

[← Chapter 5](#) | [Index](#) | [Chapter 7 →](#)

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## Chapter 6 — Warrior-Sister

Shammy found Ace on the roof of the inn.

The night air was cold, sharp, real. Shammy stood at the edge of the rooftop, reading the atmosphere, looking for signs of the storm she'd felt building since they arrived.

Ace sat with her back against the chimney, her knees drawn up, her hand pressed flat against her chest.

"Can't sleep?" Shammy asked.

Ace shook her head. "The pressure's getting worse. Every time I go down, I feel more of it. The battle. The fire. The dying."

Shammy crossed the rooftop and sat beside her. The stone was cold beneath her legs, but she didn't mind. The cold was real. The stone was real.

Ace was real.

"Tell me." Shammy said.

Ace was quiet for a long moment. Her eyes fixed on something Shammy couldn't see.

"The void below the plaza." Ace said finally. "When I touched the door, I felt what was on the other side. Not just waiting. Watching." She paused. "It knew we were coming."

"Knew how?"

"I don't know." Ace's voice dropped. "But it felt... familiar. Like something I should recognize."

Shammy didn't push. She knew Ace. Pushing only made her retreat deeper. Instead, she let the silence stretch. Let Ace find her own words.

After a while, Ace spoke again.

"When I was younger, before Mai, before you, I used to feel things like this. Traces. Echoes. I thought I was broken."

Shammy raised an eyebrow. "Broken?"

"Normal people don't feel violence in stone. Normal people don't sense death in empty spaces." Ace's hand pressed harder against her chest. "I learned to hide it. To not talk about it. To pretend I was like everyone else."

"What changed?"

"Mai found me." The ghost of a smile crossed Ace's face. "She was analyzing patterns in a city that

shouldn't exist. I was sensing traces in a building that had burned down. We ended up in the same place, asking the same questions."

"And she didn't think you were broken?"

"She thought I was data." The smile flickered. "The only person who ever looked at what I could do and didn't call it a curse."

Shammy let that settle. The night air moved around them. Not the held breath of the city below, but real wind. Real atmosphere.

"And me?" Shammy asked.

Ace looked at her. "You and I are the same. Both feeling things other people can't. Both carrying storms we didn't ask for."

Shammy's hand came up unconsciously. Electricity flickered between her fingers.

"When I first found out what I was." Shammy said. "I destroyed a building. Not on purpose. The storm just... came out. And I couldn't stop it."

"Was anyone hurt?"

"No." Shammy's voice was quiet. "But it could have been different. I could have been different. Every day, I hold the storm back. Every day, I choose not to let it out."

Ace's hand found Shammy's arm. The contact was grounding. Pressure, presence, realness.

"That's what warrior-sisters do." Ace said. "Hold each other when the storm builds. Make sure the lightning goes where we want it to."

Shammy looked at Ace. At the compressed tension in her body, the weight she carried, the pressure she was still learning to trust.

"You're carrying something too." Shammy said. "Not just the traces. Something else."

Ace's jaw tightened. "I'm fine."

"You're not." Shammy's voice was gentle but firm. "I can feel it in the air around you. A building charge. Like you're about to break."

Ace didn't respond. Her eyes went distant.

"I keep seeing things." She said finally. "Flashes. Battles that haven't happened yet. Fire that's still burning. People who haven't died."

"Visions?"

"I don't know." Ace's hand pressed harder against her chest. "When I go deep into the traces, I see things that shouldn't be there. Things that haven't happened. Or things that happened somewhere else."

Shammy understood. The storm in her own body worked the same way. Electricity that came from somewhere else, power she didn't fully control.

"Then we're both carrying things we don't understand." Shammy said. "Both holding back storms that want to break."

Ace nodded. The pressure in her chest seemed to ease slightly.

"Together." She said.

Shammy squeezed her arm. "Together."

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They stayed on the roof until dawn.

The city below began to wake. Doors opening, people emerging, smiles beginning. The clocktower showed 7:15. The bakery clock showed 4:23. The tailor's clock showed 11:05.

All wrong. All frozen. All waiting.

"The door beneath the plaza." Ace said. "We broke the seal. Whatever's behind it knows we're here now."

"And it said it was waiting for us."

"Yes."

Shammy felt the atmosphere shift as the sun rose. The held breath of the city, the suppressed storm, the pressure that had been building since they arrived.

It was close now. The breaking point.

"We go back today." Shammy said.

"Yes."

"And we find out what's been buried here."

Ace stood. Her hand dropped from her chest, but the tension didn't leave her body.

"Whatever it is." Ace said. "I have a feeling we already know. We just don't remember."

Shammy rose beside her. The morning air crackled with static. The storm she'd been holding back, the lightning that wanted out.

"Then let's go remember."

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*end of chapter six*

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[← Chapter 5](#) | [Index](#) | [Chapter 7 →](#)

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