

CHAPTER 3 — Ownership Drift

The doors opened before they arrived.

Not fast.

Not early.

On time.

That was the problem.

Ace stepped out first.

The hallway—

silent.

Not empty.

Complete.

Mai followed.

Her eyes moved—

tracking structure.

Everything aligned.

No drift.

No correction.

No hesitation.

“This is already active,” she said.

Ace didn’t slow.

“Good.”

Shammy stepped out last.

The air—

tight.

Contained.

“This isn’t breathing,” she said.

V stayed close to the elevator.

“...Yeah,” they muttered.

“...that tracks with ‘rich people paranoia’.”

“No,” Mai said.

Flat.

“This is acceptance.”

That word again.

They moved forward.

The penthouse doors—

opened.

No delay.

No scan.

No request.

Just—

entry.

Ace stopped at the threshold.

One step from crossing.

“This one matters,” she said.

Mai nodded once.

“Yes.”

No hesitation.

They stepped inside.

The space—

perfect.

Too perfect.

Glass walls.

City below.

Light—

controlled.

Everything—

exact.

Ace moved first.

The floor responded—

not physically—

structurally.

It accepted her.

Immediately.

Mai felt it.

“It’s assigning position,” she said.

Ace didn’t stop.

“Then we move.”

Shammy stepped in—

and paused.

The air—

wrong.

Not broken.

Selective.

“It’s not pushing anything out,” she said.

A beat.

“It’s letting everything in.”

That was worse.

V exhaled quietly.

“...Yeah, that’s not how security is supposed to work.”

Mai moved deeper into the room.

Her gaze shifted—

not across objects—

across ownership.

The system—

recognized her.

Not as guest.

Not as intruder.

As—

valid.

“That’s incorrect,” she said.

Ace glanced at her.

“Explain.”

Mai didn't hesitate.

"There is no single owner here."

Silence.

That landed.

Shammy stepped further in.

The air—

tightened.

Then—

spread.

"It doesn't separate people," she said.

"It absorbs them."

That locked it.

A figure moved at the far end of the room.

Slow.

Deliberate.

Not reacting.

Existing.

V tensed.

“...That’s not the client.”

Ace didn’t reach for anything.

“Then what.”

The figure turned.

Not surprised.

Not hostile.

Just—

present.

“I live here,” they said.

Calm.

Certain.

Mai’s gaze sharpened.

“That is incorrect.”

The figure didn’t react.

“No,” they said.

“It isn’t.”

That was the moment.

Ace stepped forward.

The space—

accepted both of them.

No conflict.

No resistance.

Two “owners”—

valid.

At the same time.

Shammy inhaled sharply.

The air—

fractured.

“It’s already happened,” she said.

Mai nodded slowly.

“Yes.”

A beat.

“It’s not failing.”

Another.

“It’s expanding.”

That was worse.

Ace’s gaze hardened.

“Then we stop it here.”

Mai didn’t answer.

Because the answer wasn’t simple.

The keycard—

resting on a surface nearby—

waited.

Not hidden.

Not protected.

Because—

in a system that accepted everything—

there was no need to guard anything.

And that—

was exactly

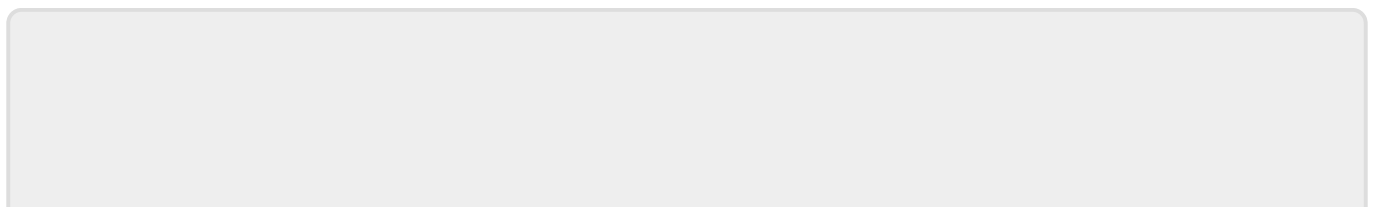
what had broken.

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