

ShadowBound 53

Chapter 53: You Better Prove Your Worth

Since class ended earlier than expected, the students made their way out of the classroom. They way on the move to locate their preferred instructors.

As the first years descended from the building, they were met by the instructors who had lined up on a platform. There was about a ten platforms, and they were all lined up horizontally.

The crowd of students surged toward the platforms, buzzing with excitement. Some students gathered in front of the key instructors—Sir Kaelen, Sir Regulus, Lady Ember, Mystica, and Sir Galen—each one poised on the first platform.

Well, except for Galen, who had found himself a chair and looked perfectly content lounging in it with his legs crossed.

Liam, Dylan, and Asher stood at the back of the group, waiting for their turn to register. Chris, Sheila, Charlotte, and a handful of other students clustered nearby, each eyeing the instructors with varying levels of excitement or anxiety.

As they stood there, Asher leaned toward Dylan. "Yo, Dylan."

"Yo," Dylan replied casually.

"I've been meaning to ask you something."

"Fire away, brother." Dylan grinned.

Asher raised an eyebrow. "How are you so... comfortable around the top six? You're way too casual with them. It's weird."

Dylan let out a chuckle. "Casual? Nah, man. I think you're reading too much into it."

Asher frowned. "Then what was all that back there with Charlotte? You two seem pretty chummy."

"Oh, that?" Dylan smirked and leaned in closer, whispering conspiratorially. "We clicked after orientation. She's not so bad... but she's crazy competitive." He gave Asher a wink.

Asher crossed his arms, unimpressed. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Means you better stay out of her way, or she'll eat you alive," Dylan teased with a grin.

Asher gave him a flat look. "You mean she'll eat you alive, perv."

"Hey! She hasn't killed me yet." Dylan shot him a smug grin. "That's progress."

Asher rolled his eyes, muttering under his breath, "Why am I even talking to you..."

Dylan snickered. "It's the charm. You can't resist."

Ignoring him, Asher shifted the conversation. "What about that princess, Sheila? You said you knew her from way back, right?"

"Oh yeah, Sheila and I go way back," Dylan replied with a grin. "My family worked at the palace of the Crescent Kingdom. My mom was a maid, and my dad was a guard. Sheila's kinda stiff, but once you get to know her, she's actually pretty fun to talk to."

"Fun? She looks like she's constantly annoyed," Asher said.

"She's a slow burn. Give her time," Dylan replied with a wink. "You might even get a smile if you don't screw it up."

Asher shook his head, though a small smirk crept onto his face.

"So, who are you choosing as your instructor?" Dylan asked suddenly. His grin turned mischievous. "I know who I'm picking—Mystica, obviously."

Asher gave him a disgusted look. "You're so predictable."

"Guilty." Dylan wiggled his eyebrows. "Hey, I learn best when I'm motivated."

Asher shook his head, muttering, "You're hopeless."

"What about you?" Dylan asked, clearly enjoying himself. "Got your eye on any instructor?"

"Galen," Asher said, glancing toward the platform. Galen remained seated, utterly uninterested in everything going on around him.

Dylan's grin widened. "Oh man, prepare to master the ancient art of doing absolutely nothing."

"Doesn't matter," Asher said flatly. "as long as I get to learn from the strongest."

Liam, who had been standing silently behind them the entire time, shifted slightly. Asher noticed and turned toward him.

"What about you, Number 8?" Asher asked, smirking.

Liam didn't even glance at him. "What do you want, buzz cut?"

Asher's jaw twitched. "Don't call me that."

"Start calling me by my name," Liam said without missing a beat, "and I'll think about it."

Asher narrowed his eyes. "Alright... Hunter. Who's your pick?"

Liam looked toward the platform and gave a slight nod. "Galen."

A grin spread across Asher's face. "Hah. Looks like we'll be competing, then. Just so you know, there's no way I'm losing to a weakling like you."

Liam gave him a side-eye glance, completely unbothered. Then, in a perfectly deadpan voice, he muttered, "Good. I'd hate to win without even trying."

Asher opened his mouth, ready to fire back, but Dylan burst out laughing. "Oh man, that was beautiful." He wiped a tear from his eye. "I gotta admit, Liam, you've got talent. Might even make a comedian out of you yet."

Asher groaned, rubbing his temples. "Why do I talk to either of you?"

"Because you love us," Dylan said with a wink.

Liam gave the faintest shrug. "Or you just have terrible taste in friends."

Asher threw his hands in the air. "I swear, I'm surrounded by idiots."

Dylan patted him on the back. "And you're stuck with us, buddy. Ain't life grand?"

Before Asher could reply, the line of students shifted forward, and they moved closer to the registration table.

Once all the students had registered their names, the instructors collected their scrolls. Sir Kaelen stepped forward, addressing the crowd with a commanding tone.

"Now that you've chosen your instructors, tomorrow marks the official start of your training. Be ready."

Mystica gave the students a sly smile. "Lucky for you, today's a short day. The rest of the day is yours—use it wisely."

The instructors began dispersing, but Galen remained seated, lazily scrolling through the list of names on his parchment.

"Hey..." he muttered, his voice carrying a note of boredom. "Why the hell are there so many names on my list?"

Several students turned eagerly toward him, but Galen's face twisted in mild annoyance as he read further.

"Let me make one thing clear," Galen announced flatly. He flicked a dismissive hand toward the crowd, gesturing toward Asher and Liam, standing at the back.

"Apart from those two idiots over there, the rest of you are dismissed. Go join the other fire-wielders. They'll keep you busy."

The crowd murmured in frustration, their envious gazes flicking toward Asher and Liam. But no one dared to argue.

"If you can't handle real heat," Galen added with a smirk, "then you're not worth my time."

With that, the students dispersed, grumbling under their breath, but unwilling to defy Galen's order. Liam and Asher lingered, watching as Galen stretched lazily and finally stood, motioning for them to follow him.

The three of them made their way to the training grounds, arriving at the same mini-colosseum where Liam had been at two nights ago.

At the center of the arena, three enormous, polished boulders sat in a neat row, their smooth surfaces reflecting the midday sun.

Asher tilted his head, eyeing the rocks with confusion. "What the hell are we doing here, old man?"

Galen froze mid-step and turned, fixing Asher with a murderous glare. "What's with you brats calling me old? I'm one of the youngest instructors here!" He clenched his fists dramatically. "Damn it!"

Asher smirked. "You sure sound old."

Galen looked like he was about two seconds away from setting Asher on fire, but he exhaled sharply and composed himself. "Anyway, let's get to business before I actually lose it."

He walked toward the three boulders and stopped in front of the middle one. "The reason I dragged you two here is simple: you have to prove you're worth my time. If you can't..." He glanced back with a smirk. "Well, I'm not wasting any effort on failures."

Liam crossed his arms, observing quietly. Asher, on the other hand, grinned. "Finally, a challenge."

Galen ignored him and placed a hand on the surface of the middle boulder. "Your task is to destroy one of these. Just like this."

The boys watched intently, expecting some dramatic buildup. But to their surprise, Galen didn't summon any flames or mystical aura.

Instead, the boulder cracked from within—then exploded in a violent burst of molten rock, sending chunks of stone flying. What remained of the boulder was nothing but scorched rubble, sizzling on the arena floor.

Liam's eyes narrowed. 'What the hell?'

He hadn't seen Galen use any visible magic. No flames, no incantations—just raw destruction from the inside out.

Asher's grin widened, his competitive spirit igniting. "How did you do that?" he demanded eagerly.

Galen's smirk deepened. "Internal Heat Manipulation." He dusted off his hands as if melting a giant rock was a casual Tuesday. "It's a technique that lets you channel heat directly into the core of an object and even living creatures. You don't see the fire... but it's there. However, if you're not careful, it can backfire and you will be the one exploding from the inside. Spectacularly."

Liam studied the melted boulder, his mind racing. 'That's some next-level stuff compared to what Draven taught me'

Asher, on the other hand, looked like a kid in a candy store. "So... we just have to do that?"

"Yup," Galen said, leaning against what was left of the boulder. "Destroy one of these rocks however you like. But if you try to copy me and screw it up..." He gave a wicked grin. "Well, you might just blow yourself up. Good luck."

Asher cracked his knuckles, excitement radiating off him. "Challenge accepted."

Liam, still calm and collected, glanced toward the untouched boulders. 'This is going to be interesting.'

"Try not to embarrass yourself, buzz cut," Liam muttered under his breath.

Asher shot him a glare. "You're so dead after this."

Galen chuckled to himself, amused by their bickering. "This is going to be fun."