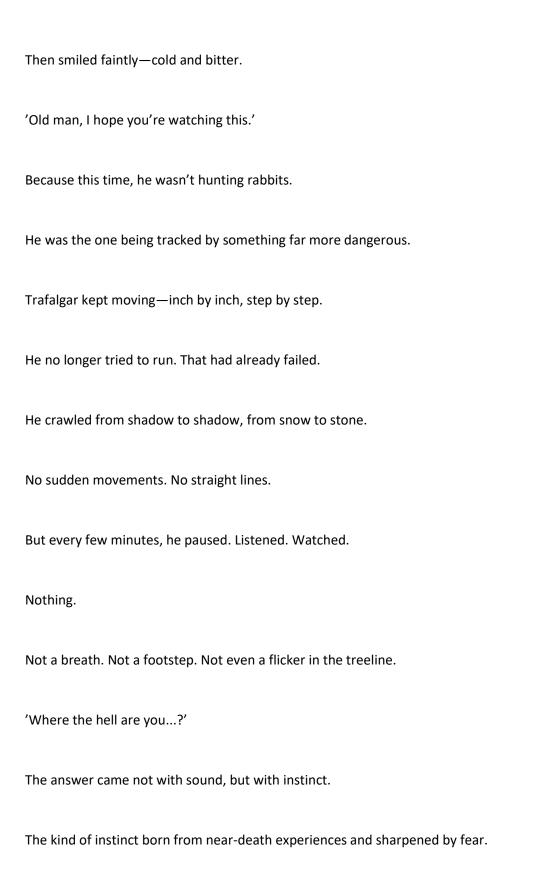
## **Tyrant 53**







He closed his eyes briefly and imagined the reverse—where he would be if he were the killer.
High ground.
Angle to shoot.
Wind direction.
Stable footing.
No line of escape.
He peered between the trees, eyes narrowing at the distant ridge above.
Was that a shimmer?
He focused harder. No movement.
'He's a fucking profesional.'
Trafalgar's hands tightened into fists.
He wasn't just dealing with a soldier. This was someone who lived and breathed the art of the hunt. Whoever Seraphine had sent was not some expendable pawn—he was the kind of weapon you kept hidden until the job really mattered.
'Even if I know where he is I can't touch him. I don't have spells or something to even hit him. My body's too slow. My cover's too thin.'
It didn't matter how sharp Maledicta was.





His voice was a low rasp, barely above a whisper. Not for fear of being heard—he knew he couldn't be.
"My Periphery Vision gives me a 100-meter read in every direction. I've been watching you this whole damn time."
He reached down and plucked another arrow from the quiver strapped to his back. The shaft pulsed faintly with violet runes—mana compression set to full burst.
"Let's see how long you can crawl before you start praying."
He nocked the arrow, drew the string halfway—and paused.
A grin tugged at the corner of his scarred lip.
"That's right. Keep squirming. Seraphine didn't say kill you fast. Just kill you well. Let you feel it first. Let you beg. That's the kind of performance she wants."
His eyes didn't shift from Trafalgar's form below.
But something in his mind suddenly twitched.
That instinct. That primal whisper in the base of the skull that told men not to look left or right—but behind.
His grip tensed.
His vision flashed.

A presence entered the edge of his detection radius—barely a flicker in his Periphery Vision, but fast, direct, and glowing red with mana.
"What—?"
A projectile was heading straight for him.
Not an arrow.
Not a spell.
Something else.
The hunter's body reacted before his mind did—he leapt backward from the ledge, twisting in midair, his bow half-drawn as he tried to identify the object barreling toward his perch.
But it was too fast.
A blur of steel and wind.
'That wasn't from the boy'
He landed hard, skidding on the snow. His breath fogged from the sudden adrenaline.
Then he heard it.
A voice.
Smooth.

Unbothered.
Amused.
"Found you."
- Trafalgar POV -
The forest exploded with noise.
A shockwave rolled through the treeline—branches snapping, snow falling like mist, the echo of something heavy slamming into the ground just ahead.
Trafalgar froze.
His instincts screamed in unison.
Run.
But something deeper—the hunter inside, the one his grandfather taught to listen to the forest, not fear it—told him otherwise.
'That wasn't an arrow. That was something else.'
Maledicta shimmered back into his grip as he crept forward, cautious, slow, brushing aside the snow-heavy branches. Every step closer heightened the air's tension—like the forest itself was holding its breath.

He reached the edge of a shallow cliff and looked down into the clearing below.

And there he saw him.
A man stood amid a small crater of displaced snow and crushed roots. Not a scratch on him.
Long, platinum blond hair, flowing loose like threads of silver under sunlight.
His back was turned, but even from here, Trafalgar could tell—tall, lean, power coiled beneath the cloak that fluttered gently behind him.
Not Valttair.
'Wait they look almost identical but this one's younger.'
Then the man turned his head slightly, revealing a pair of sharp, steel-gray eyes—eyes that cut through fog, through fear, through men.
Trafalgar's breath caught.
In his mind, something clicked. A name surfaced—one he didn't even know he remembered. From a blurry memory of the old Trafalgar, overheard once during a bitter family gathering.
'That's Mordrek du Morgain.'
He swallowed hard.
Valttair's younger brother. Ten years younger. Said to be just as dangerous.
Just as brilliant.

The kind of man who made blood run cold when he smiled.
Mordrek glanced up toward the ridge.
And for a moment, their eyes met.
His mouth curled slightly—not quite a smile.
Just enough to say:
"You're late."