

ShadowBound 30

Chapter 30: Midnight Journey

It was the last school day of the week, and Liam had made all his preparations. Tonight, at midnight, he would set off to the outskirts of Nystra City. He had returned from school earlier, choosing to forgo training in favor of getting his mind focused on the task ahead. The day passed quickly, as if time itself was aligning with his intentions.

In his room, Liam heard a gentle knock on the door. He rose from his bed and opened it, finding Ane standing there with her usual grace.

"Oh, hello, Ane. I assume it's dinnertime?" Liam asked.

"Yes, it is. May I escort you to the dining room?" Ane replied, her tone soft and polite.

"Of course," Liam agreed, stepping out to follow her.

As they entered the dining room, Liam noticed Elsie was already seated, looking a bit lost in thought. She perked up when she saw him.

"Oh, hey, Liam," Elsie greeted with a bright smile. "Looks like it's just the two of us tonight."

"That's true," Ane interjected. "Dr. Dain and Mrs. Rose have traveled to visit her mother in Vio City."

"I see," Liam replied, his tone calm as ever.

The dinner started quietly, but Elsie wasn't content with the silence. She began bringing up various topics, eager to engage Liam in conversation. "So, Liam, how did your studies go today?" she asked, trying to sound casual.

"They went well. I managed to finish ahead of schedule," Liam replied, his tone polite but lacking much enthusiasm.

"Ah, that's good," Elsie continued, searching for another topic. "Did you get a chance to read any of the books I suggested? I think you'd really like the one about the ancient kingdoms."

Liam nodded, taking a sip of his water. "I did. The history of the Mystra Empire was intriguing. Their methods of integrating myst with architecture were quite advanced for their time."

Elsie blinked, not expecting such an in-depth response. "I... I didn't think you'd read that much of it already," she admitted, impressed.

"When you suggested it, I figured it might be worth the time," Liam said, his tone steady but sincere. "You always seem to have good taste in books."

There it was—a casual compliment, but it hit Elsie like a bolt of lightning. Her cheeks turned a deep shade of red, and she nearly dropped her fork. "R-really?" she stammered, flustered.

Liam simply nodded, completely unaware of the effect his words had. "Yeah, I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it," he said nonchalantly before taking another bite of his food, his eyes focused elsewhere.

Elsie's heart skipped a beat. She tried to compose herself, but every time she glanced at him, her blush deepened, her thoughts swirling in ways she couldn't control.

It was clear Liam had no idea of the impact he had just made, and that only made her cheeks burn even more.

The dinner continued, and despite her best efforts, Elsie found herself stealing glances at him, her heart fluttering with every word he spoke.

As dinner ended, Liam pushed his chair back and stood, his movements fluid and purposeful. "Goodnight, Elsie," he said, offering a small nod.

Elsie, still reeling from their earlier conversation, hesitated before responding, her voice softer than usual. "Goodnight, Liam."

As he turned to leave, she watched him with a hint of longing, her eyes lingering on his back as he walked away.

There was something about him tonight—an air of quiet determination, as if he was carrying a burden she couldn't quite understand.

The moment he stepped out of the dining room, Liam's expression shifted, his gaze sharpening with renewed focus. He moved through the dimly lit hallways of the Silverhart residence, the warmth of the dinner quickly fading from his mind.

He had no time to linger on the pleasantries of the evening; his mission awaited him.

Back in his room, Liam closed the door with a soft click, plunging the space into silence. He took a deep breath, steadying himself as he glanced at the window, the sky outside already painted with the dark hues of night.

Midnight was approaching, and every passing second brought him closer to the journey ahead.

He began his preparations, slipping into darker, more practical clothing that blended with the shadows. The faint shimmer of his myst enveloping his hands as he readied himself for the Resonance technique.

He glanced at his reflection in the mirror, seeing the faint glow of crimson around his eyes, a reminder of the power he had been training to harness. "Tonight," he whispered to himself, "I'll get my hands on the Emberflower."

With one last look around his room, Liam exhaled slowly, feeling the surge of energy pulse through him, reigniting his determination.

As he stepped towards the window, ready to disappear into the night, his thoughts briefly flickered back to the dinner, to Elsie's shy smile and the warmth of her voice.

A small smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. "Until tomorrow," he muttered before slipping out into the darkness, the cool night air enveloping him as he moved silently toward his destiny.

Liam descended from the window in a seamless motion, landing silently on the soft grass below. He paused, his senses sharpening as he took in the surroundings.

The night was still, with only the faint rustling of leaves in the breeze. Shadows stretched across the Silverhart courtyard, but no human presence stirred.

Satisfied, he closed his eyes, reaching out with his myst. He let it flow, extending his awareness like a web, feeling every ripple of energy around him.

The myst was calm—still and undisturbed. Everyone was asleep. A faint smile curved his lips. He straightened, then spoke softly, his voice carrying an eerie calm. "Come out."

From the depths of his shadow, a creature materialized, its form rising from the darkness like ink spreading through water.

The beast stood before him, towering at a height of seven feet at the shoulders, and stretched an impressive ten feet in length. Its sleek, muscular body glistened faintly under the moonlight, exuding an air of primal strength.

Four powerful limbs ended in sharp, clawed paws that dug into the ground, and its eyes gleamed with a dull, crimson light as they fixed on Liam.

'Still as formidable as ever,' Liam thought, observing his companion. He could feel the power radiating from the creature, a reflection of the bond they shared. 'With you, this journey will be swift.'

Taking a step forward, Liam placed a hand on the beast's sleek, shadowy fur. He could feel the faint pulse of energy within, like a heartbeat. Closing his eyes, he steadied his breathing, letting the rhythm of Crimson Breathing guide him.

The air around him thickened as he pushed himself into the Ignition Phase, the first sparks of crimson igniting within his veins. Heat surged through his body, filling him with a sense of power and heightened awareness.

As the crimson aura enveloped him, he channeled it into the creature, activating the Resonance technique. The bond between them tightened, an invisible tether of myst connecting their souls.

Liam could feel the creature's strength surging, its muscles coiling with newfound energy, its heartbeat syncing with his own.

"There we go," he whispered, his voice barely audible. He climbed onto the creature's back, feeling its immense power hum beneath him, ready to be unleashed.

With a simple command, "Move," the creature sprang to life. It exploded forward with breathtaking speed, the ground blurring beneath them. Liam felt the wind whip against his face, tearing through his hair and tugging at his clothes.

It was exhilarating, the sheer force of their momentum as they sliced through the night, leaving the Silverhart residence far behind.

The resonance between them was perfect—every stride, every shift in the creature's movements matched Liam's intent. He could feel the Ignition Phase amplifying his connection, allowing him to push the creature to its absolute limit.

His heart thundered in his chest, but he remained focused, eyes narrowed against the rush of wind, determined to reach his destination before dawn broke.

In nearly fifteen minutes, Liam reached the outskirts of Nystra City, the creature slowing to a halt at the perfect spot under the starlit sky. He slid off its back, the grass cool beneath his feet. With a gentle pat on the side of its face, he commanded, "Return."

In an instant, the creature melted back into the depths of Liam's shadow, vanishing without a trace. He took a deep breath, looking out over the vast expanse before him.

"I got here faster than I thought; I can barely feel any pain in my chest," he murmured to himself, relishing the open land.

Had he simply entered the Furnace State or the Ignition Phase to sprint directly to the outskirts, he would have undoubtedly exhausted himself long before arriving.

Instead, using the Ignition Phase to enhance his Resonance technique had proven to be a brilliant tactic, allowing him to maximize his energy while minimizing wear on his body.

As he moved forward, the stillness of the night enveloped him. He paused to take in the sweeping vista, the silhouettes of distant trees etched against the twilight sky.

In that moment, he felt the weight of memories from Zone 14 crash over him—brief flashes of the Dark Forest, the battles fought, the lessons learned.

But as swiftly as the memories came, they were gone. "Screw that. It's all in the past now," he muttered, shaking his head to dispel the thoughts. He refocused his gaze, honing in on the vibrant presence of the Emberflower pulsing in the distance.

With each step toward the source, the energy grew stronger, a vibrant hum resonating through the air. He pushed through clusters of bushes, the night alive with the rustle of leaves and the distant calls of nocturnal creatures.

And then, as he moved through one particularly dense thicket, he saw it: a patch of flowers, their crimson petals glowing softly like embers in the night.

Liam's heart raced with excitement; he had finally found the Emberflower. He approached slowly, marveling at its beauty and the anticipation of what it could mean for his mastery of Crimson Breathing. It was an unexpected stroke of luck—no traps, no guards, no obstacles in sight.

But just as the thought crossed his mind, a chilling breeze swept through the clearing, causing the petals to tremble. The atmosphere shifted, and Liam's instincts flared. He glanced around, the sudden weight of silence settling in, pressing against his chest.

Liam felt it—an unsettling presence lurking in the shadows, something inhuman and undeniably lethal. The air thickened around him, as if the very atmosphere pulsed with a predatory energy, sending a chill racing down his spine.