

ACE 37.5 — Safehouse: Decision Fatigue

Rain tapped softly against the safehouse windows.

Not wrong.

Not delayed.

Just—

Rain.

Ace stared at the table.

Mai stared at the shard in her hand.

Shammy stared at neither.

“...okay,” Ace said finally.

A beat.

“...we need to eat.”

Mai nodded.

“Yes.”

Silence.

Nothing happened.

Ace frowned.

“...right.”

Mai looked up.

“We should decide.”

Shammy tilted her head slightly.

“...or let it happen.”

Ace blinked.

“...that’s not how food works.”

Shammy didn’t answer.

Mai exhaled.

“We’re overcomplicating this.”

Ace leaned back.

“Yeah,” she said. “So pick something.”

Mai opened her mouth—

Paused.

Closed it.

“...no.”

Ace stared at her.

“...no?”

Mai shook her head slowly.

“If I choose,” she said, “I’m optimizing.”

A beat.

“That’s predictable.”

Ace squinted.

“...so what, we just starve?”

Shammy shifted slightly.

The air moved with her this time.

Normal.

“...we don’t choose,” she said.

Ace stared at her.

“...you two are killing me.”

□ **ATTEMPT 1**

Mai raised the shard.

“Random selection,” she said.

Ace nodded immediately.

“Good. Do that.”

Mai hesitated.

“...no.”

Ace closed her eyes briefly.

“...why.”

Mai’s voice stayed calm.

“Because it’s still a selection process,” she said.

A pause.

“Which makes it predictable at a higher level.”

Ace stared at her.

“...you just made random predictable.”

“Yes.”

“...I hate that.”

□ **ATTEMPT 2**

Ace stood up.

“Fine,” she said. “I’ll pick.”

Mai nodded.

“Go ahead.”

Ace pointed at the first thing on the menu.

“Pizza.”

Silence.

Mai tilted her head slightly.

“...you always pick pizza first.”

Ace froze.

“...right.”

She dropped her hand.

“...not pizza.”

Shammy’s gaze drifted.

“...so something else.”

Ace pointed again.

“Burgers.”

Mai didn't even look.

“Second most common fallback.”

Ace's eye twitched.

“...okay, you know what—”

She sat back down.

“...I'm not playing this game.”

▣ **ATTEMPT 3**

Shammy moved closer to the table.

“...we could not eat yet.”

Ace turned slowly.

“...no.”

Shammy blinked.

“...why not.”

Ace leaned forward.

“Because,” she said slowly, “I’m hungry.”

Shammy considered that.

“...that’s valid.”

Mai pinched the bridge of her nose.

“This is spiraling.”

□ **ATTEMPT 4**

Mai straightened.

“We split decisions.”

Ace frowned.

“...explain.”

“You choose category,” Mai said.

“I choose vendor.”

Shammy tilted her head.

“...and I?”

Mai paused.

“...you—”

Silence.

“...you stabilize.”

Ace snorted.

“...that’s not a role in food ordering.”

Shammy didn’t react.

“...it is now.”

▣ EXECUTION

Ace pointed.

“...fine. Category.”

A beat.

“...no fast food.”

Mai nodded.

“Good.”

She looked at the shard.

Scrolled once.

Stopped.

“...Thai.”

Ace blinked.

“...okay, that actually works.”

Shammy exhaled softly.

The air settled.

“...this feels right.”

All three paused.

“...wait,” Ace said.

Mai froze.

“...that felt right.”

Shammy blinked.

“...yes.”

Ace leaned back slowly.

“...that’s predictable.”

Silence.

Mai closed her eyes.

“...we just built a stable outcome.”

Shammy nodded.

“...aligned.”

Ace stood up again.

“...nope.”

□ COLLAPSE

“Cancel it.”

Mai didn't move.

“...we haven't ordered yet.”

“Good,” Ace said. “Cancel it anyway.”

Shammy looked between them.

“...we were close.”

Ace pointed at the table.

“...too close.”

□ TIME CHECK

Mai glanced at the clock.

“...twenty-seven minutes.”

Ace stared.

“...you’re kidding.”

“No.”

Shammy blinked.

“...we haven’t eaten in twenty-seven minutes?”

Ace dragged a hand down her face.

“...I hate him.”

□ **THE KNOCK**

Knock.

All three froze.

Slowly—

Ace turned toward the door.

“...don’t.”

Mai didn’t move.

Shammy tilted her head.

“...that wasn’t random.”

Knock.

More precise this time.

Ace stepped forward.

Opened the door.

□ DELIVERY

Theta-24 stood there.

Badger in front.

Box in hand.

“...food delivery,” he said.

Silence.

Ace stared at the box.

“...no.”

Badger raised an eyebrow.

“We flipped a coin.”

Mai closed her eyes.

“...that’s worse.”

Shammy exhaled.

“...much worse.”

Grouse leaned against the wall behind Badger.

“You gonna take it or what?”

Ace didn’t move.

“...what is it.”

Badger shrugged.

“Doesn’t matter.”

A beat.

“Statistically, one of you was going to order this anyway.”

Ace stared at him.

Long.

Hard.

Then—

She took the box.

Slowly.

“...we’re not predictable,” she said.

Badger grinned faintly.

“Sure you’re not.”

□ **FINAL BEAT**

Door closed.

Silence.

Ace set the box on the table.

Opened it.

All three leaned in.

Paused.

"...of course," Mai said quietly.

Ace exhaled.

"...pizza."

Shammy blinked.

"...that feels right."

Ace closed the box.

"...we're doomed."

Rain tapped against the window.

Perfect timing.

For once—

No one reacted.

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