

CHAPTER 14 — Threshold

No one moved for a moment.

Not because they didn't know what to do.

Because moving implied direction—

and direction implied agreement.

The church didn't offer either.

Ace stood at the edge of the aisle.

One step from crossing into something that had already decided it didn't include her.

She didn't hesitate.

She waited.

Mai watched the boundary.

Not where it was—

but where it wasn't.

The line didn't exist.

That was the problem.

"It's not a surface," she said.

Padre didn't answer.

He didn't need to.

Shammy exhaled slowly.

The air—

held.

Everywhere.

Except there.

At the edge—

it didn't distribute.

It didn't respond.

"It's cut off," she said.

Mai shook her head slightly.

"No."

A beat.

"It's self-contained."

That was worse.

Ace glanced between them.

"Then we go through it."

Not a question.

Mai didn't agree.

Didn't disagree.

She stepped closer—

but not forward.

Parallel again.

The distance between her and the aisle—

shifted.

Not visibly.

Just enough.

"It's already interacting," she said.

Ace's gaze sharpened.

"How."

Mai didn't look away.

"It's correcting around us."

That tracked.

Too well.

Shammy tilted her head.

Listening deeper now.

"It's not correcting," she said.

A pause.

“It’s selecting.”

Silence.

That changed the frame.

Padre opened his eyes.

“...Selecting what.”

Shammy didn’t answer immediately.

Then—

quietly:

“What version of this room gets to exist.”

That landed heavy.

Mai exhaled slowly.

“Then it’s not fixed.”

A beat.

“It’s resolved.”

Ace didn’t care about the distinction.

“Difference.”

Mai finally looked at her.

“If it was fixed, we could break it.”

A beat.

“If it’s resolved, breaking it creates a new solution.”

Ace nodded once.

“Then we don’t break it.”

That was new.

Padre watched them carefully.

“...You’re saying you’re not going to stop it.”

Mai didn’t answer.

Shammy did.

“We can’t stop something that already agrees with itself.”

That was the closest thing to truth in the room.

The object in Mai’s hand—

shifted.

Not physically.

Relationally.

The distance between it—

and the aisle—

tightened.

Mai felt it immediately.

“It’s responding,” she said.

Ace’s gaze snapped to it.

“Good or bad.”

Mai didn't answer right away.

Because the answer depended on perspective.

"It's aligning," she said.

That was both.

Shammy stepped closer—

not to the aisle—

to Mai.

The air tightened slightly—

then held.

"It recognizes it," she said.

Padre's expression shifted—

just slightly.

"...Recognizes what."

Mai looked at the object.

Then at the space.

"Itself."

That was the moment.

Not a change.

A decision.

Ace moved.

One step.

Into the aisle.

The space accepted it.

Immediately.

No resistance.

No delay.

That was wrong.

Mai stepped in after her.

Same result.

Shammy followed.

The air—

did not react.

Padre did not move.

He watched them cross a boundary—

that had taken others.

Nothing happened.

That was worse.

The aisle extended.

Longer than it had been.

Or—

more complete.

The pews on either side—

aligned more precisely now.

The walls—

held tighter.

The room—

agreed with itself more.

Mai stopped.

“This is wrong,” she said.

Ace didn’t look back.

“Explain.”

Mai’s voice sharpened.

“We’re stabilizing it.”

Silence.

That hadn’t been the plan.

Shammy felt it too.

The pressure—

was evening out.

Not because they were fixing it.

Because they were being used.

“It’s using us as reference,” she said.

Ace's hand tightened slightly.

"Then we stop."

Mai shook her head.

"No."

Flat.

That got Ace's attention.

"Why."

Mai didn't hesitate.

"Because it already accounted for us."

That locked it.

The object in her hand—

shifted again.

This time—

visibly.

Not shape.

Placement.

For a fraction of a second—

it was closer to the center—

than her hand allowed.

Then it snapped back.

Shammy flinched.

“It’s not anchored here,” she said.

Mai nodded once.

“No.”

A beat.

“It’s anchoring here.”

That was the difference.

Ace stepped forward again.

This time—

the space didn’t just accept her.

It adjusted.

The distance to the front—

shortened.

The room—

tightened.

Padre’s voice came from behind—

further away than it should have been.

“...You’re changing it.”

Mai didn’t turn.

“No,” she said.

A beat.

“It’s deciding.”

And for the first time since they had entered—

the structure didn’t feel wrong.

It felt—

complete.

And that was the most dangerous state it could reach.

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