

ACE 29 — The Shape That Doesn't Hold

Epilogue — It Didn't Close

The report didn't settle cleanly.

Mai noticed that before anything else.

Not the content.

The structure.

Text aligned.

Data consistent.

Conclusions clear.

And still—

something about it didn't... finish.

She read the final line again.

Structural stability restored.

Accurate.

Incomplete.

Her fingers hovered over the keyboard.

Then added one more line.

Condition: Maintained through active constraint.

A pause.

Then—

she stopped.

Didn't refine it.

Didn't explain further.

Left it as it was.

A message blinked.

Gears.

<blockquote>

Gears:

Containment status?

</blockquote>

Mai read it once.

Then replied.

<blockquote>

Mai:

Not contained.
Stabilized.

</blockquote>

The response came almost immediately.

<blockquote>

Gears:

Clarify.

</blockquote>

Mai didn't elaborate.

<blockquote>

Mai:

It holds as long as something holds it.

</blockquote>

A pause.

Longer this time.

No immediate reply.

Mai closed the channel.

Didn't wait.

Across the room—

Ace leaned against the wall.

Still.

For once—

not because she was waiting.

Because nothing needed to move.

"...it's quiet," she said.

Shammy stood near the window.

The air around her—
stable.

Balanced.

“For now,” she said.

Ace didn't look at her.

“That's fine.”

A beat.

“We'll hold it.”

Shammy's voice softened.

“You can't hold everything.”

Ace exhaled once.

“No.”

A pause.

“But we can hold enough.”

Mai didn't look up.

Didn't need to.

Because that—

was the real conclusion.

Not that the distortion was gone.

Not that Serpent's Hand had stopped.

But that—

for now—

reality had chosen.

And more importantly—

someone had made sure

it stayed that way.

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