

Tyrant 157

Chapter 157: The Stranger in the Bath

Trafalgar was fifteen now.

For the last three years, ever since that day, he had locked himself away. He stopped training, stopped striving—stopped living. The boy who once pushed himself harder than anyone had turned into a shadow, drifting through time without purpose.

Mayla had changed too. She never intended to grow cold toward him, but a barrier had risen between them, built from wounds she could not heal and silences she could not break. It was not his fault, nor hers, and yet the distance remained—heavy and suffocating.

Whenever she entered his quarters, the sight hollowed her chest. Dust clung to the corners, cobwebs spread across the ceiling, and insects crawled freely over his sheets. The air itself carried the staleness of neglect. Trafalgar seemed indifferent to it all. He lay there among the filth as though it made no difference whether spiders shared his bed or not.

It was as though the brilliance he once carried—the stubborn fire that refused to die—had been drowned.

Sometimes Mayla feared she was tending to a corpse that simply had not stopped breathing. The thought chilled her, yet she could not abandon him.

So she stayed. Even as her own demeanor grew colder, even as she performed her duties like an empty shadow, she remained at his side. Deep down, she refused to believe this was all he would ever be.

The barrier between them was never her choice. But it grew all the same, shaping their days into a silence neither of them dared break.

And in those years of emptiness, Mayla waited. She waited for something—anything—to stir within him again.

One night, Trafalgar left his chambers to bathe. Yet he did not choose the bathroom near his quarters. Instead, he walked toward one of the most remote wings of the castle, where a bath lay unused by the main family. Though still luxurious, its marble walls and gilded fixtures belonged to a place forgotten, where few footsteps ever echoed.

Mayla remembered it vividly. After watching him close the door behind him, she slipped into his quarters to clean. The state of the room made her heart tighten. Cobwebs sagged from the ceiling, insects scuttled across the bedding, and dust thickened in every corner. It was not just neglect—it was abandonment, the living space of someone who no longer cared to exist.

She spent an hour sweeping, dusting, scrubbing. By the end, the room breathed again, though the stench of decay still clung faintly. Concern prickled in her chest, so she went to check on Trafalgar.

She stood outside the locked bathroom door and knocked softly. "Young master, are you there? An hour has passed."

Silence.

She tried again, firmer this time, but no answer came.

Uneasy, Mayla left to wash his clothes and clean his personal bath instead. Another hour slipped away. She returned to the same door, knocked once more, and again received no reply.

Her unease deepened into a quiet dread. The castle's corridors were deserted in that wing, so she settled on the cold floor, waiting in silence. Time crawled by.

At the third hour, faint sounds finally stirred from behind the locked door—movement, the ripple of water. Mayla stood quickly. "Young master? Are you feeling well?" she called.

For a moment, nothing. Then, unexpectedly, his voice came clear, steady:

"Yeah. I'm fine. Is... something wrong?"

Her breath caught. No muttering, no hollow murmurs. A real answer.

"It's just... you've been in the bath for over three hours."

Trafalgar cleared his throat. "Ah, right. Sorry. I was... relaxing in the bath."

Mayla frowned. 'Relaxing?'

And with that, unease rooted itself deep inside her.

The memory of that night clung to Mayla with unnatural clarity. Every detail of Trafalgar's voice, his tone, the steadiness of his replies—none of it matched the broken boy she had known for years. It was as if, behind that door, something had shifted.

In the days that followed, she noticed changes. Subtle at first, but undeniable. When she brought him his meals, he no longer accepted them in silence. He looked at her, spoke clearly, even thanked her. Those words—simple gratitude—had been absent for so long that they stirred her more deeply than she wanted to admit.

The cold, formal mask she had worn toward him began to crack. Little by little, she stopped holding herself at such a distance. The barrier she had built out of necessity started to erode.

But it wasn't just her. Trafalgar himself changed in ways that unsettled her. He began to leave his quarters, wandering the castle halls again. He no longer lay among cobwebs and insects, indifferent to the decay around him. Instead, he cleaned himself, trained, pushed his body with a renewed focus.

And then came the impossible.

At fifteen years of age—long after most would have given up—Trafalgar awakened his mana core. A feat so rare it was whispered about in noble circles, yet he accomplished it after years of despair. From that day forward, his progress accelerated with unnatural speed.

Mayla watched in silence, unsure of what to believe. Relief warred with suspicion inside her chest. Was this truly her young master, clawing his way back to life? Or had something else stepped into the hollow space he had left behind?

She remembered the first time she saw him unleash that new strength. His movements were sharp, his mana fierce, his eyes focused.

It didn't feel like the Trafalgar she had grown up with.

And though she said nothing, Mayla could not shake the certainty that something had changed forever on that night in the distant bath.

It happened on an evening when Mayla was on her way to see Trafalgar. His father had sent for him, and one of the soldiers—Roland—was also headed down the corridor to deliver the message.

But Roland's eyes lingered on Mayla instead. His stride slowed, his mouth curling into an ugly smile.

"Always following the young master around, aren't you?" he muttered, stepping closer than he should. His hand brushed against her waist as he leaned down, voice dripping with mockery. "Maybe you should spend your time with someone who knows how to treat you."

Mayla stiffened, shock and disgust freezing her in place. She opened her mouth to protest, but before she could speak, Trafalgar opened his door.

He stopped when he saw them—Roland's hand on her, her back pressed against the cold stone wall. For a heartbeat, silence stretched. Then Trafalgar's gaze hardened, sharper than steel.

Roland straightened, trying to mask his guilt. "Young master," he said casually, "your father is calling for you. I was on my way to fetch you—"

"Who are you?"

Trafalgar's voice cut through the corridor, low and cold. The boy who had once been ridiculed now stared at him with unblinking authority.

Roland stammered, "I—I didn't mean—"

"Silence."

Trafalgar's grip tightened until Roland's face twisted in pain. "You will pay for laying your hand where it never should have been." His tone carried no anger, only judgment, as if he were pronouncing a sentence.

Mayla's breath caught. This was not the Trafalgar who once shrank from confrontation. This was someone else—someone who made even a grown soldier tremble.

Roland tried to protest again, but Trafalgar's words silenced him: "She is my maid, she is mine."

Only then did he release him, the soldier staggering back, clutching his arm.

Mayla watched in silence, her heart pounding. The realization struck her with icy clarity: the boy she had known was gone. From that night in the bath onward, the person standing before her was no longer the same young master.