

ShadowBound 176

Chapter 176: Day Three: Hunting

The forest was quiet as Liam and Edith made their way east, their footsteps muffled by the thick layer of moss and fallen leaves. The morning sun filtered through the dense canopy, casting dappled light onto the forest floor. The air was cool, and a faint breeze rustled the leaves above, the only sound accompanying their journey.

Edith walked slightly ahead, her bow slung over her shoulder, with the quiver of arrows at her waist and an arrow in hand. She glanced back at Liam, who followed in silence.

"Hey, Liam. Mind grabbing some vines?" she asked in a low tone, gesturing toward a tree covered in thick, trailing vines.

Liam simply nodded, stepping closer to the tree. With a swift flick of his dagger, he cut a few strands, rolling them into a coil before securing them at his side. Without a word, he resumed following Edith as they wandered deeper into the forest.

"You know nothing about hunting, yet you volunteered for this," Edith remarked after a while, breaking the stillness. "Were you just trying to avoid watch duty?"

Liam remained unfazed. "That's part of it. But more importantly, this balances both groups."

Edith smirked. "Interesting. Nice way of admitting I'm right. But let's be honest, you always put duty first, don't you? Even if what you said is true, you still made the decision based on responsibility rather than preference. Who knows? Maybe Robin would've chosen to hunt since he actually has experience. But you? You're better at fishing."

She glanced at him from the corner of her eye, watching for a reaction. "Not that I'm judging. Everyone's free to choose what they want."

Liam didn't respond, his expression unreadable as he walked behind her.

Taking the hint, Edith let the conversation drop and shifted her focus back to the task at hand. Her sharp gaze scanned the ground and trees, searching for any sign of movement. After a few minutes, she suddenly stopped and crouched, her fingers lightly tracing a faint set of hoofprints in the damp earth.

"Looks like deer tracks," she noted, motioning for Liam to take a look. "They're fresh, too. We're on the right path."

Liam crouched beside her, studying the tracks closely. "They lead deeper into the forest. If they're this fresh, we might find a herd not too far from here."

Edith stood up, gripping her bow. "Yeah, you're right. Let's move quietly. If we find them, I'll take the shot. You can back me up if they scatter."

Liam rose as well, "Understood."

The two continued east, heading deeper into the forest, which was growing denser with every step.

'This place is starting to feel like a rainforest... and I hate rainforests. Moreover, I hate snakes. I just hope we don't run into any while we hunt.' Edith thought, her eyes sweeping through the tangled undergrowth, making sure her fears didn't become a reality.

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Behind her, Liam silently observed his surroundings as well. He noticed Edith's subtle change in movement—the slight hesitation, the extra caution in her steps. But he said nothing, letting her keep her focus as they pressed on.

After nearly twenty minutes of tracking, Edith abruptly raised her hand, signaling Liam to take cover behind a thick bush at the side. He wordlessly followed her lead, lowering himself behind the foliage. Meanwhile, Edith crouched low just slightly behind him, her sharp eyes locked onto a clearing ahead.

Liam followed her gaze—and there they were. A small group of deer, grazing peacefully in the open space, unaware of their presence.

"There," she whispered, nocking an arrow and drawing her bowstring back.

"Want me to strik—" Liam's words cut off as Edith suddenly raised her bow and rested it on his shoulder, using him as a stabilizer.

"Don't move... and breathe," she murmured, her voice barely above a whisper.

"You move, I miss. I miss, we lose our game."

Liam immediately stilled, feeling the faint pressure of the bow against him. He even slowed his breathing, his eyes locked onto the unsuspecting deer.

Edith activated her enhancement magic, sharpening her vision to ensure absolute precision. She also strengthened her arms just slightly, steadying her aim. Her breathing was slow, controlled.

Her gaze locked onto the largest deer—the perfect target. Right at the heart.

In a heartbeat, she released the arrow.

It sliced through the air in a blur, striking its mark with deadly accuracy.

The deer barely had time to react before it collapsed, lifeless.

At the sound, the rest of the herd bolted, disappearing into the trees within seconds.

A satisfied smirk tugged at Edith's lips as she lowered her bow. "Perfect shot."

Liam let out a quiet breath as Edith lowered her bow. He glanced at her briefly before standing up from behind the bush. "Let's not do that again," he said as he stepped toward the fallen deer.

Edith gave a sly smile as she followed him. "My bad, hehe. But you have to admit, that was a perfect shot," she said smugly, retrieving another arrow and keeping it ready in case of any surprises.

Liam crouched beside the deer, his eyes inspecting the clean wound. The arrow had pierced straight through the heart—efficient, instant. No unnecessary suffering. "Well, I can't lie," he said, gripping the arrow and smoothly pulling it free. "You did strike it down well. It's a clean kill."

"Of course I did," Edith replied, placing her bow over her shoulder. She then reached for the vines Liam had gathered earlier and tossed them onto the ground beside him. "Now, time to carry our prize back."

Liam picked up the vines and began tying them around the deer's legs, securing them tightly. Edith helped hold the carcass steady, working efficiently. The air between them was quiet, save for the rustling of leaves and distant chirps of birds.

"So, since we're done here, want to talk about why you've been in a mood since this morning?" Edith asked casually as she tightened one of the knots before standing.

Liam didn't look up. "Not really."

Edith snorted. "Of course. You never really want to talk about anything."

Liam finished securing the vines and stood. "But I have something else to talk about," he said as he turned his gaze toward Edith.

"Of course... wait, what?" Edith said, now actually hearing what Liam had said. "You have something else to talk about?" She teased.

"Yeah, but first... do you trust me?" Liam asked, his voice way calmer than usual.

Edith was looking elsewhere when Liam asked the question, and hearing something like that from him caught her off guard.

"W—What?" She stammered.

"I said, do you trust me?" Liam repeated, taking small steps toward her.

"Y—Yes, I do?" Edith replied, suddenly aware of her own heartbeat for some reason as she noticed Liam's approach.

"Alright, can you close your eyes for me? I need to do something," Liam said calmly, now even closer.

"O—okay, s—sure." Edith's stance faltered as she followed his words. Her thoughts began running wild.

Don't tell me he's about to do what I think he's about to do? No way. Why would he do that? Moreover, why am I just listening to him like this? Her cheeks began to turn red as she felt Liam's presence near her.

In stark contrast to Edith's imagination, Liam's stoic expression remained unchanged. His sharp eyes had locked onto a sleek black snake, coiled almost imperceptibly around a tree vine just inches away from Edith's head.

The snake's beady gaze was fixed on her neck, its tongue flicking in and out.

Then, in a blink of an eye, it struck.

Before its fangs could sink into Edith's skin, Liam's hand shot out, gripping the snake's head with unerring precision.

A sharp hiss sounded right beside Edith's ear, snapping her back to reality. Her eyes flew open—only to freeze as she saw the writhing serpent, its body coiling tightly around Liam's forearm.

"Hate snakes?" Liam asked, meeting her wide-eyed gaze.

Edith responded with a frantic series of nods, too stunned to speak.

Liam said nothing. He turned slightly away, the snake still twisting violently in his grasp. A moment later, a burst of heat flared in his palm.

With a controlled use of his fire magic, he burned the snake alive. Its body twisted and convulsed as it was reduced to nothing but ash.

Without another word, Liam turned to the tied-up deer and pulled it up with a single heave.

Edith remained frozen in place, her breath still unsteady. She glanced at the pile of ashes where the snake had once been, then back at Liam, who was already securing the deer over his shoulder like nothing had happened.

"You..." She exhaled sharply, her voice somewhere between relief and disbelief. "You could've warned me, you know!"

Liam adjusted his grip on the vines and started walking. "And, you would've panicked."

"Of course, I would've panicked! You told me to close my eyes! I thought—" She clamped her mouth shut, her cheeks heating up again.

Liam glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, his expression unreadable. "Thought what?"

"Nothing! Just—nothing!" Edith huffed, marching ahead of him. "Let's just get back before another snake shows up."