

Ace & Mai - The Shadow and The Spark

Ace 10: Ashfall — Chapter 5 - The Silent Vessel

Story: Ace & Mai - The Shadow and The Spark **Chapter:** 10.5 **Wordcount:** ~2076 **Characters:** Ace, Mai, Rook, Kalyn, Jel, Mendax Theta, The Curator **Location:** Unknown **Arc:** Arc 1 - The Shadow and The Spark

Chapter 5 — The Silent Vessel

The room they used for hard truths had no name.

Mai had stripped it years ago—no panels, no storage, no posters, nothing to remind you you were loved except the fact that someone had made a room where you could be not fine and still be safe. Four walls. A bench. A switch that turned the ship's echoes to ash.

Ace sat on the bench and let the quiet settle like a cloth.

Mai tuned the field until the air lost its habit of returning words to their owners. "No reflections," she said. "If something talks to you, it'll have to mean it."

Ace nodded. She set the copper charm on the bench beside her hand, close enough to touch without asking. The wire looked ugly and sure. She liked it for that.

Mai stayed by the door. Not hovering. Not gone. "Two taps if you need me in your ear," she said. "One if you want me out."

Ace's mouth moved. "Stay," she said. "But be quiet."

Mai's eyes warmed. "I'm very good at that." She dimmed the light to a level that had let them read to each other on hard nights and stepped back into the corner where presence was a kind of furniture.

Ace closed her eyes.

The first thing she felt was the lack. The ship's familiar thrum had been pared down to bones. No sympathetic vibration. No polite chorus. Just circulation, the backward hush of air going where it's told. And under her skin, where the tone had lived for so long it had invented itself into habit, a warmth like sunlight seen through curtains—present, patient, not asking for anything.

"Violet," Ace said, very softly.

The warmth did not answer. It didn't have to. They had come to terms with silence that wasn't indifference.

"Okay," Ace whispered to nobody and to Mai and to something that had never needed a door to come in. "We do this without a stage manager."

She let the memories line up and refused to call it a ritual.

Childhood first, because men like the Curator love beginnings and think they can own them. A narrow room; a wall that had been white and then the color of breath on glass; a woman's voice that always chose the polite word first and then ran out of breath and said the true one. The day the door locked from the outside. The people who came in with sympathy like a blueprint and left her with a word she didn't pick.

Vessel.

Ace watched it from across a small, deliberate distance. Not cold—just the distance a medic takes from an incision so the hands can do what the heart would interrupt.

She felt the first tug then. Not a voice. The suggestion of phrase-shape. The way a sentence leans before it begins.

— align —

She breathed out slow until the urge to brace turned into the urge to sit up straighter without anyone telling her to. "Not alignment," she said. "Posture."

The suggestion hesitated. The room had no echo to borrow, no furniture for the word to sit on. It pressed again, dressed in etiquette.

— harmonize —

Ace opened her eyes to look at nothing. "You don't get to call it music," she said. "Not here."

The pressure eased. Not retreat—recalculating. The Curator would have called it a courtesy pause. She called it what it was: a hand learning when to knock louder.

Mai shifted in the corner—an inhale, an exhale, a human reminder. Ace set two fingers on the charm; heat from her skin went into the ugly copper and came back as nothing magic at all. A loop. A tool.

She pushed further back.

Hallway nights. Doors that opened because she stood in front of them. A staircase down where stairs had never been. The first time the Voice tried to come inside dressed in someone's need and found her full of her own decisions. The first time she mistook the quiet afterward for a promise that it understood her.

— yes —

A syllable without temperature hovered at the edge of the bench like a coin rolled along a knuckle by a man who wanted to show you how steady his hands were. Ace watched it the way you watch an insect test a glass rim. It wanted to be hers. It wanted to tell the room what it already knew.

Mai's voice touched the air without rustling it. "Two centimeters to your right. On the bench."

Ace slid her fingers. The coin-that-wasn't nudged her skin and found no purchase. She folded the blank syllable between her thumb and forefinger and held it like a splinter she'd been meaning to remove.

"Not mine," she said.

She set it on the floor and put her heel on it and did not grind—just weight. The coin made no sound. It didn't have the decency to crack. That was fine. Not every refusal gets music.

The next turn wasn't a word. It was a picture: a spiral drawn neat with three shallow slashes across it, the precise depth of a man who likes to control his knives. The spiral wanted to be a room diagram. It wanted to tell her where to stand to be seen properly by a thing that believed in seeing.

Ace let the image hang. "You spent so long making this important," she said, to the Curator without inviting him. "Imagine if you had learned to eat."

The spiral faded not because it had been dismissed but because the room had no appetite for it. The no-echo field made it starve.

She opened her eyes again because honesty felt easier that way. Mai stood where she had stood, a dark shape against a darker wall, eyes steady, hands quiet. Ace spoke to the woman and to the ship and to the part of her that had learned to be patient with the worst rooms.

"They called me Silent Vessel because I could carry a storm without spilling," she said. "Because I have hands they couldn't read and a face that made other people confess. They liked that I could keep my mouth shut and let the noise move through."

Mai didn't move. Her voice arrived without ripples. "What do you call you?"

Ace didn't answer right away. Names are heavy; you don't pick them up just to admire how they look in the mirror.

"When I don't owe anybody," she said at last, and tasted the truth for grit, "Ace."

The warmth behind the glass brightened and then softened, like light stepping around a room to find a place where it could sit without being asked why it came. Violet didn't push. The pressure she had been once—claws on the inside of a rib—had been quiet a long time now. Today, it felt like the sun you find on a winter floor and lie down in because you remember the shape of being loved by something that doesn't ask for anything back.

Ace leaned into it without shame.

"Are you listening?" she asked, eyes still on Mai.

Mai's mouth moved in a small, honest smile. "Always."

"I'm going to stop rehearsing," Ace said. "They can keep the script. I'll keep the room."

Mai's shoulders softened by an angle no etiquette could measure. "Then we decide what to do with the audience."

Ace let herself laugh once. It sounded like it belonged to this room and not to any other. "We starve them."

She stood.

The first push that felt like a hand came then: not a shove—too polite for that—but a pressure at her sternum that wanted to be the sensation you get when a train brake lets go and the air changes its mind about standing still.

— proceed —

“No,” Ace said gently, and the word laid itself flat in the field and refused to carry an echo.

She stepped to the door. The charm warmed under her knuckles. Violet stayed, sunlight on bone, not a leash but a companionable weight. The coin under her heel remained a coin under her heel. The spiral on the inside of her eyelid tried to choose a new depth; she refused to have eyelids for a second, just to be unhelpful.

Mai opened the door.

“I didn’t two-tap,” Ace said.

“I know,” Mai said. “I came anyway.”

Ace looked at her, heat and humor and the steady thing that had no name. “Good.”

They left the room-that-had-no-name and let the ship give them back a little echo. Not enough to sing to. Enough to hear each other’s breaths without having to count.

On the bridge, the mirror corridor waited with its polite, stupid doors. Mai didn’t look at it. She brought up the ship’s local comm and recorded three sentences in a voice that engineers like because it doesn’t try to be anything else.

“Shipboard note,” she said. “Protocol change. The word ‘audit’ is retired. The word ‘consent’ belongs to people, not procedures. If you hear a schedule announce itself, ignore it.”

She sent it to the internal as a small, boring memo and watched the way the icons across the ship absorbed the change. Not defiance. Boredom. You can pry a lever out of a machine if you make the machine tired of the lever.

Ace set both hands on the rail and looked out into the dome at nothing that would help them and everything that would exist after they were done being interesting. The brown dwarf lay behind somewhere, heavy and private. The annex had shrunk to the size of a fly in a room that didn’t intend to be bothered. The etiquette engine banged its shins against mirrors and learned nothing.

“Mendax Theta,” Ace said, and the words did not ask for permission to be a plan.

Mai’s fingers were already moving. “I want a final sweep,” she said. “Between decks, the rib conduit, the spine. If he left anchors we missed, I want them pulled before he tries to make our refusals into choreography.”

Ace nodded. “Rook on standby. Kalyn with him. Jel in the galley. Keep him busy with dishes and straight lines.”

Mai’s eyes flicked. “You’re kind.”

“I’m practical,” Ace said. “He draws spirals when rooms lie.”

They moved through their ship not like owners—owners have paperwork—but like people who’ve loved a place so long their footsteps have worn decisions into the floor. Between decks gave them back the smell of glue and the ghost of paper; Mai’s lamp cut a thin ribbon of utility into the dark and made no mood. The beam slid along cable armor and rivet heads and paused only when something

pretended it had always been there.

They found two more anchors and a smudge where a third had been and wasn't anymore, as if the room had decided to clean itself to please someone it shouldn't. Mai swore under her breath in the beautiful, old-fashioned way.

"Stop being polite," Ace told the ductwork.

A screw on the next panel squeaked with the relief of being allowed to be itself.

By the time they finished, the ship had the kind of unremarkable quiet you can only get by refusing to be impressive. Mai rolled her shoulders back; Ace did the same. Rook's voice on the internal was the sound a mountain makes when it shrugs. "Clean," he said.

"Good," Mai answered. "Stay tall."

Back on the bridge, she brought Mendax Theta up on the board. The quarantine marker blinked with the patient rudeness of a locked door pretending to be a gentleman.

"Choice time," Mai said.

"Not for them," Ace said.

"For us," Mai agreed.

She looked at Ace, and Ace looked back, and the ship learned something about decisions from the way two women held a gaze and didn't need to explain it to a calendar. The charm at Ace's harness lay warm and ugly. Violet set her chin on the windowsill of Ace's ribs and watched the light.

"Case file," Mai said to the recorder, because the room asked to be told what it was about to hold. "Wake anomaly. Note five: Subject is not a venue. Labels retired: audit, alignment. Curator's domestic anchors removed. Annex identified and bored. Next action: Mendax Theta. Objective: end schedule."

Ace's hand closed once on the rail, a promise to use it or to let go as needed.

"Let's go break a habit," she said. —

© 2025-2026. "World of Ace, Mai and Shammy" and all original characters, settings, story elements, and concepts are the intellectual property of the author. All rights reserved.

Non-commercial fan works are allowed with attribution.

Commercial use, redistribution, or adaptation requires explicit permission from the author.

Contact: editor at publication-x.com

From:
<https://datavault.ws/> - **DataVault**

Permanent link:
https://datavault.ws/doku.php/canon:ace10:ace_10_ch_5_the_silent_vessel

Last update: **17/03/2026 06:02**



