

H. Academy 913

Chapter 913 News spread

As Seraphina disappeared into the distance, the tension she left behind lingered only for a moment before dissolving.

Irina exhaled sharply, rolling her shoulders as if shaking off the encounter.

She felt Astron's gaze on her, quiet but watchful, before he finally spoke.

"You did quite well."

Irina smirked. "Of course I did."

She turned to him, crossing her arms lazily. "I don't really care much about things like this anymore."

Astron's expression remained unreadable. "Really?"

"Yeah."

He tilted his head slightly, watching her with quiet calculation. "Since when?"

Irina blinked at the question.

Then—

Her smirk widened.

She leaned in slightly, voice carrying the faintest trace of mischief. "Since the moment you entered my life."

Astron didn't react.

Not outwardly.

But she saw it.

That fraction of a second where his body stilled, the briefest pause before he responded.

"Don't act cheeky."

Irina grinned, tilting her head. "Why? Your heart fluttered."

"It did not."

"Heh..."

Astron sighed, as if already regretting indulging her.

Then, his tone shifted.

"But you really are antagonizing quite a lot. First Hawkins, and now Frostborne."

Irina's smirk faded slightly, her gaze sharpening.

She knew what he meant.

The Frostborne family had always held neutral ground within the power balance even though they were rivals with Emberheart. While they weren't as aggressive as the Hawkins, they weren't passive either.

And now—

They had chosen a side.

"The Frostborne family has already involved themselves," Astron said, his voice even. "They've aligned with Hawkins."

The usual hum of conversation filled the classroom as students settled in, some reviewing notes while others, like Julia, were doing anything but preparing for the lesson. She was currently lounging in her chair, one foot propped up against the desk, smirking at Lucas, who looked like he wanted to be anywhere but here.

"So, Lucas," Julia began, stretching out his name with an almost too casual drawl.

Lucas groaned, already bracing himself. "What now?"

Julia's grin widened. "Slept well last night? Or were you too busy avoiding death?"

Lilia glanced over with mild interest. "You never explained what happened, by the way."

Lucas ran a hand down his face. "Nothing happened."

"Oh ho," Julia gasped dramatically, placing a hand on her chest. "Ladies and gentlemen, we are witnessing denial in real time."

Carl, who had been quietly observing, let out a low chuckle. "So you did do something."

Lucas exhaled sharply, glaring at Julia. "Can we not do this here?"

"Why not?" Julia said, throwing up her hands. "I need people to hear this. It's comedy gold."

Before Lucas could fire back, the classroom door creaked open, drawing a few glances from the students who were still settling in.

And that was when they walked in.

Irina and Astron entered together, side by side, moving with their usual effortless confidence—or, in Astron's case, his usual impassive silence. Irina had her arms crossed, her sharp golden eyes scanning the room for a brief second before heading toward her usual seat. Astron, as always, barely acknowledged anyone, making a beeline straight for his desk.

Julia, however, was already on the attack.

Her smirk widened as she turned her gaze toward Irina, tapping a finger against her chin as if deep in thought. Then, with an exaggerated hmm, she finally spoke.

"Loverbirds?"

The words cut through the classroom noise like a knife, earning a few glances from nearby students.

Irina, instead of scoffing like usual, merely arched an eyebrow at Julia, her golden eyes glinting with amusement. She leaned back in her chair, resting her chin on her hand, clearly in a very good mood.

Julia immediately sensed something was off.

Irina never let her banter go this easily—either she was actually having a good day, or she was about to turn the tables.

"Oh, Julia," Irina said smoothly, her tone far too casual. "Are you obsessed with my love life? Should I be flattered?"

Julia blinked. "Wait—what? No. That's not—"

"I mean," Irina continued, not letting her interrupt, "if you want to talk about my romantic prospects so badly, I can only assume it's because yours are nonexistent."

The table erupted into laughter.

Julia's mouth fell open. "Excuse me?!"

Lucas chuckled, shaking his head. "Wow. She got you good."

Lilia smirked, arms crossed. "That was brutal."

Carl, ever the quiet observer, simply nodded. "Effective."

Julia, absolutely not okay with being out-bantered for the first time in forever, clenched her fists. "That's not fair! I wasn't even trying to go that deep!"

Irina's smirk widened. "Oh? So you can dish it out, but you can't take it?"

Julia sputtered, her brain scrambling for a comeback. She had never been on the losing end of this before. And now? First Astron had bested her during training, and now Irina was out-bantering her?

Unacceptable.

Her eyes narrowed as she honed in on a new target.

"Alright, Emberheart," Julia said, leaning forward with a smirk. "You're feeling confident today. But let me remind you—Silver players shouldn't be talking to me."

The reaction was immediate.

Irina's smirk vanished, replaced with a slight twitch in her eye.

Lucas let out a gasp of mock shock. "Oh no."

Lilia covered her mouth, barely holding back a laugh. "You did not just bring up her rank."

Carl raised an eyebrow, interested in how this was going to unfold.

Even Astron, who had already tuned them all out, flicked his gaze toward Julia briefly before returning to his tablet.

Julia, now feeling slightly better, grinned wickedly. "That's right. Stay in your lane, Silver."

Irina inhaled slowly, her golden eyes narrowing. Then, instead of snapping back, she smirked.

"Oh, Julia," she said sweetly, "I can always rank up."

Julia's smirk widened. "Oh, Irina, come on. Everyone who's stuck in Silver says that."

Irina just laughed.

A real, genuine chuckle—not frustrated, not defensive. Just amused.

And that? That made Julia pause.

Her eyes narrowed slightly, suspicion creeping in. Irina was never this calm when her rank was brought up.

Why did she look so confident today?

Something was off.

Before Julia could press further, the classroom door opened again, and another familiar voice joined the group.

"Yo."

Ethan walked in, greeting them with a nod as he made his way toward his usual seat.

But something was different.

His tone was normal—casual, relaxed, like always—but his expression wasn't.

His face was set in something almost serious.

His hazel eyes had that look—not angry, not stressed, but deep in thought, like something was weighing on him.

Irina noticed instantly.

Julia did too.

Even Lilia, who rarely paid close attention to others' moods, flicked her gaze toward him in quiet observation.

Carl, as usual, said nothing, but there was a brief shift in his posture.

The atmosphere changed, just slightly.

Julia tilted her head. "Huh. You look like you're actually using your brain today."

Ethan exhaled, rubbing the back of his neck. "Yeah. It happens sometimes."

Irina leaned forward, resting her chin on her hand. "Something up?"

Ethan glanced around at the group, a flicker of surprise crossing his features. "You guys didn't get the news?"

Julia raised an eyebrow. "What news?"

Before Ethan could answer, Lilia spoke up first.

"We did," she said, her voice quieter than usual. "But... are they really true?"

Ethan's expression darkened slightly, his usual nonchalance fading. He gave a small nod. "Yeah. It's true."

Julia and Irina exchanged glances.

"Okay, hold on," Julia said, crossing her arms. "What exactly are we talking about? Because clearly, I missed something."

Irina nodded. "Same. What happened?"

Ethan sighed, leaning back in his chair. "The Hartley Guild was hit hard. Twelve of their dungeons were attacked yesterday. Twelve."