

### How Real Is Liam Calloway?

For once, Liam isn't grinning or cracking jokes. He actually looks like he'd rather be anywhere else, and that throws me off.

If he didn't want to be here, why had he been so eager about this wedding? He was the one who rushed us into every open door in East Village, the one who insisted on getting gifts—even if they were ridiculous. He hadn't exactly lit up when he mentioned knowing the groom, but he'd still put in the effort.

Then again, a cake wouldn't even crack my top fifty wedding gift ideas. But what would I know? I've never had a wedding, after all.

Liam takes the jab in stride, flashing a smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes. "Good thing the surprise wasn't for you," he says smoothly, turning to the groom on the right. The tension in his shoulders eases as he takes in the outfit, his lips twitching in amusement. But instead of commenting, he simply says, "Congratulations, Mar. Even if you did just marry an asshole—better an asshole I know than one I don't."

The Corpse Bride, Mar, lets out a light laugh, waving him off. And that's when I really see him. Beneath the elaborate makeup and dramatic costume is a genuinely beautiful man. Ginger hair, striking green eyes, freckles scattered across his skin like he tried to cover them but didn't quite succeed. He's about my height, a full head shorter than Liam and his husband, but unlike me—who finds Liam's height endlessly annoying—Mar seems to love looking up at his new husband. [2](#)


"I'll take that as a compliment on his behalf," Mar says sweetly. It's easy to see why Liam prefers him over his husband. There's something warm, effortless about him. The same can't be said for the man beside him, who's currently glaring at mine and Liam's intertwined hands like they personally offended him.

I almost pull away. Almost.

"You look lovely," Mar continues, eyes twinkling. "I knew if anyone could outshine me at my own wedding, it'd be you."

Liam smirks. "Outdo you? I wouldn't dream of it." Mar laughs once more and his attention shifts from Liam to me. The spark in his eyes seems to dim when he sees our intertwined fingers, his smile seems almost uncertain. "Actually, I wanted to introduce you to someone. Mar, this is Emilia. My girlfriend. Emilia, this is Mar. My childhood friend."

The way he says it seems distant and I find it hard believing they're actually childhood friends at all, but I say nothing and smile softly at Mar, who seems genuinely taken aback. Nothing compared to the man next to him who clenches his jaw.

"Congratulations on your wedding," I surprise myself when I manage to keep the resentment out of my voice and continue with more honesty. "You look lovely and the theme seemed ridiculous at first, well it still seems ridiculous now, but somehow, you pull it off beautifully." 

Mar blinks at me for a moment before breaking into a genuine smile. "Thank you, Emilia." His voice is warm, but there's something guarded in his expression, like he's still processing Liam's introduction.

His husband, however, isn't nearly as subtle. He scoffs, muttering something under his breath that I can't quite catch, but Liam does. His grip on my hand tightens for just a second before he forces another easygoing grin.

"Well," Mar says quickly, as if sensing the tension. "I'm glad you both could make it. I wasn't expecting to see you here, Liam, since you already missed the service and you never come for wedding receptions.." he trails off, still looking at our joined hands and shakes his head in

disbelief. "But it's... nice."

Liam tilts his head, watching Mar closely. "You know me. Always full of surprises."

Mar's smile falters slightly before he regains his composure, linking arms with his husband. "Enjoy the party. Make sure you see Mama before you leave. We'll catch up later."

Liam nods, and just before they turn to leave, says. "I got you two wedding cakes. They're Corpse Bride themed, too. Think of it as an apology. Or a pre-wedding gift."

Mar opens his mouth, then closes it. Opens it once more, but no words come out. His eyes begin to look suspiciously wet when his husband pulls him away and shoots a glare at Liam. "Fuck off, Calloway."

As they walk away, I glance up at Liam. "Childhood friends, huh?"

Liam exhales sharply through his nose, his smile vanishing the moment Mar is out of sight. "Something like that."

He doesn't elaborate, and I don't push him. He wouldn't answer anyway.

I study him as he closes his eyes, takes a slow breath, and when he opens them again - there he is. The Liam I'm used to. Smirking, easygoing, like nothing ever rattles him.

But now I wonder if any of it is real. I sift through every smile, every teasing remark, every effortless laugh, and a strange, sinking feeling settles in my stomach.

Cam's words echo in my head. Pro tip: he's great at pretending. He had said it with a laugh, but now I wonder if he actually meant it.

"Come on," Liam says, pulling me from my thoughts. "Let's go see Mama."

Mama, as it turns out, is Mar and Elijah's - Mar's husband's dog. The party is at its peak when we find her, a tiny bundle of fur with an attitude far bigger than her size. I scratch behind her ears while Liam watches Mar and Elijah waltz across the dance floor. His expression hardens, something unreadable flickering across his face.

I can't keep quiet anymore. "You're not actually childhood friends, are you?"

Liam's hand stills on Mama's back. Across the room, Mar glances our way, catches my eye, then quickly looks away.

"We were," Liam says, his voice even. "I introduced him to Elijah. Things are just... awkward because of Jessica."

Jessica. As in Jessica Monroe? The woman in every headline, every glossy magazine spread? His ex?

Before I can ask, Liam hands Mama over to a man who took the skeleton theme a little too seriously. Then he turns to me, flashing one of his signature smiles - dimples and all.


It should be charming. But his eyes aren't smiling.

I wonder how many different faces he has.

He offers me his hand. I take it, and he pulls me onto the dance floor.

We dance. And dance. And dance. The music shifts, people come and go, the room spins with laughter and champagne. Liam keeps that same easy grin plastered to his face, even when I know his cheeks must be aching from the effort.

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Hours pass, but Mar never comes back to "catch up." And when the night finally ends, Liam takes me home.

His eyes are still stormy when he says goodbye. But his lips are smiling.

I watch him drive away, and I realise - I hate that smile.

I hate him even more when I don't hear from him for weeks.

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