

ShadowBound 98

Chapter 98: First Lesson: Core Expansion

"Now, I'd like to teach you both some new spells, but before we get to that, there's something else we need to address first," Mystica said, her voice laced with mischief as she studied them both.

Sheila's eyes narrowed in suspicion. "What are you getting at now?"

Mystica's smile grew wider, almost devilish. "The two of you will need to learn how to expand your cores. This is crucial, especially for you both, since your magical elements draw heavily from myst. Without a core that can handle a vast amount of myst, you'll be nothing more than glorified amateurs. Or, in your case, Princess," she added with a mocking chuckle, "you'd be better off as a commoner."

Sheila's eyes flashed with indignation. "So, you mean to say that today, all we're doing is learning how to expand our cores? That's it?"

Mystica tilted her head, a playful gleam in her eyes. "You don't seem to grasp the gravity of the situation, do you? If your core can't sustain the vast amounts of myst your magic demands, then all the spells in the world won't help you. They'll burn out faster than you can blink. Expanding your core isn't just another lesson—it's the foundation of everything you will ever learn. Without it, you're like a candle that can't withstand the wind."

Liam shifted slightly, absorbing her words. "So, this is the first step before any real progress?"

"Exactly," Mystica replied with a sly grin. "Once you've expanded your cores, you'll have the capacity to wield more myst, and with that, you'll finally be able to handle more complex spells."

Mystica's smirk deepened as she watched the growing irritation on Sheila's face and the quiet determination in Liam's eyes. She clasped her hands behind her back, pacing lazily between them as if savoring the moment.

"To expand your core without causing backlash," she began, "you'll need to follow a very specific process. First, you must focus on controlling the flow of your myst. Overloading your core all at once will

cause it to rupture—not that I'd mind watching that, but it's a bit messy." Her tone was laced with mockery, though her words carried weight.

She stopped and turned toward them, her purple eyes glinting. "The secret lies in consistency and balance. Gradually increase the amount of myst you circulate through your core each day, pushing it slightly beyond its comfort zone. It's like stretching a muscle—too little, and you'll see no results. Too much, and you'll tear it apart."

"How do we know when we're pushing too far?" Liam asked.

Mystica grinned. "Good question, shadow boy. Your core will warn you. It'll feel like a burning ache. Push through it, but if you feel sharp pain or dizziness, back off immediately. And whatever you do, don't let your core run dry. If you drain it completely, you'll risk permanent damage."

Sheila crossed her arms, glaring at Liam before turning her attention back to Mystica. "This sounds tedious. Isn't there a faster way?"

Mystica laughed, a rich, teasing sound. "Oh, Princess, always looking for shortcuts. There is a faster way, but it involves me tearing your core apart and rebuilding it myself. Of course, that would leave you bedridden for months... assuming you survived." Her smirk widened at Sheila's horrified expression.

"No? I thought not. Patience, dear. This process takes about a week. And trust me, it's worth it. By the end, your core will be more stable and able to hold significantly more myst."

She turned on her heel, her gown brushing the grass as she began to walk away. "If, after a week, you feel satisfied with the size of your core, you can stop. But if you want to continue, you can—just be mindful not to overdo it. Greed has a nasty habit of biting back."

"Wait," Sheila called out, her tone sharp. "You're leaving us to figure this out on our own?"

Mystica stopped, glancing over her shoulder with an infuriatingly smug grin. "Of course. Consider this a test of your discipline. Besides, I'd rather not stick around and watch you two bicker like children." Her gaze flicked to Liam, then back to Sheila.

"Oh, and Princess, try not to let your distaste for him cloud your focus. You don't have to like each other, but you do have to learn."

Before Sheila could respond, Mystica raised her hand. The air around her shimmered with dark and light myst intertwining, her form dissolving into a cascade of glowing particles. As she stepped into the forest, her figure faded completely, leaving only her voice echoing behind.

"Good luck, you two. Don't blow yourselves up. Bye-bye!"

The sun remained high in the sky, casting golden rays that stretched long shadows across the clearing.

Liam and Sheila stood in a tense silence, the air between them crackling with unspoken disdain. Sheila's glare bored into Liam, her anger barely restrained.

"This is your fault," she snapped, her voice cutting through the quiet like a whip.

Liam, his hands tucked casually into his pockets, didn't bother responding. He simply turned on his heel and started walking away, his strides deliberate and unhurried.

The dismissal only fueled Sheila's fury. "How dare you walk away from me while I'm talking to you!" she barked, her voice ringing with indignation.

Liam paused mid-step, letting out a low, exasperated sigh. Without turning around, he said, "Hey, Princess? I'm not in the mood for your immature tantrums." His tone was calm, almost bored, yet carried a subtle edge that made Sheila's fists clench.

Her eyes blazed as she stepped forward. "Tch. Just because Mystica likes running her mouth doesn't mean you get to talk to me like that. Got it?" Her voice dripped with venom, her fierce gaze daring him to challenge her.

For a moment, Liam stood still. Then, he glanced over his shoulder, meeting her glare with a cold, unreadable expression. 'Annoyingly enough, it seems I'm turning into a talker. How disgusting.' he thought to

Without another word, Liam turned his gaze back to the forest and resumed walking, his figure disappearing into the trees.

Sheila's scowl deepened as she watched him vanish from sight. Her dislike for him twisted into something sharper, her thoughts spiraling. Then, an idea surfaced, and a sly smirk tugged at her lips.

'No one's here,' she thought, her pulse quickening. 'If I execute him now, no one would know. Mystica's gone, and Ariana and Dylan are all the way to the east. I'm leagues above him anyway. This might be the perfect opportunity.'