

ShadowBound 27

Chapter 27: We'll Make You Regret It

As the days passed, Elsie finally gathered the courage to confide in her parents about the bullying she had endured at the hands of the Holloway triplets.

Dr. Dain and his wife listened with a mixture of shock and sadness, but they were immensely proud of their daughter for opening up. They knew it wasn't easy for her to admit such vulnerability, and they resolved to take swift action.

Dr. Dain wasted no time in arranging a meeting with the triplets' father, Mr. Holloway, and the school principal, Mr. Valen. When the day arrived, Dr. Dain spoke with calm authority, recounting the details Elsie had shared, ensuring his tone remained measured yet firm.

He made it clear that his goal wasn't to seek harsh punishment but to ensure such behavior would never be repeated.

Surprisingly, Mr. Holloway didn't attempt to defend his children's actions. He knew their nature all too well, and it was evident from his demeanor that this wasn't the first time he'd been confronted about their behavior.

He apologized sincerely to Dr. Dain, expressing regret for the trouble his children had caused.

The principal, Mr. Valen, observed the entire exchange with a stoic expression, offering little input but taking diligent notes as the two fathers discussed how to handle the matter.

In the end, the meeting concluded without any unnecessary drama. Mr. Holloway promised that his children would face appropriate consequences, and Dr. Dain left feeling reassured that the matter had been handled with the gravity it deserved.

True to his word, Mr. Holloway disciplined the triplets, much to their chagrin. Their usual arrogance was replaced with simmering resentment, but they knew better than to retaliate, especially with their father's stern warning still fresh in their minds.

As the weeks passed, peace returned to Elsie's life. The triplets no longer harassed her, and gradually, she regained her confidence and joy in attending school. She felt a weight lift from her shoulders, and her smile returned, brighter than ever. For the first time in a long while, she could fully engage in her studies, laugh with her friends, and simply enjoy being herself.

During this time, Liam remained as detached as ever, completely unbothered by the unfolding events. He watched from a distance as Elsie's troubles resolved, indifferent to the fact that he had played a crucial role in helping her.

To him, if he had taking it upon himself to solve Elsie's issues, it would have been nothing more than an inconvenience – a distraction from his own training.

He hadn't acted out of heroism; he simply didn't want to be drawn into unnecessary drama that would waste his time.

Despite this, Elsie couldn't help but feel grateful toward Liam. She knew that without his intervention, things might not have changed as quickly or as smoothly as they did. To her, he was a hero, even if he didn't see himself as one.

In reality, Liam's actions had stemmed from something deeper. It wasn't that he cared about Elsie's plight. But he did feel a sense of obligation toward Dr. Dain, the man who had taken him in when he was injured, who had cared for him without asking for anything in return.

Liam saw this as a way to repay that kindness, a way to even the scales, even if just a little.

And so, life continued, with the days passing uneventfully. The school returned to its usual rhythm, and while Elsie thrived in her newfound peace, Liam returned to what truly mattered to him: his training, his path, and the pursuit of his own goals.

Weeks slipped by, and Liam found himself steadily mastering the Furnace State, much faster than he had anticipated. It wasn't that the process was entirely easy—far from it—but compared to the intense struggle of the Ignition Phase, this stage seemed more manageable.

He attributed it to the foundational strength he had built from mastering the first stage, yet there was an underlying truth he was beginning to recognize.

The reality was that Liam had been pushing himself beyond his limits with a relentless, almost ruthless drive. His goal to fully master Crimson Breathing within six months wasn't just a lofty ambition; it was a burning obsession.

Every fiber of his being had become attuned to this single pursuit, and in doing so, he forced his body to adapt, to endure, and to grow stronger. It wasn't just raw talent—it was his sheer willpower and unyielding determination that set him apart.

For someone only fourteen years old, Liam's level of discipline and resolve was astounding, far surpassing what most adults could muster. This intensity, this desire to reach his goals, was something deeply ingrained in him, and it drove him to train with a fervor that left little room for anything else.

As another month drew to a close, Liam continued his routine, seemingly unbothered by anything outside his training and studies. However, in the midst of this singular focus, something unusual began to catch his attention.

He noticed that he was being watched. There was a presence that shadowed him, following him around the school grounds and wherever he went, but it was done with a lack of subtlety, a telltale sign of inexperience.

While this might have unnerved anyone else, it only piqued Liam's curiosity. He sensed the faint ripples of myst trailing behind him, as whoever was following lacked the skill to properly mask their presence.

Liam's heightened awareness, a product of his training, made it easy to identify when someone was trying to observe him from a distance.

He decided not to react immediately, opting instead to play along. He pretended not to notice, going about his daily routines as if oblivious to the eyes that lingered on him.

He moved with an air of indifference, his expression unreadable, all while keeping a keen sense of his surroundings.

Liam knew that whoever was following him lacked experience. Their myst was unrefined, clumsy even, and their attempts at hiding themselves were laughable to someone like him.

With his growing understanding of psychology and critical thinking, Liam began to piece together patterns, deducing motives and intentions as he continued to be trailed.

He would occasionally pause, turn his head as if distracted by something in the distance, then continue walking, just to see if the person stalking him would slip up. And they did, time and time again.

It became almost amusing to him—this little game of cat and mouse—but he was in no rush to confront them. There was something to be gained from letting this play out, something he wanted to understand first.

It was clear that whoever was following him had an agenda, but what intrigued Liam the most was the question of why.

As the days passed, Liam pieced together the identity of his stalker, and the realization brought a spark of intrigue.

Typically, he would have brushed off such trivial matters, but a part of him craved something different—something to break the monotony of his rigorous training.

And so, he decided to play along, formulating a plan to confront his pursuer on his own terms.

It was a particularly sunny day, the sky a flawless expanse of blue, as Liam walked alongside Elsie in the school gardens.

The soft rustling of leaves and the gentle breeze added a serene backdrop to their stroll, and Elsie couldn't have been happier. Being alone with Liam, without the usual crowd or interruptions, made her heart flutter.

She hung on to his every word, cherishing the casual, almost friendly tone he had adopted today, a stark contrast to his usual aloofness.

After some time, Liam turned to her, his expression relaxed. "Hey, Elsie, I forgot something back in the classroom. I'll be right back," he said.

Elsie nodded, a warm smile lighting up her face. "Sure, Liam. I'll wait for you here."

As she watched him walk away, her heart beat a little faster, and she couldn't help the shy smile that crept onto her face. For the first time, she felt that perhaps she was beginning to break through that stoic exterior of his, even if just a little. She swayed lightly, humming to herself, the joy of the moment washing over her.

But that fleeting happiness shattered when a chilling, all-too-familiar voice interrupted her thoughts. "Well, well, look who's here, living out her little love fantasy."

Elsie froze, the blood draining from her face. She recognized that voice instantly, and fear seized her heart. Slowly, she turned around to face the Holloway triplets, who stood with smug expressions etched across their faces.

Ethan stepped forward, eyes narrowed with barely concealed resentment. "It must be nice, right? Enjoying your little romance while we're stuck suffering the consequences because of you," he sneered, his tone dripping with venom. "Did you think we'd just let it slide?"

Eliza chimed in, a mockingly sweet smile playing on her lips. "Hello, Elsie. It's been a while, hasn't it?" She waved at her in an exaggerated, almost taunting manner, though her eyes flashed with malice.

"I must say, I didn't expect to find you here, all alone." Her smile twisted into something more sinister, and she took a step closer. "Did you really think your little hero would always be around to protect you?"

Elsie's heart pounded in her ears. She felt the urge to back away, but her legs refused to move. Her voice trembled, barely above a whisper. "I...I thought you were done with me..."

Evan, who had been silent up to this point, finally spoke, his tone low and menacing. "You really thought that, didn't you?" He crossed his arms over his chest, regarding her with a look of disdain.

"Our father made sure we paid for what you did. He wasn't happy about having to apologize, you know." His gaze darkened. "And now, it's only fair that you pay us back for the trouble you caused."

"You always act so innocent, so perfect, don't you?" Ethan continued, his voice rising with each word.

"But all you did was hide behind your daddy's reputation. You made us look like fools, and for that, we're going to make sure you never forget your place."

Elsie took a shaky step back, her breath hitching. "I...I didn't mean for any of that to happen," she stammered, trying to hold back the tears threatening to well up. "I just..."

"Save it," Eliza cut her off sharply, her eyes narrowing. "We don't care about your excuses. We're not interested in why you did it. We're interested in making you regret it."

She stepped closer, her voice dropping to a whisper that sent chills down Elsie's spine. "And trust me, we're going to enjoy this."

Ethan's expression twisted into a cruel grin. "Consider this a lesson, Elsie," he said, taking another step toward her. "No one humiliates us and gets away with it."

Elsie stood frozen, her mind racing as she desperately tried to think of a way out. But all she could see were the looming figures of the triplets, closing in on her like predators circling their prey.

She could feel her pulse quicken, fear clawing at her throat, as she realized that, this time, Liam wasn't here to help her.

Least that's what she thought.