

## Black File — Interlude: “Looks Harmless”



The safehouse kitchen was not designed for this.

It was designed for:

- quick prep
- functional meals
- and getting out

Not for tradition.

Not for comfort food.

Definitely not for volume.

---

The table was full.

Flatbread stacks.  
Bowls of rice porridge.  
Melted butter.

Too much of everything.

---

Shammy stopped at the doorway.

“...this looks safe.”

---

Mai didn't look up.

“It is not.”

---

Ace was already seated.

Watching.

Not the food.

The setup.

---

Theta-24 arrived.

Badger saw the table and immediately lit up.

“OH THIS—THIS LOOKS INNOCENT”

---

HeavenlyFather slowed.

“...that’s worse.”

---

Grouse stepped forward.

Looked once.

Measured.

“...acceptable.”

---

Shammy frowned.

“That word has never meant anything good with you people.”

---

Mai folded one sultsina with precise movements.

Flatbread.

Porridge.

Butter.

Fold.

---

She placed it on a plate.

“Standard preparation,” she said.

---

Badger leaned in.

“...that’s it?”

---

Mai looked at him.

“Yes.”

A beat.

“Consumption is the variable.”

---

□

First round.

---

Ace took one.

Ate.

---

Grouse did the same.

---

Badger followed.

“Okay—yeah—this is fine—this is actually good—”

---

Shammy took one cautiously.

Paused.

“...oh.”

HeavenlyFather nodded once.

“...this is a trap.”

---

□

Second round.

---

Still fine.

---

Badger:

“I DON’T SEE THE PROBLEM”

---

Mai:

“Delayed saturation.”

---

Shammy:

“I hate that term.”

---

□

Third round.

---

The shift started.

Not obvious.

Not dramatic.

---

Ace slowed slightly.

Barely.

---

Grouse adjusted posture.

Small change.

---

Badger kept going.

Confidence intact.

---

"...still easy," he said.

---

Mai watched.

"Cumulative load increasing."

---

Shammy stared at her.

"...stop saying things like that."

---

□

Fourth round.

---

The room got quieter.

---

No one commented immediately.

---

Badger swallowed.

---

Paused.

“...okay.”

---

He looked at the next one.

Didn't pick it up.

---

“...okay.”

---

Shammy leaned back.

“...there it is.”

---

□

Fifth round.

---

Ace continued.

No complaint.

No reaction.

---

Grouse continued.

But slower now.

Measured.

---

Badger looked between them.

“...this is psychological warfare.”

---

Mai:

“Incorrect.”

A beat.

“It is mass.”

---

Shammy laughed once.

“...that’s worse.”

---

□

Sixth round.

---

No one rushed.

---

The food wasn’t the problem.

That was the problem.

---

Ace finished another.

Placed her hand on the table.

Paused.

---

Grouse did the same.

---

They both knew.

---

Mai said it.

“Threshold approaching.”

Badger:

“STOP SAYING THAT”

---

□

Seventh round.

---

Badger tried.

Failed halfway.

Put it down.

---

“...I reject this.”

---

HeavenlyFather nodded.

“Accepted.”

---

□

Eighth round.

---

Shammy stared at hers.

“...I don't want this.”

---

Mai:

“Noted.”

---

Shammy:

"I'm serious."

---

Mai:

"So is the structure."

---

Shammy closed her eyes.

"...fine."

She ate.

Immediate regret.

---

"...this is violence."

---

□

Ninth round.

---

Ace stopped.

---

Grouse stopped.

---

Silence.

---

Mai looked between them.

"Equilibrium reached."

---

Badger:

“WHAT DOES THAT MEAN”

---

Mai:

“No further intake without failure.”

---

□

Decision point.

---

Grouse reached.

Stopped.

---

Ace reached.

Stopped.

---

They looked at the table.

---

Then at each other.

---

Grouse:

“...draw?”

---

Ace:

“No.”

---

She picked one up.

---

Badger:

“NO—DON’T—”

---

Ace ate it.

---

Silence.

---

Grouse exhaled once.

Looked at his.

Didn't move.

---

“...accepted.”

---

## □ **Aftermath**

---

Badger:

“THIS IS RIGGED”

---

Shammy leaned on the table.

“I feel like gravity increased.”

---

Mai:

“Mass intake confirmed.”

---

HeavenlyFather:

“...this was predictable.”

---

Grouse nodded once.

“...acceptable loss.”

---

Badger grinned slowly.

“Oh no.”

A beat.

“Administration.”

---

## □ **Epilogue**

---

Safehouse.

---

Grouse sat.

Again.

---

Papers.

Badger’s handwriting.

System interface.

---

He stared.

Long.

---

“...this is worse than before.”

---

Shammy:

“I warned you twice.”

---

Mai:

“Cognitive fatigue will increase error rate.”

---

Ace walked past.

Paused briefly.

---

“Still inefficient.”

---

Grouse looked up.

---

“...noted.”

---

And continued.

---

Because some things look harmless—

until they aren't.

---

**End.**

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