

H. Academy 927

Chapter 927 Aftermath

Eleanor walked briskly through the academy halls, her heels clicking sharply against the polished floors as she made her way toward the Headmaster's office. The corridors were quieter than usual-most students were still in their designated areas, training or attending lectures-but the silence only served to amplify the thoughts swirling in her mind.

The call from the Headmaster had been expected, yet the timing of it was... suspicious. She could already guess the subject.

The growing divide between the freshmen and sophomores had been simmering for some time now, but these recent spikes in aggression? They weren't natural.

This wasn't just a case of upperclassmen asserting dominance.

Someone was pulling the strings.

She knew it. The academy knew it. But no one could prove it--not yet.

Too Many Incidents. Too Many Patterns.

In the past three weeks, tensions had escalated rapidly.

Several fights had broken out, all conveniently in places where faculty intervention was delayed.

Three cadets had already been expelled-all of them sophomores.

Yet, even before today's case with Ethan, multiple disciplinary actions had been taken against both sides-but disproportionately against the first-years.

The academy wasn't turning a blind eye to it. They were taking action-but was it enough?

Eleanor exhaled slowly, adjusting the cuff of her uniform as she turned a corner.

The freshmen are being pushed into a corner.

And what happens when people are pushed too far?

They start fighting back.

That's what someone wanted. Not discipline. Not control. They wanted a full-blown confrontation.

Someone was deliberately provoking this conflict.

And if it wasn't stopped soon, it wouldn't be just fights in the hallways.

It would be something worse.

Ethan Hartley: A Naïve Fool, or a Future Problem?

"Who did it?"

Julia let out a slow breath. "We don't know yet. There were no witnesses, and she wasn't able to get a clear look at her attackers."

Ethan's jaw clenched. No witnesses? That was too convenient.

His mind was still processing when Julia's tone shifted.

"Ethan," she said, her voice serious now. "I need to know what happened with you today."

Ethan inhaled sharply, debating whether or not to get into it right now. But then, as he thought about it:

He realized something.

This wasn't unrelated.

He exhaled. "They set me up."

A pause. Then, Julia's voice came through, sharp.

"Explain."

Ethan quickly ran her through what had happened-the baiting, the illusion, the fight, the rigged disciplinary hearing.

By the time he finished, the silence on the other end of the call was tense.

Then, Julia cursed.

"That's it," she said, her voice now carrying pure determination. "We're calling a meeting. Now."

Ethan barely had time to respond before the call ended.

The room they had chosen was an old study hall-one that was rarely used this late at night. The soft glow of the lanterns lining the walls cast long shadows across the wooden desks, their presence doing little to warm the chill that hung in the air.

Julia was already there when Ethan arrived, leaning against the far wall, arms crossed, her expression set in grim determination. Lucas and Carl were seated at the nearest table, their usual relaxed postures replaced by tense alertness. Irina stood near the window, her back straight, golden eyes watching the campus grounds below as if expecting trouble to appear at any moment.

And then there was Lilia.

Ethan's gaze flickered to her immediately. She sat on the edge of one of the desks, her usual easygoing smirk absent. Instead, her face was tight with exhaustion, and though she tried to hide it, Ethan could see the stiffness in her movements-the subtle tension in her shoulders, the way she held herself just a little too carefully.

Bruises lined the side of her neck, faint but visible. There was a cut on her arm, already treated but still fresh enough that she was careful not to move it too much.

His jaw clenched.

Lilia noticed his stare and rolled her eyes. "Relax, Mountain Boy," she said, voice lighter than it should have been. "I'm not dead yet."

"You look like hell," Ethan said bluntly.

"Right back at you," Lilia shot back, giving him a once-over.

Ethan ignored the remark, stepping fully into the room. His ribs still ached, but he forced himself not to favor them. It was nothing compared to the weight pressing

against his mind.

Julia pushed off the wall. "Alright. Let's not waste time." Her sharp gaze swept over them. "We need to figure out what the hell is going on."

Lucas leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table. "Let's start with what we know." His voice was calm, measured, but there was an edge beneath it. "Lilia was attacked tonight, right after Ethan got suspended for a fight that was clearly set up. Too much of a coincidence."

Ethan exhaled slowly, his mind already piecing things together. "It's not a coincidence," he said. "They're connected."

Carl frowned. "You sure?"

Ethan gave him a look. "Come on. We're not that stupid."

Lilia sighed, rubbing the back of her neck. "Whoever jumped me wasn't trying to kill me. They were just making a point."

The tension in the study hall thickened as Lilia's words settled over the group. Ethan leaned against one of the desks, his arms crossed tightly as his sharp gaze remained

fixed on her.

Julia exhaled, tilting her head slightly. "Alright, let's start from the beginning. Tell us exactly what happened."

Lilia rolled her shoulders, wincing slightly at the stiffness still lingering in her muscles. "I was training at the archery grounds when I sensed some people approaching. At first, I ignored it-students come and go there all the time. But then the door to my section opened, and before I knew it, I was dodging a mana strike."

Irina frowned, stepping away from the window. "A direct ambush? In a public training

space?"

Lilia let out a dry chuckle. "That's the thing-it wasn't public at the time. The security cameras were 'coincidentally' under maintenance."

Lucas and Carl exchanged a glance.

Another professor, a middle-aged woman with short auburn hair, spoke next. "Many of the families already feel that we are overreaching with our authority. If we impose this level of control, it will only deepen their distrust. Some of them could take action

against the academy."

Jonathan's gaze turned sharp, but before he could speak, another voice chimed in-

one he had been expecting.

Amelia.

His daughter, standing near the back of the room, arms crossed. Her tone was firm

but laced with irritation.

"Father, I understand that the situation is serious. But you're pushing too far. The

students need structure, not suffocation. If we do this, we risk turning the academy into a prison. That's not going to fix the real problem-it will only make things worse."

A few murmurs of agreement echoed around the room.

Jonathan exhaled, his patience wearing thin. He leaned forward, his gaze cold and

unyielding.

"You are all mistaken," he said, his voice like steel. "The real problem is that we have let

things spiral too far. We have allowed hesitation, concern for perception, and outside influences to dictate how we run this academy"

He stood, hands pressing against the table. The sheer weight of his presence silenced

the entire room.

"I will not let this escalate any further." His voice was calm, but it carried the unmistakable force of a Venerate-one of the Federation's strongest.

His next words sent wave of shock through the room.

"Club activities are suspended indefinitely."

The reaction was immediate.

"Suspended?" Professor Hale shot up from his chair, eyes wide with disbelief.

"Headmaster, that's absurd! The clubs are a vital part of the academy's structure!"

"They are also one of the few places where students gather unsupervised. And in this current climate, that is an unnecessary risk," Jonathan countered, his voice unwavering.

"This is going too far!" Another professor objected. "Club activities keep the students

engaged, they foster teamwork and camaraderie-if we take that away, what do you think will happen? They will resent us."

"They already resent each other," Jonathan shot back coldly. "And that resentment is being manipulated. Someone is fanning the flames of this divide, and until we uncover who and why, I will not allow the academy to provide them more opportunities." A voice of protest rose once more-this time from Amelia. "This is not the way to handle this, Father." She stepped forward, her frustration

evident. "By shutting down the clubs, you're taking away one of the only things

keeping the students grounded. If you strip them of their sense of normalcy, you're going to push them further apart."

Jonathan's gaze met his daughter's-steely, unrelenting. "And if I do nothing, we risk more than a few disgruntled students."

The room remained tense, filled with unreadable expressions. Jonathan had made his decision, and they all knew it. The discussion was over.

After a long silence, Eleanor finally spoke. "Headmaster... if we're doing this, then we

need to prepare for backlash. From the students. From the families. Even from the

guilds." Jonathan exhaled, nodding slowly. "I know." His voice was quieter now, but no less firm. "But we cannot afford to be complacent."

He turned toward the rest of the room, his gaze sweeping over the gathered faculty.

"We do not serve the guilds. His voice was clear, unwavering. "We do not serve the families. We do not serve the government."

He straightened, his presence filling the room like an unshakable force.

"We serve the academy. And we will do what must be done to protect it."

Silence followed.

One by one, the professors gave reluctant nods. Some still looked dissatisfied. Some outright frustrated. But none dared to challenge him further.

Amelia, standing near the back, clenched her fists but said nothing. She knew better

than to fight him on this now. But the battle between them was not over.

Eleanor sighed inwardly. This was going to get worse before it got better. Jonathan took one last look at the room before finally giving his final command. "Dismissed."