

Tyrant 198

Chapter 198: Dinner

The streets of Velkaris glowed beneath the silver wash of moonlight. Mana lanterns floated along the avenues like drifting stars, bathing the stone roads in hues of gold and soft blue. Vendors were closing their stalls, laughter spilling from the open doors of taverns and cafes. The air carried the scent of roasted spices, wine, and night-blooming flowers.

Trafalgar and Mayla walked side by side, their pace unhurried. Around them, families lingered after dinner—children tugging at their parents' hands, couples sharing quiet words beneath the glow of the lamps.

For a moment, Trafalgar slowed down, his gaze fixed on a father lifting his daughter into the air as she laughed uncontrollably. The simple joy of it stirred something deep in his chest.

'Families... normal ones. No titles, no bloodlines, no schemes. Just people living.'

His mind drifted to another world—one far away. His mother's voice calling him for dinner, his sister sitting cross-legged on the floor with her headphones on, the smell of food from the kitchen. Warm, familiar, safe. All of it gone now.

He exhaled quietly, eyes lowering to the cobblestones.

Mayla noticed. "You've gone quiet again," she said softly. "What's on your mind?"

He hesitated, searching for the right words. "It's strange," he murmured at last. "Seeing families like that. So... happy."

Mayla followed his gaze toward the people around them. "Most families are," she said with a faint smile. "But when you're born into power, happiness becomes something you have to fight for."

They walked for a while without speaking, their steps falling into rhythm with the faint music drifting from a nearby square. The night in Velkaris was different from Euclid—alive, vibrant, humming with life that never seemed to rest.

After a few minutes, Trafalgar broke the silence. "You know," he said quietly, "now that I think about it... I don't actually know much about you."

Mayla tilted her head. "About me?"

He nodded. "I mean, I know you've been with my family since before I could even walk, but beyond that... nothing. Where you came from, what you wanted for yourself—any of it."

Her brown eyes softened. "There isn't much to tell, really." She looked ahead, her voice calm, almost detached. "I was an orphan. The Morgain household took me in when I was a child. They trained me to serve—to read, to cook, to follow orders, and to keep quiet when I shouldn't speak."

Trafalgar's brows drew together. "So they raised you to be perfect."

She gave a small shrug. "They raised me to be a useful maid for you."

That simple word hit harder than she probably intended. Useful. It sounded too much like a tool, not a person.

"Did you ever hate it?" he asked after a pause.

Mayla shook her head. "No. It was hard, but it gave me a place in the world. When you grow up with nothing, having a purpose—even a strict one—feels like a blessing."

Trafalgar slowed his pace, his gaze drifting toward the shimmering lights of Velkaris. "And now? You're free. What do you want to do with that?"

Mayla smiled faintly. "I don't know yet. Maybe I'll learn what it means to live for myself this time."

Her answer lingered in the air, soft and sincere.

Trafalgar looked ahead, his expression shadowed. "Freedom..." He paused. "I'm not sure I've earned that word yet. Maybe I'm not free at all."

Mayla tilted her head slightly. "You sound like someone trapped."

He gave a quiet exhale. "Maybe I am."

'The Veiled Woman said my path was already written... that every step I take is part of a design I can't escape.' The thought slid through his mind like a whisper in the dark.

Still, he forced a small smile, almost defiant. "But even if that's true, I'll do what I can to take it back—to change what's written."

Mayla glanced at him, a trace of empathy softening her features. "You mean... breaking away from the Morgains?"

Trafalgar didn't answer immediately. His eyes reflected the blue glow of the mana lamps as he muttered, "Something like that."

She didn't notice the weight behind his words—or the distant look that said his chains went far deeper than any family name.

Their steps carried them uphill through the northern district, where the air grew cooler and the lights more refined. At the end of the avenue stood a tall building of pale stone and glass, its sign written in gilded runes that shimmered like starlight—The Silver Blossom.

Warm light spilled from the entrance, accompanied by the soft notes of a mana-powered harp. Couples entered and exited dressed in fine clothes, their laughter blending with the faint hum of conversation. Mayla hesitated near the doorway, brushing a loose strand of brown hair behind her ear.

"Trafalgar," she murmured, "this place looks... expensive."

He glanced at her, a hint of amusement tugging at the corner of his mouth. "It is. But tonight we're not counting coins."

Before she could protest, a young elf in a black uniform approached with a courteous bow. "Good evening, Lord and Miss. Do you have a reservation?"

Trafalgar shook his head slightly. "No. But I'm sure there's something available."

The elf hesitated—until Trafalgar slid a gleaming silver coin into his palm with practiced ease. The elf's brows lifted ever so slightly, and his posture straightened as if by reflex.

"Of course, my lord," he said smoothly, the coin vanishing into his vest pocket as though it had never existed. "I believe we can find a fine seat for you."

Mayla hid a small smile behind her hand as they followed him inside. The restaurant opened into a grand hall of glass and stone, warm light spilling across the marble floor. Diners in elegant attire spoke in hushed tones, their laughter blending with the gentle hum of a mana-powered harp.

They were guided through the softly lit room to a table near the large curved window, overlooking the glowing expanse of Velkaris. From there, the city stretched endlessly, rivers glittering like silver threads beneath the moon.

Mayla stopped for a moment, her breath catching. "It's beautiful," she whispered. "I've never seen the city like this."

Trafalgar sat across from her, his dark-blue eyes reflecting the lanterns outside. "Neither have I," he admitted quietly. "Not from here."

When their meals arrived—roasted venison, moonfruit slices, and a light mana-infused wine—the music softened, and the world seemed to shrink to the space between them.

Mayla looked out the window again, her reflection faint against the stars. "It almost doesn't feel real," she said.

Trafalgar's gaze lingered on her, voice low but certain. "It is. For tonight, it is."

They placed their orders—roasted venison with ember sauce for Trafalgar, and seared riverfish with herbs for Mayla. The waiter bowed and retreated, leaving them surrounded by the soft glow of mana lamps and the faint melody of the harp echoing through the hall.

The night outside was alive, but inside, time seemed to slow. The city lights shimmered across the glass, and every so often a passing airship glided by, its lanterns leaving trails of gold above the rooftops.

"The night's still young," Trafalgar said, leaning back in his chair. "Guess I can afford to stay a bit longer before heading back to the academy."

Mayla's smile wavered slightly. "You're really going to return tomorrow?"

"That was the plan," he admitted, swirling his wine absently. "But plans change."

When the dishes arrived, the smell filled the air—rich, warm, comforting. They began to eat in silence at first, but eventually Mayla looked up, her expression soft but uncertain.

"Trafalgar," she said, almost hesitating, "are you sure it's okay to spend this much? On me, I mean."

He paused mid-bite, meeting her gaze. "Yes," he said simply. "After everything you've done for me, this is the least I can do."

She shook her head gently. "You don't owe me anything."

Trafalgar gave a faint smile, though his voice dropped a note lower. "Maybe not for the past. But I still owe something for what Maeron did to you. I told myself I'd pay that debt someday. I just... can't yet. Not while I'm still this weak."

Mayla's fork paused over her plate. Her eyes softened, a mix of worry and affection behind them. "Don't do anything reckless," she said quietly. "You don't have to prove anything to me. I'll support you—like I always have. Just... don't throw yourself away for it."

Trafalgar leaned back, the tension in his shoulders easing at her words. Outside, the lights of Velkaris stretched endlessly beneath the moon, and for a fleeting moment, the weight on his chest felt a little lighter.

He smiled faintly. "I'll keep that in mind."

Mayla nodded, returning the smile. "Good. Then finish your dinner before it gets cold, young master."

Trafalgar chuckled softly. "You're still calling me that?"

"Old habits," she said, laughing under her breath.