

Tyrant 195

Chapter 195: A Place of Her Own

The vampire returned with a stack of ledgers balanced neatly in her pale hands. She laid them on the table with fluid grace, the faint scent of ink and parchment wafting into the air. "Here are the listings available in this district," she said, spreading the books open so the illustrations and descriptions were visible. Each page glimmered with sketches of grand homes: villas with fountains in the courtyards, estates with three floors and sprawling gardens, residences with built-in staff quarters.

Mayla leaned forward, flipping a page slowly. Her brows knit. "All of these are... far too large," she murmured. "I'll be living on my own. Something smaller would be enough." Her tone wasn't shy, but measured, practical.

The vampire tilted her head, crimson eyes narrowing in curiosity. "Just for you alone? I had assumed, of course, that the two of you were a couple."

Before Mayla could answer, Trafalgar cut in, his voice steady and without hesitation. "No. We're not."

The agent's lips quirked into a sly smile, though she said nothing more. Mayla, for her part, simply kept her gaze on the pages. She wasn't embarrassed—if anything, she found it almost amusing that people kept drawing the same conclusion. He's younger than me, she thought, and yet everyone seems to see us that way. Strange.

She turned another page, her expression tightening. Each house was elegant, beautifully designed, and undeniably expensive. Even the "smaller" properties were mansions by any common measure. "These don't feel like something for me," she admitted at last. "They look more suited for nobles entertaining guests than for someone just trying to live quietly."

Trafalgar's hand rested casually on the table. His dark blue eyes scanned the listings without flinching. "Doesn't matter. You'll choose whichever you want. Don't think about the cost."

The vampire returned after a moment with another, thinner ledger. "If the larger estates feel excessive, perhaps these will suit you better. Smaller in scale, but still within the standards of this district." She opened it before them.

Mayla scanned the pages carefully. These listings showed two-story houses rather than sprawling manors: modest gardens instead of wide courtyards, elegant halls rather than ballrooms. Even so, each one radiated luxury. Polished marble floors, private balconies overlooking the city, and imported furniture as part of the purchase.

Her lips pressed into a line. "Even these feel... too much. I grew up surrounded by grandeur in the Morgain castle, but I never thought of it as mine. To have something like this, just for me—it feels excessive."

Trafalgar leaned back in his chair, studying her calmly. "Excessive or not, it doesn't matter. Pick the one you like best. You won't pay for it."

Her eyes flicked up at him briefly, steady rather than flustered. "That isn't the point, Trafalgar. It feels strange to accept a gift of this size."

"It isn't a gift," he corrected flatly. "It's an arrangement. You'll live here safely, that's all. Think of it as necessity, not indulgence."

The vampire chuckled softly at the exchange, her crimson gaze moving between them. "Most clients quarrel about price or distance. You quarrel about whether luxury is appropriate." She rested her chin on one pale hand, amused.

Mayla exhaled slowly, returning her attention to the ledger. Despite her words, she traced one illustration with her fingertip—a modest villa with a small enclosed garden. Her thoughts lingered there, though she didn't voice them aloud.

Trafalgar, noticing, tapped the page. "If you like it, mark it down. I said the price doesn't matter."

Trafalgar tapped the edge of the open ledger once more, then leaned back, folding his arms. His voice was calm, but there was a weight behind it. "The only thing I ask is that the place be secure. Luxury means nothing if it can't protect its resident."

The vampire's crimson eyes glinted, her smile sharpening faintly. "Ah, I see. So safety above all else. Sensible." She slid another folder from beneath the counter and opened it, revealing diagrams annotated with wards and patrol routes. "Several of the properties come with different levels of protection. Some rely on the city guard's patrols in the district. Others employ private security—mercenaries paid to watch the grounds day and night. And then..." She tapped a page with one long, lacquered nail. "This one has a magical seal woven into its foundation. Intrusion is impossible unless the barrier is shattered. It's one of the safest homes in this quarter."

Mayla studied the page, her eyes widening slightly at the intricate glyphs sketched in the margins. "A magical seal? That's... far more than I expected."

"Which is why it interests me," Trafalgar said evenly. "If you're to live here, then I want no risk. Choose freely among the options, Mayla, but keep in mind—this is the one I'd consider most reliable."

She looked up at him, meeting his gaze. There was no arrogance in his tone, no sense of showing off wealth. It was simply practical, direct. She understood then—this wasn't about appearances. It was about peace of mind, his as much as hers.

The vampire leaned back, watching the exchange with a sly curve to her lips. "So decisive. Few young lords your age speak so plainly."

Trafalgar ignored the remark, turning back to Mayla. "Which of these do you prefer?"

Mayla turned a few more pages until her hand stilled over one sketch. It wasn't a sprawling villa or a marble estate—just a modest apartment on an upper floor of a refined stone building. Two bedrooms, a small kitchen, a private bath. What set it apart was the balcony: wide windows opening to a view across the northern district, rooftops stretching toward the distant horizon.

"This one," she said quietly. "It's small, but enough for me. I don't need more."

The vampire leaned forward, her pale fingers brushing the parchment. "Ah... a curious choice. Simpler, but elegant. And yes, the view is lovely. It often appeals to scholars and retired nobles who seek quiet."

Trafalgar studied the diagram with his usual calm. "What about its security?"

Her crimson eyes flicked back to him, amused by his persistence. "The building is overseen by a family contracted exclusively to guard it. They've lived there for generations, maintaining both the property and its safety. Residents have never once reported intrusion. In this district, that reputation matters."

Mayla tilted her head, surprised. "A family dedicated only to keeping watch...? That sounds safer than having strangers rotating shifts."

"Exactly," Trafalgar said with a short nod. He closed the ledger and looked to the agent. "Good. Then we'll see it now."

The vampire's smile widened, revealing the faintest glimmer of fangs. "Of course. I anticipated that answer. Come, the carriage is ready outside. We'll go immediately."

She gathered the ledgers with graceful efficiency while Trafalgar stood, gesturing lightly toward Mayla. "Let's go. It's your choice, after all."