

Tyrant 120

Chapter 120: Forced Labor

The cavern still reeked of venom and blood. The corpse of the spider mother lay shattered across the stone, its ichor drying in black pools. The mercenaries shifted uneasily near the entrance, waiting for Leon to give some order that never came.

Trafalgar's voice broke the silence. "We're not leaving yet."

Every head turned. Garrika raised a brow, Augusto tilted his chin, but only Trafalgar kept his eyes fixed on Leon and his men. He gestured toward the glowing veins of violet ore running jagged along the cavern walls.

"We came here for mythril. And until it's mined, no one moves."

One of the mercenaries blinked, stunned. "You... want us to—"

"Yes," Trafalgar cut in. His tone was sharp enough to make the man flinch. "Pick. Haul. Load. Unless you'd prefer I inform my family that House Mariven and some mercenaries attempt to blow my head off."

The Shadowlink Echo wasn't in his hand anymore, but its unspoken threat still lingered like a blade at their throats.

Leon clenched his jaw, but his voice cracked. "Do as he says."

Reluctantly, the mercenaries moved. Pickaxes were drawn from their packs, striking against the stone with dull clinks. Chips of black-violet rock scattered across the ground, each strike echoing through the cavern like the beat of a war drum.

From a boulder near the corpse, Trafalgar sat with deliberate calm, Maledicta across his knees. Garrika settled beside him, her wolf tail twitching lazily, while Augusto leaned against the rock, arms crossed.

They didn't need to lift a hand—their mere presence was enough to keep the mercenaries working without pause.

The roles were reversed. The would-be predators now toiled like frightened laborers under the watch of their prey.

The steady rhythm of pickaxes filled the cavern, sharp clinks echoing as the mercenaries chipped away at the mythril veins. None dared look up at the three watching them.

Trafalgar leaned back against the stone, his right hand flicking once. Maledicta vanished into thin air, leaving nothing behind but silence. Without a weapon in sight, he looked even more dangerous—as if he didn't need steel to kill.

Beside him, Garrika exhaled slowly, her shoulders slumping as some of the tension drained away. Her wolf ears twitched toward him, and after a moment of hesitation, she spoke.

"That was... impressive," she murmured, her voice softer than usual. She tilted her head slightly, green eyes watching him. "Even more than when you dealt with Lucien to save me."

Trafalgar didn't move for a long moment. Then, in a low whisper only she could hear, he answered.

"If I hadn't acted, we'd be dead right now. Don't mistake it for something greater. I just took advantage of the situation."

Her ears flicked again, catching every word. She smirked faintly, though her expression carried a trace of warmth. "You always make it sound simple. But most people wouldn't even know how to move in a moment like that."

Trafalgar let his gaze linger on the mercenaries, their shoulders stiff with each swing of the pickaxe. His voice dropped again, flat but honest. "There's nothing complicated. Survive first. Everything else comes later."

Garrika turned her eyes back to the ore being chipped away. For once, she didn't argue. She only nodded slowly, her tail swishing across the dirt as she whispered, "Still... it was something to see."

The clinking of pickaxes echoed steady in the cavern, but Garrika's eyes weren't on the mercenaries. They lingered on Trafalgar, sharp and thoughtful. After a pause, she leaned closer, lowering her voice so only he could hear.

"How did you know?"

Trafalgar didn't look at her. His gaze stayed fixed on the men working, his expression carved from stone. "Know what?"

"That they'd come after us. You acted like you were expecting it."

A faint hum escaped him before he finally replied, still quiet, still flat. "I don't trust anyone. And when we crossed them earlier, Leon's eyes gave him away. He knew Augusto."

At the mention, Augusto straightened from his place against the wall. His tail flicked once, his eyes darkening. "You're right. Those bastards were the ones who left me half-dead last time." His tone was low, edged with bitterness.

Trafalgar finally turned his gaze to him, the faintest curve of his lips forming something between acknowledgment and mockery. "I imagined as much. So the man you owe money to is the same lord of Mariven? You don't think you had it coming?"

Augusto let out a harsh breath, his arms crossing tighter over his chest. "The taxes he forces on me aren't justified. If I paid them, I'd have nothing left."

Trafalgar tilted his head, his eyes narrowing faintly. "Taxes are there to be paid."

'I skipped mine once, and it cost me double later...'

Garrika smirked at his side, but Augusto shook his head. "If you saw my situation, you'd understand. Ten percent is fair, like the others. But Mariven takes over fifty from me. That's not tax—that's theft."

Trafalgar's expression sharpened. "Why?"

Augusto's jaw tightened. "I don't know."

Trafalgar leaned forward slightly, his elbows resting on his knees. His voice was calm, but it carried the weight of a judgment already formed. "So Mariven bleeds you for half your earnings. They are screwing you over, real good."

Augusto's jaw tightened, his eyes flashing with restrained anger. "Exactly. That's why I refuse."

Trafalgar's lips curved faintly.

"Then let me make it simple. If I discover why he singled you out with this treatment... you won't get a coin from me for this job. Not for your service, not for the materials."

The silence stretched. Augusto's eyes narrowed, his tail flicking once. Then, finally, he gave a curt nod. "Fine. Deal."

Garrika smirked faintly, her voice low but amused. "You two sound like traders more than fighters."

Augusto simply said. "Maybe because I'm one?"

Trafalgar stood, stretching his shoulders as the mercenaries finished loading the mythril. "Maybe you are right and this path fits me better, but now is time to go."