

Tyrant 190

Chapter 190: Return to Velkaris

The winter sun hung low, its pale light glinting across the frost that still clung to the mansion's garden. Trafalgar stood ready, dressed in his dark travel clothes. Arthur waited beside him, posture firm despite the morning chill.

"Arthur," Trafalgar said evenly, "I'm leaving Euclid in your hands. If anything important happens, you're to come straight to me. The maid should've given you the address already. And remember—on the first of every month, I expect you in person with a report."

Arthur bowed his head slightly. "Understood, Lord Trafalgar."

"Good." Trafalgar's gaze sharpened. "And don't forget to train your men. A city without strength is a city waiting to fall. Euclid can't afford another disaster. Make sure your guards are capable."

Arthur straightened his back, his voice firm. "They'll be ready. I'll see to it myself."

Trafalgar gave a single approving nod. "See that you do."

With that, he turned, boots crunching over the frost-covered path. The Gate building wasn't far—close enough to reach on foot. He had taken carriages before, but today he preferred the walk. Euclid felt quieter than usual, its streets still carrying scars from the dragon's attack, but with Arthur in place, he knew the city wouldn't be left defenseless.

'It's his responsibility now. Mine lies ahead—in Velkaris.'

The Gate building loomed ahead, its stone archway marked with runes that pulsed faintly like veins of fire beneath the surface. Trafalgar stepped inside, the air immediately cooler, filled with the hum of mana resonating from the great circle at the center.

Behind a polished desk, the receptionist rose to his feet. A man past middle age, he adjusted his vest and smiled with thin politeness. "Welcome, young master Trafalgar—no, forgive me, Lord Trafalgar. It seems titles must change as swiftly as the times."

Trafalgar inclined his head slightly in acknowledgment, saying nothing.

Two soldiers in polished armor flanked the Gate itself, standing rigid as statues. The portal shimmered like liquid glass, dark violet at the edges, with light spilling inward as if into another world. When they caught sight of Trafalgar, both men lowered their heads in respect.

"Lord Trafalgar," one of them said firmly.

Trafalgar paused, his gaze flicking to the glowing arch. "My father still keeping the passage sealed, then?"

Both soldiers nodded at once. "Yes, my lord. Lord Valttair has decreed that until Euclid is fortified, no one may pass through the Gate—save for those with direct permission. Only you, of course, may come and go freely."

"I see." Trafalgar's tone was calm, but final. "Then step aside. I'll take it from here."

The guards shifted without hesitation, clearing the path. The Gate pulsed brighter, responding to his approach.

He exhaled once, then crossed.

The world blurred into light. When his vision steadied, the familiar sight of the Velkaris hub spread out before him. Dozens of Gates lined the vast chamber, each watched by soldiers, each spilling mana like rivers of fire. The place buzzed with life: merchants shouting, travelers rushing, nobles striding in cloaks of silk.

Yet all eyes turned, if only briefly, to the Gate from Euclid. Closed for months, its sudden use carried whispers that swirled through the crowd like smoke.

Trafalgar ignored them. A younger receptionist hurried toward him, bowing quickly. "Lord Trafalgar du Morgain, it is good to see you again. Forgive me—protocol demands I confirm your passage."

"It's fine," Trafalgar replied flatly. "Do your duty."

Stepping out of the hub's heavy doors, Trafalgar was greeted by the familiar cacophony of Velkaris. Carriages rattled along the cobblestone roads, their wheels splashing through shallow puddles of melted snow. Merchants barked at passersby, hawking wares imported from every corner of the continent, while the scent of roasted chestnuts and spiced wine lingered on the winter air.

Velkaris had always been alive—too alive, in Trafalgar's opinion. After weeks in Euclid's quieter streets, the capital's relentless energy pressed against him like a tide. Still, he felt no awe; this was not his first time here. The city was familiar, a place of both obligations and unresolved ties.

His eyes flicked toward the train station across the plaza, its iron rails gleaming faintly under the pale sun. 'Soon,' he thought, 'I'll take it back to the academy. But not yet. First Arden and Marella. And Mayla...'

The thought steadied him. His steps carried him through the main avenue, where nobles in fur-lined cloaks brushed past laborers unloading crates of goods. He paid no mind to the curious glances that followed him. Whispers had already spread—the Morgain heir who had survived Euclid, the one who had fought alongside his father against the Gluttony Dragon. Let them whisper.

He turned down a narrower street, the sound of the crowd softening behind him. At its end stood the local he had come for. No longer the half-ruined, weary place he remembered, it had been transformed. Fresh timber framed its windows, warm lamplight spilled onto the street, and laughter carried from inside. The once-broken establishment was now alive with customers, filled to the brim with voices and clinking cups.

Trafalgar paused at the threshold, his sharp gaze sweeping the facade. 'They managed to rebuild. Arden, Marella... they pulled it off.'

Then he pushed the door open and stepped inside.

The warmth of the renovated tavern washed over Trafalgar as he stepped inside. The air was thick with the scent of baked bread and spiced ale, laughter rising from the crowd packed into the tables. It was almost unrecognizable compared to the battered shell it had been months ago.

At the bar sat two figures who commanded the room despite their age. Marella, her gray hair pulled into a low bun, moved with practiced ease, her light-brown eyes scanning every patron like a hawk. Arden, broader and rougher in demeanor, leaned back with a worn rifle propped against the counter within easy reach. Both looked up as Trafalgar entered.

Marella's face brightened immediately. "Trafalgar! How have you been? We've heard all about what happened."

Arden gave a short grunt, his tone gruff but not unkind. "That's right, boy. Come to the back if you want to talk serious."

Trafalgar approached, giving a faint smile. "It's good to see you both. There are plenty of things I'd like to discuss. But first—Mayla. Is she here?"

Marella exchanged a knowing glance with Arden. "The girl with brown hair and brown eyes, yes? A gentleman brought her here not long ago, said it was on your instructions. Right now, she's in the capital with Garrika, shopping."

'That must've been Caelum,' Trafalgar thought, relief flickering in his chest. 'And shopping, huh? Just like I told her—free to do what she wants.'

Arden smirked, resting his chin on one hand. "So, is she your girl, then?"

Trafalgar blinked, caught off guard. "No."

"Hm. Funny," Arden rumbled. "She speaks of you with a lot of spirit."

"She was my maid," Trafalgar replied flatly. "Now she's my friend."

"Friend, eh? Let's leave it at that." Arden chuckled.

Marella waved toward the back. "Ronan, Sylven, take care of the floor. We'll handle things here."

Trafalgar followed them past the bustle, deeper into the quiet of the tavern's private room.