

ShadowBound 129

Chapter 129: Weaponry Training Grounds

After everyone had finished eating, the group made their way toward the weaponry training grounds. Liam trailed behind Dylan and Asher, his usual quiet demeanor intact, and decided not to bother asking any questions. He figured he'd just follow their lead and piece things together as they happened.

Eventually, they arrived at the training grounds, but instead of heading straight onto the field, they made a turn into the boys' changing room. Inside, several students were already there, chatting and changing into their training attire.

"Oh, right, Liam! I keep forgetting you've been out for a few days," Dylan said, scratching his head and flashing his signature silly grin.

"Huh? Who cares?" Asher interjected, already halfway into his training gear. He gave Liam an exaggerated look of disdain, his lips curling in mock disgust. "He'll adapt anyway. No need to hold his hand. That's what you get for being a weakling who gets sick every other day."

Liam, unbothered, raised an eyebrow but said nothing. He began changing into his training attire as Dylan smirked mischievously.

"I just hope you don't get under the weather, Asher," Dylan said with a wicked grin, his voice dripping with mock concern. "Or else, only the gods know how much you'd fall behind once you come back. Hehehe..."

Asher whipped his head toward Dylan, his expression a mix of annoyance and indignation. "Tsk! Pathetic. Unlike you two idiots, I'm built different. Sickness and I are mutual enemies—we don't cross paths. So, your little curse is nothing but an empty threat from a clown with no audience."

"Oh, really?" Dylan leaned in, his grin widening to comic villain proportions. "Let's hope you're still saying that the day you're curled up in bed with a fever. I'll be sure to visit and bring you soup. Extra cold."

"Ha! Dream on," Asher scoffed, puffing his chest out dramatically. "I'm untouchable. A fortress of health and vitality. Your little fantasies of my downfall are like a wet sock—annoying but ultimately useless."

"Sure, big guy," Dylan replied with a wink. "We'll see how that fortress holds up against the common cold."

Liam shook his head slightly, suppressing a rare smirk at their antics. He focused on changing while Dylan turned his attention back to him.

"Anyway, Liam, here's the deal," Dylan said. "Weaponry training's done in groups. We've got five instructors, and each one handles about twenty students. So, the whole year is divided into manageable chunks."

"See, that's your problem, Dylan," Asher interrupted with a roll of his eyes. "You're spoon-feeding the weakling information. Let him figure it out himself. Trial by fire, my friend. It'll stick in his brain better that way."

Dylan stroked his chin thoughtfully, pretending to consider Asher's point. "You know, for once, you might actually be right."

"Of course I'm right!" Asher barked, pointing a dramatic finger at Dylan. "I'm always right. And that's why I'm already dressed while you're over there yammering like a bard who lost his lute."

"Relax, buzz cut," Dylan shot back with a grin. "You act like being five seconds ahead of me is a major achievement."

"Five seconds?" Asher said, feigning outrage. "That's an eternity in the world of champions, you scrub!"

Liam, now fully dressed, watched the exchange with mild amusement. He was starting to think Asher and Dylan's bickering might actually be more exhausting than the training itself.

Asher adjusted his training arm pads with a flourish, tossing a smug glance over his shoulder. "Anyway, weaklings, try not to embarrass yourselves too much out there. I'll be busy setting the standard."

With that, he pushed the door open and strode out, his confidence radiating like a peacock in a crowd of pigeons.

Dylan shrugged and shot Liam an amused look. "You see what I have to deal with?"

Liam nodded, his tone dry. "It seems you've been through a lot these past few days than I have."

Dylan laughed. "Oh definitely, hehe." He clapped Liam on the shoulder before they both followed Asher out.

As the trio made their way to the weaponry training grounds, the sounds of clashing wooden swords echoed in the air, a steady rhythm of battle that seemed to pulse through the atmosphere. When they finally arrived, Liam couldn't help but notice the stark contrast between this training ground and Galen's.

Galen's training area was expansive but intimate, designed for a smaller group—just him, Asher, and Liam. Here, however, the space was enormous, the wide open expanse required to accommodate all the first-year students packed into one place. The energy was palpable, and the air was filled with the hustle of so many eager students.

Just like Dylan had explained earlier, the grounds were divided into five sections, each overseen by one of the five instructors—three men and two women. Each instructor stood at the head of their own designated platform, elevated on concrete mountaintops arranged in a large, rectangular formation. Most of the instructors blended into the typical image of authoritative figures: armored, composed, and stern. But one figure, sitting casually on the edge of his platform, immediately caught Liam's attention.

There, perched at the edge of the first platform, legs dangling lazily in the air, was Magnus. Unlike the other instructors, who were clad in heavy knight armor, Magnus was dressed far more casually—too casually, in fact. He wore a long black medieval shirt, sleeves pushed up to reveal his muscular, hairy forearms, paired with simple pants. A sword, secured to his waist with a leather belt, rested in place while he nibbled on a cookie, completely unbothered by the chaos around him.

Liam raised an eyebrow at the sight. Part of Magnus's hair was tied back into a loose knot, but the rest hung down in messy waves around his neck, adding to the laid-back, almost reckless aura surrounding him.

"That's Sir Magnus, our instructor," Dylan whispered, leaning toward Liam with a knowing grin.

Liam processed the sight, his mind connecting the dots. 'Our instructor? That means this training session is based on rankings, huh?' he thought. 'So, the people I'm training with are the top 20 from the class, and the rest follow the same setup for the other instructors.'

"What are you weaklings still standing there for?" Asher's voice cut through his thoughts, sharp and commanding. "Time to get on the platform."

Liam's attention snapped back to the present as the group made their way onto the training platform. As he took his place, he took his time to scan the faces around him—not looking for anyone in particular, but simply familiarizing himself with his surroundings. He already knew all their faces—these were his classmates, after all.

His eyes skimmed over Chris and his usual lackeys, who didn't seem to notice Liam or simply chose to ignore him. Liam didn't care which it was. They were irrelevant.

Then, his gaze landed on Ariana, clad in her own training gear. That caused him to pause for a moment. Ariana's here? I thought she was a mage... What's she doing in weaponry training?

The thought lingered for a second before he shook it off, reminding himself that it was none of his concern. There were more important things to focus on. Besides, Ariana was as capable as anyone, and if she was here, there was probably a good reason for it.

As Liam stood silently, waiting for whatever was about to happen, he suddenly felt warm breath against the back of his neck. The sensation was accompanied by the faintest hint of lips, lingering just a whisper away from his ear.

"Hi, stoic boyfriend," Charlotte purred softly, her voice dripping with mischief as she appeared by his side, leaning closer than necessary.

Liam's expression, already stoic, darkened further. His jaw tightened, and his gaze shifted to the horizon, as if focusing on anything other than the annoyance beside him would make her disappear.

"Move," he said flatly, his voice low and edged with irritation.

Charlotte let out a light, playful giggle, clearly immune to his attempts to push her away. Her amusement only grew as she watched his clenched expression.

Unlike the other girls, who wore their training attire with a modest practicality, Charlotte had chosen something...distinctly different. Her outfit clung to her figure, emphasizing her curves in a way that was impossible to ignore. The neckline revealed just enough to make it noticeable—if not outright distracting—and her tied-back curls left stray strands framing her face, giving her a carefree yet tantalizing look.

"Relax, Liam," she teased, brushing past him with a playful sway. "I'm not here to play with you yet. It's training time, after all. So, enjoy yourself...for now."

With that, she sauntered off, throwing a backward wave in his direction before finding her own spot on the platform.

Liam exhaled sharply through his nose, his patience visibly fraying. He was about to let it go when Dylan, standing nearby, decided to chime in.

"Man, she is the only reason I've been enjoying this training since it started," Dylan said, his voice laced with giddy excitement. His eyes gleamed as he leaned toward Liam, grinning like a cartoon villain. "That outfit of hers? Those huge melons she's carrying? I mean, come on. They're practically defying physics."

Liam shot him a look of pure disbelief, but before he could respond, Asher beat him to it.

"You disgusting waste of air," Asher muttered, his tone dripping with disdain. Without hesitation, he smacked the back of Dylan's neck hard enough to leave a red mark.

Dylan yelped, rubbing his neck with an exaggerated wince. "Ow! What was that for?! I was just appreciating nature!"

"Appreciate quietly, perv," Asher snapped, glaring at him before walking off.