

ShadowBound 158

Chapter 158: Food Is Served

With the group having split the responsibilities, Edith and Liam made their way to the riverbank. Edith carried Robin's standard bow and a quiver of arrows, borrowed after a brief conversation. Robin had happily lent them to her, confident in his backup—a compact, foldable bow he always kept for emergencies—and his ample supply of arrows.

Lucian and Karla, meanwhile, had headed off in search of firewood, despite their lack of survival knowledge. They grumbled about the task but decided to stick together, laughing off their inexperience as they trudged into the forest. Robin, following Edith's instructions, climbed a nearby hill to find a vantage point where he could oversee the area.

At the riverbank, Edith scanned the water, her eyes searching for signs of life. She waded into the shallows cautiously, her bow held high, while Liam stood further downstream, his gaze fixed on the rippling surface.

Minutes passed with no sign of fish. The river seemed unnervingly quiet.

"I swear there were a lot of fish swimming here yesterday when we arrived," Edith muttered, frustration creeping into her tone. She crouched near the edge of the water, peering into its depths. "Where did they all go?"

Liam, standing a few feet away, glanced upstream. Her observation wasn't wrong—he'd seen the fish, too. 'If the fish aren't here now, they might have been migratory.'

He hesitated before speaking. "Should we follow the river?" he asked, not wanting to present his idea straight forward.

Edith blinked, then straightened up. "Follow the river? Hmm..." She tapped a finger against her chin before realization dawned. "Oh, that makes sense! Some fish migrate along rivers depending on the time of year. If that's the case, following it could lead us to a spot where they've gathered."

Liam nodded. "I see. Then let's follow it."

'Her knowledge about all this stuff is good. She catches onto things quickly, which saves me the trouble of explaining.' Liam thought.

After walking for a while, Edith spoke again. "If we don't find fish, we might run into a rabbit or some kind of rodent along the way. Game isn't as reliable as fishing, but it's better than nothing."

Liam followed silently, his eyes scanning the dense trees and undergrowth as they walked alongside the river. The sound of rushing water filled the air, mingling with the occasional rustle of leaves in the breeze.

'Let's hope this pays off. I wouldn't like to run into some demon right now,' Edith thought, gripping her bow tightly.

As Edith and Liam followed the river, the forest around them grew denser, the sunlight filtering through the canopy in scattered beams. The sound of the water grew louder, suggesting they were approaching another bend or perhaps a larger pool.

After several minutes of walking, Edith suddenly stopped and crouched down, signaling Liam to do the same. She pointed ahead to a small clearing where the river widened into a calm, shallow pool. "There," she whispered.

Liam squinted and saw faint ripples in the water. Small fish darted back and forth near the surface.

"This is promising," Edith said, her voice low. "Looks like we've found a feeding spot."

"Good eye," Liam replied. He stepped closer to the edge of the water, his movements quiet. "How do you want to do this?"

Edith smirked. "I'll use the bow to try and catch the larger ones. You're good with your hands, right? Think you can grab some of the smaller ones or use a stick to spear them?"

Liam nodded. "I've done it before. Let's see what we can get."

Edith positioned herself on a flat rock near the pool's edge, her bow ready. She nocked an arrow, drawing it back slowly as she took aim. Her eyes locked onto a large fish swimming lazily near the surface. She exhaled and released the arrow, which pierced the water with a sharp splash. A moment later, she reeled in her prize—a decent-sized fish wriggling on the arrow's shaft.

"Not bad," Liam said, already stepping into the water. He waded in carefully, his eyes tracking a small school of fish near the bottom. Using a long stick he had picked up earlier, he quickly speared one, pulling it out with a swift motion.

Edith pulled her second arrow from her quiver, already aiming for another target. "Looks like you weren't lying about knowing how to fish," she said, a hint of approval in her tone.

Liam smirked, a real smirk. "Told you. My grandfather and I used to do this for fun."

For the first time, Liam's usually stoic demeanor softened. His eyes, often distant and guarded, seemed to light up with genuine enjoyment. His movements became more fluid, less mechanical, as if the task stirred a memory he hadn't revisited in years.

Edith paused for a moment, her gaze lingering on him. 'He's... smiling?' she thought, caught off guard by the shift in his expression. There was something disarming about seeing Liam like this—less the cold, stoic teammate and more a person simply enjoying the moment.

They continued working in sync, the pile of fish on the bank steadily growing. Edith's precision with the bow and Liam's steady hands created an efficient rhythm, their silent cooperation speaking volumes.

After a while, Edith sat back on the rock, wiping sweat from her brow. "I think we have enough," she said, glancing at their haul. "This should be plenty for all of us."

Liam suddenly stopped mid-motion, realizing he had been immersed in the fishing. He stepped out of the water with the last fish. "Sure. Let's head back before the others start wondering where we are."

They gathered the fish into a makeshift bundle using some vines Edith had cut earlier and began walking back along the river.

"You know," Edith said after a moment, glancing at Liam. "You seem quite distant but very close at the same time."

"Hm?"

"N-Nothing!" Edith stammered, her cheeks flushing faintly. She looked away, mentally kicking herself. 'What was that, Edith? Get it together.'

The two continued their journey back to the cave, the bundle of fish slung over Liam's shoulder, and the air between them surprisingly light.

By the time Liam and Edith returned to the cave, the sun was higher in the sky, casting warm light over the forest. The faint sound of conversation and laughter reached their ears as they approached.

Inside, Karla and Lucian had already stacked a modest pile of wood, though their efforts were accompanied by plenty of bickering, judging by their expressions. Robin, perched on a rocky outcrop just outside the cave, looked relieved to see them.

"You're back!" Robin called down, his nervous tone evident. "Everything okay?"

"We're fine," Edith replied, holding up the bundle of fish. "And we've got lunch."

Karla, who had been sitting cross-legged near the wood pile, immediately perked up. "Finally! I was starting to think we'd starve," she said, jumping to her feet.

Lucian gave an exaggerated sigh of relief. "I was about to suggest we start chewing on bark."

Liam shot him a dry look but said nothing, dropping the fish onto a flat rock near the cave entrance. "These should be enough for everyone."

Karla inspected the haul with a grin. "Nice work, you two. I guess that bow of Robin's wasn't just for decoration, huh?"

"Well, Edith seems to be a natural," Liam said simply, sitting down near the cave wall.

Edith gave a small nod, brushing off the compliment as she moved to untie the vines holding the fish together. "Did you guys manage to figure out how to start a fire?"

Karla grimaced. "Well... not exactly. We were kind of hoping you'd handle that."

Lucian shrugged. "We got the wood, though. That counts for something, right?"

Edith rolled her eyes but smiled faintly. "Fine. I'll handle it."

"I can just light it up." Liam offered.

"No need, I got this." Edith said.

As she began arranging the wood for the fire, Karla crouched beside her, watching closely. "Show me how to do it. I don't want to be useless if this comes up again."

Edith raised an eyebrow but nodded. "Alright. Pay attention."

While Edith and Karla worked on the fire, Liam set about cleaning the fish with a sharp rock he had picked up earlier, not wanting to use his daggers. Robin eventually climbed down from his vantage point and approached hesitantly.

"Um... do you need help?" Robin asked, fidgeting with the strap of his quiver.

Liam glanced at him, noting the nervous energy. "Sure. Hold this," he said, handing Robin one of the cleaned fish.

Robin accepted it cautiously, watching as Liam demonstrated how to properly prepare it for cooking. Despite his initial hesitation, Robin quickly caught on, and the two worked in relative silence.

After a few minutes, the fire crackled to life, drawing everyone's attention. Karla clapped her hands in triumph. "We did it! Well, mostly Edith, but I helped!"

Edith smirked. "Good job, assistant."

Lucian wandered over, rubbing his hands together. "Perfect timing. I'm starving."

The group skewered the cleaned fish on sticks and set them over the fire, the aroma quickly filling the cave. As they waited for the meal to cook, Karla plopped down beside Edith.

"You know," Karla said, "for our second day, we didn't do half bad."

Edith nodded. "We've got food, shelter, and a plan. That's more than some groups can probably say."

Robin, who was sitting a bit away from the group, spoke up hesitantly. "Do you think the other teams are doing okay? I mean... it's not easy out here."

"You know," Karla said, "for our second day out here, we're not doing half bad." Find adventures at

Edith nodded, her eyes scanning the small group. "We've got food, shelter, and a decent plan. That's more than some groups can probably say."

Robin, sitting a little apart from the group, spoke up hesitantly. "Do you think the other teams are doing okay? I mean... it's not exactly easy out here."

Lucian leaned back, smirking. "If they're not, that's their problem. We're all here to earn points for the exams. No handouts."

Karla rolled her eyes. "And you really love hearing yourself talk, don't you?"

Before Lucian could fire back, Edith raised a hand, silencing the brewing argument. "Focus, guys. We're not here to bicker. Let's eat, rest up, and then explore the area. Remember, the headmaster warned us: hiding away and waiting for the exam to end guarantees failure."