

Tyrant 186

Chapter 186: New Library

The steam curled lazily above the bath, blurring the stone walls of the chamber into a hazy backdrop. Trafalgar leaned back against the edge, letting the heat soak into his skin, his long black hair drifting like ink across the water's surface. For the first time in days, he allowed himself to breathe without tension, the ache of wounds and headaches dulled by the warmth.

'Good. Euclid's business is settled, at least for now,' he thought, closing his eyes. 'Arthur seems dependable. Straightforward, loyal. Caelum was right to mention him... and Mayla... no, she's better off with Arden, Marella, Garrika and the others. Euclid isn't safe for her. She's suffered enough. Tomorrow, I'll see her again. Not as my maid. And it should stay that way.'

He dipped under the water, scrubbing the lingering grime from his shoulders, then surfaced with a quiet exhale. The memory of Mayla trimming his hair returned, sharper than he expected. 'She's not my maid anymore... but if I asked, would she do it? Hah. I'll have to cut it soon—it's getting ridiculous.'

His gaze drifted to the faint ripple of his reflection across the steaming surface. Stronger now. Not just in body, but in presence. The Pulse core thrummed inside him like a second heartbeat, a constant reminder of the leap he had taken.

'Velkaris next. I need to check on the mithril business, see Arden and Marella. Maybe buy another accessory—this ring's good, but stacking bonuses is better. And Selara... I'll have to ask her for more crafted items, if she's willing. Then the academy. I've been gone too long. Too much reading and studying to catch up on. No excuses, even with my name.'

He pulled his hair back, letting the hot water drip from the ends. For now, this bath was his only luxury. Tomorrow, the work resumed.

When the water cooled, Trafalgar stood, droplets cascading down his frame, tracing along the lines of muscle hardened by months of training. The steam clung to him like a second skin. He reached for the bucket set aside, pouring the last of the hot water over his head, rinsing away the lingering foam.

The sensation was grounding. Each rivulet slid down his shoulders, across his chest, and finally to the stone floor. He lingered in the moment, palms pressing against his face, fingers dragging slowly through his wet hair.

He took the towel a maid had left folded on a stool, rubbing his arms and torso with quick, efficient motions. There was no indulgence—just necessity. He dried the length of his hair carefully, squeezing it out with practiced patience before wrapping it in the towel, then unrolling it and combing through with his fingers until the strands loosened.

At the vanity, his reflection was clearer than in the bath. He studied himself with a faint frown. The black hair had grown longer than he liked, heavy enough to fall in waves down his back. He gathered it into his usual low ponytail, tightening the band until it held firm.

'Too long,' he thought, tilting his head at the reflection. 'I'll have Mayla cut it. She always did it right. Even if she's not my maid anymore, I'll ask her. It's nothing compared to what she's endured.'

He pulled on the undershirt first—simple, black, snug to his frame. Then the trousers, then the belt. Over that, a lighter tunic, layered for warmth. He strapped the leather bracers at his wrists last, tightening them until they bit into the skin just enough to remind him they were there.

The dining hall was warm compared to the chill that seeped into the rest of the mansion. A fire crackled in the hearth, painting the walls with flickering shadows. Trafalgar sat at the long oak table, its surface polished to a gleam, and waited as the elven maid arranged the dishes before him.

Roasted venison, bread still steaming from the oven, a bowl of thick vegetable stew. Everything was laid out with care.

"Your meal, Lord Trafalgar," the maid said, bowing lightly before stepping back.

Trafalgar picked up the spoon, tasting the stew first. It was good—rich, seasoned properly, even comforting in its way. He ate in silence, chewing slowly, his eyes fixed on the flames in the hearth.

But as soon as he swallowed, the comparison came unbidden. 'It's good... but it's not Mayla's cooking.'

Her meals had been different. They carried something beyond taste: a weight of familiarity, of someone who cared enough to notice the details. She always knew how he liked his meat, how much spice he could handle, even the way he wanted his tea prepared depending on his mood.

He sighed quietly, setting down the spoon for a moment. 'She's not my maid anymore. I said that myself. Still... nothing tastes better than her food.'

Forcing the thought aside, he finished what was on the plate. When he was done, he pushed the dishes slightly forward and looked at the maid.

"Thank you," he said simply.

The maid bowed again, relief flickering across her face at his acknowledgment. Trafalgar stood, adjusting the belt around his waist.

"I'll take a walk," he murmured, more to himself than anyone else, and left the hall. The night air waited for him outside, cold and quiet.

The night was still. A pale moon hung above the frosted rooftops of Euclid, its light spilling like silver across the streets. Trafalgar walked with his hands tucked behind his back, the cold biting less now that his body pulsed with the strength of a Pulse Core. His boots crunched softly over patches of ice where the cobblestones still bore scars from the dragon's attack.

He turned down a quieter street, the same one where the old library had once stood. Now, only blackened stone and a collapsed roof remained. The place had been reduced to rubble. Trafalgar stopped for a moment, gazing at it.

'Rest well, old man,' he thought, bowing his head slightly. That librarian had given him the first real knowledge about Bloodlines. A debt that couldn't be repaid.

With a quiet sigh, he turned the corner—

And froze.

There, under a simple lantern, was a stand made of wood and canvas. Behind it sat an elderly man with a white beard that spilled over his chest, half-moon spectacles perched on his nose, and a cardigan far too large for his frail frame. His wrinkled hands carefully arranged books on the table, as if nothing in the world had changed.

Trafalgar's eyes widened. His heart skipped a beat.

The old man looked up, blinking, and then broke into a warm, surprised smile.

"Trafalgar! Or should I say, Lord Trafalgar du Morgain. It's good to see you again. Would you... care to learn more about Bloodlines?"

For a moment, Trafalgar could only stare, too shocked to speak. Then, slowly, a grin spread across his face.

"With pleasure," he said, stepping forward.