone, the acting commander—an imposing man in silver plate armor with a no-nonsense demeanor.

His sharp gray eyes scanned the faces before him as he drummed his gauntleted fingers impatiently on the table.

"Where is Galen?" Varyn asked coldly, irritation lacing his voice.

"Late, as usual," muttered Sir Kaelen Bane, a broad-shouldered knight with auburn hair and a perpetual scowl.

"He never takes these meetings seriously. You'd think the strongest among us would at least show some basic respect."

"That's Galen for you," chimed Lady Saria Gare, a lithe woman draped in emerald robes, her hazel eyes glimmering with amusement. "He doesn't bend to anyone, not even the Council. It's part of his charm—or curse, depending on your perspective."

As Varyn exhaled through his nose in frustration, the heavy oak doors creaked open with an exaggerated slowness.

Galen strolled in without so much as an apology. His white shirt, rolled up to the elbows, and casual black pants made him look woefully underdressed compared to the armored knights around the table.

He wore a bored expression, his hands in his pockets, and his snow-white hair caught the light as he lazily scanned the room.

"Evening," he greeted, smirking as if arriving exactly when he intended.

"You're late," Varyn growled, fists tightening on the table.

"Yeah, I noticed," Galen replied, unbothered as he took a seat at the far end of the table, kicking his feet up onto the marble surface. "But hey, I'm here now. That counts, right?"

Kaelen leaned forward, glaring. "One day your arrogance will get the better of you."

"Can't wait," Galen responded with a mischievous grin, clearly enjoying Kaelen's irritation.

Just as the tension seemed ready to explode, Mystica entered the chamber, her dark gown trailed behind her.

The playful glint in her eyes showed she was fully aware of the chaos Galen's arrival had sparked—and that she enjoyed every second of it.

She slid into the seat beside Galen, her presence commanding attention without effort.

"Always stirring up trouble, aren't you?" she teased, her voice like silk.

Galen gave her a sly glance. "Only when I'm bored."

"Then you must be bored all the time," Mystica replied with a smirk.

Varyn cleared his throat loudly, redirecting the room's focus. "Now that everyone is finally present, we can begin."

Mystica lazily rested her chin on her hand. "Oh, do get on with it, Commander. These formalities are so dull."

Varyn ignored her remark, though his jaw tightened. "As you all know, the primary reason for this meeting is the growing activity of the Blood Demons in the border regions. We've lost two squads this month alone."

At the mention of the Blood Demons, the room grew noticeably colder. Even the most battle-hardened knights stiffened, knowing the threat these creatures posed.

Kaelen folded his arms. "They're getting bolder. If we don't respond soon, they'll start moving deeper into the inner zones."

"Agreed," Varyn said grimly. "We need to prepare a preemptive strike."

Galen yawned, his head tilted back as if the conversation were a lullaby. "Blood Demons, huh? Sounds exhausting. Can't someone else handle it?"

Kaelen shot him a glare. "You're unbelievable, Galen. Do you think everything's a joke?"

Galen's red eyes flicked toward Kaelen, sharp as daggers but still dripping with indifference. "I don't think about it at all."

Before Kaelen could snap, Mystica leaned closer to Galen, her voice a playful whisper. "You know, you could at least pretend to care."

"Why bother?" Galen muttered. "They'll all run screaming when I show up anyway."

"Not everyone is afraid of you, Galen," Varyn said pointedly. "And if you don't start taking this threat seriously, it won't just be the borderlands that suffer."

Galen rolled his eyes and shrugged. "Fine. Tell me where to go, and I'll burn the whole lot of them to ash. Problem solved."

Varyn slammed a fist on the table, but before he could reprimand Galen further, Sir Beltran Cross, a quiet, scarred veteran at the far end of the table, spoke up.

"You're all missing the point," Beltran said gravely. "It's not just the Blood Demons we should be worried about. Something...worse is stirring."

A heavy silence fell over the room. Even Galen's usual smirk faltered for a moment.

"Worse than Blood Demons?" Mystica asked, her interest piqued.

Beltran nodded. "There are whispers. Some say... the demons aren't acting on their own. They're being led by something—or someone."

Galen rubbed his neck, visibly uninterested but clearly listening. "Let me guess: some ancient evil returning after centuries of slumber. Happens every other Tuesday."

Beltran gave him a tired look. "This isn't a joke, Galen. If we don't act soon, we'll be overwhelmed."

Galen waved his hand dismissively. "Then we fight harder. It's what we do, right?"

Varyn's patience was at its limit, but before he could explode, Mystica leaned back in her chair and smiled. "Well, I think this meeting has been very productive."

Kaelen scoffed. "We haven't made a single decision."

"And yet, here we are," Mystica replied with a grin, rising from her seat. "Good luck with that whole 'preemptive strike' thing. Let me know how it goes."

Galen stood as well, stretching lazily. "Yeah, it's been fun, but I think I've hit my limit for boring meetings today."

Varyn scowled. "You'll take this seriously when the time comes, Galen, or so help me—"

"Relax, Commander," Galen said with a smirk as he strolled toward the exit. "When the time comes, I'll do what I always do. I'll win."

Mystica followed close behind, her gown trailing like smoke in his wake.

"See you on the battlefield, boys," she said with a playful wink as the two disappeared through the doors, leaving the other knights to stew in frustration.

As the heavy doors shut behind them, Kaelen slammed his fist against the table. "That man is insufferable."

Beltran let out a long sigh. "He's insufferable... but he's also right."

Varyn gritted his teeth, glaring at the doors Galen and Mystica had left through. "Let's hope his arrogance doesn't cost us more than we can afford."