

ShadowBound 206

Chapter 206: Rising Issues In The Tempest Kingdom

In the Eastern Region of the Continent, within the Tempest Kingdom's vast domain, lay Veridn, Zone 9—a province known for its wealth, history, and the intricate dance of noble power. Unlike the western and central territories of the kingdom, where the monarchy ruled with an iron fist, Veridn's authority was fragmented among ancient noble houses, each holding vast estates, commanding private armies, and influencing trade routes that stretched beyond the Tempest Kingdom's borders.

To the common people, the nobility were both protectors and parasites—keepers of stability, yet insatiable in their hunger for power. Generations of wealth ensured that their bloodlines remained the cornerstone of governance, and though kings and queens sat upon the Tempest Throne, it was the nobles of Veridn who dictated the kingdom's economic pulse. A merchant's success depended on noble patronage. A soldier's future relied on noble endorsements. Even the whispers of rebellion or reform were shaped by which noble house backed them.

But the noble class was not united. Beneath the gilded halls and diplomatic pleasantries, a silent war raged. Blackmail, espionage, and assassination had long replaced the sword as the weapons of choice among the ruling houses. House Elarion, famed for its naval prowess, quietly sabotaged House Dalmont's shipments to weaken its grip on coastal trade. House Voreaux, dominant in myst research, bribed the Arcane Senate to restrict new advancements that could threaten their monopoly. House Tarsen, responsible for agricultural lands, ensured that rival estates faced 'unfortunate' droughts through mysteriously tampered irrigation systems.

For years, these conflicts remained in the shadows, a careful game where no house gained too much power, and no house fell too low. But now, a new player had entered the field—one that threatened to shatter the noble order entirely.

The Commoner's League, an underground movement advocating for the redistribution of land and political power, had begun gaining traction in Veridn's cities. Unlike past revolts, this one was organized, well-funded, and patient. The nobility dismissed it as an inevitable nuisance—until rumors surfaced that one of their own, a noble house of high standing, was secretly backing the movement.

The revelation sent shockwaves through the noble class. If true, it meant that someone among them was orchestrating the slow collapse of the system they had ruled for centuries.

Trust frayed. Accusations flew behind closed doors. Old alliances cracked as houses turned inward, fearing betrayal from within. The once-silent war intensified—poisonings became more frequent, key informants vanished, and entire estates mysteriously burned overnight.

Who among the nobility had betrayed their own kind?

And more importantly—what was their endgame?

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The Grand Meeting Room of the Tempest Kingdom was a chamber of silent storms.

Polished obsidian walls stretched high, engraved with the lightning insignia of the royal family. A massive circular table, carved from a single slab of blackwood, sat at the center, surrounded by the most powerful noble families of Veridn. They arrived draped in silks and furs, their family crests embroidered in gold, their expressions carefully composed masks of indifference. Yet beneath the surface, tension crackled like the very storms that the Tempest Kingdom was named for.

At the head of the table sat Queen Lucy Rature.

No crown rested upon her head, yet none were foolish enough to mistake her for anything less than absolute authority. Her piercing green eyes swept across the room, cold and unreadable. Dressed in a fitted royal uniform, its dark fabric adorned with streaks of silver lightning, she exuded an unshakable command that made even the most ambitious nobles second-guess their words. Experience tales at

She had watched in silence as the noble houses of Veridn played their games, whispering in corridors, sabotaging each other's fortunes, and feigning civility while daggers gleamed in the dark. But patience had its limits. And today, under her authority, the shadows would be forced into the light.

She tapped her fingers once against the table. The room fell into utter silence.

"I trust you all know why you are here."

Her voice was even—sharp, yet carrying the weight of inevitability. No one dared to answer immediately.

House Elarion's patriarch, Duke Rhovan Elarion, finally spoke, his voice smooth yet careful. "Your Majesty, if this is about recent... unfortunate incidents, I assure you, these are nothing more than—"

"Spare me the pleasantries, Duke Elarion." The Queen cut him off. "You all know exactly what I mean."

She leaned forward, her emerald gaze slicing through the tension like a well-honed blade. "For years, I have allowed you to war among yourselves—so long as it did not threaten the stability of my kingdom." Her fingers curled slightly against the table. "But the events of the past months have made it clear that one of you has abandoned the rules of the game."

Silence.

The nobles exchanged careful glances, but no one spoke.

The Queen's lips curled ever so slightly, though it was not a smile. "The Commoner's League," she continued, "has been growing at an unnatural rate. It is no mere peasant uprising." She let the words sink in before delivering the next blow. "One of you is feeding them."

The tension became suffocating.

Duke Vallian Tarsen of House Tarsen, his family controlling the farmlands that supplied Veridn's food, scoffed. "With all due respect, Your Majesty, do you truly believe that one of us would support such rabble? These are the mutterings of discontent, nothing more."

Queen Lucy's gaze snapped to him, sharp as a bolt of lightning. "And yet, House Tarsen has suffered no supply raids, while others have."

Duke Vallian's jaw tightened. The implication was clear.

House Voreaux's matriarch, Duchess Aveline Voreaux, shifted in her seat, her emerald eyes calculating. "If there is a traitor among us, Your Majesty, I trust you have evidence."

Queen Lucy held her gaze, then let the silence stretch.

"I do not need evidence," she said finally. "I need obedience."

A shiver ran through the room.

"Listen carefully." The Queen's voice dropped to something lethal. "The moment a noble house actively works against the stability of my kingdom, it ceases to be noble."

Her meaning was clear. Treason stripped one of privilege. And traitors did not live long in the Tempest Kingdom.

She leaned back, her fingers tracing the armrest of her chair. "Whoever among you believes they can play both sides—nobility and rebellion—should think carefully." Her eyes flickered with dangerous amusement. "I will not warn you twice."

The air in the room became unbearably heavy.

The nobles knew one thing with certainty—this was no mere meeting. This was a warning. The Queen was done watching from the shadows. The next move, the next betrayal, would not be met with patience.

For the first time in years, the noble houses of Veridn found themselves with a common enemy.

And she was sitting right in front of them.

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The grand doors of the royal palace creaked open, and the noble families of Veridn stepped out. The cool night air greeted them as they descended the marble staircase, their expressions carefully composed.

Duke Rhovan Elarion strode forward, his emerald cloak fluttering behind him. Beside him, his chief advisor, a lean man with silver-rimmed spectacles, walked briskly to match his pace.

"Duke, the merchant guild is growing impatient," the advisor murmured. "They demand a response regarding the tariff increases."

Rhovan's jaw tightened. "They can demand all they want. If they want the eastern ports open to them, they'll pay the price."

"They may take their business elsewhere," the advisor cautioned.

Rhovan scoffed. "And risk Tempest steel and myst? No. They'll bend."

The advisor hesitated before nodding. "Shall I arrange another meeting?"

"No need. Let them squirm for a few more days."

A few steps away, Duchess Aveline Voreaux stood near her carriage, speaking with her personal treasurer, a woman draped in dark velvet.

"The mines are producing less than projected," the treasurer informed her. "If this continues, we may need to cut labor costs."

Aveline frowned slightly. "Cutting costs means cutting hands. We can't afford unrest in the lower districts."

"Then what do you propose?"

Aveline sighed. "Reduce the exports to stabilize supply. If anyone questions it, tell them it's a strategic decision."

The treasurer gave a knowing smirk. "A shortage will only drive the price higher. A calculated move."

Before Aveline could respond, Duke Vallian Tarsen approached. His heavy coat, trimmed with silver, barely concealed the smirk on his face.

"Aveline," Vallian greeted, his tone almost friendly. "A pleasure, as always."

Aveline turned slightly, keeping her expression neutral. "Vallian."

He gestured lazily toward the palace. "Quite the gathering tonight, don't you think? Our dear Queen certainly knows how to hold an audience."

Aveline didn't take the bait. "What do you want, Vallian?"

Vallian chuckled. "Straight to the point. Very well. I heard whispers about your mining concerns. Perhaps House Tarsen could provide... assistance?"

Aveline raised an eyebrow. "Assistance? Or leverage?"

Vallian placed a hand over his heart mockingly. "Must I always have an ulterior motive?"

Aveline held his gaze. "Yes."

Vallian grinned. "Fair enough. Consider the offer open. For now."

Without waiting for a response, he gave a small bow and walked toward his carriage. Aveline exhaled, watching as his men followed him. Her treasurer leaned in.

"He's planning something."

"Of course he is," Aveline muttered before stepping into her own carriage.

Back in the Grand Meeting Room...

The doors shut, sealing the room in silence once more.

Queen Lucy remained seated at the grand table, her posture as composed as ever. Her piercing green eyes stared ahead, unreadable.

From the darkest corner of the room, a figure emerged.

He moved without sound, his uniform distinctly different from the standard kingdom attire—darker, reinforced with layered protections, built for those who operated in secrecy. His hood obscured most of his face, but the insignia over his heart marked him as one of her agents.

He knelt before the Queen, head bowed in absolute submission.

Lucy's gaze slowly drifted to him. Her voice was cold and barely above a whisper.

"Execute the traitor."

The man didn't ask who. He didn't seek details. He only responded in a low, measured tone.

"Understood, my Queen."

In the next instant, he was gone, vanishing into the shadows as if he had never been there.