

Chapter 35

Safehouse — Debrief

The safehouse was quiet again.

Rain tapped softly against the windows, the neon glow from the street outside painting faint streaks of color across the living room.

Music drifted from the kitchen speaker.

Ace had claimed the couch as usual.

Mai sat in the armchair with a book she hadn't turned a page of in fifteen minutes.

Both of them heard the door unlock.

Ace immediately sat up.

"Oh good."

Mai didn't look up yet.

The door opened.

Shammy stepped inside, rain still glistening faintly on her coat.

She hung it on the rack calmly.

Ace watched her with open fascination.

Mai finally closed her book.

"Welcome back."

Shammy nodded.

"Hello."

Ace leaned forward with a grin that promised trouble.

"...well?"

Shammy walked toward the kitchen.

"Tea."

Ace blinked.

"You are not getting away with that."

Shammy poured water into the kettle.

Mai watched quietly.

Ace pointed dramatically.

“You went out for six hours.”

Shammy glanced at her.

“Yes.”

Ace spread her arms.

“And you come back with tea.”

Shammy turned on the kettle.

“Yes.”

Ace groaned.

“Oh this is torture.”

Mai set the book aside.

“You chose a bookstore.”

Shammy nodded.

“Yes.”

Ace leaned forward again.

“Did you find a variable.”

Shammy poured tea leaves into a cup.

“Yes.”

Ace slapped the couch cushion triumphantly.

“I knew it.”

Mai tilted her head.

“Did the variable cooperate.”

Shammy considered the question.

“Yes.”

Ace pointed again.

“Define cooperate.”

Shammy carried the tea cup into the living room and sat down.

Ace leaned even closer.

"Well?"

Shammy answered calmly.

"He noticed."

Ace blinked.

"...noticed what."

Shammy sipped her tea.

"Observation."

Ace stared.

Mai watched carefully.

Ace slowly turned toward Mai.

"Okay that's worse."

Mai nodded slightly.

"Yes."

Ace looked back at Shammy.

"So he noticed you watching the room."

"Yes."

Ace leaned back slightly.

"And then."

Shammy said nothing.

Ace squinted.

"...and then."

Shammy took another sip of tea.

Mai spoke quietly.

"You escalated environments."

Shammy glanced at her.

"Yes."

Ace looked between them.

"...what."

Mai continued calmly.

“Bookstore.”

Ace pointed.

“Yes.”

Mai raised a finger.

“Café.”

Ace blinked.

“...okay.”

Mai raised another finger.

“Street.”

Ace leaned forward again.

“Oh this is getting good.”

Mai finished calmly.

“Riverside.”

Ace’s eyes widened.

“Oh you absolutely did.”

Shammy said nothing.

Ace clapped once.

“I love this.”

Mai folded her hands.

“What was the result.”

Shammy considered that.

“Positive.”

Ace burst out laughing.

“Oh my god.”

Mai’s expression softened slightly.

“Confirmation?”

Shammy nodded once.

"Yes."

Ace collapsed back into the couch.

"This is amazing."

Shammy sipped her tea calmly.

Ace wiped tears from her eyes.

"So."

Shammy waited.

"What was the variable's name."

Shammy answered simply.

"Jonas."

Ace stared at her.

"...Jonas."

Shammy nodded.

"Yes."

Ace leaned forward again.

"Okay but the real question."

Shammy waited.

Ace grinned wickedly.

"How many environment changes did it take."

Shammy took another sip of tea.

"Four."

Ace howled.

Mai allowed the faintest hint of a smile.

Ace pointed triumphantly.

"See!"

Shammy raised an eyebrow.

"See what."

Ace leaned back again.

"The quiet ones are always the most dangerous."

Mai nodded once.

"Yes."

Shammy said nothing.

Ace grinned.

"Oh I'm absolutely writing this down."

Shammy tilted her head slightly.

"For what purpose."

Ace smiled.

"Future experiments."

Shammy sipped her tea.

"Acceptable."

Outside, the rain continued falling softly over the city.

Inside the safehouse, laughter filled the room again.

And somewhere far above the skyline, two ancient observers watched with clear satisfaction.

Mephisto leaned back slowly.

"Well."

Konrad remained calm beside him.

"Yes."

Mephisto smiled.

"I believe that concludes the wager."

Konrad nodded once.

"Yes."

Mephisto glanced down toward the safehouse.

"I look forward to the next experiment."

Konrad's faint smile returned.

"As do I." —

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