

Growing Responsibilities

Part Four

Roslyn arrived at the grand hall at the appointed time with Khalan at her side. Roderick and Janine were already inside, waiting for her. She and the paladin stepped in through the door in the back reserved for members of the ducal palace. They strode to the area where the Seat of the Duchy resided and saw several of her cousins and her uncle, Count Dorma. The Count of Strathmore smiled as Roslyn approached, but then his smile faltered when he looked at the paladin with her.

He quickly composed himself and greeted her. "Roslyn! I heard you would be joining us today. Such a pleasure. It was unfortunate that I was unable to see your mother before she departed for Maireharbora." *I doubt that, uncle. You two do not agree on absolutely anything. Although to be fair, it's nearly the same for her and me as well.*

"That is unfortunate, uncle. She is quite busy, as I am sure you can understand. She needed to return but was saddened she would miss this event."

Her older cousin Esme smiled. The girl was seventeen and the second oldest of her uncle's children. Roslyn's mother waited much longer in life to bear children. Esme was also betrothed to the third son of the Duchy of Breland. Esme raised her hand slightly to get Roslyn's attention and greeted her. "It is so good to see you, cousin! I believe I am seated next to you today." Roslyn groaned internally. *Oh... swell.*

"That is wonderful, Esme! You will have to tell me all about how Academy is going for you. I, myself, depart soon to attend."

Esme's eyes widened. "That is delightful! I cannot wait to see you around before I complete my studies!"

Roslyn put on her best apologetic face. "I apologize, Esme. I meant that I would be leaving to attend the Royal Academy. As I am sure you are aware, the travel to the capital will take some time."

Esme scowled but quickly recovered and returned to her fake smile. “That... is just wonderful news. I am happy for you. To be accepted is a prestigious opportunity.”

Roslyn nodded. “Thank you, cousin. It is simply something expected of me, as part of my preparation for future duties and responsibilities.”

The older girl’s scowl did not leave her face that time. “Well, I look forward to speaking with you after we take our spots.”

“Of course, cousin.”

Why couldn't your brother be the one to attend? He's much more agreeable.

She glanced at Khalan, who simply raised a brow at her before returning to scan the crowd. Roslyn caught sight of several people she knew of but refrained from leaving the area reserved for members of the House. She would resist being sociable until after the acknowledgment. Content, simply watching the crowd grow and move amongst themselves, she stood off to the side, waiting for everything to begin. It didn’t take long, but eventually, her wish was fulfilled. Her grandfather’s majordomo announced her grandfather, and the crowd went silent as he walked in.

He proceeded to his Seat and stood in front of it to address the gathered nobles. “My friends, noblemen, and noblewomen of the Duchy of Tilorai. I know everyone is aware of why we are here, but allow this old duke a moment to drone on.”

Roslyn and her cousins took that moment to take their seats and listen to the Duke’s speech.

The crowd laughed and politely clapped. A woman in the crowd called out, “Hopefully, not too long of a moment!” which garnered more laughter, including from her grandfather.

He raised a hand, and the crowd quieted. “Yes, yes. Countess Orlen, please see me after the acknowledgment so we can speak of your upcoming fête. I have but a few suggestions about how *this time* will assuredly be exciting.”

Roslyn didn’t get the joke, but the court burst into laughter, including the countess who booed her grandfather.

The current Duke of Tiloral continued his speech. “Now, the acknowledgment of a new House is not just a formal, legal thing—it is that—it is a welcoming of a peer. A new *player* in the game, if you will. A potential partner or relationship. This time is the same, but also different. You all have heard of the terrans and their appearance in our world. People of all sorts of backgrounds, some seemingly more fascinating than the next. There have been several that the duchy has been assisting and working with to learn more about how to integrate these people safely into our society. Because make no mistake. These people are refugees, exiles, and displaced. They require our great kingdom’s largesse and one cannot say the Duchy of Tiloral will not step up and help those in need!”

“Hear, hear!” The crowd called out with excitement.

“Now, this House. This House is home to a most unfortunate displacement. A young royal, a princess, was torn away from her home and her people. Her mother, also ripped away from her kingdom, even now seeks to gather up as many survivors of this event as she can to ensure they are all safe and welcome. We will provide this welcome!” He turned and returned to his Seat. After he sat, he nodded at one of the guards by the main doors.

The tall double doors opened together and one of the ducal attendants stepped in, followed by an older elf that she knew as Ser Siveril, a long-time friend and former advisor to her grandfather. Behind the knight was a girl who was about a head taller than her. She had dark curly hair that was pinned up in an elaborate style. Her dress was almost of a similar style to Roslyn’s. However, there were no sleeves or padded shoulder rolls. Her neckline was a bit more rounded as well, and she did not wear a necklace. Her dress was a beautiful blue color with black and silver accents. On her stomach was a strange silver creature that looked like a lizard, except it had wings. The girl had a more full face like a telv, but Roslyn had to admit the girl looked beautiful, even with her small, rounded ears.

Flanking the girl were two female knights, a telv and a high elf, who to Roslyn’s dismay, had gorgeous armor that looked far better than her own knights. The way the armor shined and was accented by dark blue fabric with silver stitching almost had Roslyn rethinking her House’s chosen colors. The high elf even had her face painted with a similar blue color that made her especially striking.

Bringing up the rear of the group were three girls of various ages. All were high elves and carried themselves as nobility. They were likely the ladies-in-waiting of the princess. *Good, she has people to help her navigate our society. She'll need it.*

The attendant stopped the group at a respectful distance before addressing everyone. "Your Grace, presenting House Reinhart." The telv bowed to her grandfather and moved away.

The older majordomo for the girl took a step forward and bowed. After he stood straight, he introduced the princess and the House.

Roslyn watched the girl as he spoke. She looked nervous, yet focused. Once her knight finished speaking, he moved to the side to let the princess step forward. Princess Gwyneth gave a slow, respectful nod and said, "Thank you for inviting me to your court, Your Grace. I look forward to a positive relationship between our Houses." The girl had a fiery determination that impressed her. There was something about her that Roslyn couldn't quite place, but so far, it was not a bad showing. *Or at least it shows that she listens to those schooling her.*

She glanced at her grandfather as he stood up and gave a slight bow in return before welcoming her and verbalizing the acknowledgment. He immediately followed that up by talking about how the terrans were a topic of the court, and even that they had discussed the House Reinhart itself.

The shifting of the crowd to the left pulled Roslyn's gaze away from the girl. One of the nobles stepped out into the open. Roslyn wasn't sure who she was, so she leaned closer to her cousin and whispered. "Esme, who is that?"

Her cousin squinted as she peered at the man. "I think that is Marquess Angwin. Yes, that is him."

Roslyn nodded. The marquess moved forward and launched into a diatribe that spoke to how Ser Siveril wasn't enough to support the princess and that some other noble of higher standing—he means himself—should manage the House. *That is absurd. He can't do that.*

She looked to her grandfather, ready to interject on the princess' behalf. However, she saw the small nod of his head before Ser Siveril stepped forward and rebutted the marquess.

What followed was a back-and-forth debate between the two nobles, and it impressed Roslyn at how restrained Ser Siveril remained. She ignored most of it, especially when another lady joined in on Ser Siveril's side. A viscountess, if Roslyn was remembering correctly.

Roslyn looked for the princess and saw her speaking to two nobles, a telv woman and a high elf man. Only the high elf knight remained with her. Roslyn scanned the crowd and couldn't immediately find the others.

"This is the most fun court has been in ages!" Esme whispered from her left.

"I don't know what Marquess Angwin is doing. He's clearly in the wrong."

Esme nodded. "Certainly. House Angwin has always tried to increase their standing. They wouldn't be content even if they ran the duchy."

Roslyn narrowed her eyes. She didn't like that. *Some people should learn their place.*

"Oh, look, the princess is done speaking with those two."

She looked back at the princess and saw the telv noblewoman moving away. Princess Gwyneth spoke to the high elf knight and seemed to be looking over at Roslyn and her cousins. Roslyn smirked as she caught the terran princess' eye. The girl slowly raised her hand and held it awkwardly next to her head. After a moment, her hand was still up, and Princess Gwyneth didn't seem to want to lower it. *I bet she forgot she raised it! Oh, that's too cute. Awkward... but cute.* Roslyn giggled into her hand, which caused the princess to narrow her eyes and then jerk her head toward her hand when she noticed it was still up. With a quick motion, the arm moved to her side.

The princess slowly lifted her head and looked at Roslyn. When she was sure the girl was focused on her, Roslyn smiled and waved back at her when Gwyneth smiled. Roslyn felt a moment of concern when the girl spoke, then looked quickly around for her knight. *She's right over there! Wait...*

An older high elf walked up to her and Gwyneth noticed him right before he reached her. She watched them start to speak to each other and tried to observe the girl's face. She wasn't able to see her fully, because she was slightly turned away, but from what she saw, Gwyneth seemed more and more confused as the conversation went on. The two seemed to be arguing,

and the count kept gesticulating as if he were talking down to her. Roslyn quickly turned and looked at Khalan. “Evocati Khalan, please come here!”

She knew Roderick and Janine were nearby, but he was right there and thus quicker.

“Yes, My Lady?” Khalan asked.

“Do you see the princess over there that was introduced?” She pointed at where the high elf was arguing with the girl.

Khalan leaned closer and zeroed in on where she was pointing. “I do.” He squinted. “That... seems like an issue.”

She tried to see what Khalan was talking about and stood up from her chair. She watched as the princess spun around and started to walk toward her knight, but then the old elf grabbed her wrist and jerked her back. Roslyn gasped and cried out. “Khalan! Help her!”

She caught sight of Roderick and Janine hurrying toward her but ignored them as she focused on Gwyneth. Khalan stopped walking as they watched the female knight pull her sword and step toward the elf gripping the princess. *Oh no. This is bad.*

She turned toward Roderick and Janine. “We need to help her!”

Roderick shook his head. “My Lady, we must remain by your side. Especially if hostilities erupt.”

Roslyn scowled at her knight. “They will erupt *if* we do not help her, Roderick.”

She looked back as the knight argued with the man while taking slow, purposeful movements toward him. Roslyn almost cried out when she saw the people behind the knight start moving toward her.

“Khalan, now!”

The paladin nodded and started forward again, only to freeze when suddenly the girl’s arm burst into flame.

“No!” Roslyn cried out in fear for the girl. *Please, no! Alos, save her!* The man assaulting the princess jerked his arm back with a scream. Khalan moved only to get blocked by guards who had started rushing to the area.

Roslyn nearly rushed ahead of herself, only to freeze. The fire that was engulfing the girl’s arm wasn’t bothering her. Roslyn ignored Esme's cry of surprise from beside her as the princess lifted a hand all the fire flew from her arm and formed a ball of flame. She raised her other hand and formed a *second* orb of fire. With a simple flick of her wrist, the two orbs started rotating around her in increasingly large circles. The girl looked around, almost threatening anyone to attack her. The crowd quickly took a collective step or five back.

Roslyn looked at Khalan, who was utterly frozen and staring at the flame. She could only imagine what was going through the Paladin of Alos’ mind. *The girl is controlling fire as if it were not a wondrous feat of the gods.*

Barely a minute passed as Gwyneth stared everyone down. Then she lifted her hand slightly and the two orbs of flame flew back. The girl looked at the spheres while they flew in circles around each other. She wasn’t even sparing a glance at the noble who clutched his burned forearm and said something threatening that only made the man whimper.

Gwyneth glanced over at her knight, then turned and looked directly at her. Roslyn’s eyes went wide as she noticed that her irises looked as if they were burning. She then did something that surprised Roslyn even more. She smiled. *It’s her.*

Gwyneth looked back at the whimpering elf and pulled her hand in closer to herself, which caused the two orbs to combine into one large sun. She heard Khalan gasp and say something about Alos. Before Roslyn could even think further on the subject, the Princess closed her fist and the two spheres collapsed and blinded the entire hall in a bright flash of orange light.

What happened next was almost a blur to Roslyn. The magic Gwyneth showed mesmerized her and took away her focus. She caught sight of the guards rushing to block out a circle around the princess and her knight. At the back of the circle, she nearly missed seeing the other knight punch a guard, who collapsed in a crash of metal and move past to get to her princess. *They’re ready to fight all of grandfather’s guards. Why aren’t they helping Gwyneth? Can’t they see the other man is at fault?*

She looked over at her grandfather, who was speaking to Ser Siveril from behind two of his guards. Khalan looked at Roslyn. “That has to be her. I need to report this to the church.”

Roslyn narrowed her eyes. “Not before we help her! Why are the guards surrounding them?”

She looked back and saw one of the head guards arguing with the blonde telv. Roslyn stepped toward her grandfather and was about to plead for him to do something when the telv and the two guards broke out into a fight. The woman blocked a swing of the guard’s blade, then quickly hit him twice before grabbing his armor and *throwing* him at the female guard. Khalan grunted appreciatively next to her. “Not bad.”

Roslyn looked up at the paladin indignantly. “*Not bad?* They’re going to get killed!”

Khalan turned his head and looked down with a raised eyebrow. “They will be fine. If it looks like it will turn bad, I will go assist.”

Roslyn jerked her head back in surprise. *I have been asking you to go help this entire time!* Roderick cleared his throat from next to them. “That may be a bad idea, Evocati Khalan.”

Khalan regarded her knight for a moment before scoffing slightly and refocusing on the action in front of them. Gwyneth interrupted the two female knights talking. The telv woman turned with a furious expression on her face directly toward her grandfather. Both guards in front of him shifted and started to pull on their blades. The knight called out, anger lacing every word. “Duke Tiloral, is this how the duchy handles affairs such as this? Do you condone a noble attacking and attempting to force a *nine-year-old child* into a marriage?”

Roslyn gasped. *That man tried to do what? And she’s only nine? I’m older than her? She’s a head taller than me!* She shook her head. There were more important things to consider. Like how to convince Roderick and Janine to throw that man into a dungeon. *Or maybe Khalan can enact Alos’ Justice.*

They watched as her grandfather pushed past his guards and told everyone to stand down, having guards escort the burned elf to a doctor. He then glanced back and caught Roslyn’s attention. He gave her a slight nod, then turned to the princess and invited her to speak privately.

She looked at the paladin who had a hand on the pommel of his sword. She moved closer to him and whispered. “Evocati? What are we going to do?”

He whispered in response. “We will wait to see what His Grace does, then I will go to the church.” He took a deep breath. Roslyn listened as he whispered to himself. “She’s just a child. What Monster...” Khalan trailed off and went silent, but she could see the anger on his normally stoic features.

She placed a hand on the knight’s armored forearm. “Let us go, Khalan. We should meet with my grandfather after he meets with the princess.”

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Roslyn patiently waited for her grandfather in a separate office where one of his attendants had led her and her protectors. It took some time, but finally, her normally happy and energetic grandfather entered the office. He looked exhausted and worn out, and just emotionally drained. She immediately jumped up, and Khalan moved forward as well.

“Are you okay, grandfather?”

The duke took a deep breath and ran a hand through his hair. “I did *not* need that to happen, but yes, I am fine. The princess is fine, as well. I deeded her some land in the city and two smaller plots for her knights. That was the least I could do. I also pledged to ensure such a thing did not reoccur.”

He looked at Khalan. “I will summon the Count before me and pass judgment. I would request a member of your order to be present. As a witness, you would be preferable. However, I know your duty.”

“I will ensure one of my brothers or sisters is present.”

Her grandfather nodded. He then turned to Roslyn and, finally, smiled down at her. “Also, the princess would like to meet you.”

Roslyn gasped as her eyes shot wide.

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A knock resounded at the door, and Roslyn looked up from her studies. Before she could call out, it opened and her grandfather entered. She pushed back from the desk she sat at and stood. “Grandfather! What brings you here?”

She received a kind smile in reply. “We received an invitation for you.”

Roslyn perked up. “She sent one for me finally?”

Her grandfather chuckled and handed her a small card. She looked down and saw that it was an invitation to the princess’s celebration of her tenth year. Roslyn quickly scanned the card for the details. *It’s in a week! That’s not nearly enough time!*

Her eyes darted back to her grandfather in alarm. She scowled at his amused expression. “It is in a week! That’s not nearly enough time! I need a gown, a gift, I... I need—” Her grandfather interrupted her by placing a hand on her shoulder.

“Whatever you wish to get her as a gift, we will see it done. It pleases me to see you this excited to meet someone your age. I will send a messenger to inform Ser Siveril of your attendance as the representative of House Tiloral and the duchy.”

She nodded. Her mind was racing as she considered various ideas of what to get the princess as a gift. What does a princess even need? Roslyn thought back to how the girl looked and what she wore. *What she wore!*

Roslyn smiled. She knew *exactly* what to get Gwyneth.

She glanced over at Janine, who sat at a table with Roderick. Her knight smiled at her and nodded. Roslyn nodded back before looking back at the duke.

“Grandfather? I need access to the vaults and a letter.”

This will be perfect.

I hope she likes it!