

H. Academy 893

Chapter 893 - Game night

"You just wanted to mark me as yours."

Irina choked.

Astron watched as she flailed for a response, her face rapidly heating up. "Wha—?! I—?! That is NOT—I mean—!"

"Your name is InfernoQueen," Astron continued, his tone as even as ever. "You deliberately chose a name that complements yours. The implication is clear."

Irina's eyes darted around the room as if searching for an escape route. "L-Look, don't get the wrong idea! It's just branding! Branding, okay?! You need a strong, coordinated brand when playing online!"

Astron let the silence stretch just a little longer.

Then, finally, he gave her an out.

"I see," he said, feigning contemplation. "So, this is purely for strategic reasons?"

"YES." Irina nodded so fast she might have given herself whiplash. "Totally. 100%. Absolutely no other reason whatsoever."

"Hmm."

Astron leaned back slightly, fingers tapping idly against his controller. His eyes returned to the screen, where the name was now permanently set in place.

He didn't mind it.

Not at all.

And judging by Irina's reaction, neither did she—though she would never admit it.

"Alright," he said simply.

Irina blinked. "Huh?"

"I'll keep it."

Her mouth opened. Closed. Opened again. "Wait, really?"

He gave her a sidelong glance, his voice carrying just the faintest trace of amusement. "You put effort into it, didn't you?"

Irina looked at him, her amber eyes searching his expression as if trying to figure out whether he was being serious. And when she saw that he was—

Her lips curled into a slow, triumphant smirk.

"Heh. That's right, I did," she said, leaning back with satisfaction. "And don't you forget it."

Astron simply nodded, rolling his shoulders as he prepared for the next match.

"Alright, InfernoKnight," Irina teased, her voice dripping with playful smugness. "Time to test if you can live up to the name."

Astron stared at the name again.

[InfernoKnight.]

His sharp purple eyes flicked toward Irina, who was still basking in the glow of her self-proclaimed victory. She had that smug little smirk, the one that meant she thought she had won their exchange.

But Astron had one last card to play.

He tilted his head slightly, voice calm as ever. "It's an odd choice."

Irina blinked. "What?"

"A knight being the carry," Astron elaborated, tapping his fingers idly against his controller. "Shouldn't it be the other way around? The queen is the one who commands, while the knight protects. Wouldn't it make more sense for me to be the support and you the carry?"

Irina stiffened.

For a split second, her eyes darted to the side—clearly trying to come up with some kind of rebuttal.

Astron waited.

Then, just as he expected—

She flailed.

"T-That's—!" Irina's voice caught in her throat before she huffed, crossing her arms. "It's not like everything has to be logical! Just—just enjoy it!"

Astron's lips twitched ever so slightly. "So logic doesn't matter now?"

"Not in this case!" she snapped, her face slightly flushed. "Names are about style! You don't need to overanalyze every little thing!"

He hummed, as if considering her words. "I see. So 'InfernoQueen' can be the carry, and 'InfernoKnight' can be... what, her personal vanguard?"

Irina straightened in her seat, her confidence returning. "Exactly! See? You get it now."

Astron exhaled softly, rolling his shoulders. "Yeah, yeah..." he muttered, adjusting his grip on the controller. Then, almost too quietly to be caught—

"...My queen."

Irina froze.

Her entire body went rigid, her amber eyes widening in alarm.

Astron didn't look at her. He didn't need to. He could feel the way the atmosphere shifted the moment those words left his mouth.

There was a moment of pure, stunned silence.

Then—

"Wha—?!" Irina nearly fell off the couch. "WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?!"

Astron finally turned to face her, expression unreadable. "What?"

"D-Did you just—did you just call me—?!"

Irina froze, her entire system shutting down for a full two seconds.

Then—

Her brain exploded.

'WHAT. DID. HE. JUST. SAY?!'

She whipped her head toward Astron, her eyes blazing. "Did you just—did you just call me—?!"

Astron, stoic as ever, merely tilted his head slightly, expression completely unreadable.

"What?" he said, his voice perfectly neutral.

Irina's eye twitched.

'Oh. OH. THIS GUY.'

The way he sat there, pretending like nothing happened, like he hadn't just DESTROYED her brain with those two words—she knew he was doing this on purpose.

Just like last time.

But this time, she caught something—a tiny, nearly imperceptible twitch at the corner of his lips.

He was enjoying this.

'HE DID IT AGAIN. HE DID IT ON PURPOSE AGAIN.'

"Oh, you—!"

Before she could think, before she could even stop herself, she lunged.

Astron's eyes widened slightly as she toppled him over, pushing him down onto the couch.

His back hit the cushions, and before he could react, Irina was above him, pinning him in place.

Her hands were planted on either side of his neck, effectively caging him in.

"You're messing with me," she accused, glaring down at him.

Astron blinked, momentarily caught off guard.

For once, he hadn't expected this.

He stared up at her, his sharp purple eyes searching hers as if processing the situation.

Irina, breathing heavily from her sudden movement, realized something.

They were close.

Too close.

His breath was warm against her skin, and the second she felt it, her entire face went red.

"...."

She instantly flinched back, scrambling off him like she had been burned.

'I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO DO THIS, THIS TIME!'

She sat back, pressing a hand to her burning face, unable to even look at him.

'Why do I keep ending up in situations like this?!'

Astron, meanwhile, slowly sat up, still eerily calm.

Still watching her.

Still not saying anything.

And somehow—that made it worse.

Irina groaned internally.

Irina snatched the nearest snack bag from the pile Astron had brought, ripping it open with unnecessary force.

And then—she stuffed her mouth.

She didn't care what it was. Didn't care about the taste. Didn't care if it was too salty, too sweet, too crunchy—

She just needed something to do before her brain self-destructed.

With her cheeks puffed like a chipmunk, she aggressively focused on the screen.

"Lewt'ws qwueuwe uwp," she mumbled, barely coherent as crumbs scattered onto her lap.

Astron, now back to his usual composed self, let out a quiet sound.

"Okay."

And with that, he joined the lobby.

Irina reached for the controller, ready to slam the queue button, ready to bury this entire moment in the depths of bot lane farming—

But then—

Something blocked her view.

A shadow loomed over her, cutting off the screen.

She blinked.

And then—

"Here."

Not because he was right—because she was on the verge of choking on dry snacks like an idiot.

But because of his eyes.

Astron's voice was calm as ever, but there was something else behind it. Something gentle.

She turned her head—

And there he was, extending a drink toward her.

"You're going to get drowned," he added simply.

Irina froze.

Not because of the drink.

Not because he was right—because she was on the verge of choking on dry snacks like an idiot.

But because of his eyes.

They weren't teasing.

They weren't smug.

They were just... soft.

Like he found her ridiculous. But didn't mind it.

Like he was used to dealing with her like this.

Like he was—

'Don't think about it.'

She grabbed the drink instantly, looking away so fast she probably gave herself whiplash.

"Twank ywou," she mumbled, still chewing, her face slightly red.

Astron said nothing.

Just watched her.

And somehow, even though it embarrassed her—

It made her happy, too.