

ShadowBound 37

Chapter 37: The Time Has Come

The day had finally arrived. Liam and Elsie stood at the threshold of a new Chapter in their lives, each bound for different academies, their futures diverging in directions neither could fully foresee.

Their bags were already packed, and a carriage waited outside the Silverhart residence, ready to take them to the train station. Dr. Dain and Ms. Rose had decided to accompany them, wanting to see them off and offer their final words of encouragement.

It took around ten minutes for the carriage to reach the station. As they pulled up, Liam was the first to step down, scanning the busy scene before him.

The station was alive with activity; families saying their goodbyes, students preparing to head to their academies, and the hum of excitement and nerves filled the air. It wasn't surprising.

Today was the day many would embark on their new paths.

The carriage driver began unloading their luggage, and while this was happening, Dr. Dain excused himself to buy the tickets for Liam and Elsie. He made his way to the ticket counter where a familiar face greeted him.

"Hello, Dr. Dain. Heading to Vio City again?" the man behind the counter asked with a smile.

"Not this time," Dain replied with a small chuckle. "Today, my daughter Elsie and a friend's child are off to their academies."

The man glanced toward Liam and Elsie, who stood together by the carriage. "Ah, those two over there? They look ready for anything."

Dr. Dain smiled warmly. "Yes, that's them."

The ticket vendor shook his head, chuckling. "You seem calm about it. If it were my kid leaving for a far-off city, I'd be a wreck."

Dr. Dain sighed softly, his smile faltering just a little. "I'm not exactly calm, to be honest. I'll miss them both. But... I can't let my feelings hold them back from chasing their dreams."

The vendor nodded, admiration clear on his face. "That's a good way to look at it, Dr. Dain. Well, here are the tickets."

"One to Grandeur City and one to Citadel City," the vendor said, handing them over.

"Thank you," Dain said, giving a courteous nod before turning to head back toward the group.

As he approached, Elsie spotted him first. Her eyes lit up as she nudged Liam. "There's Dad."

Liam and Ms. Rose turned to see Dain walking toward them with the tickets in hand.

"Did you get the tickets, honey?" Ms. Rose asked as he drew near.

"Yes, I did," Dain replied, glancing at Liam. "And it looks like Liam will be leaving first."

Liam remained silent, his gaze drifting toward the distant trains.

Dain checked the ticket in his hand before pointing. "Your train leaves in about twenty minutes, Liam. That's the one over there, headed to Grandeur City."

Ms. Rose smiled, her voice soft but encouraging. "Let's get your things on board, Liam."

With the driver's help, they began loading Liam's luggage onto the train. Unlike Elsie, whose baggage consisted of various essentials and more than a few books, Liam's belongings were few and practical.

It didn't take long, but the platform was crowded with other passengers doing the same, so the process took around fifteen minutes.

"Looks like we're all set—" Dr. Dain began, but his words were cut off by the station's loudspeaker.

"The Grandeur City train will be departing in five minutes. Passengers, please take your seats."

Dain turned to Liam with a warm smile. "Well, it's time, Liam. You'd better head to your seat."

Liam took a deep breath, then bowed his head slightly. "Thank you... for everything. For taking care of me, helping me get this far. I'm really grateful."

Ms. Rose's eyes softened as she placed a hand on his shoulder. "There's no need to thank us, Liam. Helping others is what we do. And honestly, it's been our pleasure having you with us."

Dr. Dain nodded in agreement. "She's right. You've been part of our family. We're the ones who should be thanking you."

Liam straightened, a faint smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "I appreciate that. But really, thank you."

He turned to Elsie, who had been standing quietly, watching the exchange with a mix of emotions in her eyes.

He hesitated for a moment before speaking. "I guess this is it... Good luck at the Citadel, Elsie. I hope it's everything you dreamed it would be."

Elsie's heart fluttered as Liam spoke, and before she could stop herself, she stepped forward, wrapping her arms around him in a tight hug.

She could feel her cheeks burning, but she didn't care. As she pulled away, she impulsively pressed a kiss to his cheek. Her parents looked on, slightly surprised but smiling nonetheless.

As she pulled back, her face flushed a deep red, and she avoided looking Liam directly in the eyes. "Yeah... I'll see you around too, Liam. Good luck at Grandeur City."

Liam blinked, momentarily caught off guard by her sudden gesture, but quickly regained his composure. His expression remained as stoic as ever, though there was a hint of softness in his voice when he responded.

"Thank you, Elsie." He gave a small nod. "I'll see you all again someday."

With that, he turned and stepped onto the train, giving them one final wave before disappearing into the carriage.

The Silverharts stood on the platform, watching as Liam's train slowly began to pull away. They stood there in silence until the train had vanished from sight, a mix of pride and sadness settling over them.

Elsie stood quietly, her thoughts drifting between the academy and the feeling of Liam's cheek under her lips.

She smiled faintly, holding onto the memory as she watched the empty tracks, wondering when, or if, their paths would cross again.

After Liam's train had disappeared beyond the horizon, the Silverharts stood on the platform in silence, the hum of the station around them pulling them back to reality.

Elsie glanced down at the ticket in her hand — Citadel City — the place where her own future awaited. Her train wouldn't arrive for another hour, but the weight of departure already hung heavy in the air.

Dr. Dain broke the silence first. "Let's find somewhere to sit while we wait."

The family moved over to a small bench near the platform's edge. Ms. Rose sat beside Elsie, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear as she offered a soft smile. "You nervous, sweetheart?"

Elsie hesitated, her eyes distant. "A little... but mostly sad. It's hard to believe that Liam's gone already."

She fidgeted with the corner of her ticket. "We've been together for so long. I know it was just a year but still, now... everything's changing."

Ms. Rose squeezed her daughter's hand. "I know, darling. It's a big step, for both of you. But you're ready for this. The Citadel is where you'll truly grow into your magic."

Dr. Dain nodded from across the bench. "You've worked hard, Elsie. They're lucky to have you."

Elsie gave a small smile in return, but the knot in her chest remained. She couldn't help but feel that something was being left behind, something more than just the safety and comfort of home.

The minutes passed slowly as the station continued to buzz with activity. Elsie's thoughts wandered back to Liam — the way he had stood there, so sure of his path even though he rarely showed his emotions.

She wished she had more time, wished she could have said something more meaningful than just goodbye.

Suddenly, the loudspeaker crackled to life, jolting her from her thoughts.

"The Citadel City train will be arriving in ten minutes. Passengers, please make your way to the boarding area."

Elsie felt her heart skip a beat. The moment she had been dreading was finally here.

Ms. Rose noticed the shift in her daughter's expression and gently placed her hand on Elsie's back. "It's time, Elsie. Let's get your things ready."

The family stood, moving toward the platform as the distant sound of the train's whistle echoed through the air. The driver, who had returned after helping Liam, began loading Elsie's luggage onto the train.

Unlike Liam's minimalist approach, Elsie had packed nearly everything she thought she'd need — books, potions, clothes, even some herbs from Dr. Dain's clinic.

As they worked, Elsie's eyes kept drifting to the approaching train, the reality of her departure sinking in.

When all of her belongings were finally on board, she stood beside her parents, her hands clasped tightly in front of her.

The train pulled into the station with a hiss of steam, its gleaming metal exterior reflecting the afternoon sun.

The conductor called for passengers to begin boarding, but Elsie lingered, taking in the sight of her parents standing there, both of them smiling at her with quiet pride.

Ms. Rose was the first to speak, her voice soft. "You're going to do amazing things, Elsie. Don't doubt yourself, okay?"

Elsie nodded, her throat tightening. "I'll try, Mom..."

Dr. Dain stepped forward, placing a hand on her shoulder. "Remember, the Citadel is just the beginning. You've got everything you need inside you to succeed."

Elsie blinked back the emotion threatening to overwhelm her and gave a shaky smile. "I'll miss you both."

Ms. Rose pulled her into a tight embrace. "We'll miss you too, sweetheart. But we're only a letter away."

Dr. Dain followed with his own hug, his arms strong but gentle. "Be brave, Elsie. And if you ever need us, we'll be here. Always."

Elsie nodded, fighting the urge to cry. The whistle blew again, signaling that it was time for the passengers to board.

Taking a deep breath, she straightened up and turned toward the train. As she stepped onto the platform, she gave one final look back at her parents.

"I'll write as soon as I can," she called out, her voice wavering slightly.

"We'll be waiting!" Ms. Rose waved, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

Dr. Dain smiled warmly, giving her a small, encouraging nod. "Take care, Elsie."

With that, Elsie boarded the train, finding a seat by the window. She could see her parents still standing on the platform, waving as the train began to pull away. She waved back, her heart heavy but filled with determination.

As the station slowly disappeared behind her, Elsie leaned back in her seat, the soft hum of the train's engine vibrating beneath her. She closed her eyes for a moment, taking in a deep breath.

Everything was changing, but she knew this was where she was meant to be.

Meanwhile, back at the train station, Dr. Dain placed an arm around Ms. Rose's shoulders, squeezing gently. "They're off to their own paths now."

Ms. Rose nodded, her eyes lingering on the spot where the train had been. "Yes... I just hope those paths bring them back to us someday."