

Chapter 5

The rain had settled into a steady, patient rhythm by the time they reached the quieter side of the district.

Not a downpour—just persistent drops that turned every surface slick and reflective, softening the city’s hard edges without washing them away. Streetlights stretched long amber streaks across the wet pavement, fracturing whenever a lone car hissed past, tires whispering secrets to the asphalt. The usual late-night hum had thinned out to almost nothing: distant bass bleeding from a bar blocks behind them, the occasional metallic clatter of a dumpster lid, the low sigh of wind sliding between brick buildings that smelled of damp concrete and leftover fryer grease.

Ace walked like the weather was background noise—compact stride, shoulders loose under the soaked jacket, violet-black hair plastered in uneven strands that caught stray neon for half a second before shadow swallowed it again. Rain traced slow paths down her neck, disappearing under the collar.

Daniel noticed every detail. He brushed water from his sleeve, the motion almost absent.

“You realize,” he said, voice low enough the rain didn’t drown it, “most people would’ve called it quits two hours ago.”

Ace glanced sideways—quick, observant, no wasted movement.

“Most people weren’t having this conversation.”

“Fair.”

The intersection opened into a quieter residential stretch. Older brick buildings leaned close, sidewalks narrowing until trees arched overhead like they were trying to pull the street back into the earth. Leaves dripped in slow, fat drops. A single bicycle chained to a railing gleamed wet under a lonely lamp, paint chipped, seat darkened by water.

Daniel slowed. Hands still loose in pockets.

“So this is the part where the mysterious stranger disappears dramatically, right?”

Ace tilted her head, rain sliding off her jaw.

“Is that what usually happens to you?”

“No,” he admitted, quiet laugh catching in his throat. “But it feels like the kind of night that would.”

Ace studied him a beat longer—face, posture, the easy way he didn’t crowd.

“You’re not wrong.”

Daniel exhaled amusement. “Great.”

He gestured down the street, where lights dimmed softer.

“So... this is where I say goodnight?”

Ace leaned against the cool metal railing of a short stairwell leading to a basement entrance. Water

pooled at her boots.

“Depends.”

Daniel folded his arms, rain dripping from his hair in thin streams.

“That word again.”

Ace’s mouth curved—small, dry, nothing performative.

“Decisions are important.”

He considered her, rain steady between them.

Then nodded slow. Stepped closer—not touching, just sharing the downpour.

“In that case... tonight qualifies as sufficiently interesting.”

Ace raised one eyebrow.

“High praise.”

“Carefully calculated.”

She pushed off the railing, jacket creaking wet.

“Good.”

Daniel blinked, rain catching on lashes.

“That’s it?”

Ace shrugged—shoulders rolling once, compact.

“For now.”

He looked genuinely amused, mouth twitching.

“For now.”

Ace started walking again. Daniel fell in beside her without asking. Another block—rain easing slightly, puddles reflecting fractured streetlights, the city feeling smaller, more private.

Daniel finally slowed at a four-story brick building, warm lights glowing behind a couple of curtains.

“Alright. This is actually my street.”

Ace stopped.

He gestured toward the door.

“So unless the mysterious evening continues tomorrow...”

Ace considered the wet glow, the distant siren curling somewhere far off.

Then shrugged.

“Cities are full of coincidences.”

Daniel smiled—slow, real.

“I’ll take that as a maybe.”

Ace extended a hand—steady, small.

“Goodnight, Daniel.”

He took it. Warm despite the rain. Brief but solid.

“Goodnight, Ace.”

A beat of silence—only rain filling it.

Then Daniel turned, door spilling light for half a second before swallowing him.

Ace watched the door close. Stood there another moment, rain tapping her shoulders.

Then kept walking.

—

The rain had nearly stopped by the time she reached the safehouse.

The building stood quiet in the wet dark, except for one warm amber window glowing two floors up—like someone had left it burning on purpose. Steam rose lazy from a grate beside the steps. The air smelled of damp brick, distant coffee, and the faint ozone that always clung to Shammy when she’d been waiting.

Ace glanced up.

“Still awake.”

She pushed the front door—hinge soft—and climbed the stairs two at a time, boots leaving faint dark prints.

Inside, the apartment breathed calm.

Low lights: single floor lamp spilling warm gold across the couch, kitchen counter bathed in the cool blue of a tablet screen. Coffee mug sat half-full, steam long gone but the bitter-dark scent still hanging. Rain traced slow verticals down the tall windows, city glow bleeding violet and amber through the streaks.

Shammy sat at the kitchen table—tall frame folded with impossible grace, silver-white hair catching faint ionized glints, electric blue eyes lifting the instant Ace crossed the threshold. Air around her pressed gentle, heavy, already adjusting.

Mai leaned against the counter—silver hair loose and shining like runic frost, shirt open two buttons too far, collarbones sharp in the light. Printed reports in her hands, but her posture said she’d been waiting longer than the papers suggested.

Neither looked surprised.

Shammy glanced at the wall clock.

“03:17.”

Ace dropped her jacket over a chair—wet slap, water pattering to hardwood. She crossed straight to them, boots still damp.

“Still early.”

Mai didn’t look up immediately, thumb sliding along a page.

“That is not how time works.”

Ace grinned—crooked, small.

“It is tonight.”

Shammy studied her—slow, calm, pressure in the room shifting warmer near Ace, cooler near Mai. He nodded once.

“Interesting.”

Ace poured water from the tap—stream loud in the quiet, ice clinking. She leaned back against the opposite counter, hip cocked, glass rolling between palms.

“Care to elaborate?”

Shammy gestured vaguely with long fingers.

“Your movement pattern.”

Ace raised an eyebrow.

“My what?”

“Your movement pattern.”

Ace leaned in a fraction.

“You’re gonna have to translate that into human.”

Shammy considered, head tilting.

“You appear to have a new spring in your step.”

Mai finally looked up. Silver-blue eyes locked on Ace for three full seconds—reading every drop of rain, every faint mark.

Then the corner of her mouth twitched.

Ace groaned low.

“Oh no.”

Mai folded the reports with deliberate slowness, set them aside. She crossed her arms, shirt gaping further.

“Well,” she said, voice velvet-sharp. “This should be interesting.”

Ace took a slow drink, throat working.

“You two are insufferable.”

Shammy nodded once.

“That is statistically consistent.”

Mai uncrossed her arms, stepped forward until she stood right in front of Ace.

“So.”

Ace narrowed violet eyes.

“So.”

Mai tilted her head—silver hair sliding over one shoulder.

“That was not a short evening.”

Ace shrugged.

“Cities are big.”

Mai watched her longer. Then, very mild, teasing edge cutting deep:

“So it didn’t end after the first conversation.”

Ace blinked once.

“That is a wildly specific assumption.”

Mai’s eyes glinted—dangerous, amused.

“Not a denial.”

Ace pointed—small gesture, no heat.

“Careful.”

Mai smiled faintly, stepped closer until their hips brushed.

Ace exhaled—rough.

“...okay.”

She set the glass down hard enough it clinked.

“Before this turns into an interrogation—”

Shammy rose fluidly behind Ace, tall frame filling the space, one hand settling warm at the small of her back.

“Clarification.”

Ace stared at him over her shoulder.

“Don’t.”

Shammy’s voice stayed low thunder.

“Was this a single-instance social interaction or—”

Ace cut him off, but her voice had already gone husky.

“Stop.”

Mai’s expression turned dangerously amused. She reached up, fingers hooking the hem of Ace’s damp shirt.

“So it wasn’t a one-time thing.”

Ace stopped halfway to the hallway, turned, pointed.

“Dangerous line of questioning.”

Mai raised one eyebrow—slow, deliberate. She tugged the shirt higher, exposing rain-chilled skin and the faint red fingerprints high on Ace’s ribs.

Ace sighed—small, surrendering sound.

“...fine.”

She shrugged the shirt off herself, fabric hitting the floor with a wet slap.

“One could interpret it that way.”

Mai blinked once. Then smiled—real, slow, hungry. She stepped fully into Ace, pressing her back against the counter edge.

Shammy moved in behind—long arms caging both of them, chest solid at Ace’s back, heat radiating through wet denim. One hand slid up Ace’s spine, fingers threading damp hair, pulling her head back just enough. The other hand slipped under Ace’s waistband—slow, deliberate, cupping slick heat through fabric first, then beneath.

Mai dropped to her knees in one fluid motion. Shirt falling open completely. She looked up—silver-blue eyes locked—while her mouth found Ace, hot and unrelenting. Tongue flat then pointed, circling, sucking hard while two fingers pushed deep alongside Shammy’s.

Ace’s head fell back against Shammy’s shoulder. Eyes half-lidded, violet fracturing bright. Hands fisted—one in Mai’s silver hair, one gripping Shammy’s forearm.

Shammy’s lips grazed Ace’s ear.

"Look at her," he murmured, calm pressure voice.

Ace did—watched Mai's head between her thighs, watched those eyes flick up while Mai worked her open, fingers curling, tongue relentless.

Shammy bit down on Ace's neck—hard enough to mark, not break skin. Held.

Ace came with a low broken sound—hips snapping forward, whole body locking, thighs trembling around Mai's shoulders. Mai didn't stop until the aftershocks turned sharp and oversensitive. Shammy held them both through it, arms banded tight, pressure perfect.

Mai rose slow, kissed Ace deep—letting her taste herself on her tongue.

Shammy's arms wrapped fully around both—warm, steady, air settling charged and calm again.

Mai pressed forehead to Ace's, breathing ragged but smiling.

"Still smell like him?"

Ace laughed—rough, breathless.

"Not anymore."

Shammy brushed lips to Ace's temple—soft now.

"Good."

They stayed tangled against the counter, rain tapping glass softer outside, city breathing distant and unconcerned.

Equilibrium locked back in.

Warm.

Enough.

—

Far above the sprawl, where rooftops blurred into low clouds and the last rain slid off invisible edges, Mephisto laughed—quiet, delighted, coat collar high.

"Well," he said. "That went exactly as expected."

Konrad stayed silent a beat longer, watching the single glowing window.

Then simply:

"No."

Mephisto turned, amused.

"Oh?"

Konrad's gaze never left the city.

“You predicted she wouldn’t hide it.”

Mephisto smiled wider.

“She didn’t.”

Konrad shook his head once—small, certain.

“Yes,” he said.

“She did.”

The wager hung heavier in the between-space, rain finally stopping, night stretching patient and sharp. —

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