

ShadowBound 17

Chapter 17: My New Journey Begins

After their lunch, Elsie excitedly grabbed Liam's arm. "Come on, let me show you around the rest of the school!" she said, her eyes gleaming with excitement.

Liam, who had remained mostly silent during the meal, simply nodded. His red eyes swept over the bustling cafeteria one last time before following Elsie out into the open courtyard.

The sun was high in the sky now, casting warm light over the neatly paved paths and blooming gardens that lined the campus.

As they walked, students passed by, chatting, laughing, and giving the occasional curious glance toward Liam. He kept his expression neutral, but his mind was working, always observing, always calculating.

Elsie led him first toward a grand building with tall pillars and wide glass windows. "This is the library," she announced as they entered.

The inside was vast, filled with rows and rows of tall bookshelves that stretched toward the ceiling. The scent of old parchment and leather-bound books filled the air.

"You can find almost anything here--history, spell books, even some restricted sections for advanced magic studies."

Liam's eyes briefly scanned the towering shelves, mentally noting the sections he might want to explore later.

Despite his outward calm, the idea of finding new knowledge intrigued him. He didn't say much, but Elsie could tell by the way his gaze lingered that he was interested.

"We can come back later if you want," she offered. "I'll show you the best sections. I've spent way too much time in here."

Liam gave a small nod, his only acknowledgment.

Next, they headed toward the training grounds, a large, open area surrounded by tall walls where students were actively practicing magic and physical combat.

"This is where most of the action happens," Elsie said, gesturing toward the students. "You'll be spending a lot of time here, I'm sure. Everyone has different specialties--elemental magic, myst manipulation, combat skills... You name it."

Liam's eyes followed a group of students as they summoned fire and lightning, the air around them crackling with energy.

A part of him itched to join, to test his own abilities against theirs. But for now, he remained silent, his arms crossed as he watched.

Noticing his quiet contemplation, Elsie smiled. "You'll fit right in here, I'm sure."

They continued walking through the school, Elsie pointing out other important places—the alchemy lab, the auditorium where important events were held, and the dormitory building, though Liam was still staying at the Silverhart estate for now.

As they reached a more secluded part of the campus, Elsie stopped in front of a large oak tree near a small garden. "This is one of my favorite spots," she said, her voice softer now. "It's quiet here. Whenever I need to take a break from everything, I come and sit here for a while."

Liam stood next to her, his gaze following the rustling leaves of the oak tree. The tranquility of the place was noticeable, and for a moment, he allowed himself to appreciate the calm.

"You know," Elsie continued, glancing at him, "you don't have to say much. I can tell you're still adjusting to everything. But... if you ever need someone to talk to, I'm here. I just thought you should know."

Liam glanced at her briefly, then back at the tree. He wasn't used to people offering support like that, but somehow, Elsie's words didn't feel intrusive. Instead, they were comforting in a quiet way.

"Thanks," he muttered, his voice low.

They spent a few more minutes in peaceful silence before Elsie finally turned to him again. "Alright, there's just one more place I want to show you."

She led him toward another part of the school, where they arrived at a tall building with intricate stone carvings on its façade. "This is the Hall of Records," Elsie explained.

"It holds all kinds of information about the history of magic, the academy, and even some rare spells. Not many students come here, but it's one of the most valuable places on campus."

Liam's interest was piqued. If there was anywhere that might hold clues about Transcendent Affinity or other rare magic, this was likely it. He made a mental note to return here as soon as he had the chance.

"You'll probably want to spend some time here once you've settled in," Elsie added. "I know I did when I first started."

As the sun began to dip lower in the sky, casting long shadows across the campus, Elsie finally turned to Liam with a bright smile. "Well, that's the grand tour! What do you think?"

Liam, who had remained mostly quiet throughout, simply replied, "It's... useful."

Elsie laughed at his simple response. "You're a man of few words, Liam, but I'm glad you're here. I think you're going to do great."

Liam gave her a small nod, his mind already racing with plans for the days ahead. There was much to learn, and though he wasn't one to get too comfortable in new surroundings, this school offered something he couldn't ignore---knowledge and power.

After the campus tour, Mr. Ganic appeared once again, his presence calm yet authoritative.

"Liam, it's time for you to meet the principal," he announced. His voice was measured, and his gaze met Liam's with a slight nod, as if to say that this meeting was of importance.

Liam, still quiet as ever, followed Mr. Ganic through the winding corridors of the school. The deeper they went into the building, the quieter it became, the distant sounds of students fading into an eerie silence.

The walls here were adorned with portraits of past headmasters, each one with eyes that seemed to follow as they walked by. Liam's gaze lingered momentarily on each one, feeling the weight of history surround him.

They reached a set of large oak doors, intricately carved with symbols Liam couldn't yet decipher. Mr. Ganic knocked softly but firmly before pushing them open.

Inside, the principal's office was vast and elegant, with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the distant hills. The room had an ancient feel, yet it was well-kept, with rows of magical tomes lining the walls and a grand desk at the center.

Behind the desk sat the principal, an older man with sharp features and silver hair tied back in a loose ponytail. His eyes were piercing, a shade of blue so light they almost seemed to glow.

"Ah, you must be Liam," the principal said, his voice deep and resonant, carrying a certain gravity. He stood, tall and dignified, and gestured for Liam to come closer. "I am Headmaster Valen, the principal of Starfall."

Valen's gaze was intense, yet not unkind. There was wisdom behind those eyes, a kind of power that didn't need to be flaunted. As Liam walked closer, the principal's presence seemed to fill the room.

"Thank you, Ganic. You may leave us now," Valen said with a subtle wave of his hand.

Mr. Ganic nodded respectfully before leaving the office, closing the door behind him with a soft thud, leaving Liam alone with the headmaster.

Valen sat back down and gestured for Liam to take the seat opposite him. "So, Liam, tell me. How do you find Starfall so far?" His voice was calm, almost soothing, as if he had all the time in the world.

Liam, leaning back slightly in his chair, looked around the room before meeting Valen's gaze. "It's... impressive," he said, choosing his words carefully. "The facilities are extensive, and the students seem skilled."

Valen gave a nod, his expression unreadable. "That's good to hear. We strive to be a place where young magic users can hone their abilities to the fullest. It's not easy to find oneself in a school like this. Starfall is not just any academy, Liam—it's a place where the strong become stronger, where one's limits are constantly tested. The fact that you're here suggests that you've already walked a difficult path."

Liam remained silent for a moment, considering the principal's words. He wasn't one to reveal much, especially not to someone he had just met, but there was something about the principal's demeanor that made him feel as if Valen already knew more than he let on.

"I've been through... enough," Liam finally said, his voice low.

Valen smiled slightly, as if he expected that answer. "I believe you. But let's cut to the point. You've had a chance to tour the school and experience a bit of what we offer. The question now is---do you want to be a part of Starfall? This isn't a decision to take lightly, Liam. Our students are not just taught magic; they are shaped, molded into something far greater than they were before. Once you're in, you're in for life. So, do you want to join?"

Liam didn't hesitate. His mind had already been made up long before this conversation. "Yes, I do."

Valen's smile widened, though it remained subtle. "Good. Then let me be the first to officially welcome you to Starfall, the school of magic. You'll find your time here to be... transformative. But that transformation, Liam, is up to you. How far you go depends on your dedication, your willingness to push beyond your limits."

Liam gave a small nod, his face still stoic, but there was a flicker of something in his eyes---determination, perhaps. The journey ahead wouldn't be easy, but he wasn't looking for easy.

Valen leaned back in his chair, folding his hands in front of him. "One more thing before you go, Liam. You have a certain... presence about you. One that suggests you're not here solely for the sake of magic. So, tell me---what is it that truly drives you?"

Liam's gaze met the principal's once more, and he finally asked the question that had been on his mind since the tour. "Is this school solely focused on magic? Are there other areas of expertise?"

Valen raised an eyebrow, curious. "We are a school of magic, yes, but magic manifests in many ways. Why do you ask? Are you more inclined toward physical combat, perhaps?"

Liam shook his head. "No. It's not that. I'm asking out of curiosity. I wanted to understand the full scope of what's taught here."

The headmaster studied Liam for a moment longer before nodding. "Magic is the foundation of everything we teach. However, those who truly excel know that magic and physical prowess can complement each other. Should you find yourself drawn to such things, I'm sure you'll discover new paths within these walls."

With that, Valen stood, signaling the end of their conversation. "You're excused for now, Liam. Take your time to settle in, and remember---you control your own path here."

Liam stood, bowing his head slightly before turning to leave. As he walked out of the office, he couldn't help but feel a quiet excitement stirring within him. The school had more to offer than just magic. And he would find out everything he needed to know.

"And now, my journey towards power and vengeance begins"