

ShadowBound 207

Chapter 207: Rising Issues In The Tempest Kingdom 2

The Voreaux estate stood tall under the moonlit sky, its grand halls dimly illuminated by the soft glow of myst lanterns. Within its heart, Duchess Aveline Voreaux sat alone in her private office, meticulously working through a pile of documents.

The large window behind her was open, allowing the evening breeze to flow through. The lanterns cast a golden hue over the rich mahogany desk, where a half-filled glass of wine rested beside an elegant quill and parchment.

Draped in a silken nightgown, Aveline exhaled slowly, rubbing her temples. Hours had passed, yet the workload seemed endless.

Leaning back in her chair, she tilted her head toward the ceiling, reaching for her glass of wine.

But just as she lifted it to her lips, her fingers slipped.

The glass tumbled down—

—and hit the floor.

Yet, there was no sound.

Aveline frowned.

She stared at the broken glass, waiting for the telltale clink of shards scattering across the marble floor. But there was only silence.

A creeping unease settled in her chest.

Slowly, she reached for a stack of books beside her desk and let them fall.

Not a single thud.

The wind that had once rustled the curtains no longer made a sound.

The entire office was mute.

Her body tensed. Her instincts screamed.

Without hesitation, her hand darted under the desk, fingers wrapping around the hilt of a hidden short sword. She gripped it tightly, her breathing steady as her emerald eyes scanned the room.

Then—

A voice.

Cold. Chilling.

"For someone as meticulous as you, Duchess, you leave quite a trail."

Aveline's eyes snapped toward the dark corner of the office.

A shadowed figure emerged, moving with the deliberate grace of a phantom. His uniform was unmistakably that of the Tempest Kingdom, but its darker, altered design marked him as something far more sinister.

He strode along the bookshelves, gloved fingers grazing over the spines of old tomes as if browsing at leisure. His movements were unrushed, his presence eerily void of myst flow, aura, or even the faintest breath of life.

Nothing.

Aveline's grip on her sword tightened.

The man finally stopped, plucking a book from the shelf, flipping through its pages.

"You've been busy." His tone was unreadable, his fingers lazily flipping a page. "Deals in the shadows. Silent exchanges. Moving pieces on a board you thought no one else could see."

He paused, closing the book slowly. "You should have covered your tracks better."

Aveline stiffened, her expression darkening.

But then, she let out a sharp laugh—not out of amusement, but to shatter the suffocating tension creeping into the room.

"I don't know what you're implying." Her voice was measured, but there was a steel edge to it.

The man tilted his head slightly, as if considering her words.

Then, in that same cold, lifeless voice, he said—

"Acting dumb in a situation like this... is quite stupid for a lady of your stature."

Aveline's blood ran cold.

She knew, in that instant, that playing innocent was meaningless.

A slow, careful breath escaped her lips. Then, a smirk tugged at the corner of her mouth.

"So," she finally said, voice low, "this is how the Queen delivers her judgment."

The assassin didn't acknowledge her words, merely flipping another page.

Aveline let out a soft chuckle. "I suppose there's no point pretending, then."

Her emerald eyes darkened, amusement flickering through them as she slowly straightened.

"Yes, I am the traitor."

She rolled her shoulders, tension easing from her frame.

"But tell me... do you truly believe you can win against me?"

A low hum of energy rumbled through the room as blue myst surged from her form. The air vibrated with raw, unrestrained power.

With one effortless motion, she threw her desk aside, sending it crashing into the bookshelves. Papers scattered, the myst lanterns flickered wildly.

The office trembled under her power.

Yet the assassin remained utterly unmoved.

Unfazed.

As if nothing about her immense myst presence was the slightest bit impressive.

With an eerie calm, he closed the book he had been flipping through and placed it back on the shelf.

Then, for the first time, he turned toward her.

A slow, cold smirk ghosted over his lips beneath the shadows of his hood.

"You misunderstand something, Duchess."

His voice carried no fear, no urgency.

"The difference between you and me..."

He took a single step forward, the atmosphere growing even heavier.

"...is that I do not need to win."

His next words, spoken in that same chilling whisper, sent a true shudder down Aveline's spine.

"I only need to kill you."

Aveline launched forward, her short sword gleaming with raw myst energy.

Her first strike—a ruthless diagonal slash aimed for his throat.

Miss.

He tilted his head, the blade cutting nothing but air.

Her second attack came in a flash—a sudden pivot, her blade twisting in her grip as she swung low, aiming to sever his tendons.

Miss.

The man effortlessly stepped back, his movements smooth and unreadable.

Aveline's heart pounded as she pushed forward, chaining her attacks together in a relentless onslaught.

A downward stab. A spinning backslash. A rapid thrust to the ribs.

Each and every strike—dodged.

And not in the way of someone desperately avoiding a fatal hit.

No.

This was something far worse.

He wasn't just dodging. He was observing. Calculating. Studying her.

Aveline gritted her teeth.

'Why... can't I even scratch him?'

Her footwork was perfect. Her myst control—flawless. She was faster than any knight, her swordsmanship was deadly, and yet—

It meant nothing.

With no wasted movements, the assassin weaved through her strikes like a ghost, every step calculated to the millimeter.

'There's no myst aura. No presence. Nothing.'

It was as if he didn't exist in this world at all.

The thought sent a shiver through her spine.

Aveline's eyes flickered with frustration.

Enough.

She twisted her wrist, switching her grip as she went in for a feint—her body dipped low, seemingly preparing for another leg strike.

But at the last second, she vanished—her myst-infused speed boosting her to his blind spot in an instant.

She aimed directly for his spine.

But—

Before the blade could even pierce his back, he tilted slightly, letting the sword graze his cloak as he shifted his weight just enough to make her miss.

He didn't block. Didn't parry.

Just moved.

Like her attacks were inconveniences rather than threats.

Aveline's mind screamed.

'This is impossible. Who the hell is he?!'

But before she could react—

He was suddenly in front of her.

Aveline's breath hitched.

Too fast.

Her instincts flared, but her body—too slow.

Before she could even raise her sword, the man leaned in close, his voice nothing but a whisper—

"Good effort."

Then—

SHHK.

A sharp blade plunged straight through her heart.

Aveline's eyes widened in shock.

Pain—sharp, burning, final—spread through her chest as the cold steel twisted inside her.

But before she could even gasp—

SLASH.

The assassin's second blade tore across her throat in a single, clean motion.

Her body jerked, her vision blurring as warm blood sprayed across the marble floor.

Darkness crept in.

Her limbs went cold.

Her mind faded.

Aveline collapsed, her body hitting the ground in a lifeless heap.

It was over.

The assassin, unfazed, withdrew his blade, flicking off the excess blood before sliding it back into its sheath.

The silence smell in the room was canceled, the world outside eerily still.

He turned away, walking toward the open window, his mission complete.

But—

Just as he reached the edge, something shifted.

A pulse.

A vibration in the air.

The assassin stopped.

Slowly, he turned his head.

His sharp gaze landed on Aveline's motionless corpse—

—only to see a dark red aura beginning to rise from her body.

Then—

Her form twisted.

Cracked.

Morphed.

Flesh rippled. Bones stretched and contorted into something inhuman.

The assassin's eyes narrowed.

Aveline's body was no longer Aveline.

She was becoming—

A Gaia demon.