

ShadowBound 79

Chapter 79: Perfect Timing

Liam and Ariana sat at opposite ends of the table, the quiet hum of the library surrounding them. A stack of books sat untouched between them, the tension palpable as Ariana broke the silence.

"So, care to explain now?" she asked, her voice calm but laced with curiosity.

Liam leaned back in his chair, his expression unreadable. "What you saw that night was nothing more than me losing my temper. Nothing more, nothing less."

Ariana's brows furrowed. "You mean to tell me that just losing your temper made Sheila freeze in place? That doesn't add up, Liam."

He leaned forward slightly, his tone unwavering. "You catch on quickly. Now, if you're done, how about holding up your end of the deal? Where's the book?"

Ariana's lips pressed into a thin line. "I know there's more to it, Liam. You're not telling me everything."

Liam exhaled sharply, leaning his elbows on the table. "Fine," he said, his tone clipped. "After I lost my temper, I accidentally released the aura of an extracted dragon. That's all there is to it. The rest isn't your concern."

Ariana blinked, taken aback by his blunt admission. She recalled Dylan mentioning their fight with a dragon during the enrollment trials, but extracted? What did he mean by that? As an apprentice mage, her curiosity was piqued, but she knew better than to push further.

"I see," she said finally. "I guess it's my turn to be honest..." She hesitated for a moment. "You can find the kind of books you're looking for—"

"From Mystica," Liam interrupted, his tone firm.

Ariana froze. "Y–yeah..." she stuttered. "How did you know?"

Liam's gaze remained steady. "For someone like you—an apprentice—there's no way you'd have access to advanced knowledge on extinct magic unless it came from someone like Mystica. It's obvious."

Her cheeks flushed slightly at his straightforward logic. "If you already knew, why humor my request at all?"

Liam shrugged, his tone indifferent. "Because if I didn't, you'd keep pestering me about it. That would've been annoying."

Ariana looked down, her cheeks burning in embarrassment. "I see... I'm sorry for wasting your time then," she said, bowing her head slightly.

"There's no need for apologies," Liam replied, his voice softer than before. "Besides, we'll be under the same instructor starting tomorrow."

Ariana looked up, surprised by his neutral response. Her cheeks flushed further. "Y–yeah..." she began, but before she could finish, a familiar, mocking voice interrupted them.

"Well, well, what do we have here?" Chris sneered as he approached, flanked by Lucian and Logan. "The useless apprentice and the trash number 8, having some quality time alone?"

Ariana's expression darkened, and Liam turned his gaze toward the trio, his face remaining calm but his eyes narrowing slightly.

Chris smirked, clearly enjoying himself. "What's the matter, Liam? Too weak to hold your own, so you're playing nice with the library's deadweight now?"

Liam leaned back in his chair, his calm demeanor unwavering. "And here I thought dogs weren't allowed in the library," he said coldly.

Lucian's and Logan's smirks faltered, but Chris's grin widened, masking his irritation. "Careful, Liam," he said, his tone mockingly sweet. "You might bite off more than you can chew."

Liam rose from his seat slowly, his movements deliberate, his expression unchanging as he ignored Chris's mocking tone.

"Yeah, I hear you, Chris," Liam said, locking eyes with him, his voice calm but carrying an unmistakable edge. "Let's not start something that ends with all three of you taking a trip to the infirmary."

Chris's smirk faltered slightly at Liam's unwavering gaze, but Liam didn't stop there. "If you'll excuse me," he added, stepping toward the trio, "I'll be on my way now."

As Liam tried to pass, a heavy hand clamped down on his shoulder. It was Lucian, his broad frame looming over Liam as he fixed him with a cold stare.

"The prince isn't done talking," Lucian said, his voice low and menacing. "And you dare walk away from him?"

Liam glanced at the hand on his shoulder, his expression unbothered, before shifting his gaze upward to meet Lucian's glare. "Hey, muscle-brain," he said, his tone sharp and cutting.

"I don't recall looking anything like Asher, so unless you want to lose your forearm, I suggest you move that hand."

Lucian scoffed, but before he could respond, a faint metallic gleam caught his eye. He looked down to see a dagger pressed firmly against the underside of his forearm.

The realization hit fast and hard—Liam had summoned the blade without so much as a whisper of movement. It was already there, poised to strike with deadly precision.

The tension in the air was palpable. Chris's smirk vanished completely, replaced by a flicker of unease as he realized Liam wasn't bluffing. Even Logan shifted uncomfortably, glancing between Lucian and the dagger.

Liam's gaze never wavered, his voice calm but laced with steel. "Now, I'll say this one more time. Move your hand."

Lucian hesitated, the weight of the blade against his arm and the intensity in Liam's eyes leaving no room for argument. Slowly, he removed his hand, stepping back reluctantly.

Liam lowered the dagger but didn't dismiss it. His eyes shifted to Chris, who now looked more irritated than amused.

"You should teach your lackeys some manners," Liam said, his voice cutting through the silence like a blade. "It might save you some embarrassment in the future."

Chris clenched his fists, his jaw tightening as he struggled to maintain his composure. "You're walking a dangerous line, Liam," he hissed.

Liam smirked faintly, his demeanor unshaken. "And yet, here I am." With that, he turned and walked past them, his dagger disappearing as seamlessly as it had appeared.

Chris, Lucian, and Logan stood frozen for a moment, the weight of the encounter lingering heavily. Logan finally broke the silence. "Are we just going to let him walk away?"

Chris's eyes narrowed, his expression dark. "For now," he said quietly. "But this isn't over."

Liam, meanwhile, continued toward the library's exit, his pace unhurried and his expression unreadable.

As Liam stepped out of the library, he exhaled a soft sigh, his stoic expression momentarily giving way to a hint of frustration.

Those damn idiots. Why'd they have to show up now of all times? he mused, shaking his head.

Though he had maintained his composure in front of Chris and his lackeys, the reality of the situation wasn't lost on him.

Chris, the second-ranked student, and his lackeys—Logan and Lucian, ranked fourth and fifth—were leagues ahead of him in terms of raw power.

'If it had come to a fight," Liam thought, 'I wouldn't have stood a chance against all three of them. Not yet, anyway.'

Even so, his calculated threat had been enough to make them hesitate. It wasn't bravado but a gamble that paid off. The idea of sending Lucian to the infirmary without a forearm had been a desperate bluff—yet one grounded in cold truth.

'If things were to get rough, I wouldn't have hesitated to follow through. Healers could always regenerate a limb, after all,' he thought, his lips curving into a faint, bitter smirk.