

ShadowBound 217

Chapter 217: A Step Further Into Cruelty

The sun cast its golden light over the grand estate of Tempest Palace in Zone 8. Guards patrolled the vast compound in disciplined formation, while maids hurried about, tending to their daily tasks. Inside, within one of the palace's lavish hallways, sunlight streamed through tall glass windows, offering a stunning view of the palace grounds.

Queen Lucy walked with calm authority, Mystica at her side, while two guards followed closely behind.

"I trust I didn't disrupt any of your plans, Mystica." The Queen's voice was polite, but completely devoid of concern.

Mystica smirked. "Not at all, my Queen. If you've summoned me so suddenly, it must be something urgent."

Queen Lucy nodded slightly. "Indeed. There is a pressing matter, and I believe only you can assist me."

Mystica tilted her head, curiosity sparking in her eyes. "Oh? And might I know what this matter entails?"

"Not here." Queen Lucy's voice was firm. "This is not something to be discussed in open halls. We need privacy."

Mystica chuckled lightly. "Very well then."

The two continued their path until they reached the Queen's private chambers. Upon arrival, Queen Lucy gestured to the guards at the door.

"Stand guard. No one enters."

The guards bowed in acknowledgment as Lucy and Mystica stepped inside.

Standing in the center of the room, kneeling before them, was Wyjin. His posture was unwavering, disciplined as always.

"Greetings, Your Majesty. Lady Moonstone."

"You may rise, Wyjin," Lucy commanded.

Wyjin stood, his expression as neutral as ever.

"Take us to the issue."

Without hesitation, Wyjin turned and lifted his hand. A swirling magical portal materialized before them, humming with arcane energy.

Without a word, Queen Lucy, Mystica, and Wyjin stepped through—vanishing.

—

As they stepped through the portal, the air shifted—denser, older. They emerged into a grand chamber of ancient design, its cobblestone walls lined with magical torches that burned with an ethereal blue glow, casting elongated shadows across the room. At the center stood a raised platform, its surface smooth but marked with arcane inscriptions, unmistakably a site of ritual examination or treatment.

Queen Lucy's voice broke the silence, measured yet commanding. "Wyjin, bring forth the remains."

Explore more at

Without hesitation, Wyjin stepped forward, approaching the elevated platform. He raised his right hand, and with a subtle flicker of mystic energy, the remains of Duchess Aveline materialized before them.

A sharp inhale slipped past Mystica's lips. Her gaze fixed on the body laid before her, widening in something rare—genuine shock.

Half of the corpse was unmistakably Duchess Aveline—her once-proud features now frozen in the stillness of death. But the other half...

The flesh was warped, twisted beyond recognition. Jagged, earthen-like ridges emerged from her skin, merging grotesquely into hardened, bark-like structures. The once-human form was now partially morphed, bearing the unmistakable traits of a Gaia demon.

Without thinking, Mystica stepped forward, her analytical mind already dissecting what lay before her. She leaned in, inspecting the body with the precision of a scholar encountering a phenomenon beyond recorded knowledge.

"What is this?" she murmured.

Queen Lucy, ever composed, observed Mystica's reaction with a knowing gaze. "According to Wyjin, after successfully carrying out the execution as ordered, Aveline's body... began to shift."

Mystica's fingers hovered over the hardened ridges along the body's arm. "Shift into a Gaia demon?"

Lucy nodded. "Precisely. Wyjin ensured the transformation never reached its full extent. He eliminated her before she could fully become... whatever she was turning into."

Mystica stilled, absorbing the implications of what she had just heard.

"Execution?" she repeated, tone smooth but laced with intrigue.

Queen Lucy clasped her hands behind her back, her voice effortlessly regal. "Duchess Aveline had been orchestrating a movement to overthrow the other nobles of Veridn. A calculated rise to power, one that could have disrupted the balance of influence."

Mystica arched a brow, her ever-present smirk ghosting her lips. "And that warranted an execution? Not to question your judgment, of course."

Lucy let out a small chuckle, a rare moment of amusement. "Of course not. You know me, Mystica—I wouldn't execute a powerful noble simply for political ambition."

That made Mystica's smirk widen just slightly. 'Oh, but you absolutely would,' she thought. 'If the ambition displeased you enough.'

But the Queen was not finished. "No, the real reason for her execution lies deeper."

Her expression darkened. "After years of meticulous research, intelligence gathering, and investigative work, I uncovered the truth. Duchess Aveline was not merely a scheming noble. She was a monster in human skin."

Mystica listened, silent yet engaged.

"Child trafficking. Mass disappearances. An untold number of lives lost under mysterious circumstances. And when I traced every last thread back to its origin—every shadowed deal, every vanishing soul—it always led to Aveline."

Mystica exhaled slowly, reclining slightly as she took in this new information. "And that," she murmured, "was the true reason."

"Indeed."

Silence settled between them, heavy with the weight of the revelation. Mystica looked back at the half-transformed corpse, before straightened herself. Her mind had already weave together the implications of what she had witnessed.

"So, I was summoned here to determine how such a transformation was even possible."

Lucy nodded. "Precisely."

Mystica folded her arms, her gaze lingering on the corpse as she considered the unprecedented nature of the situation. "This... is entirely new to me." She spoke with rare honesty. "I have never encountered a case where a human—especially a noble of her standing—undergoes a partial demonification after death."

Her voice held a note of fascination, layered with the subtle thrill of uncovering something beyond the known bounds of magic.

She exhaled, rolling her shoulders back slightly. "I can't promise immediate answers, but I will do what I can. However—" she looked directly at the Queen "—I will need to take the body with me. This chamber is far from an ideal environment for what I need to do."

Queen Lucy regarded her for a long moment, then inclined her head slightly in agreement. "Very well. The body is yours to examine. Do what you must."

Mystica smirked. "I expected nothing less."

With a flick of her wrist, she activated her Spatial Magic, her form bathed in a fleeting pulse of deep violet light. A rift in space materialized before her, silent yet consuming, as if the very air bent to her will.

The remains of Duchess Aveline vanished into the void, drawn seamlessly into Mystica's Dimensional Storage.

The chamber fell into stillness once more.

Queen Lucy, ever composed, turned her gaze to Wyjin. "That will be all for now."

Wyjin, efficient as always, lifted his hand and summoned a portal. Without hesitation, the Queen stepped through, Mystica following at her leisure.

As they emerged, the familiar surroundings of the Queen's private chamber enveloped them once more.

Mystica turned to Lucy, her smirk returning in full. "Well then... I shall return to you once I find something interesting about your dear Duchess."