

ShadowBound 23

Chapter 23: I Will Make It No Matter What

Liam moved through the hallway, his steps purposeful as he headed toward the library. The echo of his own thoughts lingered in his mind, especially the moment when Elsie had healed him.

"She managed to heal me..." He replayed the memory, the warmth of her magic still fresh in his mind. "Dr. Dain couldn't do it when he first found me, but Elsie did, and it was an internal injury."

He frowned slightly, shaking his head to clear the distraction. "Focus, that's not important right now."

Arriving at the library, Liam's eyes settled on the familiar figure of the librarian from his last visit. She looked up, a smile playing on her lips, eyes glinting with curiosity.

"Well, look who's back," she greeted, her tone light and teasing. "Finished the book already?"

"Not quite," Liam replied, maintaining his calm demeanor. "I actually came to ask you about something else."

"Oh? And what might that be?" she asked, leaning forward slightly, still dripping with that playful flirtation.

"Do you know anything about a flower that grows in volcanic soil?" Liam asked directly, his voice steady.

The librarian tilted her head, pondering for a moment. "Volcanic soil?" She tapped her chin thoughtfully. "Can't say I know off the top of my head. But, you might want to ask that girl over there." She gestured to a nearby table where a girl sat surrounded by stacks of books, her eyes darting back and forth as she took notes. "She's known for her research skills. If anyone here knows, it's her."

Liam turned in the direction she indicated, and to his surprise, it was a familiar face. "Thank you," he said with a nod, already moving toward the table.

"Anytime, darling," the librarian called out with a wink.

As Liam approached, he greeted her, "Hello, Alice."

Alice paused, glancing up from the pages with a slight squint before recognition flashed across her face. "Oh, Liam! Hi!" She offered a warm smile. "Didn't expect to see you here."

"How's everything?" he asked casually.

"I'm doing well. Just buried in a bit of research as usual," she said, gesturing to the array of books spread out around her.

Liam nodded, glancing at the numerous texts. "It certainly looks that way. Actually, I could use your help with something."

"Sure," Alice said, her interest piqued. "What's on your mind?"

"I'm searching for a flower that grows in volcanic soil," he explained, his tone as steady and calm as ever.

"Hmm, a flower that grows in volcanic soil..." Alice repeated, her brows furrowing in thought. "I think I've come across something like that before." She stood up, moving to one of the nearby shelves with practiced ease, her fingers tracing the spines of the books until she found the one she needed. Pulling it out, she quickly flipped through the pages, her eyes scanning line after line until she found what she was looking for.

"Here it is," she said, turning the book toward Liam. "The flower you're looking for is called the Emberflower."

"Emberflower?" Liam echoed, leaning in to read.

Alice nodded, summarizing as she continued. "It's a rare flower known for its deep red petals that almost seem to glow, like embers from a fire. They bloom in areas rich with myst and are often found in volcanic soil. According to this, you might be able to find one near the outskirts of Nystra City, right at the border where Zone 14 begins. That area's known for its volcanic soil."

"Zone 14," Liam repeated, absorbing the information. "Thank you, Alice. This is exactly what I needed."

She smiled, closing the book. "Happy to help. Just be careful out there; the terrain can be quite dangerous."

"I will," he assured her, a rare hint of gratitude touching his voice. "Thanks again."

"Anytime, Liam," Alice replied, watching him as he turned to leave, her curiosity lingering on him as he walked out of the library.

As Liam stepped out of the library, the fresh air greeted him, and he couldn't help but let his thoughts wander to the information he had just uncovered.

"Emberflower, huh?" he murmured to himself, his steps steady but his mind racing. "Liora called it the Myst Infusion Catalyst... Quite a dramatic name, but I suppose it fits."

He paused for a moment, glancing up at the sky as the sun dipped lower, painting everything in hues of orange and gold. "If I'm going to obtain this flower, I'll need to prepare carefully. But more than that, I need to master Crimson Breathing first before I even consider venturing out."

Liora's words from the book echoed in his mind: the flower could only be harvested at dawn or dusk, moments when myst is most potent in the air. He clenched his fists slightly, his resolve hardening. "Considering my current circumstances, dawn is the best option. The city will still be asleep, and I can slip away unnoticed."

As Liam continued walking, his thoughts grew sharper, more deliberate. He mentally mapped out his training regimen, refining every step, every breath, every movement he would need to perfect in order to master Crimson Breathing. He would have to push himself beyond his limits, reaching heights he hadn't even imagined.

"Six months," he thought with unwavering determination. "That's all the time I have. Six months to learn and master not just the basics, but to reach Overdrive."

The enormity of the task would have deterred anyone else, but Liam wasn't anyone else. To him, the concept of failure simply didn't exist. It wasn't arrogance; it was a belief forged from the countless battles, hardships, and an unyielding spirit. He had always found a way, even when the odds were against him.

"Even if it's deemed impossible," Liam whispered to himself, a faint smile tugging at the corners of his lips, "I'll find a way. And if there isn't one, I'll carve my own path."

With newfound resolve burning in his eyes, Liam quickened his pace, the goal clear and the path set. He would master Crimson Breathing, obtain the Emberflower, and become stronger than ever before — no matter what it took.

As Liam arrived back at the Silverhart residence that evening, there was no hesitation in his steps. He moved with purpose, heading straight to the training room that had become his sanctuary.

The air was cool, carrying the familiar scent of wood and stone, and as he stepped inside, the soft glow of the mysterious light enveloped him. It illuminated the countless scratches and marks on the walls, silent witnesses to his countless hours of struggle and determination.

Now, in his usual training attire — loose black pants that allowed freedom of movement — Liam stood shirtless, the faint scars on his torso catching the light, each one telling a story of battles fought and survived.

His muscles, lean and taut, rippled with every slight movement as he took in a deep breath, feeling the air fill his lungs, grounding himself in the present moment.

Taking his place in the center of the room, he lowered himself into a meditation pose. His legs crossed, hands resting gently on his knees, eyes shut tight, and his back straight.

The silence in the room was almost deafening, amplifying the sound of his slow, steady breathing. Liam pushed all other thoughts aside, focusing solely on the rhythm of his breath, the rise and fall of his chest, the flow of myst circulating within him.

Minutes passed, and then, as if a switch had been flipped, he felt it — a sudden surge of energy as he entered the Ignition Phase of Crimson Breathing. It was as if a spark had ignited a flame within him, spreading warmth and power throughout his body.

His muscles tightened, his senses sharpened, and his heartbeat grew louder, echoing in his ears like a drum. Every beat sent a pulse of energy coursing through his veins, fueling him.

Unlike before, this time, Liam wasn't focusing on spells or intricate magic techniques. His mind was locked onto one goal: sharpening his combat skills and refining his physical prowess.

He rose from his meditation pose, his movements fluid and deliberate. With each breath he took, his body seemed to vibrate with energy, his heart racing in harmony with the controlled, steady rhythm of his breaths.

He began his routine, starting with a series of punches. His fists cut through the air with such speed that they left faint trails of myst behind, like wisps of smoke dissipating into the room.

Each punch was precise, calculated, and the power behind them intensified as he continued, his muscles working in perfect harmony with the flow of myst.

Inhale... punch... exhale... kick...

He moved seamlessly, transitioning from one technique to the next, sweat forming on his brow but never distracting him. His movements were relentless, a blur of strikes, jabs, and kicks that would have sent lesser opponents crumbling.

As he entered the second minute, he felt a sharp, stabbing pain in his lungs, as though his chest was being constricted by an invisible force.

It was as if the air itself had turned to molten fire, burning him from the inside out. Yet Liam didn't falter. He gritted his teeth, his eyes narrowing as he pushed through the pain. 'Not yet', he told himself. 'I can take more.'

With each passing second, the pain intensified, but so did his resolve. He shifted his weight, ducking and weaving as if dodging invisible blows, his body twisting and turning with the grace of a predator honing in on its prey.

He could feel the power of the Ignition Phase coursing through every fiber of his being, strengthening him, driving him forward.

Three minutes... Four minutes...

The agony in his lungs grew sharper, more unbearable, but Liam's face remained stoic, unyielding. Sweat dripped down his forehead, tracing lines along his cheekbones and jaw, falling to the ground in soft, echoing splatters.

Each breath felt like inhaling shards of glass, yet he refused to stop. His hands blurred through the air, muscles burning with every strike, every kick.

Finally, as he crossed the five-minute mark, his body trembled, his breaths coming out in ragged gasps, and the myst around him began to flicker. He could feel the Ignition Phase slipping, the flame dimming, but he fought to maintain it, to squeeze out every last drop of strength it offered.

He could barely feel his limbs, the pain in his lungs like molten lava, but there was a fire in his eyes — one that refused to be extinguished.

'Just a little more...'

And then, as suddenly as it began, he felt the Ignition Phase dissipate. The warmth that had filled him ebbed away, replaced by a chill that spread through his body, leaving him drained. He fell to his knees, his chest heaving, drawing in desperate gulps of air as if he had been submerged underwater.

But despite the pain, despite the exhaustion that weighed on him like a heavy cloak, a faint smile tugged at Liam's lips. He had done it — he had pushed past his limits, endured the pain, and held onto the Ignition Phase longer than he ever had before. And he knew that if he could endure this, he could go even further.

"Just the beginning," he whispered to himself, eyes gleaming with renewed determination. The road ahead was long, and the challenges were many, but as far as Liam was concerned, he would conquer them all. One breath at a time.

As Liam trained intensely in the solitude of the training room, the sun had begun its slow descent, signaling the approach of dinnertime. Ane, ever attentive to her duties, made her way toward his room to inform him that it was almost time to eat.

When she reached his door, she knocked gently, waiting for a response, but none came. Frowning slightly, she knocked again, this time with a bit more force, but still, there was silence.

Curiosity and concern piqued, Ane opened the door, only to find the room empty. Her eyes scanned the space, noting that there was no sound from the washroom either, confirming her suspicions.

"Of course, he's in the training room," she muttered under her breath, a small smile tugging at the corners of her lips. Closing the door behind her, Ane made her way through the hall, descending the stairs toward the familiar door at the far end of the house. As she walked, her thoughts drifted toward the enigmatic young man.

"I've never seen anyone as driven as that boy," Ane murmured to herself. "Well, apart from Dr. Dain, but even then..." Her voice trailed off as she recalled the intensity in Liam's eyes, the same fire she had seen every day since he regained consciousness.

"Two weeks, and he's already made such remarkable progress. It's as if he's fighting against time itself."

When she reached the door to the training room, she reached for the handle, but as soon as her fingers made contact, she recoiled with a soft gasp.

The metal was hot to the touch, almost searing. Her heart quickened, and her eyes narrowed with concern. Carefully, she pressed her hand to the door again, this time more cautiously, and pulled it open.

The sight before her was something she hadn't anticipated. Liam stood in the center of the room, drenched in sweat, his bare chest heaving as he fought to catch his breath.

But it wasn't just sweat that caught her eye — there was steam, an actual mist of vapor, rising from his skin as if he were a furnace. It swirled around him, dissipating into the air, and his entire body radiated a heat that made the room feel several degrees warmer.

For a moment, Ane could only stare, frozen in place. Her mind raced, trying to make sense of what she was witnessing. It was both mesmerizing and alarming—the sheer intensity of whatever he was doing had pushed his body to the brink.

Finally finding her voice, she cleared her throat, though it came out a little shaky. "Liam," she called out, trying to sound composed despite the shock. "It's almost time for dinner."

Liam's head slowly turned towards her, his eyes still burning with that fierce determination, but there was something else in them too—fatigue, but also triumph, as if he had conquered something invisible and monumental.

He nodded, breathing heavily, and wiped the sweat from his brow, sending another plume of steam into the air.

"Thank you, Ane," he said, his voice hoarse yet steady. "I'll be there shortly."

Ane could only nod in return, still transfixed by the sight of him. As she turned to leave, she couldn't help but murmur under her breath, "What kind of training could push someone this far?"

Her heart skipped a beat, and a shiver ran down her spine, not from fear, but from the realization that this boy —no, this young man — was on a path that even she couldn't begin to fathom.