

H. Academy 917

Chapter 917 Politics

The lesson carried on as usual, the instructor delving into advanced combat strategies and tactical formations. Most students were engaged—some more than others—but as the session stretched on, exhaustion began to settle in.

By the time the lecture neared its end, even some of the more attentive students were starting to space out.

The instructor, however, showed no sympathy.

"And that concludes today's lesson," he finally announced, closing his tablet with a decisive click.

A collective sigh of relief swept through the room, but it was short-lived.

"Before you leave," the instructor continued, his sharp gaze scanning the class, "I expect you all to complete the problem set by tomorrow. No exceptions."

The room filled with groans almost instantly.

Julia let her head fall onto her desk dramatically. "Oh, come on. We just survived a two-hour lecture."

Lucas looked equally pained. "Problem sets after all that? This guy has no heart."

Lilia didn't react much, but the faint exhale through her nose suggested she wasn't thrilled about it either.

Carl, of course, didn't so much as blink.

Irina sighed, stretching her arms. "Guess we don't have a choice."

Amidst the complaints and exhausted murmurs, Ethan leaned back slightly in his chair, flipping through the problem set on his tablet.

He didn't mind it.

If anything, he was actually enjoying this course.

The way the problems were structured, the way they forced him to think about combat from a different angle—it was fun.

Sure, some parts were tedious, but the challenge itself was something he welcomed.

While the rest of the class was still lamenting their workload, Ethan was already thinking about how he was going to approach the assignment.

Ethan stared at his tablet, but the words on the screen barely registered. His mind drifted elsewhere, weighed down by thoughts that had been gnawing at him all day.

The way his father had sounded on the call.

The way Azure Crest was being targeted so aggressively.

The way his family's influence was being pushed back.

None of it felt right.

Sure, Hartley had enemies—that was expected. But the sheer boldness of these recent moves? It was like someone had decided the usual rules no longer applied.

He exhaled sharply, rubbing his temple.

Maybe he just needed to clear his head.

His gaze flicked toward his smartwatch.

Jane.

He hadn't talked to her in a while. Things had been hectic, but still—she was someone who helped ground him.

Maybe a short conversation would help.

Without thinking much of it, Ethan tapped her name and waited as the call rang.

One ring.

Two rings.

Three—

The call picked up, but the moment Jane spoke, his stomach dropped.

Her voice was off.

Weak. Strained.

"...Oh, Ethan?"

Ethan's brows knitted together immediately.

Something wasn't right.

"Jane?" His voice sharpened. "What's wrong?"

There was a short pause, then a small laugh—forced.

"Nothing. Just... a little tired, I guess."

Ethan clenched his jaw. Liar.

Her breathing sounded uneven. There was a slight rasp to her voice, like someone trying to mask pain.

And Ethan knew better than to ignore it.

"Where are you?" His tone left no room for argument.

Jane hesitated. "Ethan, I—"

"Where."

Another pause. Then, finally, a quiet sigh.

"West dorm building. I'm in my room."

Ethan was already standing.

"I'm coming."

"Ethan, wait—"

Click.

He had already ended the call.

His heart was pounding, his body moving before his mind even finished processing.

He knew Jane had been bullied before. He had seen it firsthand.

And now, hearing her voice like that?

He didn't even want to think about what had happened.

He just knew one thing.

Whoever did this was going to regret it.

Ethan moved fast. His steps were brisk, his mind running through possibilities as he made his way toward Jane's dorm. The west building wasn't far, but each second felt stretched, drawn out by the unease clawing at his chest.

He didn't even know what had happened yet.

But he knew enough.

Jane had been bullied before. He had seen it, had stopped it, had thought that maybe—just maybe—things had changed. But hearing her voice like that, weak and unsteady, told him all he needed to know.

When he finally reached her door, he didn't hesitate.

Knock. Knock.

A brief silence. Then, after a few seconds, the door cracked open.

Jane stood there, looking up at him with slightly widened eyes, as if she hadn't expected him to arrive so quickly.

And just as quickly, Ethan's gaze swept over her.

She wasn't in bad shape—not like he had feared. No visible blood, no bruises. Her breathing wasn't ragged anymore, and her posture, while a little slumped, wasn't pained.

She had taken a potion.

That much was clear.

But she still didn't look okay.

Her shoulders were tense, and there was something in her expression—something subdued.

Ethan felt his jaw tighten.

"...Hey," Jane said after a second, forcing a small smile. "You really didn't have to—"

Ethan stepped inside.

Jane blinked in surprise as he closed the door behind him, barely giving her time to react before he moved toward her.

"Sit," he said, his tone firmer than usual.

She frowned. "Ethan, I'm fine—"

"You don't look fine."

She let out a breath, shaking her head slightly, but didn't argue as she moved to sit on the edge of her bed. Ethan pulled over a chair, sitting across from her, eyes sharp and unwavering as he studied her expression.

The silence stretched.

Jane shifted under his gaze, her fingers absentmindedly toying with the hem of her sleeve. "I really am fine," she murmured, though there was a small weight to her words. "It was nothing serious."

Ethan's fingers drummed lightly against his knee, his expression unreadable. "Who was it?"

Jane flinched slightly at the directness of his question. "...What?"

"Who did this to you?" Ethan repeated, his voice calm, but there was something beneath it. Something unreadable, simmering beneath the surface.

Jane bit her lip, glancing away. "Ethan, you don't need to—"

"Jane."

His voice was steady, but firm.

She sighed, shoulders slumping slightly. "It's not like before," she said finally. "It wasn't as bad. Just a few people trying to mess with me a little. But I handled it."

Ethan's eyes narrowed slightly. "Mess with you?"

Jane exhaled, rubbing her forehead. "Just words. A little pushing. Nothing that won't heal."

Ethan leaned back slightly in his chair, his gaze still locked on her. "And you already used a potion?"

Jane hesitated. "...I just wanted to feel better quickly."

Ethan didn't respond right away. His mind was piecing things together, trying to figure out exactly what had happened.

Jane had always been the type to downplay things. She wouldn't have called him, wouldn't have let her voice sound off unless something had actually affected her.

And that was what made him uneasy.

She might have healed her body, but...

"You still don't look okay," Ethan said finally.

Jane's lips parted slightly, as if caught off guard by how easily he had seen through her. She looked down, her fingers gripping the fabric of her skirt tightly for a brief moment before she forced out a small chuckle.

"I guess I'm just... tired," she said, though her voice lacked conviction.

Ethan watched her carefully.

Then, without a word, he stood.

Jane blinked. "What—?"

He reached out and, before she could react, ruffled her hair lightly.

She froze.

"You should rest," Ethan said, his tone quieter now.

Jane didn't say anything, her face partially hidden beneath his hand as he tousled her already messy brown locks.

Ethan pulled back after a second, watching as Jane slowly lifted her gaze to meet his. There was something almost vulnerable in her expression—like she hadn't expected him to treat her like this, to see her past the forced smile.

"...You're not mad?" she asked softly.

Ethan sighed, leaning back into his chair. "I'm pissed."

Jane blinked.

"But not at you," he clarified. His hazel eyes glinted with something sharper. "At the people who keep thinking they can do this to you."

Jane swallowed, her fingers still loosely gripping her skirt.

"...Ethan," she started, but he shook his head.