

Renewed Hope

Gwyn and Roslyn sat side by side on a plush rug in the Tiloral Mansion, the warmth of the fire crackling before them filling the room with an inviting glow. Outside, snowflakes gently floated to the ground, piling on windowsills and covering the landscape in a soft blanket of white. The winter nights at the Academy had been long and cold, which was why Gwyn was glad to spend her break with Roslyn. Winter in the capital was even colder than it had been when she had spent last winter in Drakensburg on her way here.

A strong gust of wind beat against the windows to the bleak outdoors, but the flickering firelight made the room they were in feel like a sanctuary from the frigid world beyond.

Gwyn turned to Roslyn, her eyes twinkling as she reminisced about their time at school the past season. "I can't believe how much we've grown since we first met," she mused, a smile playing on her lips. "It feels like we've been friends for a lifetime."

Roslyn grinned back, nodding in agreement. "I remember meeting you the first time and being all nervous. I was forced to go to the court where you were introduced, you know. When I heard about your House, I thought you were going to be some marquess!"

Gwyn giggled. "I was so nervous there! Taenya and Siveril had explained everything in excruciating detail on how I should act. Then that jerk came..."

Roslyn nodded. "Seeing your magic the first time... it was beautiful. Then when I was told I was going to be able to get you something for your birthday... I got so excited."

"Really? I saw you and I acted so silly!" Gwyn said with a shake of her head.

"It was endearing," Roslyn said with a chuckle. "I am glad I met you. I hadn't ever wanted friends. I didn't think I needed them, but meeting you dissuaded me of that notion right away."

Gwyn put a hand up to hide her blush as she smiled.

Roslyn grinned at Gwyn, then placed her hands behind her back and leaned backward, releasing a contented sigh. "It's been quite a journey, hasn't it? I'm grateful for all the time we've spent together, both studying and just having fun. The magic... oh, the magic, Gwyn," she said, her voice filled with admiration and wonder.

The girl shifted her weight to one arm and raised her hand, concentrating intensely as her eyes transformed into a vivid shade of green. She gestured gracefully toward the plant in the corner, and the rocks and soil within the pot trembled in response. Compacting together, they formed a small mound that swiftly spilled over the edge and rushed toward Roslyn.

A mere moment before the mass of earth and stone reached the rug, a subtle gust of wind lifted it into the air, propelling it in Roslyn's direction. The airborne mixture

whirled in a tight circle, ultimately coming together to create a compact sphere of dirt and rock. Suspended above Roslyn's outstretched hand, it hovered like a miniature planet, a testament to how far her friend had come in a season.

That's so cool.

Roslyn snorted at Gwyn's look of awe and with a flick of her wrist, sent the small ball flying back into the pot. "Don't give me that look," Roslyn said with a smile. "Your magic is so much better."

Gwyn shook her head. "Maybe, but you look so amazing when you do it. I can't do anything with Earth magic. I think it's because you use green mana and I don't. You're... *remarkable*," she said teasingly, using the core quality the girl had told her about.

Roslyn groaned. "You really should go do the Ceremony of Paths, as well. Khalan said he's surprised you still haven't gone."

That made Gwyn shrug. "I am not worried about it. I'm working on something else."

"Your vision? The spellbook you told me about? Have you had another vision?" Roslyn asked, instantly concerned.

Gwyn shook her head. "Yes, yes, and no."

Roslyn gave her a confused stare.

"Yes it's about the vision I had when I tried to **[Blink]**, yes it's because of the **[Spellbook]**—I think we can really make one and I want to show you how to do it when I do, and no I haven't had another vision," Gwyn explained.

"Oh. You'll tell me if you have another vision, right?" Roslyn said as she sat up and leaned toward Gwyn.

Gwyn nodded reassuringly. "Of course, I'll tell you, but I think that was the last one. You're my best friend, and I trust you. But I promise, when I figure out how to create that spellbook, you'll be the first to know, and we can work on it together."

Roslyn's expression softened, and she smiled warmly at Gwyn. "I appreciate that, Gwyn. It means a lot to me. I'm excited to see what we can accomplish together. With your magic and mine, we'll make an incredible team."

Gwyn grinned back, her eyes sparkling with anticipation. "We certainly will."

As the firelight cast dancing shadows on the walls, Gwyn and Roslyn exchanged stories of their favorite moments from the winter months. They talked about the exhilaration of mastering new spells, the satisfaction of excelling in their classes, and the joy of simply laughing together with their friends.

As the conversation gently flowed, a cozy quietude enveloped the two nearly-teenage girls. Gwyn tenderly rested her head on Roslyn's shoulder, basking in the

warmth and companionship that transcended the fire's embrace. Roslyn reciprocated by wrapping an arm around Gwyn, drawing her nearer.

In that tranquil moment, Gwyn employed her **[Draco-pyromancy]** to gracefully choreograph the hearth's flames, creating a mesmerizing ballet of sparks and flickers. Roslyn laid her head atop Gwyn's, her eyes captivated by the enchanting display. Amid the dancing firelight, their friendship blossomed ever stronger, bolstered by their shared experiences and challenges at the Academy.

“Gwyn?” Roslyn inquired gently.

The princess hummed in response, savoring the snug, cozy moment they were sharing. “Yes, Roslyn?”

“Do you ever wonder what the future holds for us? Beyond the Academy, and after we find your mother, I mean,” Roslyn mused, her voice soft and contemplative.

Gwyn pondered for a moment, her eyes still focused on the flickering flames. “Sometimes, I do. But I'm still trying to learn my place in this world. However, I do know that we'll face whatever comes our way, together,” Gwyn stated confidently.

Her best friend nodded in agreement, the motion causing Gwyn's hair to ruffle and eliciting a soft giggle from the young princess.

Roslyn looked down at her with a smile. “Side by side?” she asked, raising her free hand.

Gwyn smiled back, raising her own hand to meet Roslyn's. “Against the world,” she affirmed.

Their fists bumped softly, solidifying their unbreakable bond, and the two girls settled back into their warm embrace, knowing that whatever the future held, they would face it as one.



As winter's grip on Gwyn's school started to weaken, the frost and snow gradually retreated, making way for the subtle hints of spring just around the corner. The once-barren trees began to show the first signs of green, their buds preparing to unfurl into new leaves. Flowers, though not yet in bloom, started to push their way through the softened earth, hinting at the lively atmosphere that would soon envelop the Academy grounds. Time seemed to pass in a blur as Gwyn and her friends spent their days wrapped up in their studies, with the classes that filled their schedules becoming more and more competitive as they gained rank.

With the second season of school nearing its end, it meant that students could change Classes. Adrienne and Gwyn were excited, as they had worked hard to get to this moment.

Professor Valmaer stood at the front of the class and was droning on about *math*, which was paradoxically Gwyn's best and most deplored subject. Instead of focusing on the boring material, she was deep into her latest attempt to partially complete what her vision self had done.

As Gwyn focused on the task at hand, she could feel the mana flowing around her, the melodious energy singing its soft tunes in a way that she could understand. The mana swelled within her, resonating in harmony with her core, the source of her magic. She closed her eyes and let the mana's song fill her mind.

So, she was trying something new. She was going to let one spell go *dormant* at nearly the same time she *prepared* one in her mind.

With each passing moment, Gwyn felt more confident in her abilities. She was pulling mana into herself, trying to focus and shape it to her will. But mana wanted to fight with her, and she struggled as it tried to dance around her. Flitting away as she tried to force it to do what she wanted. Unfortunately, all of her practice had shown that it was almost like she wasn't supposed to be able to do this. But she knew she *could*.

I am a mage. I am the mage, and I will be the Archmage of Discovery! I know myself, and I know what spells I want. I know what spells I want to have available.

As Gwyn continued to focus on shaping the mana, she felt a shift in the energy around her. It was as if the mana itself was acknowledging her awareness and responding to her commands. She could feel the power of the arcane coursing through her veins, and with each passing moment, she became more attuned to its secrets. Gwyn knew that she was on the cusp of a breakthrough, and with her newfound confidence, her mind immediately went to what she wanted.

The **[Gout of Flame]** spell was one that she felt she didn't need at the moment, and one that was surprisingly difficult to manage mentally, but she had been practicing for weeks whenever she could. She could feel the mana gathering in her core, waiting for her command.

At the same time, she was also preparing her **[Blink]** spell, it was sitting there, deep in her mind. When she reached for it, she could perceive the pretty spell glyph for it.

She could feel the mana's energy tingling throughout her body like a light hum, ready to be unleashed. As she concentrated, Gwyn could hear the mana singing to her, each spell with its own unique melody. The teleportation spell was a complex, yet whimsical melody that contrasted sharply with the fierce, roaring sound of **[Gout of Flame]**.

Gwyn took a deep breath, and with a sudden burst of willpower, she willed the **[Gout of Flame]** spell to go dormant. The mana pulsed inside her, and she could feel the spell quieting down, and in her mind's eye, the flames died down to a soft, warm glow until they shimmered and formed into the spell's glyph. Her mind suddenly felt *lighter*, as it disappeared into the recesses of her mind.

She took a deep breath as she turned her attention to the next spell, feeling the mana swirling around her like a symphony. She focused on the sensation of the magic flowing through her veins, letting it guide her as she *prepared* the **[Blink]** spell.

Gwyn continued to focus on the mana, feeling it swirl and dance within her. As she concentrated, she felt a new sensation, something akin to a gentle tug at the edges of her awareness. She reached out with her mind, and explored it, seeing the intricacies of the dormant spell. It sang louder, and she willed it closer until the glyph burst into a shower of individual motes of mana and flooded into her mind with a click. She felt a rush of mana pulse through her, and she smiled.

"Miss Reinhart!" an adult voice called out.

She tilted her head in confusion as she looked up and saw wide eyes and open mouths from nearly everyone in class as they stared at her.

Realizing that she had been completely absorbed in her mana manipulation, Gwyn blushed with embarrassment. She quickly sat up straight and tried to focus on Professor Valmaer, who was now glaring at her from the front of the room. Gwyn's heart raced with adrenaline as she wondered how long she had been lost in her own thoughts and mana manipulation.

"Yes, professor?" she asked sheepishly.

Adrienne leaned over and whispered, "Your eyes, Gwyn!"

She quickly closed her eyes, willing the mana to dissipate and the purple arcane energy burning in her eyes to extinguish. The mana dissipated, and the fire in her eyes faded away. She took a deep breath, trying to calm herself.

"Miss Reinhart, we have spoken about magic in class before," Professor Valmaer said sternly. "I would appreciate it if you would focus on the material we are covering."

Gwyn tried to explain, "But professor, it's just geometry. I understand it."

Professor Valmaer's body language showed that she was at the end of her patience. "It is not just about understanding the material, Miss Reinhart. It is about focusing on the task at hand."

Gwyn nodded, feeling ashamed. She knew she had let her excitement get the better of her.

As the professor turned back around and pointed at the problems on the board, Gwyn tried to focus.

It lasted all of a minute before her mind wandered.

School had been going well these past few weeks, Gwyn and Adrienne had moved up in rank due to their electives and if all went according to plan, they would move out of Class Fourteen one after the other.

Prince Aran had been insufferable, especially since their practice fight where she had accidentally hurt him. He had become increasingly rude to Gwyn, making snide comments about her abilities and her background.

Too bad Adrienne healed him immediately.

She still saw him in the Advanced Combat Fundamentals course, but she was only allowed to practice against adults. She was looking forward to the class this week, however, because it would be the first sparring session where she would get to go all out.

Apparently, several instructors from other specialties were interested in her ability. It made her a bit nervous, but at the same time, she couldn't wait.

Gwyn's thoughts shifted to Princess Elora, who had been causing trouble for her best friend Roslyn. Gwyn had noticed the way Elora was turning people against Roslyn, spreading rumors about her and making snide comments. It made Gwyn furious, but she knew that Roslyn could handle herself. Still, she wished she could do something to help her friend. It was all so frustrating, and Gwyn couldn't help but think about how much she hated all the drama.

I just want to go back to practicing magic with my friends.

Professor Valmaer was now pointing at the math problem on the board, and Gwyn struggled to remember what they had been discussing before her mind had wandered off. Suddenly, the professor turned to Mister Michaels and asked him to explain the solution to the class.

Gwyn watched as the boy confidently walked up to the board and began to explain the steps he had taken to arrive at the correct answer. Math was the one subject where Mister Michaels excelled, and Gwyn couldn't help but be a little envious of his ability to solve equations so effortlessly.

She felt that she was quite good at the mathematics that they taught here, but Nolan Michaels was so far beyond *everyone* that it was silly.

There were even rumors that he would soon be increased in rank just so he could assist the math professors. He would always smugly talk about how math was quite important in an interstellar society, but when he thought no one else was looking, she could see how lonely the boy was.

She felt sorry for him and wished she could help him. Even if he absolutely despised her for some reason.

Boys are the worst.

As Gwyn watched Nolan explain the solution to the math problem on the board, Professor Valmaer's attention was suddenly diverted to the entrance of the classroom as the door suddenly opened. Gwyn followed her gaze to see a tall, regal-looking high elf entering the room.

Gwyn watched intently as the elf looked around the room and focused on Amari.

However, Professor Valmaer was annoyed at yet another interruption and glared at the man. "Can I help you?" she said, her tone impatient.

The high elf ignored the professor as he moved directly to the paladin. The man approached Amari and began to whisper urgently in her ear. Gwyn watched as Amari's body language became filled with surprise and concern.

"What's going on?" Adrienne whispered to Gwyn, her own expression filled with worry.

"I don't know," Gwyn replied, her eyes narrowing. "But something's definitely wrong."

Suddenly, Amari turned to face the class, her expression grave. "I'm sorry to interrupt, Professor," she said, her voice steady. "But Her Highness must leave for an important message. It's urgent."

Gwyn's heart skipped a beat. Whatever was going on, it was serious. She exchanged a look

Professor Valmaer's eyes narrowed at Amari's interruption. "Is it more important than class, Paladin?" she demanded, her tone sharp.

Amari didn't hesitate. "Yes, it is," she replied firmly.

"Gwyn, we have to go," she said urgently. "Now."

Gwyn quickly gathered her things and bid Adrienne goodbye. "We'll talk soon," she promised before rushing to follow Amari out of the room.

"What's going on?" Gwyn asked as she hurried alongside Amari through the halls of the academy.

"I don't know," Amari replied, her brow furrowed in concern. "Taenya and Sabina are waiting. I don't know what it's about, but they said you need to see them now."

Gwyn's heart raced as she tried to process what was happening. She had never seen Amari in such a rush before, and the urgency in her voice was enough to make her stomach churn with anxiety. The pair hurried along the paths of the Lower School, weaving between students and professors as they made their way towards the gates, their boots splashing through puddles of cold water.

As they neared the gates, Gwyn's eyes widened in surprise. Sabina, Taenya, and Friedrich stood before them, each clad in their full knight armor, the reflections of the

weak sunlight glinting off their polished surfaces. Their expressions were hidden beneath their helmets, giving them an air of solemnity and purpose.

Something was definitely not right.

“Amari, what’s going on?” Gwyn asked, her voice shaking with worry.

Amari didn’t respond immediately, instead gesturing for Gwyn to follow her through the gates where the Academy’s guards stood warily. One of the guards, she noticed, was standing in front of Taenya and speaking loudly.

Taenya was ignoring the man as the helmeted head turned and tracked Gwyn’s movements through the gate.

Gwyn’s heart pounded in her chest as she saw the two squads of Reinhart Guards and three paladins standing guard around the knights and carriages.

“What’s happening?” Gwyn asked again, more urgently this time.

“I don’t know,” Amari said, her voice tense. “But it’s serious.”

Gwyn’s mind raced with possibilities as they made their way through the gathering of the Academy’s guards. Her thoughts flicked through all that could be going wrong.

Is it Roslyn?

She quickly looked around, seeing if any of the Tiloral knights or Evocati Khalan, Roslyn’s paladin, were around. When she didn’t see them, her thoughts turned to Siveril.

Is he okay? Did the marquess attack him?

As they approached Sabina, Taenya, and Friedrich, Gwyn couldn’t help waiting anymore. Her eyes darted to her knight that would tell it to her straight.

‘Sabina! What’s wrong?’ she thought-spoke to the woman.

‘Nothing,’ Sabina returned. **‘We received a message from Siveril. Let Taenya tell you.’**

“Taenya?” she asked her lead knight. “What’s happened?”

“We can’t talk here,” Taenya said, her voice low. “We need to move quickly.”

Gwyn's heart was pounding in her chest as she climbed into the carriage, the urgency of the situation palpable. She could feel the tension emanating from the Reinhart Guards as they formed a protective perimeter around the carriage, their weapons at the ready. She hastily took a seat, trying to steady her breathing as the carriage lurched forward, swaying with each turn and jolt of the uneven road.

As they entered the Old Town, Gwyn's eyes widened at the sight of the streets. People were clearing the way for them as the group of knights, guards, and paladin rode past, their armored forms gleaming in the sunlight. There was a sense of order to their

movements as if they were all working together in perfect harmony to achieve a common goal.

They arrived at the townhouse and Gwyn was let out of the carriage and guided inside. She followed Taenya up the spiral staircase, Amari close behind Gwyn, with Sabina and Friedrich bringing up the rear.

As they ascended, the mind mage sent a mental nudge of reassurance that did much to help Gwyn's nerves.

'Thank you,' she sent.

'It's not bad. Just important,' Sabina assured her.

The group entered the private sitting room where they often held meetings, prompting the knights to remove their helmets and reveal their faces. The room was well-lit with natural light coming through the windows, which allowed Gwyn to see Taenya perfectly.

When the knight turned around, she couldn't help but notice the woman's puffy and red eyes, as if she had been crying. But the strangest thing was that Taenya was smiling, an expression of pure relief and happiness etched onto her face. It was a confusing sight, and Gwyn couldn't help but wonder what could have possibly caused such an emotional reaction.

As they stood there, Gwyn's heart was pounding with anticipation. The silence in the room was palpable, and the only sound was the rustling of armor as the knights and guards shifted in their seats. Gwyn looked to Taenya, waiting for an explanation, but the lead knight hesitated as if trying to find the words to say.

With a deep breath, Taenya's voice cut through the tense silence. "Gwyn," she said, her voice barely above a whisper, "Siveril found your mother. She's alive."

The words seemed to echo in the room, as if the very air around them was charged with an electric current. For a moment, Gwyn couldn't move, couldn't even think. It was as if the world had stopped turning and all that existed was that single, unbelievable sentence.

Then the floodgates opened, and a torrent of emotions hit Gwyn with a force she wasn't prepared for. Her knees felt weak and she had to steady herself against the back of a nearby armchair to avoid falling. A gasp escaped her lips as tears pricked at the corners of her eyes, threatening to spill over at any moment. She couldn't believe it. *Mom's actually here?*

The mere thought was overwhelming, and she felt mana roiling inside of her as she struggled to maintain control.

Mommy?

Then Taenya was there. The woman pulled her into a tight hug, that even in her armor, managed to feel warm and comforting. “It’s alright, Gwyn. You’re not alone anymore. We’ll find her and bring her back to you,” Taenya whispered into her ear.

Gwyn’s body shook as she was overtaken by a rush of emotions. The news that her mom was alive was almost too much to bear. She couldn’t believe it, but the thought of seeing her mom again filled her with an indescribable joy. Tears streamed down her face, and she tried to suppress the sobs that threatened to escape her lips, but it was no use. The dam burst, and she broke down into uncontrollable sobs, her body convulsing with the force of her emotions. The mere thought of her mother being alive was overwhelming, and she clung to Taenya, feeling a sense of security in her embrace.

Gwyn had been living with the constant fear and uncertainty of not knowing what had happened to her mom. The thought that she might never see her again had weighed heavily on her heart, causing her endless nights of anxiety and despair. But now, hearing that her mom was alive, Gwyn was overcome with a rush of emotions that left her feeling both elated and unsteady.

Tears streamed down her face but through it all, Gwyn felt as though a great weight had been lifted from her shoulders. It was as if a missing piece of her life had finally fallen into place, and the joy of the moment was almost too much to bear. She closed her eyes, allowing the emotions to wash over her, and let out a shaky breath.

As the reality of the news settled in, Gwyn felt a surge of joy and relief that threatened to engulf her. She felt as though she could run a thousand miles and still not contain the sheer elation that filled her. But with that came a tinge of disbelief, a fear that it might all be too good to be true. It left her feeling both exhilarated and unsteady, her heart racing with a mix of hope and uncertainty.

As Gwyn’s sobs began to subside, she pulled away from Taenya and looked at her with tear-filled eyes. “Thank you,” she whispered, her voice barely audible. “Thank you for finding her.”

Taenya gave her a small smile. “We haven’t found her yet, but we will. I promise you that,” she said, her tone determined.

Gwyn’s head tilted in confusion. “What do you mean? You just—”

She hiccuped.

Sabina moved closer. “Siveril received word from the Banking Guild about your mother. They have an idea of where she is, and he’s going to send people to find her and bring her to you. But the information is current, your mom is out there, and she’s been looking for you.”

Gwyn nodded. “Where is she?”

Taenya glanced at Sabina before smiling at Gwyn. “The records state that she is a Baroness within Blightwych. We’re going to start there.”

Gwyn's heart stopped. "A baroness?"

Taenya nodded. "Yes, Siveril thinks she is doing it out of precaution. Because..."

Her knight's voice trailed off as Gwyn unfocused, her mind slamming to a halt. All the stupid lies and the stupid games were coming to a head. She... Everything she'd done since arriving, everything that had gone wrong, all the people that had died... Raafe, Emma... it all led back to her lies. To her not telling the truth.

Only one person knew. One person who she'd trust with any secret.

Her eyes darted to Sabina.

'I need you,' she thought.

Sabina's eyes widened and looked up and around. "Everyone out."

Taenya's head jerked in confusion, Friedrich who had been silently watching tilted his head, while Amari just nodded.

"Sabina?" Taenya started.

"I need a moment with Gwyn. This is... this is confidential. Like we discussed, Taenya," Sabina explained.

The telv knight looked conflicted as her eyes darted between Gwyn and Sabina. But then she nodded. "Let's give them a moment, everyone," she said, gesturing and walking toward the exit.

As the others departed the room, Sabina took a deep breath. "Let's talk," she said.

Gwyn's mind raced as she spoke, the words tumbling out of her in a panicked stream of thought. **'Mom's not a queen? She's just a baroness? What's gonna happen? Everyone's gonna find out I'm a fraud. Roslyn's gonna hate me. The House is gonna lose everything. And what about Taenya? Will she lose her knighthood? And what if people try to kill us again? And what about Mom? She doesn't have people like us to protect her. What if they attack her?'**

Gwyn's spiraled with all the possible consequences of her lies. She was overwhelmed with fear and anxiety, her heart pounding in her chest.

Sabina laid a hand on her shoulder. **'Your mother is a ruby tier member of the Banking Guild. Siveril was told that a baroness would never get that. Only people like Roslyn's grandfather are allowed. Clearly, they think your mother is important. I will ensure she knows before it becomes an issue,'** she sent before pausing. The woman seemed to almost lose herself in her thoughts before continuing, **'I know... I know I swore to keep your secrets, and I will... but I feel as if you should tell Taenya this. She will know what to do.'**

Gwyn sucked in a breath. She'd lied to Taenya the longest, along with Onas, Keston, and Raafe... She felt herself hesitate.

Sabina noticed the hesitation and gave Gwyn a reassuring smile. ***'I know it's hard, but it's the right thing to do. Taenya is your knight and she cares about you. She will help you navigate this. Trust her,'*** Sabina said.

Gwyn bit her lip and nodded, feeling a knot of guilt and shame in her stomach. She knew Sabina was right, but the thought of confessing her lies to Taenya made her feel sick.

She looked up at Sabina, her eyes wide with fear. "But what if she hates me? What if she thinks I'm a terrible person?"

The high elf woman's expression softened. "Taenya is a good person, Gwyn. She loves you, just like we all do. She won't hate you. She'll understand that you made a mistake. And she'll want to help you make it right. Trust me."

Gwyn nodded again and took a deep breath, steeling herself for what was to come.

Sabina gave her a gentle squeeze on the shoulder. "I'll leave you two alone to talk," she said, standing up from the table. "But remember, Gwyn, you're not alone in this. We're here for you."

With that, Sabina left the room, and Gwyn could hear her talking quietly before Taenya entered, closing the door gently behind her.

Taenya walked over and sat down across from her. "What's going on, Gwyn?" she asked, her voice gentle but firm.

Gwyn took a deep breath and forced herself to meet Taenya's gaze. "I... I need to tell you something," she said, her voice shaking. "Something I should have told you a long time ago."

Despite her nervousness, Gwyn could see the love and understanding in Taenya's expression, and it gave her the courage to continue. "I lied to you, Taenya," she admitted. "I'm not really a princess. I made a dumb joke and..."

The weight of her deception felt heavy on her chest, but Taenya's response surprised her. "I already know," the knight said calmly. "And I don't care. You're *our* princess, Gwyn. All of us in House Reinhart follow *you*. We'll figure out what to do about your mother, and everything will be alright."

Just like that, the dam burst, and Gwyn again found herself in Taenya's arms crying. The relief of finally confessing her lies mixed with the overwhelming love and acceptance from her adopted aunt. Taenya held her tightly, letting her cry and whisper apologies. When Gwyn finally pulled back, Taenya wiped away her tears and smiled warmly.

“Now that we’ve got that out of the way,” Taenya said, “let’s figure out how we’re going to help your mother. We’ll need to be smart and careful, but we’ll get through this together.”

Gwyn nodded, feeling a newfound sense of hope and determination.



After the day she had, Gwyn felt mentally and physically exhausted. Amari had escorted her back to the dorms and had bid her goodnight. As she slipped into the room, the other girls were awake. Calanis and Daria were quietly talking in the chairs by the fireplace while Lorrena was reading in her bed.

“Gwyn!” Lorrena called out from the top bunk as Gwyn walked into the room.

“Hey, guys,” she said with a small smile. “Hey, Lore.”

Her two roommates waved, but Calanis was still a bit distant with her, so hers was a bit halfhearted.

Gwyn walked over to her wardrobe and started getting everything to change. Lorrena hopped down and walked over. “Do you need help, Your Highness,” the girl asked quietly.

She shook her head. “No, but we can just talk. How are you?”

“I’m fine,” Lorrena replied, a hint of concern in her voice. “But how are you? We missed you in classes today. Adrienne said that Amari rushed you out and I got worried. Lady Roslyn said Khalan wasn’t sure what was wrong either.”

Gwyn sighed. She grabbed her pajamas, walked over to their bed, and sat down heavily, feeling the weight of the day settling in. “It’s been a long day,” she said, running a hand through her hair. “I figured out some magic stuff, got scolded by the teacher, rushed off with Amari to meet Taenya and the others. They had a message from Siveril..”

Lorrena’s eyes widened. “Count Siveril? What was the message? Is everything alright back home?”

Gwyn chuckled softly. “You have the same response I did. Yes, everything is fine. Better than fine, actually.”

She gestured for Lorrena to sit down next to her. When the girl sat down, Gwyn leaned in close. “They found a lead about mom. He’s sending people to find her and bring her here,” she whispered.

Her lady-in-waiting gasped. “Gwyn!” she said a bit loudly. The girl glanced over at the other two in the room and then composed herself. “That is amazing,” she said quietly.

Gwyn nodded, feeling the emotions start to return. “It is! But now, I’m just really tired. I think I’m going to go to bed, Lore.”

Lorrena nodded. “Alright, Your Highness. You get some sleep. If you need anything, please let me know.”

Gwyn smiled. “I will. Thanks, Lore.”

With a small wave, Lorrena left the bed and climbed back up into her own. Gwyn quickly changed into her pajamas, feeling grateful for the comfortable material against her skin. As she got into bed and pulled the covers up, she couldn’t help but feel a sense of relief knowing that there was finally some progress in finding her mom. But at the same time, the weight of her lies and deception still hung heavily on her chest. She closed her eyes and let out a deep sigh, hoping that a good night’s sleep would help clear her mind.

Her thoughts drifted to the comforting embrace of magic. She pulled in mana through her core and let it settle into herself. She focused on it as she felt it swirling around her, almost like a protective cocoon.

Letting herself sink deeper into the sensation, feeling it wash over her like a warm tide, Gwyn drifted off to sleep. But then, something else happened.

Mana spoke.

It was a voice, clear and unmistakable, speaking directly to her mind. The words were like musical notes, flowing together in a beautiful melody that filled her, showing their intent in an unmistakable way.

As the strange voice continued to speak, Gwyn felt a surge of energy flow into her, filling her with a sense of power and purpose. It was as if some long-forgotten part of herself was awakening, and she could feel the magic within her responding to the voice's call.

[Elementalist – Step 55 attained!]

[Conditions Met: Trait – Self Awareness obtained!]

[Conditions Met: Trait – Mana Adept obtained!]

[Spell – Gout of Flame now dormant!]

[Spell – Blink prepared!]

And then, as suddenly as it had started, the voice stopped.