

## Chapter 1: Queen vs Charming-Lite

Every story craved a villain – the twist, the hook, the thorn in the hero's side. Heroes? Predictable happily-ever-afters! Villains? Delightful uncertainties. Would they be deliciously crispy, dramatically sacrificed, or, well, just plain...

Dead? Oh, the variety!

A thunderous explosion rattled the windows, shattering Eydis's musings. Draped in midnight silks and sporting a dangerous glint in her golden eyes, she surveyed the wreckage of her throne room with detached amusement.

"Maybe," she murmured, "I'm the twist."

Perhaps conquering the realm would have to wait. The "Virtuous" Saintess and her himbo sidekick, Prince Charming-Lite had clearly gotten wind of her plans.

Father had drilled her in ruling, politics, and even the dreaded budgeting (shudder). None of it, apparently, prepared her for the ultimate weapon: the power of... *loooooooooooooove*?

Eydis winced as another groan echoed through the chamber, this time accompanied by the satisfying crunch of plaster. A near miss. Looks like she wasn't just the villainess; she was also the target practice.

Was she not the main character of her own story? Ugh. The more she contemplated this existential crisis, the worse her headache throbbed.

"Another budgetary nightmare," Eydis sighed, eyeing the impending rain of plaster.

The heavy oak door splintered inwards, revealing the said hero who seemed to have tumbled out of a romance novel cover - all shimmering flowing silver hair, eyes, and probably even socks.

"Surrender, Queen Eydis!" Damien boomed, echoing off the ravaged marble. "Your reign of chaos ends NOW!"

"Charming-Lite, must you punctuate every word with a war cry? My migraines are acting up enough as it is," Eydis sighed, rubbing her temples. "Let's cut to the inevitable fight scene, shall we?"

Damien, the knight with the forgettable last name (much like her own, a troubling realisation), sputtered in confusion. His predictable script seemed to have jammed. He raised his sword, caught between bracing for a witty quip or a bolt of dark magic.

"Your timing could use some work," Eydis remarked, surveying the debris. "This redecorating was growing on me. Saved me an appointment with a demolition crew, at least." Her voice dripped with sarcasm, but the tremor in her hand betrayed her feelings.

The once-opulent chamber, a silent witness to her childhood dreams, was now a battlefield. A pang, sharp and unexpected, pierced her chest. Ignore it. Stick to the script.

Wait?!

As the realisation dawned, an unsettling ripple tore through the air—a tremor that felt suspiciously unrelated to the chaos. However, pondering plot holes would have to wait. Villain monologues don't speak themselves, and she had a reputation to uphold—or demolish, depending on your perspective.

"A necessary evil!" Damien roared, his voice tight with a repressed emotion that went beyond righteous anger. "You hurt...her."

Eydis's brow furrowed in confusion. "Her? The Saintess?" Her voice, usually laced with faux sweetness, faltered slightly. "I can barely recall her face, let alone how I supposedly 'betrayed' her. Where is this paragon of virtue, anyway?"

"Don't play coy! She trusted you!" Fury contorted Damien's features. He lunged forward, the holy symbol on his breastplate pulsing with a white-hot intensity. "You chose darkness! Turned your back on the light!"

Trusted? Ridiculous! They never interacted, let alone forged a bond of trust.

Eydis sidestepped his attack with ease, her fingers weaving a silent spell. Inky tendrils of darkness erupted from her fingertips, hissing as they lunged towards Damien. He met them head-on, his blade glowing with a radiant light that pushed the shadows back.

"Spare me the religious ramblings, Sir D," Eydis called over the din. "Darkness isn't just an absence of light. It's like silence, not the absence of sound, but a frequency outside humans' hearing."

A flick of her wrist unleashed a writhing serpent of dark magic that whipped towards Damien's face. He barely dodged, the magic leaving a sizzling scorch mark on his cheek.

She smirked. "Most humans, anyway."

"Nonsense!" Damien growled, renewing his attack with a flurry of slashes.

The knight's holy blade met Eydis's shadowy tendrils in a deafening clash. Light warred with darkness, the very stones beneath their feet groaning in protest. A crack, sharp and sudden, split the floor, revealing an inky abyss.

Whispers, alien and chilling, echoed from within. Eydis's eyes widened as the vortex surged upward, swallowing her and Damien whole. His scream vanished into the consuming darkness.

Silence. Absolute, deafening silence.

New? This was beyond new.

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Darkness. It had always been Queen Eydis's companion. Not a foe to be vanquished, but a necessary counterpoint to light. Mythshollow, her obsidian kingdom, thrived under its perpetual twilight. Yet, a longing stirred within her. Stories of emerald meadows and glacial peaks captured her interest. And so, she'd conquered, her empire growing larger with each victory.

Soon, her name became a source of fear for neighbouring kingdoms, a harbinger of her inevitable rise to Empress. Yet, one puzzle remained: the Saintess. Why was there a blank spot in her memory where the legendary heroine should be? And why, before her downfall, did she face someone who seemed like a pale imitation of the true Saintess?

Disoriented and vaguely nauseated, she tumbled into the abyss. Time warped and stretched, until finally, a jarring jolt ripped her from the darkness. Blinding white light assaulted her eyes. Blinking back tears, she braced for the fiery damnation promised by the righteous.

Instead, the first thing that stung her nose wasn't brimstone, but the curiously mundane scent of... cleaning products?

Dripping down her face...?!

The second was the voice, shrill and grating against the throbbing symphony in her head. "That'll teach you to steal my boyfriend, you four-eyed freak!"

Eydis, for one, agreed. Four eyes did seem a tad excessive. But was this tirade meant for her?

Blearily blinking, she found the world a blurry watercolour nightmare. Her hand instinctively flew to her neck. Still a head, good. Not yet a disembodied spirit condemned to an eternity of listening to... this.

The high-pitched whine continued. Eydis had had enough.

"Did you know..." she rasped, her voice a touch higher than usual but undeniably hers. "That chronic nastiness can take a toll on you? Both inside and out?" She squinted at the blurry shapes hovering above her, a mischievous glint sparking in her (hopefully) soon-to-be-focused eyes.

"Something to consider, given the state of your complexion."

The bully sputtered, a strangled sound that resembled a particularly disgruntled goose. Eydis preferred a good face reading to deciphering human sound effects. This lack of sight was proving to be a royal pain.

A sharp kick to Eydis's ribs jolted her back to the unwelcomed reality. The bully loomed above her, cackling like a particularly unhinged hyena on helium. Ah, yes, she was most definitely alive. Unfortunately, shockingly vulnerable.

Wonderful. "Ow."

The bully's face, as far as Eydis could tell, contorted in confusion. "Wha- what are you even talking about?" she shrieked, her voice cracking like a teenager with self-esteem issues. "Why do you talk back?"

Before Eydis could respond, another voice chimed in, an obvious lackey with the nasal whine of entitlement. "Ugh, Tiffany, let's not waste time with the nerd."

"Is a little verbal sparring out of style these days? A shame, that was one of my finer skills." Eydis murmured under her breath, "amongst others." Her hand brushed against something cold and smooth. A pair of spectacles? Four-eyed? Ah.

Fascinating.

Eydis snatched the spectacles and slapped them on her face. The world around her sharpened into a startling clarity. The ashen grey sky she'd grown accustomed to vanished, replaced by a vibrant blue expanse. A gaggle of teenagers, their faces a variety of expressions, stood before her, clad in matching uniforms – green tartan blazers and skirts that fell primly just below their knees.

Her own body, she realised with a jolt, was encased in one of the itchy blazers, paired with a skirt that fell a few inches too short for her tastes. A tentative touch confirmed her worst fear – her hair, usually cascading down her back in dark, lustrous waves, was now a tangled brown mess in a ponytail.

This wasn't right. This wasn't her world. This wasn't her body.

Ignoring the throbbing ache in her head, Eydis dusted herself off with a flourish, the movement feeling oddly out of place amongst the teenagers. Where was Damien? Where was the inevitable battle?

A harsh voice cut through her confusion. "Where do you think you're going, freak?" the blonde spat.

"Does this 'freak' have a name?" Eydis turned, a steely glint in her eyes.

Tiffany sputtered in confusion, then gritted her teeth. "What game are you playing, Eydis?"

A slow, knowing smile spread across Eydis's face, revealing a playful hint of her canine teeth. "Eydis, huh?" she purred. "Things have just gotten far more interesting."

On cue, a scream pierced through their conversation, she glanced at another group of teenagers, following their eyesight, her eyes widened in surprise.

Above them, a tear ripped open the sky, revealing a gigantic, pulsating pink eye that could only be described as... well, let's just say it looked like someone had ripped a page straight out of a horror scroll.

Electricity crackled in the air, the scent of ozone stinging her nostrils. Judging by the wide-eyed terror on the faces around her, this wasn't normal. Not for them, at least.

Instinct took over. Eydis raised her hand, the familiar tingle of magic gathering at her fingertips. But... nothing. No tendrils of darkness responded. Just an unsettling...

Emptiness.

A bead of sweat traced a traitorous path down her temple. Fear, a serpent she'd long since strangled into submission, coiled uncomfortably in her gut. This wasn't part of the plan. Where was her power? Had this oversized, tearful eyeball somehow ripped her from her throne and deposited her in this...schoolyard?

In this world devoid of magic, the only thing certain was uncertainty. She stood frozen, a solitary silhouette against the tide of hurried screaming bodies. She had no idea where to go, what to do. For a moment, she felt the enormity of it all threatening to crush her.

But then, a spark. A defiant flicker in the depths of her despair. It was the voice she knew best - her own. She straightened. A low growl rumbled in her chest, a promise, a vow. She would claw her way back to her power, reclaim her birthright: magic, darkness, the very essence of who she was.

Eydis, Queen of Shadows, wouldn't go down without a fight.