

ShadowBound 66

Chapter 66: Blood Demons

Ariana and Dylan exchanged an amused look as Liam and Asher settled into their meditative stances. Dylan couldn't resist breaking the silence as he watched the two boys with a smirk.

"Well, look at these guys," he teased, nudging Ariana. "Bet they're visualizing some epic firestorm in their heads. Wonder if it's all dramatic, with flaming dragons and whatnot."

Ariana chuckled softly, her green eyes twinkling behind her glasses. "Focus, Dylan. They're concentrating," she said, though her smile showed she was enjoying the moment.

Asher opened one eye, shooting them a glare. "Are you two done? Some of us are actually trying to master something here."

Dylan grinned wider, unfazed. "Oh, don't mind us. We're just here to... supervise." He made a sweeping gesture with his hands. "Wouldn't want you to accidentally blow yourselves up."

Liam, eyes still closed, let out a slow exhale, ignoring them both. "Shouldn't you two be somewhere else?"

Dylan scoffed, crossing his arms. "Please. I'd hate to miss watching you guys attempt to unlock something which is practically entertainment."

Ariana rolled her eyes at Dylan's antics but then turned her attention back to the two boys, her expression softening.

"Actually," she said in a gentle tone, "from what I heard from Mystica, Galen's training are never easy. But judging from how calm you guys are, I think you are progressing quite well"

"Of course we are" Asher said, his voice filled with pride.

Dylan, however, raised an eyebrow, leaning closer to Ariana. "You're being awfully nice to them. What happened to our cold-hearted bookworm?"

Ariana gave him a playful shove. "Just because you lack empathy, Dylan, doesn't mean I have to."

Asher snorted, breaking his concentration with a wry smile. "I'd call it more of a sense of decency. Something he clearly lacks."

Dylan gasped in mock offense. "How rude! You'd think I was some villain here." He put his hand to his chest, looking between them all dramatically.

"And after I graciously came to watch you both make fools of yourselves. Honestly, no appreciation."

Ariana laughed, shaking her head as Asher and Liam refocused, closing their eyes once more to find their rhythm.

As Galen approached Mystica's chamber, he didn't bother with formalities, pushing the door open with a nonchalant creak.

Inside, Mystica sat on the edge of her table, one leg elegantly crossed over the other, her gown's high slit revealing a tantalizing glimpse of her smooth, toned leg.

She held her usual mischievous smile, but her eyes sparked with something deeper, something almost unreadable.

But she wasn't alone. Lady Ember, Sir Regulus, and Sir Kaelen were also gathered, each with expressions that suggested a mix of curiosity and concern.

"Didn't expect you to come so quickly," Mystica said, her tone playful.

Galen scoffed, casting an unimpressed glance at the others before locking his gaze on Mystica. "Well, I thought you wanted to pick up where we left off yesterday." His voice held a note of irritation, with a hint of challenge.

For a brief second, Mystica's usual poise slipped as a faint blush dusted her cheeks. She coughed, quickly regaining her composure and rolling her eyes as she tried to ignore the knowing smirks of the others.

"Alright, since we're all here..." Mystica began, shifting her tone to one of serious authority. "There's something urgent we need to discuss."

The instructors settled, though Galen chose to remain leaning against the wall, arms crossed, clearly only half-interested.

"This morning," Mystica continued, her voice low and measured, "several bodies were found at the train station."

A murmur rippled through the room, all traces of amusement vanishing as the instructors absorbed the gravity of her words.

"Details?" Sir Kaelen asked, his tone steely.

Mystica nodded. "The victims were night patrol knights, completing their rounds in Zone Twelve. They were reported missing last night, and by dawn, their bodies were discovered by the morning patrol knights."

"Any chance civilians saw the bodies?" Regulus inquired, his calm voice betraying just a hint of concern.

Mystica shook her head. "No, fortunately. We contained the area before anyone could see."

"And the cause of death?" Lady Ember, usually demure, looked up with an uncharacteristic focus.

Mystica's face grew somber. "The wounds are... unnatural. Either an advanced Horror or possibly a high-ranking demon."

Kaelen frowned, his jaw tight. "Why would an advanced Horror or high-class demon come to Grandeur City—let alone Zone 12? They know high-ranked knights are posted here. It's reckless, even for them."

While the others debated, Galen let out a dramatic sigh, his impatience evident as he pushed himself off the wall.

"So, you called me here to brief me about some advanced Horror? Or a demon that barely qualifies as a threat?" He began moving towards the door, muttering under his breath. "What a waste of time."

The room fell silent as he grumbled, his hand on the door handle. But then Mystica's voice cut through, this time lacking its usual teasing quality. Her tone was edged with something deeper—an unmistakable chill.

"Blood Demons."

As Galen froze mid-step, tension thickened around him. He slowly turned back, his usual nonchalance replaced by a sharp, focused gaze.

"And how sure are you?"

Mystica folded her arms, her face turning serious. "Blood Demons leave their prey without a liver. Every one of those knights had theirs missing."

"But why a Blood Demon?" Ember's voice wavered with worry.

Mystica raised an eyebrow, letting a hint of a smirk slip. "That's easy: Liam. They've likely sensed his dark magic already." But the moment the words left her mouth, her hand shot up to cover it. "Oops."

The room erupted as Kaelen shot to his feet, disbelief and outrage etched on his face. "A dark magic user? Here?"

Mystica winced but couldn't hold back a wry smile, casting a sheepish glance at Galen.

Galen only shrugged, his voice indifferent. "Doesn't matter now. The higher-ups were going to inform you sooner or later."

Kaelen's jaw tightened as he tried to steady his temper. "Wait... the Supremes know about this boy? Who else does?"

Galen smirked. "Not sure, but seems those old geezers know how to keep this one under wraps."

"Perhaps because you threatened them?" Mystica chuckled, casting him a knowing look.

Galen's faint smirk barely masked his impatience, as Kaelen took a deep breath, visibly wrestling with his thoughts.

"If this dark magic has attracted Blood Demons, then the Academy's students are at risk. We have to consider using—"

"Not happening." Galen's voice was like ice, cutting Kaelen off mid-sentence. His gaze was unyielding.

Kaelen bristled, frustration boiling over. "You didn't even hear me out."

"I don't need to. Using my student as bait is out of the question." Galen's voice dropped to a cold, unforgiving edge.

"If we don't, every student here is at risk!" Kaelen argued.

"Then so be it. Those demons know the dangers of this Academy as well as we do." Galen turned on his heel, making it clear he considered the matter settled.

His tone turned darker as he added, "And if you think waiting for a change of instructors will get you anywhere, think again, Kaelen. I don't let things slide."

With that, he strode toward the door, leaving a stunned silence in his wake.

As the door swung shut behind him, Kaelen turned toward Mystica, who only shrugged with a sly smile.

"I'm next in line to teach Liam, and I'm not about to follow your plan. Galen's right. The students aren't the ones in danger. Those demons... well, they're the ones who should be scared."

Kaelen scoffed, frustration simmering just below the surface. "And yet, you all pin your hopes on a man who can't be bothered with anything but himself."

Regulus chuckled, crossing his arms. "True as that might be... he's still the strongest."