

ShadowBound 33

Chapter 33: It's Time To Start

The sun bathed Nystra City in a warm, golden glow as the morning bustle began at the Silverhart household.

Maids moved gracefully through the corridors, carrying out their duties with energy, the air filled with the soft clinking of dishes and the scent of breakfast being prepared.

There was a sense of life and warmth that filled every corner of the estate, as if the very walls hummed with the rhythm of the day.

Elsie was up early, dressed in a flowing pale blue gown that complimented her light features. Her hair was neatly styled, giving her an elegant yet youthful charm.

She moved through the hallways with purpose, though a spark of curiosity glimmered in her eyes as she glanced around, perhaps looking for something—or someone.

As she rounded a corner, she spotted Ane, the ever-dutiful maid, tidying the vases near the window. Elsie's face brightened instantly.

"Good morning, Ane!" she greeted cheerfully, her voice carrying a warmth that seemed to match the sunlight pouring in through the windows.

Ane turned and smiled at the sight of her. "Good morning, Ms. Elsie. You're looking lovely today. How did you sleep?"

"Oh, it was wonderful! I slept like a log," Elsie said with a small laugh. "No strange dreams, just pure, blissful rest."

"I'm glad to hear that," Ane responded warmly. "I have quite a bit to get through today, so I better be off." She adjusted the cloth in her hand, preparing to move on with her tasks.

"Of course, don't let me keep you," Elsie began with a wave but then suddenly hesitated, a thought crossing her mind.

Her smile faltered slightly, curiosity piquing. "Wait, Ane... have you seen Liam this morning?"

Ane paused, raising an eyebrow in surprise. "Liam? That's strange, I haven't seen him at all today. I thought for sure he would be in the training room."

"That's the thing—I checked, and he wasn't there," Elsie replied, her tone shifting slightly from casual curiosity to mild concern.

"It's not like him to disappear without a trace. Usually, he's either training or wandering the courtyard by now."

Ane's brow furrowed, and she shook her head. "That is unusual. I haven't seen him anywhere either."

Elsie bit her lip, her mind racing. Where could he be? she thought. It wasn't like Liam to vanish, especially after such a regular routine of training and being in the house.

"Alright, I'll go check his room just to be sure," Elsie said with a reassuring smile, masking the growing concern she felt. She gave Ane a wave and turned, making her way toward Liam's quarters.

As she walked down the hallway, her mind was filled with questions. Could something have happened?

Elsie finally arrived at Liam's door and gave it a gentle knock. No response. She knocked again, a bit louder this time, but still, silence greeted her.

Her brow furrowed as concern slowly crept in. Deciding not to wait any longer, she carefully turned the doorknob, opening the door just enough to peek inside.

The room was neat and organized, exactly how Liam usually kept it. His bed was perfectly made, and nothing seemed out of place—except for the fact that Liam wasn't there.

She stepped inside, glancing around with curiosity. Just as she was about to turn back, the door to the washroom creaked open.

Liam stepped out, a towel draped loosely around his neck, water still dripping from his damp hair. He was completely naked, his well-built frame on full display as he casually walked out without a care in the world.

Elsie froze. Her face flushed bright red, her heart practically leaping into her throat as she realized the situation. Oh my God, she thought, spinning around so fast she nearly stumbled.

Liam, on the other hand, appeared completely unfazed, moving toward his wardrobe without so much as a blink.

"Hey, Elsie. How are you doing?" His voice was calm and nonchalant, as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

Elsie was a mess of nerves, her thoughts scrambled. "I—I'm fine! Totally fine!" she stammered, staring at the floor as if it held the secrets of the universe.

"I just... I'm sorry! I didn't mean to barge in! I... I didn't see you this morning and I thought... I thought something might have happened."

"You don't need to worry about that." Liam's voice was steady, and she could hear the sound of him rummaging through his clothes. "And by the way... you can turn around now."

Elsie hesitated but eventually turned back around, cautiously opening her eyes. Her embarrassment began to fade, but as her gaze settled on him, she noticed something else—three deep, diagonal cuts across his chest. Her eyes widened, and any trace of her previous fluster vanished, replaced by concern.

"Liam... what happened to you?" Her voice was soft but filled with worry as she stepped closer, her eyes fixated on the dark wounds.

Liam glanced down at the cuts, memories of his midnight battle flashing through his mind. The demon's claws had left their mark, but there was no way he wanted Elsie to know the real story.

His expression remained unreadable, calm as ever. "Oh, these? I got hurt training last night. It's nothing serious."

"Nothing serious?" Elsie's brows furrowed as she reached for his arm, her concern deepening. "You don't get cuts like that from simple training! Sit down, I'm healing this now."

Liam didn't resist as Elsie guided him to sit on the edge of his bed. She placed her hands gently over his chest, her myst flaring to life as a soft glow enveloped her palms.

The warmth of her healing magic slowly seeped into his skin, radiating through his body. Liam could feel the tingling sensation of her myst weaving through his wounds, knitting flesh back together with care.

Elsie's face was focused, her lips slightly parted as she concentrated on the healing process.

"You need to be more careful, Liam. You can't just brush this off like it's nothing," she murmured, almost scolding him, but there was a tenderness in her voice that made her words gentle.

Liam watched her quietly, his stoic mask slipping for a brief moment as he absorbed her concern.

Though the pain was being alleviated, the heaviness in his heart remained. He wasn't used to people worrying about him like this. It was... strange, but not unpleasant.

After a few moments, Elsie finished the healing, though faint scars still lingered. She sighed softly, pulling her hands away but keeping her gaze locked on the now-healed skin. "There... it's better now," she whispered, relief evident in her tone.

"Thanks, Elsie," Liam said, his voice lower, a hint of genuine gratitude beneath the usual calm.

He hadn't expected her to be so adamant about helping him, but there was something comforting about it—her insistence, her care.

Elsie stood, folding her arms as if trying to compose herself after the intense moment. She looked at him, her usual brightness returning to her eyes. "Just promise me you won't push yourself too hard next time, alright?"

Liam gave her a slight nod, the corner of his mouth quirking up into the faintest of smiles. "I'll try."

"Alright then, I'll be taking my leave now. Bye," Elsie said quickly, trying to regain some composure as she hurried out of Liam's room.

She closed the door behind her, but as soon as the latch clicked, she leaned her back firmly against the door, breathing heavily.

Her face turned bright red again, and she slowly sank to her knees, hiding her face in her hands as waves of embarrassment—and something else—flooded over her.

'I touched his chest... I really touched his chest!' Her thoughts raced, her heart pounding in her ears.

It wasn't just the fact that she had healed him; the memory of his warm skin, the scars, and the way his muscles felt under her fingers was enough to send her into a flustered spiral.

Elsie bit her lip, trying to suppress the giddy excitement building within her. Her usual composed self was nowhere to be found.

'What is wrong with me?' she wondered inwardly, still blushing furiously.

But despite her embarrassment, a small, shy smile tugged at her lips. It was undeniable—there was something thrilling about it all.

Meanwhile, inside the room, Liam's expression returned to its usual calm, his stoic mask fully back in place.

The brief moment of warmth he'd felt from Elsie's concern had already begun to fade, replaced by his usual detached demeanor. He glanced at the faint scars now marking his chest, thoughtfully rubbing his hand over them.

"I'm grateful," he muttered to himself, "but I can't keep relying on others to heal me every time I get hurt." His eyes narrowed in determination. I have to learn how to use my dark magic for healing.

But his thoughts shifted as his gaze fell on the Emberflower sitting on the table, its deep crimson petals glowing. He picked it up, rolling the stem between his fingers as the weight of his next goal settled on his shoulders.

"...But before that," he said quietly, his voice barely above a whisper, "it's time to learn and master Overdrive." His eyes gleamed with resolve, the Emberflower's radiant glow reflecting in them as he thought of the trials ahead.

The path to Crimson Overdrive was perilous, but it was a power he needed—one that would push him beyond his limits, but in doing so, would allow him to protect himself and gain more power.

With a deep breath, he began preparing himself, knowing that his journey was far from over. The Emberflower pulsed in his hand, like a heartbeat, reminding him of the burning power that awaited within.