

ShadowBound 36

Chapter 36: That's Where I Belong

It was an unusually hot weekend, the sun blazing more intensely than usual. Liam made his way down the hallway of the Silverhart residence, his steps steady as he approached Dr. Dain's office.

'Why would he be asking for me now?' Liam wondered as he moved closer, unsure of what to expect. When he finally reached the door, he knocked lightly.

"Come in," Dr. Dain's voice was heard faintly from the other side.

Liam pushed the door open, entering to find Dr. Dain seated at his desk. What surprised him more was the sight of Elsie, who was also in the room, sitting in one of the chairs.

Liam raised an eyebrow, momentarily confused as to why both he and Elsie had been called in together. However, he brushed off the thought for the moment.

"Good morning, Dr. Dain," Liam greeted, his usual composed tone carrying into the room. He then turned to Elsie. "Hello, Elsie."

"Morning, Liam," Dain replied warmly, nodding toward him before shifting to business. "How are you doing today?"

"I'm doing well, thank you," Liam responded calmly, his curiosity still lingering.

"Glad to hear that," Dain said with a smile, his voice gentle.

"Dad?" Elsie chimed in, curiosity written across her face. "Why did you call us here?"

Dain chuckled softly. "I was just getting to that." He gestured for Liam to take a seat. "Liam, go ahead and sit down."

Liam obliged, taking a seat beside Elsie and settling into a quiet, focused state.

"Well," Dain began, his tone more serious now, "I wanted to talk to both of you because, as you know, next week you'll both be heading off to your respective high schools. I think it's important to start planning for what comes next. I'd like to hear from both of you about which Academies you plan on attending."

Elsie leaned forward slightly, curiosity piqued. "Oh, so that's why you called us in?" she asked, smiling.

"Exactly, sweetheart," Dain replied. "It's better to start preparing now rather than wait until the last minute."

Elsie nodded. "Well, I've been thinking a lot about it, and I've decided... I want to go to the Citadel of Honor Mage Academy in Zone 7. I've always wanted to focus on magic, and I think that's the best place for me to grow." She smiled brightly, her passion for magic clear.

Dain nodded knowingly, pride shining in his eyes. "I had a feeling you'd choose the Citadel. It's a great Academy for mages, and I know you'll do well there, Elsie."

He then turned to Liam, his expression soft but inquisitive. "And you, Liam? Have you decided on where you want to go? The Citadel is a great option, but maybe you've got something else in mind."

Liam, who had been quietly listening, met Dain's gaze. His expression remained as calm and unreadable as ever. "I've decided to attend the Dark Knight Academy in Zone 12," he stated evenly.

Dr. Dain raised his eyebrows, clearly impressed.

"The Dark Knight Academy? That's quite the choice. It's renowned for producing some of the best knights across all 24 zones. A top-tier Academy for those seeking to master combat and knighthood."

He paused, smiling at Liam. "That's a very strong choice, Liam. I'm sure you'll excel there."

Liam nodded in acknowledgment, his calm demeanor unchanged. "Thank you, Dr. Dain."

Dain leaned back in his chair, a reassuring smile on his face. "Well, I'm glad to hear both of your plans. Now that I know, I can do my best to help you both prepare for what's ahead."

He stood up slightly from his chair. "You're both free to go now. Thanks for sharing your next steps with me."

Both Liam and Elsie stood up, giving polite nods to Dr. Dain before turning toward the door. As they stepped out into the hallway, Dain remained in his office, lost in thought.

'They've chosen great Academies to continue their journeys,' Dain thought to himself, a hint of pride swelling in his chest. 'Next week, they'll be setting off on their new paths. I'll do everything I can to support them as they move toward their futures.'

As Liam and Elsie made their way back to their respective rooms, Elsie trailed behind him, her expression clouded with disappointment.

Ever since Liam had mentioned his decision to attend the Dark Knight Academy, she couldn't shake the feeling of unhappiness. She had been silently hoping they would both go to the Citadel of Honor Mage Academy together, but it seemed Liam had other plans.

"Mm... Liam?" she called out, her voice soft, almost hesitant.

Liam slowed his pace and turned slightly to face her. "Yeah?" he responded, his voice as calm and neutral as always.

"Can we... talk a little?" Elsie asked, her cheeks slightly flushed with a hint of shyness.

Liam raised an eyebrow, not entirely sure what she had on her mind, and truthfully, he wasn't particularly eager to hear it. Still, he thought it would be rude to just brush her off. After a short pause, he nodded.

"Alright, sure. We can talk," he said, though his tone was more courteous than curious.

They made their way to the courtyard, where a shaded structure stood in the center, offering some reprieve from the sun. It was a quiet spot, perfect for conversation.

As they sat down beneath the shade, the silence between them lingered awkwardly, with Elsie clearly struggling to find her words. Liam waited patiently, his stoic expression betraying no emotion, until finally, he decided to break the silence himself.

"What did you want to talk about, Elsie?" he asked, his voice gentle but direct.

Elsie hesitated for a moment, then took a breath. "I... I wanted to know why you want to go to a knight academy," she said, her voice a little quieter than usual.

"I'm not trying to be nosy or anything, but... you've trained so hard with a sword already. You're already skilled in combat, and... well, you've been learning magic, but you know less about it. Wouldn't a mage academy be better for you?"

Her words hung in the air as she waited for his response, her concern clear in her tone.

She wasn't trying to question his choices, but it didn't make sense to her. Why wouldn't he choose the Citadel if magic was an area he could still improve?

Liam listened quietly, his face unmoved, his expression unreadable as always. What she said wasn't wrong—he was better with a sword, and the Citadel was the ideal place for someone looking to sharpen their magical abilities.

But there was something deeper that pushed him toward the Dark Knight Academy, something more personal. His grandfather's dying wish for him had been clear: to attend the Dark Knight Academy.

It wasn't just a matter of combat versus magic; it was a feeling in his gut, a pull he couldn't fully explain.

"You're right, Elsie," he began, his voice as calm as ever. "The Citadel would help me improve in magic. But going to the knight academy... it's something I just have to do."

Elsie blinked, taken aback by the simplicity of his answer. "But... why?" she asked, her voice quiet yet pressing, though not forcefully.

"Is it just because of your training? I mean, you've been learning magic too, and I thought maybe... maybe you'd—" she trailed off, not wanting to sound too personal or emotional.

Liam sighed softly, realizing she wasn't going to let it go so easily. "It's not just about training," he said, his gaze shifting slightly away.

"There are other reasons... reasons that aren't easy to explain." He paused, then added, "It's not something I can just ignore."

Elsie lowered her eyes, her fingers fidgeting in her lap. She understood that pushing further wouldn't get her anywhere. His answer wasn't what she had hoped for, but she could sense that there was more to his decision than he was letting on.

"I see..." she whispered, clearly disappointed but trying to respect his choice. After a long silence, she glanced up at him, offering a small, sad smile. "I guess I just thought we'd... you know, go to the same academy together."

Liam turned his gaze back to her, sensing her unspoken feelings but unable to offer anything more. "I'm sorry, Elsie," he said quietly, though there was no hesitation or uncertainty in his voice. "But I have to follow this path."

Elsie nodded, trying her best to hide the hurt in her expression. "I understand," she said softly, though the sadness in her voice lingered.

After a brief moment, she stood up, dusting off her dress. "I just... wanted to know," she added with a forced chuckle, trying to lighten the mood.

Liam remained seated, watching her as she prepared to leave. "Thanks for understanding," he said, his tone softer now, though still carrying that distant calm.

Elsie offered one final smile, though it didn't quite reach her eyes. "Yeah... I'll see you around, Liam."

As she walked away, Liam sat in silence, watching her retreating figure. He knew that his choice to go to the Dark Knight Academy wasn't something everyone would understand.

But deep down, he knew it was where he needed to be, even if it meant parting ways with people who cared about him.