

Tyrant 90

Chapter 90: Promises and Debts

The air in the hallway was heavy, still buzzing with the echoes of what had just happened. Trafalgar and Barth stood outside the door, backs leaning against the wall, neither of them speaking.

From inside, a low growl broke the silence, followed by the sharp scrape of claws. Then came Lucien's voice—shrieking, raw with pain.

Barth clamped his hands over his ears, his face pale. "I-I don't want to hear this..."

Trafalgar's jaw tightened, but he didn't move. He closed his eyes for a moment, letting the sound wash over him. 'I'll never get used to this... no matter how many times I see it or hear it. This world doesn't forgive weakness. Lucien took Ronan's arm... and now Garrika is paying it back in her own way.'

Another cry echoed, followed by Garrika's voice, calm but dripping with venom. "This is for Ronan."

The door rattled as something heavy slammed against it—Lucien thrashing under her grip. His scream was sharp enough to cut through the wooden panels. Barth flinched every time it came.

Seconds stretched, each one marked by Lucien's agony. Then, suddenly, silence. Not the silence of death—there was still a faint groan, strained and broken. The sound of someone left barely holding on. Garrika's heavy breathing followed, low and steady.

The latch clicked, and the door creaked open. Garrika stepped out, her long black hair cascading down over Trafalgar's jacket, which still hung loosely on her shoulders. Her claws were slick, crimson dripping down her fingertips. She didn't bother hiding it.

Barth shrank into himself at the sight, looking away immediately. His stomach churned, but he didn't dare say a word.

Trafalgar's eyes flicked to her hands, then back to her face. He didn't comment, just asked, "Done?"

Garrika wiped her claws against the frame of the door, her expression sharp. "He won't die. But he'll remember the pain. That's enough—for now."

She walked past them, the weight of her presence leaving the air thick in her wake. Barth hurried after her, keeping his eyes firmly on the floor.

The three of them walked through the still-sleepy streets of Velkaris. Dawn was only just creeping over the rooftops, the lamps of mana dimming one by one as the city stirred awake. Garrika walked at the front, the jacket Trafalgar had given her still hanging over her shoulders, too large for her frame but giving her an oddly noble air. The dress Lucien had provided beneath it swayed lightly as she moved.

Trafalgar trailed a few steps behind, his hand resting in his pocket as he held the Shadowlink Echo, feeding a small pulse of mana into it. A faint glow shimmered before fading as the message was transmitted. "Caelum, everything's fine. But keep an eye on Lucien. I don't trust him."

Once the echo dimmed back into silence, Trafalgar tucked it away and lengthened his stride until he was beside Barth. The boy hadn't spoken once since they'd left. His shoulders were hunched, his eyes darting anywhere but toward Garrika.

"You good?" Trafalgar asked quietly.

Barth flinched, then nodded too quickly. "Y-yeah... I was just... scared. But I surprised myself too. I didn't think I'd hold up that long."

Trafalgar studied him. The memory of the timid boy who had clung to his sister on the train flashed through his mind, followed by the arrow that had nearly taken Trafalgar's life that same day. 'Maybe this will give him some confidence. He can't keep leaning on Cynthia forever. This world will eat him alive if he does.'

"Listen," Trafalgar said, his tone dry but firm. "Don't tell your sister. I like breathing, and I'd rather not die young."

Barth gave a nervous laugh. "Right... understood."

"Also," Trafalgar continued, "it's late. You should head back. I've got one more place to stop."

Barth hesitated, looking tired. "I... yeah. I used too much mana with the sleep skill. I should rest."

He turned to leave, but Trafalgar called after him. "Barth!"

The boy stopped, and Trafalgar tossed a small pouch his way. Barth caught it clumsily, blinking as the weight of coins jingled inside.

"For the orphanage," Trafalgar said. "Use the scholarship money for yourselves. This is for the kids."

Barth's mouth opened, closed, then opened again, his words tangled in his throat. "I-I... thank you... really, Trafalgar."

'Cynthia's gonna notice,' Trafalgar thought grimly. 'But whatever. This is something he earned on his own.'

"Don't worry about it," Trafalgar said with a little smile. "See you tomorrow friend."

Barth clutched the pouch tightly, smiling wide for once at the word "friend." He gave a small bow before jogging off toward the academy.

Now only Trafalgar and Garrika walked side by side. She didn't speak, just lowered her head into the fabric of his jacket, her nose brushing the cloth as if savoring the scent.

Trafalgar frowned. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing," Garrika murmured, her voice muffled. Then, more clearly, "Thanks. For everything. And... for letting me deal with Lucien."

"I said you'd get your chance," Trafalgar replied. "I just needed to talk to him first. Thanks for holding back."

She gave a small nod, but said nothing else.

The rest of the walk passed in silence, broken only by the sound of their steps echoing on the cobblestones. Trafalgar's mind churned. 'Every step I take in this world, things get crazier. I've killed, threatened and extorted... if this is what it takes to survive, then fine. I'll keep doing it. At least until I can stand on my own.'

By the time he surfaced from his thoughts, they were already standing in front of Arden and Marella's shop.

Trafalgar glanced at Garrika, then reached for the door. "Ladies first."

She stepped inside first, the oversized jacket still around her shoulders, her wolf ears twitching as if catching familiar scents. The shop was quiet, lights dimmed, but the silence broke almost instantly.

"Garrika!" Marella's voice cracked as she rushed forward. Her hands trembled as she reached the girl, pulling her into a crushing embrace.

Arden was right behind her, eyes glistening though he tried to keep his composure. "You're safe... thank god...." His usually steady voice wavered as he joined the hug, holding both wife and granddaughter tight.

For a moment, Garrika simply froze in their arms. Then her shoulders shook, and she buried her face against Marella's chest. "I'm back... I'm home," she whispered, her words muffled by sobs.

Trafalgar stepped inside quietly, letting the door close behind him. His gaze softened at the sight, though he quickly masked it. 'They really thought they lost her. Can't blame them.'

From the corner of the room, two other figures stirred. Ronan, pale and weakened, sat leaning against the wall with one arm bandaged tight across his chest, the other sleeve hanging limp where his arm had once been. Beside him was Sylven, his expression caught between relief and guilt.

"Welcome back, Garrika," Sylven said, standing. His voice was rough, like he'd been holding back tears himself.

Ronan managed a tired smile. "You're tougher than me, girl. I knew you'd make it."

Garrika turned at the sound of his voice, breaking free from the embrace just long enough to rush toward him. She knelt, gripping his remaining hand tightly. "Ronan... I'm sorry..."

He shook his head. "Don't. You're safe. That's enough for me."

Trafalgar's eyes flicked to the missing arm again. 'No miracle's gonna give that back. He's done as a fighter. Either he retires or finds another path.'

For a moment, the room was filled only with the sound of their breathing, the weight of everything that had happened pressing down on all of them.

Trafalgar broke the silence, stepping forward at last. "Well," he said, his tone even. "I promised I'd bring her back. And I did. Now..." He turned his gaze toward Arden and Marella, sharp and businesslike once more. "How about we sit down and negotiate the deal we talked about?"

The warmth of reunion shifted instantly to tension. Arden straightened, wiping at his eyes. Marella reluctantly pulled back from Garrika, her gaze flicking between the girl and Trafalgar.