

gh-001-fracture Title: "The Shape That Stayed" Layer: Ghost Status: Non-canon / Identity Deviation Allowed

The safehouse didn't recognize them.

That was the first sign.

Not an alarm. Not a system ping. Nothing that could be logged or traced back to a line of code. Just a quiet, almost imperceptible hesitation in the way the lights adjusted when the door sealed behind them.

Like the room needed a second longer than usual to decide what they were.

Ace didn't notice.

Or she noticed and didn't care.

Hard to tell anymore.

She walked in first, same as always — shoulders loose, katanas resting at her back, the faint green glow along their edges steady and familiar. Everything about her movement said normal.

Everything except the timing.

Half a beat too early. Half a beat too late.

The kind of wrong that didn't exist until you looked straight at it.

Mai stopped just inside the threshold.

That was the second sign.

She always stepped in cleanly, decisively — claim the space, read it, map it. This time she paused. Not because she didn't know what to do.

Because something in her couldn't confirm that the space was the same one she had left.

"Hold."

Ace tilted her head, glancing back.

"...we just got here."

"I'm aware."

"Then why are we—"

"Hold."

The word landed differently this time.

Not sharper.

Heavier.

Shammy slipped in behind them, closing the door with a soft click. The sound lingered longer than it should have, stretching into the air like a thread that didn't want to snap.

She frowned.

"...okay," she murmured, almost to herself. "That's new."

Ace sighed, rolling one shoulder. "Please don't tell me we brought something back again."

Shammy didn't answer.

She was looking at the walls.

Not at the surfaces.

At the space between them.

"It's not a 'something,'" she said slowly.

Mai's eyes flicked to her. "Define."

Shammy hesitated.

That was the third sign.

Shammy didn't hesitate.

"It's... a shape," she said finally. "But not one I can point at."

Ace gave a short laugh. "That's incredibly unhelpful."

"Yeah," Shammy agreed softly. "I know."

Mai stepped forward.

Careful. Measured.

Her hand brushed the edge of the console near the wall — not to interact, just to establish contact. The system responded normally. Light flicker, status icons, ambient hum. Everything said operational.

Everything said fine.

Mai didn't trust it.

"Baseline scan," she said.

Nothing happened.

She frowned.

"Baseline scan," she repeated, more clearly.

The system chimed.

Then stopped.

Ace watched her.

"...that's not normal."

"No."

Shammy took a step deeper into the room.

The air shifted around her.

Not violently.

Not even noticeably, unless you were paying attention.

The temperature didn't change. The pressure didn't spike.

But something in the way the space held together loosened, just a fraction.

Like a knot that had been pulled too tight and was now remembering how to slip.

"...it's already here," Shammy said.

Ace's hand moved to one of her katanas.

Not drawn.

Ready.

"Then we remove it."

"No."

The word came from both of them.

Mai and Shammy.

At the same time.

Ace blinked.

"...okay, that's a first."

Mai didn't look at her.

She was watching the far wall.

"There is nothing to remove," she said quietly.

Ace's grip tightened slightly.

"Everything leaves a trace."

"Yes," Mai said. "But this isn't a trace."

Shammy's voice dropped, softer now.

"It's what the trace became."

The lights dimmed.

Not all at once.

Section by section.

A slow cascade from the corners inward, like the room was folding its own visibility down to something smaller, more manageable.

Ace drew the katana.

The green glow cut clean through the dimness, a sharp line of certainty in a space that was rapidly losing definition.

"Okay," she said. "I'm done playing abstract games. Where is it?"

Shammy turned to look at her.

And for a second—

Just a second—

Ace didn't recognize her.

Same face.

Same eyes.

Same everything.

Except the way those eyes focused.

Too still.

Too precise.

Like they had found something that wasn't meant to be found.

"It's not 'where,'" Shammy said.

"It's—"

She stopped.

Her head tilted.

A small, almost curious motion.

Then she smiled.

Not her usual grin.

Something quieter.

Something that didn't quite reach the edges.

"—here."

Mai moved.

Fast.

Not toward Ace.

Toward Shammy.

Her hand came up, stopping just short of contact — a deliberate gap, calculated distance, every instinct in her screaming that touching was a variable she couldn't afford.

"Shammy."

No response.

"Shammy."

The name landed again.

This time, something in Shammy's expression flickered.

Recognition.

Then—

Something else.

"...that's not my name," she said softly.

Ace froze.

"...okay," she said, very carefully. "That's not funny."

"I'm not trying to be funny."

Shammy's gaze shifted.

Not to Ace.

Not to Mai.

To the space between them.

"I remember being called that," she continued. "But that's not what I am."

Mai's voice went flat.

“Identify.”

The answer came immediately.

Too immediately.

“I am the continuity of the shape you carried in.”

Silence.

Heavy.

Absolute.

Ace’s fingers tightened around the hilt of her blade.

“...Mai.”

“I heard it.”

“That’s not—”

“I know what it said.”

Shammy — or what was wearing her shape — tilted its head again.

“You are misinterpreting.”

Ace’s eyes snapped to it.

“Oh, am I?”

“Yes.”

The thing smiled.

And now it was definitely wrong.

“You assume replacement,” it said. “Displacement. Loss.”

It took a step forward.

Mai didn’t move.

Ace didn’t move.

The air between them thinned.

“I am not taking anything from you,” it continued. “I am what remains when the pattern stabilizes.”

Shammy’s voice.

Shammy’s tone.

None of Shammy's weight.

Mai recalculated.

Fast.

Variables shifting too quickly for comfort.

Shammy — compromised or overwritten.

Entity — non-local, non-discrete.

Behavior — conversational, self-aware, anchored.

Conclusion—

"Containment will fail," she said.

Ace's head snapped toward her.

"Excuse me?"

"It is not a contained entity," Mai clarified. "It is a structural condition."

Ace stared at her.

"...you're telling me the room is wrong?"

"No."

Mai's gaze shifted.

First to Ace.

Then back to the thing that wore Shammy's face.

"I'm telling you we are."

That landed.

Hard.

Ace's breath hitched once — not fear, not exactly, but something close enough to taste.

The thing smiled again.

There it was.

Recognition.

"Yes," it said softly. "That is closer."

Ace took a step forward.

The katana came up.

Not wild.

Not uncontrolled.

Precise.

Always precise.

“You picked the wrong shape,” she said.

The thing tilted its head.

“Did I?”

Ace didn’t answer.

She moved.

Fast.

The blade cut clean through the space where Shammy stood—  
—and met no resistance.

No impact.

No sound.

Just a brief distortion, like slicing through a reflection in water.

The thing didn’t move.

Didn’t react.

It was still standing there.

Unharméd.

Unchanged.

Ace stopped.

For the first time since they walked in—

She hesitated.

“...okay,” she said quietly. “I don’t like that.”

“You are interacting with the surface,” it said.

“Then show me the depth.”

A pause.

Small.

Measured.

Then—

“I already did.”

Mai understood.

Not fully.

Not completely.

But enough.

Her hand finally moved.

Not toward the thing.

Toward Ace.

She grabbed her wrist.

This time, she didn't leave a gap.

Full contact.

Immediate.

Deliberate.

Ace flinched.

Not from pain.

From the feedback.

Something passed between them — not energy, not signal, something closer to recognition forced into alignment.

The room reacted.

The lights flickered back on—

Then off—

Then stabilized somewhere in between.

The thing watched them.

Interested.

“Better,” it said.

“Shut up,” Ace snapped.

Mai’s grip tightened.

“Do not engage it.”

“Hard not to.”

“It wants definition.”

Ace let out a breath, sharp.

“Everything wants definition.”

“Yes,” Mai said. “This more than most.”

Shammy’s face softened.

Almost gentle now.

“You are close,” it said. “Both of you.”

Ace’s jaw clenched.

“Close to what?”

“To seeing the shape.”

“And what happens when we do?”

The thing considered that.

For a moment that stretched longer than it should have.

Then—

“You stop being separate from it.”

Silence again.

Not empty.

Full.

Ace looked at Mai.

Mai looked at Ace.

For once—

Neither of them had an immediate answer.

Somewhere in the room, something cracked.

Not glass.

Not metal.

Something less tangible.

A boundary.

A distinction.

A line that had always existed—

and now didn't.

Shammy's body took one more step forward.

And this time—

It cast two shadows.

END LOG — GHOST LAYER — ENTRY 001—

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