

Tyrant 193

Chapter 193: A Walk Through Velkaris

The doors of the tavern closed behind them, leaving behind the warmth and chatter of Arden and Marella's place. Outside, Velkaris stretched wide—its avenues alive with merchants shouting, carriages rattling, and pedestrians weaving through the crowd. Lanterns glowed faintly against the early evening light, casting golden patches on the cobblestones.

Trafalgar walked at an even pace, Mayla keeping close beside him. She held her hands together, her eyes scanning the bustle with quiet curiosity. "I haven't really visited the city," she admitted after a moment. "Well, Garrika showed me a few streets, but we only went shopping for clothes. Most of what I owned before was just maid uniforms. This outfit—" she glanced down at her simple blouse and skirt—"it's the only thing I had that wasn't tied to serving you. But it already feels outdated compared to the fashions here."

Trafalgar gave her a sidelong look, his tone steady. "It suits you. Fashion doesn't matter nearly as much as people think."

Mayla's lips curved faintly, though she lowered her gaze. "Maybe. Still... it feels strange not to be working. Ever since I can remember, my place was at your side, carrying out my duties as your maid. Now, walking like this—it's... different."

He stopped briefly at a street corner, turning to face her. "Listen. I'm at the academy now—you can't follow me there. More importantly, you deserve this. You spent your whole life looking after a useless young master, and suffered for it. The least I can do is give you freedom."

She lifted her eyes to his, her voice soft but resolute. "I told you before, Trafalgar. I never regretted it. Protecting you was never just a duty—it was my choice."

For the first time, Trafalgar allowed a small smile to slip. "Then let's stay close—but this time, without ranks between us."

Trafalgar reached into his cloak and unfolded the small sheet of paper Arden had slipped to him earlier. A neat script marked an address in the northern district—the wealthier quarter of Velkaris. He tucked it back into his pocket and glanced down the busy avenue. "North," he muttered, more to himself than to Mayla. "That's where we're headed."

The two of them moved with the flow of the crowd. The capital was alive in every sense: elves in flowing robes haggling with dwarven smiths, half-beasts carrying crates of spices, humans in fine coats striding past soldiers on patrol. Carts rattled, children laughed and darted between legs, and the constant buzz of different tongues filled the air.

Mayla's eyes widened as she took it in, her steps slowing. "There are so many races here... It surprised me when I first arrived. Back in the Morgain castle, I never saw anyone beyond the family and the servants. Meeting Garrika for the first time was... startling."

Trafalgar gave a short nod. "It startled me too. Until recently, the only times I left the castle were for the Councils of the Eight Great Families. Even then, it was all nobles and posturing. Living among so many different people, with no one caring about bloodlines or family names—it's new."

She glanced up at him, her brown eyes warm. "New... but good?"

He looked ahead, scanning the street as a pair of armored guards marched by. "Better than the suffocating halls of Morgain Peak. At least here, things feel real."

The corner of Mayla's mouth lifted into a small smile. She adjusted the ribbon holding her ponytail, her gaze returning to the crowd. Trafalgar kept walking, the lively noise of Velkaris washing over him like a current.

They turned onto a broader street, the crowd thinning as the buildings grew taller and cleaner. Mayla walked a little closer now, her curiosity plain in the way she looked at him. "Trafalgar," she said softly, "tell me what's happened with the main family these past days. I want to hear it from you."

He drew in a quiet breath. "It's a long story."

"I don't mind."

So he began. "First, I had to ride a wyvern by myself. My father sent me up to Morgain Peak—one of the highest. It wasn't elegant."

Mayla covered her mouth with her hand, a small laugh escaping. "I saw. You looked like you were about to fall off."

Trafalgar stopped, glaring at her. "You were watching? That pathetic?"

She shook her head quickly, but her laughter spilled out anyway. "You did your best. It was just... endearing."

He clicked his tongue, though the corner of his mouth twitched. 'Endearing, huh...'

After she calmed, he went on. "Then I met the family—though 'met' is a generous word. I only spoke seriously with my aunt and grandfather. The rest didn't matter to me. At dinner, they debated who would inherit Euclid. Many pushed for Maeron, being the first son without lands. But my father chose me instead. It caused a scandal."

Mayla listened intently, her steps never faltering.

"After that came the funeral. It was my first time seeing the Morgain traditions... formal, cold. And then, the hunt. My father brought me against the Gluttony Dragon—the same beast that killed my uncle. During that battle, I broke through to Pulse. My father struck the final blow."

Mayla's gaze softened. "You told me you wanted to grow strong enough to stand against anyone. I remember."

Trafalgar gave a short nod, his eyes fixed on the stone path ahead. "That vow hasn't changed. It's still far away, but I'll reach it. I'll become strong enough that no one can touch me, no one can decide my fate again."

For a heartbeat, only the sound of their footsteps filled the street. Then Mayla's voice broke the quiet, soft but steady. "And I told you before... I'll always be by your side."

Her tone carried no hesitation—only warmth. It struck Trafalgar harder than he expected, catching him off guard. His chest tightened, heat rising unbidden to his cheeks. He coughed into his fist, forcing his expression back to neutral. 'What was that tone...? Too warm, too certain. She didn't even realize how it sounded.'

Mayla didn't notice. She walked with the same calm smile, eyes drifting across the rows of shops they passed.

"Well," Trafalgar muttered, regaining his composure, "that covers everything. After I find you a safe place, I'll return to the academy. I've been gone too long, and I need to keep training."

"Mm," she hummed softly. "I understand."

The city around them shifted as they advanced north. The buildings grew taller, their stonework cleaner, the wood trim polished and freshly painted. Gardens appeared behind iron gates, and carriages with gilded wheels passed by more often. The chatter of merchants faded into the distance, replaced by the quieter hum of wealth.

Trafalgar's sharp gaze scanned the district. Villas and luxury estates rose in neat rows, their windows gleaming in the sunlight. He adjusted the folded paper in his pocket. "This is it. The north. Let's find your place."