

CHAPTER 11 — Interface

The object didn't make a sound.

That was the first thing Mai noticed.

Not when she picked it up.

Not when she adjusted her grip to account for its refusal to settle.

But now—

resting on the table—

in a space that obeyed rules again.

It should have made *something*.

Contact.

Weight.

Presence.

It didn't.

It existed—

without agreeing to the system around it.

V leaned against the wall.

Arms crossed.

Watching it without getting too close.

"...Yeah," they said.

"Still weird."

Ace didn't look at the object.

She watched the room.

Doors.

Angles.

Movement outside the window.

"Value," she said.

Direct.

V nodded.

“Yeah.”

A small exhale.

“Big.”

Mai didn't look up.

“Conversion.”

V tilted their head slightly.

“Problem.”

That got Ace's attention.

“What.”

V pushed off the wall.

Walked over to the table.

Didn't touch the object.

Didn't need to.

"You don't have a link," they said.

Mai's gaze shifted.

"Define."

V tapped the side of their head.

"Interface."

A beat.

"Bank, transfers, contracts—everything runs through it."

Ace's expression didn't change.

“Then we don’t use it.”

Mai shook her head once.

“Incorrect.”

A pause.

Ace looked at her.

“Explain.”

Mai’s tone didn’t shift.

“Currency without access is static.”

A beat.

“Static has no function.”

That was enough.

Ace didn't argue.

Shammy stood slightly apart.

Watching.

Not the conversation—

the space around it.

The object—

still didn't agree.

"It doesn't like being here," she said quietly.

V glanced at her.

"...Join the club."

Mai ignored both of them.

“Solution,” she said.

V nodded once.

“I know a guy.”

Of course they did.

The clinic was cleaner than the building outside.

Not sterile.

But—

maintained.

The lights didn’t flicker.

The surfaces were worn—

but deliberate.

This place held itself together.

Mai noted that immediately.

Ace did too.

“Exit points,” she said quietly.

V gestured loosely.

“Back door. Side alley. Roof if you’re desperate.”

Good enough.

The man behind the chair didn’t look up immediately.

Focused.

Working.

Only when V stepped closer did he glance over.

Recognition.

No surprise.

“V,” he said.

A beat.

“...You bring friends now?”

V smirked faintly.

“Something like that.”

The man stood.

Turned fully.

His eyes moved across them—

once.

Measured.

Paused.

Not on Ace.

Not on Shammy.

On Mai.

“...Huh,” he said.

That was all.

“Victor,” V said.

Viktor Vektor nodded.

“Let me guess,” he said.

“Not here for cosmetics.”

Mai stepped forward.

“Interface implant,” she said.

Direct.

Victor studied her for a moment.

Longer than he had the others.

“First time?” he asked.

“Yes.”

No hesitation.

Victor nodded slowly.

“Alright.”

A small pause.

“You know what it does?”

“Yes.”

Another pause.

“You sure you want it?”

That one mattered.

Mai didn't blink.

“It is required.”

Victor exhaled quietly.

“Yeah,” he said.

“...that tracks.”

He gestured to the chair.

“Sit.”

Mai did.

No ceremony.

No hesitation.

Ace moved slightly closer.

Not interfering.

Watching.

Shammy stayed where she was.

The air shifted—

subtly.

Uncertain.

Victor noticed.

Not consciously—

but enough.

“Relax,” he said.

Not to Mai.

To the room.

“This won’t take long.”

He moved efficiently.

Tools ready.

Interface prepared.

No buildup.

“Local link,” he said.

“Basic account routing. Nothing fancy.”

Mai nodded once.

“Proceed.”

The procedure began.

No dramatic pain.

No escalation.

Just—

connection.

Something new—

integrating.

Victor worked in silence for a few seconds.

Then—

he paused.

Just for a fraction.

“...That’s odd,” he muttered.

Ace tensed slightly.

“What.”

Victor didn’t look up.

“Nothing bad.”

A beat.

“Just... your readings don’t line up.”

Mai’s voice stayed level.

“Define.”

Victor adjusted something.

Looked again.

“Your system—”

A pause.

“—it’s stable.”

That wasn’t the strange part.

“It just doesn’t match anything I’ve seen.”

Shammy shifted.

The air tightened—

then eased.

Mai processed it.

“Functionality.”

Victor nodded.

“Works.”

A small shrug.

“Which is what matters.”

That was enough.

The process finished.

Quick.

Clean.

Victor stepped back.

“Done.”

Mai stood.

No visible change.

But something—

had aligned.

She looked at the table beside her.

A small display flickered to life.

Numbers.

Flow.

Access.

Currency—

no longer static.

“Confirmed,” she said.

Ace nodded once.

Good.

V leaned off the wall.

“Welcome to the system,” they said.

Mai didn’t respond.

She was already processing—

mapping—

integrating.

Shammy stepped closer.

The air around Mai—

held.

Not perfectly.

But enough.

Ace turned toward the door.

“We move.”

No discussion.

No delay.

The next step was already waiting.

And now—

they could take it
on this world’s terms.

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