

INTERLUDE — Safehouse Logic

The apartment wasn't theirs.

Not originally.

Nothing in Night City was.

But it held.

That was enough.

The door closed behind them—

properly.

This time—

it stayed closed.

Mai noticed.

“Consistent,” she said.

Ace dropped the case onto the table.

“Good.”

Shammy stepped inside last.

The air—

settled.

Not perfect.

But stable.

“It breathes,” she said.

V leaned against the wall.

“...Yeah,” they said.

“...barely, but yeah.”

Silence followed.

Not empty.

Occupied.

The kind that didn’t need to be filled.

Less than a month.

That was all it had taken.

From nothing—

to this.

A place.

Access.

Work.

Function.

Mai moved to the window.

Not for the view.

For the system.

Traffic patterns.

Energy flow.

Signal density.

Everything—

alive.

“Baseline established,” she said.

Ace didn’t look up.

“Explain.”

Mai didn’t turn.

“We can operate here.”

A beat.

“Reliably.”

That mattered.

Shammy shifted slightly.

The air—

followed.

“It still doesn’t like us,” she said.

Mai shook her head.

“No.”

A pause.

“It doesn’t recognize us.”

Closer.

V snorted quietly.

“...Same difference in this city.”

Ace leaned back slightly.

“Work holds,” she said.

Mai nodded.

“Yes.”

Another pause.

“Access does not.”

That was the real issue.

Ace’s gaze lifted.

“Define.”

Mai turned.

“You are flagged every time you enter a secured system.”

No sugarcoating.

“Default classification: hostile.”

Silence.

Ace didn't react.

“Works,” she said.

V laughed.

“...Yeah, until it doesn't.”

Shammy tilted her head slightly.

The air—

uncertain.

“You push through it,” she said.

A beat.

“But it pushes back.”

Ace didn’t deny it.

Mai stepped closer.

“This is inefficient,” she said.

Flat.

“Every entry increases risk.”

Another beat.

“Every system reacts.”

Ace met her gaze.

“Solution.”

Mai didn't hesitate.

“Implant.”

There it was.

No buildup.

No hesitation.

Just—

fact.

V straightened slightly.

“...Yeah,” they said.

“...that would fix a lot.”

Shammy didn't move.

The air—

shifted.

Not resisting.

Considering.

“It would change things,” she said.

Ace didn't answer immediately.

For once.

A small pause.

Not uncertainty.

Evaluation.

"How," she said.

Mai answered.

"You would be recognized."

A beat.

“Validated.”

Another.

“Allowed.”

The words hung.

Ace’s expression didn’t change.

“That’s the problem,” she said.

V blinked.

“...Wait, what?”

Mai watched her.

Carefully.

“Clarify.”

Ace leaned forward slightly.

“If it recognizes me—”

A beat.

“—it defines me.”

Silence.

That landed harder than expected.

Shammy exhaled slowly.

The air—

shifted.

Understanding.

“It gives you a place,” she said.

Ace nodded once.

“Yes.”

A pause.

“And I don’t take assigned positions.”

That was it.

V rubbed the back of their neck.

“...Okay,” they muttered.

“...that’s either really deep or really inconvenient.”

Mai didn't argue.

Because she understood both sides.

"Operational efficiency would increase," she said.

A beat.

"But autonomy would decrease."

Balanced.

Accurate.

Ace didn't respond.

She stood.

Moved to the window.

Looked out—

not at the city—

through it.

Less than a month.

And already—

it was trying to define them.

Shammy stepped closer.

The air—

soft.

“You don’t have to decide now,” she said.

Ace didn't turn.

"I already did."

That was expected.

V sighed.

"...Of course you did."

Mai watched her.

"Decision."

Ace didn't hesitate.

"No implant."

Flat.

Final.

Silence settled again.

But different now.

Defined.

Mai nodded once.

“Then we adapt.”

That was the real answer.

Shammy leaned back slightly.

The air—

steady.

Balanced.

V pushed off the wall.

“...Yeah,” they said.

“...you’re definitely going to fit in here.”

Ace didn’t respond.

She didn’t need to.

Because Night City didn’t care how you fit—

only whether you functioned.

And now—

they did.

Not perfectly.

Not cleanly.

But enough.

And somewhere—

in systems that tracked—

and classified—

and defined—

Ace remained—

unresolved.

Unrecognized.

Unassigned.

Exactly

as intended.

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