

## ## Ace & Mai — Interlude: The Ugly Key

They stumbled into the apartment like two shadows peeling off the night, the door clicking shut behind them with a sound too loud for a hallway that wanted to stay asleep. Ace's hand lingered on the knob, fingers twitching as if half-expecting some crimson filament to snake out from the woodwork. But it was only a door. Just their shitty little apartment in the bowels of the city, where neon bled through the blinds in erratic pulses.

Mai kicked her boots off, one thudding against the wall, the other vanishing under the couch. The noise turned into a half-laugh, half-sob. "Home sweet fucking home," she muttered, voice raw from shouting primes into the face of horror. The air smelled of stale takeout and that faint metallic tang that always clung after they fought things that wanted the world neat—blood, or ozone, or both.

Ace leaned against the wall, coat sliding off one shoulder, the bandages Mai had slapped on in the alley already spotting through. Her violet eyes fixed on Mai: messy silver hair, streaked with dust and the ghost of threads that had tried to weave them into obedience. "You okay?" she asked, voice low, rasped thin.

Mai nodded, and both of them knew it was a lie. She crossed the room, flicked on the yellow lamp that threw ruin across clutter—chalk stubs, a stack of books, a pizza box no one had claimed responsibility for. The city outside honked and wailed and lived. She grabbed the cheap whiskey, poured two glasses without asking. Handed one to Ace, their fingers brushing—sparks in the ordinary. "To not being threaded," she said, clinking.

They drank. Burnt throats, sharp edges. Ace set hers down too hard. "Violet's not done. I can feel her, like... threads in my head, tugging." Her hand rubbed her temple, as if erasure were muscle work.

Mai touched her arm. "Primes. Count them with me."

"Two," she began.

"Three," Ace answered, almost smiling.

"Five."

"Seven."

They went on until they lost count and laughed at themselves. It wasn't magic—just math, cold and wrong enough to anchor. By the time they reached thirty-one, Mai's smile had softened into something human again. She tugged at Ace's coat. "Off. You're bleeding through."

Ace shrugged out of layers. Mai's fingers traced edges of wounds, gentle, but her eyes clinical. "You look like shit."

"Thanks. You look like a goddess of war."

She snorted and pulled Ace into a hug. Survival wrapped them tight.

They collapsed on the couch, limbs tangled, neon rainbows sliding down the glass. Mai rested her head on Ace's shoulder, breath warm against her neck. "Remember the first time? After that warehouse?"

"You bit my hand," Ace said.

"You were screaming primes at the ceiling," Mai laughed, and caught Ace's hand again, nipping her knuckles. Their ritual: bite, cover, anchor.

"Violet called me the ugly key," Ace muttered.

Mai's eyes flashed. "Fuck her. You're my ugly key. Perfect things shatter. You don't."

She kissed her then, sudden, hungry, whiskey and blood in the taste. Hands roamed, not frantic, but claiming. The couch creaked. They didn't care.

Later, in their bedroom that still smelled of chalk dust, they stripped the rest away. Ace's body bore scars like a map—some old, some new, faint red lines the threads had tried to tattoo. Mai traced them with her lips, whispering, "These are yours now."

They moved together slowly, intimacy a ritual of its own. Bite and kiss, nails and scars, whispers of primes tangled with gasps. Violet's laughter brushed the edges of Ace's mind, but Mai's warmth drowned it. They laughed once when a knee hit the nightstand, then clung tighter, awkward angles making them real. Release came quiet, shaking, messy, perfect in its refusal of neatness.

After, tangled in sweat-creased sheets, Mai's head rose and fell with Ace's heartbeat. "We're okay," she said softly.

"Yeah," Ace whispered, and almost believed it.

—

Morning gray leaked through blinds, unforgiving. The city shouted awake—horns, curses, rain spitting down. Ace slipped out from Mai's arm, feet cold on the floor. Coffee gurgled bitter, chalk scraped against wall.

Old marks had faded. She drew new ones: crooked circles, primes stabbed into their centers, ugly lines biting. Defiance made visible.

Mai padded in wearing Ace's shirt, hair wrecked, eyes sharp. She sipped black coffee and leaned against the counter, watching. "Drawing already?"

"Need to. Violet's echoes."

She joined her, hand over his, guiding a jagged line. "Make this one bite." Together they carved a mark with teeth. Chalk dust smeared their fingers. Mai laughed when Ace sneezed.

The toaster popped; both flinched, hearts sprinting like back in the loom. Mai bit Ace's hand until the panic reset. "Gross," Ace said.

"You're mine," she shot back, eyes daring.

They scrawled more marks across sill and cupboard, primes sprawling. Mai sketched a crooked key and wrote \*Ace\* above it. "Identity."

Ace rolled her eyes. "Flattering."

"Better than Violet's polished version." She kissed his cheek, leaving a chalk print. "Marked you."

They ate toast with crumbs everywhere. Coffee went cold. They stayed close, shoulders bumping. A

knock upstairs rattled pipes—false alarm—but it made them laugh nervously.

Mai showered; steam fogged the mirror, hiding reflections. Ace stood in the doorway, passed her a towel. She pulled her in by the wrist, kissed her wet, mint on her lips. The towel slipped. They laughed and let it.

Dressed again, they drew one more symbol on the wall—both hands on the chalk, strokes blending: primes, teeth, a crooked heart. Imperfect union.

The city wailed, flawed and alive. Their apartment wore scars in chalk and dust, alive too. Ace touched the diagonal under her sternum, Mai pressed her hand to it, and together they whispered the only liturgy they trusted.

“Three.”

“Seven.”

The rest could wait.

—

© 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

From:

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

Permanent link:

<https://datavault.ws/doku.php/canon:ace6.5:start>

Last update: **16/03/2026 17:27**

