

CHAPTER 1 — Wrong Kind of Fast

The Afterlife didn't change.

Not for rumors.

Not for noise.

Only for patterns that didn't make sense.

Ace noticed it before Rogue spoke.

Not the words.

The absence.

Conversations flowed—

but not toward them.

Around.

That meant the room already knew something was wrong.

“This one’s different,” Rogue Amendiares said.

No greeting.

No setup.

Good.

Ace stopped at the counter.

“Explain.”

Rogue didn’t reach for a shard immediately.

She watched them first.

Measured.

“You ever seen someone move before they decide to?” she asked.

Silence.

V shifted slightly.

“...Define ‘before’,” they muttered.

Rogue ignored that.

“Bodies on the scene,” she said.

“Multiple.”

A beat.

“No defensive wounds.”

Another.

“No drawn weapons.”

Mai’s gaze sharpened.

“No reaction window,” she said.

Rogue nodded once.

“Exactly.”

She slid a shard across the counter.

This time—

it mattered.

Mai picked it up.

Data unfolded instantly.

Photos.

Angles.

Still frames pulled from surveillance—

all slightly wrong.

Too early.

Victims—

mid-motion—

before anything had happened.

Weapons—

still holstered—

in the moment they should have been drawn.

“This is not speed,” Mai said.

Flat.

“This is sequence failure.”

Rogue leaned back.

“Yeah,” she said.

“...figured you’d say something like that.”

Ace didn’t look at the shard.

“Target.”

Rogue tapped the counter once.

“Not loud,” she said.

A beat.

“No rampage.”

Another.

“No escalation.”

That narrowed it.

“He’s not hunting,” Ace said.

Rogue nodded.

“He’s not chasing either.”

A pause.

“He’s just... ahead.”

That was worse.

Shammy shifted slightly.

The air—

tightened.

“He doesn’t wait,” she said.

Rogue’s eyes flicked to her—

just for a second.

“...No,” she said quietly.

“...he doesn’t.”

Mai scrolled.

Paused.

Zoomed.

One frame.

The image wasn't clear—

but it didn't need to be.

A head.

Side profile.

And there—

embedded at the temple—

something that didn't belong.

Not chrome.

Not metal.

Black.

Not reflective.

Not textured.

Just—

absence.

It didn't catch the light.

It removed it.

Mai stilled.

“Object,” she said.

Not a question.

Rogue didn't answer immediately.

Because she didn't need to.

"...Yeah," she said.

"That's what my client thinks too."

Ace finally looked at the image.

Just once.

Then away.

"Location."

Rogue tapped the shard.

“Cluster of hits,” she said.

“Same district.”

A beat.

“He doesn’t stay.”

Another.

“He doesn’t need to.”

V exhaled slowly.

“...So what’s the play,” they asked.

Rogue’s gaze hardened slightly.

“You don’t chase him,” she said.

Flat.

“You won’t catch up.”

Silence.

Short.

Ace nodded once.

“Value.”

Rogue didn’t smile.

“High.”

Of course it was.

Mai closed the shard.

Set it down.

“Constraint required,” she said.

Ace turned.

“We go.”

No delay.

No negotiation.

Rogue didn't stop them.

But as they moved—

she added one thing.

“Hey.”

Ace didn’t turn.

“What.”

Rogue’s voice didn’t change.

“This one’s not faster than you.”

A beat.

“He just gets there first.”

That was the difference.

And as they stepped back into the city—

Night City didn't react.

Didn't adjust.

Didn't care.

Because somewhere out there—

in a place where people should have had time to think—

something had already decided—

and acted—

before anyone else

even knew

it was happening.

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