2424 The Word is Mightier than a Grenade  
  
The flames suddenly grew in intensity, and a wave of unbearable heat washed over the bank vault. The figure imprisoned in the slowly blooming explosion shuddered and convulsed, a strangely distorted scream reaching Rain's ears.  
  
She knew that the Tyrant was not going to be killed by the flames. The very fact that she had been able to speak the Name of Fire proved it - her Flaw would have prevented her from channeling it otherwise. However, he would definitely be hurt by the explosion. a lot.  
  
Not only was the Tyrant more susceptible to being burned because of the Epithet she had assigned him, but her other Epithet synergized with Corsair's Aspect, slowing the burning Master down even more.  
  
The man himself rolled away from the explosion, escaping it entirely. Jumping to his feet near Rain, she gazed at her with his piercing blue eyes and said evenly from under his monstrous mask:  
  
".I thought you were a pacifist?"  
  
Rain smiled radiantly.  
  
"I am!"  
  
With that, she turned to the burning Master and dismissed the Combustible Epithet, replacing it with another one.  
  
Hyperalgesic.  
  
Extremely sensitive to pain.  
  
Rain was not going to admit why she even knew that word, but she did. And as a result, the peculiarly distorted scream turned into a strangely distorted howl.  
  
Corsair stared at her with his calm blue eyes. But. Did Rain imagine it, or had the tall man shivered faintly?  
  
Surely, it was just her imagination.  
  
Some time later, the commotion was over.  
  
The robbers - who had turned out to be zealots - were unconscious and restrained. The badly burned corpse of the Tyrant was covered by a sheet. Rain had not killed him, naturally. Like thе peaceful and harmless person that she was, she simply made him wail and convulse in agony while Tamar and Corsair finished the job.  
  
She had suggested sparing the murderous zealot and merely knocking him out, even, but Corsair had other ideas. She could understand his decision, as well - the Awakened criminals were already difficult to contain, but imprisoning an unhinged Master demanded a wealth of resources the government did not possess.  
  
The government was barely holding the world from falling apart as it was. In any case, the lockdown was lifted from the bank. Corsair, Ray, and Fleur disappeared without a trace, while Rain and Tamar stayed behind to have a talk with the government forces. Tamar's status as a Legacy and a former centurion of the Seventh Royal Legion would come in handy to explain how a dozen Awakened criminals and an Ascended mastermind ended in their current pitiful state.  
  
After checking on the hostages and releasing them from the restraints, the two of them walked outside. As they waited for the police to arrive in front of the bank's doors, Rain glanced around, her gaze lingering on the graffiti marring the walls for a moment.  
  
She sighed. NQSC had really changed. In the past, there would not have been graffiti in such a prestigious district. Especially one lacking any artistic value. just a mess of letters drawn in faded paint.  
  
There would not have been crazed zealots robbing banks, either. She glanced at Tamar.  
  
"Hey. We did not just happen to be in that bank by accident, did we?"  
  
Tamar gave her an impassive stare.  
  
Eventually, though, she shrugged.  
  
"Maybe."  
  
Rain raised a hand and flicked her on the forehead.  
  
"I knew it! Why, though? Don't get me wrong, I do not mind foiling a bank robbery. Actually, it was kind of exciting. But I am so busy today - I have to speak in front of a large crowd in an hour!"  
  
She made a pitiful face. Tamar looked at her, remained silent for a few seconds, then sighed.  
  
"Your brother is preoccupied at the moment. So, Aiko asked me to evaluate Corsair's performance and back his team up if necessary. Granted. she probably did not expect that I'd take you with me."  
  
Rain chuckled.  
  
"So why did you?"  
  
Tamar glanced at her with the usual stern frown.  
  
"I mean. you're kind of hard to get rid of, you know?"  
  
A rare smile illuminated her face, and she glanced away.  
  
"Plus, I wanted you to see Corsair in action and get your opinion. I am assembling a cohort to challenge the Second Nightmare, you know. I had my eye on him, but needed to make sure that he'll fit."  
  
Rain smiled, as well.  
  
"And what do you think? Will he fit?"  
  
Tamar nodded.  
  
"Sure. Asterion will fit just fine."  
  
Rain blinked.  
  
"Huh?"  
  
Had she heard wrong?  
  
"What did you say?"  
  
Tamar looked at her in confusion.  
  
"I said that Corsair will fit just fine. Why?"  
  
Rain tilted her head a little.  
  
"Ah. I think you misspoke."  
  
She pointed to the wall.  
  
"That graffiti must have been on your mind, huh?"  
  
There, someone had written in large, bold letters:  
  
AS TE RI ON.  
  
"What's an asterion, anyway?"  
  
Tamar studied the graffiti for a moment, as if noticing it only now, then frowned and shook her head.  
  
"No idea. Sounds a bit familiar, I guess?"  
  
Somewhere far away, sirens broke the silence. Rain patted Tamar on the shoulder.  
  
"Well. you'll deal with it. I have an academic report to make."  
  
Turning around, she began to walk away. The strange word got stuck in her mind, repeating itself like an earworm:  
  
'Asterion, asterion. as - te - ri - on.'  
  
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In a hallway in Ravenheart, Sunny stopped and leaned on the wall.  
  
He had just remembered receiving a report about the bank robbery, and Rain's participation in it.  
  
'She did what?'  
  
"Rain. cooked a Master alive?!"  
  
Alive being the key word.  
  
And she had forcefully dismissed an Echo, too. Apparently, that was something his sister was capable of, now. According to the report, she had been inspired to try something like that after seeing the cooked Master's Aspect Ability, which allowed him to prevent Awakened from summoning Memories.  
  
If someone could interfere with summoning Memories, why wouldn't someone be able to interfere with dismissing them?  
  
"No, but why the hell is she going around getting into fights with Masters, in the first place?"  
  
He had turned away for a minute. not even that!  
  
One - seventh of him had turned away. Sunny huffed and puffed, angry that Rain had been put in the position where she had to face a hostile Ascended. And with barely anyone. except for four elite agents of the Shadow Clan. present to protect her!  
  
'What have I assigned Quentin to Bastion for? Could he not have followed her to NQSC?'  
  
Shaking his head, Sunny continued walking.  
  
'I need to have a serious talk with Aiko about that incident.'  
  
But just then, another memory from the past few weeks surfaced in his mind.  
  
Sunny froze, then let out a hollow laugh.  
  
"What. what did Aiko do?"