2000. Human Beasts

Tamar was enveloped by blinding blue radiance for a moment, and then thrown violently to the ground. Her zweihander fell out of her hand, rattling as it slid across the surface of the bloodsoaked bone. Her armor was scorched and melted in several places, revealing patches of gruesomely burned skin.

Wisps of smoke rose from beneath it, dissipating in the air.

Rain froze for a heartbeat, her mind numb.

‘N-no…’

What had hit here was no different from true lightning, more than capable of turning a human body to ash. However, the young Legacy must have possessed a Memory that granted her a high enough level of resistance to elemental attacks.

That was how she had survived.

Nevertheless...

She was still wounded and sprawled helplessly on the ground, temporarily unable to defend herself.

And her adversary was unscathed, still holding a sword in her hand.

Blue arcs of electricity were still dancing across her armor.

[Move!]

Her brother's voice shook Rain awake from her stupor.

The young Feather Knight took a step forward, raising her sword with an unsteady hand. Her face was pale – perhaps because she was unused to killing people, or perhaps simply because it was illuminated by the blue shine of her fearsome Aspect.

A moment later, Rain jumped over Tamar and lunged at the young woman, prepared to strike.

Of course, she had not forgotten to pour essence into the Pièce de Résistance, and limit the scope of its defense to only electricity – thus rising her protection against it as high as possible.

The young Feather Knight flinched and shifted her gaze to the new enemy.

Her sword moved, and another bolt of lightning crackled as it shot at Rain.

Its speed was too dire to dodge, or even react. Rain only knew that she had been hit a moment later, when her vision drowned in a sea of white, and terrible pain pierced her entire body.

...But it wasn't that bad.

She was blinded and in pain, but had suffered little actual harm. It seemed that the protective Memory her brother had crafted for her was quite superior to what Tamar, an actual Legacy, possessed.

She was surprisingly unhurt.

The pain was truly terrible, though, and the electrical charge messed up her control over her body quite badly.

'Ah... hell...'

Rain was blinded, but she still possessed the ability to sense the shadows. She had been trained to navigate the world with this sense, as well.

It would have to do until she regained her vision.

She still had to deal with the Feather Knight.

A moment later, she battered the young woman's sword away and rammed her shoulder into the enemy's chest, sending both of them flying away from Tamar and tumbling to the ground.

Rain was disoriented, but she still jumped to her feet first and slashed down with her sword, feeling a terrifying sense of urgency.

She was wary of her adversary.

Her movements were fluid and terrifyingly swift, but the young Feather Knight still managed to block the black tachi. She was still on her knees and a little dazed, using both hands to receive Rain's blow on the blade of her sword.

Rain could vaguely see that her enemy's helmet had flown off, and her golden hair was fluttering in the wind. The image was vague and blurry, though, making it hard to discern any details.

As soon as the two blades collided, Rain let out a shocked hiss and staggered away.

'What a... cunning wench...'

Her golden-haired foe had used her Aspect power in an insidious way. Instead of channeling it into a bolt of lightning, she simply channeled it into her steel sword. From there, it traveled through the blade of Rain's own tachi and into her body, bringing with it even more pain.

"Aargh!"

Rain's momentary fumble gave the pretty Feather Knight all the time she needed to rise.

The next moment, though, she had to duck with a startled expression as Rain unceremoniously tossed the tachi at her face.

By the time the enemy reacted, Rain was already upon her, grabbing her sword with one hand and delivering a devastating punch to her chest with another.

Rain's hands were protected by the gloves made from black, lusterless leather. Leather was a far better insulator than the blade of the black tachi, so all she felt from touching the enemy's sword and breastplate was a little sting.

Her current strength, at the same time, was dreadful enough to make the steel of the young Feather Knight cave in a little, and for a stifled scream to escape from her mouth.

...But not enough to make the young Legacy lose her edge, apparently.

In the next second, the Feather Knight's knee slammed into Rain's side, and her fists sent her reeling back in agony – one rammed into her ribs, the other slammed into her chin, making Rain taste blood.

'Why did she have to be proficient in hand-to-hand combat, as well...'

She staggered back, then instantly spun and dove down, sweeping her enemy's feet.

Not giving the golden-haired knight an opportunity to rise, Rain pressed her into the ground and punched her in the face, causing bright blood to shoot from the young woman's nose.

A moment later, the two of them were wrestling on the blood-soaked ground, trying to crush, break, and strangle each other. The white feathers on the young Legacy's armor were soon marred and turned red, and Rain's armor was no better.

Rain was stronger... but the young Feather Knight was still covered in a blue net of electric arcs, which continuously hurt and numbed the adversary.

By then, Rain's vision had almost returned, revealing the dirty, bloodied, pitiful face of her enemy. The fear and desperation in her eyes... and frightening killing intent burning in them, as well.

For a moment, Rain felt disconnected from her own mind and body.

At that moment, the two of them did not seem like warriors... or even humans, really. There was no grace, skill, or honor in their violent and ugly struggle.

Instead, they were no different from dirty, wild beasts tearing at each other in a murderous frenzy.

Still, one of them would have to die, and the other one was going to live.

That... was the essence of combat.

Rain had no time or luxury to hesitate, think, or even feel.

She could only strive to assure that, at the end, she was the one who survived.