H. Academy 925

Chapter 925 Shifting Pillars

A sharp breath tore through Lilia's lungs as her consciousness clawed its way back to reality. Pain laced every inch of her body—her ribs ached with every shallow inhale, her arms felt like dead weight, and the coppery taste of blood lingered on her tongue. The cold ground beneath her sent shivers through her battered frame.

She barely registered the sound of hurried footsteps.

"Lilia!"

The voice was sharp, edged with alarm and unmistakable fury. Strong hands grasped her shoulders, carefully turning her over. Her vision flickered, her head pounding as she blinked up at the stern face of Instructor Ethan.

His usual composed demeanor was gone—his brown eyes burned with anger.

"What the hell happened?" he demanded, his voice tight with restrained rage.

Lilia exhaled slowly, gathering enough breath to respond. "I… was attacked."

His jaw clenched. "Attacked? Here?" His gaze flicked around the training ground, his sharp eyes taking in the shattered stone, the remnants of mana residue lingering in the air. His grip on her tightened slightly, his fury barely contained.

She forced a weak smirk, though it hurt. "Yeah. Apparently, the archery club is more intense than I thought."

Ethan wasn't amused. "Enough. Can you stand?"

Lilia tried to push herself up, but pain shot through her ribs, sending a sharp gasp from her lips. Ethan didn't wait—he scooped her up effortlessly, his expression thunderous.

"We're going to the infirmary," he said, his voice leaving no room for argument.

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By the time Lilia had been settled in the academy's infirmary, her wounds being treated by the healers, Ethan had already begun investigating. His anger hadn't lessened—if anything, it had sharpened into something lethal.

Minutes later, he returned, his expression unreadable. "We pulled the surveillance footage."

Lilia forced herself to sit up despite the pain, her crimson eyes watching him carefully.

"And?"

Ethan's hands clenched into fists.

"There is no footage."

She narrowed her eyes. "What?"

Ethan exhaled sharply, his tone clipped. "The cameras in the archery grounds were conveniently under maintenance at the exact time of your attack. Every single one of them."

Lilia stared at him, her mind processing the implications. This wasn't just an ambush—it had been planned from the start.

Ethan's voice was dangerously calm. "This isn't a coincidence."

Lilia let out a slow breath. "No. It's not."

Silence stretched between them. Then Ethan pulled out his communication device, his fingers tightening around it as he issued a single command.

"Call Adrian. Now."

Lilia exhaled as she leaned back against the infirmary bed, her body still aching from the brutal beating she had endured. The healers had done their work—her wounds were stabilized, and the worst of the pain had been dulled—but she was still sore, her ribs throbbing with every breath.

The infirmary wasn't quiet.

Far from it.

Around her, the large room was filled with other injured students—most of them freshmen and sophomores. The tension was thick in the air, punctuated by hushed whispers, occasional groans of pain, and the sharp, wary glances exchanged between the two groups.

Another fight must have broken out.

Lilia's gaze flickered over to a group of freshmen on one side, their uniforms stained with dirt and blood, some sporting visible bruises and bandaged wounds. Across from them, a cluster of sophomores sat with equally battered expressions, their glares sharp, muttered insults barely concealed under their breath.

She had heard the murmurs before—the ongoing confrontation between the two groups was getting worse. What started as small rivalries had escalated into more open hostility, almost like someone had been pushing them into conflict.
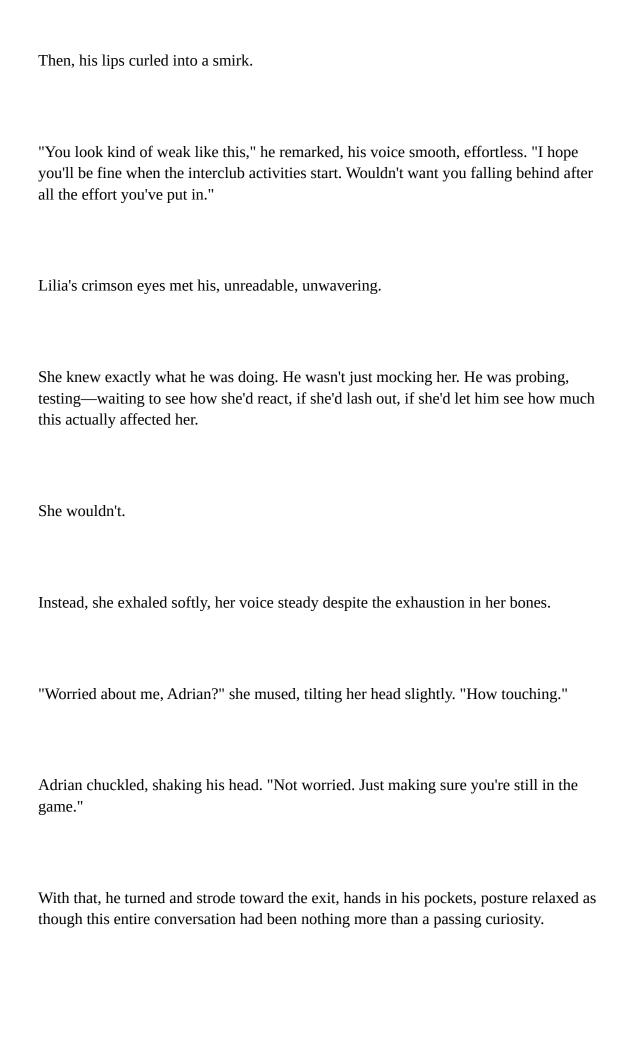
Lilia didn't need to guess who.

Her jaw tightened. Selene.

Of course, she wouldn't act directly. But stirring discord? Fostering division? That was how she played the game.

Lilia's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Ethan's voice.

"Adrian. Now."

The device in Ethan's hand flared with a mana pulse, signaling a connection. A few seconds later, a voice came through the communication line.

"Instructor Ethan?"

Adrian's voice was as composed as ever, though there was a note of curiosity in his tone.

Ethan didn't waste time. "You're coming to the infirmary. Now."

A short pause. Then Adrian sighed. "What happened this time?"

Ethan's gaze darkened. "Lilia was attacked."

Silence.

Then Adrian responded, his voice still even but carrying a sharper edge. "And you think I had something to do with it?"

Ethan's grip on the device tightened. "That depends on your answers. I want to know why the security cameras in the archery grounds were all conveniently down during the exact time of the attack."

A longer pause.

Then Adrian spoke, his tone shifting slightly, a careful balance of control and annoyance.

"I ordered the renewal of the security system."

Ethan narrowed his eyes. "Convenient timing."

Adrian let out a slow breath. "Instructor, as you know, Miss Selene decided to sponsor us for this security update."

Lilia's expression remained blank, but inside, she felt something cold settle in her chest.

Ethan's gaze flickered, his anger undiminished. "Selene?"

Adrian continued, his voice smooth. "Yes. The funding came through recently, and the system was scheduled for maintenance today. If you check the request logs, you'll find the approval went through three days ago. There's nothing suspicious about it."

Nothing suspicious?

Lilia scoffed under her breath.

Everything about it was perfectly suspicious.

Selene had set the board just right. Now, Adrian had a convenient reason for why the security had failed at exactly the right moment. No one could accuse him directly—after all, it was just bad timing.

And yet, deep down, Lilia knew the truth.

This was all orchestrated.

Ethan's lips pressed into a thin line. "I don't believe in coincidences, Adrian."

Adrian let out a soft chuckle. "Neither do I. But in this case? It looks like one."

Lilia met Ethan's gaze from across the room, both of them silently understanding the same thing.

Ethan exhaled sharply, the tension in his stance far from subsiding. His golden-brown eyes flickered toward Lilia, then back to the communication device in his grip.

"I don't care how it looks," he said, his voice unwavering. "Something doesn't add up, and I will be looking into it in the coming days."

Adrian didn't respond immediately. Then, with a light chuckle, he finally spoke, his tone laced with amusement. "Of course, Instructor. Do what you must."

Ethan's jaw tensed, but he didn't push further—not now. He had already decided. He would dig deeper, even if there were no loose threads to pull just yet.

With one last glance at Lilia, his expression unreadable, he turned on his heel and walked toward the infirmary exit, his boots clicking against the tiled floor. The tension in the air didn't ease as he left—it only settled into something quieter, something watchful.

Silence hung between Lilia and Adrian for a few long moments before he finally turned toward her.

His violet eyes roamed over her seated form, taking in the bruises along her arms, the faint traces of dried blood along her lip, the way she held herself with measured stillness.

Then, his lips curled into a smirk.

"You look kind of weak like this," he remarked, his voice smooth, effortless. "I hope you'll be fine when the interclub activities start. Wouldn't want you falling behind after all the effort you've put in."

Lilia's crimson eyes met his, unreadable, unwavering.

She knew exactly what he was doing. He wasn't just mocking her. He was probing, testing—waiting to see how she'd react, if she'd lash out, if she'd let him see how much this actually affected her.

She wouldn't.

Instead, she exhaled softly, her voice steady despite the exhaustion in her bones.

"Worried about me, Adrian?" she mused, tilting her head slightly. "How touching."

Adrian chuckled, shaking his head. "Not worried. Just making sure you're still in the game."

With that, he turned and strode toward the exit, hands in his pockets, posture relaxed as though this entire conversation had been nothing more than a passing curiosity.

Lilia watched him go, her expression neutral, but inside, something cold settled deeper into her chest.

Selene had made her move.

And now, Lilia had to decide how she would make hers.