

ShadowBound 96

Chapter 96: An Illusion Spell

"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.

Sheila's eyes darted to Liam for a fleeting moment, her disdain evident. "There's no way I'm training with him. Absolutely not."

Mystica let out a long, theatrical sigh. "Princess, I've already told you—if you can't stomach the company here, you're more than welcome to join another instructor. There are plenty who'd love to coddle you."

Sheila's lips pressed into a tight line, but Mystica wasn't done.

"However," Mystica continued, her mischievous smirk returning as she pointed to Dylan and Ariana, "these two already have a grasp on what they need to focus on. You and Liam, on the other hand? You're lagging behind. And believe me, you aren't going to reach your potential if you ego keeps getting in the way."

Mystica's words hit their mark, and she seized the moment to twist the blade. "So, here's the choice, Princess. You can let your... let's call it 'childish prejudice,' stop you from learning under me. Or," her tone grew sharper, "you can set it aside for this one month and actually progress like the student you're supposed to be."

Sheila's jaw tightened as she stared at Mystica, her internal struggle visible. She glanced at Liam again—briefly, but the disdain still flickered in her eyes.

'Mystica has a point,' Sheila thought, chewing over the mage's words. 'I need to control my emotions. It's just one month. Weapon training starts after that, and there will be more people around then. I can endure this...'

She took a deep breath, steadying herself. 'It's just one month. It's just one month. It's just one month.'

Finally, Sheila exhaled and said with a sharp tone, "Fine. You're right. I won't miss this opportunity. If it means enduring the presence of a dark magic user, so be it." Her fierce gaze met Mystica's, unwavering.

Mystica's smirk widened, satisfaction gleaming in her eyes. "Very good, Princess. You have a way of talking yourself into reason—an essential trait for anyone aiming to survive the Dark Knight Academy."

Then, shifting her attention to Dylan and Ariana, Mystica clapped her hands lightly. "Now, you two. Where would you like to train today? East or west?"

Dylan immediately stepped forward with exaggerated enthusiasm, placing a hand over his heart as he bowed. "We are but humble servants, oh Queen Mystica. Assign us as you see fit!"

Mystica blinked, momentarily caught off guard by his theatrics. Then her laughter bubbled up, light and amused. "Oh, 'Queen,' is it? How delightful. Very well, if you insist, I'll grant you a royal decree. You two shall take the east while these two head west."

Dylan straightened with a grin. "Your wish is our command, my queen."

Mystica chuckled softly, blowing Dylan a playful kiss. "Good boy."

The effect was instantaneous. Dylan's bravado faltered as his cheeks flushed a bright crimson. His usual confidence replaced with awkwardness, he cleared his throat and grabbed Ariana by the wrist. "C-Come on, Ariana. We've been assigned a noble mission."

Ariana raised an eyebrow but didn't resist as Dylan practically dragged her away. "To the east!" he shouted, his voice carrying through the trees as they disappeared from sight.

Mystica shook her head, still chuckling. "That boy never fails to entertain."

She turned back to Liam and Sheila, her tone shifting to something more commanding. "Now, let's get going then."

With Mystica leading the way, Liam and Sheila followed closely behind, the forest eerily quiet. The only sounds that broke the stillness were the occasional hum of Mystica's soft humming and the rustle of leaves beneath their feet.

After a few moments of silence, Liam's voice cut through the quiet, calm yet piercing in its usual indifference. "Mystica, I've got a question."

Mystica glanced over her shoulder, her playful smirk still in place. "I'm all ears, darling."

Liam took a slow breath, his gaze shifting to the surrounding trees. "What exactly is this place? It feels like a real forest, with myst heavy in the air, but there's something off about it. Like it doesn't entirely belong."

Mystica's eyes twinkled with amusement, and she let out a soft chuckle as they continued walking. "Ah, I see you've picked up on it already. You have very sharp senses, Liam."

She paused for a moment, her gaze faraway as if recalling distant memories. "Well, to put it simply, you're right. This isn't a normal forest. It's actually a separate realm, one that was discovered a few decades ago. It's—well, I can't tell you who exactly discovered it, but some mages found it, and they quickly realized its potential. It had a natural flow of myst that was... abundant, shall we say. So they decided to make use of it."

Liam raised an eyebrow, waiting for her to elaborate. Mystica's expression darkened for a moment, and then her playful smirk returned. "They created this vast green forest you see. Or perhaps it's better to say they created the illusion of this forest."

"An illusion?" Sheila scoffed, crossing her arms, clearly skeptical. "But an illusion spell can't last this long, or even make something look this real."

Mystica's eyes gleamed as she turned her attention to Sheila, amusement dancing in her gaze. "Ah, but that's where you're wrong. What does magic feed off of, hmm?"

"Myst," Liam answered before Sheila could respond.

"Exactly," Mystica replied, pleased with his answer. "This realm itself is overflowing with myst, and the spell that was cast by the mages draws on that very essence to sustain itself. The illusion doesn't fade because the magic has a constant source to draw from."

Sheila furrowed her brows, clearly processing the information. "So you're saying this entire forest, everything here, is just a construct?"

Mystica nodded, her eyes sparkling. "Yes, but it's not just any illusion. This entire place, though an illusion, feels real because of the myst embedded in the very fabric of this realm. It's like a living dream that never ends. Oh, and I should mention—it wasn't just one mage who created it. There were three."

Liam's mind began to churn. His thoughts drifted as he processed the new information. 'A realm of illusion, powered by myst... no wonder the place feels off in subtle ways.'

Mystica caught the contemplative look in Liam's eyes and smiled. "You're thinking about it, aren't you? That's the trick of it. It's a perfect balance between illusion and reality, sustained by myst itself. But, in the end, it's still just a constructed world."

Liam glanced at her, his mind still trying to piece it all together. 'Well, this place seems more annoying to me now.'

"Anyway we've arrived at west." Mystica said as she showed the wide area made as the tall trees surrounded it.