

## H. Academy 865

### Chapter 865 - Between

"You should give up on him." she said, her voice soft but laced with malice. "You know how things are right now, don't you?"

Jane didn't respond, but her jaw tightened.

Melanie clicked her tongue, feigning disappointment. "Oh, come on, Jane. Don't play dumb." Her gaze flickered toward the empty hallway before settling back on Jane. "The freshmen and sophomores? They're practically at each other's throats. It's only a matter of time before things escalate. And when they do..."

She leaned in again, her voice dropping to a whisper.

"You'll be caught in the middle."

Jane clenched her fists, feeling the nails dig into her palm.

"Imagine how badly that could go for you," Melanie continued, her voice sweetly cruel. "Ethan? He's a freshman. You're a sophomore. Do you really think that's going to sit well with anyone?"

Jane knew what she was trying to do. Knew that Melanie was using the tensions between the year groups as an excuse—just another tool in her arsenal to make her life hell.

But knowing didn't make it sting any less.

Melanie stepped back, tilting her head, studying Jane with something close to amusement. "You think you can pretend like this doesn't matter? Like you can just ignore it?" Her expression twisted into something darker. "You always act like you're above it all. Like you're better than us."

Jane's grip on the towel tightened. She wasn't above anything. She wasn't better.

She was just tired.

"Tch. I hate girls like you." Melanie's tone was sharp now, the thin veil of amusement slipping. "Always acting so perfect, so untouchable. But you're not, are you, Jane?"

She leaned in once more, her lips curling into a smirk.

"Because I remember."

Jane's breath came shallow, but she forced herself to stand firm. She couldn't show any more weakness.

Melanie exhaled slowly before taking a step back, as if satisfied. "Anyway," she drawled, "consider this a warning. Or advice, if you're feeling hopeful. If you know what's good for you, you'll stay away from Ethan."

She gave Jane one last look before turning on her heel, her footsteps light against the cold floor.

As she disappeared down the hallway, Jane let out a breath she hadn't realized she was holding.

The towel slipped from her grip, falling to the ground.

She clenched her jaw, forcing down the shaky feeling in her chest.

Mia.

That name still had power over her.

And Melanie knew it.

Jane took a deep breath, her hands tightening into fists at her sides.

She wasn't going to let Melanie win.

She stood there for a moment, staring at the empty hallway where Melanie had just disappeared.

Her breathing was steady now, controlled. The initial sting of the words had passed, replaced by a cold, familiar emptiness.

This wasn't new.

People like Melanie had always been around—picking, prodding, waiting for a moment of weakness to exploit. Jane had seen it before. She had felt it before. It was like walking through a storm you knew would never truly pass, only change direction.

But she had long since learned how to stand in the rain.

Without a word, she bent down, picking up the towel from the ground. She didn't bother dusting it off—her hands felt too stiff, her movements too mechanical. She needed to get rid of this feeling.

She turned on her heel and walked. Not toward the library, not yet.

She needed a moment.

The academy bathrooms were empty at this hour, the pale glow of the fluorescent lights flickering against the pristine white tiles. The quiet hum of the ventilation system was the only sound as Jane stepped inside, letting the door click shut behind her.

She moved toward the sink, placing both hands on the cool ceramic surface. Her grip was firm—steady, even as the tension in her shoulders refused to ease.

She turned on the tap.

The rush of cold water filled the silence, and without hesitation, Jane leaned down and splashed it onto her face. The shock of it sent a jolt through her system, grounding her. Her breath hitched slightly as she let the icy sensation wash over her skin, chasing away the lingering heat of anger, of discomfort.

Drip.

Water slid down her face, pooling in the hollow of her collarbone before sinking into the fabric of her training suit. Her fingers curled against the sink's edge as she slowly straightened, staring at her reflection.

Her brown eyes, still sharp.

Her expression, still composed.

Her face, still hers.

Jane exhaled, forcing a small smile onto her lips.

"It's fine. You can do it."

Her voice was soft, meant only for herself, a quiet reminder that she wouldn't break. That she had been through worse. That this—Melanie's threats, the tension between the freshmen and sophomores, the exhausting weight of it all—was just another thing to endure.

And endurance was something Jane excelled at.

With one last breath, she turned off the faucet, grabbing a nearby paper towel to dry her face. The moment she tossed it into the bin, her hands had already relaxed.

The moment she stepped out of the bathroom, her posture had already shifted—shoulders rolled back, expression neutral, unreadable.

By the time she reached the library doors, she had already pushed everything to the back of her mind.

Melanie's words.

Mia's name.

The weight of knowing this wouldn't be the last time.

She wasn't going to let any of it stop her.

Not now. Not ever.

With that, Jane stepped inside, heading toward the quiet solitude of the bookshelves.

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The dim glow of candlelight flickered against the polished mahogany walls of Headmaster Jonathan's office, casting elongated shadows that danced with the evening breeze seeping through the barely open window. The air carried the faint scent of aged parchment and ink, mingled with the ever-present tension that had settled over the academy like a storm cloud refusing to break.

Jonathan sat at his desk, his fingers interlocked, his sharp eyes fixed on the stack of letters and reports before him. The insignias of various guilds—some minor, some among the most influential in the Federation—were pressed into the wax seals. Each document contained a different variation of the same demand.

More cadets.

More recruits for their ranks.

More control over the next generation of hunters.

His grip on the chair's armrest tightened, his knuckles whitening. The guilds had always tried to exert influence over the academy, but now? Now, they were pushing harder than ever, their letters dripping with carefully veiled threats masked as requests.

A heavy knock on the door snapped him from his thoughts. "Enter," he commanded.

The door swung open, revealing Professor Eleanor, her composed expression betraying the faintest flicker of concern. She stepped inside, carrying yet another sealed document.

"This just arrived," she said, placing the envelope on his desk. Jonathan barely spared it a glance, already knowing what it would contain.

"They're getting desperate," he muttered, leaning back. His fingers drummed rhythmically against the wood, the sound filling the quiet room.

Eleanor studied him carefully. "You've held them at bay for years, Headmaster. But with everything that's happening in the Federation—the conflicts, the shifting alliances—the guilds see an opportunity. They're not just pressing for influence anymore. They want numbers. Cadets trained under our banner, but sworn to their cause before they even graduate."

Jonathan exhaled sharply. "I expected pressure, but not like this. Not all at once." His voice turned steely. "Do they think I will bend so easily?"

Eleanor didn't answer immediately. Instead, she picked up one of the documents from the growing pile, her eyes scanning its contents. "This one is from the Iron Fangs. They've increased their demand. They want an entire cadet division assigned to them as part of a 'strategic partnership.' They claim it would 'benefit the students'—exposing them to real-world conflicts before their official deployment."



Jonathan scoffed. "A partnership, is it? More like a thinly veiled conscription effort."

He sat forward, his piercing gaze meeting Eleanor's. "Make no mistake. I will not let the academy become a breeding ground for their wars."

Eleanor hesitated, then spoke carefully. "You have always absorbed the pressure, Headmaster. Confronted it head-on, shouldering the weight so the cadets remain protected. But..." She lowered the document and met his gaze fully. "Can you hold it all back forever?"

Silence settled between them, heavy and suffocating.

Jonathan's expression remained impassive, but deep within, he could feel it—the shift. The way the air around him felt different, like something unseen was stirring beneath the surface of the world.

A subtle unease. A whisper of something foreign creeping into the edges of his senses.

His instincts, sharpened by decades of battle and experience, screamed at him. This wasn't just political maneuvering. It wasn't just power-hungry guilds seeking leverage.

Something else was brewing.

Something unseen.

Something dangerous.

He exhaled slowly, his expression unreadable. "The guilds are circling like wolves, but they aren't the only ones moving. There's another force at play here, something beyond their greed."

Eleanor tilted her head slightly. "You sense something?"

Jonathan didn't answer immediately. Instead, he rose from his chair, stepping toward the window. His eyes traced the darkened horizon, as if searching for something beyond sight.

"The world is shifting, Eleanor," he murmured. "This pressure from the guilds—it's only the beginning. The true storm hasn't arrived yet."

She studied him, recognizing the weight of his words. Jonathan had been right about many things before, his foresight honed by years of battle and leadership. If he sensed something stirring, then it was not mere paranoia.

"Then what do we do?" she asked quietly.

Jonathan's jaw clenched. "We prepare."

He turned back to her, his expression colder than steel. "I will push back against the guilds as I always have. I will hold the line, no matter how many of them think they can break me." His voice dropped, more measured, more calculating. "But at the same time, I want eyes and ears everywhere. Not just on the guilds, but on everything—the Federation, the undercurrents of power, the movements in the shadows. If something bigger is coming, I refuse to be caught unaware."

Eleanor nodded. "I'll have my contacts look into it. I'll ensure the academy remains secure."

Jonathan turned back toward the window, his gaze lingering on the horizon.

"Good."

But despite his words, the feeling in his chest did not subside. The unseen force, whatever it was, had already begun to take root.

And when it revealed itself, the world would change.