

H. Academy 889

Chapter 889 - No title

Irina strode ahead with a confident air, the grand doors of her dorm unlocking at her mere presence. As they stepped inside, the entryway was illuminated by soft mana lights, casting a warm glow over the polished floors and elegantly structured space.

She made a sweeping gesture with her hand. "Welcome to my humble abode," she said, smirking as she turned toward Astron. "Two floors, a grand garden, private facilities—everything one needs to live comfortably."

Astron's sharp gaze scanned the area, taking in the high ceilings, the seamless blend of elegance and function, and the sheer space that separated this place from the standard dorms. "Lavish," he commented simply.

Irina snorted. "You haven't even seen the best parts yet."

She led him through the first floor, pointing out the fully stocked kitchen—not that she used it much—then the lounge, lined with bookshelves and mana-enhanced furniture designed for relaxation. At the back, wide glass doors led to her personal garden, a sprawling area with glowing flora, a small pond, and carefully arranged pathways.

Astron's gaze lingered on it for a moment before she pulled him toward the stairs. "Second floor has my personal quarters, study, and a few other rooms I may or may not use," she said, waving a hand. "But what's even more impressive is the compound outside."

She gestured toward the massive window overlooking the elite dorms. Beyond the buildings, in the very center of the compound, lay the personal training grounds for the top ten cadets—vast, state-of-the-art, and enchanted to accommodate extreme combat conditions.

Astron's eyes flickered toward the grounds, analyzing, calculating.

Irina grinned. "Now this is something that might interest you."

He glanced at her, waiting.

She leaned against the railing, arms crossed. "All this? It's the kind of privilege that comes with being in the top ten. You could be enjoying all of this too, you know." She tilted her head. "So? How about showing some strength?"

Astron's gaze remained unreadable as he turned his eyes back to the compound. Then, calmly, he countered, "These types of things are luxuries that are not needed for a Hunter."

Irina blinked. "Hah?"

Astron continued, his tone even. "A Hunter does not need a grand house or personal training grounds. Survival does not come from privilege, nor does strength." His sharp gaze met hers. "And more importantly, revealing one's capabilities comes at a greater cost than the rewards it offers."

Irina frowned slightly, processing his words. "What do you lose exactly?"

Silence.

Astron looked at her, his expression calm, yet something unreadable lurked behind those sharp purple eyes.

"You can't tell me, right?" she pressed, watching him closely.

"I can tell you," he admitted after a moment. "But it would be difficult to explain in a way that makes sense to you." A pause. "Rather, you will see the reasons soon."

Irina exhaled, rubbing her temple. "Sigh... You really are secretive."

"....You also had known that from the start?"

Irina scoffed, shaking her head. "Damn, I had..." Then, smirking slightly, she added, "Wish I had chosen better, though."

Astron's lips twitched. "But you didn't."

She clicked her tongue, glancing at him. "Tch. No, I didn't."

For a moment, they stood there, the glow of the mana lights casting long shadows over the space, the air thick with an unspoken challenge between them.

And yet, despite everything—Irina couldn't help but feel a little satisfied.

Even if he wouldn't admit it, she knew Astron was analyzing everything. Watching. Thinking.

Irina watched him carefully, the way his sharp eyes scanned everything—not just with curiosity, but with something deeper. Calculation. Assessment. Even here, in a place built for comfort, Astron was breaking it all down, seeing what mattered, what didn't.

'Maybe he'll find something here,' she thought. 'Maybe he'll start connecting things differently.'

But despite that hope, something heavier lurked beneath her thoughts.

A fear she still couldn't shake.

Even now, standing in the glow of her own domain, the memory clawed at the edges of her mind—the scene that had burned itself into her soul.

The spear piercing his body.

His lifeless eyes.

His form twisting, warping, signs of demonic corruption spreading like a cursed flame.

The moment when she knew—he had sold himself to demons.

Irina's fingers curled into fists at her sides. Damn it. Even now, it wouldn't leave her. No matter how much time passed, no matter how much she tried to bury it under everything else, that image stayed.

She could still hear the words from back then, a haunting echo buried deep inside her:

--"Even after trying to achieve my revenge in the pursuit of the very beings that made my life hell, I learned the enemy I deemed had never been the ones I sought."

--"It was then I realized it's not the weak's fault for being trampled, nor the strong's fault for using their power. It's this world's fault for giving power to the wrong people."

Those words—his words—still unsettled her.

'That's why...'

She looked at him now, standing there calmly, his expression unreadable, as if none of this affected him.

'That's why I have to keep an eye on you. No matter what.'

Taking a breath, she pushed the thoughts down, burying them for now. Instead, she straightened up, placing her hands on her hips.

"Now, come here and sit," she ordered.

Astron blinked, turning his gaze back to her. "What?"

Irina gestured to the floor. "Sit. Right here."

He studied her for a second longer before exhaling lightly and complying, lowering himself onto the ground with his usual composed movements.

Astron had barely settled onto the floor when Irina grabbed his sleeve and tugged him upward.

"Not there," she said, her smirk returning. "Here."

She gestured to the long, cushioned couch that stretched across the lounge. It was sleek, lined with mana-infused fabric that adjusted for comfort. Without waiting for his response, she nudged him toward it.

Astron sighed but complied, sitting down as she did the same beside him.

Then, after a brief pause, Irina turned toward him, eyes glinting with mischief. "You... do you play games?"

Astron blinked, his sharp gaze shifting to her. "Games?"

"Yes."

"I don't."

Irina smirked, already knowing the answer. "I knew it." She leaned back, resting her arm against the back of the couch. "You probably find them a waste of time, huh?"

Astron remained quiet for a second before exhaling. "...Well. They are a waste of time."

"Heh."

Irina let out a small chuckle, her fingers twitching slightly. Without another word, she raised her hand, and the air before them shimmered. A pulse of mana connected to the runic structure embedded just beneath the lounge area.

Then—click.

Right in front of them, a sleek, arcane console activated. Its interface, a smooth black panel lined with glowing golden inscriptions, pulsed as it scanned them. The mana screen in front of them flickered to life, adjusting instantly to their seating positions.

Astron's sharp purple eyes flicked toward it, taking in the sudden change. "Hmm?"

"What, hmm?" Irina smirked, grabbing a pair of floating controllers as they materialized before them. She handed one to him, fingers barely suppressing her excitement. "Today, we're playing games."

Astron stared at her, then at the controller in his hand, then back at the screen. "...This was your plan?"

Irina leaned forward, a glint of challenge in her eyes. "You're the one who thinks it's useless, right? Let's put that theory to the test."

For once, Astron didn't immediately refuse. Instead, he looked down at the device in his hand, assessing it.

Irina's smirk widened.

'Got him.'