

ShadowBound 20

Chapter 20: I'm Still Lacking

Liam's second week of school began with promise, the sun casting bright rays that illuminated the bustling courtyard filled with cheerful students. Laughter and chatter echoed through the halls, but for Liam, the atmosphere felt distant.

He had just finished another session in Ms. Valeria's class, which had been less challenging than he had hoped. While his classmates absorbed the basics with enthusiasm, Liam felt trapped in a cycle of repetition.

He yearned for deeper knowledge, advanced techniques that could elevate his abilities. To him, this pace was merely treading water; he craved a path to power, and the current course offered little more than shallow lessons.

As he wandered the corridors, lost in thought, his hands shoved deep in his pockets, a heavy sense of determination washed over him.

'I might be doing my best, he pondered, but compared to everyone else here, I'm still lacking. Most of these kids have been practicing magic since childhood, developing their myst and conditioning their bodies to support their spellwork.'

In this school, young mages were trained not only in the arcane arts but also in physical conditioning tailored to their magical affinities. They learned how to harness and expand their myst while enhancing their stamina and endurance — skills that came naturally to those committed to the life of a mage.

But Liam's aspirations leaned towards becoming a knight, a path that required not just magical prowess but also the physicality to wield it effectively.

'If I'm to walk the path of a knight, he thought, I need to find a way to improve my endurance and myst consumption. I can't rely solely on my current skills; I need something more.'

The weight of this realization pressed heavily on him. His mind raced through possibilities.

'What if I could develop a training regimen that would not only build my physical strength but also enhance my myst efficiency?'

He tried to envision a method that would merge the principles of combat training with magical conditioning — something that would allow him to push his limits without succumbing to fatigue.

As Liam moved through the corridors, lost in his thoughts, he collided with someone — a soft, feminine figure. A small gasp escaped her lips, and a book slipped from her grasp, tumbling to the floor. Without hesitation, Liam bent down to retrieve it.

"Sorry about that," he said, lifting the book with a casual grace. "I should've been paying more attention to where I was going." He stood upright, extending the book to her.

The girl before him was strikingly beautiful, with gentle features framed by dark hair that fell in loose waves around her shoulders. Her eyes, however, betrayed a flicker of unease as they darted toward Liam's shadow, which seemed to shift subtly on its own.

Despite the fear that briefly crossed her face, she managed to maintain her composure, offering a polite smile.

"Don't worry about it," she replied, her voice soft but clear. "I wasn't paying much attention either." As she reached out for the book, Liam noticed that her arms were already burdened with several other volumes, and she struggled to balance them.

Liam, with an understanding smile, gently placed the book atop the stack she was holding, careful not to disturb her precarious balance. "There you go," he said.

"Thank you," she replied, her smile warming in genuine gratitude. "I haven't seen you around here before. Are you new?"

"Yes, I am," Liam responded, his tone as composed as always.

"Ah, I thought so," she nodded. "I'm Alice, by the way."

"Liam," he introduced himself simply.

"It's nice to meet you, Liam," Alice said, a glimmer of curiosity in her eyes. "Well, I'd love to chat more, but I've got a ton of work to get through. See you around." With a quick, friendly wave, she hurried off, the books bobbing in her arms.

Liam watched her retreating figure, something about her myst lingering in his thoughts. It felt gentle and serene, unlike most he had encountered so far.

But as quickly as the thought appeared, it vanished, replaced by a realization — if students like Alice were carrying around so many books, then the library might hold the answers he was searching for.

Changing his course, Liam made his way toward the library. The grand entrance loomed before him, flanked by intricate carvings that hinted at the wealth of knowledge stored within.

Stepping inside, he was greeted by the faint scent of parchment and the soft rustle of pages turning. The room was vast, shelves stretching high with books on every subject imaginable.

As he scanned the area, his eyes landed on a woman seated at a desk. She had striking features, framed by auburn hair that cascaded down her shoulders, and wore a pair of glasses that only seemed to enhance her allure.

Her attire was formal, but there was a playful glint in her eyes as she noticed Liam approaching.

"Hello," he greeted, his voice steady.

The woman looked up, her lips curling into a smile. "Well, hello there, handsome," she said, a hint of flirtation in her tone. "What can I do for you today?" Her gaze lingered on him, taking in the details of his face and stance with unabashed interest.

"I'm looking for a book," Liam began, unfazed by her demeanor. "Something that teaches how to build endurance and stamina to better support magic usage."

The woman raised an eyebrow, clearly intrigued. "Now that's not a request I hear every day," she remarked, tapping her pen thoughtfully against her lips.

"Most people are just interested in flashy spells and incantations. But you... you're looking for the foundation." She pointed down a hallway lined with shelves. "Take the right corridor, third row from the end. You might find something that suits your needs there."

"Thank you," Liam said with a respectful nod, turning to leave.

"Anytime, darling," she called after him, a mischievous twinkle in her eyes as she watched him walk away.

As Liam headed in the direction she had indicated, he felt a surge of anticipation. This library, he hoped, would hold the secrets he needed to become stronger — step by step, he was drawing closer to his goal.

Liam reached the section he had been directed to and began scanning the shelves, his eyes trailing over the spines of countless books, each title promising some form of knowledge.

With each book he pulled out and skimmed through, however, he felt his hope slowly waning. Despite the range of topics — combat techniques, myst manipulation, mystical endurance — not a single one seemed to offer the insight he was searching for.

Minutes stretched on, turning into what felt like an eternity, as he worked his way through the rows. Still, nothing. He felt the frustration bubbling within him, a sense of impatience itching at the back of his mind.

Just as he was about to give up and leave, his foot nudged something—something out of place.

Looking down, he noticed a dusty, worn-out book protruding slightly from the bottom shelf. He attempted to shove it back with his foot, but it refused to budge. After an exasperated sigh, Liam crouched down, reaching for the book.

As his fingers closed around it, he tilted it upward to read the faded lettering on the cover: Crimson Breathing.

The title sparked something in him, a sense of intrigue. He opened it, flipping through the pages, and as his eyes darted over the words, he felt a rush of excitement.

This was exactly what he needed — a detailed guide on harnessing myst through controlled breathing techniques, methods to build endurance, and ways to enhance his stamina.

The text spoke of channeling one's myst with precision, allowing for prolonged use of techniques without succumbing to exhaustion. This was the missing piece he had been searching for.

Rising to his feet, Liam held the book with a newfound sense of purpose. He headed back toward the library's entrance, feeling the weight of the knowledge he now possessed.

As he approached the front desk, the librarian from before was still there, her eyes lighting up when she saw him return.

"Hey, I'm back," Liam said, holding up the book. "Can I take this one?"

The woman's gaze flickered to the cover, and she let out an impressed whistle. "Crimson Breathing, huh? That's not something many people pick up." Her tone was playful, but her eyes carried a hint of curiosity.

"Of course, sweetie, you can. All these books are here for you to learn from. Just be sure you actually read it," she added with a wink.

"Thank you," Liam replied, a rare smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. He turned to leave, his mind already swimming with possibilities.

"Anytime, darling," she called after him, her voice trailing off as he disappeared into the corridors.

With the book tucked under his arm, Liam felt a surge of anticipation. This was it—the next step in his journey toward power. And he wasn't going to waste a single moment.