

H. Academy 911

Chapter 911 Caught ?

Seraphina sat at her desk, her silver eyes cold as she scrolled through the academy's news channels, student forums, and the private networks where rumors thrived. The pictures she had so meticulously leaked were everywhere now. Her plan had worked—at least in terms of exposure.

And yet...

She clenched her jaw as she read through the comments, her fingers tightening against the edges of her smartwatch.

"Damn, Irina and Astron look good together."

"I didn't know they were that close. Kinda jealous."

"Irina seems so happy. When was the last time we saw her like this?"

"Matriarch Emberheart hasn't even said anything yet. If this was a problem, it would've been dealt with already."

Seraphina's grip on her smartwatch nearly cracked the device.

This wasn't how it was supposed to go.

She had imagined the fallout vividly. Irina shaken, unsure, forced to reconsider the relationship in the face of scrutiny. Astron finally forced into a position where he couldn't just walk away from consequences. And the Matriarch—surely the Matriarch would step in, wouldn't she?

After all, Irina wasn't just anyone. She was the Emberheart heir, bound by lineage, by expectation. The idea that someone of Astron's status—a nobody, an orphan—could walk into that space and remain unchallenged was unthinkable.

But the academy's reaction was the exact opposite of what she had predicted.

People weren't whispering in fear or disgust. They were celebrating. Irina wasn't cornered—she was glowing.

Seraphina had never seen her so visibly happy before.

The most infuriating part? The one thing she had counted on—the Matriarch's intervention—never came.

She had waited, checked every major news outlet and private network connected to the Emberheart name, anticipating an official statement, a reprimand, something.

And yet, the silence from the Emberheart family was deafening.

It wasn't the silence of avoidance or impending punishment. It was the silence of acceptance.

Seraphina's fingers curled into a fist against her desk, her breath slow and measured, trying to suppress the wave of irritation threatening to spill over.

'Why?'

Why hadn't the Matriarch done anything?

A woman known for her control, for her calculated authority—was she really going to sit back and allow this? Allow her heir to openly flaunt a connection to someone with no lineage to speak of?

Seraphina leaned back in her chair, exhaling sharply through her nose. Her silver eyes narrowed as she stared at the pictures now plastered all over the academy's networks.

Irina and Astron—standing side by side, that infuriatingly genuine smile on Irina's face. The way her hand rested so easily against his. The way she leaned in as if there was no one else in the world but him.

And worse...

The way Astron, despite his usual unreadable expression, didn't push her away.

Seraphina had expected chaos.

Instead, she had given them an announcement.

A confirmation of what everyone had already suspected but never had proof of. And now, thanks to her, the entire academy knew.

Seraphina exhaled slowly, her breath steadying as the chaos in her mind settled into something more focused. If the Matriarch hadn't acted, that meant she already knew about Astron.

And if that was the case...

Seraphina's silver eyes darkened as realization dawned. The fact that he still stepped into this academy meant that he was already acknowledged by her. Even if only partially.

That single fact shifted everything.

The Matriarch was not a woman who tolerated uncertainty. She ruled her house with absolute authority, controlling everything from the Emberheart family's finances to its alliances. And yet, she had not crushed Astron.

Which meant she saw value in him.

Seraphina tapped a single finger against the desk, her mind racing.

'That makes him dangerous. If he's someone worthy of the Matriarch's recognition, then others will covet him too.'

She clenched her jaw. Coveting someone like him would have been easier if he were an unknown—an orphan with talent but no backing. But now? Now he had something far worse.

Recognition.

His lack of lineage didn't matter anymore if powerful people started to look at him as a prospect rather than an anomaly.

Damn it.

She sighed, a rare, quiet exhale of genuine exhaustion. This was not how she wanted things to unfold.

Her mother's position in the household wasn't getting any better. And that was yet another problem gnawing at the back of her mind.

Not that I can do anything about that right now.

Seraphina's fingers pressed against her temple, rubbing away the dull ache of stress. She was trying—desperately trying—to grow her own faction, to solidify her network and connections. But maintaining top-tier grades while maneuvering through academy politics made it far from easy.

Still...

She allowed herself a faint smirk, though it lacked its usual sharpness. None of that mattered. She had full confidence in herself.

The moment of tension faded as she stood from her chair, her long silver hair cascading behind her.

Enough of this.

It was time to step outside, to breathe, to observe.

Without another word, she exited her dorm.

Since she was a top 10 ranker, she had the luxury of her own building—just like the other elites at the academy. The air was crisp as she stepped onto the stone path outside, the warm sunlight doing little to melt the cool aura that always seemed to linger around her.

The crisp air brushed against Seraphina's skin as she stepped outside, her silver hair catching the sunlight. The academy grounds were lively, students moving about in their usual clusters, chatter filling the air. It was a scene she had witnessed a thousand times before, yet today, something about it felt different.

She barely took two steps forward when her eyes landed on a sight she hadn't expected.

From the neighboring dorm building—Irina's building—two figures emerged.

One, vibrant and unmistakable, was Irina Emberheart, her fiery red hair cascading freely over her shoulders, her posture as confident as ever. And beside her, walking with his usual steady stride, was Astron Natusalune.

For a brief moment, Seraphina just stared.

"Heh?"

The surprised sound slipped from her lips before she could catch it.

'This... what is this?'

They weren't just walking together. It was too natural, too familiar. The way Irina turned toward him, speaking animatedly, the way she laughed, unabashed and bright, was a sight Seraphina had never witnessed before.

And Astron—though his expression remained as calm and unreadable as ever—wasn't ignoring her. He wasn't brushing her off or stepping away. He was listening, his gaze shifting toward her as if he were genuinely engaged in whatever she was saying.

'Unbelievable.'

Seraphina crossed her arms, her silver eyes gleaming with a newfound sharpness. She had expected Irina to be bold, but this?

'So she's this comfortable with him already? And he... allows it?'

A slow, amused smirk crept onto her lips.

This was an opportunity.

"Well, well," she drawled, stepping forward just enough so her presence couldn't be ignored. "Look what we have here. The lovebirds, out in the open."

Irina immediately stiffened, the casual smile on her lips twisting into a scowl as she turned toward Seraphina. "The hell did you just say?"

Seraphina let out a soft laugh, tilting her head in feigned innocence. "Oh, nothing. Just making an observation. The two of you... stepping out together from your dorm this early in the morning? People might start assuming things."

Irina's eye twitched. "You're making assumptions, you frostbitten—"

"Oh? So there's nothing to assume?" Seraphina interrupted smoothly, her silver eyes flicking toward Astron now, watching for any sign of discomfort. But, as expected, he gave her nothing. His gaze remained calm, steady.

Unmoved.

'Tch.'

It was frustrating, really. She had met all kinds of people—those who flinched under pressure, those who lashed out, those who tried to outmaneuver her. But Astron? He didn't even give her the satisfaction of a reaction.

And yet...

The way he stood there, unwavering beside Irina, not bothering to defend himself, was a response in itself.

'He doesn't need to clarify anything. Because he's already chosen where he stands.'

Seraphina clicked her tongue softly. Interesting.

She turned her focus back to Irina, who looked one insult away from throwing a punch.

"Relax, Emberheart," she said, brushing a strand of silver hair behind her ear. "I'm simply fascinated. After all, I assumed you'd be at least a little... concerned after the little scandal that went around."