

ShadowBound 152

Chapter 152: The Team

The sun hung high in the sky as Liam stood in a small clearing within Vlardia. He tilted his head upward, squinting against the light as faint, dark shapes flitted across the vast blue canvas above. They looked like birds from this distance, but given the nature of this realm, Liam wasn't inclined to assume.

'Who knows what they really are,' he thought.

The clearing felt eerily familiar. The tall green trees surrounding the area formed a dense wall, their canopy allowing only fragmented rays of sunlight to pierce through and dapple the ground in shimmering patches. The scent of wild vegetation filled the air, stirring a memory from the beast realm they had been sent to during the enrollment trials.

'This feels familiar,' Liam mused. His red eyes swept across the clearing, taking in the scene with a detached air.

A group of four other students stood nearby, their presence indicating they were his assigned companions for the next few days. 'So, these are my allies—or liabilities—for this exam,' Liam thought dryly. His gaze lingered on one of them, a familiar face leaning casually against a tree, eyes closed as though this were a casual stroll through a park.

'How interesting to have him here,' Liam thought, recognizing Lucian, one of Chris's ever-loyal lackeys.

The rest of the group was new to him. The first girl drew his attention with her athletic frame. Her short, dark blue hair framed her slender yet muscular figure. A sword was sheathed at her hip, and a sturdy shield was slung across her back. She had a serious demeanor.

The second girl was strikingly beautiful, even more so than the first. Her long, pink hair was styled in a flowing ponytail that complemented her elegant features. Her piercing sky-blue eyes. At her side, a sheathed sword with a pristine white hilt gleamed faintly under the sunlight. She stood calmly.

Among the boys, Liam recognized the messy-haired ginger who had questioned the Headmaster earlier. The boy carried a quiver strapped to his back, packed with arrows, while a polished bow rested diagonally across his shoulders. His curious eyes darted around the clearing, brimming with unease.

Finally, there was Lucian. Dressed in his uniform, he seemed utterly indifferent to the proceedings, leaning lazily against the shade of a nearby tree. His face was serene, almost bored, but Liam knew better than to underestimate him. For someone like him not only being one of Chris's lackeys but also ranked fifth among the first years, Liam knew what Lucian was capable of.

Liam's eyes narrowed slightly as he took in the group. 'They seem solid not do be a nuisance here. I hope them are whag they look like.' He thought, his expression neutral.

Suddenly, the girl with the pink hair jogged over to Liam, a bright smile lighting up her face as she grabbed his right hand with both of hers, looking up at him with an expression of pure admiration.

"It's you! From the enrollment trial!" she exclaimed, practically bouncing on her feet. "I can't believe we're in the same group again! It's so great to finally meet you like this!"

Liam stared at her, his calm demeanor unshaken, though irritation flickered in his red eyes. "Can you let go of my hand?" he asked in a calm, dry tone that made his displeasure obvious.

"Oh! Sorry!" The girl released his hand and took a small step back, bowing slightly in apology. "I'm Karla. Nice to meet you again!"

"Karla?" Liam said, his tone laced with confusion.

"You don't remember me?" Karla asked with a playful smile. "I'm the girl you saved during the enrollment trial!"

Liam's brows furrowed.

"You know... the invisible beast? It was right above my head near the tree?" Karla added, her voice rising slightly as she tried to jog his memory.

It was then that the memory clicked. During the enrollment trial, he had intervened to save a clueless girl standing too close to danger. Back then, it was a calculated move to eliminate the beast for his shadow army, not an act of heroism. Now, that same girl stood before him, beaming with gratitude.

"I remember now," Liam said flatly.

"Yay! I'm so glad you didn't forget me!" Karla chirped, her smile growing brighter. "To be honest, I wanted to thank you earlier—like during mealtime in the cafeteria—but you were always busy with your friends, so I didn't want to interrupt. But now? Here we are! In the same team! Isn't fate amazing?"

Liam's stoic face remained unchanged, but his thoughts betrayed his irritation. 'She's way too clingy. This is almost as bad as Elsie. How utterly vexing.'

"Do you mind giving me some space?" Liam said, his tone sharp enough to cut through her enthusiasm, but before Karla could respond, a stern feminine voice interrupted.

"Are you two here for bonding or survival? In case you've forgotten, this is Vlardia. Demons are roaming the area right now, and for all we know, some could be heading this way," the girl with the shield snapped, her piercing gaze fixed on the pair.

Karla immediately retreated a step, a sheepish smile crossing her face. "Oh, sorry! I was just thanking him for saving me, no need to get so fiery about it." She shuffled back to stand closer to the shield girl.

"Whatever," the girl replied with a huff. "I have a suggestion." She crossed her arms, glancing around at the group. "But first, introductions. My name is Edith Roswell, of the noble Roswell household." She spoke with confidence, her tone leaving no room for argument. "Now, here's the deal. Since we barely know each other, I suggest we start by introducing ourselves and sharing our affinities. That way, we'll have a better understanding of what everyone brings to the table."

"Fine by me," Liam said, raising his hand. 'This is perfect. I'll get to know their affinities and figure out how to best use them to my advantage,' he thought coldly.

"Yeah, me too!" Karla chimed in, eagerly raising her hand.

"I... I guess I'm in as well," the ginger-haired boy said nervously, stepping closer to the group.

With four of them in agreement, all eyes turned to Lucian, who still leaned casually against the tree, his expression unchanged.

"We're waiting on you, muscle brain," Edith said with a teasing smirk, her tone daring him to challenge her suggestion.

"Don't call me that again. We don't know each other that well," Lucian muttered, finally opening his eyes and fixing Edith with an unamused glare.

"Sorry, champ. It's the best way to catch your attention," Edith teased, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

Liam's sharp eyes flickered between the two. Do they know each other? If that's the case, things might be simpler than I thought.

Edith, unfazed by Lucian's irritation, cleared her throat and stepped forward, her posture straight and commanding. "Since everyone's here now, I'll start the introductions. I'm Edith Roswell, Class B. I specialize in enhancement magic."

Karla bounced on her toes, eager to follow. "Oh, that's cool! I'm Karla Beaumont, Class C. I wield water magic," she said, flashing a bright smile.

The ginger-haired boy shifted nervously, adjusting his quiver of arrows. "I'm R-Robin Hugh, Class D. Air magic."

Liam remained calm, introducing himself without fanfare. "I'm Liam Hunter, Class A. Fire magic."

Lucian's voice was low but steady as he finally spoke. "Lucian Keller. Earth magic, Class A."

"Great," Edith nodded, her gaze scanning each of them as she absorbed the details. "Now that we all know each other and our affinities, let's break it down. Looking at you, Liam, you're clearly a close-range fighter. Those daggers you carry, combined with your fire magic, say enough." Edith's eyes narrowed slightly as she observed him, noting the leather sheath holding his daggers at the back of his waist.

Liam gave a simple nod in acknowledgment.

"And you, Karla," Edith continued, turning her attention to the girl with the pink hair, "You're a mid-range fighter, just like me. That fancy sword of yours combined with water magic makes you more of a support fighter, but useful."

Karla grinned, clearly pleased with the assessment. "Yep, you got that right!"

Edith then shifted her gaze toward Robin and Lucian. "As for you two, Robin, it's obvious. Long-range fighter. An archer, I'd say." She paused, then turned her attention to Lucian. "And you, Lucian? What's your deal?"

Lucian's lips curled into a smirk, but it was tinged with annoyance. "None of your business. You'll find out when the time comes."

Edith wasn't fazed in the slightest. "Well, judging from you, Lucian," she said with a knowing glint in her eye, "you strike me as someone who switches between long and mid-range, but clearly prefers closer-range combat. You don't seem like the type to stay too far back."

Liam watched Edith closely as she dissected their fighting styles so easily. 'Her quick analysis... is impressive. She's either very perceptive, or she's simply using common knowledge. Regardless, her confidence makes it clear she knows what she's talking about.'

Edith shrugged as if it were all in a day's work. "There, now we all know where we stand, combat-wise. I would like us to talk about our abilities with our magic, but I don't deem this place worthy for us to waste more time here. We better get moving to—."

Edith's words were abruptly cut off by a deafening rumble that shook the very ground beneath their feet. The air seemed to vibrate with intensity as the trees in the distance swayed violently, their trunks creaking under an unseen force.