

NICHOLE HEYDENBURG

# DEADLY BETRAYAL



BOOK 2: THE SHADOW BOUND CHRONICLES

*Deadly Betrayal*

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Dedicated to Mr. B—not only the best dog in the world, but my best  
friend,  
and the inspiration for Brody.  
I love you, buddy.



Adult books (crime thriller series):

The Long Shadow Series

*The Long Shadow on the Stage*- Book 1

*The Long Shadow of Memory*- Book 2

*The Long Shadow of Death*- Book 3

Young adult books (standalone thrillers):

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*Deadly Betrayal*- Book 2

*Deadly Portals*- Book 3

*Deadly Legacy*- Book 4



Murder, violence, kidnapping, swearing

# PROLOGUE



Ammitt paced the long, narrow room, the polished concrete floors cool against his bare feet. “I promise you, brother, this is the demon hunter the prophecy spoke of. It must be her.”

“Taylor Windsor is merely a human. You claim she only discovered her powers mere weeks ago. She is not trained. How can she possibly be The Chosen One?” his brother asked.

“If you had been there . . . If you saw what I did . . . No demon hunter has ever been able to banish a demon back to our realm without assistance. How do you explain that if she isn’t The Chosen One?” Ammitt questioned, seething at the fact that his brother didn’t believe him.

“Are you quite sure her aunt didn’t have something to do with it?”

“No, it wasn’t her. She’s the one I tricked into the deal, after all.” Ammitt sneered.

“Ah, yes, your foolish deal that ended when a teenage girl banished you here. All things to be proud of,” his brother said mockingly.

Ammitt sighed and stopped his pacing, shoving the aged parchment toward his brother. “Read the prophecy again. It must be the young Windsor girl. Who else would it be? This is our best chance at defeating them once and for all. We have to kill her.”

“Correct, but you cannot return to the human realm, leaving me to deal with this.”

“If you’re the one who kills her, Ray will be pleased,” Ammitt said.

His brother took the parchment from him at last, scanning it.

Ammitt peered over his shoulder to read it once again:

*There will come a time when demons will cease to exist. When The Chosen One is born and becomes of age, they will be the most powerful demon hunter to ever exist, borne of two ancient demon hunter families, their combined powers elevating The Chosen One to a level not yet reached by demon hunters. The Chosen One will be the one to ensure humanity is safe from the evils of the underworld at last. With the erasure of demons from existence, humans will be free from evil . . .*

His brother scoffed and held the parchment aloft, then handed it back to Ammitt. “This does not prove it’s Taylor Windsor. She is not of age yet, so how will we know?”

“Go to the human world. Find a way to slither into their lives, like you do so well.”

“How am I to get close to them? They will not fall for another deal like the one you made with Melanie,” his brother mused.

“You will find a way, brother. You always do,” Ammitt replied.



The chapter title 'CHAPTER 1' is rendered in a large, ornate, serif font. The word 'CHAPTER' is positioned above the number '1'. Behind the text is a detailed illustration of an open book with its pages fanning out. Two hands are shown holding the book from below, palms up. The entire scene is set against a background of swirling, misty clouds. The number '1' is centered below the book and hands. A decorative horizontal line with intricate scrollwork and floral patterns runs across the page, separating the chapter title from the main title.

# CHAPTER

## 1

# TAYLOR

Mel sighed and ran a hand across her face, which appeared infinitely more wrinkled than it had a few months ago—or at least, it did to fifteen-year-old Taylor, whose skin was blissfully smooth. “Taylor, concentrate,” she chided.

Taylor huffed and tightened her light brown ponytail, scrunching up her face in annoyance. “I am.”

Mel put her hands on her hips and stared her down. “Then why haven’t you mastered the spell yet?”

Taylor wanted to tell her aunt that it was impossible. No one could possibly be expected to learn how to practice magic so quickly. But it was

pointless. After everything that had happened that summer, she needed to be prepared. She hadn't been able to perform any spells since that night in the woods.

She shivered, wishing she could erase the memory of Ammitt's glowing red eyes and the way he had sucked Camille's soul out of her body, then tossed her aside like a piece of garbage. The image still haunted her nightmares.

"Taylor?" Mel said in a softer tone. "Are you okay?"

She nodded and concentrated on the spellbook, her eyes scanning the incantation once again, although at this point, she had it memorized.

For the past few weeks, Mel had focused on teaching her the basic spells to prepare her for attending Grimwood Magical Academy, the school for teenage demon hunters, in the fall. Taylor would be far behind the other students who had grown up in the world of demons and magic, learning spells from a young age. Demon hunters started their formal training at the academy at age twelve, so Taylor was almost four years behind everyone else.

Mel had scheduled a meeting with the demon hunter's council to make a special request for them to let Taylor enroll for the fall semester. She was a Turner, and the Turners were one of the five original ancient demon hunter families, so they hoped an exception would be made. Taylor was willing to work hard, and she was determined, but she didn't like sticking out or being different. Mel had already warned her not to tell anyone about the banishment spell she had somehow managed by herself. It was safer if no one else knew about Taylor's extraordinary capabilities. Apparently, what she had done wasn't normal for a demon hunter of her age.

By the end of their training session, Taylor was exhausted, and they hadn't even done any physical training. The past few weeks felt more like a year. Mel locked up the spellbook in the ancient steamer trunk and

tucked the key into her pants pocket. She gestured for Taylor to leave the room first.

They had turned the formerly forbidden room into a training room. Mel had finally gone through her parents' belongings and gotten rid of some of their stuff. Then they repainted the walls, put down mats, and made the room into a safe place to practice magic. They told anyone else outside of the demon hunter world it was a storage room, and no one suspected a thing.

Trudging down the hallway to the kitchen, Taylor entered the living room, throwing her weary body onto the couch. "Ughhh," she groaned as she sank into the cushions. She relaxed slightly as she lay down.

Brody, a small, white terrier with brown and black patches, trotted over to her. He sat on the floor in front of her, expectantly wagging his tail.

"Come here, Brody." Taylor patted the seat next to her so he could hop up, which he immediately did.

He shoved his head under her hand until she giggled and started petting him.

Mel came into the room and laughed when she spotted her niece forced into petting their new dog.

Brody had belonged to Camille, a servant of the demon Ammitt, but after Camille died, Taylor hadn't wanted to abandon him. She had convinced her aunt to bring him home, and now he was part of the family. At first, he had been sad and refused to eat. Taylor suspected he missed Camille, but he had settled into his new life. The strange part was they hadn't found out his age. Mel had taken him to a vet to make sure he was vaccinated and healthy, and the vet had been shocked, claiming she had never seen such a healthy, well-behaved adult dog.

"I'll get you some water," Mel offered.

Taylor perked up a bit. "And a snack?"

Mel laughed again. "Sure, if you want a banana or a protein bar."

Taylor wrinkled her nose. "Gross."

"You need to keep up your strength." Mel paused. "And besides, I need to go grocery shopping. I'm pretty sure those are the only edible foods left in the house." Mel disappeared into the kitchen and came back a few minutes later with a glass of ice water. "Here."

"Thanks." Taylor took the glass and sipped it gratefully. "So, were the bananas rotten?"

Mel smirked. "How did you know?"

Taylor shrugged a shoulder and chugged the rest of her water, wiping her hand across her mouth with a satisfied sigh. "Lucky guess. I've been living with you long enough. Should we go grocery shopping?"

"We can always order takeout. Mexican food or pizza?"

Taylor hesitated, unable to decide. "Both? I want tacos and pepperoni pizza with jalapeños. And maybe some cheesy bread."

"Can do, kiddo," Mel said, going into the kitchen to place the orders.

Taylor leaned back into the couch cushions, resting her hands behind her head. She closed her eyes. She could almost fall asleep, but the food would arrive soon. *I'll go to bed early*, she promised herself.

Mel returned and flopped onto the couch next to her.

Brody nestled in between them and sighed with contentment, closing his eyes once he was sure neither of them was leaving.

"Pick a movie." Mel handed the remote to Taylor.

Without a word, Taylor took it from her and searched through the various streaming services her aunt paid for every month. She scrolled past several movies she had watched with Kylie earlier in the summer. A pang of guilt stabbed her. Mel had warned her not to spend too much time with Kylie and Sarah until she learned how to control her powers. She didn't want any accidents occurring. It might be overkill, considering she hadn't performed a basic spell in weeks. The most she had managed was a few measly purple sparks, hardly enough to do any damage.

Taylor dropped the remote onto the scuffed, old coffee table without selecting a movie. Burrowing her head into Brody's tiny chest, she inhaled his comforting dog scent. She had just given him a bath, so he smelled fresh and clean.

"What's wrong?" Mel asked.

Taylor didn't respond and kept her face hidden. She didn't want to admit the truth—she was depressed and didn't feel like watching a movie with her aunt. What she really wanted was to text Kylie and go out somewhere, *anywhere*, and be around normal people. She missed Kylie, but she also missed her old life back in Minnesota, before her parents died and she was forced to move to Grimwood, North Carolina, and live with her aunt Mel. Before she learned about the existence of demons and magic. Before she found out she came from a long line of powerful demon hunters. So much had changed that summer. Too much.

Mel gently nudged her shoulder. "Taylor, you can talk to me." She paused before asking, "Is this about your parents? Do you miss them?"

Taylor scoffed. "No. I mean, of course I miss my parents. But this isn't about them."

"What, then? Kylie?"

"Sort of."

Mel briefly closed her eyes. "Can you please tell me? I can't read your mind."

Taylor pulled her face away from Brody's soft fur to peer at her aunt. She kept Brody on her lap, his small, fluffy body reassuring and comforting.

He laid his head down and settled in.

"I want my old life back," she whispered.

"I know, and I'm sorry again for everything. I hope you know that. I never meant to hurt you or your parents. It's my fault you have to cope with so much loss, while learning how to master your newfound powers.

It isn't fair, but this is what we have to deal with for now. It will get better eventually, I promise."

The doorbell rang.

Mel jumped up to get their takeout. "Be right back with the food."

But Taylor didn't think her life would get better. She didn't see how it possibly could.

The chapter title 'CHAPTER 2' is rendered in a large, ornate, blackletter-style font. The word 'CHAPTER' is positioned above the number '2'. Behind the text is a faint, artistic illustration of an open book with its pages fanning out. Two hands are shown reaching up from the bottom of the book, as if holding it open. The entire title is set against a light, misty background with some dark, root-like or branch-like patterns extending from the sides. Below the title is a decorative horizontal line with a central flourish.

# CHAPTER

## 2

## MEL

Mel strode into the circular room, with her shoulders pulled back and head held high. Months had passed since she had seen any of the council members, so she was apprehensive about the meeting, but she had to do it for Taylor's sake. If she could help her niece, then she would endure seeing them all again. It was the least she could do after the chaos she had caused.

The floors in the council meeting room were swirls of polished gray-and-white concrete—gorgeous but durable and practical. The circular room was encased by stained-glass windows depicting different major events throughout their history: the first demon's appearance, the

creation of the five ancient demon hunter families and the council, their war with the demons and the eventual defeat of the demons, and the celebration for the demon hunters afterward. She stood there, taking it all in. It was magnificent, especially since she had only been in the room a handful of times. It never failed to take her breath away.

“Well, well, well, Melanie Turner . . . How long has it been?” one of the council members, a tall, thin woman with pale white skin and long black hair, greeted her.

Clarissa Cromwell was the head of her family. The council had been founded with a matriarchal structure. The only exception to this rule was Alastair Price, whose wife had died tragically seven years ago, leaving him to raise three children on his own. Since his children were still too young to take the family’s place on the council, he was acting as the interim council member until his eldest daughter came of age.

“Two years, I think,” Mel said with a tight-lipped smile at being called by her full name. Everyone knew she preferred Mel.

Mel knew exactly how long it had been since she last saw Clarissa—since her parents’ funerals. Clarissa and Gideon had been kind enough to make an appearance and give their condolences, though Mel knew it was partly for show. They didn’t care about her wellbeing; they had simply wanted the gossip about who would take over the Turner family’s vacant spot on the council. Mel’s older sister, Christa, should have taken the spot, but since she had moved away years ago and forfeited her right as the eldest daughter, Mel was the only one left. But she hadn’t wanted to join the council, anyway.

The other council members greeted her in turn. There was Alastair Price, a handsome widower with flowing white locks; Vanessa Ellis, a short blonde with three kids; and lastly, Lavender Thatcher, a brunette with two kids. Mel forced a smile and greeted them, shaking hands with each member.



“Have a seat, Mel,” Vanessa said, gesturing to the single chair in front of the raised dais where the council members all stood.

Mel complied, and the council members sat in their respective seats.

“Thank you for seeing us today,” Lavender started, shuffling a stack of papers in front of her.

Each council member had an identical stack of papers on the long, raised shelf in front of them.

Mel hid her bewilderment at the statement, considering *she* had requested the meeting, not the council. “Of course,” she said politely, not wanting to start off on the wrong foot. She wanted to remain on their good side.

“Melanie, you must realize what a terrible mistake you made,” Clarissa began, “making a deal with that demon, putting the entire town of Grimwood in danger, not to mention—”

“How do you know about that?” Mel interrupted sharply.

Clarissa chuckled, and the other council members appeared amused as well.

This time, Alistair spoke up. “Mel, you don’t honestly think we just sit back and let all the demon hunters do as they please? We’re constantly watching everyone in the community. We have eyes *everywhere*. We know everything you do. What kind of council would we be if we didn’t take such measures?”

Mel’s face paled, and her heart rate sped up. She hadn’t expected this. She needed to ask for a favor, but now she felt sure they wouldn’t grant her request. If they knew about her deal with Ammitt, then . . .

“Why didn’t you intervene?” Mel demanded, her anger flaring. If they were aware of the situation, they could have stepped in. They could have protected her and Taylor, given them a safe house to hide out, or helped in any way besides ignoring the situation and waiting to see how it played out.

“We know about Christa and Nick too,” Clarissa added with a faux sympathetic smile. “It’s terrible what happened to them, but with the Turner family spot vacant on the council and your lack of involvement over the years, we had to make a decision.”

“What kind of decision?” Mel asked, not liking where this was going.

Alastair rubbed the bridge of his nose. “It gives us no pleasure to do this, Mel, but we voted—three to one—about taking drastic measures to ensure no incidents like this happen again. The Turners had their time.”

Mel’s heart thundered in her chest. She resisted the urge to clench her fists and show her agitation until she knew the outcome. She could guess who had voted against her. “What is it? What are you planning?” she demanded.

“We’re taking away your powers,” Clarissa said in a tone that almost sounded gleeful.

Mel stared at the council members, one by one, uncomprehending. She shook her head. “You can’t be serious! You can’t take away my powers. There are protocols. It can’t—”

“Actually, we can. As I said, we already voted. All we need is a majority vote to make such a decision,” Alastair responded, sweeping his long white hair from his face.

“Don’t you need a consensus? For everyone to vote yes?” Mel asked, trying to find a way out of this. How could she train Taylor, much less protect her, if she didn’t have her powers? How could she do *anything* without magic? Sometimes being a demon hunter was a nuisance, and it wasn’t the life she would have chosen for herself, but with Taylor in her life now, she needed magic. She needed every advantage she could get.

“In extreme cases, a three-to-one vote is sufficient,” Clarissa said. “We didn’t want it to come to this, Mel, but you left us no choice. You put the demon hunters’ secrecy in danger, and you knowingly put humans in danger too, not to mention your niece. Our powers are a gift from our ancestors; they aren’t meant to do with as we please. We must respect—”

“Yes, yes, respect the magic,” Mel finished the age-old adage. “So what are you going to do, then? Banish me? Kill me?”

Lavender chimed in, “No, nothing so rash.” She ducked below the shelf in front of her. A moment later, she popped back up, holding an amulet—a silver chain with a green stone hanging from it.

Mel gasped and put her hand to her mouth. “Is that what I think it is?”

Lavender nodded. “Indeed. The Emerald Vacuus Amulet. You are to wear it at all times. We’ll enchant it so you can’t take it off, and it will suppress your powers.” She let it dangle from her fingers, the green stone catching the streaks of sunlight shining through the stained-glass windows, creating a beautiful, multicolored prism.

“I thought the amulet was destroyed,” Mel replied, inching away from the dais in front of her.

She wasn’t powerful enough to fight off all four of them, but perhaps one or two . . . Or she could make a run for it. She and Taylor could go into hiding; they could move somewhere far away and start over. Although that brought up a new series of issues.

Grimwood Magical Academy was one of the best schools for demon hunters in the country. Mel didn’t have connections to other schools. Besides, they had tried running away before, and that hadn’t exactly ended well.

As Mel backed further away from the council, Alastair gasped. His pupils turned white, and he stared off absentmindedly, as if gazing into the distance. The expression on his face remained blank for several seconds.

Clarissa turned to him and put her hand on his back, rubbing soothingly. “What is it, Alastair? What did you see?” she asked when his eyes returned to their normal green color.

“Lock the doors!” Alastair yelled, his voice booming across the polished concrete flooring.

Clarissa raised her hand as if to lock the doors with magic, but Taylor came bursting into the room.