

Tyrant 161

Chapter 161: A Sister's Burden

The corridors inside the fortress were colder than outside, the stone walls carrying the bite of the mountain air. Trafalgar's footsteps echoed softly as he followed the directions Seradra had given him. His hand brushed the rough surface of the wall. At the end of the hall, a modest oak door stood slightly ajar, light spilling faintly through the crack.

He pushed it open.

The room was simple—no banners, no finery, just a hearth smoldering with low fire. On a worn rug near the flames sat two small figures, identical in every way. The twins, Eron and Mael, were huddled together with wooden soldiers in their hands, whispering to one another as they played.

Beside them sat Syllis. Her back was straight, her hands folded neatly in her lap as if forcing herself to look composed. But her eyes—green like her mother's—betrayed the weight she carried.

She looked up at the sound of the door, surprise flashing across her face. For a moment her lips parted, but no words came out.

"...Trafalgar?"

The name trembled slightly on her tongue.

He gave her a small nod, stepping inside. "It's been a while."

The twins noticed him at once. Dropping their toys, they scrambled to their feet and rushed toward him, small voices overlapping.

"Brother Trafalgar!"

"You came back!"

Their laughter filled the room, breaking the silence that had lingered for too long. Syllis exhaled slowly, the tension in her shoulders easing just a little as she watched the scene unfold.

After more than a month apart, he was here again.

Once the twins settled back near the fire with their toys, Trafalgar sat across from Syllis. The warmth of the flames softened the chill in the room, though the silence between them was heavier than the mountain air outside.

He studied her for a moment, noticing how rigidly she held herself, hands folded tightly in her lap. Then he asked softly, "How have you been, Syllis?"

Her green eyes flickered, startled by the simple question. For a heartbeat she looked away, pressing her lips together before answering.

"I have to be strong, Trafalgar," she said quietly, almost as if convincing herself. "In a year, I'll be sixteen. That means I'll be an adult, and adults don't cry."

Her voice wavered, but she pushed on.

"Eron and Mael need me. If I fall apart in front of them, if I show weakness, they'll lose hope too. I... I can't let that happen. I have to be their example."

Her words carried determination, but Trafalgar could see the strain. Her shoulders were tense, her fingers dug into the fabric of her dress, and her jaw tightened as if to stop it from trembling. She was forcing herself into a role far heavier than her age should bear.

He leaned back slightly, his grey eyes steady on her. 'She's trying to play the adult before her time,' he thought. 'Forcing herself to look strong in front of her two little brothers.'

"You don't have to pretend all the time," Trafalgar said, his voice calm but resolute. "Being strong isn't about never crying or never showing fear. It's about standing up again after you've fallen. About protecting them when it matters most—not about pretending you're unbreakable."

Sylis's lips trembled, her hands tightening in her lap. For a moment she tried to hold his gaze, but the weight of his words pressed too deeply. The wall she had built around herself finally began to crumble.

"I'm scared, Trafalgar," she whispered, her voice breaking. "I keep telling myself I have to be strong, but I... I can't forget what happened."

Her eyes glistened as she leaned forward, clutching at the fabric of her dress as though it would steady her. "That dragon... when it came, its aura—" Her voice faltered, a shiver running through her body. "It was so dark. It felt like death itself. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't move. And then... Father..."

She stopped, a sharp intake of breath choking the rest of her words.

"He walked into the forest with that thing. He didn't even look back." Her tears spilled freely now, streaking down her cheeks. "That was the last time I saw him. He left us behind with that... monster. And I... I couldn't do anything. I just froze. I was so useless!"

Her shoulders shook as she broke down completely. She buried her face against Trafalgar's chest, her small hands clutching at clothes as if afraid he might vanish too.

Trafalgar placed a steady hand on her back, the other gently resting on her trembling shoulder. He said nothing at first, only letting her cry, his grey eyes staring into the fire with a hard glint. 'She shouldn't have had to see that. No child should.'

Finally, he spoke, his voice low but firm. "You don't have to carry that alone, Sylis. Fear doesn't make you weak. It makes you human. What matters is that you're here now... and that they still have you."

Sylis's sobs quieted, though she still clung to him, her tears dampening the fabric of his shirt. Her small frame trembled against him, but little by little, her breathing began to steady.

It was then that two small shadows appeared at his side.

Eron tugged at the sleeve of Trafalgar's clothes while Mael peeked from behind his brother, their wooden soldiers forgotten on the rug. Their wide green eyes—so much like their mother's—were filled with confusion.

"Why is sister crying?" Eron asked softly.

"Did something hurt her?" Mael added, his voice even smaller.

Sylis stiffened at their words, her hands tightening on Trafalgar's shirt as if afraid to face them. Her lips parted, but no sound came out.

Trafalgar glanced down at the twins, his expression softening. He rested a hand gently atop Eron's head, ruffling his hair before doing the same to Mael.

"She's crying because sometimes people carry too much inside," he said evenly, his voice low but clear. "And when it's too heavy, the heart lets it out. It doesn't mean she's weak. It just means she cares... maybe more than anyone else."

The twins exchanged a glance, their small brows furrowing as they tried to process his words. Then Eron moved closer, wrapping his tiny arms around Sylis's waist. Mael followed a moment later, pressing his face into her side.

Sylis gasped softly, her tears spilling again—not from fear this time, but from the sudden warmth of her brothers' embrace. She lowered her head, kissing the tops of their hair, her voice trembling. "I'm sorry... I didn't mean to worry you."

"You don't have to be sorry," Trafalgar said, tightening his hold so that all three of them were within his arms now.

The fire crackled, and for the first time since entering the room, a fragile peace settled over them.