

ShadowBound 131

Chapter 131: Weaponry Training: A Mini Spar

Liam took a moment to size up Charlotte, eyes narrowing as he studied her stance. She stood casually, her wooden claws resting at her sides, yet there was something about the way she carried herself—relaxed but ready to spring at a moment's notice. Her grin was teasing, but her gaze held a sharpness that made him wary.

'She's fast. Maxwell warned me about that. If she's fast, maybe she has a lightning affinity. But... claws? That's unconventional. Nobody else here is using them. Am I missing something?'

"Ready, Bae?" Charlotte purred, her voice playful. She flexed her clawed gauntlets, the wooden tips catching the sunlight as she slowly crouched into a low stance.

Liam twirled his daggers, setting his feet firmly. "Whenever you are."

In a blink, Charlotte moved. She darted forward, her speed unlike anything Liam had expected. Her claws swiped in an arc, aiming for his midsection. He barely managed to twist out of the way, the wooden blades of his daggers meeting her claws in a sharp clack.

The impact jolted Liam, and he felt a surprising strength behind her strike. 'She's strong. Not just fast, but strong enough to force me back.'

"You're quick, Bae. I like that," Charlotte said, her voice lilting as she pressed forward, swiping again and again with relentless speed. Each swing was precise, leaving Liam with little room to counterattack.

Liam backpedaled, parrying as best he could. He could feel the strain in his arms as her strikes pushed him off balance. She was toying with him, but her strength was no joke. 'This isn't just raw speed—her movements are controlled. She's faster than me, stronger than me. I need to stay sharp.'

Finally, he spotted an opening. As Charlotte lunged, Liam pivoted to the side, aiming a quick jab with his dagger toward her ribs.

Charlotte twisted mid-air, her claws catching his dagger and deflecting it effortlessly. She landed gracefully, her grin widening. "Close, Bae. But you'll have to try harder than that."

Liam exhaled slowly, resetting his stance. "You're holding back."

Charlotte's laughter rang out as she shifted her weight. "Of course I am. Can't have you crying on your first spar with me, can I?" She darted forward again, this time lowering her center of gravity. Liam barely had time to react before she swept his legs out from under him.

He hit the ground hard, but he rolled quickly, springing back to his feet. Damn, she's relentless. Her footwork's impeccable too. I can't let her control the pace.

Liam decided to switch tactics. Instead of retreating, he charged forward, aiming low to throw off her timing. For a moment, he thought he had her—his daggers came in close, and Charlotte was forced to block instead of dodge.

But then, she stepped into his space, closing the distance entirely. Her claws locked his daggers in place, and before he could react, she twisted her body, using her weight to shove him backward.

Liam stumbled, his heart pounding. She's not just fast—she's smart. She knows how to exploit openings without overcommitting.

Charlotte's smirk softened slightly as she straightened. "Not bad, Bae. You're holding your own better than most. But..." She closed the distance in a heartbeat, her claws stopping just short of his throat. "You're still too reactive. Stop waiting for me to make a move."

Liam's jaw tightened. "Noted."

They reset, circling each other again. This time, Liam focused not on her speed, but on her patterns. She always led with her right claw, always aimed for his weaker side first.

When she lunged again, he anticipated the arc of her swipe, sidestepping smoothly and aiming a quick slash at her exposed side.

Charlotte twisted just in time, her claws parrying his attack, but there was a flicker of surprise in her eyes. "Oh, so you can learn," she teased.

The spar continued, both of them moving faster and faster. Liam's muscles burned from the effort, but he refused to let up. Charlotte's raw strength and speed were undeniable, but he was starting to adapt, using her own momentum against her when he could.

Still, no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't land a clean hit. Every time he got close, Charlotte countered with ease, her movements fluid and precise.

Finally, she stepped back, her chest rising and falling as she caught her breath. "Alright, Bae. That was fun. You're impressive, just how I want it."

Liam wiped the sweat from his brow, his expression still stoic. "You're better than I expected."

Charlotte laughed, leaning in close again. "Flattery will get you everywhere."

"Move," Liam said flatly, brushing past her.

Maxwell, who had been watching the whole exchange, clapped his hands. "Impressive, both of you. Charlotte, you're terrifying as always. Liam, you seem like a natural, but you still need more practice."

Liam nodded, his mind racing with everything he had learned. 'She's strong, fast, and skilled. I wonder if the rest of these guys are the same.'

Charlotte tilted her head, a playful glint in her eyes. "Same time tomorrow, Bae?"

Liam didn't bother responding. He simply walked off to rejoin the others, his thoughts already focused on improving his technique.

Magnus, still perched lazily at the edge of the platform with one leg dangling over the side, finished the last bite of his cookie with a contented sigh. His sharp eyes, though half-lidded in apparent indifference, had been closely tracking Liam and Charlotte's spar. Now, as the session drew to a close, his mind worked through the analysis, despite his relaxed demeanor.

"Huh, not bad for someone who looks like he wandered in here by accident," Magnus mused inwardly, brushing a crumb off his tunic. "That kid took on two Syncs with those glorified toothpicks he calls daggers and still managed to move like that? After injuries, no less. Mystica really outdid herself this time. Guess it helps when you're ambidextrous. Lucky brat."

Magnus leaned back on his hands, watching as Liam rejoined the group, his movements precise but tinged with exhaustion. It didn't escape Magnus' notice that Liam had been absorbing every bit of instruction Maxwell threw at him earlier, nor did the moments of quick adaptation during his bout with Charlotte.

"Whoever taught him to fight clearly had a 'sink or swim' philosophy. All survival, no finesse. No wonder the kid looks like he's always calculating his next move. He's good, but raw. Too raw. Someone like him with proper training could be... well, interesting." Magnus sighed inwardly, his expression shifting ever so slightly from lazy amusement to contemplative focus.

He scratched his chin absentmindedly, still chewing over the thought. "Looks like I've got no choice. I can't let a talent like that go to waste. What a pain."

The sparring field cleared as the students moved to put away their wooden weapons, and Magnus finally pushed himself to his feet with an exaggerated groan. "Alright, you overenthusiastic toddlers, that's enough for today!" His voice boomed across the training ground, drawing everyone's attention.

He stretched dramatically, arching his back like a cat waking from a nap. "Some of you are actually starting to look like you know what you're doing. Others..." Magnus trailed off, letting the silence hang as his eyes drifted lazily over the group. "...should consider careers in gardening instead of combat."

A ripple of nervous chuckles went through the crowd as Magnus clapped his hands together, his usual smirk back in place. "Class dismissed! Pair off for duels if you want to practice more, but don't come crying to me if you get your nose broken. And for Myst's sake, someone please find me a better cookie next time. This batch was mediocre at best."