

## ShadowBound 47

### Chapter 47: The Orientation

The morning sun poured through the windows, casting a warm glow across Liam's room. He was already awake, wearing only the same pants from the night before, his upper body glistening with sweat.

By the side of his bed, Liam moved methodically, doing sit-ups with focused determination. The rhythmic rise and fall of his torso suggested he'd been at it for quite some time, muscles taut from the effort.

Just as he reached another set, a soft knock sounded at the door. Liam exhaled sharply, stopping mid-motion. Wiping the sweat from his brow with the back of his hand, he stood, fluid and precise, and made his way to the door.

When he opened it, standing on the other side was the staff member from the previous night. Still dressed in her revealing uniform, she gave him a polite, almost radiant smile.

"Good morning, Sir Liam," she greeted warmly.

"Good morning..." Liam replied, his tone even as he tried to remember her name.

With a slight bow, she introduced herself again. "My name is Naya, and I'll be responsible for looking after you throughout your time at the academy."

Liam raised an eyebrow, slightly irritated but keeping his composure. "Could you explain what exactly that entails... Miss Naya?" His tone was calm, but the undertone of curiosity was clear.

"Of course." She nodded, her smile unwavering. "I'll be cleaning your room every morning, showing you around the academy, and ensuring you receive your meals on time. I'll also assist with any other needs you might have." She paused, her voice soft but professional. "Please, just call me Naya."

Liam gave a brief nod, still unfazed by her warmth. "Just Liam will do for me."

He paused for a moment, his gaze steady. "I appreciate you handling your duties, but I'd prefer if you leave the cleaning out of it. That won't be necessary." His voice was respectful, yet blunt.

Naya blinked, visibly taken aback. For a moment, her composure faltered, an uneasy smile tugging at her lips. "I—uh, Liam, those duties were assigned by the academy's administration. I'm required to follow them. Please, reconsider."

Liam's crimson eyes held hers, and he stepped forward slightly, making their height difference apparent. His presence seemed to press down on her like a weight, his calm demeanor carrying an unexpected intensity.

"The academy gave you this assignment, right?" he asked, his voice cool.

"Yes..." Naya stammered, her confidence shaken.

"Then, as my assigned attendant, you're expected to follow my instructions. And I'm telling you now—cleaning my room is no longer part of your duties. Do you understand?" His tone was soft, but there was an edge to it that made her heart skip a beat.

Naya hesitated, her breath catching in her throat. "O-of course. I'll make the adjustment," she replied, lowering her gaze.

"Good." Liam's expression softened, though his eyes remained sharp. "Today's the orientation, right? Give me ten minutes, and we'll head out."

Naya gave a quick nod, still slightly flustered. "Yes... I'll return in ten minutes."

Liam offered a polite nod in return. "Thank you for understanding." With that, he turned and shut the door quietly behind him.

As the door clicked shut, Naya leaned back against the wall, exhaling deeply. The pressure in her chest finally eased, though her heart still raced.

"What... was that?" she whispered to herself, her breathing unsteady. The moment replayed in her mind—the subtle menace in his gaze, the quiet authority in his voice.

'How can a student, who's clearly younger than me, carry such a commanding presence?' she wondered, her pulse quickening again.

Then, unbidden thoughts crept into her mind. 'And that physique...' She bit her lower lip, heat rising to her cheeks as she recalled the glimpse of his well-defined torso, the way his muscles flexed effortlessly. 'If he wasn't just a student... I might've—'

Before the thought could fully form, another staff member appeared at the end of the hall, calling out to her. "Naya, what are you doing over there?"

Startled, Naya straightened up, forcing a smile to cover her embarrassment. "Oh! Just checking in with my assigned student about orientation," she replied, her voice a little too bright as she hurried over to her colleague.

But as she walked away, a faint blush lingered on her face, and her thoughts remained tangled in the encounter.

Exactly ten minutes later, Liam had finished his shower. He dressed in something simple—nothing special or fancy, just formal enough to fit the occasion.

Feeling refreshed, he walked toward the door and opened it to find Naya waiting patiently, her posture a bit rigid.

"Looks like you're ready," she said, her voice slightly shaky, still affected by their earlier encounter.

"I am. Please, lead the way," Liam responded, his calm tone steady as ever.

Naya gave a quick nod and turned to guide him. They walked down the hallway, descending to the bottom floor where a few other staff members moved about their tasks.

The cool morning air greeted them as they stepped outside, sunlight washing over the academy grounds.

Liam took in his surroundings as they walked, his sharp gaze noticing every detail—the towering structures, the well-kept gardens, and the occasional groups of students passing by.

The academy was vast and bustling, a world unto itself. For nearly five minutes, they moved through the winding paths, until Naya finally stopped in front of a grand, well-designed building.

"We've arrived. This is the Beacon Hall," Naya said, her voice quieter now. She avoided Liam's gaze, still embarrassed by their earlier interaction. "It's where the knights gather for important announcements."

Liam looked up at the building's entrance, his expression neutral. "So, I just go inside?"

"Yes. Some students are already there," Naya replied, glancing down at the ground.

"Well, thank you," Liam said as he reached for the door. Naya gave a small bow and quickly turned to leave, still unsettled by his presence.

As Liam pushed open the door, a wave of gazes immediately fell upon him. The hall buzzed with the quiet murmur of students seated in neat rows, their eyes shifting to the newcomer.

Some whispered among themselves, casting curious glances. Others gave him wary looks, remembering that he was one of the three Galen had acknowledged during the trials—an act that definitely carried weight in the academy.

Unfazed by the attention, Liam scanned the room. The layout was straightforward: two sections of fifty seats each, split evenly to the left and right, arranged in five rows and twenty columns.

At the front of the hall was a raised stage, where a group of knights sat in a line. A wooden pulpit stood at the center, clearly intended for whoever would address the students.

As Liam searched for a place to sit, a familiar voice called out to him from the left side of the room.

"Liam! Over here!"

Turning toward the voice, he saw Dylan waving at him enthusiastically from the second row. Though Liam wasn't particularly interested in sitting there, he decided to oblige and made his way over.

Dylan greeted him with his usual lively energy. "How are you, Liam? Didn't think you'd show up this late!" he said with a playful grin.

Asher, sitting one seat to Dylan's left, rolled his eyes. "He's not late, idiot. He's actually early." His voice carried a grumpy edge.

Dylan chuckled, rubbing the back of his neck. "Oh, right. My bad!"

"I'm doing well," Liam replied as he reached the row. As he went to sit down, he noticed his name etched into the seat with a faint glow—some sort of enchantment marking it as his.

He paid it little mind and took his place between Dylan and Asher, settling into the designated spot.

To his left sat Asher, brooding as always, while Dylan occupied the seat to his right, as animated as ever.

They were positioned on the second row—Asher in seat 2, Liam in seat 3, and Dylan in seat 4. A student Liam vaguely recognized from the trials occupied seat 5, while an unfamiliar face sat in seat 1.

Liam's attention drifted to the front row, where a handful of students sat with a quiet confidence that set them apart.

Though no introductions had been made, Liam instinctively knew these were the students Galen had mentioned—ones who stood out from the rest.

Dylan, being his usual self, tried to strike up lighthearted conversations, cracking jokes and making playful remarks.

Most of the other students ignored him, and even Liam only half-listened, responding with the occasional nod but not giving him much attention.

After about ten minutes, the last of the students trickled in, and the murmurs in the hall quieted. All eyes turned toward the stage as a lady knight stood from her seat and approached the wooden pulpit at the center.

Her armor gleamed under the light, and her sharp gaze swept over the gathered students. With an air of authority, she cleared her throat and began to speak.

"Welcome to the Beacon Hall," she announced, her voice carrying effortlessly across the room. "The orientation will now begin."