

Tyrant 24

Chapter 24: The Veiled Stranger

The woman slowly took a step forward.

Trafalgar stood still, his back straightening instinctively.

"...Can I help you with something?" he asked, trying to sound unfazed.

No answer.

She kept walking toward him—slow, deliberate steps, as if she had all the time in the world. The black veil still hid her face, but the pressure radiating from her presence was undeniable.

Trafalgar's brows drew together. His instincts were flaring.

He turned to the balcony door and reached for the handle.

Click.

It didn't budge.

His breath hitched.

'Fuck off... Why now? What's going on?'

He clenched his jaw and tried to raise his arm to summon Maledicta.

Nothing happened.

His heart skipped a beat.

He tried again. His fingers wouldn't twitch. His shoulders wouldn't move. Even his legs were frozen in place.

'No, no, no—what is this? My mana's still there. I can feel it—but I can't—move.'

The woman was only a few steps away now, her black robes flowing soundlessly behind her. Every inch she closed made the air feel heavier, colder.

Trafalgar's body remained locked. He was stuck, unable to summon his weapon, unable to speak again.

All he could do... was watch.

The woman stopped just in front of him.

Trafalgar stared, his breaths growing shallow. She raised her hand slowly, her fingers pale against the dark veil.

Something shimmered between her fingertips.

A pill.

Small. Black. Faintly glowing with a deep crimson light that pulsed like a heartbeat.

'That... doesn't look friendly, is this another try to kill me? Even in this fancy place?'

She reached out, inch by inch.

Trafalgar tried to flinch back, to tilt his head, to do anything—but his body remained paralyzed. His eyes were the only part of him that could move, and they darted between the pill and her hidden face.

She pressed her fingers to his lips.

His mind screamed, Don't.

But she was already pushing it past his teeth.

As soon as it touched his tongue, the pain hit. Like fire tearing down his throat, crawling through his insides.

He gasped, finally able to breathe—but the air tasted like smoke.

His knees gave out.

Trafalgar collapsed forward onto the cold marble floor, one hand barely catching his fall. His head hung low, sweat dripping from his chin.

Every breath burned. Every heartbeat felt like thunder in his chest.

He forced his gaze upward.

The woman was gone.

Gone—no sound, no trace. Nothing but silence and that unbearable burning in his gut.

Then, faintly—

[Bloodline is stirring...]

His vision blurred.

[Bloodline is stirring...]

The words echoed again, like whispers in the back of his skull, until everything went black.

- Random POV -

Far across the banquet hall, a door creaked open.

A tall bestman in a formal suit stepped out, grumbling under his breath. His long ears twitched with irritation, and his tail flicked once behind him.

"Damn nobles..." he muttered, pulling out a slim cigarette. "I need to relax for a bit. These social events aren't my thing."

He lit the cigarette with a small snap of his fingers, conjuring a spark of mana. The orange glow illuminated his face as he leaned against the balcony railing.

Then he froze.

His eyes locked on a figure slumped near the center of the balcony floor.

"...What the hell?"

He rushed forward, the cigarette slipping from his lips and hitting the ground with a hiss.

"T-There's someone here! Hey!" he shouted over his shoulder. "We've got an injured guest!"

Footsteps thundered from the hall as two workers in white-trimmed uniforms burst through the door.

"What happened?"

"I just stepped out—he was already like this!"

A moment later, a third figure arrived—an elven healer, robes flowing behind him, a glowing staff already in hand.

He knelt beside Trafalgar and immediately placed a hand on his back.

"[Heal]."

A gentle light spread over Trafalgar's body... and then dimmed.

No change.

"He's not responding," the elf said, frowning. "But he's alive. Something's... wrong with his mana flow."

"Should we move him?"

"No. Stabilize the pulse first, we don't know if he's alright."

The scene grew tense and quiet, the party continuing just meters away—completely unaware of what had just happened on the balcony.

- Valttair POV -

In a circular chamber far removed from the festivities.

Eight individuals were seated around a large obsidian table carved into a perfect circle. In front of each of them lay a single metal coin—engraved with the crest of their house—nestled in a slot embedded in the table itself.

Silence lingered. The air was thick with mana and power.

Valttair du Morgain sat with his back straight, hands resting over his lap. His long platinum hair flowed past his shoulders, and his cold gray eyes scanned the others.

To his right sat Roderic au Vaelion, tall and broad-shouldered. His golden hair, slicked back, gleamed under the light, and his crimson eyes burned with quiet confidence.

The matriarch of House Myrrhvale adjusted her sea-colored robes. Faint gills fluttered on her neck as she breathed—barely noticeable beneath her high collar. Her name was Lady Nyssara di Myrrhvale, and the scent of salt and herbs clung faintly to her.

Opposite her, seated with unnerving stillness, was Lord Malakar du Zar'khael—a demonkin with curved black horns and dark crimson eyes. His fingers tapped the table slowly, leaving trails of mana in the air.

To Malakar's left, Lady Lysaria au Nocthar, matriarch of the vampiric bloodline, smiled faintly. Her white hair shimmered like moonlight, and her red gaze flicked between the others with detached amusement.

Beside her, the towering patriarch of House Thal'Zar, Kaedor du Thal'Zar—a muscular man with short brown hair and sharp amber eyes—sat hunched slightly forward. Though in human form, the wild aura surrounding him was unmistakably beastlike.

Grumhald au Dvergar of the dwarven house grunted, arms crossed. His short frame did little to diminish the weight of his presence. The runes on his armor glowed faintly.

And finally, Lady Elenara au Sylvanel, matriarch of the elven bloodline, tilted her head gracefully. Her deep green eyes shone with arcane clarity, and her staff rested against the chair. Vines curled lazily around her ankles, responding to her pulse.

The door creaked once more.

Ten figures entered—elderly men and women in long ceremonial robes. Their expressions were solemn.

One of them stepped forward. His hair was gray, but his posture was firm. His eyes locked with Valttair's for a brief moment.

The man was his father.

"Let us begin," he said, voice calm but firm. "This marks the 142nd Council Gathering."