

## Evolution 157

Chapter 157: Ivory Bloom. (Suggested Song: "A Final Sacrifice" — Luke Richards)

The rest of the elites were left shocked again, incapable of believing that one of them was slain.

They thought that Nurah was the sole danger in this ragtag group of kids, only to be met with another hidden monster.

Even Jojo's friends were taken aback, not expecting to have such a powerful ability unlocked.

A one-shot spiritual cannon; they instantly knew it was an ultimate ability.

"Good job, Jojo! Six more to go. We can do it!" Melissa cheered everyone up; her morale was at its peak.

From a complete despair of dealing with an army led by Tier 4 nightcrawler and ten Tier 3 elites, to a mere six elites.

Levi and Arthur dealt with two elites and had the bulk of the army occupied while Velmira was dealing with Rhy'tha.

Success was no longer an impossibility.

Sadly, Jojo's ultimate ability didn't come without a downside... Her praying beads, which were supporting everyone, were no longer around. She also exhausted a massive percentage of her spiritual reservoir.

Omar was the first victim.

The elite he was holding off got angered at last and morphed his arm into a gigantic stone hammer, smashing it on Omar's forearms with everything he had.

Crack!

Omar's reinforced steel batons were useless against this kind of force; his forearms turned into mushed flesh in an instant... Then, the hammer connected with his chest.

Whoosh!

He got hurled into the distance, rolling on the ground nonstop until he smacked into a cracked boulder, half of his body lodged inside of it... Unmoving.

"Omaar!"

With Omar out of the way, Keira managed to let out a single aghast outcry before a rain of crystal shards bombarded her body.

Her surgical halo was full-on active to protect her, but alas... It might be enough against rookies or juniors, but not tier 3 nightcrawlers.

Ting Ting...

The knives managed to block a couple of shards before their defense was broken apart, leaving Keira at the mercy of the crystal shards.

Blood flew everywhere, her body twitching back and forth with each shard piercing through it... In less than two seconds, Keira fell on her knees, her despairing eyes devoid of life.

It happened so fast... leaving her no time to activate any protection totem.

'Omar... Keira.'

Melissa covered her mouth in anguish at the sight, not used to it one bit. Her crossbow shook as she took a single step back, her heart clutched in dread.

Alas, this was the wastelands... Losing focus was nothing short but suicide.

Before she could react, a speedy, thin, crystallized golem appeared before her with a sinister smile... His blade-shaped arm was already swinging in the direction of her torso.

The blade was so oppressive, Melissa could feel the wind getting sliced up... Before she knew it, a chilling sensation assaulted her abdomen.

Stunned, she looked down just to find her upper body sliding away from her lower body...

Thud, she fell on the ground, sliced up from the middle... coughing out bubbling blood, the heat leaving her body rapidly.

It happened so fast... leaving her no time to activate any sort of ability or protection totem.

Around her, the clashing of weapons and crystal filled the air... but all she could hear was the thud of her own heart... Heavy. Slow.

Yet, the fear of death didn't set in... Something heavier did... Being worthless.

'Again... I'm useless.'

The memory of her past defeats came back sharper than ever... Failed training exercises, multiple spar defeats, and moments she hesitated just long enough for someone else to bleed.

Her first expedition with Rayan and Omar went good only because of them. As for her? She was overwhelmed and missed many arrows, some almost put her partners in grave danger.

Although they succeeded in the expedition, it was streamed live, which made her get grilled by the viewers.

This made her doubt if she was truly on the right path in life? Besides her light affinity decent potential, was she really meant to be a Daywalker?

Then it hit her... She never dreamed of becoming a Daywalker as the only thing she wanted was to feed and support her family... A family consisting of a large foster home with many orphaned brothers and sisters.

Just like her... Survivors.

In this day and age, being a Daywalker was the best career path to get a lot of money... and fast.

Thus, Melissa decided to become one by participating in the Blood Hunters' Agency's recruitment phases... She was found to have a decent light affinity but lacked combat skills, making them take her in for training and preparation to become a Daywalker with many other candidates.

The recommendation letter wasn't easily obtained... either through official or unofficial ways.

It wasn't easy on Melissa... She was bullied for being too sweet, too kind, too... unfit for such a merciless job.

But Melissa refused to listen... the well-being of her brothers and sisters relied on her.

Instead of changing what's within... She changed to a gothic style, dyed her hair, and wore accessories that made her look vicious, cold... Skulls, chimes, fake tattoos.

Whatever worked... Whatever made her look tough on the outside.

Yet, she was only a loving big sister, a pacifist, who picked up a weapon out of necessity... Not desire.

And a disguise was still... just a disguise.

That's why her persona never matched the sinister look she wanted to portray... Her gentleness always escapes... especially with Levi and the rest of her friends, feeling safe enough to show her true self.

Just when her morale was at its lowest, Instructor Seraphis came forward and provided her with the necessary courage to keep moving forward.

He didn't scold her performance in the expedition or put her in the corner alone for this mission.

He told her that he believed in her and that time would come when she would look back and appreciate her humble beginnings.

And now? She was going to die... like this? Without doing a single thing that mattered? Proving that Seraphis was wrong about believing in her?

Her jaw clenched.

A scream twisted in her throat, half pain, half defiance.

'I'm not done,' She rasped, eyes flashing with raw fury. 'I'm not dying like this... Not when my family relies on me... Not when my friends need me the most...'

Melissa waited with bloodshot eyes until the thin, crystalized green golem stood next to her. Then, she murmured under her breath, the golem failing to hear it.

"You got some last words? Tell me, I will deliver your message."

The golem leaned in with a mocking smile, having no plans to do such a thing... He just wanted to tease her one last time before she goes, under the stunned eyes of her friends.

But, when he leaned closer, the only thing whispered was:

"Ivory Bloom... activate."

Bones burst from her flesh with a sickening crack, blooming like ragged white flowers from her back, arms, legs... sprouting and fusing, grinding through blood and muscle to hold her shredded body together!

Her bottom half, moments from going limp, jerked back toward her torso, the bones binding her halves into one broken, bleeding shell!

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!

Her agonizing scream echoed across the battlefield, filled with an unfathomable level of pain.

The golem tried to lunge back instinctively... too slow.

Thorns of hardened ivory speared upward from Melissa's blooming ribcage, piercing through the golem's body, stabbing into the hidden energy vein just beneath its crystalized flesh.



In an instant, he suffered from the same fate; his lower half slid off in chunks... dead weight.

Melissa's body trembled. Blood soaked her chin. Her arms were shaking. But her bloodshot gaze never wavered.

Her crossbow was already drawn.

Through the cage of her own blooming bones, she aimed her final arrow... the distance between them barely half a meter, lying next to each other... both cleaved in half, both desiring to survive.

But, unlike him... Melissa wasn't dazed by the sudden ambush... Her mind was already made.

Breathing ragged.

The arrow flickered with condensed energy...

"Die..."

She fired Piercing Arrow with the crossbow, almost touching the golem's chest.

Eyes filled with dread... The arrow exploded into his chest, shattering the core in a burst of light.

The elite nightcrawler was left with a stunned expression, gazing at the hole in his chest... and then crumbled.

Melissa's arm collapsed too, surrounded by blood, bone, and the silence of a victory she wasn't sure she'd live to remember.

But... She had done something.

Finally.

A faint, bitter smile crept on her lips as she closed her eyes at last, realizing that her will to survive wasn't enough to offset her devastated body... Not even Ivory Bloom could heal the damage in time.

After all... She was still a Rookie Daywalker.

A rookie Daywalker defeating a Tier 3 nightcrawler... Alone.

An achievement, a few dared to claim.

'I am sorry, Lir'Shaveth... It seems you have chosen the wrong partner.'

She whispered one last time... darkness slowly creeping into her mind... her eyes too tired to remain open, feeding her flickering scenes of Rayan and Jojo rushing in her direction, desperation clouding their faces.

Lir'Shaveth's doll-like eyes appeared on the chimera crossbow, gazing at her partner in silence, and a tint of sorrow.

A moment later, a weak smile ghosted her lips... memories of their time together flooded her mind.

"Don't be... Albeit short, it was fun... Thanks for treating something as ugly as me... like I was worth loving." She murmured, her voice turning dimmer, "I never knew it could feel that good..."

As the last word faded out of the doll's mouth, the Shadowlife seed within Melissa's abdomen started crystallizing until it became a blue gemstone.

It slid from her wide-open abdomen and lay on the ground, gleaming faintly above a pool of blood.

Waiting to be collected, and restart the cycle...