

Tyrant 197

Chapter 197: The Lord's Bargain

They had already toured the apartment, inspected every corner, and even stood out on the balcony overlooking the northern district. Now, back in the real estate office, the air felt heavier—business replacing awe.

The vampire spread a parchment across the polished oak table, smoothing the edges with her pale hand. A faint glow from the mana lamps lit up the inked lines of the contract. Mayla sat beside Trafalgar, still carrying a quiet smile from earlier, though her eyes were fixed now on the deal about to unfold.

"As agreed," the vampire began, her tone as smooth as velvet, "the apartment stands at two thousand gold. A reduced price, thanks to the favor I owe Arden and Marella. Once signed, it will officially belong to you."

Trafalgar leaned back in his chair, arms crossed over his chest. His dark-blue eyes fixed on her with unflinching calm. "Two thousand. Better than three, I'll admit. But for what this place offers, it's still too much."

The vampire arched a brow, lips tugging into a faint smirk. "Too much? Even here, in the northern district? You won't find safer streets or cleaner walls in all of Velkaris."

"I don't care about appearances," Trafalgar replied bluntly. "I care about practicality. Euclid still needs rebuilding. I won't throw coin at vanity when my city demands investment."

A brief silence followed. The vampire studied him more closely now, as if reassessing the young Morgain before her. He didn't sit like a pampered heir flashing gold. He sat like a negotiator who had done this before.

Trafalgar tapped a single knuckle against the table, steady and deliberate. "If you want me to sign, you'll have to do better than two thousand."

The vampire leaned back in her chair, folding her pale fingers together. Her crimson eyes shimmered faintly in the lamplight. "Two thousand is already generous. This district doesn't sell cheap. The protections, the silence, the prestige—these things cost more than walls and a roof."

Trafalgar's dark-blue gaze stayed firm. "Prestige means nothing to me. I'm not buying this for appearances. I'm buying it for her." He nodded slightly toward Mayla, who kept her hands folded in her lap. "She doesn't need luxury. She needs security."

The vampire's smile deepened. "Security is precisely what gives this apartment its price."

Trafalgar tapped his knuckle against the table, steady and deliberate. "We already discussed this. You'll get rights to build in Euclid—apartments like this one. But let's be clear: that permission isn't free. If you build, I'll take a share of the revenue. Call it thirty percent."

The vampire's expression shifted, playful curiosity giving way to calculation. "Thirty? You don't ask for little."

"I'm not giving little," Trafalgar replied evenly. "Euclid has a Gate. Traffic, trade, settlers—everything flows through it. With reconstruction underway, demand for housing will explode. You'll profit more there than you ever would milking me for a few thousand gold here."

Mayla's eyes flicked toward him, surprised by the sharpness in his tone. He wasn't just pushing back; he was dictating terms like someone who'd done it before.

The vampire tilted her head, crimson gaze narrowing. "So the heir of Morgain wants to play merchant, does he? Not just the apartment, but percentages too."

Trafalgar leaned forward, voice calm but unyielding. "I don't play. I invest. Lower the price, accept the terms, and we both win. Otherwise, you lose Euclid."

For the first time, silence stretched—broken only by the faint hum of the mana lamp overhead.

The vampire broke the silence first, her crimson eyes gleaming with quiet calculation. "Very well, Lord Morgain. You want practical? Then let's be practical."

She slid the parchment closer, her long nails tapping against the ink lines. "Two hundred and fifty gold for the apartment. A price so low it's nearly a gift. And in Euclid, I'll take the construction rights—but you'll keep thirty percent of the revenue. A fair balance, wouldn't you say?"

Mayla's lips parted slightly in shock. Two hundred and fifty? It was a tenth of what had been asked just moments ago. Trafalgar, however, didn't flinch.

Inside, he understood. 'Of course. The thirty percent. She's lowering the apartment price to secure Euclid. This isn't generosity—it's strategy. Still... thirty isn't much. I'll let her think she's won.'

He leaned forward, signing the parchment with a flourish of mana. "Done."

The vampire smiled, fangs just barely visible. "Efficient. I like that."

But Trafalgar wasn't finished. His dark-blue eyes narrowed, sharp as steel. "One more thing. You don't have permission yet. Euclid is still in recovery. When the city is ready, I'll allow it. Not before, and remember it is for just one apartment."

The vampire froze, her smile faltering. "What? That wasn't part of the agreement. You—"

He calmly turned the parchment, tapping the bottom line where his mana signature shimmered faintly. A clause written in his own hand glowed against the paper: Permission will be granted at the lord's discretion, when Euclid is deemed stable.

Her crimson eyes widened. "You slipped that in—!"

Trafalgar's expression remained calm, almost amused. "I didn't slip anything. You signed it. And in this district, signed mana is law."

The vampire's jaw clenched, but after a tense pause, she let out a sharp, incredulous laugh. "You little fox."

Trafalgar smirked faintly. "Get used to it. You'll be building in Euclid one day. But on my word, not yours."

The contract burned softly in the air, dissolving into sparks of red and blue mana as the terms sealed themselves into law. Silence hung for a moment, then the vampire extended her pale hand across the table.

"Fair play," she said with a smirk, her crimson eyes glinting. "I didn't expect this from a boy."

Trafalgar clasped her hand firmly, his grip steady. "Not a boy," he corrected with a faint smile. "An adult. I'm sixteen already."

For a moment, the vampire blinked—and then laughed, a genuine, melodic sound that revealed the sharpness of her fangs. "Sixteen, and already outsmarting me. Very well, adult. You'll be interesting to watch."

They parted, and she escorted them to the front of the shop. By the time the door opened, night had already fallen. The lanterns of the northern district burned in neat lines along the streets, their glow casting soft halos over cobblestones polished by wealth. The air was cool, tinged with the faint perfume of gardens behind the gated homes.

Trafalgar stepped out first, inhaling the night air, then glanced at the sky. "It's gotten late." His stomach gave a quiet protest, and he rubbed at his midsection absently.

Turning to Mayla, he caught her brown eyes in the lamplight. There was a softness there, a warmth he hadn't seen in years, not since the days she served as his maid.

He straightened slightly. "I'm hungry. Want to go grab dinner somewhere? To celebrate."

Mayla blinked, taken aback for only a heartbeat before a smile spread across her face. "Celebrate...? Yes. I'd like that."

Together, they stepped into the night, the district alive with quiet elegance, and for the first time in a long while, Trafalgar allowed himself the thought that maybe—just maybe—life could feel normal.