

I Hope You Have a Spare

Taenya watched as the marquess stood before the Seat of the Duchy of Tiloral. Duke Tiloral peered down from the dais which held his Seat, examining the noble that had come before him, and then spoke, “Marquess Angwin. I suspected you would speak, proceed.”

While she didn’t have the best vantage point, she would have sworn she saw a scowl appear on the elf’s face. The man gave the slightest bow she had ever seen if you could even call it that before turning and facing the gathered aristocrats. He swept his gaze through both all of the nobles and wealthy merchants or land owners. The man either didn’t notice Siveril or he maintained his composure well.

“All of you have, *or should have*, seen the decree from His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince. I will not stand here and repeat what has already been *ordered*. What I am here to do today, is lay out my own decree as granted by my authority under His Royal Highness. As the Representative overseeing the Office of Magical Affairs within the Duchy of Tiloral, I have been given the responsibility of managing the kingdom’s response to this new phenomenon within the duchy specifically. As such, I have established my Office within the grounds of the Royal Academy’s branch within Strathmore.

“The exact decree will be made available to all within the duchy starting today. However, I will inform you all now as to what is expected. One: Due to the size of the duchy, my Office orders the Duchy of Tiloral to enact a test of all citizens to ascertain the exact ability—”

“No.”

The marquess jerked in surprise at the voice that came from behind him. He turned and scowled at the Duke that was standing. “Excuse me?”

“I do believe you heard me, Marquess Angwin. Nowhere in the decree that was sent by the Crown Prince does it state that you may order *me* or *my people* to do your job for you. You will need to figure it out yourself. Perhaps the Crown can give you a stipend to pay for personnel. If not, I am sure House Angwin has sufficient funds to support such an endeavor, but no, the

Duchy of Tilorral will not spend a single coin in doing your duty,” Duke Tilorral stated with finality before sitting back down. He gestured absently with his hand. “You may continue.”

“We will see about *House Tilorral’s* dismissal of the intent of the Decree at another time.”

“We shall,” the duke said, almost tiredly.

The marquess turned and looked over the crowd again, almost threatening anyone to interrupt or challenge him. “Very well. Since the duchy *refuses*, any and all citizens within the duchy must register with my Office if they have shown any level of magical ability. Nobles of sufficient standing will register with my House personally and I will determine whether to personally provide oversight of the individual.”

The duke cleared his throat, causing the marquess to scowl again, but he did not turn around. “Due to the small size of the Academy’s branch here, my House will invest in supporting their research and oversight of this new phenomenon and how it affects our citizens. Dean Kirna has already approved and welcomes this support,” The marquess said, the last with a pointed look at the duke.

“As we have seen an incident recently, I have made the decision that any public disturbance or assault by someone with magic must be reported and assigned direct oversight of the individual by my office. Any noble will immediately be assigned oversight by myself.”

Siveril leaned close. “That’s our cue.”

Taenya followed Siveril as they slowly made their way through the crowd, Niles close behind her with his documents at the ready.

The marquess glanced at them as they moved, but he did not pause his speech. “As such, I will immediately be providing direct oversight of the terran princess, Gwyneth of House Reinhart for her magical assault of a member of the kingdom’s nobility, *even if the duchy chose to forgive it*. Her actions prove the Crown’s decision, as a child should not be trusted with such abilities without keen authority to guide it.”

Their group walked from the crowd and Siveril addressed the Duke. “Your Grace, with your permission?”

The marquess turned and looked at the Duke, who waved Siveril on. “Of course, Ser Siveril. Address the Court.”

Siveril looked at the marquess, and Taenya thought he was taking a measure of the man. “With respect, *Marquess* Angwin, Her Highness does not fall under the purview of this decree. She is not a *citizen* of this Kingdom. Her House was approved under the Recognition Act of 851. As a recognized noble-in-exile, she is granted the same status under our laws but is not considered a citizen of the Kingdom. Therefore, you may not provide *direct oversight*, to even suggest so is insulting, and House Reinhart takes offense.”

Taenya narrowed her eyes as the marquess sneered. “As expected. *Ser* Siveril. Unfortunately, your princess is a *de facto* citizen of the kingdom. She cannot claim to be in exile if the kingdom cannot even access her home nation. She is a girl displaced by the very phenomenon I have been tasked with overseeing. No law or decree governs her status, as such a thing was never envisioned. By granting her House status, and by the fact that our kingdom is unable to communicate with her government, she is more of a refugee than an exile. Therefore, the decree most certainly applies. I expect to see her—”

“Very well. Esquire Balfiel?”

Niles stepped forward, the marquess tilting his head even as his hands formed into fists after being interrupted.

The high elf cleared his throat as he unfurled the scroll he had written, speaking loudly so all those gathered could hear. “House Reinhart takes grave offense to the presumptive and overreaching actions of the marquess for House Angwin. His Royal Highness’ Decree of Magical Affairs does not state that the Representative within may enact personal oversight and control over citizens, especially citizens that outrank him in status. It is House Reinhart’s stance that Marquess Angwin is seeking to cause irreparable damages to our House and thus cannot abide by his unlawful order.” He paused, as discussed, waiting for the marquess to react.

It didn’t take long. Marquess Angwin glanced at the duke, who had leaned forward in his Seat and was listening, but not otherwise doing anything.

“House Reinhart openly admits to a willful disregard for the crown prince’s decree and the *lawful* decree of the Royal Office of Magical Affairs. Your Head of House is not even here? Why? Because she is a child. A child who has shown a willingness to openly attack a noble. The

Office is *well* within its authority to provide oversight to the minor since it seems that mere knights are incapable of doing so. In fact, this situation is an example of the very purpose the Office was established. To ensure the safety and proper management of this phenomenon within the kingdom.

“If you wish to speak of law and legal standing, then note that the very laws you believe allow your House to ignore the order of the crown prince have provisions to protect the kingdom. They also state that any willful infringement of royal decrees and laws will result in a dissolution of the House for which the transgressor heads. As such, I demand the duchy follow through with upholding the law and dissolve House Reinhart.”

Siveril stepped forward and turned toward the duke. “Your Grace, we would like to continue our statement.”

Duke Tiloral stood. “You may continue, but you must address the marquess’ *very real* concerns.”

Siveril bowed. “We shall, Your Grace.” The majordomo turned, his face not visible by the marquess, and smirked at Taenya. “Esquire Niles, please continue.”

“Thank you, Ser Siveril.” He bowed toward the duke. “Your Grace. Now, House Reinhart recognizes that House Angwin wishes to utilize his authority to further actions that would dissolve our House illegally. Additionally, House Reinhart formally accuses Marquess Angwin of Grave Abuse of Authority as it pertains to the Royal Decree of 896.”

Collective gasps and murmurs could be heard from the crowd behind Taenya as people discussed what they heard. The marquess jerked his head backward in surprise. “*How dare you.*”

Duke Tiloral nodded. “That is a bold statement, Ser Siveril. This is the stance of House Reinhart?”

“It is, Your Grace. We wish to submit proof that was given to our House by a concerned party,” Siveril stated, turning to Taenya and nodding.

Taenya gave a curt nod in response and reached into the satchel she wore. She pulled out the scroll that Sabina had written and stolen, clutching it tightly. Taenya strode forward toward

the dais and the duke. She bowed, as expected of a knight in armor, and handed the scroll to the guard that had stepped forward to receive it.

The guard handed it to an elf advisor, who examined the seal and showed it to Duke Tiloral. The two spoke quietly, then the elf broke the seal and unfurled the scroll. His eyes darted over the scroll, widening as he read what was within. When he had finished, he handed the scroll to the duke and whispered in the man's ear. The duke's ear twitched as he listened, and he brought the scroll up and started reading, a scowl forming as he did.

When he had finished reading, his expression unchanging, he stood. He held up the letter and paced back and forth on the dais as he addressed both sides of the court. "It seems Marquess Angwin wishes this seat," he said, gesturing toward his chair. The crowd gasped, but the duke continued. "It further seems that the marquess wishes to conspire with the *crown prince* to use the princess of House Reinhart as a weapon against our duchy."

He turned toward the marquess who stood silently. "The *crown prince* is not *king*, yet. This letter *and I do not doubt its authenticity*, shows clear evidence of what House Reinhart accuses." Duke Tiloral faced Ser Siveril. "Ser Siveril, do you have more to address?"

"We do, Your Grace."

"*Continue.*"

Esquire Balfiel cleared his throat again. "With House Angwin and its Head's attempt to abuse the *limited* authority delegated to him by the crown prince, House Reinhart has been the target of a nefarious plot against the duchy itself. The Marquess' attempt to force Princess Gwyneth, *a ten-year-old child*, into *de facto* slavery and the dissolution of her House, is dishonorable of the highest degree. As such, House Reinhart seeks damages. As House Angwin wishes to eliminate our House and force its Head into servitude, we believe any compensation should be reflected in this. Therefore, we request that all holdings of House Angwin within Strathmore and Maireharbora be transferred to House Reinhart. Further, we request a payment of one thousand gold coins per year... for ten years."

The total amount was large, and enough to finance the entirety of the duchy for a year. They had discussed the amount and settled on a number that they knew the marquess could afford—barely—and one they were sure he would decline.

The marquess stood stunned, for that could be the only reason he had not reacted or said anything. Taenya watched him as he processed everything, then continued as the implications came crashing on him. His composure slowly returned, and she saw this expressed by his fists opening and closing, the glance at his majordomo—who immediately sent one of the guards rushing out of the hall.

Angwin turned in place and stared at Ser Siveril. His voice was low as he spoke, “Did you harm my servant?” Taenya was surprised that the first question was one of seeming concern for one of his people. For all of his other faults, that one thing spoke well of how he treated those within his House. Something that even Sabina couldn’t refute when she related what she saw and felt from those within the Angwin Estate.

Ser Siveril scoffed. “None of your people were harmed. Are you admitting that this letter is yours?”

With a small shake of his head, Angwin smiled. “You have shown that you illegally stole privileged communication between the crown prince and my House.” He faced the duke. “Your family have sat upon that Seat and looked down upon the nobility of this duchy for long enough. Fortunately, no laws state I cannot communicate with the Crown about what they wish. You have made an enemy of the Crown, *Tilorat*. Your feigned neutrality will not save you.”

He gestured toward Siveril. “House Angwin will *not* bow to some mere knight, who only believes he is relevant because of a *child*. We *refuse* to accede to any demand made against us by one. The crown prince may not be king, yet, but the actual king has given him broad powers in preparation for this. This farce of a Court will submit to our authority in time.”

Duke Tilorat laughed, an act that surprised everyone, especially the marquess.

“Angwin, there have been many pretenders like you through the centuries. Do you know what they all have in common? House Tilorat remains standing after whatever little plot they concoct. The crown prince wishes to make an enemy of Tilorat? *I welcome it.*”

He laughed some more, before turning and grabbing a goblet from a servant and drinking deeply. When he finished, he gently handed it back and thanked the telv, who bowed his head and stepped away.

Angwin fumed where he stood, but had the presence of mind to not interrupt the man who controlled the land on which he stood.

Duke Tiloral turned back and looked down at Angwin. “You may tell the crown prince that he has made his bed. I know at least one member of my family will be happy to hear that House Tiloral is finally entering the Polite War.” The last part he said with a glance and a smile to the side where Taenya noticed Roslyn, her two knights, and the paladin standing by her protectively as she sat and observed. The anger she saw on that young face was not surprising. She had become fast friends with Gwyn.

She looked back at the marquess when she heard him speak.

“You will regret this, Tiloral,” the man sneered as he took a single step backward.

Taenya stepped forward, interrupting the back and forth because it seemed the man was soon to storm out. “Marquess Angwin. Your Grace, I apologize for the interruption, but House Reinhart has been shown harm and we *will* have resolution.”

The duke nodded and gestured for her to continue.

The marquess turned his head. “The commoner finally wishes to speak? Do you not know when to hold your tongue in front of your betters?”

“I am *Ser* Taenya Shavyre, Knight-Captain of House Reinhart and protector of Her Royal Highness, Gwyneth Reinhart. You have sought to forcibly dissolve our House and control my charge. You refused our reasonable demands. You are dishonorable and a blight upon our kingdom and do not deserve the status that you hold.”

Angwin scoffed. “That is not your choice to make, *commoner*,” he sneered.

She nodded. “It is not. However, this is.” She removed her gauntlet and threw it at the man, hitting him squarely in the chest. The shock was evident on his face as the act surprised him. “For the heinous acts you plotted to commit against my charge, I challenge you to a duel. One that can only be resolved when one of us is no longer breathing.”

She heard swords being pulled from where the marquess’ men stood. Taenya ignored them.

“How dare you? I will see—”

“House Angwin accepts!”

Taenya jerked her head to the left where the marquess’ men stood. One of the high elves stepped forward, sword returning to its sheath. The elf removed his own gauntlet and threw it on the ground, followed by spitting at her feet. “I am Lord Nicolas Angwin, and on behalf of my father. I accept this challenge. *I will mount your head on a pike, telv.* When I am done with that, *your princess’ will be next.*”

Taenya glanced at the marquess who looked as if he wanted to scream at his son, anger evident in his features. When he caught her looking at him, he scowled. She smiled. “It seems your heir wishes to fight your battles. A pity.”

Taenya shook her head, walked forward, and retrieved her gauntlet. When she rose, she spoke so only the marquess could hear.

“I hope you have a spare.”