2418 VIPs  
  
The assailants moved with speed and discipline one would expect from well-trained soldiers, not thugs who would go around robbing banks. Before Rain could even come to terms with the shifting situation, she and Tamar were being escorted into the depths of the building.  
  
The Tyrant was leading the way, with six of his men following. The two hostages were walking behind, with Corsair and Fleur guarding them.  
  
Which meant that four Awakened bandits stayed behind to guard the rest of the hostages, and were now alone with Ray.  
  
'Can we take them down?'  
  
Rain and Tamar werе restrained with enchanted cuffs that made their essence peculiarly sluggish and prevented them from summoning any Memories. The former would have interfered with their ability to use Aspects Abilities if not for the Mark of Shadows. Every member of the Shadow Clan was a master at controlling essence due to bearing the Mark and undergoing extensive training - so, they were all but immune to the insidious influence of the enchanted restraints.  
  
Rain had dismissed the Epithets she had assigned herself to avoid the Tyrant's wrath, and was now considering her next steps.  
  
First. She glanced at the rifles the assailants were carrying. It was strange to see Awakened using contemporary weapons instead of Memories. Sure, while it was difficult to seriously harm a Master with a bullet, Awakened themselves were far more susceptible to modern firearms. In fact, it was only marginally harder to kill them with a high-powered shot than it would be a mundane human. So, the rifles posed quite a real threat to Rain, Tamar, and the other Shadows. Still, possibly because she had spent so many years in the Dream Realm, seeing Awakened carrying modern weapons felt very peculiar. More than that, Memories were simply a better choice - not only because they were deadlier, more powerful, and could possess potent enchantments, but also because they were far easier to carry and conceal.  
  
Rain signed a question:  
  
[Why are you armed that way?]  
  
It was Corsair who responded, hinting that he was in charge of this mission.  
  
[Memories are unique, so they are easier to identify and trace. Anonymity is key in these matters.]  
  
She considered his words for a moment. That was an unexpected but logical perspective. But the readiness of his response was a little peculiar.  
  
[You seem to know a lot about this stuff. Robbed many banks recently?]  
  
Corsair responded calmly. It was a weird thing, but after practicing for a while, one could discern tone and еmotion in the movement of the other person's shadow when communicating with shadow signs. Fleur, for example, signed softly and smoothly. The new recruit, on the other hand, signed precisely and mechanically, with the measured indifference of a finely tuned machine.  
  
[.Not many.]  
  
Rain and Tamar looked at each other. Where, exactly, had her brother found this guy?  
  
He was sort of cool.  
  
'Wait, did he really rob a bank before?'  
  
Come to think of it, there had indeed been a similar mission in the works.  
  
The assailants were descending into the basement of the bank, with one of them quickly unlocking the armored doors that stood in their way from a handheld console. They seemed well-prepared for the job, even if locking themselves in a bank with the govеrnment forces guaranteed to arrive and surround the building rapidly was pure madness.  
  
Rain signed another question:  
  
[What is their plan, exactly?]  
  
Corsair responded after a short pause.  
  
[We were not told the details. One of them has a spatial movement Aspect Ability, though. He is their escape route.]  
  
'.Wait, he must be really new. How come he uses shadow signs so confidently, then?'  
  
It took her ages to learn this peculiar manner of communication. Was this guy a genius?  
  
That was so unfair!  
  
Rain suppressed her envy and asked the final question:  
  
[So, what do we do? Shall we take them down?]  
  
Corsair shifted faintly, and she could feel his cold gaze.  
  
[Please don't do anything yet, Princess. At least not until they reveal all their cards.]  
  
Rain frowned. It was reasonable to assume that the Tyrant had an ace or two up his sleeve, but.  
  
[What if they hurt the hostages?]  
  
His response was curt.  
  
[They won't.]  
  
She had no choice but to believe him.  
  
'So.'  
  
Corsair, Fleur, and Ray were here to spy on the assailants and learn something about them, then take them down. Which meant that these were not easy criminals.  
  
Rain wanted to scratch her head, but sadly, her hands were restrained. Who, then? Misguided loyalists refusing to accept the fall of the Valor and Song regime? Disciples of some strange doomsday cult?  
  
Several of those had sprouted out of nowhere after Sister-In-Law made her explosive announcement.  
  
Finally, they reached the vault. This one, the Tyrant's tech specialist could not unlock - so, the leader of the assailants invited Tamar forward, gesturing to the complicated lock.  
  
"If you will, Lady Tamar."  
  
She stared at him chillingly for a few seconds, then nodded to the lowest part of the contraption.  
  
"Am I supposed to scan my fingerprints while my hands are tied behind my back?"  
  
Her clan had a deposit box in the vault, so her data would by stored in the bank VIP client repository - that alone would probably not unlock the door, but it would help the tech specialist deceive the system.  
  
The robbers studied her silently. Finally, the Tyrant pushed one of them forward.  
  
"Take the cuffs off."  
  
Then, he turned his glassy gaze back to Tamar.  
  
"Please don't do anything rash, young lady. If you do, I'll start with cutting off a finger. I know that you won't be deterred by such a easy threat - Legacies can be quite stubborn, after all - but do understand that I don't mean your finger. I mean you little friend over there and it won't end with a single finger, either."  
  
Rain instinctively clenched her fists, hiding her fingers. Tamar remained nonchalant, staring at the Tyrant darkly, while Corsair tilted his head a little.  
  
'Poor Tyrant. he doesn't know what's coming for him.'  
  
Rain almost pitied the man.  
  
The cuffs came off.  
  
Tamar walked over to the lock and unhurriedly scanned her retinas and fingerprints. Lastly, she channeled a little bit of her essence into a special spelltech pattern that lit up, recognizing it. Soon, the heavy door let out a series of low clicks and opened slowly.  
  
Far above, in the foyer of the bank, Ray was sitting on the floor among the frightened hostages. His hands were zip-tied behind his back, and there was an appropriately scared expression on his face. His eyes, however, hid a hint of boredom. The four robbers were watching the hostages like hawks, but no one seemed to be paying him much attention.  
  
Ray remained motionless. But. Unnoticed by anyone, a black snake slowly slithered out of his sleeve. The snake coiled on the floor, then raised its triangular head. Its fangs bit into the zip tie, easily slicing it apart.  
  
Ray brought his hands forward and rubbed his wrists. Then, he reached back and picked up the snake gently. A moment later, its body rippled and turned into a razor-sharp black blade.  
  
Still ignored by everyone, Ray inhaled deeply and slowly rose from the ground.