

ShadowBound 65

Chapter 65: Inconvenient Timing

The sun cast a warm glow over the academy grounds as two first-year girls strolled down the path by the mini coliseum, chattering excitedly about their weekend plans.

"Did you see the dress Malia bought? I swear it's got some kind of enchantment—made her look practically radiant," one of the girls, a petite brunette named Elena, said with a grin.

Her friend, a taller girl with a pixie-cut and bright blue eyes named Lila, nudged her playfully. "Enchanted or not, she's definitely got her eyes set on impressing a certain someone," Lila smirked.

But their conversation came to an abrupt halt when the sharp, rhythmic sound of blades clashing caught their attention.

"You hear that?" Elena whispered, her eyes darting to the open-air coliseum just a few yards away.

Lila's brows lifted, her curiosity sparked. "Yeah... should we take a peek?"

A mischievous grin spread across Elena's face. "Obviously."

The two crept toward the edge of the coliseum and peeked through a small gap in the stone wall, careful to stay hidden.

Their jaws dropped at the sight in front of them: two shirtless boys, dripping with sweat, relentlessly hacking away at massive boulders with determined precision.

Their movements were powerful, each strike landing with a force that sent subtle tremors through the ground.

"That's... Liam and Asher, right?" Elena whispered, unable to tear her gaze away.

Lila nodded, her eyes wide. "Yeah, but... what are they doing? Are they training like this on their own?" Her gaze settled on Liam's form, noticing the faint wisps of steam rising off his skin. "Is it just me, or is he... smoking?"

Elena stifled a giggle. "Are you seriously asking if Liam Hunter is spontaneously combusting? But, I mean... look at them. They're both... so focused."

The girls watched, mesmerized. Liam's form seemed almost to glow with the heat radiating off his skin, while Asher's movements were sharp, his body coiled with energy as his sword struck the stone with an intensity that matched Liam's. Both boys were absorbed, as if the world around them didn't exist.

Lila raised a brow, a playful smile tugging at her lips. "And to think we thought our enchantment class was hard work."

Elena snickered, giving her friend a playful nudge. "Yeah, right? They're insane! But... not in a bad way," she added with a little blush as her eyes trailed back to Liam. "He... um, really gives it his all."

Lila smirked. "Oh? Do I sense a crush forming?"

Elena's face flushed deeper. "Stop it! I'm just... impressed, that's all."

Just as they were about to settle in for more observation, a shadow loomed over them. They froze, feeling the weight of someone's presence.

Slowly, they turned, only to find Galen himself standing behind them, with a dark, unamused look in his eyes.

"You two," His voice was calm, but there was an unmistakable edge to it. "Better start running along, before I lose it."

The girls nearly jumped out of their skins, their faces pale as they muttered apologies, scrambling to their feet and dashing off down the path.

As they disappeared around the corner, Galen let out a sigh, rubbing his temple as he turned his attention to the coliseum.

He stepped into the boys' view, his presence instantly commanding attention. Both Liam and Asher stopped mid-motion, turning to face him, sweat dripping down their faces.

Galen's gaze flickered between the two boys, a faint smirk dancing at the corners of his mouth. "What's the matter? Am I interrupting your 'masterpiece'?"

Liam and Asher remained silent.

After a pause, he slowly circled them, inspecting the boulders that had somehow survived their relentless assault with barely a scratch. He let out a low chuckle, shaking his head.

"You both look like you've been through a rainstorm, but from what I see..." he tapped the stone with the toe of his boot, "these rocks haven't even warmed up to your efforts."

Asher's jaw clenched, the competitive spark in his eyes reigniting. "I'm just getting started."

"Right," Galen drawled, a glint of amusement in his gaze. He leaned against the stone, folding his arms, as though settling in for a casual conversation. "Because nothing says progress like beating a rock until it pities you."

Liam, wiping sweat from his brow, met Galen's eyes with a steely gaze. "We're not here for pity," he said, voice low but certain.

Galen's expression softened slightly, though the hint of a smirk remained. "Good. Because you won't get any. Swinging mindlessly," he nodded at the boulders, "only wears you out faster."

Asher, his frustration now evident, shot Galen a sharp look. "Well, maybe we wouldn't be here swinging 'mindlessly' if you'd actually taught us properly the first time."

Galen's eyes sparkled with a mocking glint. "Ah, true, true. I humbly accept my mistake," he drawled with a smirk, his voice thick with sarcasm. "But it seems you two have made some progress despite my, shall we say, subpar instruction."

He gestured at the faint, wavering flames they'd managed to summon mid-air. "Not just anyone can pull off that kind of heat. So, credit where it's due."

Galen's smirk deepened as he folded his arms. "Still, I may have forgotten one crucial step. Without it, all this swinging is just a waste of time."

He leaned forward, voice dropping. "It's called Alignment. It's a meditative practice to help you connect your inner myst and heat to your blade. Mastery can skip this, but beginners like you? Essential."

He stepped back and motioned for them to sit. "Lay your blades in front of you, take a seat, and focus. Feel the flame within you, and let it flow into your weapon. Forget strength; think of harmony."

As Asher and Liam were about to sit and channel their myst, a voice cut through the silence.

"Sir Galen!"

Galen turned, irritation flaring as he spotted Ariana, bowing slightly, with Dylan right behind her.

"Good morning, Sir Galen," she greeted politely. "Ms. Mystica sent me to get you."

Galen's brows furrowed. Mystica? What could she possibly want at this hour? He mentally groaned, a twinge of frustration leaking through. The memory of last night flashed through his mind, and he resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

With a reluctant sigh, he turned back to Liam and Asher. "Looks like you'll have to meditate on your own, boys," he said, waving over his shoulder without looking back. "Just when I finally had the edge to teach something today..."

As he walked away, muttering about inconvenient timing, Liam and Asher exchanged a quick glance, then settled into their meditative stances, blades resting before them.