

## H. Academy 877

### Chapter 877 - Artifact Training

Sylvie stared at her academy portal screen, her breath catching slightly as she processed the names listed under her assigned team.

Sylvie Gracewind—Layla Everett—Ethan Hartley.

For a moment, she blinked in surprise.

I actually got lucky.

Layla was Layla. Someone that she was familiar with being her friend.

And then, there was Ethan Hartley.

Sylvie glanced toward the approaching figure, his familiar hazel eyes gleaming with friendly amusement as he made his way toward them. Ethan carried himself with an easy confidence, his relaxed stride making him stand out even among the clusters of cadets forming their teams. Unlike the more cutthroat students, Ethan had a reputation for being approachable, his tactical skills matched with a natural charisma that made him an effortless leader.

As he neared, his gaze flickered toward Sylvie, his friendly smile never faltering. "Hey, Sylvie," he greeted casually, giving her a nod. "Looks like we're on the same team."

Sylvie nodded in return, adjusting the strap of her bag as she met his gaze. "Yeah, looks like it."

Ethan's eyes shifted to the girl standing next to Sylvie. Layla was observing him with a neutral expression, her sharp blue eyes steady. Unlike Sylvie, who at least had some level of familiarity with Ethan, Layla looked as though she had no opinion on him whatsoever—simply analyzing him the way she would any other teammate.

Ethan chuckled slightly, rubbing the back of his neck. "I'm guessing you're Layla, then?" He extended a hand, his expression apologetic. "Sorry for not knowing earlier. I've seen you around but never caught your name."

Layla stared at his hand for a brief moment before finally shaking it. Her grip was firm, her voice composed. "Layla Everett. And don't worry about it."

Ethan grinned. "Well, now I know. And since we'll be working together, I'm glad to be teamed up with you both."

Layla studied Ethan for a brief moment before offering a small smile in return. "Glad to be working with you too," she said, her tone more relaxed now. Despite Ethan's easygoing confidence, Layla didn't sense any arrogance from him—just a genuine, natural charm that made it hard to dislike him.

After shaking his hand, she turned to Sylvie, her green eyes lighting up slightly as she greeted her. "And you—it's nice that we're together for this. At least I know I've got someone reliable watching my back."

Sylvie smiled softly, nodding. "Yeah, I feel the same."

Of all the possible team assignments, this was one she was genuinely comfortable with. She had been prepared for the possibility of being paired with someone completely unfamiliar—or worse, someone difficult to work with. But with Layla and Ethan, she felt a sense of ease.

Layla, ever the energetic one, tapped Sylvie lightly on the shoulder. "Guess that means we're both stuck making sure he doesn't do anything reckless."

Ethan let out a small gasp, placing a hand over his heart. "Reckless? Me?"

Sylvie chuckled at his dramatics while Layla smirked. "I mean, you do have that 'natural leader' vibe going on. People like you tend to get overconfident."

Ethan raised an eyebrow, tilting his head slightly as if genuinely curious. "Really? I come off like that?"

There was no irritation in his voice—just genuine surprise. He blinked, processing Layla's words as if this was the first time anyone had ever told him such a thing.

Layla, who had been expecting him to brush it off with another joke, stared at him for a moment in mild awe. "Wait, you didn't know?"

Ethan shrugged, running a hand through his dark blond hair. "I mean, I try to be confident, sure. But overconfident?" He shook his head with an easy smile. "That's news to me."

Sylvie, standing beside them, instinctively glanced at Ethan's emotional aura through her [Authority]. As usual, there was nothing dark or misleading there—no hidden arrogance, no irritation at being called out, no masked emotions trying to play off something deeper. Just pure anticipation, curiosity, and... mild amusement.

He really had been unaware.

Layla folded her arms, studying him with an expression of disbelief. "You seriously didn't know? You walk into a room like you already have the whole situation under control."

Ethan laughed at that, shaking his head. "I think you're giving me too much credit. I just go with the flow, really."

Sylvie found herself smiling slightly. That's just who he is, she thought. Ethan had this natural way of making people comfortable, of making things seem easier than they really were. His confidence wasn't forced—it was the kind that came from someone who simply trusted in himself and those around him.

Layla huffed, shaking her head in mild exasperation. "Well, just don't go running ahead and getting yourself into trouble. If you're going to be our leader, at least make sure we don't have to rescue you."

Ethan grinned, placing a hand over his chest. "I solemnly swear I will do my best not to get us all killed."

Sylvie chuckled softly at their exchange, the tension from earlier fully melting away. I really did get lucky with this team.

As their conversation continued, the anticipation in the room grew. The simulation was coming up soon, and with a team like this, Sylvie had a feeling things were about to get interesting.

Ethan stretched his arms slightly before resting his hands on his hips, his hazel eyes gleaming with easy confidence. "Alright, so here's the deal," he began, his tone casual but assured. "We don't need to waste time overcomplicating things. None of us specialize in stealth, so sneaking around isn't exactly going to be our strength."

Sylvie blinked at that, a stray thought flickering in her mind. Astron would have been perfect for that, she mused briefly. He was a natural at moving unnoticed, his presence seemingly disappearing when he wanted it to. But she quickly pushed the thought aside. That's not relevant right now.

Ethan continued, completely unaware of her distraction. "Since we can't play this quietly, the best option is to hit fast and hit hard. Layla and I will take the front, keeping the pressure on, while you act as our enchanter, Sylvie." He looked at her, his expression open and expectant. "How does that sound?"

Sylvie considered it for a brief moment before nodding. "It makes sense," she agreed. "If I reinforce you both with my enchantments, you'll be able to push through faster."

Layla nodded after a moment of thought, cracking her knuckles. "Sounds good to me. I've never really tested my abilities as a tank in a formation against fellow cadets before, but I should be fine." Her sharp blue eyes gleamed with anticipation. "Besides, if brute force is the plan, I'm more than ready for it."

Ethan grinned. "That's what I like to hear."

Sylvie adjusted the strap of her bag and exhaled softly. "Alright, let's go with that, then. I'll focus on keeping your defenses up, and you two can clear a path."

Ethan gave an approving nod. "Simple and effective. We'll adapt if we need to, but for now, we stick with the plan."

With their strategy set, they headed toward the entrance of the simulation building. The massive structure loomed ahead, its digital framework glowing faintly under the influence of the mana-link system. From the outside, it resembled a run-down urban battlefield—crumbled walls, shattered windows, exposed interiors. The environment was intentionally unstable, designed to force cadets into high-stress decision-making.

The moment they stepped inside, the air shifted. The mana simulation hummed around them, fully immersing them into the battlefield.

Ethan tapped the side of his wristband, scanning the environment. "Alright, artifact's location should be deeper in. The moment we grab it, other teams will start converging. So we hit first, hit fast, and keep moving."

Layla smirked. "Sounds like my kind of plan."

Sylvie took a breath, her yellow mana flickering softly around her fingers as she prepared to support them. "Let's do this."

And with that, the three of them charged forward, brute-forcing their way through the battlefield.

Layla led the way, her stance unyielding as she absorbed incoming attacks from enemy cadets. Her shield pulsed with reinforced mana, blocking an onslaught of strikes as she pushed forward. Ethan moved seamlessly beside her, his agility making him a difficult target while delivering quick, efficient counterattacks.

At least that was how it was supposed to be yet the reality was different.

BOOM!

In front of them stood a giant man with a huge hammer.

"Carl."

It was Carl.

SWOOSH! And at the same time, arrows were flying over their heads.

"Lilia."

The enemy was really unbalanced....