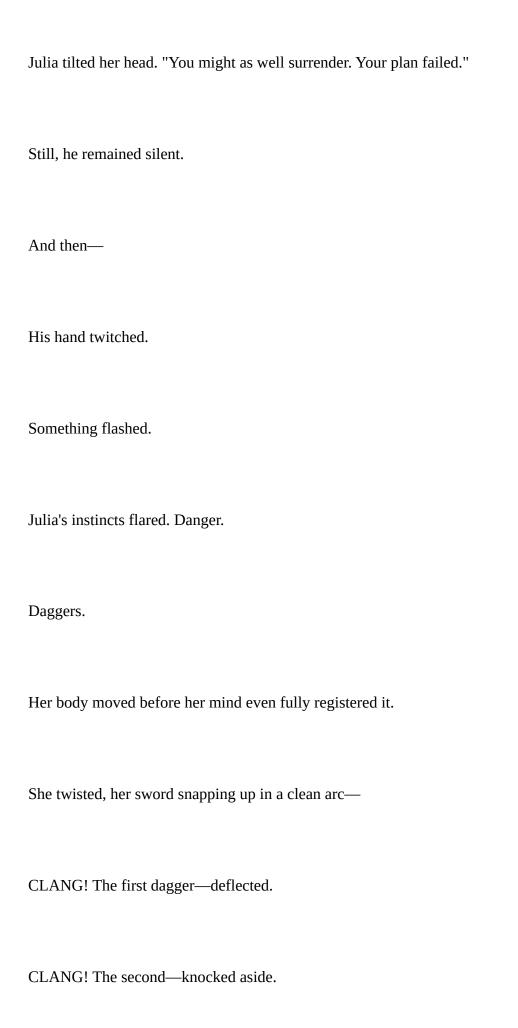
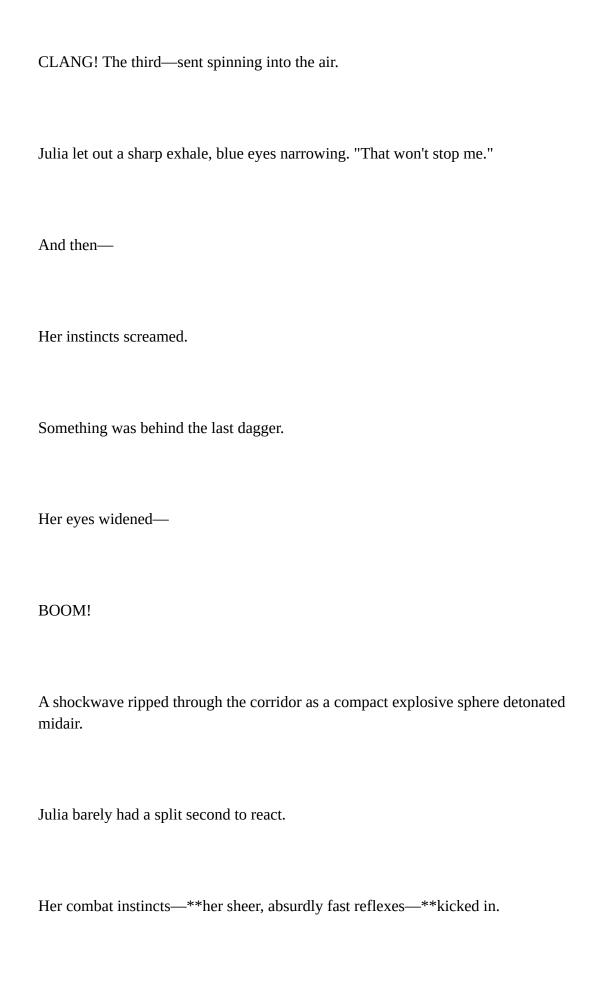
## H. Academy 875

Chapter 875 Artifact Training
"Tch—finally."
Astron exhaled, his stance shifting lower, more defensive.
But Julia wasn't slowing down.
With every step forward, her attacks came harder, sharper, heavier.
CLANG! CLANG!
He was still matching her pace.
But no longer blocking everything.
Her blade was cutting through.
And at this rate?

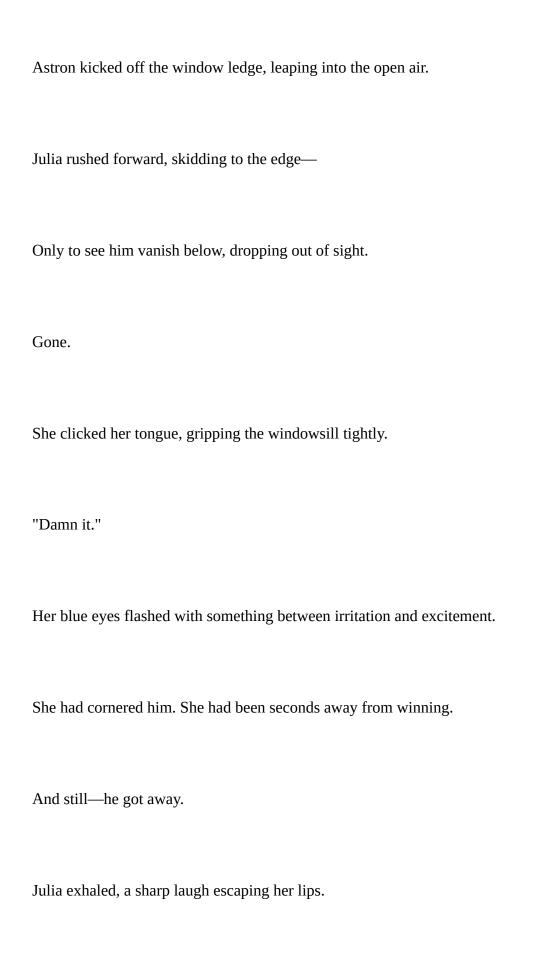
She was going to bring him down.
Julia's strikes didn't stop.
Her blade carved through the air, relentless, forcing Astron further back. Step by step, her blue eyes tracked his every movement, reading his reactions, adjusting—tightening the noose.
And then—
She sensed it.
The wall.
Her smirk widened.
"That's it, huh?" she exhaled, slowing her swings just slightly, enough to speak. "End of the line, Astron. You've got nowhere left to go."
Astron didn't answer.
Didn't even blink.





A barrier.
A thin, golden shield of condensed mana flashed into existence around her, just in time to absorb the worst of the explosion.
The force still slammed against her, pushing her back a few steps. Smoke and debris kicked up in the air, obscuring her vision.
But she saw it.
Through the haze—
Astron.
Already beside the window.
His purple eyes locked onto something.
And then—he clenched his fist.
Julia's gaze snapped down.

The artifact—the one still lying on the floor where he had dropped it—
It moved.
It flew straight to his hand.
Her eyes widened. "Telekinesis? No"
Mana threads.
A barely visible, ultra-thin connection of mana had been wrapped around the artifact from the moment he dropped it.
And now?
He just reeled it back in.
Julia lunged—
But—
Too late.



"Tch sneaky bastard."
She pushed herself back from the window, rolling her shoulders.
That was fun.
And next time?
She wasn't going to let him slip away.
Julia took a deep breath, shaking off the lingering sting of the explosion. The heat had already faded, leaving only the lingering scent of smoke and the faint static hum of dissipating mana in the air. She clenched her jaw, then let out a sharp exhale before stepping away from the window.
Astron had gotten away.
She didn't like it.
She had him—had him. Cornered, outmaneuvered, pushed back to the wall. But he had slipped through the cracks like damn mist, smooth, calculated, and with zero wasted movement. Even now, she replayed it in her head. The daggers were bait. The real trap had been the moment she thought she won.



Rebecca sighed, her voice tinged with something bordering on annoyance. "And there no sign of the last one. The third guy. Couldn't track him at all. He could be on your side."	's
Julia's blue eyes flicked around the room, scanning the remnants of the battlefield, checking for any lingering shadows in the corners, any hint of movement. But there we nothing. Just the aftershock of her fight with Astron and the faint static of disturbed mana.	as
Then she laughed. It was a light, almost amused sound.	
"Well," she exhaled, dragging a hand through her hair. "Doesn't really matter, does it?"	•
Rebecca clicked her tongue. "What do you mean?"	
"The artifact's already gone." Julia let out another short laugh, shaking her head. "Astronatched it and jumped out the damn window."	on
Silence followed.	
Then—	
"Wait. What?!" Rebecca's voice spiked, completely dropping her usual composed tone	<u>)</u> .
Damian let out a low hum, processing the information before speaking. "So. We lost."	

Julia's smirk twitched, but she didn't deny it. "Yeah." The admission came out smooth, easy, but there was a sting underneath it. She hated losing. Absolutely loathed it. But she wasn't about to lie about it either. That wasn't her style. She was a fighter, and fighters owned their losses. Nothing scratched her pride worse than making up excuses. "I had him cornered," she continued, rolling her shoulders. "I was this close. But the bastard had another trick up his sleeve." Damian let out a slow breath. "Astron, huh?" Rebecca muttered something under her breath, then sighed. "Well. I guess there's no point in sticking around, then. We're done here." Damian's voice came through again, his usual composed tone laced with amusement. "That was the guy you wanted on your team, right?" Julia scoffed, brushing some dust off her sleeves as she turned away from the window. "Yeah, what about it?" She never hid it. Hell, she had proposed it in front of the whole damn class, causing an uproar that had people talking for days. If anything, she made it pretty damn clear that she wanted Astron in her squad.

Rebecca let out a small chuckle. "Guess he really is talented if he can even outsmart Julia Middleton."
Julia clicked her tongue, not because Rebecca was wrong, but because she hated admitting it. Astron had gotten the best of her this time. That was just a fact.
Damian, of course, had to keep running his mouth. "You should've thought this through more," he mused, his tone that perfect mix of casual and smug. "A guy like that? He's got layers. If you really thought you could just power through him without thinking about what he had up his sleeve—"
Julia let out a short laugh, cutting him off. "Oh, shut up, Damian."
She could already hear the satisfaction in his voice.
But, annoyingly enough, he had a point.
Astron wasn't just strong. He was smart. He had read the battlefield, read her, and set her up without making a single unnecessary move. He had baited her into pushing him to the wall and then flipped the whole damn situation in a split second.
That wasn't just skill. That was foresight.
And that?



