

ShadowBound 78

Chapter 78: She Saw

As they left the training grounds, Dylan stretched his arms above his head, clearly itching for something to do. "Man, that was a nice little chat with Galen. Nothing like a good ol' 'stay out of my training grounds' to make you feel welcome."

"Pretty sure he was one second away from roasting you," Asher said, smirking.

"Details, details," Dylan replied, waving him off. "Anyway, since we're free for a bit, how about we check out that new café near the sparring arena? I heard they've got this incredible myst-infused cake. Imagine! A cake that recharges your stamina. Pure genius!"

Liam raised an eyebrow but didn't slow his pace. "Pass. I've got things to do."

"Things to do?" Dylan asked, mockingly aghast. "What could possibly be more important than spending quality time with your amazing friends?"

"The library," Liam said flatly.

"The library?" Dylan repeated, as though Liam had just declared he was going to spend the evening watching paint dry.

"Yes," Liam said, glancing at him briefly before continuing. "I have some research to do. You two have fun with your cake."

Before Dylan could protest, Liam turned on his heel and headed toward the direction of the library, leaving the two behind.

"Well, there goes Mr. Serious," Dylan said, crossing his arms. "And just when I was starting to think he might loosen up."

"Yeah, good luck with that," Asher said with a chuckle.

"Guess it's just you and me then, buddy," Dylan said, throwing an arm around Asher's shoulders.

Asher sighed, shaking his head. "Do I really have a choice?"

"Nope!" Dylan replied cheerfully. "Come on, I'll even buy you a slice of cake. You look like you could use some sweetening up."

"Fine," Asher muttered. "But if it's terrible, I'm making you pay me back for wasting my time."

"Deal!" Dylan said, practically dragging Asher down the hall.

As they made their way to the café, Dylan launched into a detailed monologue about the supposed mystical properties of desserts and how he planned to rank each one.

The library was vast and silent, its towering shelves filled with countless volumes that seemed to stretch endlessly toward the ceiling. Ariana stood on one of the ladders, scanning the rows of books with a furrowed brow.

"Let's see," she murmured to herself, her delicate fingers brushing over the spines. "The Principles of Arcane Symmetry? No. Mystflow Dynamics? Too advanced. The Art of Elemental Blending? Not quite what I'm looking for..."

She sighed, tapping her chin in thought. "It should be here somewhere. Maybe it's one of the older editions?" Her eyes scanned higher, catching sight of a dusty tome tucked away in a forgotten corner.

"Aha! There you are," she said triumphantly, reaching out toward the book. It was just barely within her grasp, her fingertips brushing the edge. "Come on... almost... gotcha."

She managed to tug the book free, but the sudden shift in weight made the ladder wobble. "Whoa—!" Ariana gasped, her hands losing their grip as the book tumbled from her grasp.

The next moment happened in a blur. The ladder tipped, Ariana felt herself falling backward, the world spinning for a heartbeat. She braced for the impact of the cold, hard floor.

But instead, she landed in something firm yet steady.

Opening her eyes, she found herself cradled in someone's arms. Blinking rapidly, she looked up and saw Liam's face, his stoic expression as unreadable as ever. His sharp features were illuminated by the soft light streaming through the library windows.

"Are you okay?" Liam asked, his voice calm, as though catching falling people was just part of his daily routine.

Ariana's cheeks flushed crimson. "Uh... um... yes. I mean, I think so. Thank you," she stammered, trying to compose herself.

Liam nodded slightly, then carefully set her down on her feet. "Be careful next time," he said, his tone neutral but firm, as he picked up the fallen book and handed it to her.

"R-right. Thank you again," Ariana said, clutching the book to her chest. She tried to steady her breathing, but her heart was still racing—not just from the fall but from the unexpected closeness.

Liam didn't say another word. He simply turned and walked toward a different section of the library, leaving Ariana standing there, flustered and more than a little embarrassed.

As she watched him disappear between the shelves, she couldn't help but whisper to herself, "Well, that wasn't in my plans for today."

'Wait, I can ask him'

Liam stood amidst the shelves in the dicorner of the library. His sharp eyes scanned the titles methodically, his fingers trailing along the dusty spines.

"Myst Applications... Practical Spellbinding... Channeling the Arcane..." he muttered under his breath, frustration creeping into his tone. "Nothing. None of this is what I'm looking for."

He exhaled sharply, his mind racing. "This library is enormous, but there's nothing truly forbidden here. Of course, they'd keep anything about dark magic locked away. Too dangerous, too 'immoral.'" He scoffed. "But how am I supposed to master it if they hide the knowledge?"

As he leaned against a nearby shelf, he rubbed his temple, trying to push the annoyance aside. "I'll just have to hope Mystica might just have a book. Yeah, because I'm wondering how she is even going to teach someone with the magic which is claimed to have been extinct."

Just as he was about to turn and leave, a voice called out behind him.

"Liam," Ariana said, her tone soft but determined.

He turned to glance at her briefly, his expression impassive. "What do you want?"

Ariana hesitated, clutching the book she had retrieved earlier. "I wanted to thank you again... for catching me earlier. But also, there's something I've been meaning to ask you for a while now."

"I'm not interested," Liam said curtly, already turning away. "If that's all, you can save your breath."

Ariana's brows furrowed, and she took a step closer. "Wait! It's about that night... the one with Sheila."

Liam paused, his back still to her.

"I was there," Ariana continued, her voice quieter but insistent. "I saw what happened. Sheila froze like she'd seen a ghost—or worse. What was that?"

Liam's shoulders tensed slightly, but he didn't turn around. "It's none of your business," he said coldly, his tone edged with finality.

Ariana bit her lip, feeling the sting of his words, but she pressed on. "I can help you," she said, her voice firmer now. "I know you've been looking for a book on dark magic. I saw you searching just now. And I know where to find one."

That caught Liam's attention. He turned his head slightly, his eyes narrowing as he glanced back at her.

Ariana's confidence grew at his reaction. "I know where you can get a book on dark magic," she repeated. "But I'm not telling you unless you answer my question first."

Liam fully turned to face her now. He studied her for a moment, weighing her words. She didn't flinch under his scrutiny, standing her ground despite the tension in the air.

After a moment, he exhaled. "Fine," he said, his voice low. "You'll tell me exactly where to find it. Then, maybe I'll consider answering your question."

Ariana crossed her arms, her expression unwavering. "Then you can just forget about it. Either you tell me what happened first then I tell you where you can find the book."

Liam smirked faintly, 'Looks like she knows how desperate I am right now huh?' He thought to himself.

"Fine then, I'll tell you, but don't you dare play any games with me." He replied with a calm yet cold tone.