

H. Academy 885

Chapter 885 Integrating Into

"Well, you haven't even seen her 'talent' yet..."

Ethan's head tilted slightly. "What did you say?"

"Nothing," Irina replied smoothly, that familiar smirk creeping back onto her lips.

But Ethan knew she had said something.

He narrowed his eyes slightly, but Irina had already moved on, leaning against the lockers like she wasn't hiding anything at all.

"But it's good that you understood her value," she said lazily. "Though you're a bit late."

Ethan scoffed. "Yeah, yeah." He crossed his arms, glancing away. "Maybe."

Julia, who had been quiet for longer than usual, finally rolled her eyes. "Alright, you two stop talking like you're scheming something. It's annoying."

Irina just smirked. "What? Can't I be in a good mood?"

"Absolutely not." Julia deadpanned.

Lilia, who had remained silent through the exchange, finally spoke.

"She's efficient," she said, her voice even, but thoughtful.

Irina turned her gaze toward her, golden eyes gleaming with interest. "Sylvie?"

Lilia nodded, tilting her head slightly as if running through her thoughts before voicing them. "I had been curious for a while," she admitted, crossing her arms. "You picked her early. And you're never careless about the people you choose."

Irina smirked slightly at that but didn't interrupt.

Lilia continued, her crimson gaze sharp. "I didn't see it at first. I've seen support casters before—ones who reinforce, ones who heal, ones who shield. And I've fought against them." She exhaled softly, tapping her fingers against her arm. "But Sylvie is different."

Ethan, who had been listening quietly, shifted slightly, eyes flicking toward her. "How so?"

Lilia met Ethan's gaze, expression neutral but firm. "It's hard to explain."

She left it at that, but inwardly, her thoughts spiraled.

'No. It's not just hard to explain. It doesn't make sense.'

The reason Sylvie had caught her attention wasn't just because of her skills as an enchanter. It wasn't because she was adaptable, or because she had refined techniques that were clearly polished beyond her rank.

It was something deeper.

Something fundamental.

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Something fundamental.

Lilia's fingers twitched slightly, resisting the urge to tap against her arm again.

'The way she controls mana... it feels familiar.'

Lilia had never been a mage. She had never been someone who cast elaborate spells or wielded overwhelming destructive magic. That wasn't her field.

And yet, when it came to understanding mana—how it moved, how it flowed, how it could be manipulated beyond the standard applications—she had always been ahead of the curve.

It was one of the reasons why she had excelled in archery despite her family having no history with it. The way she wove mana into her arrows, the way she shaped it around her shots, the way she could bend the very laws that other archers adhered to... That wasn't something she had been taught.

It was something she understood.

Instinctually.

As if mana itself made sense to her in a way it didn't to others.

Not even Irina, who was a born mage, had that kind of relationship with mana. Irina's spellcasting was refined, her mastery of fire psions was undeniable—but her approach to magic was still methodical, structured. It had rules. It followed a path.

Lilia had never felt bound by those paths.

And now, standing here, she realized that Sylvie... Sylvie was the first person who made her feel like she wasn't alone in that.

The way Sylvie's enchantments had shifted—not just adapted, but flowed, weaving themselves seamlessly into the battlefield, almost like an extension of her will. It was too fluid. Too natural.

'She's not just adjusting her spells. She's shaping them as she casts. Like she's not even thinking about it—it just happens.'

And that...

That was something that only Lilia did.

Her crimson eyes flickered slightly as she kept her expression composed, giving away nothing.

'That's why I noticed it. That's why it felt strange. Because it was too close to the way I control mana.'

She didn't like that feeling.

Lilia took pride in her abilities, in the way she had carved out her own place through talent and instinct. If there was one thing she owned, it was her natural grasp of mana, her ability to take what others needed years to master and make it hers with nothing but understanding.

Lilia's thoughts sharpened, her mind sifting through the details with a methodical precision.

'It's similar, but... different.'

That was what unsettled her the most.

She had fought against countless mages, had seen all types of mana users—those who wielded it through rigid formulas, those who shaped it through willpower, those who refined it through years of discipline.

None of them had ever made her feel like this.

Because while Sylvie's control reminded Lilia of herself, something about it felt off.

An unease settled in her chest, subtle but undeniable.

Her fingers flexed slightly as she recalled the moment mid-battle when Sylvie had conjured a barrier against her arrows. Lilia had felt the energy, traced its flow, tested the way it had been structured.

Her approach had been simple—she had moved, weaving around it, adjusting her shots mid-flight, bending her mana to slip through any gaps in its formation.

And yet...

'It didn't work.'

No matter how precisely she adjusted, no matter how naturally she shaped her own energy, she hadn't been able to bypass it completely.

That shouldn't have been possible.

Lilia's talent—what made her different—wasn't just her skill in archery or her reflexes. It was her ability to manipulate mana as if it were an extension of herself, to flow around obstacles rather than confront them head-on.

And yet, against Sylvie's barrier, her weaving had been blocked.

Not because she lacked the skill. Not because she had miscalculated.

But because something about Sylvie's mana didn't respond the way it should have.

It was like trying to move through water only to find it solidifying around her, refusing to bend, refusing to let her slip through.

That wasn't how barriers were supposed to work.

That wasn't how mana was supposed to react.

Lilia had been forced to overpower it, pushing more energy into her next shot to break through rather than bypass.

And that bugged her.

Because it meant that Sylvie's mana wasn't just instinctually controlled.

It was something else entirely.

'What are you?'

A sharp snap of fingers near her face yanked Lilia from her thoughts. She blinked once, her focus returning to the present as Julia waved a hand in front of her with an exaggerated sigh.

"Hello? Lilia? You still in there?" Julia drawled, tilting her head. "You spaced out for a second."

Lilia exhaled softly, regaining her composure. "I was just thinking."

"Yeah, I noticed." Julia rolled her eyes, then leaned in slightly. "So? What's the deal? You looked like you were deep in thought. You gonna elaborate or what?"

Lilia tapped her fingers against her arm again, this time intentionally. She wasn't the type to explain herself unless she found it necessary, but Julia was persistent. And, truth be told, even she didn't mind voicing what was already circling in her mind.

"She's talented," Lilia said simply.

Julia raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, no kidding. You said that already."

Lilia's crimson eyes flickered slightly, narrowing just a fraction. "No. I mean, she's really talented. In a way I wasn't expecting."

That caught Irina's attention again, her golden gaze sharpening with quiet interest.

Lilia continued, shifting her stance. "I have good mana control. That's something I've always known. Even though I'm not a mage, I've always been able to manipulate mana in ways that others struggle with. It's the reason I excel at archery—not just because I practice, but because I can shape my shots beyond what normal archers can do."

Ethan, who had been silent up until now, nodded slightly, as if that much was obvious.

"But Sylvie..." Lilia hesitated for just a moment before continuing, "...I wasn't expecting that kind of talent from a healer."

Irina smirked slightly, but she didn't say anything. She didn't have to.

Lilia turned to look at Ethan then, something unreadable flickering behind her gaze. "She even used [Cleansing]."

The reaction was immediate.