

H. Academy 894

Chapter 894 - Game night

As the match loaded in, Irina's competitive instincts flared up.

'Alright. No more weird moments. No more distractions. It's game time.'

She cracked her fingers, eyes locked on the screen as their champions spawned in the base.

Astron's ranged carry stood beside her support champion, the two of them ready to head to bottom lane.

Irina immediately shifted into teacher mode.

"Alright, listen up," she said, gripping the controller. "We're heading bot lane. That's your main spot as the carry."

Astron nodded, following her movements. "Understood."

She smirked. "Now, your job early on? Stay safe. You're weak as hell right now—glass cannon types like you don't do much damage early, so it's usually better not to fight."

Astron hummed thoughtfully.

Then, after a moment, he asked—

"But, if the enemy is playing by the same rules, aren't they also weak too?"

Irina's brain short-circuited.

'...Wait.'

She paused.

She had been playing this game for months. Had played hundreds of matches.

And never once had she actually thought about it like that.

'Holy crap. He's right.'

If both carries were weak early, then why was she so used to being passive?

Why not push the advantage first?

Irina stared at the screen.

For the first time ever, she was thinking about the game instead of just playing it on autopilot.

And it was annoying.

'Damn it! This is a game! If I wanted to think, I'd go study! What the hell is this?!'

He, of course, was still watching the screen with calm curiosity, completely unaware of the existential crisis he had just given her.

Irina groaned, rubbing her temple.

She glared at Astron.

He, of course, was still watching the screen with calm curiosity, completely unaware of the existential crisis he had just given her.

Irina groaned, rubbing her temple.

"Okay, you know what?" she muttered, clicking her tongue. "Let's not overthink things. Just follow my lead and don't die."

Astron tilted his head slightly, his purple eyes shifting toward Irina as he absorbed her frustrated reaction.

Then, with his usual unreadable tone, he said, "Why does it feel like you are the kidnapper giving a child candy?"

Irina jerked.

Her head snapped toward him, baffled. "What are you saying?!"

Astron remained calm, adjusting his controller grip. "What? Your expression sure looks like that."

Irina's eyebrow twitched. "I am not kidnapping anyone."

"It's an analogy," Astron replied smoothly.

"Yeah! But it's an analogy that is irrelevant!"

He hummed in that infuriatingly calm way of his. "Maybe because you can't refute it?"

Irina gasped dramatically.

She slammed a hand against her chest as if personally wounded by the accusation.
"Bastard! Insufferable knight!"

Astron didn't react.

He simply let the silence stretch for a moment before calmly saying—

"..."

And that somehow made her even angrier.

"STOP DOING THAT!" she shouted.

"Doing what?" he asked, as if genuinely confused.

"THAT! Just not reacting! It makes me feel like I lost even when I should've won!"

Astron's lips twitched ever so slightly.

"...Noted."

Irina exhaled sharply, glaring at the screen to stop herself from launching another counterattack.

"Alright, InfernoKnight," she muttered, stretching her fingers dramatically. "Time to show me you can actually play."

Astron nodded. "Understood."

The match began, and as soon as they stepped into lane, Irina was already nitpicking.

"Too far forward," she muttered as Astron's champion stepped slightly past the minion wave. "You're going to get hit if you stand there."

Astron adjusted his position immediately, his character shifting just slightly behind her.

Irina nodded approvingly, but a second later, she clicked her tongue. "Now you're too far back! You're missing gold!"

Astron didn't react, simply moving forward again, this time carefully threading the space between safety and efficiency.

'Tch. He actually listens fast.'

As the laning phase continued, Irina kept nitpicking, pointing out his movement issues, his timing on last hits, his reaction speed—everything.

But despite all of that—

They were winning.

Of course, the enemies were just bots, and Irina was already level 50—far past the threshold needed to play ranked. So victory was basically guaranteed.

Still, Astron was getting better.

Faster than she expected.

Faster than she had when she first started.

Sure, he still moved too much, repositioning like he was still thinking in real combat rather than staying steady to maximize his attacks. He misused some of his skills, missed a few crucial last hits.

But every single mistake was something he immediately corrected.

Irina narrowed her eyes slightly.

'This guy... is actually improving mid-game.'

Most people took days, weeks even, to refine their mechanics.

But Astron?

He was figuring it out in real time.

Irina pursed her lips, trying not to let that bother her.

'Nope. Not thinking about it. Not thinking about how he's already better than I was at this stage. No way.'

Instead, she focused back on the real goal.

Winning.

With one final push, they smashed through the enemy base, taking down the Nexus without losing a single bot tower.

The victory screen flashed.

Irina leaned back, exhaling sharply.

"Well," she muttered, setting her controller down. "That's that."

Astron tilted his head slightly. "It was easier than I expected."

Irina clicked her tongue at his casual remark. "Don't get cocky, InfernoKnight. That was just bots. Real players will stomp you if you don't play properly."

Astron simply nodded, calm as ever.

But Irina squinted at him.

He wasn't satisfied.

He wasn't acting like someone who just won their first match.

He was acting like...

Like he was already looking ahead.

'Oh no. No, no, no. Don't tell me—'

Astron turned toward her.

"Let's queue again," he said.

Irina's eye twitched.

'Damn it. He's actually enjoying this now.'

Harin Anderson staggered back, his body slamming against the damp, soot-covered wall of the alley. His breath came in ragged gasps, every inhale a struggle as blood seeped from a deep gash in his side, soaking through his tattered coat. His legs trembled, barely able to support his weight, but he refused to kneel.

Not to them.

The flickering lamplight above cast long, distorted shadows across the narrow alleyway, illuminating the figures surrounding him. They moved with unnatural grace, their bodies hidden beneath black coats that seemed to ripple, as if the very fabric of their garments was alive.

Harin coughed, spitting crimson onto the cold pavement. His head tilted up, bloodshot eyes glaring at his attackers. Even in this dire moment, his will remained unbroken.

"You..." His voice was hoarse, but there was still fire in it. "...Demonic bastards!"

A cruel chuckle echoed in the alley.

One of the assailants stepped forward—a tall man with sharp, inhuman features, his irises glowing a dull, eerie red. His presence was suffocating, his very aura exuding a pressure that made the air feel thick and heavy, like a vice clamping around the lungs.

"Heh..." The man's voice was silky, almost amused. "Mister Anderson... You have been warned countless times, but you still decided to go against our wills."

Another figure emerged from the darkness, their fingers twitching unnaturally, as if itching to carve deeper wounds into Harin's flesh. The alley walls pulsed with unseen symbols—marks of a ritual in progress, designed to ensure that no soul beyond this place would hear his cries.

Harin clenched his fists. His mind raced, searching for any possible escape. But his body screamed in protest. His ribs ached, at least two of them cracked. His left arm was sluggish, his muscles numb from where a dagger had found its mark earlier in the fight.

But none of that mattered.

He had fought for too long, had suffered too much, to let the Azure Crest Guild fall here. He had lost too many comrades to these wretched contractors.

And Emily—his daughter—was still out there.

A slow, deliberate clapping sound filled the space. Another of the demon contractors, this one a woman with violet, pupil-less eyes, smiled mockingly. "You really thought you could resist forever?" she mused, tilting her head. "That a mere human guild could stand against us?"

Harin exhaled sharply, his fingers tightening. His nails dug into his own palm, the pain snapping his thoughts into focus.

'I will need to use that.'