

Ace 8.5: Small on Purpose — Interlude - Small on Purpose

Story: Ace & Mai – The Shadow and The Spark **Chapter:** 8.5.Interlude **Wordcount:** ~530

Characters: Ace, Mai **Location:** Apartment **Arc:** Arc 1 – The Shadow and The Spark

Ace 8.5 — Small on Purpose

The radiator ticked like a second heart. Outside, fog pressed against the window with the patience of something that wanted in but had all night to wait. The flat was warm in the way only a too-big couch and too-many blankets could make it. Small on purpose.

Ace sat cross-legged on the couch, jacket abandoned on the floor, a strip of gauze looped loose around her forearm where concrete had kissed too hard. Mai knelt beside her, hair damp from the sink, sleeves pushed back, hands steady. She cleaned the scrape with movements that were neat enough to be ritual.

“You heal faster than this deserves,” Mai murmured.

“I like the attention,” Ace replied, smirk pulling at her mouth even as she hissed softly when the alcohol bit.

Mai’s eyes lifted—silver catching the radiator’s glow. “You’d fight a building just to end up here.”

Ace tilted her head, the smirk softening. “Didn’t fight the building. Told it no. There’s a difference.”

Mai taped the gauze down, her touch lingering an unnecessary second. The pause was heavier than the scrape itself. Ace let the silence stretch, savoring the closeness.

“Your turn,” Ace said. She reached for Mai’s wrist, fingers brushing the shallow bruise forming under her jacket cuff. Mai didn’t pull away. Ace peeled the fabric back and saw the mark, thumb tracing it gently. “You bruise pretty.”

Mai rolled her eyes, but her breath caught. “That’s not a compliment.”

“Sure it is. Means you let me see.”

Mai’s laugh was quiet, half-caught in her throat. She leaned back against the couch. Ace followed without hesitation, shifting until they were side by side, shoulders pressed. The radiator’s rhythm matched theirs after a while—three heartbeats braided into one.

Ace reached for her hand. Mai gave it, fingers interlacing without fuss, but the warmth of it was a confession. They sat like that until the fog outside looked more like a wall than a view.

Ace turned, forehead brushing Mai’s temple, voice low. “We keep coming back from places that don’t want us. This—” she pressed their hands together harder “—this wants us.”

Mai turned, met her mouth halfway. The kiss was not tentative; it had waited through too many collapsing walls to waste time now. It deepened, slow and deliberate, until the couch was no longer too big, until the flat was no longer small. The room was exactly their size.

Clothes found the floor like they had planned it. Skin pressed to skin, warmth replacing every cold corridor. The rhythm was theirs alone—sometimes banter, sometimes gasps, sometimes silence that meant more than either.

When it was over, they stayed tangled. Mai's head rested in the hollow of Ace's shoulder, Ace's arm curved around her waist like it had been made for that one function. The radiator ticked approval.

Ace kissed Mai's hair, a rare tenderness unguarded. "With you?" she whispered. "Always."

Mai's fingers traced idle circles on Ace's chest, half-asleep already. "Inside voice," she murmured.

The fog outside gave up trying to enter. The flat, stubborn and warm, kept its promise. They belonged exactly here, exactly together, small on purpose and infinite in practice.

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