

H. Academy 866

Chapter 866 - No title

The morning light streamed through the tall windows, illuminating the chatter-filled classroom as students trickled in, their conversations lively and energetic. The air was buzzing with one topic in particular—their first mentorship sessions.

Ethan strolled in alongside Lucas and Carl, their discussion already deep in recounting their own experiences. Lilia arrived shortly after, her sharp red eyes scanning the room. She quickly spotted Julia slumped over her desk, looking utterly destroyed.

Her usual fiery energy was nowhere to be seen. Instead, she sat with her head on the table, her arms sprawled out lifelessly as if she had just fought a war—and lost.

Lilia threw her a side-eye, crossing her arms. "What happened to you?"

Julia let out a long, suffering groan before finally lifting her head just enough to mumble. "...A truck went over me."

Lilia blinked. "What?"

Julia groaned again, rubbing her temples. "Kaya Hartley. That's what happened."

The group, now fully invested, turned toward her. Ethan raised an eyebrow, a knowing smirk forming. "So, Aunt Kaya has made you taste her medicine, huh?"

Julia shot him a half-hearted glare before slamming her head back onto the desk. "I have seen hell."

Carl, ever the pragmatist, leaned forward slightly. "What kind of training did she put you through?"

Julia turned her head just enough to glare at them all, her blue eyes glassy with exhaustion. "Do you know what it feels like to die and be reborn in the span of a few hours? Because I do now."

Lucas smirked. "I take it she didn't go easy on you."

"She never goes easy," Ethan added, chuckling. "Trust me, I know."

Julia sat up slightly, only to immediately groan and slump back down. "She threw us off a cliff."

Silence.

Lilia tilted her head. "Excuse me?"

Julia groaned again, massaging her temples. "Threw us. Off. A cliff. And when I climbed back up, she just nodded and said, 'Do it faster next time.' Next time?!"

The group exchanged glances, taking a moment to process what Julia had just said.

Lucas was the first to react, letting out a low whistle. "Damn. That's rough, even for Kaya Hartley standards."

Ethan grinned, clearly enjoying this way too much. "And here I thought you wanted excitement, Julia."

Julia shot him a look so dead inside that even he had to hold back his laughter. "Excitement is one thing, Ethan. Getting thrown off a cliff is another."

Lilia, smirking slightly, leaned against a nearby desk. "Sounds like a you problem."

Julia groaned again and covered her face. "I hate all of you."

Ethan shrugged. "Well, at least you survived."

Julia peeked up through her fingers. "That's not comforting."

Lilia exhaled, stretching slightly. "Well, mine was nothing like that. Selena Vayl went easy on us. Probably because it was the first session."

Lucas raised an eyebrow. "Easy as in...?"

Lilia shrugged. "No extreme tests or physical endurance trials. She mostly just went over advanced elemental manipulation concepts. A bit of sparring at the end, but nothing crazy."

Carl leaned back in his chair. "Huh. Guess not every mentor believes in breaking their students on day one."

"Wish I had one of those," Julia muttered, rubbing her arms as if she could still feel the pain of whatever hell Kaya had put her through.

Irina, who had been quiet up until now, finally spoke, flipping her hair over her shoulder. "Same for me. Amelia Lake took a similar approach. First session was mostly theoretical—breaking down magic application in different battlefield scenarios."

Lucas smirked. "So, you just got to sit and listen the whole time?"

"Not exactly." Irina's golden eyes flickered with something unreadable. "Her session was mixed with sophomores and freshmen."

That made the group pause.

Ethan's expression turned more interested. "Oh?"

Irina nodded. "You can imagine the tension."

Lilia crossed her arms. "Sophomores always think they're better than us."

"They do have more experience," Carl pointed out.

Irina exhaled, shaking her head. "That's not what I meant. It wasn't just a matter of experience. It was... expectations. Some of them clearly weren't thrilled about sharing a mentor with freshmen."

Julia finally sat up properly, curiosity momentarily overriding her exhaustion. "Did anything happen?"

Irina's smirk was faint, but there. "Not yet. But I could tell some of them were already drawing lines. A few didn't even try to hide the fact that they thought we were wasting Amelia's time."

Lucas scoffed. "Cocky."

"Typical," Lilia muttered. "The academy's competitive as hell. Sophomores probably think we're just taking up space."

Ethan hummed thoughtfully. "I take it Amelia didn't do anything to address it?"

Irina shook her head. "No. But I think she wants us to sort it out on our own."

Lilia smirked slightly. "Sounds like your first real test won't be training—it'll be proving you belong."

Irina's eyes gleamed with amusement. "Wouldn't be the first time."

Carl glanced around. "And what about you, Ethan?"

Ethan smiled, the usual carefree edge in his demeanor softening just slightly. He leaned back against his chair, arms crossed, a faint glint of exhaustion in his blue eyes—but not complaint.

"Well," he said, exhaling, "Professor Eleanor made sure I didn't walk out of there unscathed."

That caught everyone's attention.

Lilia arched an eyebrow. "I assume that means she didn't go easy on you?"

Ethan chuckled, shaking his head. "Easy? No. But that's not really her style, is it?" He paused for a moment, rolling his shoulders as if the phantom weight of the session still lingered. "She pushed my limits. Not just physically, but how I use my mana. Turns out I've been treating it more like a backup tool than an extension of myself. She made that very clear."

Carl gave a knowing nod. "Makes sense. You've always relied on raw strength first."

"Exactly," Ethan agreed. "But Eleanor—she doesn't just teach you how to be strong. She forces you to understand why certain things work, and why others will get you killed." He exhaled, shaking his head with an amused smirk. "She said I'm incomplete."

Julia blinked. "Incomplete? That's... harsh."

Ethan shrugged. "Not really. She's right. I've spent my whole life training, but there's always been this gap—one I didn't even realize was there until she pointed it out. It's like she sees every flaw, every weakness, and she knows exactly where to hit to make you confront them."

Lilia hummed in thought. "That's probably why the academy holds her in such high regard. Anyone can teach combat. Few can teach refinement."

Irina, arms crossed, studied him with quiet curiosity. "And? Do you think you'll adapt?"

Ethan smirked slightly, but there was no arrogance in it—just determination. "Of course. If there's a weakness, I'll fix it. That's the whole point of training."

Lucas shook his head, a small grin tugging at his lips. "You really are a battle junkie, huh?"

Ethan chuckled. "I just don't like being second to someone who's stronger than me."

Irina scoffed. "A noble goal, but good luck with Eleanor. I doubt she'll ever be satisfied."

Ethan laughed, but there was a sense of truth in his voice when he said, "Yeah. I figured that out pretty quickly."

Lucas leaned forward slightly, resting his elbows on his knees. "Alright, so what exactly did Eleanor make you do? Just push your limits, or was there something worse?"

Ethan let out a short breath, rubbing the back of his neck as he thought back to the session. "She started with her pressure."

Lucas blinked. "Her what?"

Ethan smirked, but there was no humor in it. "Her pressure. The full weight of her mana. She put Astron and me under it right from the start."

There was a brief silence before Julia threw her hands up. "Wait, hold on. Her pressure? What, is she crazy?"

Carl's expression darkened slightly, and even Lilia's usual nonchalance gave way to a more thoughtful frown.

Irina, arms crossed, exhaled. "Of course she did. If it's Eleanor, that's to be expected."

Lucas, however, looked around in confusion. "Okay, I know she's an S-Rank, but you guys are acting like she's a monster or something."

Ethan shook his head. "Not just an S-Rank. People seem to forget now that she's a professor for freshmen, but Eleanor isn't just powerful—she's unique."

Lilia nodded. "If you've ever spent time around high-ranking Hunters, especially those in the top circles, you'd know about her."

Lucas frowned. "Alright, then explain it."

Carl leaned forward slightly. "Most S-Ranks radiate pressure naturally because their mana is so refined and overwhelming. But Eleanor's? Hers is something different."

Ethan nodded. "Yeah. It's not just raw force. It adjusts—like it's alive. Most high-rankers apply mana pressure like crushing weight, making it hard to move or breathe. Eleanor's does that, but it also influences how you react."

Lilia added, "It forces you to adapt in ways you wouldn't expect. She doesn't just make you endure—she makes you struggle in a way that forces change. That's why she's terrifying."

Lucas exhaled. "So, let me get this straight. She just threw you and Astron under that on day one?"

Ethan let out a dry chuckle. "Yep."

Julia shook her head, her exhaustion momentarily forgotten. "Man, that's evil."

Ethan smirked. "You say that, but I get the feeling she hasn't even started being truly evil."

Ethan was right.