

## CHAPTER 4 — They Were Expecting You (Rewrite)

The room didn't distort.

It corrected.

That was worse.

Lines didn't just hold—

they aligned.

Too clean.

Too exact.

After everything behind them—

this didn't feel stable.

It felt decided.

Ace stepped in.

No hesitation.

No adjustment.

The space accepted her immediately.

No delay.

Like it had already accounted for her weight.

Mai followed—

her gaze moving fast—

then slowing—

then stopping entirely for a fraction too long.

"...it's holding itself," she said.

Not fully certain.

"Not naturally."

Shammy stepped in last.

The air settled—

instantly.

No lag.

No resistance.

It didn't need to adjust.

It already knew how to sit.

"That's not normal," she said quietly.

A beat.

"It didn't learn us."

It didn't have to.

They weren't alone.

Figures stood in the room.

Not placed.

Not positioned.

Just—

present.

They didn't shift when the Triad entered.

Didn't reorient.

Didn't react.

Like they had already done that part.

The symbol was there.

Not displayed.

Not emphasized.

Worn.

Integrated.

Like it had always been part of them.

One stepped forward.

Not initiating.

Continuing.

"You made it," they said.

Calm.

Certain.

No trace of relief.

No confirmation.

Just—

completion.

Ace stopped.

Measured the distance.

The space didn't move.

Didn't need to.

Mai stepped slightly off-line.

Testing.

The geometry didn't break.

It didn't even try.

"You expected us," she said.

The figure inclined their head.

"Yes."

No delay.

No uncertainty.

That wasn't belief.

That was memory.

Shammy shifted—

just slightly—

trying to feel where the pressure would form.

It didn't.

The air stayed—

even.

That was the problem.

Ace spoke.

“Object.”

Direct.

Flat.

The figure looked at her—

and didn’t answer.

Not immediately.

Then—

“They call it that,” they said.

A beat.

“We don’t.”

Mai’s eyes narrowed.

“Location.”

Flat.

The figure’s gaze moved—

past her—

to Ace.

“You already crossed once,” they said.

Calm.

Measured.

No emphasis.

No weight.

Like it was already resolved.

For a moment—

Ace didn’t respond.

Didn’t react.

But something—

slipped.

Not a memory.

Not clearly.

Just—

a fraction of a step—

that felt familiar in the wrong way.

Gone before it could settle.

“...irrelevant,” she said.

Flat.

But not perfectly timed.

The figure watched her.

Longer now.

Then nodded.

Not agreement.

Acknowledgment.

“You don’t remember all of it,” they said.

No accusation.

No explanation.

Just—

fact.

Silence held.

Not tension.

Completion waiting for the next step.

Ace didn’t engage.

“Object.”

Again.

Same tone.

Same demand.

The figure turned.

Not away.

Forward.

Like the conversation had already ended.

They gestured.

The space behind them didn't open.

It was already open.

It just—

became the direction.

"There," they said.

No barrier.

No threshold.

No transition.

That was worse.

Mai didn't move.

"This isn't defensive," she said.

A beat.

"They're not preventing access."

Shammy tilted her head.

The air—

still even.

Too even.

"They're not deciding anything," she said.

"...it's already decided."

That locked it.

Ace stepped forward.

No hesitation.

No correction.

She moved past them—

and for a moment—

the space didn't adjust.

Like she had already passed.

Then it aligned again.

Mai followed—

slower now—

not trusting the timing.

Shammy last.

The air didn't shift.

Didn't need to.

Behind them—

the figures didn't turn.

Didn't move.

Didn't track.

Like they had already seen what came next.

Like this part—

had already finished.

And somewhere—

just beyond the space they were entering—

something that had been taken

wasn't waiting

to be found—

it was waiting

to be placed back

into a position

that had already been made for it.

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