

# CHAPTER 12 — Rogue

The Afterlife didn't pretend to be neutral.

---

It didn't need to.

---

The moment they stepped inside, the air changed—not in pressure, not in structure—but in intent. Conversations didn't stop, but they adjusted. Eyes didn't stare, but they tracked. Every movement meant something, even when it looked like it didn't.

---

Ace registered exits first.

Three immediate. Two deeper. One not obvious.

---

Mai registered spacing.

Tables placed just far enough apart to prevent accidental overlap—but close enough that nothing stayed private unless it was meant to.

---

Shammy—

---

Shammy felt the density.

---

Not physical.

---

Human.

---

Too many intentions in one place.

All of them held together by a system that didn't forgive mistakes.

“This place is... compressed,” she said quietly.

---

V glanced at her.

---

“Yeah,” they said.

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“...that’s one way to put it.”

---

They didn’t stop.

---

Didn’t hesitate.

---

That told Ace everything she needed to know.

---

You didn’t pause here.

---

You moved like you belonged.

---

Or you didn’t move at all.

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---

They reached the bar.

---

No announcement.

No greeting.

Just presence.

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The woman behind it didn't look up immediately.

---

She finished what she was doing first.

---

Of course she did.

---

Then—

---

her gaze lifted.

---

Once.

---

That was enough.

---

Rogue Amendiares didn't react.

---

Not visibly.

---

But something in the space around the bar—

---

shifted.

---

Recognition.

---

Not of identity.

---

Of deviation.

---

“V,” she said.

---

Flat.

---

Measured.

---

“You bring something in, or just sightseeing?”

---

V leaned slightly against the counter.

---

“Brought something.”

---

Rogue’s gaze moved past them—

---

not scanning—

---

selecting.

---

Ace.

---

---

Dismissed.

---

---

Shammy—

---

---

held a fraction longer.

---

---

Then—

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---

Mai.

---

---

Pause.

---

---

“...Yeah,” Rogue said quietly.

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---

“...that tracks.”

---

---

She gestured once.

---

---

“Show me.”

---

---

No drama.

---

No buildup.

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---

Mai stepped forward.

---

The object in her hand—

---

still didn't sit right in the world.

---

---

She placed it on the counter.

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---

The sound—

---

was wrong.

---

Not loud.

---

Not soft.

---

---

Just—

---

misaligned.

Rogue didn't touch it.

She leaned in slightly.

Watched.

A few seconds passed.

Then—

she exhaled.

“...That's not standard.”

V let out a quiet breath.

“Told you.”

Rogue ignored them.

Her eyes stayed on the object.

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Not curious.

---

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Not cautious.

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---

Calculating.

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"It's stable," she said.

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---

Mai nodded once.

---

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"Locally."

---

---

Rogue's gaze flicked up.

---

---

"Define."

---

---

Mai didn't hesitate.

---

---

“It maintains internal structure.”

A beat.

---

“It does not fully agree with external reference.”

---

Silence.

---

Short.

---

Rogue leaned back slightly.

---

“...Yeah,” she said.

---

“...I’ve seen worse.”

---

That was either true—

---

or a test.

---

Ace didn’t react.

---

“Value,” she said.

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---

Rogue’s eyes moved to her.

---

---

This time—

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---

she didn’t dismiss her immediately.

---

---

“Depends,” Rogue said.

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---

On nothing she explained.

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---

“Who’s asking.”

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---

Mai answered.

---

---

“You are.”

---

---

That got a reaction.

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Small.

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But real.

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---

Rogue smiled—

---

just slightly.

---

---

“Careful,” she said.

---

“...that kind of answer gets people killed here.”

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---

Mai didn't blink.

---

---

“Noted.”

---

---

Another pause.

---

---

Rogue looked back at the object.

---

Then:

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---

“...Someone’s looking for this.”

---

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That landed.

---

---

V straightened slightly.

---

---

“How much.”

---

---

Rogue didn’t answer immediately.

---

---

She didn’t need to.

---

---

“Enough,” she said.

---

---

Ace nodded once.

---

---

“Then we sell.”

---

---

Rogue’s gaze snapped back to her.

---

---

“No.”

---

---

Flat.

---

---

Immediate.

---

---

That changed the room.

---

---

Ace didn’t move.

---

---

“Explain.”

---

---

Rogue leaned forward slightly.

---

---

“Because if you just sell something like this,” she said quietly,

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“...you don’t get paid.”

---

A beat.

---

---

“You get noticed.”

---

---

That mattered more.

---

---

Mai processed it instantly.

---

---

“Then we route through you.”

---

---

Rogue’s smile returned.

---

---

“There it is.”

---

---

She tapped the counter once.

---

---

“Now we’re talking business.”

---

---

Shammy shifted slightly.

---

---

---

---

The air around the object—

---

tightened.

---

Not dangerously.

---

But enough.

---

Rogue noticed that.

---

Of course she did.

---

Her eyes flicked to Shammy—

---

then back to the object.

---

“...It reacts,” she said.

---

Mai didn’t deny it.

“Yes.”

---

---

Rogue nodded slowly.

---

---

“Good.”

---

---

That was unexpected.

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“Means it’s still worth something.”

---

---

Ace crossed her arms.

---

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“Next.”

---

---

No interest in negotiation.

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---

Rogue respected that.

---

---

“You don’t sell this,” she said.

“You use it.”

Silence.

That wasn’t what V had expected.

“...Use it how,” V asked.

Rogue didn’t look at them.

She was already looking at Mai.

“Padre’s got a problem,” she said.

There it was.

“He can’t hand it to his usual people.”

A beat.

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---

“...and I don’t hand problems like that to anyone who can’t walk away from them.”

---

---

Ace’s expression didn’t change.

---

---

“We don’t walk.”

---

---

Rogue’s eyes sharpened.

---

---

“Good.”

---

---

That was the answer she wanted.

---

---

Mai stepped back slightly.

---

---

“Details.”

---

---

Rogue didn't elaborate.

"Church," she said.

That was enough.

"Structure's wrong."

That was more than enough.

Shammy's head tilted slightly.

The air shifted—

just a fraction.

Recognition.

"It's already active," she said.

Rogue's gaze flicked to her.

---

---

"...Yeah," she said quietly.

---

"...that tracks too."

---

---

Ace turned.

---

---

"Then we go."

---

---

No delay.

---

---

No hesitation.

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---

Rogue didn't stop them.

---

---

Didn't warn them.

---

---

She just watched them leave.

---

---

And for the first time since they had walked in—

something in her expression changed.

Not concern.

Not doubt.

Interest.

Because whatever those three were—

they weren't from here.

And for once—

that wasn't a disadvantage.

It was exactly  
what the job required.

—

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