

ShadowBound 52

Chapter 52: Lessons Officially Begins

Liam strolled across the academy grounds, the first day of classes finally here.

Students buzzed around in their uniforms—black fabric with sleek golden accents, the academy's crest stitched proudly across the back.

Everyone seemed eager to leave a good impression. Everyone except Liam.

While others rushed to their classes, Liam took his time, unbothered by the usual first-day pressure.

The neatly kept hallways stretched before him, lined with portraits of past knights. Sunlight streamed through the tall windows on one side, casting faint reflections onto the polished floor.

Liam eventually reached his classroom door, pushing it open slowly. As expected, every head in the room turned toward him.

Their stares clung to him—a silent judgment that was becoming all too familiar.

"Again with these annoying stares," Liam muttered under his breath as he slipped inside and shut the door behind him.

Scanning the room, he spotted Dylan at the back by the window, waving him over like an excited kid.

Dylan's grin was impossible to ignore. He had saved the last seat of the column—right behind him. Liam couldn't decide whether to feel grateful or irritated.

"Yo, Liam! Got your seat right here!" Dylan beamed, patting the desk behind him.

"Thanks, Dylan," Liam said, keeping his tone neutral as he made his way over. As he passed the second column, he exchanged a brief, wordless glance with Asher, who sat lazily in the last seat.

Neither said a word, and the unspoken tension between them lingered for a moment before Liam moved on.

The classroom was arranged in five neat rows of five columns, with every seat occupied.

At the front and center, Liam expectedly spotted Sheila sitting prim and proper in the first seat of the middle column. Ariana sat just to her left, adjusting her glasses with a quiet elegance.

Toward the back, Chris lounged in the far corner, his confident demeanor radiating even from his slouched posture. Charlotte was seated in front of Asher, leaning over her desk in a way that could only be described as provocatively casual.

As Liam sat down behind Dylan, Dylan leaned in, already stirring trouble. "Watch this, bro," he whispered with a mischievous glint.

He turned his attention to Charlotte, grinning like a fox. "Hey, Charlotte! You look... exceptionally stunning today. New perfume, or are you just naturally that intoxicating?"

Charlotte shot him a glance over her shoulder, her full lips curving into a slow, teasing smile.

"Flattery, Dylan?" she cooed, her voice honeyed. "You know that won't get you anywhere... unless you're trying really, really hard."

Dylan's grin only widened. "You're saying there's a chance?"

Charlotte chuckled, flipping a lock of curly hair off her shoulder. "Keep dreaming, handsome."

Liam shook his head, exhaling quietly. Typical Dylan—ever the joker, always poking where he probably shouldn't. Yet, Charlotte's sultry friendliness hinted she didn't entirely mind the attention.

"One day, Dylan," she added with a wink, "you might impress me. But not today."

"Guess I'll just have to keep trying," Dylan quipped, turning back to Liam with a satisfied smirk. "See? She loves me."

Liam rolled his eyes. "You're delusional."

"And you love it." Dylan winked, clearly in his element.

As Liam settled into his seat, the low chatter of the classroom continued. He could tell it was going to be a long day—and Dylan wasn't going to make it any easier.

As the students settled into their seats, the chatter faded when a familiar voice filled the room.

"Hello, my little darlings," came Mystica's soothing tone.

In an instant, a swirl of smoke appeared at the front of the class, dissipating to reveal her elegant figure.

"I trust your first day is treating you well," she said, her playful smile lighting up the room. "If not, don't worry—I, Mystica, am here to make it better."

The room buzzed with quiet awe, particularly from Dylan, who couldn't tear his eyes away from her.

Mystica's smile widened as she raised a hand to hush the soft murmurs. "Now, let's get started. I'll be teaching you essential battle knowledge and universal magical techniques."

The students leaned in, listening carefully.

"Before we begin," she continued, "there's something important you all need to know. By the end of the day, you must select the instructor you want to train under."

She paused briefly, letting the information settle.

"We have Lady Ember for ice manipulation, Sir Regulus for lightning abilities, Sir Kaelen for beast transformation, and Sir Galen—our fire expert. There are other instructors, but these are the ones the academy believes align best with your badge."

The students exchanged glances as she continued, her tone light but clear.

"Of course, for those whose magic falls outside these fields, there are other specialized instructors. And regardless of your abilities, everyone will undergo weapons training. The chief instructor for that is Sir Magnus."

She chuckled softly at how intently the students followed her every word.

"One last thing," Mystica said with a playful glint. "I, too, am an instructor—but only for those whose magic is deeply entwined with them. That includes students like Ariana, Sheila, Dylan... and Liam."

She gestured to each of them in turn, her smile widening when the students looked their way.

"And just so you know," she added with a wink, "Ariana here is my official assistant. Keep that in mind."

Ariana gave a small nod, adjusting her glasses with a serene smile, while the class absorbed every word with eager anticipation. Mystica, clearly amused by the rapt attention, clapped her hands together lightly.

"Now then," she said cheerfully. "Let's begin."

Mystica clapped her hands, the room still as the students waited for her to begin.

"Alright, little darlings," she said, her voice soft yet commanding. "Today's lesson is about something very close to your futures: your main adversaries—demons."

A chill seemed to creep through the room, the mention of demons enough to make even the students who claimed to be bold, shifted in their seats.

Mystica's playful smile remained, but her tone darkened just enough to signal the gravity of the topic.

"Long ago," she began, "mages tried to classify demons using grades—A, B, F, X, and Z. But over time, those names felt... inadequate. So, we gave them something more fitting. More poetic. Something to remind us exactly what we are dealing with."

She raised her hand, conjuring an ethereal diagram that floated above her palm, showing a series of shadowy shapes morphing into various demonic forms.

"Today, I'll introduce you to three of the five major groups. The rest... well, you'll learn those when you're ready. No need to ruin the fun too soon."

A few chuckles echoed through the room, though there was an uneasy undercurrent among the students.

"First, we have what we call Ferals. These demons take the shape of beasts—wolves, bears, serpents. They grow unnaturally large, sometimes towering above the tallest of trees. But size isn't everything." Mystica winked.

"They're the weakest of the bunch, though I wouldn't advise underestimating them. Many mages let their guard down, thinking 'Oh, it's just a wolf.' Then that wolf tears them to pieces before they can scream for help."

Her words hung in the air like a warning, and some students visibly stiffened.

"Now, the next group—Titanborne." She waved her hand, and the floating image shifted into towering giants with bulging muscles, each wielding massive weapons like clubs and hammers.

"These demons are walking mountains. They don't move fast, but when they hit, oh, they hit. A single swing from one of these can flatten a fortress. Strength is their essence. They thrive in battle and crush anything that gets in their way."

Dylan let out a low whistle, clearly imagining himself going up against one. "Might need a little warm-up before taking one of those on," he whispered, mostly to himself. Charlotte, seated beside him, turned with a sly smile.

"You'd last two seconds," she teased, her voice dripping with amusement.

Mystica gave them both a playful glance but continued, her tone turning sharper. "Now, the third group... these are where things get nasty. Horrors."

The floating shapes morphed into grotesque figures—twisted, malformed bodies with warped faces and limbs.

Some looked almost human, but their features were eerily wrong: eyes where they shouldn't be, limbs bending the wrong way, faces that seemed to grin far too wide.

"They're fast," Mystica said, her voice lowering. "Faster than you'll expect. They hunt in the shadows, and their strength lies not just in their speed but in their unpredictability. They can move like animals, yet fight with the cunning of a human. Many have died underestimating them."

As Mystica spoke, Liam's gaze sharpened. The description of the Horrors stirred something in him—a memory, vivid and unwelcome.

He thought back to the outskirts of Nystra City, where he had faced the demon. The features match with the floating images and what Mystica had said. The way that demon moved, the way it grinned as it attacked—everything about it matched perfectly with what she was saying.

Liam clenched his fist under the desk, keeping his expression neutral. 'So that's what it was... a Horror.'

"Now," Mystica continued, "I know what you're all thinking—'How do we survive against these things?' Well, that's why you're here. The only thing that stands between you and becoming a demon's meal is preparation. You must learn how to predict their movements, counter their strengths, and exploit their weaknesses. You won't always get second chances."

Her words were accompanied by a flick of her wrist, and the floating images vanished into wisps of smoke.

"Remember: survival isn't about brute strength or fancy magic. It's about knowing your enemy better than they know you. And that is why I'm here." She smiled, her playful tone returning. "To make sure none of you get eaten on your first mission."

Dylan leaned back in his chair, flashing a grin at Charlotte. "Guess I'll have to stick close to you in case things get hairy."

Charlotte gave him a sultry smile, her tone teasing. "Just don't slow me down, hero."

Mystica clapped her hands again, drawing everyone's attention. "Alright, little ones. That's all for today's introduction. Remember—by the end of the day, you must choose your instructor. Pick wisely. Your survival might depend on it."

The students nodded, the weight of the lesson lingering in the air. Mystica's playful demeanor returned as she gave a little bow.

"Class dismissed—oh, and don't forget to eat something. You'll need your strength soon enough."

With that, she vanished into a swirl of smoke, leaving the students buzzing with whispered conversations and quiet excitement.