

ShadowBound 203

Chapter 203: Tactical Espionage Class 2

Seraphina took her time, her piercing gaze sweeping across the room, taking in the mix of wide eyes, tense shoulders, and barely concealed horror. Some students clenched their fists as if grappling with what she had just told them. Others looked pale, their rigid expressions betraying their unease.

She sighed dramatically, shaking her head with mock sympathy. "Oh dear, I can already hear the thoughts running through your heads... 'Does this mean we'll eventually have to kill our own kind?'"

She let the question hang in the air before flashing a knowing smirk.

"The answer is simple—yes. Whether you like it or not, at some point, taking a human life will become necessary. It's inevitable."

She let that statement settle, watching the tension in the room rise.

"What did you think being an assassin was all about?" She leaned back. "Did you think knight-assassins spend all their time sneaking into demon hideouts and heroically slitting their throats in the name of justice? That's the kind of garbage they put in books to make people sleep better at night."

A scoff left her lips as she swung her legs slightly, still perched on the desk. "Yes, demon extermination is part of the job. But let me make something very clear—you will find yourselves dealing with humans just as often. Corrupt lords, treacherous nobles, rogue mages, spies, war criminals... the filth of humanity is endless. And when the time comes, you will have to decide—are you capable of doing what needs to be done?"

Another wave of hushed murmurs swept through the class, some students exchanging glances filled with uncertainty, while others sat rigidly, staring straight ahead, trying to process her words.

Seraphina chuckled softly, shaking her head. "This reaction? Not new. Kaine and I see it every year. You're all so eager to join this class, thinking it'll be just another skillset to add to your repertoire. But let me tell you now—this isn't for the faint-hearted."

Her expression turned unreadable as she sat up straighter.

"And because we are so generous, we always put an option on the table right here, right now. You can walk out that door and never come back. No one will judge you. No one will punish you. If you don't think you can handle the weight of what this course will demand of you, leave now."

She gestured lazily toward the door.

"Or stay, and accept that from this moment on, you are training to survive in a world where illusions of honor and morality will only get you killed. Stay, and see this through until your final year in this academy. The choice is yours."

Silence swallowed the room as the students processed her words. The air was thick with tension, with some shifting uncomfortably, while others sat frozen, deep in thought.

Seraphina and Kaine remained still as they watched the students wrestle with their thoughts. The silence was broken when a chair scraped against the floor. A male student stood up, his face pale but resolute.

"I—I can't do this," he muttered, shaking his head. "No matter how true all of this might be, I can't imagine myself... killing someone. The thought alone makes me sick."

His words seemed to be the push others needed. Four more students rose from their seats, each looking just as uneasy.

"Yeah, this isn't what I signed up for," a girl added, wrapping her arms around herself as if warding off a chill. "I thought this class was just about tactics, not... murder."

A few students exchanged glances, their expressions unreadable, but no one else moved.

Seraphina simply smirked, completely unfazed. "Well, at least you figured it out now and saved us the trouble of wasting our breath on you." She flicked her wrist toward the door. "Go on then. The academy

is already prepared for cases like this, so don't worry. You'll be reassigned to another course to fill up for this one."

The students hesitated for a moment, but then, without another word, they shuffled toward the exit, the heavy silence following them out the door.

Kaine, who had been watching their retreat with a blank expression, finally spoke. His deep, cutting voice carried through the room.

"The rest of you still have a chance to leave."

His words hung in the air like a challenge. A few students flinched, their fingers twitching against their desks, but no one else stood up. Despite the unease in some of their eyes, they remained in their seats.

Kaine gave them all a slow, scrutinizing look before turning back toward the front of the class.

"Good. Let's move on."

Seraphina clapped her hands together, her smirk widening as she scanned the room. "Well, well. This year's batch seems to have colder hearts than the previous ones. To be left with sixteen students? Now that's a surprise. But don't get too comfortable—there's no need to celebrate just yet."

She leaned back slightly, tilting her head as if observing them from a different perspective. "You see, this class isn't just about theory. It's built on live scenarios—real experiences that will test you in ways you can't even imagine yet. And I guarantee you, by the time this semester ends, some of you will walk out of this room and never return. It happens every year. By the time the second semester begins, we'll finally have the real number of students willing to see this course through to the end.

But for those of you who do stay—from now until the end of your academy years—there's something you should understand." She paused for just a moment.

"The moment you step beyond these academy walls and take the skills you've honed into the real world—whether in an assassin's guild or an intelligence division—you will have blood on your hands. And let me be clear... that blood won't belong to demons."

Her smirk deepened as she continued, her voice both chilling and oddly inviting. "Each kill, each mission, each decision—whether justified or not—will leave a mark on you. The screams of the lives you've taken will follow you in ways you can't predict. And unlike those who have already left, or those who will eventually quit, they will never weigh the same burden you will. They will move on, live lives untouched by the ghosts of their choices. But you?" She chuckled, a low, knowing sound.

"You will never feel the same again."

The room was dead silent, the weight of Seraphina's words settling over the students. Some shifted uncomfortably in their seats, while others sat frozen, their minds undoubtedly racing with the implications of what she had just said.

Kaine, who had remained quiet during her speech, finally spoke. "This is your final chance. If you stay past today, you commit. There's no quitting halfway, no second-guessing when the pressure becomes too much. Once you start this path, you finish it—one way or another."

His cold gaze swept over them, daring anyone to stand. A few students clenched their fists, some swallowed hard, but no one moved.

Seraphina let out a soft, amused chuckle. "Well then, looks like we finally have our group." She hopped off the desk, dusting off her hands. "Now that we've gotten past the usual dramatics, let's get to work, shall we?"

Kaine nodded and stepped forward. "For the remainder of today's session, we'll be testing your instincts—how you react under pressure, how quickly you think on your feet, and most importantly, whether you can handle unexpected threats."

Seraphina's smirk returned as she leaned against the desk. "And lucky for you all... we like to make things interesting."

Before anyone could process her words, the classroom's torches suddenly flickered, their flames dimming. A split second later, the lights went out completely, plunging the room into pitch-black darkness.

And then—

A sudden rush of movement. The sound of footsteps—fast, unpredictable. A sharp whisper of steel slicing through the air.

Then chaos erupted.