

Tyrant 148

Chapter 148: Hot Welcoming

The garden of the Morgain estate stretched before Trafalgar, a field of white broken only by the jagged black statues that lined the entrance.

He stepped down first, boots crunching into the snow. Behind him, he glanced over his shoulder—Caelum was gone. Not a trace of his presence lingered.

'Normal, I guess. Technically, only Valtair, the elders, and the wives are supposed to know of his existence. That's what he told me. I'll just have to trust him. He's helped me enough already. Still... my priority is clear. Mayla. I need to see her first.'

A rough laugh pulled him from his thoughts. Alfred leaned against the ramp, one hand on his captain's hat. "The rat returns to its cage."

Trafalgar smirked despite himself. "Hope you survive a few more days, old man. Don't let your bones freeze out here."

Alfred clicked his tongue, bristling instantly. "Not that old! These bones could outlast yours in a storm any day, boy."

"Sure," Trafalgar said with a shrug, his grin faint but sharp. "Whatever you say."

Alfred's eyes narrowed, but there was no malice in them—just the same back-and-forth they always shared. With a dismissive wave, the old captain returned to his ship, leaving Trafalgar standing alone in the snow.

The black silhouette of the castle loomed ahead, its towering gates shut, its shadow stretching across the courtyard. No welcoming party awaited him; the soldiers nearby busied themselves with their own duties, barely sparing him a glance.

But someone was coming.

And the sight of her made his blood boil.

From the far side of the courtyard, a figure approached through the snow. Long platinum-blond hair spilled down her shoulders, catching the pale light of the mountains. Her coat of black fur hugged her frame, gloves sleek over her hands. The smile she wore was beautiful—but it dripped venom, a predator's curve of the lips.

Trafalgar's jaw clenched.

'Why her? Why now? Out of everyone, it had to be this bitch.'

He tried to keep walking, eyes fixed on the gates. But she slid gracefully into his path, her gray eyes locking onto him like claws.

"You have grown up well, little brother," she whispered, her tone as smooth as poisoned wine.

Trafalgar's lip curled. "You can keep your words. You disgust me. Get lost."

Her smile didn't falter. Instead, she reached for his arm, fingers sharp with intent. But this time, Trafalgar didn't let her.

His body blurred sideways in a sharp arc. [Severance Step]—the snow around his boots remained untouched as he reappeared several meters past her.

Rivena's eyes widened slightly, then narrowed, amusement flashing. "Interesting."

A burst of mana erupted around her legs. She vanished in a streak of heat and reappeared directly in front of him, the air behind her trembling with a thermal afterimage.

[Morgain's Phase Dash].

Trafalgar's temples throbbed as Sword Insight roared to life. The image of her movement hammered into his skull, a fragment of understanding searing into place.

[Understanding of Morgain's Phase Dash +2%]

'Damn it... just from watching her land in front of me, the pain hits. But it's worth it.'

She leaned closer, eyes gleaming. "You can't run from me, brother."

Trafalgar exhaled sharply, fingers twitching toward his blade.

'Persistent bitch. Do I summon Maledicta? Or just endure this until...'

The sound of stone grinding broke the tension—the gates of the castle creaked open.

The massive gates groaned open, the iron mechanisms echoing through the courtyard. From the shadows of the archway stepped a tall figure draped in a heavy black cloak. Platinum hair fell past his shoulders, his gray eyes sharp as blades of steel.

Valttair du Morgain.

Trafalgar's breath left him in relief he would never show. 'Thank God... this could have ended badly.'

Valttair's gaze swept across the courtyard and landed on the scene before him. His voice cut through the air, deep and commanding. "Rivena. What are you doing with your brother? I believe we already spoke about this."

The venomous smile on her lips faltered, though only slightly. She inclined her head, her tone demure. "Of course, Father."

She turned, her platinum hair catching the snowlight, but before leaving she tilted her head just enough for Trafalgar to see her lips move soundlessly.

"See you later, my dear Trafalgar."

The words sent a chill through him, worse than the mountain wind. His stomach twisted with disgust, memories of the old Trafalgar clawing their way back to the surface.

'Not again. Never again. I swore the moment I took his place that I'd never let her touch me. The past may have broken him—but I won't be broken by her.'

Rivena vanished into the shadows of the castle, her perfume lingering like poison in the snow.

Silence fell.

Valttair remained at the top of the stairs, his expression unreadable as he looked down on Trafalgar.

"Hm. You've grown, son."

The words rang hollow in Trafalgar's ears.

'Son... how convenient. If you'd called him that sooner, maybe the old Trafalgar wouldn't have killed himself. Don't think you've earned that title now.'

But outwardly, his face stayed calm.

Trafalgar stood at the base of the steps, Valttair above him, the distance between them measured not just in height but in years of silence. Snow drifted between them, catching in the folds of Valttair's heavy cloak.

"I can also sense your progress. You stand on the brink of the third core. An incredible pace... far beyond the boy you once were. It pleases me to see you finally taking things seriously."

Trafalgar inclined his head. "Thank you, Father. I've worked hard. My time with Mordrek helped."

At the name, a shadow flickered across Valttair's eyes. His tone softened—barely. "Mordrek... yes. His loss weighs heavily on us all."

'On us? You mean on you. Maybe for once you actually feel it. But where was that when the old Trafalgar was crying for help? Where was this "father" then?'

Outwardly, Trafalgar's tone remained respectful. "If you don't mind, Father, I'd like to visit Mayla. My maid."

Valttair raised a brow. "Mayla?"

"Yes. She's been important to me."

For a moment, Valttair said nothing, his sharp gray eyes cutting into him. Then he nodded. "Very well. But tonight, you will attend the family dinner. It is not optional."

Trafalgar fought the urge to sigh. 'Of course. The circus of vipers. Last time I stayed quiet—this time, I'll need more patience than ever.'

"Understood, Father," he said instead.

"Good. You may go."

Valttair turned, cloak sweeping as he disappeared back into the shadows of the great hall.

Trafalgar climbed the stairs slowly, his mind heavy. 'He looks... weaker. Maybe Mordrek's death cut deeper than he admits. But his pain isn't my concern. He ignored Trafalgar's for fifteen years. Why should I care now?'

The corridors of black stone swallowed him as he walked. At last, the infirmary doors came into view, quiet and waiting.