

ShadowBound 25

Chapter 25: Don't Dare

Few Moments Earlier

The school bell chimed, signaling the end of the day, and Liam was ready to head home. He stepped out of the classroom, moving with his usual composed stride toward the spot where the carriage always awaited him and Elsie. As he made his way there, his eyes scanned the familiar school grounds, taking in the fading sunlight.

Within minutes, he reached the carriage, where Paul, the driver, was already waiting. The man's eyes lit up when he saw Liam approaching.

"Hello, Mr. Paul," Liam greeted, his tone polite.

"Ah, Liam! Good to see you," Paul replied with a warm smile. "How was your day today?"

"It was quite good," Liam said with a nod. Over the past month, he'd gotten better at making casual conversation, and it seemed more natural now.

Paul looked around for a moment before turning back to Liam. "By the way, where's Elsie? She's usually with you around this time."

"I was wondering the same thing," Liam said, frowning slightly. 'She usually walks with me here or gets here ahead of me,' he thought to himself. 'If she had something to do, she would've told me... unless she forgot.'

"We should wait for her a bit," Liam finally said, maintaining his calm demeanor. "She might have been held up."

"Fair enough," Paul agreed, leaning against the carriage.

Liam climbed inside and sat, his mind wandering to other things as the minutes ticked by. However, as time passed, unease began to creep in. It wasn't like Elsie to take this long. After nearly ten minutes, he finally decided that something wasn't right.

"I'm going to look for her," he declared, stepping out of the carriage.

Paul nodded, though concern flickered in his eyes. "All right, we'll wait here."

Liam began to make his way through the school grounds, checking the usual spots where Elsie might be: the library, the garden, and even the benches near the main building.

Each one turned up empty. As he continued his search, he moved closer to the outskirts of the school grounds and eventually arrived at the old storage shed.

It was there that he heard it — Elsie's voice. Muffled, strained, but unmistakable. He paused, staying in the shadows as he carefully approached the shed. As he drew nearer, he could make out three figures standing around Elsie, who was facing them with her back to him.

Liam narrowed his eyes, listening intently. The triplets, he realized. Their tone wasn't friendly, and Elsie's body language was stiff, uneasy. He kept himself hidden, not wanting to reveal his presence until he knew exactly what was happening.

Suddenly, one of the boys stepped back, raising his hand. Myst swirled around his fingers, taking on the form of flickering flames. The moment Ethan began to form the fire spell, Liam knew something was wrong — seriously wrong.

It was then he stepped forward, his presence cutting through the air like a blade. "I wouldn't do that if I were you," he said, his voice cold and sharp.

All eyes turned to him, and as they met Liam's, they were struck by the icy calm in his gaze. There was no hesitation, no fear — just a controlled intensity that froze the triplets in place. He stepped closer, his eyes locked onto Ethan's, who faltered, the flames in his hand flickering uncertainly.

In that instant, it was clear that Liam wasn't just some bystander. There was an unspoken authority in his stance, a confidence that made it seem as if he had already seen the outcome of this confrontation.

And as he took one more step forward, he added in a voice that could freeze fire itself, "Touch her, and you'll regret it."

Ethan stood there, spell faltering in his palm, unable to move or speak. For the first time, he felt the presence of someone who didn't just see him as a threat but as an obstacle —a mere inconvenience in their path.

Present Moment

Liam moved toward Elsie with a calm, steady stride, his presence radiating a sense of quiet strength. Elsie's eyes widened as she saw him approach — fear mingling with a palpable sense of relief.

She was glad to see him, yet a knot of anxiety twisted in her chest. She couldn't shake the feeling that she might have pulled him into something he shouldn't have been a part of.

He walked past Evans and Eliza as though they weren't even there, his eyes focused solely on Elsie. Ethan, standing closest to her, watched in disbelief as Liam ignored him, moving as if he were simply passing by a stranger on the street. The air was thick with tension, the kind that made it hard to breathe.

When Liam finally stood in front of Elsie, she opened her mouth to speak. "Liam, you shouldn't—"

"Please be quiet, Elsie," he cut her off, his voice gentle but firm, leaving no room for argument.

He turned his gaze briefly to the triplets, eyes narrowing slightly. "I don't know what you three are trying to accomplish, and frankly, I don't care.

But you're cutting into my practice time..." He paused, letting that thought linger before continuing, "...and now, we're leaving."

Ethan, Evans, and Eliza exchanged irritated glances, clearly unaccustomed to being dismissed so easily. Ethan finally regained enough composure to snap back, "Hey! You can't just barge in here and interrupt our conversation!"

Liam turned to him, the slightest raise of his eyebrow the only indication he even acknowledged the boy's existence. He then glanced back at Elsie, seemingly unperturbed by Ethan's outburst.

Ethan clenched his fists, his frustration bubbling over. "How dare you disrespect us like that? Do you even know who we are?!"

Liam turned fully to face him now, his expression still calm, yet there was a weight to his gaze that seemed to press down on Ethan. "You're shouting," he said, his tone carrying a hint of exasperation, "and I'm standing right here.

It's quite unnecessary." He took a breath, tilting his head slightly. "And to answer your question — no, I don't know who you are, and to be honest, I couldn't care less."

Ethan's face turned red with anger, and Liam continued without missing a beat, "So, if you'll excuse us, we'll be leaving now."

Liam gestured for Elsie to follow, and although she hesitated, still feeling the weight of the triplets' eyes on her, she took a tentative step toward him.

Her heart raced, fear still gnawing at her, but there was something in Liam's demeanor that made her feel safer than she had in weeks.

As they passed Ethan, his pride couldn't take it anymore. "You really think you can just disrespect us and walk away?" he spat, his voice shaking with rage.

With a flick of his wrist, the flames sprang to life in his hand, this time larger, hotter, and angrier, as he hurled the fire spell directly at Liam.

But before the fire could reach its target, Liam's hand moved with a speed that was almost inhuman, catching the flames in his palm. The magic collided with an invisible barrier, and for a moment, the fire writhed and twisted against Liam's hand, before fizzling out into nothing.

The air crackled with the remnants of heat, but Liam remained unfazed, staring at Ethan with eyes that seemed to pierce through him.

"Was that supposed to impress me?" Liam asked, his voice colder than ice. "If you want to play with fire, make sure you don't get burned."

He took a step closer, and for the first time, Ethan felt a shiver of genuine fear run down his spine, his bravado crumbling. Liam's gaze remained locked on him, unyielding and unafraid.

"Next time," Liam said, his voice low and dangerously calm, "think twice before trying something so... reckless."

Without waiting for a response, he turned back to Elsie, his demeanor shifting in an instant, the warmth returning to his eyes. "Let's go," he said softly, and this time, Elsie followed him without hesitation, leaving the triplets standing in stunned silence.

As the triplets watched Liam and Elsie disappear from sight, an uncomfortable silence settled over them. It was Eliza who finally shattered it, her voice tinged with a mix of amusement and condescension. "Well, Ethan, I've never seen you look so utterly pathetic before," she sneered, a teasing smirk tugging at her lips.

Ethan's fists clenched, still simmering with rage. "You'd better watch your mouth, Eliza," he spat. "I'll make him pay for this—humiliating me like that." His voice was laced with venom, and his eyes burned with the desire for revenge.

Eliza let out a laugh, the sound sharp and mocking. "Oh please," she said, rolling her eyes. "After that little display? Your so-called revenge is going to be nothing more than a pathetic fantasy." She glanced at Ethan, unimpressed by his posturing. "You couldn't even lay a finger on him."

Evans, who had been watching the exchange silently, finally chimed in. "If you're that enamored by him, why don't you just go and join them, Eliza?" His tone was casual, but there was an edge to it, the words cutting.

"Exactly," Ethan jumped in, eager to regain some of his lost pride. "Besides, I saw the way you looked at him when he walked past you. All doe-eyed and desperate. Don't pretend you weren't practically drooling over him."

Eliza's expression shifted, eyes narrowing. "First of all," she snapped, "don't you dare call me desperate, Ethan. And second," she paused, a sly smile forming, "I'll admit he was... intriguing. There's something about confidence that's quite... irresistible." She tossed her hair back, her tone dripping with sarcasm. "But don't get it twisted. Just because he's hot doesn't mean I'm switching sides."

Her gaze hardened, turning serious for a moment. "And you two had better make sure that girl knows her place. I don't want Elsie getting comfortable just because her little knight in shining armor showed up once. She needs to learn that no one gets in our way."

Ethan nodded, his expression darkening. "Don't worry, Eliza," he muttered. "Liam might have saved her today, but that doesn't mean she's safe. This isn't over."

Evans crossed his arms, a calculating look in his eyes. "Next time," he murmured, "we'll be ready."