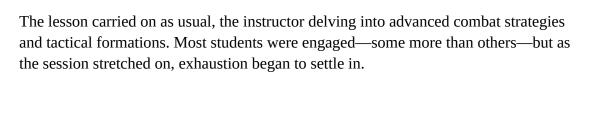
H. Academy 917

Chapter	917	Pol	litics
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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."

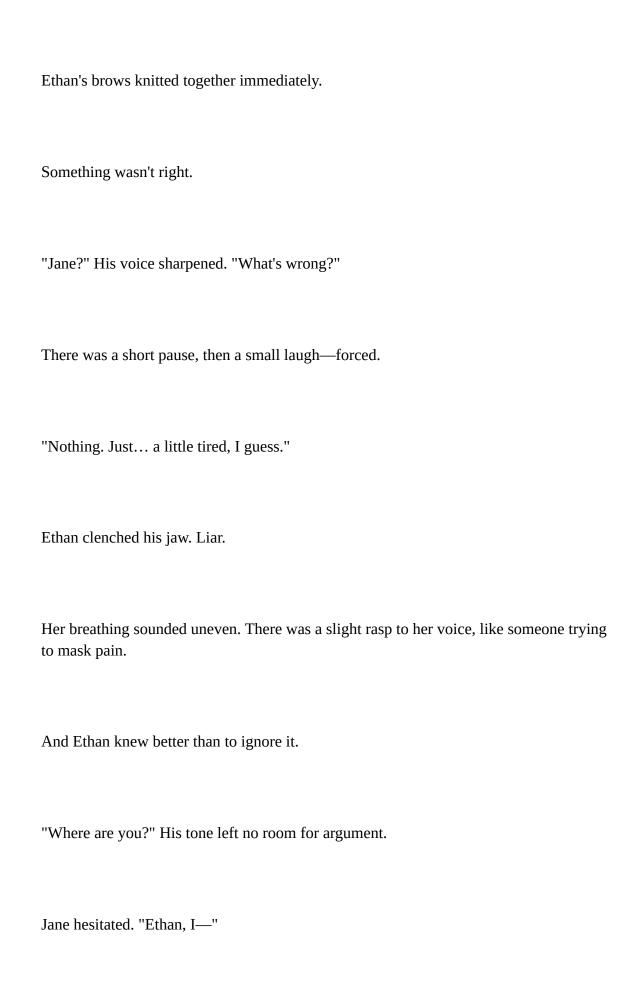
The room filled with groans almost instantly.

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.

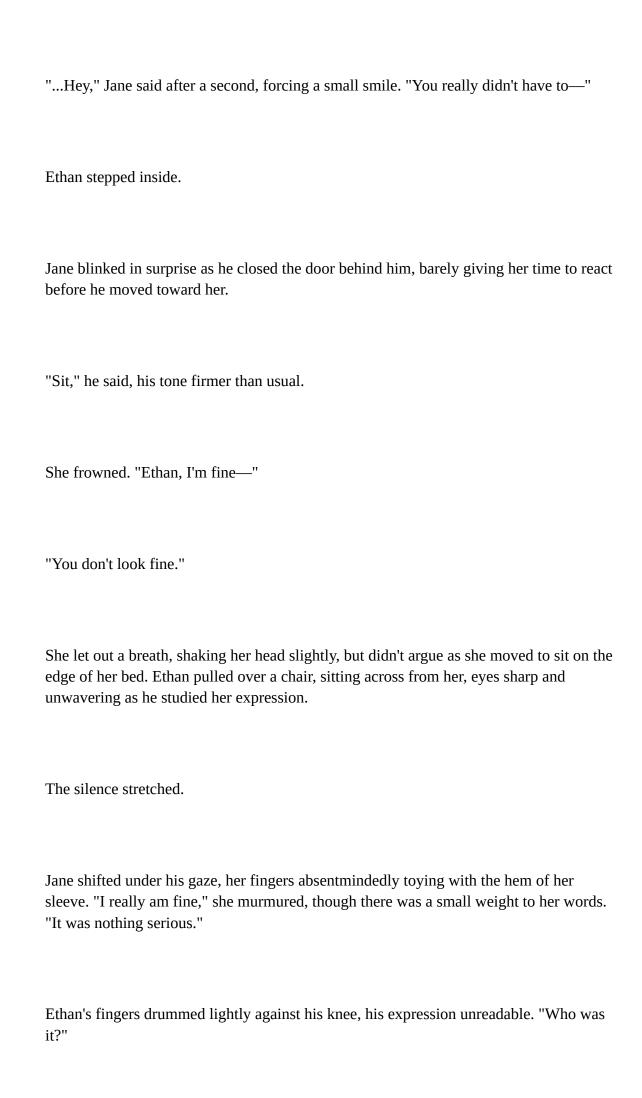
Jane.
He hadn't talked to her in a while. Things had been hectic, but still—she was someone who helped ground him.
Maybe a short conversation would help.
Without thinking much of it, Ethan tapped her name and waited as the call rang.
One ring.
Two rings.
Three—
The call picked up, but the moment Jane spoke, his stomach dropped.
Her voice was off.
Weak. Strained.
"Oh, Ethan?"



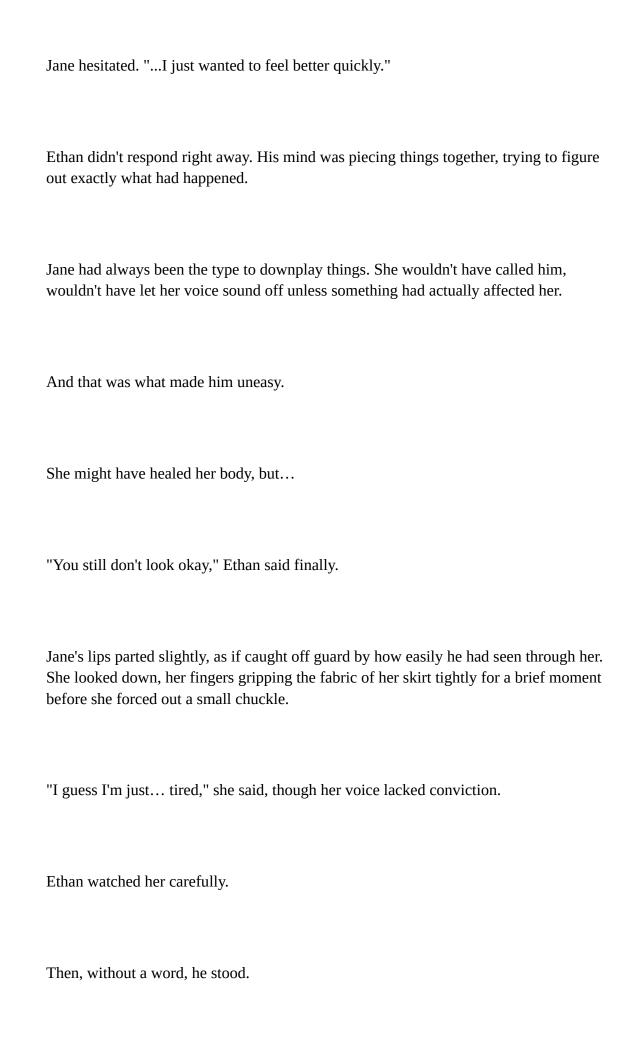




Knock. Knock.
A brief silence. Then, after a few seconds, the door cracked open.
Jane stood there, looking up at him with slightly widened eyes, as if she hadn't expected him to arrive so quickly.
And just as quickly, Ethan's gaze swept over her.
She wasn't in bad shape—not like he had feared. No visible 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.



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 swallowed, her fingers still loosely gripping her skirt.

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