

Chapter 8 — The Room That Remembers Nothing

They didn't have to search for it.

That was the first deviation.

Until now, everything had been—

Uniform.

Repetitive.

Indistinguishable.

But this—

This stood out.

Not visually.

Not immediately.

But—

Structurally.

Mai stopped first.

Not because she saw something.

Because something aligned.

“There,” she said.

Ace followed her gaze.

Another door.

Identical.

Same surface.

Same handle.

Same—

Everything.

And yet—

Ace frowned.

“That one’s different,” she said.

Mai nodded once.

“Yes.”

Shammy didn’t move.

Her attention was already there.

Not on the door.

On the space behind it.

“It’s heavier,” she said quietly.

Ace glanced at her.

“Heavier how?”

Shammy didn’t answer.

Because there wasn’t a word for it that fit cleanly.

Mai stepped forward.

Hand on the handle.

Paused.

Not hesitation.

Recognition.

“This is where something tried to persist,” she said.

Ace tilted her head slightly.

“Then we’re opening it.”

Mai didn’t disagree.

She turned the handle.

The door opened.

Inside—

A room.

Office.

Desk.

Chair.

Cup.

Stillness.

But—

Not the same.

Ace stepped in first.

Slow.

Measured.

She scanned.

Corners.

Ceiling.

Floor.

Nothing.

No threat.

No movement.

But—

She stopped at the desk.

“There,” she said.

Mai entered.

Shammy followed.

The air shifted slightly—

Then held.

Mai approached the desk.

Looked down.

A cup.

Plain.

Ceramic.

There was something in it.

Not liquid.

Not empty.

Just—

Something.

Undefined.

Ace leaned closer.

“You seeing that?”

Mai nodded.

“Yes.”

A beat.

“It’s not resolved.”

Ace frowned.

“That’s not a thing.”

“No,” Mai agreed.

“It isn’t.”

Shammy stepped closer.

Not to the cup.

To the space around it.

Her expression changed.

Slightly.

“This is where it failed,” she said.

Mai’s eyes sharpened.

“Explain.”

Shammy didn’t look at her.

“It tried to keep this,” she said.

A beat.

“And couldn’t.”

Ace glanced between them.

“So what, someone left a coffee cup and the universe broke?”

“No,” Mai said.

That came immediately.

“This isn’t random.”

She reached out.

Stopped just before touching the cup.

Then—

Carefully—

Made contact.

Nothing happened.

No temperature.

No texture.

No resistance.

But—

Her hand didn’t feel it.

She pulled back immediately.

“That’s wrong,” she said.

Ace raised an eyebrow.

“You’ve said that a lot.”

Mai didn’t react.

“It’s not interacting,” she said.

Shammy nodded.

“It can’t,” she said.

Ace crossed her arms.

“Then why is it here?”

Silence.

Mai looked at the desk.

The chair.

The position of everything.

Then:

“This isn’t a memory,” she said.

Ace tilted her head.

“Then what is it?”

Mai’s voice dropped slightly.

“It’s an attempt at one.”

That landed.

Hard.

Shammy stepped closer still.

Now directly beside the desk.

She inhaled slowly.

The air responded—

More than before.

The room—

Shifted.

Just a fraction.

The cup flickered.

Not visually.

Structurally.

Like it almost—

Existed.

Ace saw it.

“There,” she said.

Mai didn’t move.

“Again,” she said quietly.

Shammy focused.

Didn’t push.

Didn’t force.

Just—

Listened.

The air tightened.

The room—

Compressed.

And for a brief—

Impossible—

Moment—

The cup was real.

Solid.

Present.

Then—

Gone.

Back to—

Undefined.

Shammy exhaled.

The effect collapsed instantly.

The room returned to its previous state.

Perfect.

Empty.

Wrong.

Ace let out a slow breath.

“So it almost worked.”

Mai nodded.

“Yes.”

A beat.

“And that’s the problem.”

Shammy looked at her.

“It can’t complete it,” she said.

Mai nodded again.

“No.”

Ace glanced around the room.

“So this is what it’s holding.”

Mai shook her head.

“No.”

A beat.

“This is where it failed to hold.”

That distinction mattered.

A lot.

Shammy stepped back.

The air settled again.

The room flattened.

Everything returned to baseline.

Ace looked at the door.

Still open.

Still leading back to the corridor.

Still—

Unchanged.

She turned back to Mai.

“What now?”

Mai didn't answer immediately.

Her gaze remained on the desk.

On the cup.

On the space that refused to remember.

Then:

“We make it fail again,” she said.

Ace’s expression sharpened.

“On purpose?”

Mai met her gaze.

“Yes.”

Shammy tilted her head slightly.

“That will hurt it,” she said.

Mai nodded once.

“That’s the point.”

Silence.

The room did not react.

But—

Something—

Deep in the structure of the space—

Shifted.

Not visible.

Not audible.

But—

Present.

The first real instability.

And this time—

It did not fully disappear.

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