

Tyrant 13

Chapter 13: After the Ashes

The sky was still dark, but a faint glow had begun to rise from behind the mountains. Cold wind whispered across the snowy plains, carrying with it the stench of ash, blood, and something less tangible—regret.

Trafalgar stood at the edge of the hill, surrounded by silence and ruin. His breath formed visible clouds in the air as he looked to the east, where the first rays of sunlight pierced through the mountain peaks. The battlefield stretched far beyond his sight—burned buildings, shattered earth, corpses half-buried in snow. In the distance, he could see the last of the Demonoids retreating, their figures vanishing into the forest mist.

'Who was that girl...? She doesn't match any of Trafalgar's memories. Could she be part of the foggy parts I still can't access? And what did she mean by "after this, things will calm down between our two families"?'

He narrowed his eyes, frowning.

'More questions... and fewer answers. This is turning into a complete mess. I just hope this is finally over.'

His gaze dropped to the sword still clutched in his hand. Blood had dried on the blade. His knuckles were pale from holding it too tightly.

Slowly, Trafalgar opened his fingers and let the weapon fall. It landed in the snow with a dull thud, disappearing halfway into the icy slush.

'I don't want anything to do with it anymore.'

He turned toward the fallen. Three lives had been taken by his blade. One human, two Demonoids. One of them had begged.

'He tried to kill me first... but still. I wonder if he would've spared me, had our roles been reversed.'

His chest rose and fell with an uneven breath.

'The way I killed him... it was brutal. But maybe it was better than letting him bleed out, frozen and alone.'

He stood there, letting the wind bite at his cheeks.

Below, Morgain soldiers were already moving. Some carried stretchers, others helped civilians or comrades who could barely walk. A few still worked on putting out fires with controlled ice magic, the smoke rising in tired columns. It was the aftermath of chaos—quiet, bitter, and sobering.

Trafalgar clenched his jaw and took a step forward.

Trafalgar carefully made his way down the slope, stepping over cracked debris and charred remnants of battle. The air still carried heat from magical flames, and the ground beneath his boots crunched with frost and ash. He didn't speak to anyone—there was no one to talk to. Everyone was busy tending to the wounded, moving bodies, or reuniting with surviving villagers.

'The safest place is still next to him... If I stay close to Valtair, no one will dare try anything.'

The thought of assassins still haunted him. The memory of that soldier's eyes as he'd driven the blade into his heart... it refused to leave.

As he reached the edge of what was once the village center, his vision started to blur. A sharp pain pierced through his skull like a blade. He stumbled, clutching the side of his head.

"Ngh... again?"

His knees buckled.

It was like a tidal wave crashing through his brain. The pressure was unbearable, ringing in his ears like the echo of a sword being drawn endlessly.

He tried to take another step—but his legs gave out.

Trafalgar collapsed to the ground.

From atop, Valttair stood motionless, still overseeing the aftermath from the same spot he had occupied after slaying the thirty-meter beast. His gaze briefly flicked toward the movement below.

He saw the boy fall.

'Still weak... but not bad, for a first time.'

Without moving his expression, Valttair raised a hand and gestured.

"You two. Get him. Put him in the carriage."

Two nearby soldiers nodded and hurried toward the unconscious Trafalgar.

Valttair then turned to one of the commanders nearby. "Your squad will remain here. Assist the wounded and help rebuild the perimeter. I'll send reinforcements soon."

The commander saluted. "Understood, Lord Valttair."

Not far from them, Helgar stood with his arms crossed, watching the scene unfold. Elira leaned on Helgar's massive greatsword, her blonde hair stained with soot. Rivena remained silent, her arms folded behind her back.

"Tch," Helgar grunted. "Looks like the House Zar'khael still holds a grudge against Father."

Elira nodded. "It didn't feel like a full-on assault, though. They held back. More like a warning."

Helgar sighed. "Guess this time Father won't be able to avoid the council meeting. It's been long overdue. They'll demand an explanation—and likely a solution."

"If the council gathers," Elira added, "there'll probably be an event tied to it. We'll all be expected to attend."

"Right," Helgar agreed. Then glanced sideways. "Rivena, you okay? You've been unusually quiet."

"Oh, I'm fine," Rivena answered with a faint smile. "Just a little drained. One of their fighters was at Prime level... like me."

"They sent someone that strong just to deliver a warning?" Helgar raised an eyebrow.

"He escaped," Rivena murmured. Then her eyes glinted slightly, her expression softening into something unreadable.

'So you survived, little brother. That's good. Now I'll have more time to play with you...'

The dark carriage rumbled down the snow-dusted road, its wheels creaking faintly with each rotation. Inside, Trafalgar lay unconscious, his breathing steady but shallow. His body swayed slightly with each bump, but he didn't stir.

Outside, Valtair rode silently atop his dark steed, leading the convoy. Behind him followed Helgar, Elira, and Rivena on their own horses—quiet, solemn. Other Morgain soldiers marched or rode behind, guarding the rear and flanks. The scent of blood and burnt wood lingered in the cold morning air.

An hour later, the towering silhouette of Morgain Castle came into view—its obsidian walls rising like jagged fangs from the mountain's edge. As they approached the main courtyard, dozens of uniformed guards stood ready, forming two neat lines. Several clerics and medics were already rushing forward with stretchers and blankets for the wounded.

Among them stood Mayla.

Wrapped in her winter cloak, the young maid's chestnut eyes searched anxiously. As the first carriages arrived and the injured were carried out, she scanned every face—until she saw him.

"Trafalgar!"

Two soldiers gently lifted him from the carriage and placed him on a stretcher.

"Is he hurt? What happened to him? Is he bleeding?" Mayla asked frantically, running toward the stretcher. "Is he—?"

"Step aside," one of the soldiers ordered calmly.

Mayla looked like she was about to argue when a cold, commanding voice spoke from behind.

"You're his maid, aren't you?"

Mayla froze and slowly turned.

Valttair stood tall behind her, his cape lightly flapping in the breeze, his expression unreadable.

"Y-Yes, my lord," she replied, lowering her gaze.

"Good," he said, his tone detached. "When he wakes, tell him to come to my office."

Mayla blinked. "Of course, my lord. But... may I ask—is he alright?"

Valttair glanced toward the stretcher being carried inside. "It seems he overexerted himself for the first time in years. It's exhaustion."

His words were cold and simple, without concern.

"I... I understand. I'll make sure he comes to your office when he wakes up."

Valttair said nothing more. He turned and walked toward the inner halls of the castle.

Mayla watched him go, then turned back and hurried after the soldiers, her gaze fixed on Trafalgar's unconscious form.

Behind her, the three Morgain siblings dismounted. Helgar, arms folded, glanced toward their father with a smirk.

"Well, look at that," he said. "Seems like the bastard finally earned some respect from Father."

Neither Elira nor Rivena responded. They simply watched as Mayla disappeared into the corridor, following the stretcher into the castle.