

Tyrant 138

Chapter 138: The Elevator of Unspoken Truths

The circular platform hummed softly as it rose through the tall shaft of the dormitory building. Beyond the glass walls, the night stretched cold and silent, the faint glow of mana-lamps tracing the path upward. Trafalgar stood with his hands loosely at his sides, his gaze fixed forward on the platform's slow ascent.

Beside him, Zafira remained quiet. She still wore the jacket Trafalgar had draped over her shoulders earlier, its faint warmth clinging to her despite the chill air. Her gray eyes lingered on him—not the serious young man standing there now, but the memory of the timid boy he once was.

Years ago, in a fleeting moment of fear and courage, Trafalgar had acted for her sake. It had not been a promise, nor some grand vow, but a small act of bravery from someone who was afraid. That simple moment had left a mark on her heart. It was then that she had begun to love him.

'Childish?' she wondered. 'Perhaps to others. Perhaps to those who believe such feelings are trivial, born of youth. But even now, at sixteen, I have never let go of that timid boy who once reached out to me.'

She studied his face, sharper now, colder. The warmth of the past had hardened into steel. Trafalgar had changed—serious, calculating, distant. It was logical. The heirs of the Great Families never had easy lives. Responsibility, politics, power... all of it weighed upon them from the moment they were born.

Zafira knew no romance between two of the Great Families had ever been allowed. A union could tilt the balance of the world, intertwining bloodlines and classes into something far stronger.

Still, as the platform neared its stop, she held the jacket closer, silently refusing to let go.

The elevator continued its slow ascent, the mana-crystals beneath the platform pulsing faintly. Neither Trafalgar nor Zafira spoke. The silence between them was not uncomfortable, but heavy, as though filled with thoughts neither dared to voice.

Zafira lowered her eyes, her fingers brushing the edge of the jacket around her. She wanted to thank him, to tell him that the gesture meant more than he could imagine, but the words never left her lips.

Trafalgar's eyes narrowed slightly as he stared ahead.

'If Zafira truly fell for the old Trafalgar... this could become a problem. An alliance between two of the Eight Families would never be seen as simple affection. Others would think it calculated—an attempt to merge bloodlines, to seize more power. And in this world, power is everything.'

He exhaled quietly, almost inaudible above the hum of the lift.

'The labyrinth... when those memories returned to me, I realized how deep her feelings might go. But what is she thinking now? Does she even understand what this could mean?'

Zafira glanced at him again, almost as if sensing his unease. 'We stand at the top of the world, heirs to names that govern nations... and yet, here I am, clutching his jacket as if I were still that girl from years ago,' she thought.

The platform slowed, the glowing glyphs on the walls marking their destination. Neither spoke, both lost in their private storms, both aware that a single step forward could change far more than just themselves.

The platform eased to a halt, the faint hum fading as the sigils along the walls dimmed. The corridor ahead stretched wide and silent, lined with doors reserved for the heirs of the Eight Great Families.

For a moment, neither moved. Then Trafalgar broke the silence.

"Looks like we'll need to go again," he said casually, his voice carrying a rare trace of humor. "We forgot the food and drinks I wanted for my room."

Zafira blinked, startled by the sudden invitation. She had expected him to simply wish her goodnight and disappear into his own world of cold resolve. Instead, he offered her another chance—unexpected, yet strangely comforting.

Her lips curved softly. "I'd be delighted to accompany you again, Trafalgar."

The sincerity in her tone made him pause, but before he could respond, she stepped forward. Almost without warning, Zafira leaned in and pressed her lips lightly against his cheek. Their heights matched closely enough that the gesture came effortlessly, natural in its intimacy.

Trafalgar froze, unprepared. His breath caught as if the world had stopped in that single moment.

Zafira lingered only a heartbeat before stepping back. Her gray eyes shimmered with quiet warmth, her smile playful yet gentle. "See you," she whispered.

Still holding his jacket around her shoulders, she turned gracefully and walked down the left side of the corridor, toward the last door. Her steps were calm, unhurried, as though the kiss had been the most natural thing in the world.

Trafalgar remained rooted to the spot, his cheek still tingling.

The door closed softly behind her, leaving Trafalgar alone in the quiet hallway.

The corridor felt strangely hollow after Zafira's door shut. Trafalgar stood frozen, his cheek still tingling from the kiss.

'...Shit. I was right then. She really does have feelings for Trafalgar. Back at the Council, I could already tell she wasn't just some childhood friend playing along. There was more behind the way she looked at me... and now it's clear as day.'

He dragged a hand down his face, the weight of it settling in.

'The problem is... she doesn't like me. She likes the Trafalgar who lived here before—the timid kid who was part of her past. For her, that's who I am. For me... it's a mask I inherited with this body. What the hell am I supposed to do with that?'

He turned, forcing himself toward his own room, steps echoing faintly on the polished stone floor. The dim glow of the mana-lamps cast long shadows, stretching out into silence.

But then he stopped.

At the far end of the hall stood a tall figure, posture straight and calm as if he had been waiting. Pale gray hair, neatly trimmed. A fitted black suit of high rank, gloved hands resting with quiet composure. His sharp eyes reflected patience, intelligence, and something unshakable.

Not a stranger. Someone Trafalgar knew.

Valttair's secret assistant. The one man who had pledged loyalty to his father, and later to him.

The air grew heavy, words unnecessary. His presence alone carried weight.

Trafalgar's jaw tightened slightly, the name leaving his lips in a low murmur, more acknowledgment than greeting—

Caelum.