

ShadowBound 70

Chapter 70: I'll Be Damned

'What the hell was that just now?' Asher seethed, replaying the scene of Liam's sudden burst of speed and flawless execution of Inferno Edge.

His hands balled into fists, the heat of his own flames curling along his knuckles, but they weren't from excitement.

They were from the bitterness gnawing at him, a raw wound exposed. 'How did he push Galen to actually show even a fraction of his power... while I'm just standing here like a damn spectator?'

The thought hit him like a slap, a bitter taste settling in his mouth. 'Bullshit. This whole time, I've been telling myself I'm better than that wannabe. I never once considered he could surpass me.'

He grit his teeth, every word in his mind sharper than a blade. 'I've been so full of myself, thinking I had all the answers. Tch... pathetic.'

A wave of rage surged through him, his mind racing as his pride took the blow, each thought feeding the flames inside him.

'That should be me. I should be the one to make Galen smirk with interest, to force him to take me seriously. I didn't come here to stand in anyone's shadow—not Galen's, and definitely not his.'

His thoughts roared, echoing in his mind like a battle cry. 'I came here to become the best—the strongest knight this academy, this entire world has ever seen. That's my goal. My damn right.'

His eyes locked onto Liam, an intense fire blazing in them. 'And I'll be damned if I let some quiet wannabe stand in my way.'

"Is that all you've got, kid?" Galen taunted, a smirk tugging at his lips. He was almost led to removing his hands to brush through his hair but quickly remembered the rules of the fight. His eyes were glinting with a mocking edge. "Thinking of quitting already?"

Liam let out a soft scoff. "Sorry to disappoint you, Galen," he said, narrowing his eyes as he summoned his speed, vanishing from his spot and reappearing directly in front of Galen, high in the air, leg pulled back for a powerful kick. "...but 'quitting' isn't wired into my system."

As his kick swung toward Galen, the older knight's grin widened, a glint of amusement in his eyes. Just before impact, Galen vanished in a blur, reappearing behind Liam faster than a blink to deliver a retaliatory kick.

But Liam twisted mid-air, crossing his daggers in a desperate block. Nice try, Galen thought, disappearing again only to reappear at Liam's back. This time, he struck hard with a brutal kick that sent Liam hurtling forward.

Anticipating the blow, Liam managed to twist his body, taking the impact in a way that allowed him to roll back onto his feet.

Barely stopping to breathe, he launched forward again, daggers flashing as he unleashed a flurry of attacks.

But Galen effortlessly dodged every swing, weaving around Liam's strikes, punctuating each evasion with a mocking tap of his foot against Liam's shoulder, chest, or back—playful kicks that still held a sting.

To Ariana and Dylan, watching from the sidelines, it was a dizzying spectacle of blurs. Galen and Liam seemed to vanish and reappear faster than their eyes could track.

The only clue of their positions was the faint shockwaves each time Liam's daggers struck the ground or Galen's kicks missed by a hair.

"I can't see anything right now," Dylan muttered, squinting at the chaos.

"Me neither," Ariana admitted. "But it's amazing—didn't expect Liam to move like that." She added as she watches in awe.

"Yeah, he wasn't moving like this during the enrollment trials. If he'd had that kind of speed back then, we would've finished off that dragon way faster."

"Wait, what?"

Dylan gave a mischievous grin. "Oh, so you didn't know we fought a dragon? Pretty awesome, huh?"

Ariana's eyes went wide. "What do you mean? You three fought a dragon?"

Dylan scratched the back of his neck, chuckling. "Yeah... guess it didn't get around. Honestly, I thought we were all toast, but somehow—"

A sudden explosion of fiery blue light cut him off as Asher's flames erupted onto the field, bathing the area in a blaze of intense heat.

Back on the training ground, Liam had just repositioned for another assault on Galen when a firm hand pushed against his chest, halting him.

He looked up to see Asher, his eyes burning with intensity, stepping in front of him.

"Move it... wannabe," Asher said coldly, shoving Liam back with force. Without waiting, Asher spun mid-air, a surge of blue flames bursting to life around him as he struck, his sword slicing forward in a sudden arc that even Galen hadn't anticipated.

Galen's smirk faltered for a split second as he dodged, Asher's sword slamming into the ground, sending an eruption of blue flames through the field.

The flames spread out in a wild ring, scorching the earth and illuminating the stunned faces of those watching.

"Looks like you want in on the action too, don't you, Blue Flames?" Galen said, his grin reforming as he faced Asher with renewed interest, amusement sparking in his gaze.

Liam slowly pushed himself back to his feet, his gaze steady and unreadable as he fixed it on Asher.

"Hey, what the hell was that?" he asked, his tone calm but edged with a hint of irritation.

Asher shot him a glare over his shoulder, eyes cold and unwavering. "Shut it. I'm taking down this cocky bastard myself. You just stay out of my way, got it?"

Liam's expression didn't change, but his voice grew firmer. "Is that so?...", said calmly. "...Look, I don't know what's gotten into you, but neither of us can pull this off alone. So, get over whatever this is, and let's finish this together."

Asher narrowed his eyes, his grip tightening on his weapon. "Maybe you didn't hear me the first time," he said, his voice dripping with scorn. "I'm going to win this—on my own. So stay out of my way... wannabe."

Without sparing Liam another glance, Asher turned his gaze forward, eyes locked on Galen, his determination burning even brighter.