

ShadowBound 95

Chapter 95: How Amazing

"That's it for today," Mystica announced, placing the chalk down with a sharp clack. Her gaze swept across the room, lingering on a few students with a mischievous smirk.

"It seems some of you look unexpectedly tired for some reason," she added, her eyes gleaming as they landed briefly on Ariana's face.

With that, Mystica strode out of the classroom, her dark gown flowing behind her.

Liam sat at the back, close to the window, his chin resting lightly on his hand. He gazed outside, the sunlight filtering through the leaves, creating dancing patterns on his desk.

'I might have slept for just three hours, but I feel more alive than I expected,' he mused, his expression unreadable. 'Turns out using Myst Recovery while sleeping was the right choice.'

Despite the late-night training and limited sleep, Liam had woken up with an almost unnatural vitality. While most would find such a feat impossible, Liam's mastery of Crimson Breathing allowed him to absorb Myst even while asleep. Combined with Crimson Overdrive, which amplified his absorption rate, replenishing his reserves during those few hours had been effortless.

Channeling Myst to his core has become second nature by this moment.

He shifted his gaze back to the classroom.

His eyes flicked to Ariana, seated in the front row. Despite her stoic expression, there was a subtle fatigue in her posture that hadn't gone unnoticed by Mystica—or Liam.

'She seems more tired than I expected,' he noted, observing her for a moment longer before turning his attention back to the window.

Liam's quiet musings were interrupted by Dylan, who spun around from the desk in front of him with his usual enthusiastic grin. "Hey, ready to go?"

"By 'go,' you mean training with Mystica, right?" Liam asked, his gaze still fixed out the window.

"Of course! What else would I be talking about? Trust me, I'm in no mood to stir up trouble today," Dylan replied, his grin widening.

"That's news worth celebrating—for once," came Asher's dry remark from the next column over. He leaned back in his chair, arms crossed, his sharp blue eyes gleaming with mock amusement.

"Whatever, buzz cut," Dylan shot back, waving him off dismissively. "So, Liam, let's get moving. Besides, this time we can all go together."

Liam arched an eyebrow but said nothing.

"Look, Sheila and Ariana haven't left yet, so we can all tag along. What do you think?" Dylan leaned in, lowering his voice to a conspiratorial whisper.

"Let's just get going, Dylan," Liam said, standing from his seat with his usual calm.

"Yes!" Dylan jumped up, visibly thrilled. "And you, Asher, enjoy your precious time with your favorite instructor—Sir Galen!" He added with a laugh as he strode toward Sheila and Ariana's desks, leaving Asher shaking his head in mild exasperation.

Dylan approached with a dramatic flair, bowing slightly as he addressed the two girls. "Hello, ladies!" he began, his tone dripping with mock charm.

Sheila barely spared him a glance. "Not in the mood for your useless jokes, Dylan," she replied flatly.

Dylan clutched his chest in mock agony. "Ouch! Such harsh words for a humble admirer. I merely approached two radiant jewels to invite them to accompany me and my noble brother," he gestured toward Liam, "to the sacred grounds of our enchanting queen—Mystica!"

"I said shut it, Dylan," Sheila snapped, her icy tone cutting through his theatrics.

As Dylan and Sheila continued their verbal sparring, Ariana sat quietly, her gaze drifting toward the hallway where Liam stood waiting, his back turned to them. Her cheeks flushed as her thoughts spiraled.

I can't believe I barely slept because of him. 'What is wrong with me? He hasn't even said anything remotely romantic, yet just looking at him makes my heart race.' She fidgeted with her hands, trying to steady her nerves.

"Ariana... hey, hey, you still in there?" Dylan's voice snapped her back to reality as he waved a hand in front of her face.

"Yes!" she replied, her tone a bit louder than intended.

"Woah, someone's jumpy today," Dylan remarked, though his grin didn't falter. "Anyway, Miss Icy Heart here—" he gestured dramatically toward Sheila, "—has agreed to our humble stroll."

Sheila muttered under her breath, arms crossed tightly. "Gods, grant me patience not to murder him."

With a shake of her head, Ariana rose from her seat, and the three of them made their way to the hallway, where Liam was waiting.

"Ay, Liam!" Dylan called out, his grin mischievous as ever. "They've graciously accepted my noble proposal!"

Liam didn't even glance back. "Let's get going then," he said simply, his voice devoid of emotion as he started walking.

Sheila bristled at his indifference, her annoyance bubbling beneath her composed exterior.

"Hey, wait up!" Dylan shouted, jogging to catch up with him, leaving the group to follow behind.

The four students finally arrived at Mystica's training ground—the lush green forest.

Liam glanced back at the cave they had just exited, the same strange sensation from the first time lingering in the air. 'There's that feeling again... like we just passed through a teleportation portal.' His thoughts churned as he refocused on the forest ahead.

"Welcome, my little darlings," Mystica's sultry voice rang out, drawing their attention.

Seated comfortably on an ornate chair carved from entwined tree roots, Mystica smiled mischievously. "You're on time, as always. How delightful."

"Since we're early, I assume that means we're jumping straight into your lesson?" Sheila asked, her tone dripping with irritation as her sharp gaze landed on Liam. "Or is this another session devoted to teaching him?"

Her disdain was palpable, and Liam met her glare with his usual stoic expression, his hands tucked casually into his pockets.

Mystica raised an eyebrow, her purple eyes gleaming with amusement. "Ah, Princess. It seems you're still clinging to your vendetta against dark magic. How predictable."

Nearby, Dylan stifled a laugh, nudging Ariana. "Pfft. Icy heart is at it again."

"Why waste time teaching someone like him?" Sheila continued, her voice filled with venom. "It's pointless. As a Dark magic user, he destined to die anyway."

Mystica chuckled softly, leaning back in her chair. "My dear Princess, if you're so opposed to Liam's lessons, you're free to leave. I'm sure the other instructors would be thrilled to deal with your sunny disposition."

Sheila huffed and turned her head away, her arms crossed tightly.

"Now then," Mystica said, rising gracefully to her feet. Her long black gown flowed like liquid shadow around her. "Shall we, Liam? I'd like to finish teaching you the rest of those techniques today."

Liam remained unfazed, his tone cool and indifferent. "There's no need for that anymore."

Mystica tilted her head, intrigued. "Oh? And why is that? You do realize you need those techniques to progress, don't you?"

"I'm aware," Liam replied, meeting her gaze. "But I've already learned them."

Mystica's smirk deepened. "Already learned them, you say? That's quite the claim. And who, pray tell, taught you? I certainly didn't."

"Ariana did," Liam answered bluntly.

Mystica's eyes darted toward Ariana, who stood beside Dylan, suddenly looking very self-conscious.

"How fascinating," Mystica purred, her teasing tone thick. "Ariana, you've saved me the trouble of teaching our little Liam. Such a thoughtful gesture."

"O-Oh, it was nothing," Ariana stammered, her cheeks flushing as she avoided Mystica's piercing gaze.

Mystica's smirk widened as she glanced back at Liam, her thoughts swirling with amusement. 'Such a relentless hunger for power. How amazing.'

"Well then," Mystica said, her voice shifting to something more serious. "If that's the case, we'll move on to something that benefits both of you." She gestured between Liam and Sheila.