

Chapter 6 — Force Does Not Apply

They didn't move immediately.

Not out of hesitation.

Out of alignment.

"Define 'break,'" Ace said.

Mai didn't answer right away.

Not because she didn't know.

Because the word itself—

Didn't fit.

"Not destruction," she said finally.

Ace gave a faint, dry exhale.

"Then pick a better word."

Mai looked at the wall.

"Disrupt," she said.

That was closer.

Ace nodded once.

“Good.”

She drew both katanas.

The air shifted—

Reflexively.

Not from the space.

From Shammy.

A faint pressure change.

Subtle.

Contained.

Ace stepped forward.

No wind-up.

No dramatic motion.

Just—

Action.

The first strike cut clean across the wall.

No resistance.

No impact.

No sound.

The blade moved—
And then stopped.

Mid-motion.

Ace pushed.

Nothing.

She pulled back.

The cut did not exist.

Ace stared at the wall.

Then struck again.

Harder.

Faster.

Same result.

The blade entered—
Then ceased.

No effect.

No mark.

No—

Anything.

Ace lowered one blade slightly.

“That’s new,” she said.

Mai didn’t move.

“Yes.”

Ace rotated her grip.

Changed angle.

Struck again.

Diagonal this time.

No difference.

The motion completed.

The result did not.

Ace stepped back.

Not frustrated.

Updating.

“It doesn’t accept force,” she said.

Mai nodded once.

“Confirmed.”

Ace glanced sideways.

“What if I don’t stop?”

Mai met her gaze.

“You already are.”

That landed.

Ace didn’t argue.

She moved forward again.

This time—

She didn't aim for the wall.

She aimed for the space *through* it.

Both blades.

Full motion.

The air shifted—

Just slightly—

From Shammy.

Then—

Nothing.

The strike vanished into the same non-response.

Ace froze mid-follow-through.

Not physically.

Functionally.

She lowered the blades slowly.

“That’s not resistance,” she said.

“No,” Mai replied.

A beat.

“It’s non-participation.”

That was worse.

Ace sheathed one blade.

Kept the other out.

“Then we change the rules,” she said.

Mai didn’t respond.

Because—

That assumed there were rules to change.

Shammy stepped forward.

Closer this time.

Not to the wall.

To the space between.

She lifted her hand.

Paused.

Then—

Pushed.

Not physically.

Pressure.

The air responded.

Finally.

A ripple.

Small.

Contained.

But real.

Ace's head snapped toward her.

"There," she said.

Shammy didn't answer.

She pushed again.

Harder.

The ripple expanded—

Then stopped.

Like something had noticed it.

And chosen—

Not to continue.

Shammy's brow furrowed.

"It's rejecting amplitude," she said.

Mai stepped closer.

"Define."

Shammy didn't look at her.

"It allows presence," she said.

A beat.

"But not change."

Ace exhaled slowly.

"So we exist here."

"Yes."

"But we can't affect it."

Shammy nodded once.

"That's the current state."

Silence.

Ace rolled her shoulder once.

Then—

Without warning—

She sprinted.

Full speed.

Straight down the corridor.

Mai didn't call after her.

Didn't need to.

Ace vanished into the distance—

Then—

Stopped.

Not because she chose to.

Because—

She was still there.

The distance had not changed.

She stood exactly where she had started.

Ace turned.

Walked back.

Same result.

She rejoined them.

Calm.

Controlled.

"That's worse," she said.

"Yes," Mai replied.

Ace looked around again.

Not searching.

Accepting.

"This isn't space," she said.

Mai nodded.

"No."

A beat.

“It’s constraint.”

That word held.

Shammy exhaled slowly.

The air responded—

A fraction more than before.

Still limited.

Still contained.

But—

Present.

Ace noticed.

“That’s the only thing it reacts to,” she said.

Shammy didn’t deny it.

“No,” she said.

A beat.

“It reacts to pressure.”

Mai’s eyes sharpened.

That—

That was something.

Finally.

“Not force,” she said.

Shammy nodded.

“No.”

“Not motion.”

“No.”

Mai stepped forward.

Slow.

Measured.

“Pressure,” she repeated.

Ace looked at her.

“You have a plan?”

Mai didn’t answer immediately.

Then:

“Not yet.”

That was honest.

That was enough.

The corridor remained unchanged.

No marks.

No damage.

No response.

Except—

For that one thing.

A slight tightening in the air.

Barely noticeable.

But—

Growing.

The space had not reacted to violence.

It had not reacted to movement.

It had not reacted to intrusion.

But now—

For the first time—

It was reacting to them.

Not as a threat.

Not as an enemy.

But as something it did not know how to process.

And that—

Was the first crack.

Even if it left no mark.

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