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## Fractures

Roslyn, her posture poised and dignified, continued her graceful exit from the Hall of Lords, feeling the weight of her responsibilities more than ever. The air outside promised a brief respite from the stifling atmosphere of political machinations that filled the chamber she had just left. As the heiress of House Tiloral, she was acutely aware of the delicate balance of power and influence she had to navigate. Despite her youth, her role demanded a maturity and astuteness beyond her fourteen years.

Something a certain princess was loath to take to heart.

*It's good that we left when we did, otherwise I may have channeled my inner Gwyn or something.*

As she approached the main doors, seeking the solace of fresh air, she was intercepted by a figure whose presence only added to her growing headache. The second son of House Breland, who was in the city after the execution of their minor lord by Gwyn's paladin, approached her. His demeanor was polite, but Roslyn could sense the underlying tension. "It is disappointing to see House Tiloral vote against the economic stability of the kingdom," he remarked, his tone carefully neutral.

Roslyn offered him a gentle, diplomatic smile, masking her inner turmoil. "Lord Breland, a pleasure," she replied, her voice smooth and controlled. "I am simply voting based on the interests of my House. Quite frankly, it is telling that House Breland would seek to introduce an economic proposal that included restrictions based on shipping imports of all things. I wasn't aware your shipping industry in the duchy was so threatened."

She had to sneak that small jab in there; after all, there was no such shipping industry since the only port and access to the sea was firmly within the Tiloral Duchy. The entire section within the proposal was an insult that had no hope of passing. In fact, even if it had, it would have been dead on arrival because of treaties her House had with the crown that prohibited such meddling.

Lord Breland's expression faltered momentarily, betraying his surprise at Roslyn's pointed observation, or the fact that a fourteen year old had taken the time to read the entirety of the one hundred page proposal filled with legalese that sought to hide the small shipping section.

However, that wasn't the only issue at play. The recent tension between their Houses was an unspoken undercurrent in their conversation. House Breland's attempt on Gwyn's life had shattered any semblance of the once-close relationship between their families, leaving a rift that was felt deeply in the political landscape. While her grandfather's people had learned that the poisoning *had* been done at the behest of someone other than Duke Breland, that did not matter.

Roslyn, and thus House Tiloral, would stand by her friend. No matter the cost.

Everyone in that chamber had understood what the underlying statement the section was supposed to make and the heiress of House Tiloral would not take that political slap lying down.

Roslyn continued, her tone remaining courteous yet firm. “It’s unfortunate that our Houses find themselves at odds over a trifling matter, Lord Breland. But to be clear, it wasn’t simply the subsection based on shipping that was concerning. Several other matters were also unpalatable to many of our other colleagues. The proposal didn’t fail on my vote alone, but at the end of the day, the welfare and interests of House Tiloral are my utmost priority, as I am sure you can understand.”

Lord Breland nodded, a forced smile on his face. “Of course, Lady Tiloral. It is only natural for you to protect your duchy’s interests. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on our revised proposal. I’m sure it will pique your interest.”

She politely ended the conversation and stepped away. As soon as she did, Roslyn’s thoughts turned to the complex web of politics and enmities that defined her world. *I need to be careful. Every word, every vote, it’s like walking on a tightrope. And with House Breland being used by the Noble Faction against us, it’s only going to get trickier. And the Crown Prince has been silent as of late while he focuses on the war.*

She sighed softly, feeling the burden of her station. Yet, she squared her shoulders, determined to navigate these turbulent waters with the grace and strength that were the hallmarks of her Tiloral lineage. The path ahead was fraught with challenges, but Roslyn was resolute in her duty to her House and her people.

Evocati Khalan gave her a sympathetic look when she walked outside. “What do you want to do to clear your head?”

“Let’s go to the plaza.”

She knew he’d know which one. It was the oldest in the city, and was always a relaxing place to walk with its fountains.

When Roslyn finally stepped into the bustling plaza in the Old Town, the lively chatter and the occasional laughter of passersby created a soothing backdrop to her thoughts. The two paladins flanked her, their presence a subtle yet constant reminder of her status and the need for vigilance. A few steps behind, Ser Roderick, one of her personal knights, maintained a discreet yet watchful distance.

As she meandered through the plaza, Roslyn allowed herself to briefly escape the complexities of her noble responsibilities. Her mind wandered to a more pleasant topic—Gwyn’s upcoming birthday. What would be the perfect gift for Gwyn? she mused, considering her best friend’s

preferences and interests. *Maybe something magical, or something for her art? No, she'll have her mother for magical items whenever she gets here, and I get her art supplies all the time.*

The gentle sounds of a nearby fountain and the soft rustling of leaves in the gentle breeze offered a calming respite, allowing Roslyn to think more creatively. She scanned the various stalls and shops lining the plaza, each offering an array of goods and trinkets. *Perhaps something unique from one of these local artisans, she pondered, her eyes scanning the colorful displays. No...*

*Ugh.*

She sat down on the edge of the fountain and quickly lost herself to her thoughts. *Why do I always get her art supplies? She's got to be tired of it.*

Roslyn winced. She knew why she did it. It was because she thoroughly enjoyed when Gwyn used her as a subject for her art. Although, she had to admit... she was horrible at posing when it was deliberate. Her last attempt had her dressing up like one of those pirates she'd read about in her books.

The art was well done as always, but Roslyn always looked like she had a stick up her bum no matter how much 'artistic license' Gwyn tried to take. Her friend would apologize and say that she wasn't quite good at setting up poses, and that she felt better about more 'candid' moments.

Roslyn could understand it. She'd tried to draw Gwyn one night when her friend was reading a book while Calista lay her head in Gwyn's lap, but that attempt had been abysmal. She'd promptly crumpled it up and tossed it into the fireplace much to her bestie's surprise.

She'd taken up journaling after that and returned to her books. The current one she was reading was about a princess and a knight who had gotten lost in some wastelands and had to fight together to return home. Only for the king to get furious about their burgeoning love and exile the knight from the kingdom.

Roslyn cried for hours after that. She didn't even know why. But Gwyn had lay with her in bed and cuddled her until she had fallen asleep.

There was supposed to be a sequel, but Roslyn hadn't found it yet. She'd delegated the responsibility of locating it to Ser Janine. She just had to know if the knight and princess would get together in the end. If the princess would get her happy ending.

She sighed and got back up. Happy that Khalan wasn't giving her a hard time for being all mopey. *Maybe I just need some more Gwyn time. That always cheers me up.*

As she walked, she occasionally stopped to examine a particularly interesting item, her paladins and Ser Roderick subtly adjusting their positions to ensure her safety without intruding on her space. The plaza, with its vibrant energy and myriad possibilities, was the perfect place to find inspiration for Gwyn's gift.

*I'm getting a tad hungry. Gwyn doesn't care for the food around here.*

Lost in her thoughts, Roslyn barely noticed the time passing. The sun began to dip lower in the sky, casting a warm, golden hue over the plaza. She smiled softly to herself, grateful for these rare moments of normalcy away from the intense scrutiny and rigid formalities of her noble life. While it would have been more fun with her best friend here, it was good to just spend some time to herself. Plus, Roslyn couldn't shop for Gwyn's birthday if she was with her. So this was perfect.

Finally, with a handful of potential gift ideas in mind, a few new books to share with her bestie, and feeling recharged by the brief respite, Roslyn signaled to her companions that it was time to return. But before they even exited the plaza, Khalan went into motion.

The evocati's sudden shift in demeanor from calm vigilance to heightened alertness sent a ripple of unease through Roslyn. He quickly maneuvered to shield her, his eyes scanning the crowd with intense focus. The yellow glow of his eyes only added to the gravity of the situation.

He called out to the other paladin, "Close in. Threat." Khalan turned to Roderick. "Get the carriage, now. Run. We're extracting."

Roderick's swift departure to retrieve the carriage was a blur in Roslyn's peripheral vision. He didn't even hesitate to listen to Khalan which really hammered home the seriousness of the situation. Her mind raced with possibilities, trying to make sense of the sudden change in circumstances. *Who would target me here, in the heart of the capital?* she wondered, her thoughts a whirlwind of concern and speculation.

Roslyn's heart raced as she tried to peer around Khalan, looking for any sign of the threat he had sensed. The bustling plaza, once a source of relaxation, now felt like a labyrinth of potential dangers. The sounds of the crowd seemed to amplify, each footstep and murmur adding to her growing apprehension.

"Stay close, Roslyn," Khalan instructed, his voice firm but calm, which she knew was designed to reassure her without alarming the surrounding onlookers. The vicori, equally alert, moved to flank her other side, creating a protective barrier around Roslyn.

Khalan's hands, emanating a soft yellow glow, were ready to unleash his spells and abilities at a moment's notice. The subtle hum of magic in the air was almost palpable as he continued his vigilant watch over the area.

Roslyn felt afraid as she looked up at the sun elf next to her. "What's wrong Khalan?"

His head jerked in another direction. "There's a serious threat. Let's go. Place a hand on my back just like we practiced, alright?"

Roslyn did her best to stay composed and followed Khalan's instructions to keep her hand firmly on his back. The practiced movement, something they had rehearsed for emergency situations, now felt all too real and urgent.

The trio moved with purposeful strides, their formation tight and coordinated. Roslyn could almost see the tension emanating from both paladins, while her [**Mana Sense**] helped her to feel the magic coming from them as their every sense was used to detect and respond to any threat.

She made sure to stay close and maintain contact with Khalan. It was something they practiced so he could ensure she was close and within protective range without having to look for her. Khalan and the Vicori kept exchanging tense glances, their conversation a mix of hushed urgency and concern.

"I can't pinpoint it," Khalan murmured, his eyes scanning the sea of faces. "But I'm certain we're being followed."

The Vicori, equally vigilant, kept looking over his shoulder. "Any idea who or what we're dealing with?"

Khalan shook his head slightly, his glowing eyes not missing a beat. "No, but we can't take any chances. There're at least five separate instances that my spell is trying to pinpoint. Let's get Lady Roslyn to safety first before anything else."

"Fire Castle?" the Vicori asked.

*What? What is that?*

Khalan nodded immediately and responded without looking back. "Absolutely. No chances."

"Roderick—"

"Let me worry about him. He'll see reason."

Roslyn's heart pounded in her chest as she heard their exchange. The realization that at least five unseen threats were stalking them sent a chill down her spine. She tried to catch glimpses of potential dangers in the crowd but saw nothing out of the ordinary—just commoners going about their day—but her paranoia had her second guessing everything she saw.

When they reached the waiting carriage, Ser Roderick was already barking orders to the coachman. Khalan quickly stepped forward. "Take us to the Reinhart Estate," he commanded.

Roderick hesitated, his brows furrowing in confusion. "But my lady will be safest at our estate. It's protocol. It's closer, and—"

Khalan cut him off with a shake of his head. "No, Roderick. The safest place for her right now is beside the girl who wouldn't hesitate to burn down this city to protect her. Add two more paladins and Ser Taenya to that mix, and it's the most secure location in the city after the temple complex."

Roderick nodded and relayed the new orders to the coachman and the accompanying guards.

The carriage door swung open, and Khalan gently ushered Roslyn inside. As she stepped into the carriage, the reality of the situation hit her. She was being whisked away to safety, but the nature of the threat remained a mystery, a shadow lurking just out of sight.

The door closed with a soft thud, leaving Roslyn alone in the dimly lit carriage. She sank into the plush seat, her mind racing with questions and concerns. The gentle rocking of the carriage as it moved offered little comfort. She felt a mixture of fear and frustration, knowing that someone was targeting her but not knowing why or who they were.

As the carriage rolled towards the Reinhart Estate, Roslyn tried to steady her breathing, her thoughts turning to Gwyn. *I'll be safe there, with Gwyn and her protectors around me. But who is after me? And why?* The questions swirled in her mind, unanswered, as the carriage carried her away from immediate danger but deeper into the web of intrigue and uncertainty that seemed to envelop her life.



In a secluded corner of the Reinhart Estate, Sabina sat cross-legged on the ground, her focus intently on the young dragon who sat on her haunches before her. Calista, her scales shimmering like polished obsidian, was an impressive sight, her size now comparable to that of a large feline predator. Despite her youth, there was an intelligence in her eyes that belied her age, a keenness that spoke of both curiosity and understanding.

One of Sabina's first lessons with her was teaching her how to properly communicate her thoughts and feelings. It was something Calista had loved because she was able to speak with Gwyn a lot better. This was a feat that Sabina understood was only possible due to Gwyn's **[Surrogate Sister]** trait instead of **[Telepathy]** like herself.

Using her **[Detect Emotions]**, Sabina tuned into the dragon, feeling the swirl of <<Excitement>> and <<Curiosity>> emanating from Calista. She reached out telepathically, her voice gentle in the dragon's mind, *'Calista, are you ready to continue our lesson?'* she sent.

*'Yes! I want to learn more about the shadows,'* Calista replied, her telepathic voice bubbling with the enthusiasm of a young girl.

The dragon wasn't even physically one year old as of yet, but still her demeanor and intelligence were like that of a ten year old, if Gwyn had been a good comparison at least.

*'Remember, shadow magic and [Shadowmancy] are more than just manipulating darkness. It's about understanding and harnessing the subtler aspects of magic,'* Sabina

explained. She demonstrated by extending her hand, her own shadow stretching and twisting into intricate patterns.

Calista watched, fascinated, her own shadow mimicking the movements in a more rudimentary fashion. Sabina sensed a surge of <<*Frustration*>> from the dragon and sent a reassuring thought. *'It's okay, Calista. This takes time and practice. You're doing very well for your age.'*

*'I'm a dragon, I have to be good at magic. Sister says that dragons are amazing with magic.'*

The dragon's emotions shifted to <<*Determination*>>, and she tried again, her shadow now moving more fluidly, though still with a few missteps here and there. Sabina smiled, both impressed and proud of the young dragon's progress.

*'See? You're getting the hang of it. Shadow magic is like a dance—graceful and fluid,'* Sabina encouraged. *'Like when you're flying.'*

Calista's wings fluttered in excitement, and she managed to shape her shadow into a rough silhouette of a dragon. *'Look! I did it!'* she exclaimed telepathically, her achievement bringing a sense of <<*Joy*>> and <<*Pride*>>.

*'Excellent, Calista! You're a quick learner,'* Sabina praised, feeling a wave of satisfaction at the dragon's progress.

As they continued, Sabina carefully guided Calista through the nuances of shadow magic, each step further developing the young dragon's burgeoning abilities. She was really quite—no—she was *terrifyingly* good at it, which if Gwyn was anything to go by, then Sabina shouldn't be surprised.

*'And don't forget to work with your imprinted spells. Has Gwyn helped you with any?'* Sabina asked.

*'A little bit! But I still need to make some.'*

Sabina nodded. *'When you do, remember that you can combine your [Shadowmancy] with these spells,'* she explained. *'It makes them both more powerful, and allows them to be more versatile.'*

To demonstrate, Sabina used her [Shadowmancy] to deepen the shadows of the nearby copse, then seamlessly shifted into them using her [Shadow Step]. Her form turned into a wispy, black shape then shot forward before she emerged from a shadow next to the trees. The quick, fluid motion was almost like a dance with the shadows themselves.

Calista's emotions filled with <<*Amazement*>>. *'Wow.'* Her telepathic voice conveyed her awe.

Sabina smiled and sent, *'The more you work on your magic, the less it's affected by the time of day. Even in the brightest midday, where there's light, there are shadows. But for us, the night truly is our friend.'*

*'I understand! I really like the night too.'* Calista's response was filled with enthusiasm.

*She may be nocturnal. I should discuss this with Gwyn,* Sabina thought, considering the implications.

She glanced over at Rhion, who was finishing up his training session with several members of the House Guard. Turning back to Calista, she sent, *'You should go practice your flying now.'*

*'Oh! Flying! Thank you!'* Calista's <<Excitement>> almost had her bouncing as she rushed off toward Rhion.

Sabina observed the estate's activities, noting Gwyn practicing various elemental spells with Maya Rolfé, while Ilyana chatted animatedly with Amari. It was a scene of peace and progress. Something she had to protect.

There was still a lot to do, and she needed to plan her next move. Lucian was at the monastery this week, so she would have to do without him until he returned.

*'You look lost in thought,'* Taenya's mental voice came from behind, startling Sabina slightly.

*'Only you can sneak up on me,'* Sabina replied with a smile. She stepped out from the shelter of the trees and onto the grassy field. Despite wanting to just plop down, she lowered herself gently onto the cool, lush grass, feeling its softness against her palms.

She patted the ground next to her, a silent invitation for Taenya to join her. As the telv woman settled beside her, Sabina leaned back slightly, allowing herself a moment to just breathe, to feel the gentle touch of the breeze against her skin and the faint warmth of the sun filtering through the leaves above.

*'What's bothering you?'* Taenya asked.

Sabina sighed, her gaze lingering on Gwyn, who was now alternating between fire, ice, and stone bolt-like spells. *'Look at everything we've helped build, Tay. I'm worried about what's coming. How she'll react... I can't forget how she was after the attack in Strathmore...'* her voice trailed off.

Taenya leaned her head on Sabina's shoulder. *'She has the two best aunts anyone could ask for. How have your talks with her gone?'*

Sabina's expression turned somber. *'Not well. I still don't know how she hid it from me. I feel... I feel like a failure. I'm supposed to be the mind mage, and understand emotions... and she's been hiding all this rage and fury... Roslyn figured it out, but I...'* she paused, frustration



evident in her tone. *'I've tried to convince her to send that spell to her tome, but she refuses. She says she might need it, despite her promise.'*

*'You've been spread thin, Sabina. You can't be everywhere at once, and Gwyn knows how to mask her emotions, especially if she had to learn to do so around you. She's still young and has been through a lot,'* Taenya reassured her gently.

As they watched Calista take to the skies with Rhion close behind and Gwyn perfecting her spells, Sabina felt a mixture of pride and concern. They had built something remarkable here, a sanctuary and a fortress, but the shadows of the past and the uncertainty of the future loomed ever-present. Sabina knew that whatever challenges lay ahead, they would face them together, as a family united in purpose and in care for one another, especially for Gwyn.

Then Sabina's vision went white as she watched the young war mage fire a beam of pure sunlight at a target.

*'Alos's bollocks, a little warning would have been nice,'* Taenya complained before stumbling to her feet. *'I'm going to go give her a piece of my mind.'*

Sabina chuckled and stood up to join her.



The aftermath of Gwyn's spellcasting left the training grounds bathed in a lingering, sun-like brilliance, causing everyone in the vicinity to shield their eyes or look away. The intense light slowly faded, leaving behind a sense of awe and a faint echo of power in the area. All that remained of the bale of hay that had been set up as a target for her was a circle of burnt grass.

Catching her breath, Gwyn turned towards her instructor, the corners of her mouth upturned in a mixture of fatigue and satisfaction. "Do you think that's enough for today, Miss Maya?" she asked the scholar, her voice still carrying the remnants of exertion from channeling such a potent spell.

Maya Rolfe, an accomplished scholar and one of Gwyn's trusted mentors, magic or otherwise, was slowly recovering from the dazzling display. She blinked a few times, her eyes adjusting back to the normal light as she surveyed the aftermath of Gwyn's spell. "Y-Yes, I believe that will be quite sufficient for today's session," she finally managed, a hint of admiration in her tone. "That was quite impressive, Gwyn. Did you advance a step this time?"

Gwyn's eyes sparkled with excitement as she nodded vigorously. "Yes, I did! About time, yeah?"

Maya's smile grew wider. "That's wonderful to hear. Now, if you wouldn't mind, could you please retrieve your [Spell Tome]? We should review your changes."

“Sure thing!” Without hesitation, Gwyn reached out with her trait, summoning the tome from the aether. The book materialized out of thin air, its size adjusting to become more manageable as it floated gently in front of her. With a practiced motion, Gwyn grasped the tome, its cover glowing faintly with an inner light, and flipped it open to the first section.

**Gwyneth Reinhart**

***“The First Mage”***

**Terran**

**Path: War Mage (Mage/Leader)**

**Steps: 68 (II)**

**Core Quality: Renowned**

**Affinity: Evocation, Alteration, Abjuration, Unknown**

**Attunement: Red, Blue, Black, Yellow**

**Alignment: Magical**

**Primary Attribute: Capability**

**Secondary Attribute: Control**

**Traits: Focus, Mana Sense, Cryomancy, Draco-pyromancy, Telekinesis, Surrogate Sister, Arcanomancy, Shadowmancy, Spell Tome, Enlightened**

**Passive Spells: Mana Sight, Aura of Winter, Frozen Heart, Flame Shield, Antimagic Field, Invisibility**

**Active Spells: Elemental Bolt, Ice Wall, Blink, Ice Blade, Sunbeam**

Gwyn surveyed the pages of her **[Spell Tome]** with a sense of accomplishment that was hard to suppress. The past season had been a whirlwind of progress and personal growth, her magical prowess expanding with every new step she took. She had advanced four steps, a feat that filled her with pride, especially considering how challenging each step had become since her refinement.

*Where I saw mamma.*

She was happy that she had seen her, but she was sad that they couldn't be together yet. Gwyn shook her head slightly, pushing these mixed emotions aside as they were still both a happy-sad subject for her.

The past season had seen many changes to her excerpt, mainly new spells but also some changed spells due to her refinement like her **[Self Awareness]** being changed to **[Spell Tome]**, which meant she no longer heard mana speak to her when she gained steps. There was also **[Fireball]** that was changed to **[Elemental Bolt]**, something she had expected because of her Vision of Potential. The new spell was extremely flexible compared to the old version and it allowed her to change the element

she could cast without having to rely on her *-mancy* traits. So far she'd managed to throw bolts made of fire, ice, and stone for the more *element* based magic as well as bolts of arcane and shadow.

She'd learned [**Antimagic Field**] with the help of her [**Arcanomancy**]. Unlike the active version she had seen in her vision, Gwyn had created a passive variant—a mage killer spell, as she mentally dubbed it. All she had to do was cast it and let it create a field that centered on herself. While her own magic was restricted within it, the field did nothing to hinder spatial magic, thus she could [**Blink**] around and use her blades against other mages. No more would just sending extra mages at her have a chance of working.

Moreover, her new [**Invisibility**] spell, an extension of her black mana work, offered her unprecedented stealth capabilities. With it, she could move unseen, allowing her to be extra sneaky if she wanted to.

Next on her to-do list was to work on her shielding.

Gwyn flipped past her excerpt to a page labeled 'Cantrips'. This addition was a perk of her [**Enlightened**] trait, a gift of her status as a 'true mage'. Currently, the page listed only [**Prestidigitation**], a convenient spell for minor tasks like cleaning her clothes or creating small, helpful effects.

She then moved to the dormant spells section which helped her to easily swap imprints with. Well, the process was easy, but doing so wasn't something she could do often. She'd figured out that swapping dormant spells more than once or twice a day gave her a massive headache.

Each page was dedicated to its own spell, which she suspected would make the tome quite large in the future. She flipped through pages adorned with elaborate glowing runes that depicted each spell while fancy calligraphy wrote out the name all pretty like.

None were anything she didn't already expect—there was [**Gout of Flame**], [**Wave of Frost**], [**Inferno Wave**], [**Arcane Cage**], [**Blast Wave**], and the one she added today, [**Pillar of Flame**]. All active spells.

"Everything is as expected, yes?" Miss Maya's voice pulled Gwyn back from her introspection.

Gwyn glanced up, a confident smile playing on her lips. "Yup! Everything's looking great. It's amazing to see how far I've come."

Her attention turned away from her tome to see Taenya and Sabina approaching, her expression shifting to a mix of admiration and sheepishness. Taenya reminded Gwyn of the importance of caution with her spells. "Gwyn, remember to give us a heads up when you're planning to unleash something that bright and powerful, alright?"

Gwyn offered an apologetic smile, her eyes sparkling with a hint of mischief. “Oops, sorry about that! I got a bit carried away.” She then shifted gears, her tummy evidently making the rules now. “I’m starving! Have you guys eaten yet?”

Taenya chuckled, reaching into her pouch and producing a small bag of jerky. “We just had lunch, but here, take this.”

Miss Rolfe, excusing herself with a light chuckle, left the trio to their conversation. Gwyn eagerly accepted the jerky and plopped down onto the soft grass, her eyes following Calista’s aerial antics. As she tore into the snack, a look of concern crossed her face. “She’s not going to be able to stay with me next year at school, is she?”

Taenya shook her head, her expression turning serious. “No, she’s growing too quickly. It won’t be long before the city becomes too confining for her.”

Gwyn’s face fell slightly. “Damn.”

“Language, Gwyn,” Taenya gently chided.

“Sorry,” Gwyn muttered, her attention still partly on the soaring dragon.

Sabina, settling down cross-legged beside them, joined in. “I’ve really been enjoying our training sessions. Calista is doing incredibly well.”

Gwyn’s face brightened at the mention of Calista’s progress. “Yeah, she loves your lessons! It’s great that she’s getting the hang of **[Telepathy]**. She’s always so excited to tell me about what she’s learned.”

Sabina’s face lit up with a warm smile. “It’s not quite **[Telepathy]**, but I don’t doubt she’ll get it soon. It’s a pleasure to work with her. She’s full of energy and curiosity.”

“Much like you were when you first arrived here,” Taenya quickly added. “Sorry, I didn’t mean—”

Gwyn waved off the apology with an understanding smile. “No worries. I get what you’re saying. It’s kind of nice to see someone else go through that awe and wonder, you know?” She tore another piece of jerky, her gaze wandering back to Calista, watching her little dragon sister soar.

The peaceful atmosphere was suddenly shattered by the sound of yelling and the frantic clatter of a carriage pulled by galloping horses racing onto the estate grounds. Instantly, Taenya and Amari sprang into action, their voices sharp as they called everyone to form up. The guards, well-trained and responsive, moved swiftly, forming a protective ring around Gwyn while others moved toward the manor itself.

As the carriage drew closer, Gwyn felt her heart pounding in her chest. But before panic could fully set in, a familiar voice echoed in her mind, bringing an unexpected sense of relief.

***'It's Roz!'*** Calista's mental voice rang clear.

Without hesitation, Gwyn raised her hand, signaling to everyone. "It's Roslyn!" she shouted, her voice cutting through the chaos.

At her words, the tense air immediately softened, and the guards relaxed their stance, though their alertness remained. The carriage, now slowing down, approached the front of the manor. As Gwyn and her group hastened to the carriage, they saw Khalan and Ser Roderick engaged in a tense conversation with Friedrich. The scene was a whirl of activity, the estate coming alive with the urgency of the moment.

Gwyn stepped forward, her eyes fixed on the carriage, filled with both concern and anticipation, wondering what had brought Roslyn here in such a rush. The sight that greeted her was alarming—multiple bolts from crossbows were embedded in the side of the carriage. Gwyn's heart skipped a beat, her breath catching in her throat.

Amari, her presence commanding and authoritative, stepped forward. "Evocati, report," she demanded.

Khalan turned, his expression grave. "Fire Castle," he stated succinctly, his words loaded with an unspoken severity.

Without missing a beat, Amari faced Taenya. "We need to lock down the estate," she ordered crisply. "Prepare for Firebreak."

"On it," Taenya replied. She immediately set into motion, orchestrating a lockdown with practiced efficiency.

The estate guards sprang into action, moving with precision and purpose. They secured entry points, patrolled the grounds, and communicated through subtle gestures and concise commands. Their movements were like a well-choreographed dance, each step taken with the singular goal of ensuring the safety of everyone on the estate.

Sabina edged closer to the gathering, her eyes black with her mana as she scanned the surroundings with a trained vigilance. Meanwhile, Calista landed gracefully behind them, her large wings folding as she settled.

***'What's wrong, sister?'*** Calista's concerned voice echoed in Gwyn's mind.

***'I dunno, Nyx,'*** Gwyn sent back, her own uncertainty clear.

While Khalan briefed Amari on the situation, Ser Roderick opened the carriage door.

As Roslyn stepped out, assisted by Ser Roderick, Gwyn's fears momentarily eased. But as soon as Roslyn's feet touched the ground, she rushed to Gwyn and enveloped her in a tight hug. "Oh Alos, Gwyn. People were after us," Roslyn said, her voice trembling with emotion.

## Manabound - Resilience

Feeling a surge of protectiveness, Gwyn pulled mana into her core, ready to defend her best friend with all she had. Amari turned to Rhion, who had approached them. “Quietly make sure the grounds are fully secure,” she instructed. “Check for any breaches in the outer wall.”

Rhion nodded, his response firm and confident. “Understood.” With that, he launched himself into the air, Calista following close behind, both of them ready to secure the perimeter and ensure the safety of all within the estate.

The embrace between the two best friends lingered like a sanctuary amidst the chaos. As Gwyn felt Roslyn’s grip tighten, she could sense the tremors of fear that still echoed through her friend’s body, and in response, she held her even closer.

“Roz?” Gwyn whispered, her voice soft yet filled with an unwavering strength. “You’re safe now. I’m here. I won’t let anything happen to you.” Her words were a promise, a vow she intended to keep with every fiber of her being.

Roslyn’s response was muffled against Gwyn’s shoulder, her voice breaking slightly. “I knew I could count on you.” The trust and reliance in those words weighed heavily on Gwyn, yet it was a burden she accepted willingly.

With a gentle smile, Gwyn replied, “Of course. I’m your knight, milady.”

A soft chuckle escaped Roslyn, her violet eyes looked up at her and sparkled with gratitude and affection. “Silly princess...” she murmured. But then, as if caught by a distant thought, her gaze drifted away. “Huh. You really are, aren’t you?”