

ACE 35 — “Blind Transport”

Chapter 9 — Exit Without Object

They did not look back.

Not because they were afraid of what they would see.

Because looking back—

would complete it.

Ace moved first.

Already past the point where the system had failed to resolve her position.

Her steps no longer aligned with the space beneath them.

Not drifting.

Not unstable.

Unreferenced.

Mai followed—

but not directly.

She didn't try to match Ace's trajectory.

Didn't try to reconstruct the geometry.

That phase was over.

Now—

she was choosing where the system *would have to catch up*.

“Don't anchor to me,” she said.

Ace didn't answer.

She already wasn't.

Shammy came last.

And for the first time since entering—
the air moved with her.

Not smoothly.

Not cleanly.

Wild.

Unbounded.

Three pressure systems—
colliding—
refusing to settle.

The room—
if it could still be called that—

struggled.

Not collapsing.

Trying to exist.

Behind them—

something tried to reassert order.

The pedestals—

flickered.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

Then—

not quite.

Mai felt it.

Not as movement.

As correction.

“...it’s rebuilding,” she said.

Ace didn’t slow.

“...let it.”

A beat.

“...we’re not staying.”

Shammy’s breath caught—
just slightly—

“...it doesn’t need us to stay.”

Silence.

Mai didn’t look back.

“...no.”

A beat.

“It needs us to agree.”

That was the difference.

The exit—

should have been there.

The door.

The seam.

The line that decided.

It wasn't.

Ace stopped.

Not hesitation.

Recognition.

"...it's gone."

Mai stepped forward.

Slow.

Measured.

The wall in front of them—

perfect.

Seamless.

Unbroken.

Not closed.

Never opened.

"...no," she said quietly.

A beat.

"...it's waiting for alignment."

Shammy exhaled.

The air tightened again—

not under her control—

under the system's.

"...it wants one frame," she said.

Ace didn't blink.

"...it doesn't get one."

Silence.

Then—

Mai moved.

Not forward.

Not back.

Across.

A sharp deviation—
breaking the last remaining consistency between them.

Shammy followed—
but not in the same direction.

Her path cut through Mai's—
not intersecting—
not avoiding—

ignoring.

Ace didn't move at all.

She held.

One point.

Three observers.

Three different truths.

No agreement.

The wall—

flickered.

Not visibly.

Existentially.

For a fraction of a second—

it wasn't a wall.

It was—

a possibility.

Ace stepped.

Not through.

Not into.

Out.

The world snapped back.

Sound returned first.

Distant traffic.

Low hum.

Wind moving across empty structures.

Then light—

real light—

uneven—

imperfect—

alive.

Then space—

distance behaving again.

Mai stumbled—

just slightly—

as her internal model recalibrated to a world that actually resolved.

Shammy inhaled—

sharp—

the air rushed in—

unfiltered—

unmanaged—

hers again.

Ace didn't stop.

Didn't turn.

Didn't check.

"...count," she said.

Silence.

Mai didn't answer immediately.

Shammy didn't either.

Not because they couldn't.

Because they understood.

Finally.

"...don't," Mai said.

A beat.

"...it doesn't apply anymore."

Ace nodded once.

That was enough.

Behind them—

the structure stood.

Matte.

Silent.

Unchanged.

But for a moment—

just a fraction—

its surface rippled.

Not outward.

Inward.

As if something—

inside—

had failed to decide

what had just left.

And then—

it stilled.

They walked.

No urgency.

No chase.

No aftermath.

Just—

distance.

Afterlife didn't feel different when they returned.

That was the second thing that didn't hold.

The noise was back.

Full.

Layered.

Alive.

But now—

they could hear

where it wasn't.

Small gaps.

Tiny discontinuities—
where sound should have been
and wasn't.

Mai noticed.

Of course she did.

She didn't comment.

Not yet.

Rogue was already there.

Same booth.

Same glass.

Different ice.

She didn't ask how it went.

Didn't need to.

Her eyes moved once—

counting.

Not objects.

People.

"...you're early," she said.

Ace didn't sit.

"...job's done."

Rogue tilted her head.

"...you don't have them."

Silence.

Mai slid into the booth.

Not relaxed.

Not tense.

Resolved.

"We completed the transfer," she said.

Rogue's gaze sharpened.

"...to where."

Mai met her eyes.

Didn't look away.

"...out of agreement."

A beat.

"...they don't stabilize outside the system."

Shammy sat last.

The air around the table shifted—

subtly—

alive again.

"...they're not objects," she said.

Rogue didn't respond immediately.

She lifted the glass.

Watched the surface.

For a moment—

it stilled.

Perfect.

Flat.

Then—

a ripple.

Small.

Precise.

Uncaused.

Rogue set the glass down.

"...client's not going to like that," she said.

Ace's voice didn't change.

“...client doesn’t understand what they asked for.”

Silence.

Rogue considered that.

Then—

she smiled.

Not amused.

Not pleased.

Just—

recognizing something useful.

“...no,” she said.

A beat.

“They don’t.”

The booth settled.

The noise of Afterlife flowed around them again—

imperfect.

Incomplete.

Alive.

Shammy leaned back slightly.

“...we didn’t bring anything out,” she said.

Mai’s eyes flicked once—

toward the room.

Toward the gaps.

“...yes we did,” she said quietly.

A beat.

“...we brought the possibility with us.”

Silence.

Ace didn't respond.

Didn't need to.

Because somewhere—

between one sound

and the next—

something

almost

moved.

—

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