

ShadowBound 54

Chapter 54: Bunch Of Weaklings

The sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows over the arena. Despite their relentless efforts, the boulders remained intact—smooth, untouched, and frustratingly immovable.

"Damn it... these things won't even budge," Asher groaned, collapsing onto the ground. He lay sprawled out, panting as he tried to catch his breath.

Liam stood nearby, leaning on his knees. He was barely upright, exhaustion etched into every muscle despite relying on Crimson Breathing. His breaths were sharp, and his limbs trembled under the strain.

'This is way tougher than I thought...' Liam clenched his jaw, wiping the sweat from his brow.

'We've been going at it since noon, and now the sun's gone. I feel weaker than I ever have...' He swallowed bitterly. Crimson Breathing's not enough for this.

From the audience seats, Galen's voice broke the silence, dripping with disdain. "So... are you done?"

The two boys glanced toward him, their frustration growing as they saw the knight lounging casually, arms folded.

"You're nothing but weaklings," Galen continued, standing slowly and stretching. "Not that I blame you. It's my fault for thinking you two could accomplish anything in the first place."

Liam narrowed his eyes as Galen turned to leave. "Go get some rest. Starting tomorrow, join the other fire-wielders. I've wasted enough time on you."

The casual dismissal hit them like a slap.

Liam straightened, wiping the dirt from his chin. His voice was calm, but there was a sharp edge to it. "You know... for someone who's supposed to teach us, you haven't given us any advice. Not a single word."

Galen paused mid-step, turning his head slowly. "Huh?"

"I hate to agree with him," Asher added, rising from the ground and brushing dust off his pants, "but Liam's right. All you did was show off, and then expect us to copy you." A mischievous grin crept across his face. "What kind of teacher does that?"

Galen's gaze darkened, his irritation evident. "I already told you—"

Liam cut him off, meeting his gaze with unwavering determination. "I don't care about what you did earlier. I just need advice on how to use my own abilities."

Galen's eyes narrowed, a dangerous gleam flashing through them. The temperature seemed to shift as the air thickened with his restrained bloodlust.

"You've got guts to interrupt me like that, kid." His voice was low and sharp, enough to make both Liam and Asher tense under its weight.

For a moment, silence settled between them, heavy with unspoken tension. Then Galen exhaled through his nose, raking a hand through his white hair, irritation giving way to reluctant amusement.

"Alright," he muttered, his tone easing slightly. "You're right. I'll give you some advice. But don't come crying to me if you can't handle it."

He locked eyes with Asher first. "You, Asher, are one of the rare few born with blue flames—the hottest type of fire. Not many wielders can manage them, and you're lucky enough to be naturally good at it."

Asher puffed out his chest, grinning smugly. "Of course I am."

Galen shot him a deadpan look. "Yeah, yeah, save it. Listen up. Instead of throwing those weak fireballs at the boulder, focus on raising the temperature of your flames. You need to increase the heat to its maximum—and release it in a continuous storm. A single burst won't cut it."

Asher's grin faltered slightly, realizing the magnitude of what Galen was asking.

Then Galen turned to Liam. His expression grew colder. "Now, you."

"Unlike Asher, your flames are just ordinary red ones," he said bluntly. "Nothing special. But you've learned that ridiculous breathing technique, haven't you?"

Liam's eyes widened, caught off guard. 'How the hell does he know about Crimson Breathing?'

Galen didn't seem interested in explaining. He gave a dismissive shrug.

"Since you already know it, make sure you're using it to its full potential. You need to synchronize it with your fire—channel every bit of heat your body can generate and push it beyond its limits. The more controlled your breathing, the hotter your flames will burn."

Liam absorbed the advice, his mind racing with possibilities. "Crimson Breathing isn't just for endurance... it can boost my flames too. I've been doing that ever since I master but looks like I'm still holding back.'

Galen stepped back, looking between the two boys with a cold, detached expression. "Get some rest. Try again tomorrow. If you still can't destroy those boulders..." He smirked. "Dismiss yourselves before I have to."

With that, Galen turned and walked away, leaving them in the dim glow of the arena's fading light.

Asher and Liam looked as he disappeared from sight.

'That crazy bastard, all he told me was something I already know.' Liam thought as he clenched his fists.

Asher shot Liam a smug grin. "Well, in the end, I'm still better than you... obviously."

Liam didn't bother to glance his way, keeping his focus on the stubborn boulder.

Asher's grin widened. "Guess by tomorrow, those things won't be looking so round anymore."

A strange, menacing smirk curled at the edge of Liam's lips. "Why wait until tomorrow?" His voice was calm, almost daring.

Asher blinked, then narrowed his eyes. "Oh, I see what this is. You wanna beat me to it, huh? Trying to succeed before I do?" His competitive spirit flared to life, practically sizzling in the cool evening air.

Liam scoffed, his gaze still fixed on the boulder. "I don't care about you, buzz cut." The words were blunt, slicing through the tension like a dagger.

Asher clicked his tongue, folding his arms. "Tch. Well, guess I'm staying after all. No way I'm letting you pull ahead of me."

Liam gave a dismissive shrug. "Do what you want. Just make sure you don't get in my way."

Asher clenched his fists, his irritation bubbling up. "That's supposed to be my line."

Liam shot him a sidelong glance, the faint trace of a smirk still on his lips.

Both boys stood in the deepening twilight, silent but determined, their rivalry sharpening the air between them like steel on a whetstone. The boulders wouldn't survive the night.

The first rays of sunlight crept over the horizon, casting a soft orange hue across the academy grounds. Dawn was settling in, and the students were stirring, preparing for the day.

Galen strolled through the courtyard, yawning lazily, his hands stuffed in his pockets. His walk was casual, almost careless, like he had all the time in the world.

"Look who's up early."

Galen glanced to his side, and there was Mystica, gracefully matching his stride, her dark hair flowing behind her. A mischievous smile curled on her lips.

"You actually yawn? I thought knights were immune to exhaustion," Mystica teased, her purple eyes twinkling.

"Yeah, well, we can't all sleep in silk beds and dream about unicorns," Galen shot back, stifling another yawn.

Mystica laughed, her voice playful. "Oh, come on. I bet you secretly enjoy this whole 'grumpy knight' routine. It makes you seem... mysterious."

Galen gave her a side-eye. "If mysterious means tired, then yeah, nailed it."

They walked in silence for a moment, the calm morning air making everything feel peaceful—until a sudden, deafening BOOM echoed through the grounds, followed by a second explosion that shattered the tranquility.

Mystica's smile vanished, replaced by sharp alertness. "That's coming from the arena."

Without hesitation, both of them broke into a sprint toward the source of the sound.

As they approached the mini-arena, Mystica's hand hovered near the edge of her gown, prepared to summon magic if needed. "If this is another one of those rogue firebeasts, I swear—"

They rounded the corner and froze. There were no enemies, no fire creatures, just Liam and Asher standing before the shattered remains of two massive boulders.

Steam curled off their skin, heat still radiating from their bodies as if the stones had absorbed every ounce of their effort.

Mystica blinked, stunned. "What in the world...?"

Asher smirked, brushing soot off his arms. "Told you I'll beat you to it."

Liam cracked his neck, his face calm but a flicker of satisfaction gleamed in his eyes. "No one cares buzz cut"

Mystica turned to Galen, completely baffled. "You... let them do this all night?"

Galen crossed his arms and gave the boys a rare grin, something that made Mystica raise an eyebrow. "I didn't let them do anything."

Mystica shook her head in disbelief, hands on her hips. "You're absolutely crazy. They should be dead tired by now!"

Galen chuckled, clearly impressed. "Nah. They're not weaklings. They just proved they're ready." He stepped forward, glancing at the shattered rocks. "Well done, you two. You earned your place under me."

Asher gave a victorious grin, his competitive spirit alive. "Does that mean I'm officially your favorite student?"

Galen shot him a flat look. "Don't push it."

Liam wiped the sweat off his brow, giving Galen a respectful nod but keeping his expression neutral. "So, are you ready to teach us properly now?"

Galen smirked. "Now? go get some rest. Training begins at noon. And trust me... today's lesson will make you miss these boulders."

Mystica rolled her eyes, her amused smile returning. "Boys and their competitions..."

"Don't act like you're not entertained," Galen said, throwing her a smirk.

Mystica laughed softly. "Oh, I am. This is going to be fun to watch."

As the boys exchanged a knowing glance, the two instructors turned to leave. Liam and Asher stood in the midst of the shattered boulders, satisfied with the achievement.