

H. Academy 921

Chapter 921 Shifting Pillars

The cold stone beneath Ethan felt distant. His body was screaming, the dull ache of bruises and the sharp sting of open wounds merging into a single, suffocating sensation. His breath came in shallow, ragged gasps, his blood pooling beneath him in slow, seeping rivulets.

Damn it...

He had fought. He had fought hard.

But even with his instincts, even with his speed, even with the calculated strikes that had taken down two of them—he was still outnumbered.

And they weren't just some random thugs.

They were sophomores. Trained. Experienced. Stronger, if only by virtue of time and technique.

The last blow had sent him sprawling. A direct hit to his ribs—he wasn't sure if they were cracked or broken, but breathing hurt like hell. He had tried to get up. Tried.

But his body had given out.

Now, lying on the ground, vision swimming, he forced himself to do one thing.

Memorize their faces.

Even through the pain, even as his vision blurred, he committed each of them to memory.

The one with the scar near his eye. The one with the heavier frame, favoring his left side. The one who had stayed back, only striking when Ethan had already been worn down.

And Melanie—standing a few feet away, watching with a satisfied smirk.

She had barely lifted a finger.

Ethan's fingers twitched against the ground. His body refused to move, but inside, a slow, boiling rage burned beneath the surface.

This isn't over.

Then, suddenly—

The air shifted.

A presence. Someone approaching fast.

A pair of heavy boots struck the ground near him, and Ethan felt a sharp pulse of mana spread through the area. A weight settled over the space, thick and unmistakable—authoritative.

An instructor.

"Enough!"

The voice rang through the hallway, filled with barely contained fury. Ethan's barely-open eyes caught the sight of a tall figure, their coat swaying slightly from the sheer force of their presence. A mana signature flared around them, pressing down on the surrounding students like an invisible force.

The world around Ethan swayed, his body on the edge of giving in completely, but he was aware enough to understand what had happened.

The academy had finally detected the fight.

Mana barriers were deployed.

But they were late.

Again.

Too many conflicts had broken out at the same time, scattering the instructors across different parts of the academy. By the time they had reached him, it was already over.

Ethan let out a slow, strained breath. His fingers twitched again.

The instructor crouched down beside him, their presence overwhelming but steady.

"Ethan," they said firmly, their voice sharp with concern. "Can you move?"

Ethan tried.

His arms trembled, his muscles burned, but his body refused to lift.

A low grunt escaped his lips, but that was all.

The instructor let out a controlled sigh, their gaze flickering upward—to them.

To the sophomores still standing.

To Melanie.

The temperature in the air seemed to drop.

"All of you," the instructor's voice was cold now, dangerous, "will be coming with me."

Melanie, to her credit, still managed a smirk, though Ethan could tell it was slightly more restrained now. "Of course," she said smoothly, feigning innocence. "We wouldn't want to cause any trouble, now would we?"

Ethan wanted to glare at her. Wanted to do something.

But his body had reached its limit.

As darkness crept at the edges of his vision, as the instructor moved to lift him up, Ethan had only one thought lingering in his mind.

This isn't over.

Not even close.

Then—his vision faded to black.

Ethan's consciousness stirred slowly, his body still heavy, muscles aching with the deep, dull pain of bruises layered over sharper stabs of something worse.

His ribs throbbed. His limbs felt weighted, sluggish.

The scent of antiseptic filled his nose, the faint hum of mana lingering in the air, the telltale sign of healing magic at work.

He wasn't in the hallway anymore.

His eyelids fluttered open, vision swimming for a second before the world slowly focused.

White walls. Soft lighting. The faint rustling of curtains as a gentle breeze from the ventilation shifted them slightly.

The infirmary.

A woman stood over him, her hand glowing faintly with golden mana as she hovered it over his side, her touch light but precise.

She wasn't a student.

A proper academy healer.

Her sharp, experienced gaze flicked to him the moment she noticed him stir.

"Good, you're awake," she said, her tone professional, but not entirely cold. "Stay still. You took quite a beating."

Ethan swallowed, his throat dry. He felt the faint pull of magic knitting together the worst of his injuries, but even with that, his body still ached.

The healer seemed to notice. "Your ribs took some nasty hits. Two were fractured. One was close to breaking entirely. You're lucky we got to you when we did."

Ethan exhaled through his nose, his jaw clenching slightly.

Lucky.

That wasn't how it felt.

His mind replayed the scene. The fight. The overwhelming force of it, not just in numbers but in pure aggression.

They hadn't been trying to scare him.

They had been trying to break him.

And all of it—all of it—over something this stupid.

His fingers twitched against the infirmity bed.

Again.

Again, he had been dragged into this pointless war between years, between status, between idiots who thought they had control.

He had already fought his way through this garbage once.

And now?

Now he was lying here, body bruised, while they were still walking around, probably thinking they had won.

His blood simmered beneath his skin, his anger not loud or explosive but cold.

This wasn't going to happen again.

No.

He wouldn't let it.

The healer sighed, finishing another pass of her magic before stepping back. "You shouldn't move for at least a few hours. Your body's recovering, but pushing it will just slow things down."

Ethan didn't respond immediately. His mind was still turning, his breathing steady despite the sharp, bitter weight in his chest.

Then, finally, he spoke.

"...Who brought me here?"

The healer tilted her head slightly. "The instructor who found you. They didn't say much, just that there was another incident and that you needed immediate treatment."

Ethan's jaw tightened.

Another incident.

Right. That was how they were going to frame it. As if this was just another random scuffle.

As if Melanie hadn't deliberately orchestrated the entire thing.

As if she wasn't going to walk away from it, untouched.

Ethan inhaled slowly, his fingers gripping the thin blanket covering him.

"How long was I out?"

"Not long. Maybe an hour, at most."

Ethan let that sink in. An hour.

Enough time for the academy to cover things up, to frame it in whatever way they saw fit.

He exhaled sharply, his anger sinking deeper, settling into something heavier.

Then he sat up.

The healer narrowed her eyes. "I just said—"

"I know," Ethan muttered. "I just need a minute."

The healer sighed, shaking her head but not stopping him. "Don't overdo it."

Ethan barely heard her.

His mind was already elsewhere.

Because this wasn't over.

Ethan sat on the infirmary bed, his body still aching, but his mind was somewhere else entirely.

That senior went too far.

He could deal with a fight. He could deal with being outnumbered. He could even handle getting beaten down if it came to that.

But that illusion.

That disgusting, twisted fabrication that Melanie had shown him—it crossed a line.

Ethan's intuition screamed at him that something was off about it. It wasn't just the content. It wasn't just the way Melanie had spoken.

It was something deeper.

The way the image had felt wrong.

The way the details had been too precise.

Like it wasn't just some random illusion. Like it had been constructed with intent.

Ethan detested it.

His jaw tightened, his fists clenching around the thin sheets of the infirmary bed.

What was she trying to do? Humiliate Jane? Break him?

No.

There was something else at play.

And Ethan wasn't going to let this slide.

Not this time.

Just then, the door to the infirmary creaked open.

Ethan turned his head, his hazel eyes narrowing slightly as a familiar figure stepped inside.

Eleanor.

His homeroom instructor.

Her sharp, unreadable eyes swept over him briefly before she stepped closer, arms crossed. Even without saying a word, her presence alone made it clear that this wasn't just a casual check-in.

"Ethan," she said, her tone firm. "You're coming with me."

Ethan exhaled slowly. He had been expecting this.

Without another word, he swung his legs over the side of the bed and stood.

The healer let out a sigh behind him. "At least pretend you're still recovering."

Ethan ignored her.

Eleanor didn't wait for him to complain or ask questions. She simply turned and walked out of the infirmary, fully expecting him to follow.

And Ethan did.