

## ShadowBound 101

### Chapter 101: Execution Attempt Failed

'Tch. This bastard is getting cocky,' Sheila cursed inwardly, her gaze fixed on Liam as he stood there, unmoving but radiating confidence.

Determined not to show weakness, she straightened her posture, adopting an upright stance to assert her dominance. "Hope you're not letting those two lucky strikes get to your head, because—"

She was cut off before she could finish.

"Hey," Liam interrupted, his tone low. "You still don't get it, do you? Talking in the middle of a fight for survival only proves how much of a joke you are. You claiming you're going to execute me? It's nothing more than empty words. Just noise." His voice was cold, his expression indifferent, yet his presence weighed heavily in the air.

Liam's eyes studied her carefully, calculating. 'She might have annoyed me earlier with that pathetic display of fake killing intent—that's why I had to show her what real intent looks like. But if she's serious about executing me, I'll need to make sure the fear she's feeling now stays buried in her mind. I'd rather walk away in peace than leave here in pieces.'

Though Liam currently held the upper hand, he understood the reality of the situation. Sheila was strong—stronger than him, in fact. She wasn't known as the strongest first-year for nothing.

But beneath the tough façade she projected, Liam had glimpsed something deeper during their past encounters: a crack in her armor.

Behind all her bravado and authority, there was a part of Sheila that could falter—a piece of her true self that she had buried under the weight of emulating her brother, Percy.

She had worked hard to model herself after him, creating an aura of control and dominance. Over time, it had become second nature—or close to it.

Yet, that genuine, vulnerable part of her still existed, no matter how small. Liam had seen it, and now he intended to exploit it.

'The truth is, she's more powerful than me,' Liam thought, his mind racing through the scenarios. 'In a straight fight where she's fully serious, my odds aren't great. With my shadow army at my side, maybe I'd have a 60–40 chance in her favor. Without them and relying solely on my flames, it all comes down to how badly she wants the win—or the kill.'

Despite the odds, Liam didn't plan on backing down. He wasn't afraid to gamble, especially when his survival depended on it.

Sheila's eyes narrowed, her confidence still intact on the surface, but Liam could see the subtle cracks forming. Her hand twitched slightly, her ice beginning to manifest again, but this time it lacked the same conviction as before.

Liam continued, stepping forward deliberately, the weight of his presence bearing down on her like a storm. "The problem with you, Princess, is that you're trying too hard to convince yourself you're invincible. But deep down, you don't even believe it. That hesitation I felt in your attack earlier? That's you doubting yourself."

"Shut up," Sheila snapped, her voice sharp but unsteady.

Liam tilted his head, his eyes narrowing. "Touched a nerve, didn't I? You're trying to prove something—not to me, but to yourself. You think imitating your brother's strength and authority will fill whatever void you're carrying, but all it does is make you predictable."

Sheila clenched her fists, her icy aura flaring around her. The ground beneath her feet frosted over as her temper rose, but Liam didn't flinch. Instead, he raised his dagger slightly, the faint flicker of flames licking its edge.

"You think you've got me cornered because of your strength," Liam said, his voice calm and cutting. "But you don't understand what it means to fight for survival. To kill because you have to, not because you want to."

He took another step forward, his gaze piercing. "If you did, we wouldn't even be talking right now."

Sheila's magic surged, a sharp spike of icy mist enveloping her. "You don't know anything about me!" she shouted, launching a wave of frozen shards in his direction.

But Liam was ready. He dashed sideways, the flames trailing from his movements evaporating the shards before they could touch him. As he came to a stop, he locked eyes with her again, his stoic expression unwavering.

"Maybe I don't," he admitted, his tone steady. "But I know this—if you don't stop pretending and start fighting like you mean it, you'll never defeat me. And that? That should terrify you."

Sheila's chest heaved as her frustration bubbled over. For the first time, Liam saw it—the fear she was trying to suppress. Not of him, but of herself. Of failing to be what she thought she needed to be.

"You talk too much," she growled, summoning another wave of ice. "Let's see if you can back it up."

Liam gracefully dodged the barrage of ice, his speed and agility keeping him just ahead of the freezing attacks. Each step he took left faint trails of flames in his wake, a stark contrast to the biting cold filling the air.

But as the fight dragged on, something became increasingly apparent—Sheila's attacks were becoming more erratic, more volatile.

Liam's sharp eyes noticed it immediately. The precision in her strikes was waning, replaced by sheer force and desperation. She was losing control.

"Looks like this is getting out of hand," Liam muttered under his breath, his gaze narrowing. He knew he had to end this now, before she completely lost herself.

With a flick of her wrist, Sheila summoned a massive wave of ice, the sheer cold radiating from it enough to make the air around them shimmer. It roared toward Liam with the intent to freeze him solid.

But instead of dodging, Liam made his move.

As the glacial wave barreled toward him, he surged forward, his body igniting in flames as he activated his technique. Fire enveloped him, his myst harmonizing with the intense heat as he bolted straight at the attack.

At the last possible second, just as the freezing mist threatened to engulf him, Liam shifted his momentum. His flames burst outward, propelling him past the wave in a blur of blazing heat, leaving the icy assault to shatter behind him.

Before Sheila could react, Liam appeared in front of her, a mere breath away. Her eyes widened in shock, but she had no time to counter. In one fluid motion, Liam moved with precision and strength, pinning her to the ground.

The impact sent a cloud of frost and ash into the air as Sheila's back hit the ground, the chill of her magic clashing against the heat of Liam's flames. She gasped, her breath hitching, as she felt the cold steel of Liam's dagger pressed firmly against her neck.

Liam leaned in slightly, his face a mask of calm intensity, his voice low and steady. "Seems my life can't be yours today, Princess."

Sheila's hands twitched at her sides, her magic still crackling faintly, but she didn't move. For the first time, Liam saw genuine hesitation in her eyes, the same fierce will now clashing with doubt and realization.

"You sure are strong," Liam said, his tone low and soft. "But all that power... without control? Without the will to see it through? Its useless. Besides, the person you are trying to imitate so much, I doubt he would've lost control like you just did."

Sheila's jaw tightened, her pride warring with the truth in his words. She glared up at him, defiance flickering in her gaze, but deep down, she knew—she had been bested.

Liam didn't press the blade further, though the weight of his presence kept her rooted in place. "Take this as a lesson," he said, his voice cold. "My life is not for incompetent spoiled royalties like you to play with. "

With that, Liam pulled back, standing upright as he returned his dagger back to his void. The warmth of his flames dissipated, leaving only the faint chill of Sheila's lingering ice in the air.

Sheila remained on the ground for a moment, staring up at the canopy above. Her pride was bruised, her body ached, but most of all, her mind raced with everything that had just happened.

Liam didn't wait for her to respond. He turned and began to walk away, his voice drifting back to her as he disappeared into the forest.

"Let's not do this again, Princess."