

Black File — Interlude: “Delayed Reaction”



The burger looked normal.

That was the problem.

Safehouse.

Late.

Table.

Six identical burgers.

No markings.

No warning.

Shammy stared at them.

“...that’s it?”

Mai didn’t look up.

“Capsaicin concentration is the variable.”

Badger leaned forward.

“...that’s just a burger.”

HeavenlyFather:

“...no, it isn’t.”

Grouse stepped closer.

Looked once.

Measured.

“...acceptable.”

Ace sat.

Already decided.

“Rules,” Grouse said.

Ace:

“Eat.”

Silence.

Badger:

“I LOVE SIMPLE RULES”

□

First bite.

Ace.

No reaction.

Grouse.

No reaction.

Badger.

Paused.

“...okay this is actually good.”

Shammy took a careful bite.

“...yeah—no—this is fine.”

Mai:

“Initial response latency expected.”

Badger:

“STOP SAYING THINGS LIKE THAT”

□

Second bite.

Still nothing.

Badger:

“SEE? NOTHING.”

HeavenlyFather:

“...wait.”

Shammy blinked.

“...okay.”

A beat.

“...okay.”

□

Third bite.

The delay ended.

Badger froze.

“...oh.”

Shammy inhaled sharply.

“...oh no.”

Ace didn't stop.

Grouse didn't stop.

Mai watched.

“Onset confirmed.”

Badger stood up instantly.

“THIS IS A PROBLEM”

□

Heat.

Not sharp.

Not explosive.

Spreading.

Badger grabbed water.

Drank.

Stopped.

“...that made it worse.”

Mai:

“Confirmed.”

Shammy:

“WHY WOULD IT DO THAT”

Mai:

“Diffusion.”

Shammy:

“I HATE SCIENCE”

□

Ace kept eating.

No visible reaction.

Grouse slowed.

Not from pain.

From calculation.

Badger paced.

“THIS ISN’T NORMAL HEAT—THIS IS—”

He stopped.

“...this is malicious.”

HeavenlyFather nodded.

“...yes.”

□

Shammy leaned on the table.

“...this is worse than spicy.”

Mai:

“Different mechanism.”

Shammy:

“DO NOT EXPLAIN IT”

□

Halfway.

Badger:

“I CAN'T FEEL MY FACE”

Mai:

“Incorrect.”

Badger:

“THEN WHY DOES IT FEEL LIKE THAT”

Mai:

“Signal overload.”

Shammy:

“STOP HELPING”

□

Ace finished half.

Still steady.

Grouse reached halfway.

Paused.

That pause—

mattered.

Mai:

“Deviation detected.”

Badger:

“HE’S BREAKING AGAIN”

Grouse:

“...noise.”

But his hand didn’t move.

□

Shammy sat down.

Hard.

“...this is betrayal.”

HeavenlyFather:

“...this is consequence.”

□

Final phase.

Ace continued.

Same pace.

Grouse tried.

Stopped.

Badger:

“DON'T DO IT—IT GETS WORSE”

Ace took another bite.

No reaction.

Shammy stared.

“...how.”

Mai:

“Tolerance variance.”

Shammy:

“UNFAIR”

□

Last bites.

Ace finished.

Set the burger down.

Silence.

Grouse looked at his.

Didn't move.

“...accepted.”

□ **Aftermath**

Badger was on the floor.

“...this is chemical warfare.”

HeavenlyFather handed him milk.

“...drink.”

Badger drank.

Paused.

“...okay that helps.”

A beat.

“...a little.”

Shammy sat completely still.

“...I regret all decisions.”

Mai:

“Data confirmed.”

□ **Epilogue**

Later.

Grouse.

Again.

Papers.

Badger’s handwriting.

He stared.

Longer than before.

“...this is escalating.”

Shammy (from the couch):

“You lost three times.”

Mai:

“Pattern consistent.”

Ace walked past.

Didn’t stop.

“Still inefficient.”

Grouse looked up.

Eyes slightly narrowed.

“...noted.”

And continued.

Because pain fades.

But paperwork—

doesn’t.

End.

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