

CHAPTER 6 — Aftermath Delay

The city didn't notice.

It never did.

By the time anyone arrived—

it was already over.

Not cleaned.

Not contained.

Just—

finished.

Ace stepped out into the street.

No rush.

No hesitation.

Behind her—

the building held.

No distortion.

No collapse.

Everything—

back in sequence.

Mai followed.

The difference—

subtle—

but there.

Her gaze moved—

faster.

Cleaner.

Less delay between observation—

and conclusion.

Shammy stepped out last.

The air—

settled.

Breathing again.

Even.

“It’s gone,” she said.

Not relief.

Confirmation.

Mai shook her head slightly.

“No.”

A beat.

“It failed.”

That was different.

V leaned against the wall—

exhaled.

“...Yeah,” they muttered.

“...and I’m not sure that’s better.”

Ace didn’t respond.

She watched the street.

Flow.

Movement.

Noise.

Everything—

normal.

That was the illusion.

“Payment,” she said.

Direct.

V snorted.

“...Yeah, Rogue already transferred.”

Of course she had.

Mai confirmed—

instant.

No delay.

“Received,” she said.

Clean.

Efficient.

Ace glanced at her.

Just once.

Long enough to notice.

The difference.

Shammy noticed it too.

The air—

shifted—

around Mai—

not because of pressure—

but because of pace.

“You’re thinking differently,” she said.

Mai didn’t deny it.

“Yes.”

Flat.

Accurate.

No hesitation.

That was new.

V pushed off the wall.

“...So,” they said.

“...that thing—whatever it was—”

A beat.

“...we done with that?”

Mai didn’t answer.

Because “done” wasn’t correct.

Ace did.

“It’s not here,” she said.

A pause.

“That’s enough.”

For now.

They moved.

Not together—

not separate—

just—

aligned enough to function.

The street swallowed them quickly.

No one looked twice.

No one ever did.

And somewhere—

in the space between events—

in the gap where decision should have been—

something adjusted.

Not the implant.

Not the man.

Something else.

Because Objects like that—

didn't disappear.

They relocated.

They reformed.

They waited.

For a system—

a pattern—

a structure—

they could break again.

Ace slowed—

just slightly.

Not enough to stop.

Just enough to register.

“...That would’ve been faster,” she said.

Quiet.

Not to anyone.

Just—

fact.

Mai didn't respond.

She already knew.

Shammy did.

The air—

shifted.

V glanced sideways.

"...You're thinking about it."

Ace didn't answer.

She didn't need to.

Because for the first time—

in a city that rewarded speed—

and punished delay—

the idea wasn't abstract anymore.

It was measurable.

Concrete.

And closer—

than it had been before.

Not a decision.

Not yet.

But no longer—

unnecessary.

And in Night City—

that was how it started.

Not with desire.

Not with need.

But with one simple realization—

that being exactly what you were—

might not be enough

to keep up

with what came next.

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