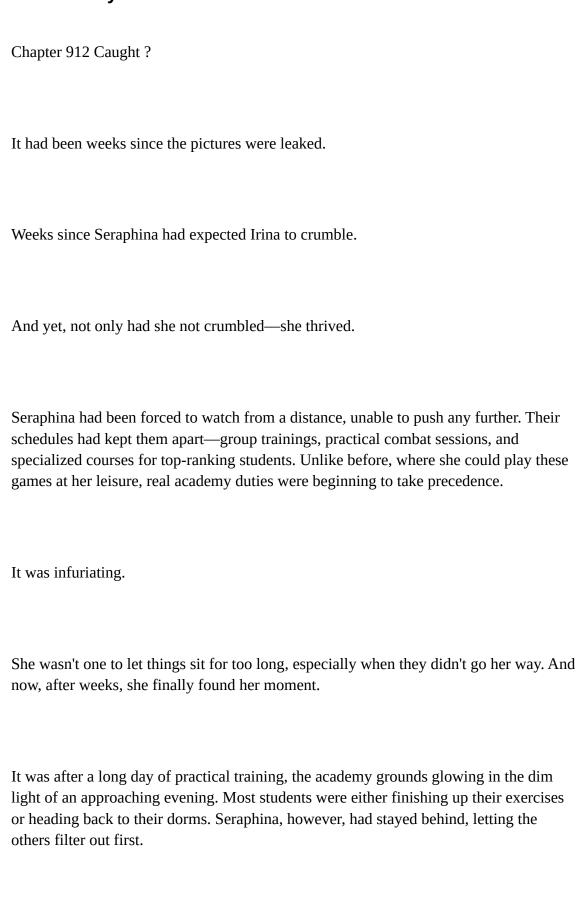
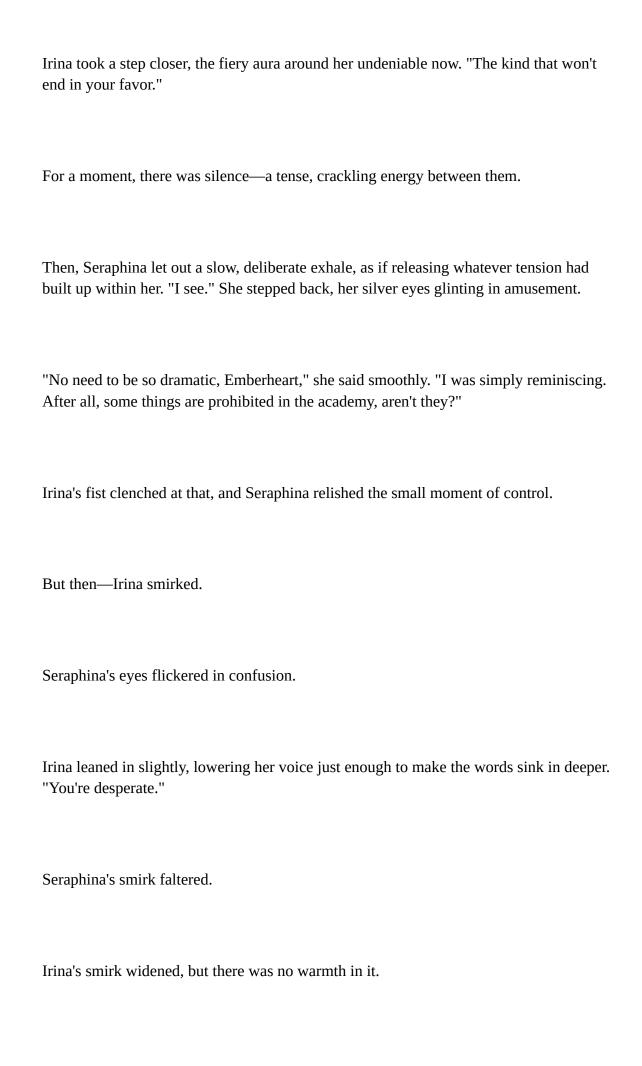
H. Academy 912

And that was when she spotted her.



Irina Emberheart, alone, finishing up some post-training cooldown exercises near the academy's sparring fields.
Seraphina's lips curled into a smirk. Perfect.
She strode forward, purposefully, letting her presence be known before speaking. "You must be tired."
Irina didn't even flinch, her crimson eyes cutting toward Seraphina as she rolled her shoulder. "What do you want, Frostborne?"
Seraphina let out a soft laugh. "So hostile. Shouldn't old classmates be more welcoming after not seeing each other for weeks?"
Irina gave her a flat look. "Classmates, sure. Friends? No."
Seraphina smirked. "Pity." She took a step closer, her silver eyes gleaming. "I was actually wondering how things have been going for you and him."
Irina's posture stiffened, but only for a fraction of a second. A lesser observer wouldn't have noticed it, but Seraphina did.
'Oh?'

"Why do you care?" Irina asked, crossing her arms, her tone clipped.
Seraphina tilted her head. "Curiosity, of course. You two have become quite the sensation around campus, after all. People are still talking."
Irina scoffed. "Let them talk."
Seraphina chuckled, feigning amusement. "I suppose you don't care if certain things are revealed, then?"
The air around them shifted.
Irina's amber eyes narrowed, and a faint pulse of mana rippled through the space between them. It wasn't an outright challenge—not yet—but it was a warning.
Seraphina's smirk didn't waver. If anything, she looked amused by the reaction.
"You shouldn't overstep your boundaries, Seraphina," Irina said, her voice calm, but dangerously firm.
Seraphina clicked her tongue. "Oh? And what boundaries would those be?"



Because she knew.
She had known since the beginning.
The moment the pictures of her and Astron had been leaked, she had gone straight into damage control. Not just to control the rumors, not just to minimize the chaos—
But to find out who dared to touch their family's name.
And it hadn't taken long.
She had traced the leak to a small media agency—one that had no history of breaking high-profile stories like this, no connections deep enough to even dare making a move on the Emberheart family's business.
Which meant—
Someone fed them the story.
Someone pushed them to publish it.

agency contacted, the executives forced to s agency had been discarded, made into an ex	crap every trace of the news. The head of the ample without hesitation.
Yet when Irina looked deeper, she saw some	ething even more interesting.
The woman running the agency?	
She had never been the mastermind.	
Just another pawn thrown away once her us	efulness had run out.
And who else could be behind it?	
Who else had the resources, the ruthlessness something like this off?	s, and the personal motivation to try and pull
Irina had known the answer before she even	asked the question.
Seraphina Frosborne.	
Because only she could do something like the	nis.

And when Esme and others got involved, the situation had been handled instantly—the

Only she would be this thorough, this precise, this unrelenting—
And only she could discard people without hesitation once they had served their purpose.
Irina saw it in her eyes now.
That flicker of control, that calculated amusement starting to waver—
Because Seraphina knew that Irina had figured it out.
"You're desperate," Irina said again, low and steady, letting the words sink in.
Seraphina's smirk wavered.
Not much.
But just enough.
Irina's smile sharpened. "Got quiet, didn't you?"





Irina let out a slow, exhaled chuckle. "Contrary to you, I don't need to fear little schemes like this." Her lips curled into a smirk of her own. "I already knew this would happen."
Seraphina tilted her head, feigning curiosity. "Oh? And yet, here we are, discussing it."
Irina's fingers traced the edge of her gauntlet absentmindedly, the faint flicker of embers trailing at her touch. "We're discussing it because I wanted to. Not because you made me."
Seraphina chuckled softly, her silver eyes gleaming. "You're still defensive. Which means it got to you just a little bit."
Irina's smirk widened. "Or maybe I just wanted to see you struggle to act like you still have control."
Seraphina felt a sharp flicker of irritation deep in her chest, but she didn't let it show. Not here. Not now.
Because this wasn't a loss.
A setback, perhaps. But not a loss.
Seraphina leaned in just slightly, her voice a whisper against the tense air between them. "Enjoy this moment, Emberheart," she murmured, silver eyes glinting like frost catching

the morning light. "Because eventually, you'll make a mistake. And when you do, I'll be right there to watch you fall."
Irina's smirk didn't waver. If anything, she looked amused. "You'll be waiting a long time, Frostborne."
Seraphina stepped back, exhaling slowly, letting her aura cool.
Then, without another word, she turned on her heel and walked away, already planning her next move.