

Chapter 25

The rain had started again by the time Mai reached the safehouse.

Not heavy. Just the quiet, steady kind that turned every streetlight into a soft glowing halo and made the pavement shine like polished obsidian under passing cars. The drops fell in gentle rhythm against her jacket and hair, cool but not unpleasant, carrying that clean, metallic scent the city always got after rain.

Inside the apartment the atmosphere was calm and lived-in.

Soft music drifted lazily from the kitchen speaker — low jazz piano and brushed drums, the kind that wrapped around the room like a comfortable blanket. Someone had made tea; the faint herbal warmth still hung in the air, mixing with the scent of old leather from the couch and the faint ozone trace Shammy always carried when she had been sitting still too long.

Shammy sat in the deep armchair by the window, tall frame folded with effortless grace, laptop open on her lap but clearly not being used. Silver-white hair caught the low lamp glow in faint ionized gradients, electric blue eyes calm and watchful. One long leg crossed over the other, fingers resting loosely on the armrest.

Ace was sprawled across the couch like she owned every inch of it — one boot propped lazily on the coffee table, black tank riding up slightly at the waist, phone held loosely in one hand while she scrolled with the other. Violet-black hair fell messily across her forehead, violet eyes half-lidded but sharp the moment the door opened.

Mai stepped inside.

She closed the door behind her with a soft click, set her coat aside on the hook, water droplets pattering lightly to the floorboards. Her silver hair was slightly damp at the ends, catching the warm lamp light in soft runic glints as she moved.

Ace didn't look up at first.

"Back already?"

Mai crossed the room toward the kitchen, boots quiet on the hardwood.

Shammy glanced over the top of her screen, electric blue eyes studying her with quiet intensity.

"Good afternoon."

Mai nodded, voice calm but carrying a quiet, warm undertone.

"Hello."

Ace finally looked up.

And paused.

Then slowly sat up, swinging her legs off the couch, violet eyes narrowing with sudden interest as she took in Mai's posture, the faint flush still visible high on her cheeks, the small, satisfied curve at the corner of her mouth that Mai wasn't even trying to hide.

“Well now.”

Shammy closed her laptop with deliberate care and set it aside, leaning forward slightly, tall frame shifting with graceful attention.

Ace tilted her head, violet eyes sparkling with predatory amusement.

“...huh.”

Mai walked past them toward the kitchen counter, silver hair swaying softly with each step. She poured herself a glass of water, movements graceful and unhurried, but there was a new lightness in the way she moved — a quiet, emotionally satisfied warmth radiating from her that both Ace and Shammy noticed immediately.

Ace leaned forward, elbows on her knees, grin widening.

“Okay.”

Mai took a slow sip of water.

Ace pointed directly at her.

“Someone has a new spring in their step.”

Mai paused for half a second, glass halfway to her lips, then continued drinking, silver-blue eyes flicking toward Ace with warm, teasing amusement rather than clinical detachment.

Shammy’s gaze moved from Ace back to Mai, studying her carefully, the pressure in the room shifting gently as she observed the subtle changes in her posture and the soft glow in her expression.

Ace leaned forward even more, grin turning wicked.

“Oh this is already good.”

Shammy remained calm but clearly attentive, voice low and thoughtful.

“Your experiment concluded successfully.”

Mai turned slightly from the counter, glass still in hand, silver hair catching the light as she met both their gazes — emotionally warm, teasing spark clear in her eyes.

“Yes.”

Ace snapped her fingers triumphantly.

“Called it.”

Shammy folded her hands thoughtfully, head tilting slightly.

“Define successful.”

Mai returned to the living room and sat in the empty armchair opposite them, crossing her legs gracefully. There was a quiet satisfaction in the way she settled, silver-blue eyes warm and open as she looked at them both — no longer just the cool analyser, but someone clearly carrying the

afterglow of a morning well spent.

Ace leaned forward immediately, elbows on knees, violet eyes glittering.

“Oh no no no.”

Mai raised an eyebrow, but the gesture was playful, affectionate teasing threading through it.

“What.”

Ace pointed dramatically at her.

“You do not get to sit there looking all calm after clearly having an entire day of mysterious fun.”

Mai answered simply, but her voice carried a soft, teasing warmth.

“Observation.”

Ace laughed outright, the sound bright and delighted.

“Bullshit.”

Shammy’s mouth twitched faintly with restrained amusement as she watched Mai’s relaxed posture and the faint, satisfied smile she wasn’t quite hiding.

Ace crossed her arms, leaning back with a predatory grin.

“So.”

Mai waited, silver hair falling softly as she tilted her head, emotionally present and clearly enjoying their reactions.

“How many data points did you collect.”

Mai tilted her head, silver-blue eyes sparkling with quiet affection and teasing intelligence.

“Several.”

Ace leaned back against the couch cushions, laughing again.

“Uh huh.”

Shammy asked quietly, voice calm but warm.

“Did the variable cooperate.”

Mai considered the question for a moment, then answered with genuine warmth in her tone.

“Yes.”

Ace burst out laughing, wiping a tear from the corner of her eye.

“Oh my god.”

Shammy glanced toward Ace, then back at Mai with thoughtful amusement.

“You appear unsurprised.”

Ace wiped another tear, still grinning.

“Shammy... look at her.”

Shammy looked at Mai again — carefully, taking in the soft glow in her expression, the relaxed set of her shoulders, the quiet satisfaction radiating from her.

“Yes.”

Ace spread her hands dramatically.

“That is the face of someone who absolutely did not stop at coffee.”

Mai remained perfectly calm, but there was clear teasing warmth and affection in her eyes as she took another sip of water.

Ace pointed again.

“See.”

Shammy tilted her head slightly, a small smile tugging at her lips.

“Your stride was also different when you entered.”

Ace clapped once.

“YES.”

Mai sighed softly, but the sound was warm and amused, her silver-blue eyes sparkling as she leaned back in the chair.

“You are both exaggerating.”

Ace leaned forward again with predatory curiosity, violet eyes bright.

“Am I.”

Mai said nothing, but the faint, satisfied smile remained.

Ace grinned slowly.

“Oh this is going to be fun.”

Shammy observed quietly, but her eyes were warm with amusement.

“You are avoiding the direct question.”

Mai met his gaze, silver-blue eyes soft and emotionally open.

“Yes.”

Ace pointed triumphantly.

“HA.”

Shammy nodded thoughtfully, the pressure in the room light and fond.

“That implies the answer is interesting.”

Ace leaned back with a satisfied smile, one boot back on the coffee table.

“Oh it’s definitely interesting.”

Mai folded her hands calmly in her lap, but there was clear, warm amusement in her expression now — no longer the distant analyser, but someone quietly enjoying being read by her triad.

“You are both drawing conclusions without sufficient evidence.”

Ace laughed louder.

“Oh we have evidence.”

Mai raised an eyebrow, silver hair shifting as she leaned forward slightly.

“Explain.”

Ace leaned forward again, eyes glittering.

“That look.”

Mai blinked once, genuinely amused.

“What look.”

Ace grinned like a shark.

“That look that says ‘it didn’t stop at coffee.’”

Shammy nodded slowly, a rare, warm smile breaking through.

“Yes.”

Ace snapped her fingers again.

“And the walk.”

Mai frowned slightly, but the expression was playful.

“What about the walk.”

Ace leaned back again, still grinning.

“Spring.”

Mai exhaled softly, but the sigh was warm and affectionate as she picked up the tea mug from the table, taking a slow sip.

“This conversation is inefficient.”

Ace howled with laughter.

“Oh no.”

She pointed toward Shammy.

“You asked the wrong question earlier.”

Shammy glanced sideways, clearly enjoying herself.

“Which question.”

Ace grinned.

“You asked if the experiment was successful.”

Shammy nodded.

“Yes.”

Ace leaned forward again, eyes glittering with amusement.

“The real question is...”

Mai already knew what was coming, but she let it happen, silver-blue eyes warm and teasing.

Ace pointed dramatically.

“...did it stop at one round.”

Mai stared at her for three full seconds.

Then quietly said, voice filled with fond exasperation:

“You are insufferable.”

Ace collapsed back into the couch laughing.

Shammy’s shoulders shook with restrained amusement as she covered her mouth.

Mai picked up the tea mug again, calm on the surface, but her eyes carried the faintest trace of genuine satisfaction and warm affection as she looked at both of them.

Outside, the rain tapped gently against the windows.

Inside, the safehouse filled with bright, easy laughter — the kind that only came when the triad was fully together and completely at ease.

And somewhere far above the city, two ancient observers watched the scene unfold with quiet delight.

Mephisto clapped slowly.

“Oh that was magnificent.”

Konrad allowed himself the faintest smile.

“Yes.”

Mephisto grinned.

“I believe that settles our wager.”

Konrad nodded once.

“Yes.”

Mephisto glanced down toward the safehouse.

“Well then.”

His voice carried quiet amusement.

“Until the next experiment.”

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Last update: **15/03/2026 11:59**

