

Ace noticed it first because nothing hurt.

That was wrong.

Not “good wrong.” Not relief. Just... absence. The kind of absence that left edges behind. Muscles that should have been screaming were quiet. Joints that should have complained were still. Even the small background ache that lived somewhere behind the ribs after a bad run—gone.

She didn’t trust it.

She sat on the edge of the safehouse couch, elbows on her knees, staring at the floor like it might explain itself if she waited long enough. The room was dim, lit mostly by a single strip of warm light along the far wall. Night City bled neon through the half-closed blinds, but it felt distant here. Filtered. Contained.

Too contained.

Ace flexed her fingers once.

Nothing.

She frowned.

“Nope.”

Mai didn’t look up from the table.

“What?”

“This,” Ace said, gesturing vaguely at her own body. “This is suspicious.”

Mai paused mid-note, then continued writing.

“You are not injured.”

“I know.”

“Then the absence of pain is expected.”

Ace leaned back slightly, squinting at her.

“That sentence is illegal.”

“It is accurate.”

“It is creepy.”

Mai finally set the pen down and looked at her.

“You are used to baseline strain. Remove it, and your perception flags the difference as anomalous.”

Ace pointed at her.

“See? You’re doing it again.”

"Doing what?"

"Making rest sound like a system error."

Mai opened her mouth.

Closed it.

Considered.

"...fair."

From the other side of the room, Shammy shifted.

She had been standing near the window, one hand lightly against the frame, looking out at the fractured glow of the city. Or maybe not looking at anything in particular. With Shammy, it was hard to tell whether her attention was directional or... distributed.

She turned slightly.

"You are both louder than the room."

Ace blinked.

"That's because the room is too quiet."

Shammy tilted her head.

"That is also true."

Ace pushed herself upright, rolling one shoulder, then the other. The movement was smooth. Too smooth.

"I don't like it."

Mai leaned back in her chair.

"You don't like being functional without resistance."

"I like knowing where my limits are."

"Your limits are still there."

"Yeah, but they're not... talking."

Shammy's mouth curved faintly.

"They are resting."

Ace made a face.

"Don't side with her."

"I am not siding," Shammy said. "I am observing."

"That's worse."

Mai tapped the table once with her fingers.

"You are tense because you do not know how to stop being tense."

Ace stared at her.

"That's not—"

She stopped.

Thought about it.

"...okay, maybe a little."

Mai nodded once, like she'd just confirmed a calculation.

"Then we fix the cause."

Ace narrowed her eyes.

"That sentence has never led to anything simple."

"It can."

"No, it can't."

"It can," Mai repeated, calmer this time. "Muscle tension is physical. We address it physically."

Ace leaned back again, slower.

"What are you proposing?"

Mai met her gaze directly.

"Massage."

Silence.

Ace blinked once.

Twice.

"No."

Mai didn't react.

"Why not?"

"Because," Ace said, gesturing vaguely again, "that is how normal people fix normal problems."

"Yes."

"We are not normal people."

"That does not make your muscles fictional."

Ace opened her mouth.

Closed it.

Looked at Shammy.

Shammy was already moving.

Of course she was.

She cleared a section of the room without asking, shifting a low table aside, straightening a folded blanket, adjusting the light slightly so it softened instead of cut.

Ace pointed at her.

"See? This is how it starts."

Mai stood.

"This is how it works."

"This is how it goes wrong."

"Explain the failure mode."

Ace hesitated.

"...I don't know yet, but I'll recognize it when it happens."

Shammy glanced over her shoulder.

"You will tell us."

"Absolutely."

Mai gestured toward the cleared space.

"Sit."

Ace stared at her.

"No."

Mai waited.

Ace looked at Shammy.

Shammy waited.

Ace exhaled slowly through her nose.

"This is a bad idea."

Mai said nothing.

Ace stood.

Walked over.

Dropped onto the blanket with all the grace of someone surrendering to a situation she had already decided to complain about for the next ten minutes.

"Fine."

Mai knelt behind her.

"Try not to talk."

"No promises."

Mai placed her hands on Ace's shoulders.

Ace flinched.

Not away.

Just... reacted.

Mai paused.

"Relax."

"I am relaxed."

"You are not."

"I am relatively relaxed."

"You are braced."

"I am prepared."

"For what."

Ace thought about it.

"...everything."

Mai's thumbs pressed into the muscle just below Ace's neck.

Ace inhaled sharply.

"Okay—what was that—"

"Pressure."

"That was a crime."

"That was correct application."

"That was—"

Mai adjusted slightly, slower this time, less direct.

Ace's next protest died halfway out.

Her shoulders dropped a fraction.

Mai noticed.

Did not comment.

She shifted rhythm. Less clinical. Still precise, but not dissecting. Following tension instead of attacking it.

Ace tried to stay upright.

Failed.

"...don't get used to this."

"I am not."

"You're enjoying this."

"I am solving a problem."

"You're enjoying solving it."

"That is unrelated."

Ace snorted.

Then went quiet.

Not fully.

But less.

Mai's hands moved with increasing confidence, mapping out the tight lines across Ace's back, shoulders, spine. Each adjustment found resistance, then eased it. Not all at once. Not completely. Enough.

Ace's breathing slowed.

Not something she would ever admit out loud.

But it did.

After a while, she muttered, almost as an afterthought:

"...okay, that one worked."

Mai's voice stayed neutral.

"I am aware."

"Don't say it like that."

"Like what."

"Like you knew it would."

"I did."

Ace huffed.

But didn't move.

"Your turn."

Ace sat back, rolling her shoulders again, testing the difference like she didn't believe it would hold.

It did.

She didn't comment.

Instead, she looked at Shammy.

"You."

Shammy stepped forward without hesitation and sat where Ace had been.

There was no tension in her posture.

That was the problem.

Ace circled once, like she was assessing an unfamiliar target.

"Say if this hurts."

"It doesn't," Shammy said.

Ace frowned.

"That's not helpful."

"It is accurate."

"That is the problem."

Shammy's hair shifted slightly as Ace's hands came down onto her shoulders.

Ace started too firm.

Not violently.

But with intent.

Shammy didn't react.

At all.

Ace paused.

"...okay, no."

She adjusted. Less force. More focus.

Still nothing.

Shammy's breathing didn't change. Her posture didn't shift. There was no resistance to work against. No clear tension points.

Ace's expression tightened.

"What am I even doing here."

Shammy spoke softly.

"You are trying to find where I hold myself."

"I don't see it."

"That is because I do not hold it the same way you do."

Ace slowed further.

Her hands moved, searching now instead of pressing. Testing. Light pressure, then slightly more, then back again.

Something shifted.

Barely.

A change in Shammy's breathing, so small it almost didn't count.

Ace stilled.

"...there."

Shammy's voice lowered.

"Yes."

Ace focused.

Not harder.

Better.

The adjustment was subtle. Precision over force. The kind of control she usually only used with

blades.

Shammy exhaled.

Not relief.

Alignment.

Ace felt it under her hands and didn't comment.

Didn't joke.

Didn't push it further than necessary.

For a few moments, the room went quiet again.

Not empty.

Just... occupied.

When Shammy moved away, Mai didn't wait.

She sat down without being asked.

That alone told Ace enough.

Ace looked at her.

"Don't expect miracles."

"I expect competence."

"That's a high bar."

"For you?"

Ace smirked.

"Fair."

Her hands came down on Mai's shoulders.

Immediate difference.

Tension.

Controlled, layered, precise tension. Not chaotic like Ace's. Not diffuse like Shammy's.

Structured.

Too structured.

Ace pressed once.

Mai inhaled sharply.

“...that was excessive.”

“You’re locked.”

“I am functional.”

“You’re locked.”

Mai didn’t answer.

Ace adjusted.

Less force. More angle.

The reaction changed.

Not a flinch.

A release.

Small.

But real.

Mai’s posture shifted.

Just enough.

Ace noticed everything.

“Yeah. There it is.”

“Do not narrate.”

“I’m not narrating, I’m—”

“Observing out loud.”

“Same difference.”

“No.”

Ace smirked again, but quieter this time.

Her hands moved slower now, following the tight lines along Mai’s shoulders, down her back. Not technical. Not elegant.

Effective.

Mai tried to stay upright.

Failed.

Her shoulders dropped.

Her breathing lost its strict pattern.

Ace felt it.

Didn't comment.

Didn't ruin it.

Good.

For a while, none of them spoke.

Just movement.

Breath.

The soft shift of fabric.

Outside, Night City flickered and roared and argued with itself in neon and noise.

Inside, the safehouse held.

No alarms.

No voices.

No systems trying to define them.

Just three people who had, for once, decided not to fight anything.

Mai closed her eyes.

That was rare.

Ace noticed.

Didn't say anything.

Better.

"Don't get used to this."

Ace's voice broke the quiet first.

Of course it did.

Mai didn't open her eyes.

"You already like it."

"I tolerate it."

"That is not the same."

"It is close enough."

Shammy shifted slightly where she sat, watching them both.

"You are quieter now."

Ace didn't look at her.

"Don't get used to it."

Shammy smiled.

Not wide.

Just enough.

Mai exhaled slowly and leaned forward, out of Ace's hands.

The moment broke.

Not badly.

Just... ended.

Ace flexed her fingers again.

Still no pain.

Still didn't trust it.

But it felt different now.

Not empty.

Reset.

She glanced at Mai.

At Shammy.

Then leaned back against the couch again.

"We are not making this a routine."

Mai opened one eye.

"You already said that."

"I mean it this time."

"You meant it last time."

"That was different."

“How.”

Ace thought about it.

Didn’t find a good answer.

“...shut up.”

Mai’s mouth curved.

Shammy leaned back against the wall, eyes half-closed.

For a while, no one moved.

No one needed to.

And for once—

nothing happened.

Exactly as intended.

—

© 2025-2026. “World of Ace, Mai and Shammy” and all original characters, settings, story elements, and concepts are the intellectual property of the author. All rights reserved.

Non-commercial fan works are allowed with attribution.

Commercial use, redistribution, or adaptation requires explicit permission from the author.

Contact: editor at publication-x.com

Check out our SubscribeStar page at <https://subscribestar.adult/konrad-k>

From:

<https://datavault.ws/> - **DataVault**

Permanent link:

<https://datavault.ws/doku.php/canon:ace42.1:start>

Last update: **26/04/2026 16:10**

