

## ShadowBound 19

### Chapter 19: Fleeting Moments

Hours had slipped by unnoticed as Liam immersed himself in his training. Bit by bit, he had refined the resonance technique, pushing his understanding and control to greater heights. It was surprising how such a seemingly basic skill demanded so much energy — more than he had initially anticipated.

Even though Liam possessed impressive stamina and endurance, he could feel the drain creeping in. Resonance wasn't just about aligning myst; it demanded a profound connection between the body and the energy around him, and that connection took its toll.

The same could be said for his other techniques, like Extraction and the Veil of Flux. Each one required a precise blend of mental focus and physical fortitude, a delicate balance that could easily tip if his body wasn't up to the challenge.

'No matter how potent my magic becomes...', he thought, pausing to catch his breath, '...it means nothing if I can't endure the strain of battle. These techniques are only as effective as my body can handle.'

Deciding he'd had enough of resonance training for now, Liam shifted his focus. His gaze fell on a rack of weapons, and his hand naturally reached for one of the swords hanging there.

The cold steel felt reassuring against his palm. He assumed his stance, letting muscle memory take over as he began a series of drills.

Each movement was sharp, precise, the blade slicing through the air with a controlled grace that only came from years of training.

Despite everything he'd learned about magic recently, he knew he couldn't afford to neglect his combat skills. His instincts told him that battles wouldn't always be won with spells alone. He had to be just as proficient with a blade as he was with his myst.

'Magic is my main target right now, but a neglected weapon arm will only make me vulnerable.'

He paused for a moment, letting the tip of the sword rest against the ground as he wiped the sweat from his brow. Beads of perspiration trickled down his bare chest and back, the cool air of the training room offering little relief. He could feel the strain in his muscles, a familiar ache that reminded him of his limitations.

'My body's in peak condition right now, but even so, these techniques... they drain me far more than they should.' His gaze turned inward as he pondered.

'There has to be a way to make myself more resilient. More durable. Otherwise, it won't matter how skilled I am—I'll collapse before I even have a chance to fight.'

He glanced around the room, the echoes of his own breathing filling the silence. There was a part of him that refused to accept this limitation, this weakness that threatened to undo all his progress. He had come too far to be held back now.

"There has to be a way to make myself stronger... to push my body beyond its limits," he muttered under his breath, his eyes narrowing in determination.

After a few more swings of his sword, Liam decided he'd trained enough for the day. He sheathed the blade, grabbed his shirt, and exited the training room, shutting the door behind him with a soft click. He made his way up the dimly lit staircase, feeling the cool air brushing against his skin as he ascended.

The hallway was as quiet as ever, the only sign of life being the occasional maid bustling about her duties. Liam moved toward his room, but as he reached for the doorknob, a familiar presence tickled his senses. He paused, recognizing the myst aura that lingered on the other side. He wasn't alarmed—he knew exactly who it was.

Opening the door, Liam stepped inside to find Elsie sitting on the edge of his bed, fidgeting slightly.

"Oh, hey, Elsie," Liam greeted with his usual calm tone, his expression barely shifting. "Didn't expect to see you here."

"Sorry for barging into your room, Liam. I wanted to talk to you, but you weren't around, so I thought I'd wait," Elsie replied, her eyes flickering over his bare chest before she quickly glanced away, her heart skipping a beat. Wow... I didn't realize he was this... toned.

"Can we talk about that later?" Liam said nonchalantly, reaching for the hem of his pants. "I need to wash up."

"Sure, we can—" Elsie began but cut herself off as she saw him start to undress, right there in front of her, as if her presence didn't even register. Her eyes widened in shock, and her cheeks turned a deep crimson as Liam continued undressing without a hint of hesitation, now completely exposed.

Her mind blanked, and she barely managed to stammer out, "I-I'll see you later!" before bolting from the room, slamming the door shut behind her with a loud thud.

Liam, now standing naked in his room, glanced over his shoulder at the door. "Weird," he muttered to himself, shaking his head slightly before heading toward the bathroom.

Meanwhile, Elsie stood just outside his door, her back pressed firmly against the wooden surface, her chest rising and falling with rapid breaths. Her heart was pounding so hard she swore it might burst. What did I just see? Her mind raced, replaying the image of Liam's chiseled physique over and over again. He didn't even hesitate... Didn't even care that I was standing right there!

She pressed her hands against her burning cheeks, trying to cool them down. But... he was kind of... hot, she admitted to herself, biting her lip as the thought lingered. "Ah! What am I thinking?" she whispered harshly, shaking her head vigorously as if to shake the thoughts loose.

Just then, she caught sight of Ane approaching down the hall, her composed figure moving with practiced grace.

"Good evening, young mistress," Ane greeted with her usual polite tone, inclining her head slightly.

Still flustered, Elsie jumped, her eyes wide as she fumbled for words. "Mm—oh, h-hello, Ane!"

Ane gave her a curious look, tilting her head slightly. "Dinner will be ready soon, Miss Elsie. I was just about to inform Liam as well."

"L-Liam's... busy right now," Elsie stuttered, her voice embarrassingly high-pitched as she tried to act normal, her face still flaming.

"Busy?" Ane repeated, raising an eyebrow. "I see. I'll come back for him later, then." There was a brief pause before Ane's eyes narrowed in curiosity. "Miss, if you don't mind me asking, why is your face so red?"

Elsie's eyes widened in pure horror, and she immediately waved her hands frantically, her words tumbling out in a panicked rush. "N-nothing! It's nothing at all!"

Without waiting for Ane's response, Elsie turned on her heel and bolted down the hall, her embarrassment trailing behind her like a storm cloud. Ane watched her go, a bemused smile playing on her lips as she murmured to herself, "Teenagers..." before heading back to her duties.

The rest of the night seemed to pass by in a blur for Liam. After washing up, he joined the others for dinner.

The dining room was elegantly lit, with a warm glow cast by the chandeliers hanging above. The table was laden with a variety of dishes, their scents filling the room.

Dr. Dain sat at the head of the table, exuding his usual calm and authoritative presence. Beside him was Ms. Rose, Elsie's mother. She was dressed in a simple yet elegant gown. Elsie sat across from Liam, her face still tinged with a hint of red from the earlier encounter.

"So, Liam, how has your first week of school been?" Ms. Rose asked warmly, her eyes filled with genuine curiosity.

"It's been interesting," Liam replied, his tone steady, "I've learned quite a lot."

"That's good to hear," Dr. Dain added, "You have a promising path ahead of you."

Elsie, trying to keep her composure, chimed in, "Liam's really adapting well. He's even learning some interesting magic spells already."

"Is that so?" Ms. Rose's eyes brightened. "That's impressive, especially so soon. Most students take months before they can grasp few spells."

Liam gave a modest nod, "I still have a long way to go."

As the dinner continued, the conversation shifted to various topics, from Elsie's progress in her studies to some amusing stories about the patients Dr. Dain had treated recently.

Ms. Rose shared a few anecdotes of her own, and her laughter filled the room, creating a comfortable, familial atmosphere.

Elsie, who seemed more at ease now, stole glances at Liam, occasionally lost in thought about the earlier scene.

Every time their eyes met, her face would turn slightly red, causing her to quickly look away, much to her parents' confusion.

Soon, dinner came to an end, and everyone retreated to their rooms. The rest of the night passed uneventfully for Liam, and he found himself finally getting some well-deserved rest.

The weekend flew by just as quickly. Liam spent most of it training in the underground room, further refining his control over resonance and honing his combat skills.

He noticed that both Dr. Dain and Ms. Rose seemed to be busy with their own affairs, while Elsie often stopped by to observe his training, though she always kept her distance, still slightly embarrassed from their last interaction.

Before he knew it, the last day of the weekned had come to an end, and it was time to prepare for another week at the school.

