

When the Forgotten Shadows Wake

CHAPTER 5

Ethan's words seemed to freeze the air between them. Umbra Wraiths. The name alone sent a chill skittering down Luna's spine. These things weren't supposed to exist - not anymore.



The forest dimmed around them, the mist thickening until it clung to their boots like icy, grasping fingers. Ethan counted four shapes moving through the haze, silent and deliberate. Every step they took seemed to leach the warmth from

the air. Luna's light struggled to hold, flickering and dwindling beneath the crush of shadows closing in around them.

Ethan stood rooted to the spot, disbelief slamming into him like a storm. These creatures - the Umbra Wraiths - should have been nothing more than legend. He had read about them in his father's forbidden tomes, the ones bound in black leather and sealed with warning runes. He'd disobeyed, night after night, driven by a hunger for knowledge stronger than fear.

Those books spoke of shadow-born predators, remnants

of the ancient wars between light and dark. They were supposed to have purged them, wiping them out so completely that even their name was removed from history.

And yet, here they stood. No longer words on a page. No longer myths. They were real. And they were standing right in front of him.

“This isn’t possible,” Ethan muttered again, his breath misting in the frozen air. His mind raced, pulling fragments of old knowledge from memory. Wraiths were supposed to belong to ancient history - monsters so dangerous that only the most elite arcans had once been trained to hunt them. People destroyed them decades ago. At least, that was what everyone believed.

Not anymore. No one had seen a Wraith in over fifteen years. Of course, Luna didn’t recognize them - how could she? They had become the sort of stories told at bedtime, the kind meant to frighten children into practicing their wards.

“What do we do?” Luna’s voice snapped him out of his thoughts. She looked pale, her hands shaking as she struggled to keep the fragile sphere of light alive above her palm. The glow sputtered again, dimming dangerously, like a candle caught in the wind.

Ethan’s voice cracked under the pressure. “Fight them! You’re the best duelist we’ve got!”

Luna shook her head, her light flaring weakly. “I duel students, not monsters dragged out of forgotten legends,”

she said, her voice cracking though her resolve held. “No one ever taught us how to fight something like this. Wraiths were nothing but bedtime stories to us.”

Ethan’s fists tightened as he tried to calm his racing heart. She was right. This wasn’t a sparring match in front of Professors. There were no safety wards here, no second chances. If they failed now, there was no do-over, and they wouldn’t be walking away. His eyes flicked to her trembling hands, to the sphere of light shrinking as the darkness pressed tighter around them.

Luna bit her lip, dropping her voice to a whisper. “Should I... put it out? If they feed on magic, maybe-”

“Don’t!” Ethan’s voice rose sharply before he tempered it. Luna flinched, and he continued more evenly. “They consume magic, yes, but they fear light. That spell is the only thing keeping them back.”

He watched the shadowy figures circle at the edge of the failing glow, calculating. “They’re studying you,” he said grimly, turning to Luna. “You need to use your magic to strike, not just shield. It’s our only chance.”

Luna’s eyes widened, fear flashing through them. “But what if-”

“No time to doubt,” Ethan cut in, forcing steadiness into a voice his twisting stomach did not support. “You have to trust me. Focus on your light—make it stronger.” He had no idea whether it would work, but in that moment, belief was all they

had left.



Luna nodded, the fear still visible in her eyes, but her determination was rising through it. She drew a deep breath, light beginning to shimmer around her fingertips. Ethan could see how hard she was fighting to keep herself together:

the tremble in her hands, the tightness in her jaw. There had to be something he could do. He would not let her face this alone. I won't let her fall, he vowed.

Ethan dragged a hand through his hair, forcing himself to remember every grim detail from the old books. Umbra Wraiths thrived in darkness; their sight was perfect in the absence of light. They were relentless hunters; once they caught the scent of prey, few things could force them to let go. Luckily for them, light magic was one of those things.

“Well,” he muttered under his breath, “good thing we brought the human lightbulb.”

The problem was that Luna was too terrified to concentrate. Her hands would not stop shaking, and the glow gathering in her palms sputtered like a dying bulb.

Then, without warning, one of the Wraiths lunged. Luna

screamed, throwing up a shield on instinct. The impact rang through the clearing, and the light blazed bright for one sharp second before dimming again. The creature recoiled with a snarl and slipped back into the mist, circling as it waited for another opening.

“I don’t know if I’m good enough.” Luna’s voice cracked, the words quivering in the cold air. Ethan went still. He was not accustomed to seeing her like this. The confident, untouchable prodigy suddenly looked... human. Just a scared kid like him.

“I’ve seen your spells,” he whispered, forcing calm into his tone even as his heart thundered. “I know what you can do, Luna. You’re strong. Stronger than you think.”

Her eyes locked onto his - wide, uncertain, nothing like the confident Luna he thought he knew. The small orb of light in her hand wavered and dimmed as fear tightened its grip. Ethan did not know what she was searching for in his face, but he knew one thing for certain: he had to stay steady, for her.

“This isn’t Harmony Court. These things are not...” Her voice faltered as a shiver ran through her.

“I know,” Ethan said quickly, his tone firm but gentle. “But they’re not invincible. You can drive them back. I know you can.”

Luna studied him for a beat, his words hit her harder than she expected. She still looked uncertain, but she nodded anyway, jaw tightening. Determination sparked in her blue eyes as she turned back and clenched her fists. The light in her hand

flared, forcing the darkness to retreat a little farther.

Beside her, Ethan turned to face the Umbra Wraiths again. They circled like sharks, their glowing eyes unblinking. His heart hammered, but he forced the fear down. This was not the moment to crack. Not now.

The only way out of this mess was straight through those monsters. He couldn't just stand there while Luna did all the heavy lifting. He had to help somehow.

He was nothing like her, though. She had that fierce, unstoppable kind of power. His magic was mostly theory and trial, built from study, from scrolls, from sleepless nights spent hunting knowledge. But knowledge alone would not save them. Only action would.

He whispered a quick spell, trying to twist the mist into an ice wall. It wouldn't stop the wraiths for long, but maybe it could buy Luna a few precious seconds to catch her breath. A faint shimmer flickered in the air, thin and fragile. Too fragile. The Wraiths barely reacted, drifting closer with that same slow, chilling intent.

"Come on, focus," Ethan muttered under his breath. "You know the theory. This should be easy."

But it was not. His hands shook as he poured more energy into the spell, yet the mist only drifted lazily, completely unmoved, totally unimpressed by his effort.

A rush of frustration washed over him. He had always

been terrible at this, and he cursed himself for never getting better at attack magic. The books had made it all seem so easy - rules, steps, perfect outcomes. But this was not theory. This was real, and he was failing.

Then, suddenly, Luna's hands exploded with light. A radiant beam tore outward, slicing through the mist and sending the Umbra Wraiths shrieking into retreat. Their spectral forms faltered, ripped apart by brilliance and driven back into the shadows that had birthed them.

Ethan could only stare at Luna in awe. She was finally fighting back, her light pulsing stronger with every heartbeat. But even as she forced the Wraiths away, he could still see it - the tightness in her shoulders, the fear flickering in her eyes. She was still holding back, afraid of what might happen if she didn't.

"Luna!" he called, stepping toward her. "Keep going. You've got this. Trust your magic!"

Ethan could see the doubt eating at her - the same kind that always sank its claws into him. He almost laughed at the irony of it, telling her to believe in herself when he barely trusted his own power.

But they were not the same. Luna had talent, raw strength, and instinct. Ethan had... books. Notes. A sharp memory for runes and theory. Not exactly the kind of arsenal that mattered when your enemies could not care less about test scores.

At this point, all he could do was trust Luna and give her

every scrap of knowledge he had that might help.

“Listen,” he said, forcing his voice steady. “These things feed on darkness. If you hold back, they’ll eat us alive. We need everything you’ve got.” He held her gaze without wavering. “Don’t hold back.”

“No pressure, huh?” she muttered through clenched teeth.

Ethan didn’t respond, his brain already racing through possibilities. “Watch how they move,” he blurted. “They’re not just attacking - they’re trying to surround us. We can’t let them box us in.”



Luna clenched her jaw and nodded, shifting her stance as her light sharpened. Ethan noticed it then - the calm settling into her movements. Two small orbs of light formed in her hands, burning brighter, stronger, by the second. When a pair of Wraiths lunged forward, she struck fast, twin flashes of light slamming into them and driving them back with a hiss.

“Yes, oomph!” Ethan’s cry of triumph died the instant something slammed into him. He barely registered the dark blur before the Umbra Wraith hit him again, this time with full

force, sending him sprawling backward. Then came the shock of the lake - ice-cold, merciless. He struck the water hard, the shock punching the air from his lungs. Gasping, he broke the surface, every nerve screaming as the cold clamped down on him.

For one blinding moment, panic swallowed him. His feet barely skimmed the lakebed, and the freezing water was stealing what little strength he had left. The Wraith lunged for him, but Luna was there, light flashing as she drove it back. He had to move. He had to get out. The shore looked impossibly far, but he kicked anyway, thrashing against the freezing water. The battle behind him blurred, replaced by the pounding in his ears and the violent churning of the lake.

Then, something flickered beneath the surface. A faint glow, soft and shifting. Ethan squinted through the rippling water, wondering if his numb brain was seeing things. But no, the light was real, pulsing slow and steady, calling to him as if it wanted to be found.

“Ethan!” Luna’s voice sliced through his thoughts, sharp with panic. “Get out of there!” Her magic flared at the edge of his vision, light and shadow colliding, but her tone left no room for argument. Whatever that glow was, she did not want him anywhere near it.

Ethan swore under his breath, realizing hesitation was no longer an option. He drew in a sharp breath and dove, the icy water swallowing him whole. Cold knifed into his skin, and the world dissolved into shifting shadows. Still, he kept his eyes fixed on the light. It burned brighter now, unmistakably real,

shining from something half-buried in the lakebed with an eerie, magnetic pulse.

The weight of the water pressed in on him from all sides, and he could almost sense the Wraiths nearby - like unseen eyes tracking his every move. His lungs burned, desperate for air, but he pushed forward, stretching numb fingers toward the glow. His hand closed around something smooth and cold. Without pausing to think, he grabbed it, shoved it into his pocket, and turned back to leave.

Something brushed against his foot. Ethan's gasp escaped in a burst of bubbles, panic surging through him as he twisted around. Nothing. Only shifting shadows and darkness. But the sensation clung to him, cold and crawling. He kicked hard off the lakebed, lungs screaming as he fought toward the faint shimmer above that promised air.

Ethan broke the surface in a rush of sound and breath, dragging air into his burning lungs. Above the lake, Luna still fought like a fallen star, her light defying the darkness even as exhaustion shadowed her face.

"Are you mad?!" she cried, turning toward him, her voice ringing with fury and fear. "I thought you were dead!" The words cut through the clash of battle like lightning, raw and desperate.

Ethan hauled himself onto the shore, shivering so violently his bones felt ready to split apart. Water streamed from his sleeves as he coughed up another mouthful, yet he still managed a crooked grin. "Sorry to disappoint."

Luna shot him a look balanced between irritation and relief as her magic pulsed brighter around her. “Just... try not to drown again, okay?”



“Noted,” Ethan muttered, forcing himself upright. His whole body shook, his soaked clothes plastered to his skin like ice. He wanted to look at whatever he had pulled from the lake, but there was no time. The Umbra Wraiths circled them, eyes glowing, drawn to Luna’s flickering light - the only thing keeping them alive. They needed an escape, and fast.

Luna was gasping now, her magic trembling like a candle caught in a storm. Ethan edged closer, studying the Wraiths. They were not striking yet. They were waiting, testing, toying with their prey.

“They’re vulnerable in the eyes and chest!” Ethan suddenly shouted, his voice rough and cracking from the cold. “Aim for those spots!”

“Why didn’t you say that before?” Luna snapped, frustration lacing every word.

“I’m sorry, I was a little busy drowning!”

Luna shook her head, but she raised her hand anyway, and a beam of light burst from her palm toward the nearest Wraith. The creature tried to dodge, but the beam clipped its chest. A horrible, high-pitched shriek tore through the air, and Ethan flinched.

The Wraith staggered back, its glowing eyes dimming as it dissolved into the mist. Ethan didn't waste the moment. "That's it, Luna! Drive them back. You've got this!"

Luna lifted her other hand, and her magic sparked brighter as a glowing barrier formed around them. It wavered once, then steadied, light pushing back against the encroaching darkness.

A Wraith lunged, its form twisting into a blur, but Luna's light flared and hurled it backward with a shriek that echoed through the trees. Ethan felt a flicker of hope. They could finally fight back. They could survive this.

"Keep the pressure on them!" he shouted. "Hold the barrier and hit them hard. Don't give them a chance to regroup!"

"Anything else?" Luna grunted, her face tight with focus, but she didn't let up. The barrier solidified, her light bursting outward in steady waves that forced the Wraiths even deeper into the forest. Their hisses weakened. Their movements lost coordination.

Ethan tracked every shift, his mind racing. They were

breaking formation. If they could hold out just a little longer, they might actually make it.

Suddenly, one Wraith lunged, its speed a blur of darkness and fury. Ethan barely had time to shout before Luna unleashed a blinding beam of light. It struck the creature square in the chest, bursting straight through it. The Wraith screamed - a terrible, unearthly sound, before unraveling into a storm of black mist.

The remaining Wraiths faltered, their glowing eyes dimming as they weighed their hunger against the force of her light. Then, sensing their defeat, they slipped back into the forest, swallowed by shadow.



“They’re retreating,” Luna said between breaths, her voice trembling with relief. “We did it.”

Ethan nodded, though his pulse still pounded. “We can’t stay here. Once your light fades, they’ll come back.” He could still feel their presence in the darkness - lurking, waiting for the glow to die. A shiver crawled down his spine.

The mist swirled close, pressing against the edges of Luna’s magic, but her light held. She strengthened the barrier and reached out her hand to him.

Adrenaline still buzzed in Ethan's veins as he stared at her outstretched hand, blinking as though he didn't quite understand what she was offering. "What...?"

Luna gave an impatient shake, glancing nervously over her shoulder. "It'll be easier to hold the barrier if you just, take it."

When her eyes met his again, something in them had changed. There was warmth there - familiar, unexpected, something he had never seen in her back at the Academy. A strange feeling stirred in his chest, but he shoved it down and took her hand.