

ShadowBound 28

Chapter 28: You Guys Are Jokes

As the triplets closed in on Elsie, a calm but sharp voice sliced through the tension, freezing everyone in place.

"You've got to be kidding," Liam's tone carried a faint trace of amusement, as if he found the whole situation absurdly comical.

The triplets spun around, their expressions shifting from malice to surprise. They hadn't expected him to show up, and certainly not with that unfazed demeanor.

"So, let me get this straight," Liam continued, taking a leisurely step forward. "You've been stalking me all week, just so you could confront Elsie with your little 'We'll make you regret it' nonsense?" His initial intrigue gave way to thinly veiled annoyance. "Honestly, that's kind of pathetic."

Ethan, Evan, and Eliza stood there, stunned and momentarily lost for words. They hadn't expected him to not only see through their plan but to treat it with such disdain.

Eliza, however, quickly regained her composure, determined to regain the upper hand. She crossed her arms and tilted her head, a smirk playing on her lips.

"So you finally decided to step in, shining knight," she said mockingly, trying to provoke him. "Now that you've come to her rescue again, what exactly do you plan to do, huh?"

She gestured dismissively at her brothers. "Beat them up? Because let's be real—you might be able to take one, but you sure as hell can't handle both."

Hearing her words, Ethan and Evan's confidence swelled. What Eliza said made sense—they had always been stronger together, and Liam didn't look like much of a threat compared to the combined might of two experienced fire mages.

Liam let out a soft chuckle, running his left hand through his hair, seemingly unbothered by their bravado. "You're really full of yourselves, aren't you?"

He glanced at the triplets with eyes that glinted with a dangerous edge. "Here's a piece of advice," he said, his tone turning cold, "you'd do well to shut up before you embarrass yourselves further."

That struck a nerve. Eliza's smug expression faltered, and Ethan's hands clenched into fists, flames flickering to life around them.

"You think you're so tough," Ethan snarled, stepping forward, his aura intensifying. "Let's see you back up those words!"

Evan followed suit, fire coursing through his veins as he allowed his rage to fuel his myst. Their combined energy started to swell, crackling around them in a fiery display of power.

Liam watched, unimpressed, his gaze unwavering. "So now you're angry?" He shook his head, sighing as if bored by the whole spectacle.

"Fine. But let's be clear—if you're going to waste my time any further, you'd better make it worth my while." He took a step closer, meeting their eyes with a steady, unyielding stare. "All three of you. Come at me with everything you've got."

The triplets' faces twisted into expressions of pure fury, their myst flaring wildly. Eliza tried to maintain her cool, but even she couldn't hide the tension building in her muscles.

Ethan and Evan, meanwhile, were practically shaking with anticipation, their eyes fixed on Liam as if they were ready to incinerate him on the spot.

"Big mistake," Eliza muttered, her voice low. "You have no idea who you're messing with."

"Oh, I think I do," Liam replied with a smirk, his tone dripping with sarcasm. "The three of you are just spoiled brats with a bit of fire magic and way too much arrogance."

That did it. Their myst surged with explosive intensity, flames erupting from Ethan and Evan's hands, the air around them warping from the heat. The ground beneath them scorched, leaving blackened marks in their wake. It was clear they were no longer holding back.

Elsie watched in horror, her heart hammering against her chest. This wasn't what she'd expected at all.

To her, it felt like Liam had just signed his own death warrant. The triplets were known for their prowess in fire magic; they came from a long line of renowned fire mages, after all.

But as she glanced back at Liam, she saw no trace of fear. His expression was calm, eyes sharp and focused. He stood there, seemingly indifferent to the inferno building before him, as if he were looking at nothing more than a passing breeze.

"Alright," Liam muttered to himself, rolling his shoulders as if preparing for nothing more than a casual exercise. "Let's see if you can even make this interesting."

And with that, the stage was set. The triplets, burning with rage and power, versus Liam, standing there with an almost lazy smile. As the air crackled with tension and heat, one thing was certain—this wasn't going to be an ordinary confrontation.

As the triplets prepared to launch themselves at Liam, a firm, authoritative voice cut through the tension.

"Enough."

The intensity of the moment dissolved instantly, as all eyes shifted toward the source of the voice.

Mr. Ganic, hands clasped behind his back, approached the scene with an air of authority that immediately deflated any lingering aggression.

"It appears the three of you haven't learned anything from the punishment your father gave you," he said, his tone sharp and unyielding.

The triplets' heads lowered, chastised by his words, the fiery bravado they'd displayed moments ago reduced to nothing but sullen silence. Meanwhile, Liam stood there, his expression shifting from interest to thinly veiled irritation.

He had been eager to test himself against the triplets, to gauge his progress, and now that opportunity was snatched away. He clenched his fists, but quickly forced himself to relax, not wanting to show how annoyed he truly felt.

Of all present, Elsie was the most visibly relieved by Mr. Ganic's intervention. She had already imagined the worst possible outcome if the fight had actually broken out, and it wasn't something she wanted to witness.

Mr. Ganic shifted his gaze back to the triplets. "I'll give you one warning—leave now, and do not harass these two again," he stated firmly, "or I'll ensure that your behavior reaches the ears of the principal. This will not be tolerated."

The triplets exchanged glances, their pride clearly wounded, but they had no choice but to comply. As they turned to leave, they muttered in unison, almost as if rehearsed, "But he started it," nodding toward Liam, who merely raised an eyebrow at their pettiness.

Without another word, they walked away, their steps heavy with reluctant obedience.

Once the triplets had disappeared from view, Mr. Ganic shifted his attention to Liam. "That was a close one," he said, his tone softer now, carrying a hint of genuine concern. "You would've been seriously injured if you had taken on all three of them."

Liam's jaw tightened, but he kept his voice steady. "Thank you for your concern, Mr. Ganic," he replied, though there was a clear undercurrent of frustration in his tone.

Sensing Liam's reluctance to dwell on the matter, he quickly redirected the focus. "How are you feeling, Elsie?" he asked, his voice softening, trying to shift attention away from himself.

Mr. Ganic blinked, as if only just remembering that Elsie was there, and he turned to her with a look of genuine worry. "Yes, Elsie, are you alright?"

Elsie took a deep breath, gathering herself. "Y—yes, I'm fine now," she replied, offering a small but sincere smile. It was clear that the presence of Mr. Ganic had allowed her to regain her composure.

"Good," Mr. Ganic said with a nod. "You two should be more cautious in the future," he added, his eyes lingering on Liam with a hint of warning. "Not every situation needs to be handled with fists and myst."

Liam merely nodded, though the gleam in his eyes suggested that his curiosity had not been quenched in the slightest. As Mr. Ganic turned to leave, Liam glanced at Elsie, his expression softening just a bit.

"Come on," he said, his voice quieter now, "let's get out of here."

And for the first time since the confrontation, Elsie felt a genuine sense of safety wash over her, all because Liam had stood his ground.

As the final month arrived, Liam stood in the dimly lit training room, his body tense with anticipation.

This was the moment he had been working toward—the last step in mastering Crimson Breathing: Flare Burst. He had come so far, and now, everything would be tested.

Liam sat cross-legged, closing his eyes as he began the rhythmic breathing he had become so familiar with.

He inhaled deeply, feeling the familiar warmth of the Ignition Phase ignite within him, then slowly transitioned into the Furnace State, the intensity of the myst burning hotter within his veins. He had mastered these stages, and now came the ultimate challenge.

As he delved deeper, Liam began to push his breathing, forcing the myst to flow faster and harder through his body. Every inhale drew in more heat, every exhale sent it coursing through his muscles, his heart pounding like a war drum.

Sweat dripped from his brow as his pulse quickened, but he didn't relent. He had to go beyond—he had to feel the flame within him reach its peak.

The room's temperature began to rise, the air thick with heat, as Liam pushed his myst to its absolute limit. He gritted his teeth, his entire body trembling as he felt the searing burn deep within his core.

It was as if his blood had turned to molten lava, threatening to consume him from the inside out. This was the Flare Burst—raw, unrestrained power.

Suddenly, his eyes snapped open, glowing with a crimson light. The myst exploded outward, engulfing him in a brilliant red aura that flickered and danced like fire. The sheer force of it pushed against the walls, causing them to creak and groan under the pressure.

Liam let out a ragged breath, feeling his strength surge to unimaginable heights. His senses sharpened, his muscles felt like they were thrumming with energy, and for the first time, he felt the full, unrestrained power of Crimson Breathing coursing through him.

But it wasn't without its cost. The heat was overwhelming, scorching his skin, and each breath felt like inhaling flames.

He knew this power was not meant to be held for long, but in that moment, he embraced it. He stood, fists clenched, flames licking at his feet, knowing that he had reached the final stage.