

ShadowBound 73

Chapter 73: The Aftermath

"Whoa! Can't believe Asher actually landed a touch on Galen, especially after getting beaten up that badly," Ariana said, her eyes wide with astonishment as she watched the aftermath.

Dylan leaned back, folding his arms with a proud stance and a mischievous grin. "Told you they'd make it."

Ariana rolled her eyes, smirking. "Yeah, you told me all right—told me they had zero chance of winning. You perverted liar."

Dylan laughed, unbothered. "Details, details."

"But honestly, I thought Liam would be the one to break through Galen's guard," she added, a hint of disappointment in her voice.

"I expected him to come up with some brilliant strategy... not go along with Asher's reckless ego trip."

Dylan scratched the back of his neck, a sheepish grin still in place, before pausing, his expression shifting to something surprisingly thoughtful. "You really don't see what actually happened, do you?"

Ariana raised an eyebrow. "Huh? What do you mean?"

"Alright, let me break it down for you," Dylan said, leaning forward, a hint of playful mischief in his eyes.

He looked like a professor about to dive into a lecture, even though his tone was far from serious. "Everything we just saw... it was all Liam's doing."

Ariana's brow furrowed in confusion. "How? Asher was the one who touched Galen and technically won the fight."

"Sure, technically," Dylan said, clearly enjoying himself. "But that's only because Liam set it up perfectly. He didn't just go along with Asher's ego for no reason. He used it—pushed Asher to go all out, knowing that if the moment came, Asher would dive headfirst for the spotlight."

"So... you're saying..." Ariana's voice trailed off as she pieced it together.

"I'm saying," Dylan continued, "Liam planned for Asher to make that final move. When Liam seemed ready to land the blow but got knocked aside, it wasn't just a mishap. It was the setup. With Liam out of the way, Asher saw his chance and took it, and by then Galen's guard was down. It was all orchestrated."

Ariana shook her head, still skeptical. "But Asher took a direct hit to the chest, and he forced himself to reach Galen. That didn't seem planned; it just looked like Asher being... well, Asher."

Dylan chuckled. "You still don't get it. Even from here, I could tell, and Liam definitely knew it. Once Asher's fired up with that desire to win—even if it's just to prove himself—he'll push through anything, even Galen's strength."

Ariana's eyes widened slightly, realization dawning. "So... Liam used himself as bait because he knew Asher wouldn't let it slide if he thought he had a chance to one-up him?"

"Exactly," Dylan nodded, his grin widening. "And let's be real, if it was Liam who got the last touch, Asher would've jumped right in to sabotage it, whether they were working together or not. This was the only way it could've worked."

Ariana leaned back, a smile creeping onto her face. "Huh... makes sense. Guess Liam's more calculating than I thought."

Dylan shrugged, a glint of mischief returning. "Or maybe that's just my interpretation. Who knows? Maybe Liam didn't have any of this in mind at all."

Ariana rolled her eyes, but this time her smile stayed. "Yeah, right. Keep telling yourself that, professor."

Just as Dylan opened his mouth to add another comment, Galen's voice cut through the chatter.

"Hey, you two. Come grab these two and take them to the healer's quarters. Looks like they've both passed out," Galen said, bending down to pick up his red coat from the ground.

He slung it over his shoulder casually, his gaze lingering briefly on the two battered boys.

Ariana and Dylan exchanged quick glances before hurrying over.

"When they wake up," Galen continued, "tell them they've earned a day off. They'd better not think about showing up here tomorrow; they'll need the rest."

He began heading toward the exit, then paused, his gaze drifting to the wreckage strewn across the training grounds.

"Oh, and Ariana—when you're done here, find one of the muscle-bound earth-wielders and have them clear these boulders. They're... in worse shape than I expected."

Ariana looked over at the remains of the stone blocks that once stood as unyielding test pieces. Now, they were cracked and scattered across the floor, some split clean in half from the relentless strikes Liam and Asher had thrown at Galen, only to miss their mark.

"Yes, Sir Galen," she replied, watching him walk off with that effortless confidence.

"Alright," Dylan said, eyeing the two downed boys. "I'll get Liam. You can handle Asher."

Ariana gave him a slight smirk, then knelt beside Asher, placing a gentle hand on his chest.

Murmuring a quiet spell, she watched as Asher's body lifted, suspended in the air by an unseen force. Moving over to Liam, she repeated the spell, his unconscious form floating up beside Asher.

Dylan's jaw dropped, his eyes gleaming with admiration. "Gravitational magic? That's sick!"

"Yes, Dylan," Ariana replied with a small smile, her voice amused yet urgent. "Now, let's get them to the healers before their injuries get worse."

She directed both floating boys forward, and they hovered steadily in front of her.

"Hey, wait up!" Dylan called, jogging to catch up, grinning as he followed Ariana and the weightless duo out of the training grounds.

Galen made his way down the dimly lit corridor toward his private chamber, the heavy door creaking as he pushed it open.

Inside, the room was as refined and minimalist as one might expect of a knight of his rank. Dark wood shelves lined the walls, filled with old tomes, neatly arranged weapons, and a selection of polished armor pieces.

A single chandelier hung from the ceiling, casting a warm, golden glow over the chamber, while a broad mahogany desk sat against the far wall, papers and maps meticulously stacked.

Closing the door behind him, he shrugged the red coat from his shoulder, tossing it onto a plush armchair beside the crackling fireplace.

Crossing the room with an air of ease, he approached his collection of fine spirits. Selecting a deep crimson wine, he poured himself a generous glass and took a slow sip, letting the rich flavors settle.

"Well, this is a rare sight," a familiar, mocking voice sounded from the shadows near the doorway. "What's got you so stirred up that you're breaking out the wine at this hour?"

Galen turned with a raised eyebrow, watching as Magnus stepped forward. His dark-haired friend had shoulder-length locks that framed a striking, chiseled face—a look of both rugged charm and keen intelligence.

His dark knight's uniform fit him perfectly, the silver accents glinting in the firelight, and he was just as handsome and imposing as Galen. Magnus unfastened his forearm guard with a casual grace, letting it fall onto the table beside him.

"And what's that supposed to mean?" Galen asked, swirling the wine in his glass.

Magnus smirked, crossing his arms as he leaned against the doorframe. "Come on, Galen. I've known you long enough to know you only drink like this when something's got you truly fired up."

"Fair enough," Galen replied, nodding slightly. "Though I didn't expect you back from your mission this early."

Magnus shrugged, a lazy grin on his face as he reached for another glass from the shelf, pouring his own drink. "Things wrapped up faster than expected. Thought I'd head back to the academy and catch up."

"Any updates worth sharing?" Galen asked, taking another sip, his eyes glinting with intrigue as he studied his friend.

Magnus tilted his head thoughtfully, his gaze distant. "A few things here and there. Some of it... well, it might interest you." He raised his glass, clinking it lightly against Galen's.