

## Chapter 2

Detroit was already forgetting them.

That was the way of cities.

By the time the Triad left the safehouse, the rain had stopped completely and the streets had resumed their usual morning rhythm — delivery vans, commuters, construction noise, the slow metallic hum of a city pretending it hadn't spent the entire night vibrating with illegal horsepower.

The parking structure beneath the building smelled faintly of oil, damp concrete, and cooling engines.

Ace stopped halfway down the ramp and looked at the two cars waiting in the shadowed corner.

The **vanta black Nissan Nismo 270R** sat low and quiet under the concrete lights, its surface absorbing the brightness around it like it didn't particularly approve of being seen. Even parked, it looked predatory — the kind of machine that preferred motion to stillness.

Beside it stood the **silver Aston Martin DB11**, clean lines catching the faint overhead glow like a blade catching sunlight.

Two cars.

Two completely different philosophies.

One system.

Shammy leaned against the railing above them, looking down at the vehicles with obvious appreciation.

"You know," she said casually, "from Detroit's point of view, those two cars are now basically cryptids."

Mai paused beside the Aston and glanced up.

"Cryptids?"

"Yes."

Shammy pushed herself off the railing and walked down the remaining steps with unhurried grace.

"Think about it. Mysterious pair of cars appear out of nowhere, dismantle the Blacklist chain using a scoring rule nobody expected anyone to actually use, and then vanish before sunrise."

Ace rested one hand on the Nissan's roof.

"It was not that mysterious."

Shammy smiled.

"It was to Detroit."

Mai reached the Aston and lightly brushed rainwater from the windshield with her sleeve.

"The important part," she said, "is that nobody has a clean ID on us."

Ace glanced sideways.

“That part was intentional.”

“Obviously.”

Shammy walked slowly between the two cars, studying them like an art exhibit.

“Also,” she added thoughtfully, “the internet has already decided the Nissan is haunted.”

Ace raised an eyebrow.

“Haunted.”

Shammy nodded.

“Apparently a car that quiet shouldn’t be that fast.”

Mai opened the Aston’s door.

“That’s because most drivers prefer machines that announce themselves.”

Ace ran her hand along the Nissan’s roofline.

“I prefer machines that don’t.”

Shammy stopped between them.

“And then there’s the Demon Supra.”

The three of them went quiet for a moment.

Ace leaned lightly against the Nissan.

“He enjoyed that.”

Mai slid into the Aston’s seat.

“Of course he did.”

Shammy tilted her head.

“You’re surprisingly calm about it.”

Ace shrugged.

“He always does that.”

“Appears out of nowhere?”

“Yes.”

“Embarrasses you in public?”

Ace looked at her.

“He did not embarrass me.”

Shammy grinned.

“Detroit disagrees.”

Mai started the Aston.

The engine came alive with a smooth, controlled rumble that echoed softly through the garage.

“Detroit,” she said, “is frequently wrong.”

Ace walked around the Nissan and opened the driver’s door.

Shammy stopped beside her.

“Serious question.”

Ace looked up.

“Yes?”

“Did he actually pass you just to annoy you?”

Ace slid into the seat and started the engine.

The Nissan’s idle was low, quiet, almost restrained — like a predator breathing slowly before moving.

“Yes.”

Shammy blinked.

“That’s it?”

“That’s it.”

She leaned down slightly toward the open door.

“That’s extremely petty.”

Ace met her eyes.

“Yes.”

Shammy considered that for a moment.

Then she laughed.

“Okay, I like him.”

Mai’s voice came over from the Aston.

“No you don’t.”

“Probably not.”

Ace glanced toward the ramp.

“Ready?”

Mai nodded.

“Yes.”

Shammy moved around the Nissan and slid into the passenger seat.

The door closed with a soft mechanical click.

For a moment the two cars sat there in the dim concrete light.

Then the Aston rolled forward first, gliding toward the exit ramp.

The Nissan followed.

Outside, Detroit had resumed its daytime illusion.

Traffic lights blinked lazily over half-empty intersections. Delivery trucks rumbled past storefronts still opening for the day. The wet pavement reflected the pale morning sky like dull metal.

The two cars merged into traffic without drawing attention.

Which was exactly the point.

For a few minutes they drove in silence.

Then Shammy spoke.

“You realize something, right?”

Ace kept her eyes on the road.

“What.”

“Detroit is going to spend the next decade arguing about last night.”

Ace shifted gears smoothly.

“That sounds like Detroit.”

Mai’s voice came through the open channel.

“They already are.”

Shammy leaned back in the seat.

“I checked again before we left.”

“And?”

“There are at least four different theories about who we are.”

Ace said nothing.

Shammy continued.

“One group thinks we’re a traveling professional team.”

Mai snorted softly over the channel.

“Unlikely.”

“Another group thinks we’re a tuner collective testing prototype cars.”

Ace turned onto the highway ramp.

“That one’s closer.”

“And one guy thinks we’re part of a cult.”

Mai sounded amused.

“A cult.”

“Yes.”

“What kind of cult?”

Shammy checked the phone again.

“Something about summoning mechanical spirits through illegal racing.”

Ace almost smiled.

“That’s creative.”

Mai’s Aston accelerated ahead slightly, clearing space in traffic.

“And the fourth theory?”

Shammy scrolled.

“That the Demon Supra was the real winner and the rest of us were just background noise.”

Ace sighed.

“He’s going to love that.”

“Yes,” Mai said.

“He will.”

For a moment the radio channel went quiet again.

Then Shammy spoke, more softly this time.

“You know what the funniest part is?”

Ace glanced at her.

“What.”

Shammy looked out the side window at the city sliding past.

“They’re all wrong.”

Ace nodded once.

“Yes.”

Mai’s voice came through the comms.

“Completely wrong.”

The highway opened ahead of them, lanes stretching out toward the edge of the city.

Detroit’s skyline slowly receded in the rearview mirrors.

Behind them, the story of the night before was already mutating into legend.

The vanta black Nissan.

The silver Aston.

The Demon Supra.

None of it was accurate.

None of it needed to be.

The truth was quieter.

Three people.

Two cars.

One system that Detroit hadn’t been built to understand.

Shammy finally leaned back and stretched slightly in the passenger seat.

“So,” she said casually.

Ace glanced over.

“Yes?”

Shammy smiled.

“Horizon.”

Ace looked back at the road.

“Yes.”

Mai's Aston maintained a steady distance ahead of them.

Shammy's voice carried a hint of anticipation now.

"That's going to be... interesting."

Ace didn't answer right away.

Her hands rested calmly on the steering wheel.

The Nissan's engine hummed beneath them, steady and restrained.

Finally she said:

"Yes.

It is."

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