

Chapter 189: Selection Of Course

After being dismissed from the Beacon Hall, students scattered across the academy, each processing the announcement in their own way. Some hurried straight to their dorms, seeking solitude and a quiet space to carefully consider their course selections. Others gathered in the cafeteria, using food as a distraction while debating their options with friends. A few simply stood in stunned silence, still reeling from the realization that they wouldn't be expelled after all.

And their shock was justified. Many had already begun mentally preparing themselves for the worst—rehearsing explanations for their families, dreading the disgrace of returning home as failures. Expulsion from the Dark Knight Academy after only four months would have meant one thing: they weren't good enough. But for some, failure wasn't just personal—it carried grave consequences for their families.

For noble families, where prestige and power were paramount, having a child expelled from one of the continent's most prestigious academies wasn't just a disappointment—it was a humiliation. Their social standing, built on generations of reputation and influence, could be severely damaged. In aristocratic circles, weak heirs reflected weak bloodlines, and such disgrace often led to a decline in political alliances, marriage prospects, and business connections. Parents with high expectations would not tolerate such shame, and the pressure to succeed—whether for personal ambition or familial duty—was immense.

Yet, with today's revelation, the students had been granted an unexpected reprieve. The looming stigma of failure had been lifted, replaced with a new opportunity—a chance to prove themselves not necessarily as warriors or mages but in other equally valuable disciplines.

The academy's new system allowed them to carve paths beyond their families' rigid expectations. While some would still strive for battlefield glory, others could now explore strategic warfare, arcane research, alchemy, political studies, or even diplomatic affairs—fields that could still bring honor and recognition to their houses, even if they weren't the traditional ones their families had envisioned.

For many, this was a second chance—but it was also a test. A test not just of their skill, but of their ability to adapt and redefine success in a world where status and legacy mattered just as much as talent.

Inside the academy's library, Liam and his group sat around a table, their magical screens glowing softly as they discussed their course selections.

Max leaned back in his chair, eyeing the list of available courses. "Gotta say, this new system is pretty interesting," he mused.

"Yeah," Sheila nodded, scrolling through her own screen. "Adding all these extra fields to the curriculum really takes the pressure off. Now we're not all just stuck fighting to the death for a living."

She glanced around. "Anyway, have any of you actually chosen your courses yet?"

"I haven't," Dylan admitted with a lazy grin, before turning to Liam. "But I bet our dear Liam already has, huh? You've probably mapped out your entire future, right?"

Liam's eyes flicked up briefly from his screen before returning to it. "Not done yet," he replied, his voice as calm as ever.

Dylan smirked. "Just making sure, buddy. By the way, how does it feel to be in the top five now, huh? You and Asher, climbing the ranks like that."

The others turned their attention toward them.

Asher scoffed, leaning back in his chair with an arrogant smirk. "Why are you guys acting like it's a surprise for me? I am Asher Hawthorne. My path only goes up."

"Pfft." Charlotte let out a snicker, her eyes gleaming with mischief. "Yeah? And yet Liam's still ahead of you. Twice in a row, actually. First, he beat you with the highest kill count, and now he's ranked fourth while you're stuck at fifth. How bad do you want Liam on top of you, Asher?"

Asher's eye twitched. "Better watch your tongue, kitty cat. I'm not your pretty boy Liam who'll just sit back and tolerate your nonsense." He leaned in slightly with a sly grin. "And for the record, I don't mind going down with a girl either."

Charlotte gasped dramatically, placing a hand over her chest. "Oh~? Is that so? Wanna test that theory right now?"

The two locked eyes, the air between them crackling with tension—before Sheila let out a sigh and cut in.

"This is a library, you know," she reminded them flatly. "Not exactly the best place for a fight—or whatever that was turning into. Just sit down and focus on your selections."

Charlotte rolled her eyes before throwing Asher a sassy grin. "Fine. But tell him to stay away from my bae. Only I deserve to be beneath him~"

Asher scoffed, crossing his arms. "Don't order me around, ponytail."

Sheila blinked. "Ponytail?"

Asher gave a slow, smug nod. "Pony-ta-il." He dragged out the syllables just to irritate her further.

Her eye twitched. She exhaled through her nose, doing her best to maintain her composure. "Looks like Dylan's been rubbing off on you," she shot back with a smirk.

Asher opened his mouth to retort, but his words died in his throat as he spotted the librarian strolling past, eyes sharp and ready to dish out punishments.

He promptly shut up.

The others exchanged amused glances, and Dylan chuckled. "Smart move, buddy. I was about to start planning your funeral."

"By the way, Ariana, how'd you drop to ninth so fast?" Dylan asked, tilting his head curiously. His words made everyone's eyes shift toward Ariana, who had been quiet the whole time.

"Yeah, Ari, I was wondering about that too," Charlotte added, raising a brow.

Ariana fidgeted slightly, pushing up her glasses. "Oh—umm... well, I guess it's because of how terribly I performed during the battlefield exam," she admitted. "Like I told you guys before, Logan was the leader of my group, and, well... let's just say he made things very difficult, which dragged the rest of us down."

Charlotte scoffed. "Ugh, that jerk of a lackey really messed you up, huh?" She leaned in dramatically, wrapping Ariana in a tight embrace. "Oh, my dear Ari, don't you worry about that good-for-nothing piece of garbage!"

"S—stop it, Charlotte! I can't breathe!" Ariana protested, her voice muffled against Charlotte's shoulder.

Max chuckled. "Well, at least thanks to you acing the Theory Exam, you didn't fall out of the top ten."

Ariana sighed, straightening her glasses once Charlotte finally let her go. "Yeah, I guess that saved me."

Dylan smirked. "And hey, at least you didn't let that idiot rank higher than you. He's tenth, after all."

Ariana blinked before a small smile crept onto her face. "Yeah, thanks, Dylan."

Dylan gave her a dramatic bow from his seat. "Always at your service, RiRi."

Ariana rolled her eyes with a soft laugh, while Charlotte gagged. "RiRi? Ugh, you really are the worst, Dylan."

Dylan ignored her, leaning back in his chair and kicking his feet up onto the table, crossing them lazily. "Anyway! Back to the real discussion. What courses are you guys picking? Because I already know what I'm choosing."

"Really? Care to share?" Sheila asked, arms crossed.

"But of course, my lady," Dylan said with an exaggerated bow.

Sheila's expression remained deadpan. "Don't. Just tell us your choices and don't derail the conversation."

Dylan dramatically pouted. "You're no fun."

"Never have been. Now talk."

"Fine, fine. Since we have to pick two primary courses and one secondary, my first choice is Forgemastery and Enchantment—makes sense, right?" Dylan grinned. "I mean, my dad's a forgemaster, and I've got steel magic. It's a perfect fit."

Sheila smirked. "Not surprising. You used to drool over your dad's craftsmanship every time he made weapons for the Crescent Kingdom—my family."

Dylan gasped, placing a hand over his heart. "Oh? Look at our little princess showing concern for me! I must be truly irresistible."

"Tch. Shut up and just continue, idiot," Sheila snorted.

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"As you command, my princess." Dylan winked before continuing. "For my second primary course, I'm going with Knight Combat Training. Even though I specialize as an archer, the battlefield exam made me realize just how useless I am in close combat. And that needs to change. So! Combat Training and I are about to become best buddies."

Charlotte smirked. "Wow. Who knew you were capable of deep thinking?"

"Me, obviously," Dylan shot back smugly.

Liam, who had been silently observing, finally spoke. "Interesting. And what's your secondary course?"

Dylan's grin widened. "Oh? Even Liam is curious now? Alright, let's make it fun. Any guesses?"

The group exchanged glances before Sheila sighed. "Don't tell me you're actually going through with that plan."

"Heh. You already know I am," Dylan said, sitting back smugly. "Opportunities like this come once in a never, so... I'm picking Alchemy."

The entire table went silent.

"You?" Asher raised a brow. "Are you sure you can handle the brainpower required for that?"

Dylan leaned forward, his smirk turning sharp. "I know I can. After all, I did pass both you and Max in the Theory Exam."

Max coughed into his fist. Asher's eye twitched. Charlotte cackled.

"You got him there," Charlotte said, nudging Asher.

"I should've just stayed quiet."