

Tyrant 49

Chapter 49: Can You Stir This?

The fire crackled quietly, its warmth cutting through the cold sting of mountain air. Trafalgar stepped closer, eyes narrowing at the pot suspended above the flames. The smell was... tolerable. Simple porridge, seasoned lightly with dried herbs.

Dren stood beside it, sleeves rolled up, stirring with a wooden ladle.

"What are you making?" Trafalgar asked, his voice flat.

"A soup, young master. Should be ready soon," Dren replied, offering a casual smile. "Would you mind watching it for a second? Nature calls... rather urgently."

Trafalgar arched a brow. "...Fine. Go."

"Thank you."

Dren handed him the ladle and walked briskly toward the rocks and sparse trees just beyond the edge of camp.

Trafalgar stirred the pot slowly, watching the mixture bubble. The flames flickered in his eyes, but his face remained unreadable.

The crunch of snow muffled under Dren's boots as he disappeared behind the largest boulder. He crouched down, grunting, then looked up as a tall shadow approached.

"About time," Dren muttered.

Rusk loomed over him—easily two meters thirty, built like a war beast, his arms crossed.

"When do we hit him?" Rusk asked, voice low and eager. "Doesn't look like he's gonna be a problem."

"Once he sleeps," Dren said without looking up. "Lady Seraphine will pay when it's done, we just need to wait."

Rusk snorted. "Five hundred gold upfront. Fifteen hundred after. Retirement kind of money you know?"

Dren wiped his hands on the snow beside him. "You know how it works. The Eight Great Families don't blink at that kind of payout. But once it's done, we lay low—permanently. There'll be heat."

"Heat for killing him?" Rusk scoffed. "You heard the rumors. Trafalgar—the Morgain reject. Couldn't even awaken his core until three months ago. Bastard child, no talent, dead weight. Honestly, this job's too easy."

Dren stood up, pulling up his trousers. "Don't get cocky. A Morgain is still a Morgain. There's a reason those families rule the world."

He stepped past Rusk, brushing the snow from his coat.

"Just stick to the plan."

They walked back toward the fire.

Dren returned with a casual gait, wiping his hands on a cloth tucked into his belt. Trafalgar didn't move, still gently stirring the soup with the ladle.

"Thanks for keeping an eye on it, young master," Dren said, reaching out to take over. "Please, take a seat by the fire. I'll serve in a minute."

Trafalgar handed him the ladle. "Fine."

He walked over to the campfire, his boots crunching softly against the frost-covered ground. The four others—Kael, Beren, Rusk, and Tovin—were already seated in a semicircle around the flames, relaxed, sharing quiet looks.

As he sat down, they greeted him in unison.

"Young master."

"Evening."

"Hope the ride hasn't been too rough."

Trafalgar gave a faint nod. "Not yet. Still waiting for someone to try and kill me."

A chuckle went around the group, though only Kael's felt genuine.

He leaned back slightly, letting the heat soak into his legs. "So... mercenaries, huh? You all been doing this long?"

Kael smiled. "Twelve years for me. Started after the Southern War ended. Needed coin."

"I fought in that one," Beren added, adjusting his gauntlet. "Didn't like working for nobles, but the pay was good."

Tovin poked the fire with a stick. "Did escort work before this. Plenty of spoiled brats. You're not that bad so far."

Rusk grunted. "Wouldn't call this a hard job. Quiet client, decent pay, mountains aren't crawling with bandits for once."

Trafalgar smirked faintly. "Give it time."

The fire popped. Sparks drifted upward into the darkening sky.

He watched them as the mercs kept talking, each sharing a story or two—close calls with ogres, drunken brawls in border towns, smugglers who turned out to be cultists. Trafalgar listened, asked the right questions, gave just enough reaction to keep the rhythm going.

Dren finally returned, holding a tray with five bowls of steaming porridge.

"Dinner is served," he said with a half-smile, handing out the bowls one by one.

Beren, Tovin, Kael, Rusk—each took theirs without hesitation.

Dren set the last one in front of Trafalgar.

"Yours, young master."

Trafalgar stared at it for a moment, then looked up.

"I'm not hungry. You can have mine."

Rusk's eyes lit up. "With your permission, then... I won't let it go to waste."

He took the extra bowl eagerly and began eating.

The air was still.

The mercenaries ate without hesitation, chatting between bites as if the night would pass without incident. The soup steamed in their bowls, spiced just enough to mask anything suspicious.

"You sure, young master?" he asked mid-bite. "Not even a taste?"

"I said I'm not hungry," Trafalgar replied evenly, not taking his eyes off him. "But I appreciate your enthusiasm."

Kael chuckled, unaware. "Can't remember the last time we had hot food on a cold night."

A few more seconds passed.

Then Beren dropped his spoon.

He hunched forward, fingers trembling, breath coming in sharp gasps.

"Beren?" Kael asked, concern flashing across his face.

Beren looked up—eyes wide and bloodshot—then vomited a thick stream of blackened blood onto the snow. His veins pulsed visibly beneath his skin, dark and swollen, crawling like shadows along his neck and jaw.

He tried to speak, but only blood came out.

Then he collapsed, twitching once before going still.

Tovin stood abruptly, his bowl falling from his hands. "What the f—"

His sentence never finished.

He staggered sideways, choking violently, blood splattering across his sleeve. His lips turned dark purple as he dropped to one knee, struggling to breathe.

Rusk dropped his spoon too. "It's poisoned—!"

But even as he shouted, his body betrayed him. He clutched his stomach, stumbling back, the veins across his face turning black like cracked ink.

Kael reached for his sword in panic—but his hands were already shaking.

Trafalgar remained seated, arms still folded, watching in silence.

Rusk fell face-first into the snow, spasming briefly before going limp. Tovin collapsed next, eyes rolled back, twitching in place.

Kael got as far as a single step before collapsing to one knee, coughing up blood between his teeth.

Dren, however, didn't fall.

He dropped his bowl and stumbled back from the fire, breathing hard, but still on his feet. His legs shook under him, his skin pale with sweat—but he endured.

He turned toward Trafalgar with narrowed eyes, his breath ragged.

"You poisoned us, bastard—! Lady Seraphine will bury you for this!"

Trafalgar finally stood up, brushing a bit of dust from his sleeve.

"Tch. You should've died with the rest."