



Chapter 22 — Pick Your Own Turn

Mai didn't give the next intersection the dignity of being a "moment."

She made it messy.

A slow approach. A full stop. A reverse half-length. A different stop. A slight wheel-turn without movement—like the car itself was shrugging at whatever suggestion tried to ride the choice.

Ace watched the trees and the ditches and the mirrors, and kept her face bored on purpose. Bored was armor now.

Halverson's voice stayed low in the back. "You're doing the right thing."

Mai didn't answer. She let the car answer.

They crossed the intersection on a route that wasn't "left" or "right" in any meaningful sense—just the one they chose after making choice expensive.

The pressure receded into a background irritation.

Ace exhaled. “So, note to self: if the world whispers a direction, drive like a confused raccoon.”

Mai’s eyes stayed forward. “Drive like you’re not trainable.”

Ace’s mouth twitched. “Same animal, different résumé.”

They kept moving.

No radios. No screens. Fewer signs. Fewer “permissions” that could be borrowed.

And still—every now and then—Ace caught a sliver of tall stillness in some reflection plane: a puddle, a mirror, the dark sheen of a roadside ditch.

Always too brief.

Always too controlled.

Like a reminder, not an attack.

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