

H. Academy 922

Chapter 922 Shifting Pillars

Ethan followed Eleanor through the dimly lit halls of the academy, his steps steady despite the dull ache in his body. His mind was already turning, anticipating what was coming next.

When they reached her office, the door was already open.

Inside, three familiar figures were already waiting.

Melanie.

And the two sophomores who had jumped him.

Melanie sat comfortably, her legs crossed, her expression the perfect picture of innocence. The two guys beside her were more restrained, standing stiffly, but their presence alone was enough to remind Ethan of what had happened.

Eleanor stepped inside, gesturing for Ethan to take a seat. He did, though his muscles remained tense, his entire body wired for whatever was coming next.

The air in the room was heavy.

No one spoke at first.

Then, Eleanor's voice cut through the silence.

"Tell me what happened."

Ethan exhaled through his nose, leaning forward slightly. His hazel eyes flickered toward Melanie, his jaw tightening. "I was leaving the dorms. She was waiting for me."

Eleanor's sharp gaze turned to Melanie. "Is that true?"

Melanie's smirk widened just slightly, as if she had been expecting this exact question. "Well, I was waiting for him, yes." She tilted her head slightly, her tone light. "But only because I wanted to talk."

Ethan's fingers curled into his palms.

"Bullshit," he muttered.

Eleanor's gaze flickered toward him, but before she could say anything, Melanie sighed dramatically.

"See? That's exactly the problem," she said, shaking her head. "I really did just want to talk. But instead, he got aggressive."

Ethan's breath slowed. His body went still.

He already knew where this was going.

And then—

Melanie reached for her smartwatch and tapped the screen.

A video began to play on the holographic display.

The moment Ethan saw the footage, his stomach twisted.

The angle was clear, steady—someone had been recording from a distance.

It showed him standing in the hallway. Melanie in front of him, speaking. Then—Ethan attacking.

The moment his fist moved. The moment his spear flicked out.

But everything before that was gone.

There was no taunting. No illusion. No mention of Jane.

Just him.

The aggressor.

Ethan's jaw clenched. "That's not the whole video."

Eleanor didn't react immediately, her gaze still fixed on the footage as it played out.

Melanie let out a soft hum. "I don't know what you mean," she said smoothly. "That's exactly what happened. I tried to have a conversation, and you escalated."

Ethan's fingers dug into his palms.

He knew she was lying. She knew she was lying.

And yet—she had come prepared.

"That's not the full conversation," Ethan said, his voice dangerously quiet.

Melanie blinked, tilting her head. "Oh? Are you saying the academy's recording system is flawed?"

Ethan let out a slow breath, trying to control the way his chest burned with frustration. "You know what I'm saying."

Melanie shook her head, putting on an impossibly innocent expression. "I really don't." Then, she glanced at Eleanor, her eyes wide, almost mockingly sincere. "Professor, I just wanted to talk to him about his friend. I was worried. That's all."

Ethan's blood boiled.

He had to clench his jaw to keep himself from snapping.

"That's a lie," he forced out.

Melanie gasped lightly, putting a hand to her chest. "Wow, Ethan. That really hurts. I was just trying to be a good senior, you know?"

Ethan felt the walls closing in.

It was the perfect setup.

Ethan's breathing remained even, but inside, he felt the sharp coil of frustration tightening in his chest.

'This is so damn unfair.'

He knew it. He could feel it.

Every instinct told him that this was planned—that Melanie had set this up perfectly, waiting for the right moment to twist the story. And worse, she had evidence.

Even if the video was incomplete.

Even if it left out the most important parts.

It didn't matter.

Because what mattered was what was shown.

And what was shown?

Him attacking.

Melanie had already won before he even stepped into this room.

Eleanor was silent for a long moment, her sharp golden eyes flicking between them, watching their body language, reading the room. Ethan could tell she was assessing the situation, trying to see if there were any cracks in the story being presented.

Then, she finally spoke.

"There was a sound barrier."

Melanie didn't even blink. "Yes, there was."

Eleanor leaned forward slightly, her voice slow, deliberate. "Why?"

Melanie sighed, shifting slightly in her chair, playing the role of patient senior dealing with an unreasonable freshman.

"I just wanted to talk to Ethan about his friend," she said, her tone even, almost gentle. "But I also didn't want the conversation to be overheard. You know how rumors spread at the academy, Professor." She let out a small, well-practiced chuckle. "I thought it would be better if we kept it between us. That's all."

Ethan's fingers curled into fists.

'That's all? That's all?!'

She was acting like this was some harmless conversation.

Like she hadn't been baiting him, hadn't been pushing him into reacting.

But the worst part?

She had a perfect excuse.

"And the reason it was still up when the fight broke out?" Eleanor pressed, her eyes narrowing slightly.

Melanie sighed again, shaking her head as if Ethan was the one being unreasonable. "Well... it all happened so fast. Ethan attacked first. We didn't exactly have time to deactivate it before things got out of control."

Her tone was so reasonable, so measured, that even Ethan could see how convincing it sounded.

And Eleanor?

She didn't say anything immediately.

Because what could she say?

The footage was there.

There was no proof of Melanie's taunts, no record of her pushing him, nothing that showed why Ethan had snapped.

All that was left was his word against hers.

And a cropped video that made him look like the aggressor.

'This is insane.'

Ethan inhaled slowly, forcing his shoulders to stay still, forcing himself to not react.

But his thoughts were racing.

'I was provoked. I know I was. She did it on purpose. She's making it sound like I just lost control for no reason.'

But... hadn't he?

His fingers twitched.

Melanie had been taunting him. She had been pushing him, baiting him into losing his temper, into reacting exactly the way she wanted him to.

And he had.

He had let her win.

He clenched his jaw, his nails pressing into his palms as he forced himself to stay still.

Because he wanted to lash out.

He wanted to shout at her, tell Eleanor that this was all a set-up, that Melanie had planned this from the start.

But if he did that?

If he lost his temper again?

He would be playing directly into her hands.

Again.

So instead, he just exhaled slowly, his hazel eyes flickering to Eleanor, watching her expression carefully.

She wasn't convinced.

He could tell.

But without proof, without anything to back him up—what could she do?

Eleanor leaned back slightly in her chair, folding her arms. Her gaze lingered on Melanie, then flicked back to Ethan.

"You're telling me," she said slowly, "that you put up a sound barrier just for a casual conversation?"

Melanie nodded. "Of course. I didn't think it would be a big deal."

Eleanor's gaze didn't waver. Her fingers tapped against the desk in slow, deliberate beats, the only sound filling the tense silence.

"Yet, you still had time to record?"

The question cut through the air, cold and precise.

For the first time since entering the room, Melanie's smirk faltered.

It was brief—just a flicker—but Ethan caught it.

Her posture remained relaxed, but there was a split-second pause before she answered.

"Of course, we did," she said smoothly, though there was a slight edge to her voice now. "Ethan was already getting aggressive. We had to protect ourselves. We didn't think it would escalate, but clearly, we underestimated just how violent he is."

Ethan's jaw clenched.

'Violent? You—'

Before he could open his mouth, Melanie suddenly switched tactics.

She inhaled sharply, her expression shifting from smug amusement to something more wounded.

"Professor, I really don't understand why we're the ones being interrogated right now," she said, her voice rising slightly, a touch of exasperation slipping through. "We were the ones attacked. We're the victims here."

Ethan forced himself to stay still, but his nails were already digging into his palm.

Melanie's performance was flawless.

The shift in tone, the way she played offended but composed, hurt but reasonable.

Like she was barely holding herself together after such a tragic encounter.

Eleanor didn't react immediately. Instead, she tilted her head, her sharp gaze scanning the room, her expression unreadable.

Then, after a moment, she leaned forward slightly, her elbows resting on the desk.

"You seem awfully fine for a group that was 'attacked,'" she said, her voice flat. "Meanwhile, the so-called 'aggressor' is sitting here badly injured."