

Home Away From Home

Taenya observed as Gwyn spoke to the man in her beautiful and melodic language from her world. The man seemed to perk up as he tried responding in what seemed to be a language similar to Gwyn's.

Taenya saw Sabina lean closer out of the corner of her eye. "Good idea with this. Frankly, I enjoy her language."

"Agreed. Keep an eye on him—"

"Any sudden moves, and I'll grab her." Sabina finished. *Good, she's on the same page.*

The two humans continued speaking to each other. It seemed like there were a few words that each spoke that they couldn't understand. Gwyn gestured wildly with her hands as she spoke, and the man looked a bit amused at it. Taenya considered the gesturing and slight language differences may be something regional or slang.

They paused and Gwyn turned while the man looked up at Taenya and Sabina. "Allora, so, he can speak in Italian. But, it's not perfect. His name is Friedrich. He's a knight too! Uh. Which is actually weird. His clothes are weird."

Gwyn went still, her eyes wide. She then jerked a bit and started rapid-firing questions at Friedrich, who seemed to be a bit overwhelmed. He did a motion and said something she assumed was to ask the Princess to slow down. The princess took a deep breath and then continued her interrogation more slowly.

After watching them talking and seeing more and more confusion on both of their faces, Taenya decided to interject. "Your Highness, what is happening?"

Gwyn kept going a bit more, oblivious to Taenya. "Princess Gwyneth."

Startled, Gwyn jerked her head back toward Taenya, "Cosa? I mean... what? Sorry."

Taenya repeated, "What is happening? Is everything okay?"

Gwyn started shaking her head back and forth before Taenya even finished. “No! Everything is *not* okay.” She threw her hands up and pointed at the man. “He’s not from home. He doesn’t know *anything* about home. He keeps saying something about Tyrol and something about the Holy Roman Empire and whatever the Hapsburg lands are? I don’t know. Hold on.”

She then started talking to the man again, getting more and more frustrated as time went on. Taenya could tell from his facial expressions that he didn’t know what she was asking.

“Should we, uh, intervene again?” Sabina uncertainly posed.

Taenya held a hand up. “Wait a moment.”

The man asked a series of questions, that caused Gwyn the look equally confused. The last question made her look at the man as if he was stupid.

Taenya quickly got Gwyn’s attention. “What did he ask?”

“What the year is. How doesn’t he know the year?” Gwyn looked dumbfounded.

“Answer him, please.”

With an eye roll, Gwyn answered the man’s question. “Duemilaventiquattro.”

Taenya knew from their previous discussions, that Gwyn thought the year was two-thousand twenty-four in her world’s calendar system.

The man’s eyes went wide and he quickly started looking around. He started to ask a question, but then his gaze passed over Sabina and he froze. Taenya looked to Sabina then back to the man, realizing he finally noticed her long sharp ears.

Finally, he looked between Gwyn and Taenya and in very accented Common, asked, “Where... Am... Me?”

Gwyn’s eyes went a bit wide and she started slowly speaking in their mutual tongue. The look on the man’s face got more and more pained as she continued. By the time she was finished, the man was quietly sobbing.

Taenya reached forward and laid a hand on Gwyn’s shoulders. “Princess, let’s give him some space.”

Sabina looked at the guards that were standing around, “He’s like the princess, however, it seems they’re not quite from the same place. He doesn’t understand Common too well. Please speak slowly and use gestures to explain what you need or are doing. He just lost everything he knows. Please be understanding.”

The guard that Taenya knew was in charge nodded, “Understood, Ser. We’ll take care of him.”

“If you need anything, please grab one of us,” Taenya added.

“Taenya, we got this, I’ll make sure he’s comfortable,” Onas added from where had been watching the ordeal.

Taenya nodded to her friend. “Thanks, Onas. We’ll talk more later? Let me get the Princess back so she can rest.”

“I’ll be here.” He replied with a sad smile.

Sabina and Taenya walked with Gwyn back to their camp. The princess went straight to the fire and sat on her cot. Holding her knees to her chest, she looked up at the two women. “He’s not from home. It’s like he came from a storybook.” She started sniffing. “We’re going to find my mom, right? She’s here?”

Taenya sat down next to her and put her arm around her, pulling her close. The girl started crying softly into Taenya. Sabina sat on her knees on the other side.

Taenya rubbed the girl’s arm, “We’re going to find her, Gwyn.”

She looked up as Sabina started gently patting Gwyn’s back. “Don’t worry... Gwyn. Theran and I will help in any way that is needed.”

Taenya saw a determination in Sabina’s eyes that spoke to history better left unquestioned for the time being.

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Taenya was riding next to the carriage as they reached Strathmore. Keston was guiding the carriage, and Gwyn was inside as they discussed. They were all prepared to be as formal as necessary.

Theran led the carriage and wagon to the eastern noble gatehouse. It was smaller than the main gate, but it would allow them to enter the city quicker and reach the noble district.

The group arrived and were stopped by four guards and Taenya saw another four positioned around the gate itself.

“Halt! This gate is for nobles only. State your business.” A guard called out.

Theran spoke up, “We wish entrance into the city. I am Ser Theran, Knight of House Reinhart. I have Her Highness, Princess Gwyneth, and her retinue arriving to take ownership of her house within the city.”

Taenya rode forward, “Ser Theran, is there an issue?”

Theran looked to the city guardsman, who looked back to another, older, guardsman. The older man stepped forward and gave a slight bow, “Sers, please allow me to retrieve the Lieutenant. We will be able to get you into the city quickly. My apologies.”

Naught but a few minutes later, he arrived with a tall high elf with dark hair and hazel eyes. He had the look of a low noble, likely a lower-ranking son of some smaller family who pushed for him to join the guard.

He walked up and addressed the two knights with a salute. “Sers, I am Lieutenant Kieran Valro of the Strathmore Guard. I apologize for the delay and the request, but could you please provide your liege’s House Patents?”

Taenya looked to Theran, “Please provide Her Highness’s Royal Patent, Ser Theran.”

With a nod, the knight withdrew the document case from his satchel and handed it over to Lieutenant Valro.

Taenya watched as the Lieutenant reviewed the documents Baron Iemes had fabricated. After he examined each, he looked up. “Everything looks in order. However, I should inform you that I will be required to inform His Grace, Duke Tiloral of your arrival. While I do not wish to

presume, I suspect His Grace will wish to meet Her Royal Highness, Princess Gwyneth at her earliest convenience.”

Ser Theran nodded, “As expected. Please inform His Grace that Princess Gwyneth is but nine at the moment. We wish to get her House established before she joins the Academy next year, so it will keep her quite busy for the time being.”

Lieutenant Valro nodded, “I understand. I will pass it along. Please give my regards to Her Highness for the delay.” He looked to the other guards, “Let them through!”

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The group arrived at the site of what would be the beginning of House Reinhart. Taenya had only been to the Iemes House one time before. It was certainly not as modest as Baron Iemes made it seem.

Keston also seemed to agree, as he let out an impressed whistle. “This isn’t bad at all. It has its own wall and a nice small courtyard. This is the house of a Count. Not a Baron.”

“Baron Iemes has done very well for himself with Mr. Onas and their trade with the Kingdom of Meris and the Duchy of Tiloral,” Sabina interjected.

Taenya turned as she heard a chuckle from behind her. “We’ve done alright. I remember when Varciel—I mean Baron Iemes—purchased this. It was *actually* a Marquess that owned it previously.” Onas corrected.

Theran nodded, “I recall that. I was back in Larton at the time, but it was the talk of the castle for weeks.” The knight walked up to the gate and started talking to the guard that was standing there.

Sabina smiled, “And now it’s fit for royalty. Onas, will you be joining us?”

The merchant shook his head. “Not this evening. You should all get settled in and meet the staff.” He took out a scroll from a bag he held and handed it to Taenya. “Here, give this to

Majordomo Ser Siveril. It will explain to him the transfer of personnel from House Iemes to House Reinhart. If he accepts—which I don't doubt he will—then he will handle everything.”

Taenya accepted the scroll. “Thanks, Onas. We'll see you soon?”

Onas smiled, “Of course! We have to introduce Gwyn to my family! Speaking of...” He chuckled as he turned and noticed Gwyn coming out of the carriage.

“You're going home Mr. Onas?” the princess asked hesitantly.

“I am. I have been away from my family for some time, but don't worry! We will see each other again soon. For now, you'll have these four.” Onas reassured her.

“What about Sir Friedrich?” Gwyn asked.

“He's going to come with us. You want to help him?” Taenya asked, trying to gauge what the girl was thinking.

“Yes! We should help him, he lost his home, even if it's a different home than mine.” Gwyn stated with resolve.

Taenya nodded, “Then, Keston will help get him settled, then tomorrow after we have everything in hand, we can invite him to meet with you. You can translate for us. We'll get him a teacher so that he can learn Common.”

“I'll look after him, princess. Don't you worry.” Keston added.

“I won't if it's you, Keston! Thank you.”

“Of course, Your Highness.”

Theran turned back to the group, “The guard is going to get the Majordomo. He should be here soon.”

Taenya watched through the gate as the guard talked with an older Loreni, who should be the Majordomo if she remembered correctly—it had been a few years. The two glanced toward the gate and then the head of the house staff said something to another servant who rushed back inside.

Taenya turned back to Onas who saw the two heading toward them from the house. “Alright, that’s Siveril. This is where I take my leave.” He turned and leaned over toward the princess. “Princess. We’ll see each other again soon. We’ll be working together a lot. Alright?”

“Okay, Mr. Onas. See you soon.” She said as she started to walk over toward Taenya. She stopped and spun around then ran at Onas, slamming into the man and giving him a tight squeeze. “Thank you, Mr. Onas. For everything. I can’t wait until you meet my mom.”

“I can’t either, my dear.” He said before turning and walking back to his wagon.

Taenya would have normally watched him go, but she had to meet the Majordomo. She nodded to Sabina then walked to the gate and stood next to Theran. She looked back and saw Sabina standing next to the Princess.

Majordomo Siveril stepped through the gate after the guard had opened it. “Greetings. Welcome to Iemes House. I am told you here to speak—” The Majordomo noticed Taenya and he smiled, “Oh, Taenya! Was that Master Onas leaving as well? What can I do for you?”

Taenya took a step forward and addressed him. “Majordomo Siveril Norric, Ser.” The man straightened as he recognized the formality of her statement. She gave a subtle nod of appreciation, which he gave the slightest smirk of approval at. “I am Ser Taenya Shavyre...” His eyes widened noticeably at that. “Knight-Captain of House Reinhart. With me is Ser Theran...” Taenya gestured to the knight beside her, then stepped to the side and gestured behind her. “And Ser Sabina. We are here escorting Her Royal Highness, Princess Gwyneth of House Reinhart. I have a sealed scroll from Baron Iemes that will inform you as to our purpose. After you have read it, we can discuss it further.”

Taenya handed the man the scroll that Iemes had written and sealed for this purpose. The Majordomo accepted the scroll, broke the seal, and unrolled it. His nerves showed through the shocked expression and transferred to a very slight shaking in his fingers.

As the man read the scroll, Taenya looked at her group. She noticed Keston with the probably-human knight behind the carriage. She looked at the princess and smiled at her. The girl smiled back and gave her a quick thumbs-up, which made Taenya feel pleased.

She turned back to the Head Staff of the house just as he finished reading. His expression was one of many emotions, but what settled when he looked up was a pinch of shock with a large serving of resolve and determination.

He straightened, quietly speaking to himself, "I see."

He strode forward, and Taenya stepped aside so that he could approach Her Highness.

After an elegant bow, he straightened his back again with immaculate posture and addressed the princess. "Your Highness, Princess Gwyneth, please allow me to be the first to welcome you to your new home, *Reinhart House*, and Strathmore. I am Majordomo Siveril Norric and I coordinate all of the domestic affairs for the House in the city. I would be honored to assist you in establishing your House both in the city and kingdom in any way that I am able.

"Now, I am sure your travels were long and tiring from Baron Iemes' castle in Larton. Please, follow me and we will allow your driver to move the carriage into the courtyard so that your belongings can be brought inside.

"I can introduce you to your new staff and show you to your new rooms to rest after a brief tour of your home. When you awaken, we can formulate a plan of action. With your approval of course."

Gwyn gave a respectful nod. "Thank you, Ser Siveril. I look forward to working with you. I would be grateful to get some rest. Sleeping in a carriage is quite uncomfortable." She giggled softly into her hand like practiced. "Please, show me around your beautiful home. I can't wait to meet all the wonderful people who work here."

She is good, Taenya thought, swelling with pride.