

H. Academy 904

Chapter 904 InfernoKnight

"If I were to hit top 10, I would see this view every day. And it would soon lose its meaning."

Irina paused.

She opened her mouth, then closed it.

And when she finally found a reply, all she could say was, "...You really know how to suck the fun out of things."

Astron gave a quiet hum, barely acknowledging her words.

She sighed, rolling her eyes. "Yeah, yeah... Mister quick reply. You're always right."

Astron didn't respond immediately.

Instead, he simply kept looking out at the night sky, his gaze distant.

Irina followed his line of sight.

The moon had risen high, its silver glow casting over the academy grounds, illuminating the quiet streets below. And in that light, his face was soft.

No sharpness. No guarded expression.

Just... calm.

Irina stared at him for a long moment.

'What is this feeling?'

There was something about this moment.

Something about the way the night had stretched longer than expected.

Something about how she didn't want it to end.

And something about him—standing there, gazing at the moon, looking like he belonged somewhere beyond the present.

It felt like something was about to come.

Something was about to change.

Irina couldn't explain it.

This feeling.

It had no logic behind it, no real basis, and yet, she felt it all the same.

Something about tonight was different.

And she didn't know why.

Her gaze flickered between the moon above and the quiet expression on Astron's face.

That distant look of his—it made her feel like he was somewhere else entirely, somewhere she couldn't reach.

And she didn't like that.

Before she could even think, her fingers moved on their own.

She reached out—grabbing the hem of his t-shirt.

Astron stiffened slightly, as if pulled back into the present.

He raised his eyebrows, turning his head toward her.

"Hmm?"

Irina's grip on the fabric tightened, her own thoughts still uncertain.

"You like this now, right?" she asked, her voice quieter than before.

Astron blinked. "Like this now?"

"Like living like this," she clarified, her eyes not leaving his.

Astron paused.

A small silence stretched between them.

Then, carefully, he asked, "Where did that come from?"

Irina clicked her tongue, her grip on his shirt not loosening.

"Just answer my question."

Astron narrowed his eyes slightly. "What kind of question is this?"

Irina exhaled sharply, looking away for a second before meeting his gaze again.

"I'm asking," she said, her voice steady, "now, are you loving the life you're living?"

Astron didn't reply right away.

For the first time in a while, he hesitated.

His sharp purple eyes studied her, as if trying to figure out why she was even asking this.

And for a moment—

He looked like he didn't have an answer.

The fact that Astron didn't immediately answer bothered Irina more than she expected.

Because that wasn't like him.

Astron always had an answer. He always had something to say, something quick, logical, and precise.

Yet now?

Now he was silent.

And when he finally did speak, his voice was quieter than usual.

"Living like this... it is indeed strange."

Irina's grip on his shirt tightened slightly.

"Why?" she asked, her amber eyes locked onto him.

Astron exhaled lightly, his gaze dropping to where her fingers were still holding onto him.

"Why?" he repeated, almost as if he was asking himself. "It is hard to explain."

Irina narrowed her eyes, her grip refusing to loosen.

"Try," she pressed.

Astron's gaze slowly lifted back to hers.

And under the moonlight, her fiery red hair—normally wild, untamed—looked softer, calmer.

She wasn't just asking for an answer.

She was looking for something.

And Astron knew that.

So after a brief pause, he said, "If I were to tell you... I didn't know how to live before."

Irina's breath hitched slightly.

She didn't move.

Didn't react.

She just... stared at him.

Because the way he said it—so simply, like it was just a fact—made something deep in her chest tighten.

Astron didn't break eye contact with her.

"I lost something really important."

His voice was calm—too calm.

Like he was stating a fact rather than talking about something that had shattered his world.

Irina didn't say anything. She just watched him, her grip on his shirt still firm, her heart beating a little faster for a reason she didn't want to think about.

Astron continued, his tone quiet, steady, but carrying something deeper beneath the surface.

"And when I lost it... my whole world crumbled at that moment."

Irina swallowed, her throat suddenly dry.

He had never spoken like this before.

He had never given her this kind of glimpse into what he had been through.

Though she herself knew what happened to him, she also knew times like this were really important.

"So from then on," Astron continued, "I didn't know how I lived at all."

Irina's fingers twitched against his shirt.

"It was like..." he paused for a second, his eyes darkening slightly, "I just went on with life, using vengeance as my fuel."

She knew what that meant.

Everything he did. Everything he was.

Fueled by something that had been taken from him.

Irina's lips parted, but no words came out.

Her chest felt tight.

She wasn't sure what she wanted to say.

So instead, she asked, "And now?"

Astron's expression didn't change.

"Now..." he murmured, "I am still doing that."

Irina sucked in a slow breath.

She should've expected that answer.

Of course he was. That was who he was.

But before she could dwell on that, Astron's eyes softened just a little.

"But," he added, his gaze flickering to hers, "if you told me at the start of the academy that I would be living like this—gaming with you, staying up late over something so trivial..."

He let out a small, almost humorless scoff.

"Me from that time would have just scoffed in your face."

Irina let out a short laugh, shaking her head.

She could remember it so clearly—the start of the semester, the first time she had met Astron.

Just like herself, he had been one of the least likable people in the academy.

And she meant that in the most literal way possible.

The her from back then?

She had been arrogant, impatient, someone who looked down on weak people. She despised those who held her back, who made her unable to reach her 'potential'—and Astron?

He had been exactly that.

And unfortunately for both of them, they had been put on the same team.

She tried to command him, tried to make him submit—but unlike most people, he never did.

He scoffed at her antics, disregarded her presence, and outright ignored her when she got too annoying.

And that had driven her insane.

Remembering that version of him—the cold, untouchable, distant version—compared to how he was now...

She could see the difference.

No, she could feel it.

Astron exhaled softly, his gaze shifting back to the moonlit sky. "I guess I should thank you for that."

Irina tilted her head slightly, eyeing him with curiosity. "Thank me for what?"

"For everything," he said simply.

Irina blinked. "That's vague."

Astron didn't immediately respond, his expression calm but thoughtful. Then, in a quieter voice, he continued, "I don't know how you are doing that, or why... but sometimes, I feel like you are intentionally looking for things that would make me feel alive again."

Irina's breath hitched for a split second.

Because he was spot on.

How?

She wanted to ask, but then again—it was Astron.

Of course, he would notice something like this.

Her lips pressed together before she clicked her tongue, covering up the momentary break in her composure with a smirk. "You should be really grateful, indeed."

Astron let out the smallest huff, playing along. "Yeah, your majesty."

Irina's smirk widened slightly. "Good. Now, my knight... kneel before me."

Her mouth twitched slightly as she said it, half-joking, half-teasing.

Astron turned to look at her, his expression as neutral as ever. "I may not be able to do that."

Irina let out a dramatic sigh. "Hmph. Disrespectful knight."

Then, without warning, she reached forward—grabbing him by the collar.

Astron's eyes widened slightly, but he didn't pull away.

Irina stared at him for a brief moment, taking in the quiet challenge in his gaze, the unreadable expression, the way he simply let her do as she pleased.

Her heart pounded.

And before she could overthink it, before she could even try to stop herself, she leaned in—

And kissed him on his lips.