

## H. Academy 929

### Chapter 929 Aftermath

The room settled into a tense silence, the weight of Lilia's words still hanging over them. Ethan leaned against the desk, arms crossed, his mind working through everything that had just been laid out. The attack on Lilia wasn't random. It was calculated, deliberate.

And now, with her father involved, things were about to escalate.

Julia was the first to break the silence. She turned toward Ethan, arms still crossed, but her sharp blue eyes flickered with something curious.

"Alright, we've got Lilia's situation covered for now," she said, tilting her head slightly. "Now tell us what happened to you."

Ethan exhaled slowly. He had been expecting this.

"It was a setup," he said simply.

Julia narrowed her eyes. "Explain."

Ethan ran a hand through his hair, pushing back the lingering frustration as he recalled everything from earlier. "It started after I left Jane's dorm. Senior student—Melanie—was waiting for me. She baited me into reacting, used an illusion, then had two

sophomores jump me. When the academy stepped in, they had already recorded a cropped version of the fight that made it look like I attacked first."

The room went still.

Lucas frowned. "Melanie?"

Carl crossed his arms. "Don't know her."

Irina's golden eyes narrowed slightly. "I've heard the name in passing, but she's not someone who stands out. What's her deal?"

Ethan clenched his jaw. "She's been behind Jane's bullying for a while. Today, she made it clear that she hates her. And, apparently, she hates me too."

Julia frowned. "Because of Jane?"

"Because I don't play into their stupid hierarchy." Ethan scoffed. "Apparently, that pisses her off."

Lucas let out a low whistle. "So, let me get this straight. A senior baited you, started a fight, and then had evidence ready before the academy even showed up?"

"Yeah," Ethan muttered, the anger simmering beneath his voice. "And when we got to Eleanor's office, Grayson stepped in and shut everything down before I had a chance to fight back."

That got a reaction.

Lilia's crimson eyes sharpened. "Grayson?"

Ethan frowned, his frustration momentarily shifting to something more focused. "Grayson?" he repeated, his voice edged with curiosity. "What about him?"

Lilia let out a small, dry chuckle. The kind that wasn't out of amusement, but out of realization.

"What?" Julia narrowed her eyes. "What's so funny?"

The smirk on Lilia's lips wasn't one of humor. It was one of understanding. The final piece of the puzzle clicking into place.

"You guys really don't see it?" she mused, stretching slightly despite the stiffness in her limbs.

Carl crossed his arms. "If you've got something, say it."

Lilia exhaled, tilting her head. "Well, I guess I'm the only one here who actually bothered to look into the academy's faculty and their connections."

Ethan's gaze sharpened. "What do you mean?"

Lilia turned, resting her hands behind her on the desk, her crimson eyes gleaming. "Professor Grayson is affiliated with the Vargras family."

Silence.

Then, Lucas muttered, "Shit."

Julia's expression darkened instantly. "You're serious?"

Lilia nodded. "Dead serious. When I was looking into the backgrounds of certain people here, I came across his name. Didn't think much of it at first—lots of professors have political ties—but now?" She clicked her tongue. "Now it makes sense."

Ethan's grip on the edge of the desk tightened. His mind was already piecing things together, but with Vargras now in the equation, the situation had just escalated from an isolated academy dispute to something much, much bigger.

The Vargras family.

A name that carried weight—or at least, it used to.

Once, they had been a major force within the Central's Pentagon Alliance, a political powerhouse with influence spanning guilds, economic sectors, and military divisions. But that changed when the Pentagon Alliance ruled them out.

Stripped from their position.

Removed from Central's core governing forces.

And the one family that had played a key role in replacing them?

The Hartley family.

Ethan exhaled sharply, his mind racing.

"This just keeps getting worse," Julia muttered, rubbing her forehead.

Carl frowned, crossing his arms. "Vargras got kicked out of Central. They were humiliated. Of course, they've been angry about it. But what does that have to do with this?"

Lilia smirked faintly, but there was no amusement in her eyes. "Everything."

Lucas' gaze flicked between them, sharp with understanding. "If Grayson's tied to them, then he's not just protecting Melanie. He's protecting their interests."

Ethan's jaw clenched. "And if he's involved, then that means they have a senior backing them."

A silence stretched through the room.

Then, Lilia sighed, shaking her head. "You guys really haven't been paying attention, huh?"

Julia narrowed her eyes. "Lilia—"

"There's someone from Vargras in the academy."

The weight of her words settled instantly.

Ethan stiffened, his hazel eyes narrowing.

Carl frowned. "Who?"

Lilia tapped her fingers against the desk. "A senior. Leontius Vargras."

Ethan exhaled, recognition flashing through his mind.

Leontius.

A name that wasn't unfamiliar.

A top-ranking senior. Known for his ruthlessness in combat and his meticulous control over people. He wasn't loud. He wasn't flashy. But those who knew of him understood one thing.

He didn't waste time with people who had no use to him.

And if Melanie was working under him...

Ethan's gaze darkened.

"There's a high chance those seniors who set me up were working under him," he muttered.

Lucas let out a quiet curse. "So this wasn't just about Jane. Or about Melanie's personal grudges."

Julia's fists clenched. "They're making moves."

Carl's expression remained unreadable, but there was a sharp look in his eyes. "And if they're targeting you specifically, Ethan, then it's not just about the academy's internal politics."

Ethan exhaled slowly, his fingers tightening slightly against the desk. His mind churned, threading together too many pieces at once.

This wasn't just the academy's usual power plays.

His family—the Hartleys—were already in conflict outside these walls.

The Philips family.

A rival force, one that had been pushing against Hartley dominance in the past few months. Political maneuvering, resource struggles, open hostility in some cases. His father had been handling it, but the pressure was building.

And now, here at the academy?

The Vargras family—a family that had already lost its position in the Pentagon Alliance—was moving against him.

Ethan's hazel eyes darkened.



'This isn't just about the academy. This is bigger.'

What if the pressure outside was connected to what was happening here?

What if his family's enemies were starting to extend their reach?

A sharp wave of frustration settled in his chest.

If that was the case, then this was even worse than he thought.

Because right now?

He couldn't do anything about it.

He wasn't in a position to move.

Leontius Vargras wasn't some random bully. He was a senior. A top-ranked student, someone with influence, someone who had already embedded himself into the academy's structure.

If Ethan just went after him directly, he'd be the one to suffer for it.

His fists clenched.

That didn't mean he'd let it go.

But for now, he had to be smart.

He let out a breath, shaking his head slightly. "We can't act recklessly."

Lilia nodded, her expression calmer now, but still firm. "I know."

Julia, who had been gripping her arms tightly, exhaled sharply. "So, what? We just let this sit? We let them keep pulling strings while we wait?"

Ethan sighed. "We don't have a choice right now. Going after Leontius or Melanie directly isn't an option. Not unless we want to get shut down again."

Carl, who had been silent for a moment, finally spoke. "So we wait?"

Ethan glanced at him. "For now," he admitted.

There was a heavy pause.

Then, Lilia pushed herself off the desk, rolling her shoulders despite the soreness still lingering in her body. "Alright," she said. "We keep our heads down for now. Gather information. See how they move."

The group fell into a momentary silence. The tension was still thick in the air, but the decision had been made.

No reckless moves.

No direct attacks.

Not yet.

But when the time was right?

They wouldn't sit back.

Ethan pushed off the desk. "Alright. We'll leave it at that for now. Go get some rest."

The others nodded, and one by one, they started to disperse.

Lilia was the first to leave, shaking her head slightly but saying nothing as she stepped out. Lucas followed, his hands in his pockets, his thoughts clearly still racing.

Carl walked past Ethan, giving him a simple nod before heading out as well.

Julia lingered for a second, her blue eyes scanning Ethan's face. "Don't let them get to you," she muttered.

Ethan scoffed lightly. "Too late for that."