

Tyrant 168

Chapter 168: Tomorrow's Funeral

Instinct prickled down Trafalgar's spine the instant the voice reached him. His hand twitched, almost calling Maledicta into existence, but he forced it still. This wasn't the place. The Cemetery of Swords wasn't for fighting or killing—Morgains didn't draw blood on this ground.

Slowly, he turned.

A man stood a short distance away, silver hair falling loose against the night. He wasn't much taller than Trafalgar, but the weight of his presence was enough to make the air heavier. His face was bare, no beard, his skin marked by time yet strangely youthful, as if raw strength had pushed age back.

He wore only a light noble shirt and trousers, no cloak, no fur, no armor. The surreal cold that clawed at Trafalgar's skin seemed meaningless to him. The contrast almost made Trafalgar laugh bitterly: he looked like an overstuffed hunter wrapped in furs, while this man stood as if on a casual stroll.

Recognition hit. This wasn't just another Morgain. This was Armand du Morgain—the patriarch, Valtair's father. Trafalgar's grandfather.

He'd seen him once before, but only at a distance. Now, face to face under the star-cast glow, there was no mistaking it. Gray eyes, sharp and cutting like Valtair's, but deeper, calmer, touched by years. He seemed closer to fifty in appearance, though Trafalgar knew the truth: the man was in his nineties.

For a long moment, neither spoke. They both looked toward the chained sword at the center of the cemetery, its light catching on Armand's profile. The old man finally turned his head, those gray eyes pinning Trafalgar in place.

"Trafalgar, isn't it?" he said, his voice calm, resonant, carrying authority without needing to be raised.

Trafalgar straightened under that steady gaze. "Yes," he answered, keeping his tone formal. "Trafalgar du Morgain, my lord."

The older man tilted his head, and a faint, almost amused smile touched his lips. "Lord? Don't call me that. You may call me grandfather—or call me Armand. Nothing else."

The correction caught Trafalgar off guard. For a second, he hesitated, then nodded. "Fine... grandfather, then."

Their eyes held, gray locking onto gray. The silence between them wasn't hostile, but heavy, like two different generations measuring one another.

Armand was the first to look away, back toward the chained sword. "It seems you'll have far more work ahead of you now."

Trafalgar exhaled through his nose, scratching the back of his neck. "Tell me about it. Father gave me Euclid, though I don't get why. I'm still in the academy, I don't have the time to sit in a territory and command it. He has other heirs who are older, stronger. I'm the ninth—the youngest."

Armand gave a small nod, as if agreeing. "You're right. The others are stronger. More experienced. But Valtair explained his reasoning to me. You carry a unique talent, something that must be nurtured for the good of our family. You may not see it yet, but there's purpose in his choice."

Trafalgar folded his arms, frowning. "Purpose or not, it feels like he threw me into the deep end. I barely understand what I'm supposed to do with it."

Armand's voice deepened, though it remained calm. "It is not about what you do today. It is about what your name will mean tomorrow. That's why Valtair made the choice."

For a moment, Trafalgar had no response. The weight of those words pressed heavier than the mountain winds.

The stars shimmered above, casting the cemetery in silver light. Armand's eyes, sharp yet calm, stayed fixed on Trafalgar.

"You may not realize it yet," the old man said, "but the situation is more fragile than you think. The Eight Great Families... their balance is crumbling. At the Council of Elders, they nearly drew blades on one another. Peace is only a thread, and every move matters."

Trafalgar frowned, shifting his weight. 'So even the so-called strongest families are that close to tearing each other apart. No wonder Valtair keeps forcing things.'

Armand continued, his tone matter-of-fact. "Euclid was given to you not to burden you with work, but to protect you. With that title, your name carries weight. They will think twice before raising a hand against you."

Trafalgar let out a dry laugh. "Technically, yeah. That doesn't mean they won't try."

Armand's lips curved faintly, almost approving of the bluntness. "You sound more like your uncle than your father."

The word made Trafalgar pause. His brow furrowed. "Uncle? You mean Mordrek?"

"No," Armand said simply. His gaze drifted back toward the chained sword. "Another."

Trafalgar waited for him to elaborate, but the silence stretched, final. He exhaled, letting it drop. 'Doesn't matter. Family drama's the last thing I need right now.'

The old man's gray eyes gleamed under the starlight. "Still, you should understand why Valtair chose as he did. It wasn't favoritism, nor pity. It was strategy. Your talent is unique. If it grows, it could reshape more than just Euclid."

Trafalgar lowered his gaze to the sea of swords at their feet, the weight of expectation pressing down. 'Great. Another prophecy wrapped in a pep talk. Just what I needed.'

For a while, neither spoke. The only sound was the wind whistling through the mountain passes and the faint rattle of the chains binding the central sword.

Then Armand's voice broke the silence, lower now, as though each word weighed on him. "Tomorrow... I must bury another son of mine." His gaze stayed fixed on the glowing blade ahead. "It does not get easier, watching your children fall while you remain alive to witness it."

Trafalgar shifted uncomfortably. He thought of Syllis, of the twins who had left the hall earlier dressed in black. The thought of them tomorrow, standing here as their father's blade was driven into the earth, twisted something in his chest. 'Damn it... even I wouldn't want to stand through that.'

Armand finally turned, his gray eyes searching Trafalgar's face. "Why are you out here, Trafalgar?"

"I needed air," Trafalgar admitted simply.

The old man gave a small nod. "So did I." His gaze swept the terraces below. "At sunrise, Mordrek's sword will be planted among the rest. That is our way. Each blade is a testament, a memory. Tomorrow, his will join them."

The meaning struck Trafalgar in full then—the endless forest of steel around him. Each weapon was a life ended, a Morgain buried, their strength sealed in the ground.

They began to descend together, their steps slow across the frozen stone. Trafalgar walked a few paces ahead, the crunch of his boots echoing in the night. At one point he glanced back.

Armand had paused on the terrace, standing alone, the starlight painting his figure in silver. He didn't look ready to bury his son.

Trafalgar turned away. Tomorrow would be another long day.