

ShadowBound 155

Chapter 155: Search For Shelter

The rest of the group stood frozen, their expressions a mixture of awe and disbelief as they stared at Liam. The remains of the Demon Wolf painted the ground in a grotesque display of dark blood and organs, the sheer violence of the scene lingering in the air.

Edith, standing closest to the carnage, felt her legs trembling slightly. Just seconds ago, she was certain she was about to meet her end. Her mind raced as she tried to process what had just happened.

'How did he move so fast?' she thought. 'I didn't even see him react, let alone strike... and the wolf—it's just...'

Robin dropped from his perch, his boots landing with a crunch on the blood-soaked dirt. His voice trembled as he spoke. "H-how did he do that? I didn't even see him."

"I don't know," Karla replied, her eyes still wide. "It was like... like time just stopped for a moment."

Lucian clenched his fists, his jaw tightening as he struggled to contain his irritation. 'Impossible, no matter how strong he is, he should be able to pull off something like this. There should've been limits... but this? It's as if he's on a completely different level. I couldn't even track his movements like last time. How humiliating.'

Liam, unfazed by their reactions, calmly flicked his daggers, letting the blood drip to the ground before sliding them back into their sheaths. His expression remained stoic as he assessed the situation.

'Did I overdo it? They seem too shocked. I should've just gotten Edith out of harm's way instead of going all out on the wolf. My instincts took over. No point dwelling on it now. I need to redirect the focus.'

"Where to next, Edith?" he asked, his tone steady and unbothered.

His words snapped Edith out of her trance. She blinked rapidly, straightening herself as she tried to regain composure. "Er—right. Great job, everyone. You all fought well. The Demon Wolves didn't stand a chance against our teamwork." Her voice wavered slightly, but she forced a confident smile.

She turned to Liam, her expression softening. "And Liam... thank you. You saved my life."

"Just doing my job," he replied curtly.

Edith cleared her throat, addressing the group. "I know that fight took a lot out of us, especially you, Lucian. Your magic was crucial. Thanks to you and Liam, we managed to pull this off."

Lucian's cheeks flushed slightly at the unexpected praise. "It was... nothing," he muttered, trying to mask his embarrassment.

"Yay! The two superstars of Class A save the day!" Karla said, clapping her hands together with a grin.

"Y-yeah, great job, guys," Robin added, still shaken. "We owe you one."

Edith's expression grew serious. "As much as I'd like to celebrate, we need to move. We can't stay here. The smell of blood will attract more demons, and nightfall is closing in. Let's find shelter before it gets dark."

"Agreed," Lucian said, steadying himself as he stood.

"Alright, everyone, let's move out," Edith ordered, picking up her shield and sword.

Robin hesitated, pointing at Liam. "Um... what about him? He's covered in blood."

Edith turned to Liam, her brows furrowing. "Right. We can't have you walking around like that. Karla, can you handle it?"

"Of course," Karla replied with a cheerful smile. She stepped closer to Liam, raising her hands as water magic swirled around her fingers. A sphere of water enveloped Liam's body, gently pulling the blood and gore from his uniform. With a flick of her wrist, she drew the water away, leaving him clean.

"All done," Karla said, inspecting her work. "Looking good as new!"

"Thank you," Liam said, glancing over himself to confirm.

Karla gave a sly smile. "Least I could do after you saved me, too. Now, could you do something about this?" She gestured to the floating sphere of bloodied water still suspended in the air. "It's kinda gross."

Without a word, Liam summoned a small flame in his palm and flicked it toward the sphere. The fireball struck the water, evaporating it in an instant, leaving only a faint mist in the air.

"Thanks," Karla said with a chuckle.

"Alright, with that out of the way, we head north," Edith declared confidently as the group began their trek through the forest.

"Why north?" Lucian asked, his tone tinged with mild curiosity.

"According to my dad," Edith began, glancing back at him, "if you ever find yourself in a crucial situation like this—being in a large forest—it's best to head north. The northern side is usually cooler and has denser vegetation due to moss growing on that side of the trees." Her explanation was calm and precise, her gaze scanning their surroundings.

"I see. That's actually useful information," Lucian admitted, nodding in approval.

"And if we're lucky, we might find better vegetation depending on how Vlardia is structured," Edith added.

"Even better. Let's just keep going until we find a good place to rest," Lucian replied.

The group of five moved steadily, with Edith and Lucian leading the way. Their conversation flowed naturally as they guided the others, though Lucian occasionally glanced over at Edith with an expression that lingered longer than necessary.

Behind them, Karla and Robin walked together, though the atmosphere between them was anything but smooth. Karla's bubbly, hyperactive energy clashed awkwardly with Robin's nervous silence. Every attempt she made at small talk seemed to dissolve into stammered responses or awkward laughs.

Meanwhile, Liam trailed silently at the back, his hands stuffed into his pockets, his eyes scanning the forest.

'Edith seems well-versed in this environment—similar to me. The only difference is her knowledge comes from experience in natural forests, while mine is rooted in the Dark Forest. Still, her insight should help us sustain ourselves here. Putting her in the leader position was the right call, even though Lucian is clearly trying to play second-in-command. Not that I care about his power plays.'

Liam's eyes flicked toward Lucian for a moment before returning to the trees. 'There's something I've noticed about him, though. He doesn't seem as cunning as Chris. He acts the part, sure, but it's more like he's imitating Chris's behavior rather than truly embodying it. Ever since we got here, he's been... different, especially around Edith.'

He let out a quiet sigh, his pace steady. 'Not that it matters to me. But it's worth noting—if Chris ever tries one of his crazy stunts again, I could potentially use Lucian against him. He's predictable enough to manipulate if necessary. For now, though, that's a problem for another time.'

His thoughts shifted as his gaze darted to a rustling bush nearby. 'My real priority is ensuring we avoid a Titanborne. Running into a demon of that class would be a nightmare to deal with in our current state. They're rare, but in an environment like this, there's no telling what might appear.'

Meanwhile, back at the Academy within the grand observation dome, the Headmaster, knights, and nobles watched the Vlardia trials unfold on numerous magical screens. Each display showed a different group of students navigating the perilous forest.

"The kids are quite talented this year," one noble remarked, leaning forward with interest.

"Indeed. The white-haired boy has impressive skills," another noble replied, nodding toward a screen showcasing Asher's firework.

"Yes, but the one with the daggers just now—he's not only skilled but strikingly handsome as well," a female noble chimed in, her tone appreciative.

"Very true, sister," another noblewoman added, though her voice carried a faint hesitance. "But don't you think he gives off... a certain energy?"

"Hm? What sort of energy?"

"You know, that kind of energy," the first woman replied, subtly gesturing with her eyes toward Galen.

Galen, seated at the very back row, couldn't have looked less concerned. His long legs stretched lazily over the seat in front of him, hands clasped behind his head as he indulged in what appeared to be a very serious nap.

Magnus, seated nearby with a plate of cookies, chuckled as he nudged Galen with his elbow. "Hey, Gally. I thought you said you weren't going to teach the kid that technique until after the exam. What happened? Don't tell me your fatherly instincts are kicking in."

Without opening his eyes, Galen's response was dry. "Shut up when you're eating, mop head."

Magnus smirked, not at all offended. "So, you did teach him, didn't you?"

"I didn't teach him directly," Galen said, finally cracking open one eye. "His buddy—the one I was training a couple of months ago—passed it on."

Magnus paused mid-bite. "Oh, the guy with the buzz cut?"

"Yeah."

Magnus let out a mock sigh, wiping an imaginary tear with a cookie. "Man, I wish we had friends like that. Sharing high-level techniques without a care in the world? Must be nice."

"Stop whining and eat your cookies before I burn them," Galen muttered, shutting his eye again.