

Growing Responsibilities

Part One

It was a new day and Roslyn Tiloral reflected on all she had to accomplish as she sat at her vanity, allowing the servants to prepare her hair. First, she had an appointment to meet with her mother. She was not entirely sure what the meeting was concerning, however, she had suspicions. With her recently reaching her tenth year, it was time for the family to determine her path forward. The idea made Roslyn scoff—which caused the servant braiding her hair to pull accidentally on one of the strands too tightly, forcing Roslyn to wince at the sudden pain.

“Apologies, My Lady.” The telv woman quickly said.

“It was no fault of your own.” She assured the woman. She wanted to rub the area but knew that would just require her to sit there longer to correct her hair.

The woman gave Roslyn a moment to collect herself before continuing. Roslyn herself went back to her thoughts. She and her family knew exactly what her future would entail. This meeting was simply part of the ceremony. She would attend the Royal Academy of Avira just as all previous Dukes and Duchess of Tiloral had. As the next in line for the duchy after her mother, she had obligations that were required of her. Attending and performing well at the Academy was one of them.

After she met with her mother, she was sure there would be something else to accomplish. A free block of time in the middle of the day inevitably was filled with whatever her mother wished. Luckily, that time was followed by a scheduled stroll through the market. She needed to purchase something new for the court her grandfather was holding in a week. There was a new House in the city that needed to be acknowledged. *Sounds excessively boring.* Although, the fact that the court was being held exclusively for one new House told her that it was an important new noble. *Likely a Marquess. Seems fitting for grandfather to establish relations with a new march. Anything else would not require much fanfare.*

After she was finished getting ready for the day, she stepped from her suite and saw Ser Roderick and Ser Janine waiting for her. Her two telv knights gave her a slight bow and Ser Roderick greeted her. “My Lady, good morning. I trust you are well?”

Roslyn inclined her head just so. "I am. I had my morning repast in my suite and am ready to begin the day." She looked to Ser Janine who maintained her schedule. "We have a meeting with the Marchioness, correct?"

Ser Roderick raised a brow as he usually did when Roslyn referred to her mother in such a way. *I must practice. Mother expects it.*

Ser Janine, however, showed no outward reaction. "Yes, My Lady. We will see what Lady Tiloral has for you at the meeting I suspect. She should be leaving to return home soon. I believe the meeting consists of duties she wishes you to fulfill after she leaves."

Roslyn refrained from scoffing. "Of course. The Lady has ample demands upon my time and we will see them done."

She took the lead as the three of them made their way across the ducal palace to the wing that housed the Ducal Heiress while she was in residence. It was situated next to a courtyard that separated the Ducal Palace from the estate reserved for her mother's younger brother. That estate was palatial in itself due to its function of hosting the current Count or Countess of Strathmore. This required the wing to have offices and other administrative areas set aside for the governance of the city itself, which was the role the second child of the Duke fulfilled. *That will be my brother one day. When mother takes her seat as Duchess, I will be required to move into the castle at Maireharbora.* Roslyn herself would inherit a courtesy title of Viscountess upon her fifteenth birthday, which technically had land attached to it, but was land the Duchy would never own in truth. The Ayeval Forest was untamable and one of the Great Val Forests that were holdings of Eona's Guardians. A fact that never seemed to deter the duchy's ambitions of conquering the land. It was a title that would last her until she assumed the position and duties as the Marchioness of Maireharbora.

The Duchy of Tiloral had the privilege of being one of the wealthier duchies within the kingdom, and this was reflected by the ducal palace. Its status was second only to the Duchy of Avira. However, Roslyn personally did not count that duchy, as it was firmly a holding of the Royal Family, and the Crown Prince held the title of Duke of Avira. Roslyn herself was firmly within the noble faction. She saw how often her grandfather and mother complained at the stranglehold the royals liked to put them under. They seemed almost fearful of the influence and power of the Duchy of Tiloral. This was a constant source of frustration for her grandfather, who had always been loyal to his kingdom.

Her mother had remanded her several times when Roslyn had expressed her feelings on the subject and desire to support the noble faction. She remembered what her mother had said, 'We have to remain neutral, Roslyn. We cannot choose a side. Our status demands it.' *Hmph, I don't see why we have to remain neutral when the royal family constantly pushes us and treats us as a threat to their power.*

Tiloral was host to three important cities within the kingdom and its only access to the sea. This also required the duchy to play host to the only naval forces within the kingdom. While the Royal Fleet was larger, the duchy's fleet was nothing to scoff at. In fact, the duchy's fleet was made of more modern ships, and in her opinion, stronger ships. Their role was to defend the limited coastal access of the kingdom, while the Royal Fleet was more expeditionary in function. *The roles should be reversed. It's an embarrassment for such old ships to be seen more than our own glorious vessels. That will change when I am duchess.*

While Strathmore was not as large or economically infused as the largest city in the duchy, Maireharbora, the city was a key location to facilitate trade with both the dwarves of Dirn Loduhr and the Kingdom of Meris. Maireharbora was *the* port of the kingdom, and as such, was the second richest and largest city in the kingdom. It also gave her mother influence and power that was equivalent to most of the other duchies. *As it should, it is only right that we are respected for all that our family has accomplished, even with the pressures we withstand.*

The group entered the wing itself and was met by one of her mother's advisors, Ser Primrose. "My Lady, the Marchioness is expecting you. Right this way, please." She gestured down the hall and Roslyn followed the woman to the office she had expected to find her mother in.

As they reached the door, it opened and several people filed out. Roslyn noticed them as various members of the Guilds. Lady Batteux exited last and smiled at Roslyn. "Lady Roslyn, it is lovely to see you. How are you today?"

"I am well, Guildmaster Batteux. You have business with the Marchioness I see."

The woman did the same raised eyebrow that nearly everyone else did when she referred to her mother by her proper title. "Oh yes. Nothing too serious, just discussing potential business with your mother."

“I look forward to hearing about it, Guildmaster. Now, please excuse me. I do not wish to waste the Marchioness’ time.”

Lady Batteux seemed slightly surprised but recovered quickly, as expected from the head of the Guilds in Strathmore. “Then I bid you a pleasant day.” She gave a respectful bow of her head and moved to follow her fellows.

She observed as the group walked away, remembering what she had been told about the Lady and how the Guildmaster of Strathmore’s branch for the Banking Guild was fairly unique amongst the organization. Primarily, the fact that she was a noble was something the Guilds usually sought to avoid. However, Lady Batteux was an odd case. Her nobility derived from a favor the kingdom owed the Guilds. She did something to impress the Banking Guild, and that favor passed to her in the form of a minor peerage.

Ser Primrose led Roslyn into her mother’s office while Ser Roderick remained outside. Ser Janine was permitted to join the meeting and sat quietly in a chair near the entrance to maintain notes for Roslyn to review as needed.

Her mother was standing at her desk with her back to the door, looking down at what appeared to be a ledger of some sort. As the door closed behind Roslyn, her mother closed the ledger and turned around.

“Ah, Roslyn. Thank you for coming. How are you this morning?”

Roslyn took a deep breath. They were in private. It was an appropriate time. “I am well, mother. Of course, I could not neglect to attend our scheduled meeting. I see you met with the Guilds. A productive meeting, I hope.”

Her mother waved her hand as if it were no bother. “Yes, yes. They wished to discuss all of these new people that have appeared. You have heard of them. The terrans. An entirely new race of people that appeared after the Flash.”

Roslyn squinted her eyes in thought. She *had* heard mentions, but nothing definitive. “I may have heard a passing mention, yes.”

Her mother smiled and gestured to the two chairs in front of a fireplace. “Please, join me.”

As mother and daughter sat down, the servant's door opened and one of the servants brought in a tray of tea. Roslyn had her tea with a single cube of sugar while her mother scooped a small measure of honey onto a spoon and stir it in. Roslyn sat back and enjoyed her delicious drink. Her mother used her title and position in Maireharbora to reserve some of the finest teas that came in by ship. This particular variety came from a small tropical kingdom in the south. The aroma was floral with a tinge of herbs and spices. It was exquisite.

They spoke brief niceties while they sat and Roslyn counted down the time until her mother would finally address the real reason she was there. Her mother did not simply invite her over for tea without requiring something. When she set her tea back onto the saucer and placed it on the table next to her, it seemed to be the queue her mother needed.

"My dear, I wanted to discuss a few important topics with you today, which is why I called upon you." Her mother said.

Roslyn simply nodded. Nothing the woman had said required a response.

"It is time for you to start taking on responsibilities befitting your status. You will soon leave for the Academy as expected of you, and your grandfather and I believe you should be given duties until that time."

That's strange. There is no back and forth. No questioning of a path. "Of course, mother. I look forward to beginning the path ahead of me in the name of the duchy."

Her mother narrowed her eyes slightly. "That is expected of you, yes. Surely, you did not consider anything other than what is required of an heiress?"

Again, Roslyn was surprised. She knew she was in line for the duchy, but everyone else... *Ah, there's my mistake. I considered incomparable circumstances. That will not happen again.*

Roslyn tipped her head in acknowledgment of her fault. "I did not consider alternatives. I made a slight error, my apologies, mother."

Her mother stared at her for several heartbeats, taking the measure of her. Finally, she nodded. "Very well. See that such errors do not occur in the future. Your role was given to you at birth. There has never been but a single path for you to follow. Now, where were we? Ah yes, the Academy. You will attend next year, therefore you will need to leave soon. This will give you

ample time in order to winter in Drakensburg. The manor there will be prepared to accept you and your retainers.”

She looked down in thought. Reaching that city gave her only a few months to leave. While the distance to the capital was only about four hundred kilometers, the travel would take her months. Winters in West Ikios were severe, and the roads became even more dangerous during the worst part of the season. Usually, wintering just meant the time between the festivals of hearth and love, which was about forty days.

She considered the route and realized she may need more than just Ser Roderick and Janine to join her. Roslyn had never been to the capital herself. It was exciting. Especially since she would be representing her House and the duchy.

She looked up at her mother. “I will be prepared. Will you be here when I leave or are you departing for Maireharbora soon?”

“I will be departing within a fortnight. The ferry to Fen’s Crossing has already been reserved.”

Roslyn nodded. Fen’s Crossing was a town that sat on the opposite side of Lake Gori from Strathmore, it was the quickest way to travel there since the southern end of the lake bordered the Kingdom of Meris and the northern land route added a week to the travel time.

Fen’s Crossing itself was a testament to the ingenuity of the people in the Tiloral Duchy. The founder of the town had a brilliant idea a few decades ago to establish a small ferry port at a key point for trade and travel. The prime location and successful venture of his company caused the small village and port he built to spiral into a large town. It was unfortunate that barely a decade later, he drowned while attempting to sail one of his ferries alone and drunk. His estranged brother, who was a sailor from Maireharbora, inherited the fledgling empire and kept the name in honor of his late brother. The brother used the funds earned from the ferries to even purchase several ocean vessels in her mother’s city. The venture Fen started so long ago was now a prominent merchant shipping company with routes all along the Aegis Sea.

Roslyn glanced at the window, trying to gauge the time. “Was that all you wished to discuss, mother?”

Her mother chuckled ruefully. “Roslyn, do you desire to leave my company so soon?”

Roslyn jerked her head. “No, of course not, mother. I merely considered that you have many pressing needs upon your time and did not unduly wish to burden you with idle talk.”

Her mother sighed. “Roslyn, I am your mother. Could you please speak to me as such?”

“My apologies, mother. I simply wish to maintain proprieties as you have instructed.”

Her mother tilted her head backward and closed her eyes. Roslyn was not sure what the problem was. It had been made clear to her numerous times how she was to speak when in her mother’s presence. *Is she testing me? Do not worry, mother. I will not make a mistake again.*

The marchioness took a deep breath and refocused on Roslyn. “Moving on. You have some time set aside today. Father wishes for you to go to the temple complex as a representative of the ducal court. You will present the monthly donations to the Temples there.”

Roslyn barely kept herself from groaning in displeasure. There were six temples in the square. One temple for the pantheon overall, one temple each for the four major gods, and finally one for the collective minor gods. Such a task would take her longer than the time she had blocked out for the day.

“All six temples require donations?”

Her mother nodded her head. “They do, however, you will not need to travel to each in order to provide a donation. It will suffice if you personally handle the donation to the Temple of the Celestials. The retinue your grandfather sends with you may accomplish the task for each dedicated temple.”

“I will see it done, mother.”

“See that you do. This is but the first of the responsibilities you may expect. You should expect more over time as you get older and more mature. There will also be duties to perform within the capital, however, father wishes to speak of that himself before you leave. Now, be off. You do not want to waste time if you still wish to go to the market.” Her mother said.

Roslyn stood and bowed her head. “Thank you for the tea, mother. I hope to see you again before you depart.”

Her mother embraced her, then kissed her on either cheek. “You will. Now, be off with you.”