

Growing Responsibilities

Part Two

Roslyn followed Ser Roderick and Ser Janine as they walked up to the vast plaza leading to the Temple of the Celestials. The other eight members of the ducal house had split up to go to each of the other temples dedicated to the gods. They had arrived early, which gave Roslyn time to slow down and enjoy one of her favorite hobbies: *architecture*.

The grand plaza was four hundred twenty meters long and three hundred and forty wide. She stopped just as they got to the perfect location just inside the entrance to the square. It was a spot where she had to always stop to appreciate the beauty before her. If she turned and looked out from where she was, she would see across the main thoroughway to the large domed Temple of the Stars and its gardens and obelisks.

To her left and right were the two massive colonnades that were five pillars deep that curved to create an elliptical center plaza that contrasted the trapezoidal entrance to the grounds. Vines spiraled around each of the columns in a beautiful display of greenery to contrast the white marble. In the center of the plaza was a large reflecting pool that surrounded the Tree of Eona. An imposing weeping willowy thing that towered over any structure around save the temple itself at over ninety meters tall. The trunk was easily twenty meters around while its canopy reached out twenty meters on either side before cascading down.

It was beautiful, and from where she stood, you could just see the temple cresting over the top of the tree. The temple complex was the largest in all of Ikios and one of the reasons Strathmore remained such a center of power, despite Maireharbora's financial strength, or the capital, with its being the center of the kingdom. The complex held the central Temple of the Celestials, where administrative functions for each of the four churches were accomplished. Behind the temple were the gardens and buildings dedicated to the different functions of the churches. She looked one last time to the left and right of her. Inside the colonnades were two entrances, each that led to the individual temples of the gods. Those temples were where the high priests of the city resided, along with the central members of the clergy.

Roslyn took a deep breath and then nodded with a contented smile, ready to continue. The group walked around the tree and she caught sight of the colossal temple itself. It was a gorgeous structure, centered in the rear of the plaza and the anchor point to the surrounding colonnades. It was built of white stone with four columns that were nearly as wide as the tree they had just passed. Each column represented one of the four domains of the celestials: night, day, life, and death. There was the enormous Door of the Celestials centered between the columns dedicated to Alos and Eona. A door that remained locked until Alos himself would open it and usher in a new age.

There were two much smaller doors to the left and right that were used as the entrances for the public. Ser Roderick led them to the door on the left, as that was reserved for nobility and the priests or priestesses. *All architecture should evoke such feelings and inspiration in those who view it.* She really felt that art expressed within architecture was a sign of a healthy society. *When I am duchess, all buildings will be required to be thought-provoking as well as functional. We should all strive to build such lasting legacies.*

The temple guards at the entrance quickly let them in and an older telv priest greeted them right after entering. The man promptly bowed and addressed her. “Lady Tiloral, it is an honor to have you today. Please, the Archpriestess is expecting you.”

Roslyn’s eyes widened. “I would not wish to impede upon Her Holiness’ time. I am simply here to make a donation to the church.”

The man smiled. “She mentioned that you would say that. It will be quite alright. Please, right this way.”

She glanced back at Ser Roderick and Ser Janine, only to notice them looking at each other with surprised expressions. With a shrug, she turned and followed the priest through the temple. Roslyn barely had time to look at the art and tapestries that adorned the walls as they walked through the main hall and into one of the hallways that led deeper into the temple.

Roslyn walked behind the priest and slowed once she entered one of the private sacella. She gasped as she noticed that right to her side on a wall in the small out of the way place of worship was the painting of *The Love of Light and Life* by the artist Keira Dornas from over a century ago. She quickly jerked her head to Ser Janine and opened her mouth to call out how fortuitous it was to see, but noticed both knights had already adopted a reverential bearing and were viewing the painting themselves.

Roslyn turned and took in the view. The painting was every stroke of the masterpiece she'd heard about from her grandfather and had even read about in numerous books but had yet to see in person. She barely noticed the priest smile and politely stand aside to wait for her.

The painting took up almost the entirety of the wall, and she could not help but gaze upon its beauty. It depicted the moment Alos stepped foot on the world eons ago. It showed him stepping down onto a moss-covered land with the sun rising from behind him. His face was full of surprise and infatuation from his first sight of Eona. The goddess herself was rising with the grass, trees, and even birds of all types flying into the sky as her nature responded to the heat and life-sustaining nourishment of the sun. Eona focused her piercing gaze on the fiery being who would capture her heart as she reached out to touch him. A swirl of green tones from the scene of the life goddess merging in the center of the painting with the red hues of the sun god.

Roslyn knew from her books that there were hints hidden that referenced the births of Tenera and Relena. There were many conspiracies surrounding the painting and its possible secrets. Unfortunately, she didn't have time to delve deeply enough to locate them. She sighed. *At least I got to see it. This is magnificent.*

The last feature she noted before turning away was that on either side of the painting, in recessed platforms within the wall, were statues of Alos and Eona. Both statues were leaning out to peek around the painting to look at each other with longing and love. The quality of the painting of the two statues made them appear so lifelike that she had to double-take just to make sure they were not people posing.

She smiled and shook her head. *That would be silly.* With one last longing gaze, she reluctantly turned to follow the priest out of a small door and into a hallway. They followed along for another ten minutes through hallways and even tunnels. Passing a solitary priest or priestess here and there, but largely, the route they took was devoid of people. What she did see though were statues galore. They depicted prominent priests and priestesses of the past with varying levels of wear. Finally, they ascended a set of stairs that led into a building that was behind the main temple on one of the hills.

Inside were the Paladins of Alos in their ceremonial red tinted armor and helmets with their distinct half cape and white tabards with their golden sunburst. The lead paladin with a golden trim to his armor stepped forward and bowed before removing his helmet, revealing an

older sun elf man with a scar over his left eye. “Lady Roslyn Tiloral, welcome to the inner sanctum. I am Praetor Xoreth of the Paladins of Alos. Her Holiness is expecting you.”

She nodded her head in appropriate deference. The paladins were an order to be respected, for they gave their lives to the church and trained extensively in martial combat, even to the point where they eschewed relationship attachments. They stripped even their surnames and statuses upon joining the order. They were elites by even elite standards. Despite not being nobles, the paladins were what knights wanted to be when they grew up.

As Roslyn stepped forward, two more paladins moved to block Ser Roderick and Ser Janine from following. They both looked between her and the paladins, but Roslyn nodded to her telv knight. He returned the gesture and stepped back, with Janine following his lead.

She walked into an office that was only slightly smaller than her grandfather’s. Roslyn wasn’t sure why, but that one fact made her happy. She immediately noticed the old sun elf woman standing by the large window to the side. Her white, red, and gold robes billowed slightly from the wind. The Archpriestess of the Celestials wore an elaborate sunburst head ornament that doubled as a way to hold her grey hair in a bun.

The woman turned, a smile on her face directed at Roslyn and the Praetor. “Roslyn! I am just delighted to see you. I do believe you were barely old enough to bounce on my knee the last time I saw you.”

Roslyn barely held back her surprise. She could not remember ever meeting the Archpriestess. Her grandfather and mother, of course, would have, but that was simply since the holy district and the temple complex itself were within the city. The Archpriestess and the Temple of the Celestials were not *technically* a part of the kingdom. They and all temple lands were considered sacred and, as such, neutral from the affairs of governments. Roslyn did not expect to meet a sovereign of the church until the current Archpriestess’ successor’s successor took up the mantle after she became duchess.

Roslyn placed her right hand over her heart and bowed. “Your Holiness, it is an honor to meet you. Please forgive me. I do not recall meeting you previously.”

The woman surprised her by wrapping her in a grandmotherly sort of hug and looking down at her. “Nonsense. None of that, my dear. Come, Milla has prepared some tea for us.”

Roslyn could only nod repeatedly as the Archpriestess wrapped an arm around her and guided her to a small table pre-set with tea. Her mind was in a whirl as she sat down and the orkun woman she suspected was Milla served her sugar and provided some small pastries. The Archpriestess immediately picked up her cup and started drinking. After a large sip, she placed her cup back down with a clank.

“Thank you for joining me here, Roslyn. Did your grandfather give you any hints as to why we would meet?”

Roslyn quickly shook her head. “He told my mother he wanted me to drop off donations to the church.”

“Ha! Oh, that sly dog!” the woman started laughing until she was coughing. Milla rushed over with a glass of water and helped the older Loreni take small sips.

The Archpriestess smiled. “Oh, I got a bit excited there! Where were we? Oh! Of course, Das had your mother deliver the news. We all know that man can’t hide the truth to save his life.”

Das? She has a nickname for grandfather? Roslyn nodded. Still as confused as ever.

She hesitated for a second, but then she asked. “Your Holiness? Why... exactly am I here? What didn’t my grandfather tell me?”

The Archpriestess’ face turned serious. “The world is changing, my dear Roslyn. A new people have been brought to us from another place amongst the stars. Which is *Revelation* unto itself. A world untouched by Alos and Eona or the Sisters. There has been a *Seeing*.”

Roslyn gasped. *A Seeing? There hasn’t been one in centuries. Why am I here?* “But, Your Holiness. What does that—”

“What does that have to do with you?” Her Holiness finished for her.

Roslyn nodded meekly.

“Why, my dear, it is because you were in it.”

Roslyn froze. *I was in it? What? Why? How?* There was no way that it could be her. She was too young. She did not do anything to deserve such a thing.

Her Holiness took her silence as a sign to continue. “There wasn’t much, dear. It was barely flashes of events to come. We are unsure of your role or involvement, if any. You were older in the images and were with another girl. Someone who we could not identify. There were only flashes of her eyes that burned and dark hair, but she was with you.” Roslyn heard the door open behind her but did not turn around to look. She was too engrossed in what the Archpriestess was saying. “Therefore, because it *could* be something and as a courtesy to my friend, your grandfather, I will be assigning a paladin to your protection.”

Her brows shot up, and she turned her head, seeing a paladin standing there. The sun elf man had his helmet off and stood there was a serious look on his face. His short cropped hair gave him an aura that many soldiers had, yet the way his hair looked as if it almost had waves in it elevated his appearance drastically. Roslyn almost suspected the light-skinned sun elf was former nobility just by how he held himself. *Or that could just be his paladin training. I probably shouldn’t ask.*

She jumped in surprise when the Archpriestess spoke from right next to her. “This is Evocati Khalan. I have assigned him to provide your protection until such a time as the Seeing can be fully interpreted. He is to not leave your side except for what is expected for propriety’s sake.”

Roslyn scowled. *I don’t need a minder from the church. They aren’t even part of the House!*

The Archpriestess clearly read her mind, because she answered what was unspoken. “Your grandfather has already accepted this. In return, Evocati Khalan will follow your, *and only your*, directives. Treat him as you would any of your personal knights. He knows the details of the seeing intimately.”

“In Alos’ Name, I am at your service, My Lady,” Khalan said.

Roslyn slowly nodded. *If grandfather already approved of this, there isn’t anything I can do.* “I understand.”

“Good. Now, you must be quite busy. Please excuse this old woman from taking up so much of your time.”

Roslyn giggled. “Your Holiness, you jest. It has been my pleasure.”

The Archpriestess smiled with mischief in her eyes. “Now, when you see your grandfather, I want you to say this...” The old sun elf bent down and whispered into Roslyn’s ear.

Roslyn laughed so hard that she snorted.

“I will.” She promised.