

## A Common Tongue

Ser Taenya Shavyre subtly shifted in her saddle, trying to portray an image of confidence and strength that she felt the Knight-Captain of House Reinhart should have. *Which is impossible with how much my arse hurts.* They had finally almost made it to Strathmore and she couldn't wait to get settled back at home.

*Well...or at least gather my things to move to my new home.* Taenya still couldn't believe the sequence of events that had culminated with the formation of House Reinhart and her as a knight.

She shook her head, the last month had been busy, they had pushed fairly hard in between the villages leading home. Taenya had spent many evenings speaking to Theran and Sabina coming up with plans for the HousGwyte. Those two were a massive help in making decisions about everything.

She glimpsed over at Sabina, who was riding her horse with far more poise than Taenya currently. *I bet her arse hurts. She just hides it better.*

Sabina noticed Taenya looking at her and gave her a wave, "Everything alright, Ser Taenya?"

Caught, Taenya had to commit. "Of course, and, please, Taenya. I've told you that before, Sabina."

Sabina gave a small sigh, "Ser Taenya, it's not proper. You are the Captain."

Taenya rolled her eyes, "and we're basically in private. If you insist, you may maintain protocol in public, but out here? Come on, give me a little."

With a nod and slight grimace, Sabina acquiesced. "I will...try."

Taenya studied the pale high elf woman as she went back to watching their surroundings. Sabina had dark brown hair that fell just below her shoulder blades and styled it with a braid that fell in front of her face. The most prominent features were on her face though, which had a

dark blue line on the left side that went from her hairline above her temple and curved through her eye to the jawline. Her thin-almond set eyes were a bright blue but with a dark ring that accentuated the iris even more. The scar that ran from her cheekbone diagonal through her lips to the chin gave her an aura of experience.

Sabina was lithe but of an average height, so a bit shorter than Taenya. From what Taenya could tell, she was a great knight. They had sparred a few times and her skill was exceptional.

Theran was also no exception. The other knight that had joined her in House Reinhart was an expert swordsman. Taenya always had difficulty when she fought him. Luckily, she was able to keep up just from her... unorthodox fighting style. *Sometimes you gotta fight dirty.*

She had already decided that he would lead any weapons training that was needed within the House. The knight in question was riding ahead of them, watching for any forward threats. The six guards Onas had hired in Larton were around his wagon and to the rear. They were... competent, she supposed. *At least they listened to her orders.*

Taenya felt a little bad, she had barely even learned their names, but Onas had only hired them for the trek to the city. It also didn't help that they preferred to keep to themselves and avoid the knights.

She glanced at the sky, gauging the time, and decided they should start looking for a place to stop. Taenya looked to Sabina, "Sabina, we should find a good location to set up camp for tonight. Please inform Theran to start searching. I'll inform Her Highness and Onas's guards."

"Of course, Captain." The woman sped her horse up slightly to catch up to Theran.

Taenya slowed until she was next to the carriage. "Keston, how you holding up? We're looking for a place to stop."

"I'm good, Taenya. Could use a rest, Gwyn is inside practicing magic again." He said with a slight roll of eyes.

Before she could reply, the small sliding window behind Keston opened and a small head popped out next to him. "I'm not practicing fire this time. Don't worry! We're going to stop soon, Taenya?"

Taenya shook her head, the girl was getting more and more intuitive. *I could have just been coming to talk*, she thought with a smirk. “Yes, Gwyn, I have Theran looking for somewhere to stop now.” She answered truthfully though, keeping her joking to Keston. Although, that had waned ever since Raafe...

Keston sighed a bit, “I’ll start preparing everything for dinner after we stop. We need more people, Taenya.”

Gwyn nodded her head a bit enthusiastically, “Yeah, we do. Poor Keston. Sabina is super nice, and Theran is pretty cool, but...” she trailed off.

“But they’re more used to combat than being support personnel for a House.” Taenya finished.

“I guess they’re trying. They know how to set up camp and do basic field tasks, but they are clearly not comfortable yet in the role that you need them for, Gwyn. They at least don’t treat me as beneath them, like some knights would.” Keston pointed out.

Gwyn stuck her fist through the window and started shaking it. “They better not! I’ll beat them up.”

Taenya chuckled, “They won’t. They know how you feel about that, Princess.”

Gwyn scowled, “Taenya...”

Keston smirked, “Yeah Taenya, I saw you earlier when Sabina wouldn’t call you by your name.”

Taenya sighed. “You’re right. Sorry, Gwyn. I guess this is all a bit different for us all isn’t it?”

It was Gwyn’s turn to sigh. “Yeah... I’m gonna—I’m going to practice some more magic.” She shifted to look at Keston, “please tell me when you’re about to cook, Keston. I want to help.”

Keston slid over a bit so he could turn and look at the girl. “Of course, Gwyn. Can’t change a good thing.”

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Sabina was sitting off to the side while Taenya and Theran spoke about various details related to the House for when they arrived in Strathmore the next day. Sabina would join in a bit later, for now, she would relax and eat the food Keston and Her Highness had made for the group. Sabina liked that the Princess assisted with such tasks, it spoke to her character and the relationship she had with her people.

Keston and the Princess were sitting down playing a game the young royal was teaching him. He kept losing which had her in a constant fit of giggles. “Allora... basta. Keston! Like this!” Gwyneth said as she showed Keston the proper sequence of sayings and hand gestures for the children’s game. Which she promptly won again.

It made Sabina smile, the guard and the captain were both close to the girl. She liked that. Her Highness would need all the help she could get in the days to come.

Sabina chuckled as Keston messed up again causing Gwyn to throw her hands up and exclaim animatedly in that language of hers, Italiano she called it.

The language was intriguing, it flowed much better than common and the girl would go on tangents that had her speaking so fast. Princess Gwyneth had explained it was from her home. *That was in another world.* Sabina shook her head, it was so much. At least no one would understand the language. The House would just need to learn it. Hopefully, the young girl knew enough to teach them.

Sabina finished the meal the two had prepared and stood up to go relieve herself. As she left the camp, she nodded to the merchant guards that were spread around another fire they had set up. The merchant Onas was working on his ledger in his wagon. Onas and Baron Iemes were quite close. It didn’t surprise her that the rich Baron—whose fortune was tied to the merchant—readily accepted everything Onas had told him.

She headed nearby into the woods to do her business and thought back to how she became involved in the new House.

When Baron Iemes had approached her about the young princess, she saw no hesitation from him in wanting to assist in establishing a new Royal House. He provided everything they

would need so that Gwyneth wouldn't be overly scrutinized. While Sabina knew that the baron and merchant both were hitching to a potential rising star, they were both good men in their own right.

That the head of Fenren Trading Co. was still traveling like a simple route merchant spoke to his willingness to maintain the relationships that got him to where he is. Sabina knew that the Fenren Merchant House and the company it controlled was a trading powerhouse in the duchy and the Kingdom of Meris.

Sabina finished up and started heading back to camp but the sound of rustling and cracking twigs caught her attention. She mentally scolded herself for not having her sword as she drew her dagger and started scanning her surroundings. Sabina slowly backed toward the camp, when she saw a figure leaning against a tree.

Sabina looked back to the camp, brought her fingers to her lips, and whistled. The action startled the person who jerked and looked toward her and raised a hand. She slowly made her way toward them, making sure to keep near the trees so that she could quickly put one between her and any potential threat.

As she got close, she took in the appearance of what looked like a man. One who had seen better days. He had a gash on his cheek and his shirt was torn and stained with blood. She raised a hand and called out to him, "Do you need help friend?"

The man stumbled before replying in a language she wasn't familiar with. Although Sabina believed she understood the sentiment—he needed help. So she turned back toward the camp and noticed the guards were coming toward the treeline armed and looking around. *Such a slow response.*

The others of House Reinhart would be securing the princess. That was the plan at least. She yelled to the guards, "In here! We have a man that's injured!"

She walked to the man in question and addressed him again as the guards caught up finally. "Milady knight! We're here. What do you need from us?"

"He's going to need assistance. You have someone trained in aid, yes?"

"Of course, Ser." The telv said as he moved toward the man.

“I am Ser Sabina. These are some guards for our small caravan. We can help you.”

The man looked confused and started to fall. The telv guard managed to catch him and helped him walk. As they got out of the woods and closer to the camp, Sabina saw Onas and Taenya standing with the last guard looking toward them.

Taenya came forward, “What happened?”

“I found him walking toward the camp. He’s been injured by something. I don’t know if he understands Common. He is speaking another language.” Sabina explained and then turned to the guards, “Take him close to the fire and place him on a cot. Grab some water.”

The guard nodded, “Of course Ser Sabina. We will handle it from here.”

Ser Taenya looked between her and the injured man, and Sabina noticed her eyes suddenly widening in shock. “Ma’am?”

“Sabina, his ears.”

Sabina looked at the man and saw that his ears were short and rounded. *Just like the Princess’.*

Taenya glanced back toward their part of the camp, “Can you go grab the princess? We may need her.”

“Understood,” Sabina said as she rushed to retrieve her liege.

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Gwyn was standing with Keston and Theran. Taenya had run off to see what was wrong with Sabina. She peeked up at Keston, “What’s going on?”

Keston shook his head, “I’m not sure—”

Theran interrupted while looking over to where Mr. Onas’s fire was. “They have someone over there. Someone injured I believe. Sabina’s heading this way.”

Gwyn watched as the pretty knight walked toward them, she was just about to wave when Sabina called out. “Your Highness! There’s one of your people! Can you see if you can speak to him? His language is different.”

Gwyn perked up, *a human?* “Okay! I’m coming!” She looked up to Keston and Theran who both looked at each other.

Gwyn ran with Keston to Sabina and asked, “Is he okay?”

Sabina nodded, “Yes. He got hurt, but it isn’t really bad. He just needs rest and water I think.”

That made Gwyn happy. She followed the knight to Onas’s camp and saw the man laying on a blanket with his back propped up against a log. Gwyn looked to his ears and took note that they were indeed just like hers.

He was drinking some water the guards had given him. Looking at him, she saw that the man had light brown hair and a funny mustache. It looked like it was coming down a bit on both sides of his mouth and then twirled out. He glanced up at her as she walked up and she saw his dark blue eyes as they scrutinized her.

She didn’t actually know what to say, deciding to just start with a wave and, “Hi. I’m Gwyn.”

The man tilted his head and started to speak... in something, but not English.

After a moment, with squinted eyes, as she was thinking, Gwyn thought it *sounded* like German. “Uh, is that German?” She looked over to Taenya and Sabina, “I don’t speak German.”

Taenya tilted her head then shrugged, “I don’t know what that is. Maybe try the other language you know?”

Gwyn smiled. *Of course!* She looked back at the guy and said, “Ciao! Parli Italiano? Come ti senti?”