

H. Academy 912

Chapter 912 Caught ?

It had been weeks since the pictures were leaked.

Weeks since Seraphina had expected Irina to crumble.

And yet, not only had she not crumbled—she thrived.

Seraphina had been forced to watch from a distance, unable to push any further. Their schedules had kept them apart—group trainings, practical combat sessions, and specialized courses for top-ranking students. Unlike before, where she could play these games at her leisure, real academy duties were beginning to take precedence.

It was infuriating.

She wasn't one to let things sit for too long, especially when they didn't go her way. And now, after weeks, she finally found her moment.

It was after a long day of practical training, the academy grounds glowing in the dim light of an approaching evening. Most students were either finishing up their exercises or heading back to their dorms. Seraphina, however, had stayed behind, letting the others filter out first.

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?"

Irina took a step closer, the fiery aura around her undeniable now. "The kind that won't end in your favor."

For a moment, there was silence—a tense, crackling energy between them.

Then, Seraphina let out a slow, deliberate exhale, as if releasing whatever tension had built up within her. "I see." She stepped back, her silver eyes glinting in amusement.

"No need to be so dramatic, Emberheart," she said smoothly. "I was simply reminiscing. After all, some things are prohibited in the academy, aren't they?"

Irina's fist clenched at that, and Seraphina relished the small moment of control.

But then—Irina smirked.

Seraphina's eyes flickered in confusion.

Irina leaned in slightly, lowering her voice just enough to make the words sink in deeper. "You're desperate."

Seraphina's smirk faltered.

Irina's smirk widened, but there was no warmth in it.

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.

And when Esme and others got involved, the situation had been handled instantly—the agency contacted, the executives forced to scrap every trace of the news. The head of the agency had been discarded, made into an example without hesitation.

Yet when Irina looked deeper, she saw something even more interesting.

The woman running the agency?

She had never been the mastermind.

Just another pawn thrown away once her usefulness had run out.

And who else could be behind it?

Who else had the resources, the ruthlessness, and the personal motivation to try and pull something like this off?

Irina had known the answer before she even asked the question.

Seraphina Frosborne.

Because only she could do something like this.

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?"

Seraphina exhaled, regaining her composure quickly, but it was too late. Irina had already seen through her.

"You're talking nonsense, Emberheart," Seraphina said smoothly, but Irina could hear the slight edge in her voice.

"Am I?" Irina tilted her head. "Because I remember how fast that media agency collapsed. And I remember how quickly that woman was discarded. The way she just... disappeared."

Seraphina's fingers twitched.

Oh.

Oh, that hit.

Irina leaned in slightly, lowering her voice to a whisper. "You really don't hesitate to throw away your pawns, huh?"

Seraphina's expression froze for a fraction of a second—just a flicker, just barely noticeable—

But Irina caught it.

And she knew she had won.

Seraphina inhaled slowly, letting Irina's words settle in the space between them.

She had expected this.

From the moment the media agency collapsed, from the moment the whispers in the academy turned from scandal to spectacle, she had known this conversation would come.

So what if Irina had figured her out? So what if the pawn she used had already been discarded?

It changed nothing.

Seraphina took a step forward, closing the distance between them until they stood just inches apart, her silver eyes locking onto Irina's burning crimson ones.

Her smirk returned, slow and deliberate, as if she was unfazed by the confrontation. "So?" she murmured, her voice light, almost teasing. "Did you like my present then?"

Irina's glare sharpened, but before she could speak, she did something unexpected—she leaned back, right into Astron, resting her weight against him as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Seraphina's eyes flickered, but she didn't react.

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.