

ShadowBound 77

Chapter 77: He Had Lost His Calm

Back in his room, Liam stood under the steady stream of the shower, water cascading down his body and through his dark hair. Steam filled the small space, curling around him like a misty veil.

One hand braced against the wall, his fingers splayed for support as droplets slid over his chiseled features, tracing the sharp lines of his jaw. He stood still, letting the warmth of the water wash away the lingering tension in his muscles.

Moments later, Liam stepped out of the shower, water dripping from his toned frame. He grabbed a towel and ran it briskly over his body, the cool air brushing against his damp skin. Tossing the towel aside, he reached for his pants and shirt, slipping into them with practiced ease.

He moved to the edge of his bed, sitting down heavily, his elbows resting on his knees. For a moment, his gaze was fixed on the floor, but his thoughts were far away, spiraling into the chaos of recent events.

His mind replayed the confrontation with Sheila. He hadn't just lost his temper—he'd completely snapped. For the first time, his control had slipped so far that he had unleashed his dragon's aura. Yet, it wasn't Sheila's provocation or even her sudden attack that had pushed him over the edge.

It was him. That voice. The one from his unconscious state.

"That crazy bastard," he muttered under his breath, his fists clenching against his thighs.

The memory of the voice grated on his nerves, its arrogance and condescension echoing in his mind. The claim that Liam's life was something he had to "prove worthy of" was a bitter pill to swallow.

He didn't want to live by someone else's terms, nor did he have any intention of justifying his existence to a disembodied entity.

The more he thought about it, the angrier he became. His jaw tightened, and a faint flicker of myst crackled around his clenched fists.

But beneath the anger lay something colder—fear. Even in that shadowy realm of unconsciousness, Liam had felt the overwhelming power of the voice.

It was a suffocating presence, a force so vast that it felt like it could snuff him out with a mere thought. The realization gnawed at him, filling him with a sense of helplessness he despised.

And that helplessness was a problem.

If his life truly dangled on such a fragile thread, what would become of his mission? The thought of never avenging his grandfather, of never putting an end to that blood demon, sent a surge of frustration through him.

His vengeance was the anchor that kept him moving forward, the purpose that defined him. Without it, what was left?

Liam let out a sharp exhale, forcing himself to unclench his fists. He couldn't afford to let his emotions cloud his judgment. Not now. Not when the stakes had been raised higher than ever.

"I'll just have to grow strong," he muttered, his voice low but resolute. "That bastard isn't taken my life."

The road ahead was uncertain, but one thing was clear—he wouldn't let anyone, not even a self-proclaimed ancient force, decide his fate.

With that, he leaned back on the bed, staring up at the ceiling. The anger still simmered beneath the surface, but it was tempered now, channeled into a steely resolve.

A week had passed since the intense sparring match between Galen, Asher, and Liam. With the first month of training behind them, it was time for the academy's instructor rotation, bringing changes for students who possessed both magical and elemental abilities.

"Hey, Liam," Dylan began, his tone light and curious. "You'll be joining Mystica's lessons for the change, right?"

"Yeah," Liam replied nonchalantly, his focus elsewhere.

"Yes!" Dylan exclaimed, his grin widening. "Finally, another guy in the class! Now I can focus on just one woman... heh heh."

"What the hell are you talking about, you idiot?" Asher interjected, his face twisted in disgust.

"Well," Dylan began, adopting a mock-serious tone, "since Liam's joining Mystica's magic lessons, he can keep Ariana busy while I devote my undivided attention to Mystica. Not that handling two amazing women is a problem for me, of course," he added with a smirk, "but Mystica is the only woman for me."

Liam's expression remained impassive, his mind elsewhere, while Asher shook his head in exasperation.

"You're hopeless," Asher muttered, his tone tinged with disgust.

Dylan wagged a finger at him with a knowing look. "Ah, but if you saw what I see, my friend, you'd call me 'the wise and honored one.' Heh heh."

"Gods, shut up," Asher sighed, visibly irritated.

"Anyway," Asher said, steering the conversation back on track, "isn't Sheila joining Mystica's lessons too? She's got something to do with light magic, right?"

"Oh, yeah," Dylan said, scratching his chin as if pondering. Then, with a mischievous grin, he added, "Guess I'll still have Ariana and Mystica all to myself. Sheila's all yours, Liam. Heh heh."

He leaned in closer to Liam, his grin widening. "And let's be honest, you two get along so well."

The teasing was thick, and Dylan's grin practically sparkled with mockery. He knew full well that Liam and Sheila couldn't stand each other. Still, Liam didn't so much as flinch, his stoic demeanor acting as an impenetrable shield.

"So," Dylan said, clapping his hands together. "What are you guys up to right now?"

"Galen wanted to see us before the instructor rotation begins," Asher replied, crossing his arms.

"Oh, can I come along?" Dylan asked eagerly.

"Sure," Asher said with a shrug. "As long as you don't annoy him... too much."

"Well then, let's not keep him waiting!" Dylan said, flashing his signature grin.

With that, the three made their way to meet Galen, Liam walking silently beside the chatterbox duo.

The trio arrived at the training grounds, the late afternoon sun casting long shadows across the dirt and stone arena. There, amidst the silence of the arena, they spotted Galen.

He was slouched in one of the spectator seats, his arms folded and his head tilted back in apparent slumber, white hair gleaming under the sunlight.

"Seriously?" Dylan muttered, hands on his hips. "He's sleeping? What kind of legendary knight naps in the middle of training hours?"

"Careful," Asher warned, smirking. "Say it any louder, and you might wake the 'legendary knight.' Then again, that might be fun."

Dylan rolled his eyes and, without missing a beat, cupped his hands around his mouth. "HEY, SIR GALEN! WAKE UP, YOU LAZY—"

Before Dylan could finish, a sudden burst of heat rippled through the air. It wasn't overwhelming, but it was enough to make the trio pause.

Without opening his eyes, Galen spoke, his voice calm but laced with warning. "If you value your life, boy, you'll keep the noise to a minimum."

Dylan froze, his face pale as Asher chuckled. "Told you."

With a slow stretch and a yawn, Galen finally opened his crimson eyes, giving the trio an unimpressed look. "What's with the crowd?" He pointed lazily at Dylan. "You're not on my schedule. Why are you here?"

"I wanted to join in on the fun," Dylan said, flashing his usual grin.

Galen narrowed his eyes for a moment, then sighed and waved a hand dismissively. "You know what? Don't explain. It's probably better for my sanity if I don't know."

Dylan chuckled nervously as Galen stood and dusted off his coat. He walked over to Asher and Liam, the casual lethargy in his movements doing nothing to mask the sheer aura of power that surrounded him.

"Well," Galen began, crossing his arms, "I've got some news for both of you."

He turned to Liam first. "Kid, since you've got both magical and elemental abilities, you're heading to Mystica for your next month of training. I assume you already knew that?"

Liam nodded, his expression unreadable.

"Good," Galen said. "Here's some advice: enjoy your time away from me, but don't get too comfortable playing with magic. I expect you to keep up with your fire lessons. Because once you're back under me, it's gonna get hella hot. Got it?"

Liam smirked faintly. "Got it."

Galen turned to Asher, his tone shifting to something almost smug. "And as for you, lucky or unlucky, you've got another month with me. Since you'll be the only student under my instruction, I might finally have time to drill some actual skills into that thick skull of yours."

"Looking forward to it," Asher said with a confident grin.

"Good," Galen said, his lips curling into a devilish smirk. "You'll need that enthusiasm. Trust me."

He then turned to Dylan. "And you."

"Uh, yes, sir?" Dylan said, straightening up like a soldier under scrutiny.

"Stay out of my training grounds unless you're on my schedule. Got it?"

Dylan nodded quickly. "Crystal clear."

With that, Galen yawned again, stretching like a cat. "Well, that's all I had to say. You're dismissed." He paused, then added, "And Dylan, don't steal any of my snacks on the way out."

Dylan blinked. "You have snacks?"

"No," Galen replied flatly, his expression deadpan. "But if I did, you'd better believe they'd be off-limits."

The trio turned to leave, but as they walked away, Asher whispered to Dylan, "You were this close to getting torched."

"Yeah, yeah," Dylan muttered. "Totally worth it."