

CHAPTER 6 — Quiet Agreement

Back in the quarters, the room felt smaller.

Not because the walls had moved.

Because the future had.

Mai sat on the edge of the bed and began disassembling her disruptor pistol for maintenance out of habit, not necessity. Her hands moved with calm precision. A ritual.

Ace leaned against the wall near her sheathed katanas, posture loose but attention awake. She was always half a breath from violence, even when she didn't want to be.

Shammy stood by the window and stared at nothing outside. There wasn't much to see—just the reflection of fluorescent lights on reinforced glass, and beyond that, darkness that belonged to a facility built to hide itself.

"I don't like cages," Shammy said quietly.

Mai didn't look up. "Neither do we."

Shammy's stormlit eyes flicked to Ace. "But you live in them."

Ace's lips tightened. "We survive."

Shammy's mouth curved, sad. "Survival is not always living."

Mai's hands paused for half a second. Then she continued. "We know."

Silence fell again, but it wasn't the same silence as before.

Before, it had been the silence of strangers learning each other's breathing patterns.

Now it was the silence of people who had decided to move forward together even if they didn't yet know what "together" would cost.

Mai set a component down. "Detroit will be loud," she said.

Shammy nodded. "Cities are storms."

Ace's gaze rose. "And races."

Shammy turned. "I don't understand why people race when death is possible."

Mai's voice went dry. "Sometimes they race because death is possible."

Shammy's brows knit. "That is... human."

Mai glanced at Ace. "She's allowed to be human."

Ace snorted—barely a sound, but it existed, and that alone was a small miracle.

Shammy's smile widened a fraction. "You laugh like thunder trying not to happen."

Ace's eyes narrowed. "Careful."

Shammy held up both hands innocently. "Observation."

Mai finished reassembling her pistol and slid it back into its holster. She stood and faced Shammy directly, the way she faced problems.

"Listen," Mai said. "This is not... a romance triangle. This is not a cult. This is not a family unless we choose it to be."

Shammy's eyes widened slightly. "I did not assume—"

"I know," Mai said. "I'm stating it anyway because humans are stupid and the Foundation is worse."

Shammy's mouth twitched. "You are honest."

Mai's expression softened just enough. "It keeps us alive."

Ace's voice came low. "You stabilize."

Shammy blinked. "Me?"

Ace nodded once. "The air."

Shammy's eyes flicked down, then up again. "I don't know how. I just... am."

Mai stepped closer and placed a hand on Shammy's forearm—careful, respectful, acknowledging height difference without making it awkward.

"Then be," Mai said.

Shammy's breath hitched, and for a second the air in the room lifted like a stormfront trying to become rain.

Ace watched it happen and felt Violet press behind her eyes, curious.

Ace didn't let it rise.

She breathed instead. Once. Twice.

The room steadied.

Mai looked at Ace. "You okay?"

Ace answered with a small nod.

Mai's gaze held hers, and the old bond between them—sharp, stable, already proven—tightened into something like a brace around the triad's new shape.

Shammy watched them and didn't intrude. She simply existed in the same space without trying to own it.

After a moment, she spoke again. "When we leave... do I sit in the back?"

Mai's brows lifted. "What?"

Shammy gestured awkwardly. "In the car. The Aston. I am... large."

Mai's mouth curved. "You sit wherever you want as long as you don't kick the dashboard through the firewall."

Ace's voice came quiet. "Shotgun."

Mai laughed, short and real. "Of course you say that."

Shammy blinked, then laughed too—softer, airy, like wind catching on a roofline.

For a moment, the room felt less like a holding cell and more like the beginning of a route.

Mai exhaled and looked toward the door as if she could see the future through concrete. "We move tonight."

Ace's fingers brushed her katana sheath absentmindedly. "Good."

Shammy's eyes turned toward the window again. "Detroit," she murmured, tasting the word.

Mai's voice went flat again, the way it did when she made decisions that would hurt but were necessary.

"We're going to bleed pressure," she said. "And we're going to come back alive."

Ace's violet eyes glinted. "We will."

Shammy's stormlight eyes sharpened. "We must."

Three voices.

One agreement.

Quiet.

And absolute.

EPILOGUE — Before the Engine Starts

They moved like shadows.

No sirens. No convoy with flags. Just trucks and trailers and men in gray who understood that attention was a predator.

The garage doors opened. The Nismo and the DB11 rolled forward under their own power, engines low and disciplined. They sounded like restrained violence.

Ace walked beside the Nismo as if it were an extension of her own body.

Mai walked beside the DB11 as if it were a problem she'd already solved.

Shammy walked between them, and the air moved differently around her—subtle, respectful, like the night itself had noticed her and decided not to pick a fight.

Bright stood at the edge of the loading bay with his hands in his pockets, watching like a man who

had bet on something he couldn't fully control.

Gears stood beside him, tablet in hand, eyes already on data that hadn't yet been born.

As the cars were secured, Bright glanced at Mai. "One last thing."

Mai's eyes narrowed. "Always."

Bright's smile was thin. "If it tries to make you choose... don't choose alone."

Mai's gaze flicked to Ace, then to Shammy.

She didn't answer with words.

She simply nodded.

Ace climbed into the transport vehicle without ceremony. Mai followed. Shammy ducked slightly and entered last, filling the space in a way that made the vehicle feel like it had swallowed weather.

The doors shut.

The engine turned.

The convoy rolled out into the night.

Detroit waited ahead like a mouth.

And somewhere beneath everything—beneath asphalt, beneath city lights, beneath the Foundation's fear and the triad's quiet resolve—the fault listened.

Not speaking.

Not yet.

But waiting for speed. —

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